

Re•gen•er•a•tion

A Spiritual Journey

BY
KENT R. HUNTER

Re•gen•er•a•tion: n. a) a being or group renewed, reformed, or reconstituted;
b) a spiritual rebirth.

R	Rated R for Regeneration
This book is appropriate for mature Christian leaders.	

ALSO BY KENT HUNTER

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Foundations for Church Growth

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A Spiritual Journey

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INTRODUCTION

YOUR CHURCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

Are you old enough to remember any of these?

- Black Jack chewing gum
- Soda machines that dispense glass bottles
- Howdy Doody
- S&H Green Stamps
- Blue flash bulbs

Do you remember a time before these?

- Twitter
- Homeland Security
- Cell phones
- Identity theft
- Online banking

You Snooze, You Lose

While you were sleeping, the world has greatly changed. It has changed from one era to another, one epoch to another. This is more than just the change of a century. This is the change of how we understand the world and the way the world works. This is a change from a world that was modern to one that is postmodern. This world has moved from manufacturing to information technology. This world rearranged from hierarchical to flat. This world has morphed from institutions to relationships. Your world has disintegrated from Judeo-Christian values to secularization.

While you were sleeping, those in the United States discovered they live in the third largest mission field in the world. There are only two countries with more self-declared non-Christians than the USA. Number one is China. Number two is India. The United States is now number three. While China and India report hundreds of millions of people, Christianity is growing rapidly in those countries. In the U.S., Christianity has been declining for decades. Christians are becoming marginalized.

Most American Christians operate with a dated worldview of their faith. They are blind to the major erosion of Christian influence at almost every level. They consider the United States as the great sending country — deploying

missionaries throughout the “mission fields” of the world. For over two decades, thousands of missionaries have been coming to the United States, recognizing the opportunity for mission. They come from South Korea, Nigeria, Brazil, Russia, and other countries around the world. The worldview for most Christians in the U.S. is out of date. The world has changed, while you were sleeping.

The American Church has been struggling. Sixty to eighty percent of Protestant congregations are plateaued or declining. Approximately six churches close their doors every day, 365 days a year. This trend began over 25 years ago. While you were sleeping, however, new churches were being formed.

New Wineskins

There is an emerging, new type of Christianity. It is somewhat disorganized, often chaotic, sometimes on the fringes, and occasionally in disharmony with the Scripture. These aberrations are normal and predictable for infant churches. The movement is still finding its way, but beginning to show promising signs. A new version of Christianity is shining on the horizon!

This is not the first time God has reinvented this movement. Jesus, ushering in the “New Covenant,” brought the first new wineskin. It was not a departure

from the continuing thread of salvation history. Yet, it was a new version. Centered on Christ and His life, death, resurrection, it became "Christianity." It was so different the "religious people" had difficulty catching it. It was a hinge point in history. Many struggled to make sense of it.

We are there today. As Jesus said, "New wine requires new wineskins."¹ What Jesus said then is happening today. It's not about new wine. It's about new wineskins. It's not about the essence of Christianity. It's about the container. It's about how we do church.

As a church consultant, I have spent most of my life helping churches become more effective. Ironically, 95% of what most churches do is fine. However, the 5% makes 100% of the difference for impact. The content is not the problem. It's the container. It's not the message, but the delivery systems. It's not the transforming power of God, but the approach.

Americans continually say they are very interested in spiritual issues. As Jesus would say, "The harvest is ripe."² Yet, sixty to seventy percent of Americans consider the church to be irrelevant. That includes some who attend church!

Denominations have been declining for decades. Denominations are relatively

new containers in the history of Christianity — only a few hundred years old. Whether they are the way churches are connected in the future is questionable. What is happening at the macro level in denominations reflects dynamics occurring in your local church.

Life in the Christian Movement is complicated by the increasing secularization of the culture. Is it possible that secularization is leveraging the changes necessary for the church? It certainly is getting our attention!

Mind Molders

The influences that shape us are often called the mind molders of culture:

1. Family. What have you noticed over the last few decades concerning this basic unit of culture, the family? Have you observed the deterioration of families? Think of the second and third generations of semi-orphans who are raised by single parents or Mom and her sleep-in boyfriend, or the his/hers/ours blended families.
2. Business. Have you seen deterioration and corruption in business? What about Enron, Wall Street, ponzi schemes, cover-ups? Our secular nation has provided secular solutions: more regulators, and then regulators who regulate the regulators. The secularization in the business sector has

- contributed greatly to a bankrupt economy driven by greed and personal gain — oblivious to Judeo-Christian values like service, honesty, integrity.
3. Education. What have you seen as you look at the education models of our world? Top graduates in various fields — with destructive lives. Universities, many of which were founded by the Christian Movement, no longer have any semblance of spiritual impact.
 4. Media. Scroll through the channels on your satellite network flat screen. What does it tell you about the appetite of our culture? The media plays to the consumer mentality, hedonism of a culture that seeks first and foremost personal gratification, models sexual promiscuity, and glorifies violence and corruption.
 5. The arts. At different times in history, the church was the engine that generated the very best of the arts. The church has lost that position to secular-minded entrepreneurs in the area of film, books, and magazines. Looking at a magazine rack in a pharmacy, scanning the covers, it was easy to see what sells: sex, gossip, wealth, fitness.
 6. Religion. When the church makes headlines, it's usually about conflict among Christians, sexual child abuse by church leaders, or violent acts of fanatics.
 7. Government. It is increasingly clear that there are few leaders in government. They are mostly managers. They vote the party line because they want to get re-elected. They are often seen as self-serving rather than servants of the public's best interest. The political platform is gridlocked

because the values of statesmanship have been put aside for personal gain.

Secularization has a profound effect on the psyche of those in the culture. Many are fatigued by the corruption, petrified by the economy, and depressed by a sense of hopelessness. There is an increasing hunger for hope, a positive future, and restoration. Ironically, this discouraged environment provides the environment for receptivity to all that Christianity proclaims. It prepares the stage for the church to be the church, in the best sense. It provides the opportunity for Christians to do church in the best sense of biblical meaning. However, it won't happen through a church, a wineskin, that has become irrelevant. The essence of the Christian Movement is not the container, but the content. That content is as valid and powerful today as ever. Yet, it is being hindered by a delivery system, which is antiquated and inappropriate for the era in which we live.

Hinge Point

It is difficult to see history when you are in the middle of it for those of us who help churches focus on identifying God at work in our world today. During the last 10 to 15 years, it has become clear that we are in a time of change. This is a hinge point of history. Since the beginning of time, the movement of God's salvation history has experienced only a few of these epochal changes. We are

alive in the middle of one of them.

Change makes life difficult, but very exciting. It makes church challenging, but filled with opportunity. In this time, we must separate form from substance. The substance of Christianity is essential and never changes. But the form in which it is carried, the wineskin by which it is delivered, has always changed. It will continue to change. Today, Christians are called to dramatically and transformationally change strategy. It is a time of great receptivity. With proper strategy, you will discover: this is harvest time.

In this era, there are many pioneering churches. Christian leaders are increasingly saying, "What we do, the way we do it, doesn't work anymore." In this process, God is capturing our attention, even though we may not be clear about the road ahead. Pioneering churches are moving, on a journey — a pilgrimage. We must press through this hinge point in history, paying very close attention to what God is doing and joining Him there. As we partner with this move of God, Christians become part of a regeneration pilgrimage.

As pioneers, we are sometimes challenged to find our way. Pioneers often travel a long way to find a pass over the mountains, only to discover that the route they chose will not work. They backtrack and try another direction, until

they find success. This is the time in which we live. It is a pioneering time. It is a hinge point of history. It is just the beginning of a regeneration of Christianity.

CHAPTER ONE

GOD WATCHING

What would you do to help your church become more effective during this epochal change in history? How would you develop an approach for your church that does much very well, but has “ceilings” — roadblocks that scream the church is out of date and broadcast the horrible message that Christianity is worthless? How would you help your church present the God of the universe in a way that seems relevant to your neighbors? Would *you* be willing to change — to help your church?

There are several options for your church. One is to focus on what is wrong. This common approach looks for the negatives. Leaders spend most of their time, energy, and resources correcting problems. A second approach is to bring the latest and greatest model from some well-known church. This is the toolbox approach, assuming every church is the same and “one size fits all.” There is a

better, biblical way.

Finding the God-Niche

In the process of helping your church in the best way possible, use the affirm-and-build model. Thank God for what is going well. People are motivated by good news more than bad news. Build on your strengths.

Henry Blackaby, in his book *Experiencing God*,¹ identifies two different approaches to Christianity. One is to come up with a strategy and pray like crazy God blesses it. The other approach is to focus on what God is doing. Identify where God is moving and join Him there. This is a biblical approach. It is all about discovering what God is already blessing and getting in the middle of it.

What Jesus said to His disciples one day must have sounded, at first, very strange. It is counter-intuitive to most church people in our century as well. Jesus said, "I only do what I see the Father doing."² Jesus was doing more than reporting to the disciples, His followers, about His particular approach to everyday life. He was giving them a paradigm to follow. He was telling them to go where God is going, do what God is doing, and get in the middle of what God

is blessing. Your approach to church is to first identify, in your unique church, what's working — how people are being changed, how they are growing spiritually, being transformed, how the church is effectively making a difference in the lives of people in their community. Affirm what God is doing and help the church build on that. Instead of fixating on weaknesses or problems, build on the church's strengths. It is what Jesus would do. It's surprising how rare this approach is among those who lead churches. And, what about you? How do you look at life?

Any believer can become a God watcher. When you listen to the morning news, ask yourself the question, "What is God going to do through this?" When you hear about a natural disaster or a political debate, what do you think about? When you read a newspaper or magazine article, how do you process it? If you train your mind, you can begin to ask the questions "Where is God in this?" What are the spiritual implications? What are the biblical dynamics behind the behavior, someone's reaction, this report? You may not know the answers, but asking the questions will turn you into a God watcher.

As you look at this era of Christianity, it may raise more questions than provide answers. As you focus on Christianity regenerated, share what you have seen, what you experience. If you begin this discipline, and watch for the next 10 to 20 years, you will see a new epoch of Christianity unfolding before your very

eyes. You will observe what you read here. You will either see it in your church, or you will see it elsewhere. Whether you see it in your church and your own life will greatly depend on the choices you make over the next few years. What you read here may transform those choices.

In my perception, we are approximately two-thirds of the way through this hinge point in history. It is difficult to nail down history when you are going through it. It is a process, which is a series of events. This means every Christian, every ministry, every church does not have much time to make some very important choices, key decisions, and significant changes in the way we do Christianity. It has to begin with the way you understand Christianity. It reflects how you understand the world and the way the world works. There is no question, in my mind, that we are well on our way through a hinge point of history, moving from one epoch to another. This journey did not begin just recently.

Praying for Revival

Are you praying for your church? For the last 30 years, I have prayed that God would revive the church. Some call it a revival. Others call it a renewal or an awakening. This has occurred often in history. Today is a major turning point of Christianity. Many have been asking God to bring about some movement —

no matter what you call it — that would release the powerful impact of Christianity on our world.

Why wouldn't I pray? Christianity has made a big difference in my life. God has changed my direction. He has had an impact on virtually every important area of my life. While it is not always easy, I have no regrets. Why wouldn't I want that for other people? What about you? When I look at churches, I'm frustrated. It is pathetic. The more I learn, the more I see God at work, the more I understand, the more frustrating it gets. This is the challenge and the burden that goes with God watching and praying for God to move.

My journey started many years ago. I began visiting areas of the world experiencing flash points of Christianity — a move of God. I wanted to learn at the micro level what God was doing in that particular culture, at that particular time, among those specific people. Yet, I also wanted to learn what I could on the macro level, in case God would ignite a movement for the whole world.

My early journeys took me to Seoul, Korea, where I found some of the largest churches in Christian history. In the early days of that movement I made several trips to the Yoido Full Gospel Church and became friends with their leader, David Yonggi Cho. No church has ever existed in history with hundreds of thousands of members. They worship in several buildings scattered

throughout the city. I learned of the outreach they developed through cell groups. Sometime later, I visited the Jesus is Lord Church in the Philippines. I was amazed at the contagious spirit of how Christians brought others. I was humbled by how they worshipped without a building in a large parking lot, bringing in chairs by pickup truck and setting them up every weekend.

I had the opportunity to visit various movements in Nigeria, West Africa. I observed the Deeper Life Bible Church with Pastor W.F. Kumuyi. I saw how the power of hope meant so much to the Nigerian people. They live in such a chaotic and often hopelessly corrupt society. During that time, I also had the chance to visit my friend Pastor Kriengsak Chareonwongsak, leader of the Hope of Bangkok Church. This church began a movement to plant a church in every area of Thailand. Kriengsak brought an indigenous style of Christianity to the Thai people. I observed how they were more receptive to Christianity in their own heart language. It was enlightening to see how that movement exploded among the Thai people.

During the years just before the fall of Communism in the former Soviet Union, society was loosening up. Young adult Christians were being freed from jail, where they spent years because of their faith. I saw many Russians with a new and growing sense of freedom being attracted to Christianity. I had the opportunity to experience, on several occasions, the church movement among

the indigenous peoples of the Amazon Jungle, as we worked with pastors in Manaus, Brazil. It was my privilege to travel throughout China, where the house church movement is growing so rapidly no one can calculate the size of the movement.

It was exciting to be a part of the explosive growth of Christianity during the fall of apartheid in South Africa. I had the opportunity to teach the first conference for thousands of pastors, both black and white. They came together for the first time in that country's history. It was a special moment to experience mutual reconciliation and declaration of forgiveness. The Christian Movement began growing rapidly among blacks throughout South Africa.

I had the opportunity to work among many of the countries in the northeastern part of Africa. There is rapid growth of Christianity in many different cultures in Africa, even though they often face significant challenges, ranging from famine, political instability, and the AIDS epidemic.

In all of these experiences, I traveled as a God watcher. Looking for threads of universal principles — actions of God — that might be a clue to a worldwide move. But it was not yet time. The stage was not quite set.

England: The Sheffield Movement

A few years ago, I was working with my friend, Walt Kallestad, senior pastor of a mega-church in the Phoenix area. While his church had grown to 10,000 in worship, Walt was increasingly concerned about reaching those who are unchurched, the largest population group in the U.S. He was also concerned that, while his church was reaching new people for Christ, they were not growing in depth and quality of discipleship. Walt, a God watcher himself, told me he had taken some time away from his church and visited a man who had written books about the Emerging Church Movement, Brian McLaren. Brian encouraged Walt to visit St. Thomas' Church in Sheffield, England.

During my next visit to Phoenix, Walt had just returned from his trip to Great Britain. He had a new level of enthusiasm. His message was short: "Kent, for what you do to help churches, you absolutely have to go to Sheffield, England, to experience what's going on there." I told Walt I would pray about it, but honestly figured his enthusiasm would soon wane. "After all," I rationalized, "the last thing I need is another airplane trip."

Four months later, I was at Walt's church again for a Board meeting. That is when I learned his enthusiasm had not diminished. It actually increased, as he processed what he experienced. He held me accountable, asking me if I had

been to England. I said, somewhat sheepishly, "No, but I'm still praying about it." With that confession, I privately promised God I would now seriously pray.

A few months later, I invited four pastors to accompany me on a short, whirlwind visit to this city in north central England, to see what God was doing. I stayed with Mick Woodhead, pastor of St. Thomas' Anglican/Baptist Church in an area of Sheffield called Crookes. As we were eating breakfast together, I was reflecting upon how this was, at first blush, a movement that looked more like the church of the Book of Acts than I had ever seen anywhere in the world. I told Mick I had traveled the world, looking for a move of God that might be trans-cultural. I was fascinated by this new introduction to what God was doing. This movement has influenced numerous churches in England and throughout Europe.

While all this was new, and my understanding was shallow, I recognized the basic elements of the vibrant New Testament Church, dressed in 21st century clothes. As we were talking, God spoke into my life and prompted me in a way that was very clear. God directed me to return, soon, and bring my son, Jonathan, who had just graduated from high school and was getting ready to start football camp at a university in Indiana. God also directed me to bring others to England to relationally experience this movement.

For the last several years, I have taken church leaders from North America to England to teach and coach them, while they experience what God is doing. *A movement is caught as much as taught.*

Four years after my first visit, I learned why I was supposed to take Jonathan to England. While he was excited to visit England with me, he was soon heavily involved in his university studies and football. When he graduated four years later, he was invited to take a year of training at that church in FORM, a discipleship training experience aimed at spiritual formation. The young adults in FORM are imprinted by God with the DNA of this movement.

During the 10 months Jonathan was in training, my wife and I watched (via Skype) his spiritual transformation.³ We watched as he grew to a missional level of Christianity much like others at that church — a level I have not seen equaled anywhere in the world. It looks like a contemporary version of the New Testament Church. Today, SEND North America is patterned after FORM in England. North American young adults are being transformed. Numerous other young-adult training efforts are emerging throughout North America. This is part of what God is doing.

Many of the church leaders I have taken to England over the years have returned to North America to start incubators of this movement. I've continued to learn more about what God is doing in and through this British Movement. I've also been watching various pockets of new movements in North America. One of the best models of an organic church plant with the DNA of the British Movement has been pioneered by my friend, Tom Schaeffer, in Toledo, Ohio. Tom leads Threshold Community Church. Like most churches in this movement, much of the ministry takes place out in the community. Tom is one of the first pastors I took to England. He has the DNA of that movement and has discipled a core group of leaders who are now discipling others. Threshold is on the verge of exponential growth — a characteristic of this movement.

River City Church in Jacksonville, Florida, was planted by a church in London, England. It is a part of this movement. River City is a dynamic congregation with a commitment to the city, reaching out with many of the principles similar to what I have observed at England.

Neil Cole, author of *Organic Church*⁴ and *Church 3.0*,⁵ has launched a movement of several hundred house churches. Neil and the leaders of that movement develop "simple churches," small organic congregations that do not require a building or full-time pastoral staff. This movement represents another dimension of how God is moving. Other churches in North America are

multiplying by developing satellite locations with video-venue preaching — the spiritual adaptation to franchising.

While the satellite and video-venue models are focused on growing the movement out of an established church, organic churches start with new believers and often meet in coffee shops, homes, and other public venues.

A similar movement is led by Alan Hirsch, author of *The Shaping of Things to Come*.⁶ Alan is part of The Tribe of LA, a Jesus Community in the Los Angeles area. Solomon's Porch is a well-known church in Minneapolis that sponsors emergentvillage.com, a platform reporting various dimensions of this movement. In Germany, Wolfgang Simson has emerged as a self-proclaimed prophet. Simson says, "I was one of those guys absolutely disgusted sitting next to my mother on the organ bench, listening to things some guy said in front of some Lutheran church, being bored to death." Simson is part of what is called the Simple Church Network⁷ and author of the book *Houses That Change the World*.⁸

These are only a few examples of new movement churches. Many of them are in pioneering stages. They represent different ways to do church. Many of these movements are not connected and only some network with each other. However, similar principles connect many of them. Even though the leaders of

these movements may not be conversant or know a lot about the other movements, they are remarkably the same. This, for a God watcher, is important. It signals that God is at work, providing spontaneous generation — regeneration — a new wineskin for doing church. While there are varieties of expressions, there are threads of similarity. What is most exciting is that these threads of similarity look very similar to the New Testament Church at the level of DNA. They are new expressions, moving from what has become an incrustated Christianity, encumbered with the baggage of religion, to a new, fresh movement that is delivering the message of Jesus Christ. They are new, but old. They reflect a return to New Testament basics. They are part of a pilgrimage of what God is doing — a regeneration.

You may have never had the opportunity to experience a major move of God. It may not be part of your experience to have witnessed, first-hand, the exponential explosion of Christianity. Churches are over-crowded. People come to Christ so rapidly, in such large numbers, it is unexplainable, humanly speaking. There is such rapid growth of the faith that it is, literally, out of control — at least human control. This is what happened in the Mediterranean world of the New Testament. It can happen again. I've seen it around the world. It can happen anywhere. It is spontaneous regeneration. It can happen to you.

CHAPTER TWO

THE 500-YEAR ITCH

Consider the possibility that worldwide Christianity is spontaneously making a major change of epochal proportions. Consider that this is a move of God. Consider that this has been coming for, perhaps, 50 years. The beginning of this may have been the Charismatic Movement of the last century. Connected to this was the Jesus Movement. It was a time when Christians longed for a faith that was more real, more spiritual, more experiential, and more biblical. Is that what you want?

Decade of Transition

Think about this: in the last decade of the 20th century, some interesting events occurred in the Christian Movement. In the 1990s, there was an explosion of contemporary Christian music, utilizing instruments, words, tempo,

and volume more in line with present generations. That music explosion brought about one of the most dramatic growths in media, the rapid proliferation of Christian radio stations. It was during this time denominational walls began to fall and Christians sensed the desire to stand up for their faith in different ways. It was a football coach who began to gather men in what became known as Promise Keepers. This was soon followed by Women of Faith. During this same time, a massive worldwide movement of Bible study emerged, Bible Study Fellowship (BSF). Challenging Christians to hours of homework, accountability, and deep teaching of the Bible, BSF gathers tens of thousands. They mingle with people from different denominational backgrounds, fellowships, and movements for high-end Bible teaching. It was during this time that a psychologist, concerned about the deterioration of the family, started Focus on the Family, with impact on millions of young parents and their children. During the 1990s, brave pioneers launched a television show called *Touched By An Angel*, which led to an increasing number of shows and films that reflected Christian thought and teaching. It was during this time that two authors published numerous volumes of the *Left Behind* series, which caught the attention of millions. This series was on the best-seller list for years. *The Jesus Film* was produced by Campus Crusade for Christ. It was shown to millions, from a small village in northwest Thailand to a major theater in downtown Moscow. At the turn of the century, Mel Gibson, in spite of the enormous pushback from Hollywood, released the film *The Passion of the Christ*, which

became a worldwide box-office smash hit, in spite of the fact the words were delivered in subtitles on the screen. My friend, Rick Warren, published *The Purpose Driven Life*, a book that saturated North American life at every level, and moved on to the international stage, influencing whole nations.

It doesn't take a church consultant or rocket scientist to look back at that period of time and see something very dramatic. Almost none of these spectacular Christian efforts were promoted by a church, churches, or a denomination. However, in the media, among para-church organizations, from entrepreneurs, and through the arts, there has been a blossoming of Christianity, which ended perhaps 40 years of decline between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1990s.

What if this is true? What if we are two-thirds through this hinge point of major change? If your church is cutting edge, most of the change is behind you — with not much of the transition left. It may not seem to be that far along due to the “lag effect” of identifying reality while you are in the middle of change. Many other churches have resisted change. They are entrenched and resistant. Like dinosaurs, they may sense that extinction is on the horizon. Christianity is going through a major overhaul, moving toward regeneration. This is not the first time the Christian Movement experienced an upgrade. What were the other eras? When did they occur?

The Reinvention Cycle

I'm indebted to Phyllis Tickle, who published a book in 2008 called *The Great Emergence*.¹ Phyllis is an Anglican historian. She is not a person you would identify with launching a new movement in our world today. She, like many of us, is not part of the younger generation who represent much of the backbone of this movement. But God watchers come in all ages. Phyllis is an outstanding God watcher. She makes a great case that, throughout history, every 500 years, Christianity has reinvented itself. God is constantly regenerating! There have been many smaller revivals in between. This would include most of those I have observed throughout the world over the last 30 years. But change in Christianity, at epochal dimensions, seems to happen about every 500 years, as Tickle points out.

If, indeed, this is a time of change to a regeneration of Christianity, then we can think about what happened around 500 years ago. That was the Protestant Reformation. During the Protestant Reformation, the wineskin of Christianity was dramatically changed. Before the Reformation there was the Eastern Orthodox Church, in its various forms, and the Roman Catholic Church. The church had become a hierarchical system, encumbered by centuries of tradition and corporate baggage. At the time of the Reformation, God raised a number of leaders throughout the continent of Europe. Luther, Zwingli (and, later,

Wesley). There were many others who — spontaneously and simultaneously — were writing, debating, and speaking about a better way to do church. They were not abandoning the substance of Christianity. They were reforming it. In the process, they were casting off baggage the church had collected over the centuries. This baggage represented a religion of rules and habits that became roadblocks to faith. Christianity had changed from a movement to an institution. While the initial intent was to reform the church, the movement became a new wineskin.

Phyllis Tickle also reflects on the 500 years before the Reformation. One thousand years ago, it was the time of what is known as the Great Schism. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, there was a Roman Catholic Pope called Gregory the Great. Gregory the Great was instrumental in cleaning up much of the chaos and mess of the church. Gregory could be called a reformer within the Roman Catholic Church. He also launched the Monastic Movement, providing a platform for Christians, particularly those who are focused on mission, to work unencumbered by all the rules, regulations, and bureaucracy. They were the first para-church organizations, and there were several. The Jesuits became known throughout the world for their missionary work, particularly in South America. During this same time, the Council of Chalcedon took place. This was the Church's fourth ecumenical council. The key issue focused on the incarnation. Christians identified and articulated clearly who

Jesus is, asking the question, "Was Jesus *a* son of God, *the* Son of God, human, divine, or what?" With focus on Jesus as true God and true man, the clarity of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,² provided significant fuel that ignited the mission activity of the church throughout the world.

Phyllis Tickle reflects on the Christian Movement 500 years before the Great Schism. Fifteen hundred years ago was about the time of the birth of the Roman Catholic Church. While most Protestants look at the Roman Catholic Church post-Reformation, this hinge point in the history of the Christian Movement — the birth of the Roman Catholic Church — was an important maturation point. The Roman Catholic Church brought order to a young Christian Church. The movement had drifted. Christianity incorporated magic and animistic practices (a remnant of that still exists in our modern language, as magicians use the words "Hocus Pocus," which is from the Latin Mass of the Lord's Supper). The emergence of the Roman Catholic Church brought trained leaders, called clergy, into the mix. For the first time, people were, to some degree, equipped for leading local churches.

Five hundred years earlier, 2,000 years ago, is the New Testament Church. The Early Church exploded across the Mediterranean world. There are many reasons why the church grew so rapidly in the first century. Rodney Stark, in his book

The Rise of Christianity,³ documents some of the cultural, spiritual, and environmental issues that reflect the explosion of Christianity. This was the first-generation Christian Movement. The followers of Jesus quickly adapted to the new wineskins, provided by His teaching and modeling, and the teaching of His followers, especially the Apostles.

New Testament Refrigerator

There is a key environmental dimension to the Early Church that parallels the regeneration of Christianity we are experiencing today. In the Mediterranean world of the Early Church, mobilization was not an issue. Many of the Roman roads were not yet built, travel was dangerous, and ship travel had not yet been perfected and was not widely used. Consequently, generations of the same family lived within the same village, city, or area. Literacy was not common. The main form of communication was talking to one another in the marketplace of life. There were no refrigerators. Since food could not be preserved, people went to the marketplace every day. Michael Green, in his book *Evangelism In the Early Church*,⁴ says the marketplace provided the platform for people to “gossip the Gospel.” There was a spontaneous chattering of the good news about the difference Jesus made in peoples’ lives. As one spoke to another, the message flowed rapidly through family networks. The concentration of families, with people meeting in the marketplace, provided a network platform.

Christianity spread quickly through the Mediterranean world through social networking. Sound familiar?

Throughout the 20 centuries that followed, the world has become increasingly mobile. As work opportunities arise, families are scattered. As economic conditions improve, people are able to buy homes and experience what those in under-resourced cultures cannot experience: privacy. Throughout the centuries, people have become increasingly cloistered, communicating primarily for business, recreational, educational, and survival needs.

In the 16th century, with the introduction of the printing press, mass communication took a different form, moving from relational conversation to books.

In the 20th century, with the invention of mass media (radio and television), people continued to become more isolated to the point where, in the 1980s, at least in American culture, sociologists were discussing the phenomenon of "cocooning." Why talk to anyone but your few and favorite friends and family when you can listen to the radio, watch TV, enjoy the comfort of your home, and have pizza delivered?

Then came an epoch-changing breakthrough: the Internet. In the beginning, few people recognized how it would reshape the DNA of coming generations. John Naisbitt, in his phenomenal work *Megatrends*,⁵ gave a hint of what was to come. He said, “High tech would demand high touch.” To my knowledge, virtually no one in Christianity saw what was coming, or how it would impact the Christian Movement.

For many of us, we use the Internet by adoption. It was not there when we were born, it came along during our working years, and we learned to use it, sometimes begrudgingly, to whatever extent we had to, to get by. Some — who are more technologically attuned — adapted rapidly along the way. Yet, it has never been a part of our DNA. One day, somebody invented a mobile phone. They were big and expensive at first, but soon became small, inexpensive, and appeared everywhere. Soon, generations were born that never knew life without the cell phone. Children entered preschool already knowing how to use the computers in their classrooms. The digital world is not only a technological reality. It shapes relational life.

The Rise of Natural Networkers

While you were sleeping, new generations were birthed with the DNA of networking. Before you knew it, there were generations of people who were

imprinted as natural networkers. I first observed this with my own children. When they became old enough to drive, they wanted to go to the mall. In my generation, a generation that saw the birth of shopping malls, we went to the mall to buy something. In my children's generation, they went to the mall to hang out with their friends. The rest is history.

With the fall of Communism, the old, antiquated, and unreliable phone system, representing the infrastructure of the former Soviet Union, was replaced almost entirely by cell towers. In China, everywhere I look, I see young people talking on cell phones. Among the thousands of apps technology brings, are you thinking about all this does for the Christian Movement? Are you God watching?

For the first time in history since the 1st century, generations are, by design, networkers. It's in their DNA. This is more than technology. It is cultural. To think of it another way, for the first time in the history of humankind, the whole world is becoming networked. There are no longer "closed" countries. Those countries, like Iran, pretend they can dominate their people. However, they will only find increasing unrest among younger generations. They surf the Web and know a different world exists beyond their country's borders. No regime will ever be able to rule a group of people again and keep them oblivious to the rest of the human family. The historic changes revolving around The Arab Spring demonstrate the power of technology for movements.

Everything has changed. With the change, the world, for the first time in history, is a global network platform. For the first time ever, the stage is set for an explosive growth of Christianity, and there are no limits. This is not the only dimension of Christianity regeneration. But it does provide the opportunity for Christianity to capture the world. It won't be promoted in the old wineskin of worn out patterns. This is the key.

Offloading Baggage

As Phyllis Tickle points out, during every 500-year epochal shift the church unloads its cultural baggage. This is baggage that worked well 500 years prior, but the world has moved on — that baggage does not work anymore.

In missionary language, it means the church will reinvent redemptive analogies. These are metaphors — ways of communicating the faith that reach the target audience now before us. Contemporary music, engaging worship, house churches, and outreach approaches are aspects of regeneration to reach a world that has dramatically changed. At this hinge point of history, Christians will increasingly focus on whatever it takes, strategically — in methodology — to penetrate the world it faces. Churches will do this or perish.

It is not easy living in a hinge point time. There are incredible challenges.

These are difficult times for the church. Strategically speaking, most churches cannot make this change with the present leadership alone. The present leaders of most churches are too involved doing what leaders should be doing: guiding the church every day. Most do not have the capacity, time, or energy to initiate this type of change.

A primary strategy is to bring change by intervention. The key opportunity is for your church to use a specialist — a guide — to help encourage the leaders. Very few leaders can do this alone. They need the catalytic support of those who have thought through this process of change and know how to bring it about without completely disrupting your church. With that help, it is possible for most churches to move through this hinge point of history and excel in productivity in the years ahead. In the 1st century, early church, who were these catalysts? They were the apostles. Not personally connected to the local church, the apostles could bring objectivity and experience. This worked well, as the record shows. It still works today.

The time is short. Within a few years, it will become apparent that some churches are stuck. They have put a stake in the ground to remain as they are. Others have made the changes toward a pilgrimage of regeneration. With each passing day, the dramatic difference between the two postures becomes a wider gulf.

Results on the Horizon

Phyllis Tickle, in *The Great Emergence*, reflects on three “corollary events” that take place through the transition to regeneration.

First, Christianity bursts forth with new vitality and energy. New people come to Christ. These are not just lapsed Christians but many who were previously unbelievers. The church is tangibly effective because it is a different church. What is different? Values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews have changed. Behavior changes. The church has a renewed vigor to care for the widows, orphans, and the poor. The church has a measurable impact on culture and community. The church disciplines Christians, lives grace, and loves people.

Second, in the process, Christianity goes back to its basic values, what I call New Testament culture. It begins to look like the 1st century church in 21st century clothes. There is a renewed, reinvigorated form of the church that reflects more of the New Testament Church in its dynamic and DNA. Even those churches that do not make the change will be impacted by some form of renewal. For example, the Roman Catholic Church lost masses of people to the Protestant Reformation. However, the seeds of the Reformation have influenced the Roman Catholic Church and continue to do so today.

Third, every time Christianity has gone through regeneration, the exponential growth of the movement has impacted more people who were previously not Christians. As this happens, regenerated churches, in a world imprinted by the Internet, have the opportunity to experience worldwide revival. Revival is when God gets tired of being misrepresented and shows up to represent Himself.⁶

CHAPTER THREE

NOT YOUR FATHER'S CHURCH

The door is closing on your father's church. It may continue or it may disappear. If it continues, becoming healthy and productive, it will undergo transformational change. This change will result from a spiritual pilgrimage. It will be spiritually renewed, reformed, reconstituted. How has the Christian Church survived? It is not that the church has learned the secret of growing old, but found the miracle of being born again. It is all about spiritual formation — regeneration. It is not about programs for the institution. It's all about you. You are the church.

If a church refuses change, it will likely focus on ritual, demonstrate hyper-institutionalism, and glorify the perceived orthodoxy of the past epoch. In truth, it will lose the essence of orthodoxy: the relevance and effectiveness to impact anyone. It may continue to survive. If it does, it will not escape some tweaking

toward regeneration. The Roman Catholic Church eventually experienced Vatican I and Vatican II, as well as many other minor changes through the backdoor influence of the Protestant Reformation. Depending on the church's resistance, it may simply be a casualty of epochal change: another closing church.

As you think about this for your church, from the outset, look through the lens of a transformational change of historic proportions. Recognize that few churches can do this by themselves. Do not let pride direct you to thinking this is within your grasp without help. Get help from those who have thought longer, processed further, and experienced more. The Proverb says, "A wise person has many counselors."¹ Those counselors, as I showed in the previous chapter, are "apostles." What is their role? How does it work?

The New Testament is not the first reference in history to use the word "apostle." From antiquity, kings and emperors who conquered new lands would extend their kingdoms by establishing a new culture among people groups. Typically, the people would, over time, drift from the king's culture. The king would send a special ambassador to reestablish the culture: the values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews of the king and his kingdom. These emissaries were called "apostles." The Holy Spirit uses this terminology in the New Testament. One of the roles of the apostles was to keep the churches focused, culturally. God knows the human tendency is to drift. The local

community of believers is subject to drift in several areas: 1) from mission to maintenance; 2) from movement to programs; 3) from Body life to institutionalism; 4) from low control to bureaucracy; 5) from relational discipling to volunteerism; 6) from spiritual gifts-based deployment to volunteerism; 7) from high accountability to low accountability; 8) from everyone witnessing in their social networks to an evangelism committee; 9) from a starfish-type organization called the priesthood of all believers to a hierarchical staff organization; and 10) from a "sentness" to a "you all come" approach. This cultural drift is best corrected through the influence of an outside interventionist. God's plan is to use apostle-like leaders to come alongside local congregations, and, from an objective perspective, be used by God to influence the culture. It is why an apostle, like Paul, could say to the Christians at Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by a renewal of your mind" (the way you think — your worldview, your culture).²

If you are a leader at your church, you are in a position of influence. At this hinge point in history, you are a gatekeeper with epochal responsibility. On the one hand, you should not be overwhelmed. Even if your local church closes, God's Kingdom will continue. God will raise up other churches in its place. The King lives...long live the King! Jesus already demonstrated a resurrection of His body. He can do the same for a Body of Christ, the local church. For some churches, death may be required first. On the other hand, if you may feel God

has a role for your church, that He has uniquely brought together a group of people who can and should be an ongoing, cohesive force as ambassadors for Christ in this new era. If you believe that, then find the guidance you need to direct you through the complexities of a spiritual pilgrimage and transformation. Ask God for regeneration: a spiritual rebirth.

Remember, this is only the fifth time in history that Christians have had this opportunity. One hundred years ago, people were not faced with this challenge. There was no postmodernism, no Internet, no flat world, no networking, no hinge point of history. Those who lived 200 years ago were not bothered by this; or, for that matter, those who lived 300 or 400 years ago.

Think back to those who lived 500 years ago, at the time of the Reformation. From our historical vantage point, it looks glamorous and exciting. Martin Luther hammering 95 theses on a church door — how exciting is that? But recognize that Luther and other reformers were in fear for their very lives. They struggled day and night. They argued and debated. They lost friends, suffered splits in families, divided churches.

A hinge point in history is messy. It is not for the weak of heart. Regeneration-level change doesn't occur through church leaders who are managers. Epochal change is not managed, but led. This is a time for courageous leadership,

casting vision, stepping into the unknown, and going into uncharted territory. God raises apostolic leaders to guide and direct. They are spiritual pioneers. They are Christian entrepreneurs — and they can help you help your church. This isn't a birth of new Christianity, but a rebirth of New Testament Christianity. God is raising leaders who consider this a divine opportunity. Are you one of them? Then embrace this moment with joy and excitement!

Consider this a "God moment" for your personal growth, renewed spiritual strength, the building of character. This is what God accomplishes in times like these. Be a God watcher. See God's hand in history — your history, your church's history. With help from an "apostolic" guide, look for both the forest and the trees. Your guide is your friend, if you are humble and wise enough to seek counsel and direction.

Glimpses of God at Work

The following chapters provide some glimpses of what we already see God demonstrating through universal principles. The 10 areas highlighted are not exhaustive. They represent a cluster of core realities in this spiritual movement. In each of these elements are corollary sub-units. Collectively, they are a snapshot of what — as God watchers — we see God doing among churches. On the surface they seem simple to implement. Such thinking is dangerous and

could very well divide your church. Without a basic, missional, culture change, they could end up being just another program — with no lasting or substantive impact for your church. God is calling for transformational change. It means your church will become a different church — a New Testament version of its former self. Regeneration means rebirth. This is personal. It's about you. It's about others in your church. You are on the precipice of a great spiritual experience. You will never be the same.

Some of these elements will look familiar. You have, perhaps, seen a preview of them in some cutting-edge churches that might be further on the pilgrimage through this hinge point of history. If they don't look familiar, they may *feel* familiar. That feeling of familiarity comes from what you know about the New Testament Church. These elements have an amazing resemblance to the missional culture of 1st century Christianity. In this pilgrimage, you are not moving on but returning back...to New Testament Christianity.

You will conclude that through generations of cultural baggage, your church has abandoned many of these elements. You may feel anger, as you wonder how your church could drift so far. Remember, throughout history, the church — from the people side — has naturally gravitated from faith to religion, from a movement to an institution, from relationships to programs.

My friend Joe is on this pilgrimage. For a long time he didn't even know it. Joe has always been active in his church. Through the years, he has grown, through a mission trip to Africa, starting a home Bible study group, facing adversity, reading cutting-edge books, and connecting with regeneration leaders. In a way, Joe has become wrecked for his own church, which struggles with a subtle determination to remain in a previous epoch. This is a great struggle for Joe. Can you relate?

In the beginning of every chapter of the Christian Movement, some of that cultural baggage was useful. That's how it got into the church in the first place. Those people in the first 100 to 200 years after the Reformation were not bad people. They were not developing strategies to clog the mission and quench the Spirit. They were developing cultural approaches that effectively reached the people of their time. Those innovators are not the enemy.

The real culprit is the natural propensity for human beings to resist change. I like to say, "We kept the liturgy but lost our kids." That is further complicated by the human cloudiness that confuses content with containers and style with substance. Here is an example: just after the launch of the Reformation, someone decided that standing during worship was difficult and tedious. They designed benches so people could sit. Later, someone decided it would be more helpful to put backs on the benches. This was the birth of the church pew. In

another era, a practical inventor decided to pad the pews, perhaps so people could sleep in church more conveniently!

In the 21st century, many churches still have pews, even though new inventors have greatly improved ways to seat human beings. During building campaigns, churches fight — even divide — over the decision of pews or chairs. Somehow, in the history of seating, someone baptized pews. They changed from seats to sacred.

Unprecedented Opportunities

A hinge point of history has unprecedented challenges. There are also unprecedented opportunities. The danger in sharing the 10 glimpses of what God is doing might tempt you to see quick-fix, symptom-level “programs.” To follow such a strategy will surely end in the demise of your church. Later, we will focus on the cultural center at the heart of every church that reflects these 10 elements. If you miss that central issue, you miss everything. To reflect on these 10 elements is like looking through the window of a church that has stepped boldly into the pilgrimage of faith — a church that has experienced a rebirth of New Testament culture. This is some of what regeneration looks like. This stuff is not new. It is New Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

THINKING TOWARD A DIFFERENT FOCUS

What image comes to mind when someone talks about church? Ever catch yourself looking at your church from the perspective of a consumer? Many approach “church” thinking, “What does the church do for me? Here’s what I want the church to do.” Do you see “church” as a place? A building? An institution? It takes a major paradigm shift to look at your church as a movement. Yet, that’s what was birthed at Pentecost. Changing the way you see your church...well...changes everything.

Element #1: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Way We Think

At the heart and core of a faith pilgrimage is different thinking. This is the area of worldviews. A worldview reflects the way you understand the world and the way the world works. A biblical renewal of the church includes a major overhaul

of the way you understand the world of the church and the way the world of the church works.

Everyone, without exception, has a cluster of worldviews they bring to church. In fact, most church arguments — heated discussions — are not really about the issues being discussed. In almost every instance, the tensions come from a clash of worldviews about the church and how the church works. These tensions have increased over the last 50 years in North America. Secularization has increased greatly in our culture. Worldviews exist, most often, at a subconscious level. That's why church members who have been friends for years are often surprised when they disagree about some issue at church. "I just don't understand where Jack is coming from on this!" That's a confession about not having the same worldviews.

You and I are bombarded by secular viewpoints, each waking hour of every week. It is hard to develop biblical thinking by spending one or two hours in Bible class and worship every seven days. How do you capture a vision for the church from a biblical worldview when you live in a secular culture? It takes focus on what the Bible says about the nature and purpose of the church. The DNA of the biblical church — Christ-followers in community — consists of the values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews that are established in the Bible.

Here is an example. Many church tensions revolve around the issue of comfort. While it is rarely articulated, this subconscious worldview causes many challenges. Our culture is strongly committed to human comfort. Most people have hot showers, warm homes, surround sound in their cars, and air conditioners in hot weather. They see hundreds of commercials every year declaring comfort as an entitlement and priority.

The Scripture says, "God is love."¹ Many Christians, driven by the subconscious worldview of comfort, extrapolate a confused theology that says, "Since God is love, God, above all, must be interested in my comfort." Meanwhile, some creative and energetic leaders of the church notice the congregation is graying. They recognize that younger generations often prefer different styles of music, using different instruments. They suggest an added worship service for those whose heart language is "contemporary music." Soon after, a drum set and several other instruments become fixed elements in the worship space. After the traditional service meets for worship, it is likely one of the faithful members responds, "I don't like those drums in our sanctuary. I'm just not comfortable with that."

The issue may seem like drums, but it is actually an issue of comfort. The basic biblical worldview question is, "Is there evidence, anywhere in Scripture, that God has a high priority for your comfort?" The answer is overwhelmingly, "No!"

Throughout the Old Testament, God allowed His people to be uncomfortable — often, so they would repent. At times God caused the discomfort! One would think that any Christian who knows about Good Friday would clearly recognize that God is much more interested in the mission being accomplished than comfort — even His own son suffering and dying on a cross.

Another worldview transformation is the primary purpose of the church. Our research shows that, among those who actively worship at a church, over one-half (57%) have a “country club” view of the church. This view of church reflects a priority for providing a place of fellowship and showing love to “each other” — those in the church. The constitution of almost every church, every denomination, declares the purpose as “making disciples.” This implies outreach to others and personal growth. By gently surfacing this thinking, most churches can realize a 30% growth among those who “get it” when it comes to the main purpose of the church. This changed thinking changes the way people behave.

The issue of worldviews is at the heart and core of transforming a church through a spiritual pilgrimage. Romans 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (*New International Version*). That is, “the way you think.” The New Testament word for repentance is “metanoia.” It literally means to “change your mind” so you will change direction. This is where regeneration begins.

1 Corinthians 2:12 says, "God has given us His Spirit. That's why we don't think the same way the people of this world think" (*Contemporary English Version*). 1 Peter 4:1-2: "Since Jesus went through all we are going through, and more, learn to think like Him. Then you will be free to do what God wants you to do, rather than be tyrannized by what you want" (*The Message*). In Mark 1:15, Jesus said, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (*New International Version*).

I have written about 10 worldviews that bring health to the church in the book *Discover Your Windows*.² This book has become a core resource for the campaign *70 Days of Vision*.³ The campaign begins with the *Discover Your Windows Questionnaire*,⁴ reflecting on the 10 biblical worldviews. Those who participate in this self-reflective survey are often shocked when they score the results. They discover several biblical worldviews that are not clear in their Christian life. These issues are another centerpiece for changing behavior. This is not about another program. A spiritual pilgrimage toward church regeneration identifies the roadblocks; and — in part — the roadblock is us: the way we understand the world of the church.

At the heart and core of a healthy church is this reinvigoration of core worldviews that are in sync with the New Testament. Do not underestimate the issue of worldviews. Recognize, as well, that reconstruction requires

deconstruction. This, in essence, is the biblical concept of repentance. A spiritual pilgrimage begins with repentance, "metanoia," a change of your mind in a way that changes your direction. A church cannot change directions unless a critical mass of the people change the way they see the world of the church and understand the way that world works. This first element of focus is about *being* church. The next element of regeneration is the focus of *doing* church.

Element #2: The Focus of Church Will Shift From "Y'all Come" to "Go" Where People Are

This second element of Christianity basically turns the church inside out. This is an entirely different viewpoint of "church." It is a 180-degree reversal of the flow of church. Instead of taking people to church, we take the church to people. This, first and foremost, is a reorientation in the way people look at church, not as a destination, but a launch pad or training center. In the Old Testament, the role of God's people was to be a light to the nations. The nations were to make the pilgrimage to the Temple, where God lived. There, the priest would go into the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people. Israel was a light to the nations, much like your porch light on a warm, summer night draws the insects. Jesus turned this around. He said, "You are the light of the world."⁵ He said, "Go to the ends of the earth" (paraphrased).⁶

With this different orientation, church activities become very different. For example, while most people think of holding a Bible study at the church, the preferred venue is a restaurant, a park, or on the job during lunch. Your neighbor might see you in a restaurant and ask, "What are you doing?" If you explain you're in a Bible study, it could lead to a future faith discussion over coffee. It is unlikely your neighbor would discover your Bible study if it is held in the church basement.

Pastor Tom Schaeffer, Threshold Community Church in Toledo, Ohio, has disciplined the majority of the people to think 180 degrees differently. When a church leader from another church hears about this exciting regeneration church and wants to learn more, they might ask, "When can I come and observe a worship service?" Tom will reply that, while they are welcome to attend worship, they will never grasp the essence of Threshold Community by attending a service. Though it is great to attend worship, the real heartbeat of Threshold takes place in the community.

Tom Schaeffer's "office" is at Buffalo Wild Wings, where he has made friends with staff. He has become the "chaplain" of the restaurant. He carries his cell phone, his laptop, and utilizes the employee's break room. That's where he holds training meetings for leaders and where people who want to visit with him can meet.

Threshold Community's members are involved in what they identify as "call-outs." This terminology comes from the root word for church, "ecclesia" in Greek. This reflects the New Testament concept of believers who are "called out." These call-outs represent groups involved in ministry beyond the church, in the community.

One of the call-outs is "11/7." On the 11th day of each month, they meet at 7:00 p.m. — for pizza. They are on a quest to visit restaurants in the greater Toledo area, to identify the best pizza. But "11/7" is more than pizza and fellowship. During the meal, they have the Lord's Supper. At the end of the meal, they pray and look around the restaurant, seeking God's leading. When they come to a consensus on a selected table, they take an offering, call the waitress, and pay for that table's dinner. They call it a "pay-it-forward" ministry. Can you imagine the reaction to this random act of kindness?

"11/7" is all about food, but not just feeding themselves. Their primary mission is to serve the Toledo area by feeding the hungry. They began with a vision to feed 5,000 people in one year, without any cost to the church. Before the year was over, they had reached their goal! "11/7" works with the local soup kitchen, feeding homeless people, and occasionally gives away free hot dogs on a major city street. As people try to pay, they refuse remuneration, but always offer prayer, simply asking, "Anything I can pray for?" If people respond with a

request, they pray with them, right on the spot. They hand out no invitations to church. This is not a disguised strategy to fill worship. Threshold Community is patterned after a church in England, which is an excellent “classroom” for the regeneration movement around the world.

In England, St. Thomas’ Church is scattered with ministries throughout the city of Sheffield. One Sunday each month there is no worship service at the church in the morning. They chain the doors shut! Instead, those who come to church put on a “Love Sheffield” sticker, divide into teams, and hit the streets. It’s your choice: you can be part of the picking-up-litter team, handing-out-bottled-water team, handing-out-chocolates team, or some other ministry to demonstrate “Love Sheffield.” Again, no brochures to invite people to church, but always a willingness to pray for people — and witness to Christ.

If this sounds counter-intuitive to you, then you are beginning to grasp the depth of the spiritual pilgrimage God brings through regeneration of your church. You will also begin to sense the extent your church has drifted from the biblical norm. This is related to the next element, which reengineers the church’s platform, centered around relationships.

Element #3: The Focus Has Moved From Institutions to Relationships

This element redesigns strategies away from programming, toward a culture of networking. There are hundreds of implications for every church once you evaluate everything you do from the perspective of whether it is institutionally organized or operating relationally.

For example, at the church I attend, the pastors ask several people to help distribute the Lord's Supper. It is offered the first, third, and fifth Sundays of the month. Since I travel in my work helping churches, I'm not at my home church very often. When I'm home, worshipping with my family, someone on the worship team will ask me to help distribute the Lord's Supper. I don't mind, since, as a frequent traveler, there is not much I can do to serve our church. Most of the people they ask to help are older. I wondered what that signaled to the younger crowd in our worship service. So I politely asked my pastor if he would consider inviting some younger people to help. I suggested that those of us who do this could simply identify younger members of the congregation and invite them to come forward with us. My thinking was that some of us could model and mentor them in a relational approach to distribute the Lord's Supper. Our pastor, who is an excellent preacher and way-above-average pastor, defaulted to an institutional strategy. He: 1) put a notice in the bulletin for those who would be interested and 2) offered a class on Thursday night for those who responded.

While this may not seem like a monumental issue, it represents a *modus operandi*. It's a way many churches operate — from the position of an institution rather than the platform of relationships. If you study the New Testament carefully, you will notice that the movement (not institution) primarily operated by relationships. In fact, Jesus developed His followers by discipling — a relational approach to training.

Emerging, younger generations will subconsciously gravitate toward churches that operate from a relational base. They are subconsciously repelled from churches that operate as institutions. Influenced by technology, present generations are natural networkers. This is a symbol of hope for the rapid expansion of the church. Social networks play a huge role in the culture of emerging generations. This global phenomenon has implications for the spread of Christianity in unprecedented dimensions.

I was at a church recently, attending worship. I arrived early and noticed the sanctuary was a buzz of people talking, laughing, hugging, and greeting one another. As the music started, and after an opening song, the pastor gave the announcements. They included the pastor's friendly exhortation that as people come into the sanctuary they should sit quietly "in reverence to God and to prepare your heart for worship." After the worship service, I was engaged in conversation with a young couple who was greatly offended by the pastor's

announcement. They were greeting their friends and felt judged. I recalled a visit to Jerusalem several years before, when I was asked to join with two Jewish rabbis and another Christian pastor to consult the government of Israel. We attended the Sabbath service at the Great Synagogue of Jerusalem. It was a special opportunity, as I had an English-speaking rabbi commentator on each side, one a conservative and the other reformed. They described what was going on during the service. At the beginning, I was amazed at the “energetic chatter” that was taking place throughout the synagogue. It seemed like these devout Jews were preparing for worship with more sensitivity to relationships than this young couple was experiencing at their church.

The issue of moving from institutions to relationships has hundreds of implications in the life of a church. My British friend, Mick Woodhead, regularly pauses at some point in the worship service and asks for everyone to take out their cell phones. I know what you’re thinking — you’ve heard it a hundred times. You’re thinking Mick was about to tell them to turn off their cell phones so they don’t disturb the “institutional” worship. Not at all! Mick does just the opposite: “Turn on your cell phones. Now, in the next couple of minutes — we’re all going to do this — text one (or more) of your friends who is not in worship today. It doesn’t matter if they’re asleep, they’ll get your message when they wake up. Tell them you’re worshipping God, and tell them to have a great day!” If this seems unusual to your experience in church, you may have

some adjustments to make about the focus on institutions or relationships. One more thing about the worship led by Mick: I have never experienced more reverent worship and engaged worshippers anywhere in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE

REDEFINING OUTREACH

When you see your church as relationships rather than institution, and the trajectory as “moving out” rather than “gathering in,” it won’t be long before you abandon the baggage of the old evangelism committee at your father’s church. A key to regeneration is the strategic explosion of evangelistic outreach.

Element #4: Outreach Has Changed From the Evangelism Committee and Staff to Every Believer

As you journey on this spiritual pilgrimage, the focus on evangelistic ministry moves from an institutional program to the priesthood of all believers. At the time of the Reformation, leaders resurrected this concept in theory, but it didn’t much make it to the practice field. In each of the spontaneous movements

around the globe, we see a consistent emphasis to identify the “person of peace.”¹ This is one who shows signs of receptivity and openness to spiritual matters. We have found in these churches a consistent thread: everyone personally “owns” the Great Commission. Everyone has an eye for those who demonstrate spiritual interest. Those with heaps of problems are not ignored, but welcomed. People in “unacceptable” lifestyles — involved in “sinful” activities — are viewed totally different than in churches without this element.

A key element of this biblical approach requires a rearrangement of “the path.” The journey in many traditional churches is believe → behave → belong. Once you receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and learn how to act in and around church — and in your everyday life — you can become a member with the official “seal of approval” that says NOW YOU BELONG. However, Jesus did not use this path. This is not the biblical path used by the New Testament Church. It is also not very effective for the Great Commission. More effective, for the church that experiences spiritual regeneration, is the path of belong → believe → behave. When the love of Christ permeates the atmosphere of believers, people with “offensive” lifestyles are attracted through a spiritual magnetic force. They meet Jesus — in you.

In some churches, many would feel a person in an obviously wayward lifestyle would be too far away from God to receive the Good News of Jesus. However,

in this regeneration culture, Christians are much more likely to gain the reputation Jesus had: "He eats with tax collectors and sinners."² Neil Cole, author of *Organic Church*, has shared with me this insight: "Bad people make good soil. They are up to their ears in fertilizer." Neil reflects the attitude of those imprinted by this spiritual pilgrimage.

This biblical attitude toward "outsiders" could not work under the old system. That strategy brought them to the institution — to church. How do you bring a homeless person, an alcoholic, a prostitute, a convicted felon, a gay or lesbian co-worker to church? Not easily. Reverse that! Take church to people; focus on relationships, not the institution. This is something everyone can do, among everyone they meet, anywhere they meet them.

Another dimension of this element is a different way of looking at the mission field. Remember when each church identified its mission field by the neighborhood where it was located? Then, as people became more oriented to time rather than distance, it became a certain number of minutes away from church. In this regeneration of Christianity, the mission field is an entirely different dimension. It becomes the way-of-life contacts within the social networks of those in your church. Consequently, the redefinition of the "mission field" becomes those in your sphere of influence: your friends, relatives, neighbors, people with whom you work or go to school, within the "reach" of

your church. If you include those you influence through the Internet, your reach is worldwide. We have friends in Detroit sharing the story of Jesus with contacts inside the “closed” country of Iran. This is a major departure from training people in evangelism to knock on doors and talk to strangers (even those strangers who have visited the church). This is a re-orientation to a relational approach that centers outreach in the social networks of each and every believer. The result is a strategy of exponential proportions. Christianity becomes, once again, the movement God intends.

For the regenerated church, it’s not about an “evangelism program,” techniques, or, for that matter, those with the “gift of evangelism.” Christians do not have to be trained in ways to share their faith. That’s why this regeneration is a spiritual pilgrimage. It’s not a gimmick, program, or strategy. It is not about what you do, but who you are — and who you become.

It is not about inviting people to church. Secular people are not evangelized because you get them to sit in church. In fact, for those who are second-generation, unchurched people (“I’ve never been to church, my parents never went to church, but my grandparents, they went to church”), the leap from the world to the church is far too great. An invitation to worship is, in most cases, inappropriate and on the verge of being unkind. (This will be discussed further under element #10.)

Evangelism has been transformed from the chief responsibility of a committee in an institution to everyone sharing within their own social networks. It changes from a program to a lifestyle. This could scare many Christians. They would be petrified because they don't know how to share their faith. They don't know Bible verses to quote. They don't know how to "argue religion" or defend the faith. Forget all of that, because effective evangelism has returned to something simple, much like it was in the New Testament. Sharing the faith has become light-weight/low-maintenance. You will love this!

Element #5: Evangelism Becomes Witnessing

Can you remember the days when, in enthusiastic churches, a few members were trained in "evangelism?" They learned how to visit people in homes, beginning with a general conversation that showed interest. The objective was to share an outline (complete with Bible verses), present the Truth to people, and lead them in a prayer to receive Christ. In that previous era, much of that outreach was effective — and appropriate.

The world has changed. Postmodern, secularized people have no familiarity with biblical knowledge. They don't want to hear a sermon or a five-point outline and could care less about Bible verses. This does not make them bad people. They are postmodern. For them, truth is relative.

When I was young, my faith was greatly influenced by watching Billy Graham on television. I am grateful for the ministry he provided. I can still hear Dr. Graham, Bible in one hand and finger pointing to Scripture with the other, saying, "The Bible says..." And that used to work. At that time, people — for the most part — believed in absolute truth. They just needed to know (or be reminded) what it was.

Post moderns consider truth relative. What's true for you is true for you. What's true for me is true for me. Even though both truths are complete opposites, they are both true. For many, truth is no longer the authority. For this new target audience, the Bible has no authority in the outreach process. This does not make postmodern non-Christians "more pagan," it simply calls for a different approach. In the process of outreach, the Bible is not the authority. However, once God moves them on their pilgrimage toward Christ, Scripture can and should become a focus of authority. In the outreach process now, the authority is experience.

Those who are unchurched do not want to know if Christianity is true — not at first. They want to know if it works. They want to know if your faith has made any difference in your life. The "authority" is your experience, resting on the platform of your relationship. This is the key: your relationship gives you credibility; your experience gives you authority. This changes evangelism in the

classical sense: from providing a presentation leading to conviction and response — to witnessing. It's like being an eyewitness. You share what you have seen, experienced, and what has happened to you.

This is really good news. Sharing the faith has become a lot easier in regeneration Christianity! There are no Bible verses to learn — they don't want to hear them. You don't have to be a theologian — they would be bored. There is no outline — they would feel accosted. Witnessing is a response to the question, "What has God done in your life lately?"

In some circles, this is called "giving a testimony." It is not a testimony in the classical sense. Most do not want to know your life story. They don't want to know how bad you were as a kid, ended up in jail or had a major health issue, and how God changed your life and you have been in the church ever since. Today, we live in a world of real-time information. People are interested in real-time testimonies, not your life story. If you identify a "person of peace" in your social network, and they give opportunity for you to share, the best approach to witnessing is to tell the story in which you believe God made a difference. Your witness does not have to be spectacular. In fact, the most authentic testimony is one that is unrehearsed and unpolished. It is simply telling it like it is.

These are the key ingredients that any Christian can learn, anyone can use:

- Look for opportunities, primarily in your social network (not strangers).³
- Learn to identify the “person of peace” (one who shows interest, is faced with a challenge).
- Be authentic (don’t worry about a “polished” presentation).
- Talk about what God has done recently in your life (not your whole spiritual history).

In regeneration churches, Christians share what God is doing in their lives, in real time. The approach is not an institutional program, but through each opportunity God gives you. This culture is constantly encouraged in a regeneration church. When you are gathered for Bible study, begin with an opportunity to share what God has done in your life since the last time you met. At a congregational dinner, select one or two members to share what God has recently done in their lives. At every opportunity, provide time for people to become accustomed to sharing what God is doing in their lives. Regeneration leaders do not have to teach people to share what God is doing in their lives. On the contrary, since the church practices this culture regularly, people share naturally — which is the best approach. In a regeneration church, it’s more important to truthfully, genuinely share what God has done in your life than it is to invite someone to church. It is likely most of your social network contacts are not ready for church anyway. If they are, let them tell you. This is the

mentality of witnessing in the new era.

CHAPTER SIX

A BIBLICAL FORM OF DECISION-MAKING

Almost every branch of Christianity has inherited a church government that is a major roadblock to regeneration. The decision-making process in most churches inhibits appropriate change. A key element for the spiritual pilgrimage is to get back to a biblical approach toward making decisions.

To explain this best, let's begin with the end in mind. Many pastors and church leaders want their church to become "missional." They promote this like it's the latest fad, buy a program, train leaders, and superimpose it from the top-down. A number of those in the church are ready. They jump on board with enthusiasm. It goes well...for a while. However, when you experience a "critical mass" — somewhere around a tipping point of 50% — those who aren't that excited for this radical change begin to rebel. The next step? They get organized. Then they get political. Then, what happens? It is certainly not "all *heaven* breaks loose." This has happened in thousands of churches. Leaders

are under stress. The church is divided. People leave. Money gets tight. Pastors look for another church. What happened? Two issues: they used an approach from the top-down. That's not a movement, but a program. Second, when the issue became political, they were facing a New Testament change with a secular decision-making process — "modern church government."

Element #6: Church Government Changes to a Biblical Form of Decision-Making

Ninety-nine percent of all churches have a form of church government influenced by secular society. There is nothing whatsoever biblical or helpful about votes, nominations, committees, majority rules, decision-making (or denying) boards, or top-down structure. Every church that successfully experiences regeneration will entirely change their decision-making process, known as church government. Why? Because many of the changes that are required for churches to move into the new era are issues that are challenging, require ownership, and are transformational to the majority. Churches are not able to make these changes effectively with their present unbiblical form of church government.

Churches across the world reflect a variety of decision-making formats: hierarchical, congregational (democracy), republic, oligarchy, co-equal plural

eldership, and theocracy.¹ Over the last two decades, I've come to realize the powerful roadblock church government can be. It took Church Doctor Ministries 13 years to develop a *Church Government Consultation Process*² that gently guides churches to a biblical form of church government. The process uses universal, biblical principles applicable to every church. One of the basic issues to remember is that your church is unique. Principles are universal, but deployment structure cannot be a packaged, one-size-fits-all application. Each church should structure these principles into a decision-making mechanism that is appropriate to its own uniqueness, size, place, and time. This implies that the constitution of a living organism (your church), in a world of rapid change, is a fluid document — revised regularly. The system changes. The universal principles do not. The organism (Body of Christ) always shapes the organization. In the regenerated church, it is never the other way around. In the majority of churches, unfortunately it is. Remember this: the organism does not serve the organization. The organization serves the organism. This is just another reason Christianity is losing ground. When the organization serves the organism, you have freedom to add or delete structure (programs) based on fruitfulness. You have the freedom to change.

The regeneration principle of church government is what I call an apostolic theocracy. "Theocracy" means "the rule of God." It is entirely driven by decisions based on God's will. The environment for making decisions is: "above

all, we want what God wants.” While Christians in churches everywhere believe in seeking God’s will, and pray about it in the Lord’s Prayer, when it actually comes time to make decisions, they are almost always guided by other principles. Have you been in a church meeting where opposing sides are locked in debate about what to do — and nobody is asking, “What would God want us to do...and why? And what is the biblical evidence to direct us?”

The word “apostolic” reflects the way the apostles influenced the New Testament Church. As leaders, the apostles displayed significant influence among the churches. Yet, they were not political. They were not elected; they did not run for office. They were not bureaucratic by nature. *They influenced through relationships.* Once again, you see a relational orientation rather than institutional. The apostles were strong leaders but they made their appeal to the churches through a relational environment, not through by-laws, procedures, elections, or votes. This is the difference between a spiritual pilgrimage (and a movement) and religion.

In a world of flat organizations and teamwork, the hierarchy of a top-down or republic form of government will not attract emerging generations to serve in the church. Most churches, still living in the previous era, have a high-control form of decision-making. If someone in the church decides God is calling them to start a ministry, there are hurdles to jump: board or committee approval,

discussions, debates, votes. The priesthood of all believers is shackled by high-control bureaucracies. This high-control mechanism exists because the culture of most churches reflects low accountability.

Rarely is accountability practiced — in the approach of New Testament culture — among churches today. Rather than following Matthew 18, speaking directly to the one who offends you,³ rampant gossip infects many churches. Members complain about others to a third party. Rather than “speaking the truth in a spirit of love,”⁴ they tend to speak negatively behind someone else’s back. When confronted with this non-biblical behavior, most people respond, “But I don’t like conflict.” That is an irrelevant excuse. No normal person likes conflict. It is only by the power of Christ, having a high value for New Testament culture, that a person practices high accountability.

Regeneration churches have reoriented the culture of decision-making. Members deal with one another differently. The culture is reversed: from high-control/low-accountability to low-control/high-accountability. Those who experience regeneration say they feel liberated. They are! They experience freedom to focus on ministry. You can’t improve on God’s biblical plan.

In the simple churches led by Neil Cole, the discipleship posture includes “life transformation groups.” These are high-accountability groups of three Christians who hold one another accountable. This practice is also found in

other house church movements that reflect regeneration lifestyle. As these life transformation groups meet, there are 11 questions that are asked each time they meet. The 11th question is, "Did you tell the truth about the other 10?" These are very personal and direct questions.

This element is similarly found in the British Sheffield Movement. They use a triangle to identify the three key relationships for every Christian: God, other Christians, non-Christians.⁵ (Note, once again, the emphasis on relationships rather than institutions.)

The triangle represents the "Up, In, and Out." This reflects a relationship to God (Up), a relationship to other Christians (In), and a relationship to unchurched people (Out).⁶ The questions are not surface level, like "how is your relationship to God?" Under the "Up" dimension, the questions are, "How is your worship life? How is your prayer life? Are you consistent in your Bible reading?" This is a high-accountability culture. It reflects a culture that permeates the entire church and is reflective in the church government. Anyone who becomes a leader, as a mark of the leadership lifestyle, is "huddled" every two weeks. This is the culture our team practices at Church Doctor Ministries. We have several huddles that meet regularly, by gender. The atmosphere is not at all legalistic. It is a grace-oriented, relational context that reflects a New Testament lifestyle. It is a refreshing, encouraging experience to regularly practice "speaking the

truth in a spirit of love.” It works!

The low-control dimension is the balance. There is a grace atmosphere of Christian freedom in this regeneration culture: “You can feel it in the air!” If someone in a regeneration church feels called to start a ministry, there are no obstacles, no bureaucratic ladder to climb. The leadership asks: (1) Is it illegal? (2) Is it immoral? (3) Will it cost the church money? If the answers are “no,” the response is “how can we help you start that ministry?” This is low control. It is the regeneration of the priesthood of all believers.

Without this regeneration of church government, a church will struggle to move toward effectiveness. In the way most church governments operate, somewhere in the process the majority has a vote in decisions requiring change. The large group always votes the status quo. Those in the large group most often vote their comfort. That does not make the rank-and-file members of your church “weak” Christians. It does recognize that God raises up leaders to lead people beyond their comfort zones, to make the hard decisions, to face change, and follow vision. Good leaders recognize, however, that a bottom-up movement is like yeast in bread.⁷ When it is processed in a regenerated decision-making environment, it works.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MOBILIZATION

When the church operates as an institution, mobilizing workers drifts into the mode of recruiting corporate volunteers. Pastors beg for helpers from the pulpit, through public announcements, the church's newsletter, and Sunday bulletins. As you consider this, you will see how far the church has wandered from the biblical culture of discipling. The spiritual regeneration of the church changes the way you mobilize the masses for the Christian Movement.

Element #7: Volunteerism Becomes Discipling

Many churches have become masters of organizational volunteerism. The recruitment and training of volunteers becomes a well-honed art. This is not the biblical approach modeled by Jesus and practiced in the Early Church. A person studying to be an electrician is more likely to be disciplined (apprenticed) than a Christian who has been asked to teach Sunday school.

While consulting hundreds of churches for 30 years, I have observed very little intentional discipling, regardless of denomination brand or fellowship. Discipling is rarely modeled by leadership. Pastors often conduct their ministry alone, with little intentional modeling, training, equipping, or discipling. Pastors visit those in the hospital with no one at their side, who they are equipping to do ministry. Church boards include leaders who arrived there by nomination and vote. They were not mentored by previous leaders.

When consulting, we often interview those who teach in a Sunday school. When asked about the Sunday school, one of the most common responses is, "We just can't get enough Sunday school teachers." How would you respond if you were a church consultant? My first question is, "What is the 'job description' — written or perceived — for a Sunday school teacher?" As we politely listen, we keep asking, "Is there more to that job description?" Here is what we have discovered: the approach of most teachers does not include the personal responsibility of praying for, looking for, finding, and inviting someone to come alongside them. There is little attention in Sunday school ministry — or any other ministries — to practice the New Testament culture of multiplication. Yet, multiplication is basic to God's plan. It's what makes Christianity a movement. When it does not occur, the work of the church is operating outside of God's plan. It is more like a program than a movement.

The regeneration approach is relational ministry. The organizational approach is to put a notice in the bulletin to recruit Sunday school teachers. It is to challenge church members, three weeks before Vacation Bible School, indicating that "if we don't get more volunteers, we're not going to have Vacation Bible School." However, if a congregation operates in a culture where each person involved recruits a "helper" in an environment of discipling, within three or four years, there will never again be a need to plead for volunteers. It's not that hard. Jesus used three words: "Come, follow me."

This biblical concept is *relational multiplication*. Jesus did it with His disciples. Paul had Timothy. It's obvious. It is part of the DNA of regeneration churches. In Paul's Letter to the Ephesians,¹ it says that God has given certain leaders to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their primary responsibility is equipping others for the work of ministry. The leaders are models to everyone else. The model is relational multiplication. In Matthew 28:19-20, "to make disciples" represents the "marching orders" for the followers of Jesus. Jesus said it. He modeled it. His disciples got it. Their disciples did it. The Early Church got it. The movement exploded. A few hundred years later, the church forgot it. It organized the organism. It lost the big objective. When you get to heaven, it shouldn't surprise you if the one big issue is "how many did you disciple?" It will likely be the lens for determining the words, "Well done good and faithful servant."² It won't be the question, "How many people in

worship?" Or, "How many hospital calls did you make (by yourself)?" Or, "How many times did you help in Vacation Bible School?" Or, "How many times did you usher?"

In regeneration churches, this is part of the culture of church life. It reflects the next element. If "doing church" was a two-sided coin, one side would be discipleship multiplication. The other side would be leadership that equips.

Element #8: "Professional" Church Leaders are Equippers for Ministry

I have traveled my own pilgrimage in this area. This is a mystery. When I left the seminary to start ministry as a pastor in a church, my key priority, every day, every week, was very clear: get ready for Sunday. That meant to prepare for the "big event." It was all about preparing a sermon and putting together the service. I was trained for a version of Christianity heavily loaded with worn-out baggage, and drift from New Testament dynamics.

My son, Jonathan, who trained one year at St. Thomas' Church in Sheffield, England, and later joined their staff, reflects the DNA of regeneration churches. One day, when he was visiting the U.S., I asked him, just to see what he would say: "Jonathan, how should pastors spend the largest percentage of their time?" Without hesitation — with no need to think about it — he said, "Training

leaders, multiplying them.” I knew then that he was trained in regeneration ministry. I myself have come to know this by adoption. For me, it was a process of deconstructing what I had learned. I learned the wrong way by watching other pastors. It was reinforced in my seminary training. I’ve had to “un-think” my self-image. I came to realize the biblical priority is to equip and train others. You, too, may have to deconstruct and reconstruct in this area.

What would happen if you followed the programmatic, top-down approach? What would happen without a reorientation of values? If, for example, the pastor was to start *equipping* Christians for ministry, rather than *doing* ministry, what would happen? People would complain! Imagine the person in the hospital who receives a visit by a trained member of the church — not the pastor. Most would respond: “Nice of you to stop by. When will the (real) pastor visit me?” Training others is counter-intuitive for most Christians. However, Christianity will never become a movement unless it recaptures this basic New Testament principle. God’s plan is entirely about multiplication. God said to our first parents, “Be fruitful and multiply.”³ Through the centuries, people have been quite good at that. They have populated the world well. When it comes to growing the Kingdom, Jesus made a similar statement, “Go, make disciples....”⁴ This is also a movement of multiplication. Yet, the average church, strategically, is all about addition.

One of the corollary realities to this element is the training of “professional” workers. In regeneration churches, the training of leaders will increasingly return to the level of the local church. This will provide a significant challenge for seminaries and Bible colleges. These institutions will and should still exist. However, they should become “specialty shops,” with uniquely trained and gifted teachers. They would provide short-burst, boot-camp opportunities (probably no longer than two weeks at a time) with intensive focus on unique topics. They will provide more online learning opportunities. This means workers will never be away from their churches for very long. Most of their training will occur while they are serving. Training for ministry will change from a graduation event to a lifestyle process. It will become life-long learning for a world in rapid change. Bible colleges and seminaries will become non-geographic, deploying specialists to provide high-end teaching in short sound bites. Any training institution that experiences regeneration — and wants to serve the new “market” of regenerating church workers — will make these changes:

1. Abandon the high-priced residential, institutional model.
2. Bring expertise into the relational level “home-schooling” (workers equipped in their home church).
3. Define the target market as all those, at any level, involved in ministry, abandoning the credential centerpiece restricted to “professional,” “ordained,” or “certified” end users.
4. Serve to equip more people, in lifelong learning.

In addition, churches will increasingly develop equipping mechanisms of their own. Within the DNA of regeneration, opportunities for discipleship training will be provided in ways leaders can stay at home and learn at very affordable prices. One of the best models I've seen is FORM at St. Thomas' Church in Sheffield, UK.⁵ This training approach is primarily focused on spiritual formation. It is inexpensive, church-based training for those involved in ministry. It includes a mentor — a mature Christian who speaks into your life, discipled you, and holds you accountable. It includes classroom teaching, utilizing a wide variety of specialists. What is learned in the morning is practiced in the afternoon. Each student must have a part-time job to supplement their income while they are training for ministry. This keeps students in the "real" world. Now, SEND North America⁶ has begun. Patterned after FORM in England, SEND is a 10-month, boot-camp experience for young adults in their 20s. The result? Amazingly enthusiastic, well-trained, missionary-minded disciples. It is my perception that training missionaries like FORM and SEND will permeate the regeneration movement and become part of the lifestyle of many churches. They will become the "farm clubs" for the emerging staff in each church. They will also equip leaders for house churches, multi-site venues, and church plants. The multiplication element is exponential.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FACILITY: FROM RETREAT CENTER TO LAUNCH PAD

Connect the regeneration worldview of going out (rather than y'all come) and the concept of equipping the masses for ministry, and you discover a new way to think about the church building.

Element #9: The Church Office Will Be Located in the Marketplace

In the regeneration of the church, buildings become less important. If you take the journey of the spiritual pilgrimage, you'll discover that more effective ministry takes place outside of the church than within it. This is based on Jesus' commitment to penetrate and engage culture. One result is that churches will increasingly move their office to a strip mall or shopping center. Think about it: members of the church, if they want to see someone at the office, will go wherever it is located. However, secular, unchurched people are increasingly

uncomfortable with stepping onto a church campus to make a visit. Buildings, in regeneration Christianity, are less important.

The extreme expression of this is the house church movement. Focusing on "simple church," there is no building, no paid pastor, low control (balanced by high accountability), and most of the energy and resources are directed to mission.

For those churches that do have buildings, the worship services will be more decentralized. A present form of this is expressed in the multi-site movement.¹ Churches multiply worship venues using technology or deploying staff to different venues, targeting different styles, heart languages, or locations. One of my favorite churches is North Coast Church,² which has grown dramatically, providing over one dozen worship services on and off campus, using a variety of worship styles. They utilize video to provide the senior pastor's message in all of the worship services, with the exception of "North Coast Live," where you see him face-to-face.

Churches will increasingly provide extensions of church worship services that will occur in storefronts, bars, restaurants, funeral homes, and other venues that penetrate the culture.³ The primary reason to use other venues? They are more strategic than the church building, which carries the stigma of "institution." To

those outside Christianity, the building signals “religion” rather than spirituality. For believers, that is rarely a challenge. With sensitivity to those who are unchurched, moving out to new venues increases openness to meet Jesus Christ through His followers. More ministry happens at Starbucks than most Christians could ever imagine.

This raises the question about mega-churches. Is there room for mega-churches to exist in the regeneration era? Probably so. At least for the next 20 or 30 years, and perhaps beyond. Mega-churches provide unique ministry opportunities by virtue of their size, resources, sprawling campuses, and multi-million-dollar facilities. However, the most pioneering mega-churches will also develop ministries that include the elements listed in this chapter. Ultimately, this is the trade-off: money spent on bricks and mortar, or directed toward mission efforts. Remember, buildings are not wrong or bad. The gathering is still a very important aspect of ministry.

Recognize that buildings are less important, but not unimportant. Add the “go” posture of outreach, and witnessing through relationships, and the missional cluster will be a strategic approach for regeneration churches.

Element #10: Missional Clusters

Clusters are often mid-size groups of 25 to 30 people, though there is nothing significant about the exact number. Earlier (chapter four), I discussed call-out “11/7,” which is part of the ministry of Threshold Community Church in Toledo, Ohio. “11/7” is a missional cluster. Missional clusters are designed specifically for outreach purposes. Most churches that have mid-size groups find they provide fellowship, Bible study, and a good platform for assimilation. The emphasis on Adult Bible Fellowships (ABFs) is an example of this fellowship infrastructure in many churches.

Missional clusters are different because their reason to exist is outreach. In regenerated Christianity, the reason a person would belong to a cluster is the missional purpose of that cluster. Each cluster reaches a specific target group in the community. At St. Thomas’ Church, Sheffield, England, one cluster reaches homeless people. Another cluster targets freshmen students at the local university. A missional cluster can be developed to reach people who live in a certain neighborhood, or certain types of immigrants who are new to the city, or those in certain occupational networks. For example, I have spent time with a cluster called “Radiate.” (Every cluster has a name, as a point of identity.) “Radiate” consists of people who work in the medical community: doctors, nurses, hospital custodians, dentists, those who deliver pharmaceuticals, etc.

Those who belong to “Radiate” have a heart to reach people for Jesus Christ in the medical community, where they spend their work lives.

“Radiate” meets two or three times a month, usually during the weekend. Trained well to understand the “person of peace,” those in the cluster clearly understand the mission of the church. They understand that inviting people to worship is not a primary way to build God’s Kingdom. So, they look for conversation opportunities within their networks in the medical community. They identify the “person of peace.” When it becomes appropriate, they may share what God has done in their lives. If the initial conversation goes well, they will invite the “person of peace” to a cluster gathering. Why not invite them to church? For those who live in a secular society, to start the journey of faith by attending a worship service would be spiritual culture shock.

Cluster gatherings can take place in restaurants, around a meal in a home, a backyard barbeque, or in a park. This is primarily a social gathering — not a Bible study. At the cluster, the “person of peace” would be introduced one-on-one to each person, as the group mingled informally. (It’s all about relationships!) The primary purpose of the cluster is to party! It is for fellowship and fun.

Not long ago, I talked to Michael, a waiter at one of my favorite pubs in

Manchester, England. He asked what I was doing in Great Britain. I said I was leading a group of North Americans to visit a Christian conference. He said, "I'm not very religious." I asked, "Why not?" He simply placed his finger by the bottom of his nose and pushed upward. He saw church people as snobs who don't have much fun. Michael could meet Jesus in a missional cluster!

During the cluster, the leader will gather the group together. The leader will ask anyone who has brought a friend to introduce their friend to the group. For example, if I brought Michael, I would introduce him. At this point, Michael has already met most everyone individually, but is now introduced in the group setting. The group welcomes that person, as does the leader. The leader shares some "icebreakers." The leader might ask, "Anyone want to share what movie you've seen lately — that you really enjoyed?" After the icebreaker, the leader asks the group, "Now, for those who are part of our church, would anyone like to share what God's been doing in your life since we last met?" In this context of relationships, those who are Christians share how God has made a difference. This provides an opportunity for me, in further conversations with Michael, the next time we meet at the pub.

At some point, when there are further signs of receptivity, the cluster members invite the "persons of peace" to worship at church. The invitation would not be to the Sunday morning service — not yet. It would be to attend the Sunday

evening service, where the cluster sits together. This occurs once each month on "Cluster Sunday." In this way, first-time guests at church are surrounded by friends from the cluster. This really helps newcomers across the threshold of their first worship service. Some "people of peace" from secular backgrounds may attend a cluster for years before visiting a worship service.

This concept of a missional cluster provides important "middle steps" for those who are far from God. It is a way for them to begin their spiritual journey. They belong before they believe and behave. Clusters tap into the natural networking culture of relationships. Missional clusters represent a pioneering outreach element for regeneration churches. However, here is a warning: missional clusters are not a program. They are not, as many think, the next-best, greatest fad. They are actually the outgrowth of a missional culture developed by a spiritual pilgrimage — an intentional season of two-to-five years in most churches, with the first two years being guided from the outside. If you develop missional clusters prematurely, (1) they will revert to self-focused fellowship groups, (2) you will inoculate much of your church from effective missional clusters for approximately 10 years, (3) you will either "run off" those who don't get it (suffer a division) or they will rebel, feeling coerced by the leadership.⁴

Overwhelmed? Regeneration seems like a big change — because it is! With

good leadership, guidance, coaching, and direction, any church can begin this pilgrimage of faith. In the next chapter, you will begin to explore the strategic approach toward healthy regeneration.

CHAPTER NINE

THE STRATEGY MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

It is important to identify goals and objectives for regeneration churches. It is valuable to know the characteristics or elements of the movement. The greatest challenge, however, is identifying the correct strategy for change. The implementation strategy is the piece of the pilgrimage that makes or breaks what God wants your church to become.

Those who pioneer a spiritual pilgrimage in a church are what I call “spiritual entrepreneurs.” They are “early adopters” of a move of God that is larger than the local church. Often, they have been touched by the Holy Spirit to lead an “awakening” in their church. They have “holy discontent” or “spiritual restlessness.” They think about this often, saying, “I wish our church had greater impact. I’d like our church to be more effective.”¹

There are many individuals, groups, and churches that have caught the vision for regeneration. Yet they have struggled to choose the appropriate strategy. The majority of those who have the heart and desire to move into the spiritual pilgrimage toward regeneration choose the wrong strategy — to their peril.

As a church consultant, my favorite churches are those with strong leadership and sound strategy. They are relatively healthy and want to become more effective. Those churches are the easiest to help. At the other extreme, the most painful consultation experiences are those that have adopted the wrong strategy. They experience a high level of division among the members and are overloaded with stress and discomfort. It is important to help those churches, and we see that as part of our ministry. However, it is a situation not unlike when a pastor meets a young, married couple who want counseling because one of them just filed for divorce. It's not impossible to fix, but it's late in the process! Put this at the top of your list: the correct strategy is extremely important. Get it right at the beginning of your journey.

There are three strategic choices for the local church. All three are represented in the New Testament Movement. That's right. There is biblical evidence for all three. However, one strategy most often brings agony, a second strategy is the best for established churches, and the third strategy is the most valuable for the Kingdom. You should avoid the first, practice the second, and plan, in the

future, to launch the third.

Strategy #1: The Transition Model

The transition model most often brings agony. Yet, this model is by far the most popular one used on the North American continent! It is used by many who have the right objective: to move to spiritual regeneration, to achieve missional effectiveness. These are some of the most advanced, pioneering leaders in the Christian Movement. They are visionaries. They get it right. Actually, they get it half right. Right objective, wrong strategy. These are church leaders who have a passion to turn the maintenance-oriented church into a mission-cultured church. Their choice of implementation is their demise. Some of them choose this strategy because it came highly recommended.

The transition model is frequently used by some consultants and is most often recommended by denominations. There are conferences on how to transition your church to a mission-oriented church. There are also books on the subject. This is perhaps why it is the most common model found in the church today.

The biblical reflection of this model occurred early in the Christian Movement, following Pentecost. The Apostle Paul, a missionary on steroids (in the good sense!), went into the local synagogue and started preaching the good news of

the New Covenant in Jesus, the Messiah. His strategy was to stir up the synagogue, find the God-fearers in the ranks (those whose hearts the Holy Spirit had prepared for the Messiah in the person of Jesus), and form a new group. This could also be called the “blow-it-up model.”

As you know from Scripture, this, often, didn't go well. The Apostle Paul was frequently run out of town, sometimes jailed, a few times beaten, and I'm sure there were many times he thought, “It seemed like a good idea at the time.” While this is the most popular model used in churches today, it is the least effective for established churches.

The Rambo Approach

This is how it happens today. We know — we've worked to help a number of these churches try to put their congregations back together again. A pastor, and perhaps the staff of a church, go to a conference and hear a very exciting speaker talk about changing the church from maintenance to mission. These speakers will talk about how it's biblical — and, technically, they're right. They will talk about the need to persevere, fight conflict, and invite church members who don't catch the vision to move to another church. When I asked one prominent leader about losing people who go away mad, he said, “I can't be concerned about ‘collateral damage.’ I'm an apostle.” (Personally, I've never

thought of people for whom Christ died as “collateral damage.”) Basically, these leaders are talking about blowing up the church and refer to the synagogue model, practiced in the early days of Christianity by Paul.

This scenario is not entirely new to our generation. During the 1980s and 1990s, many churches, representing an early era — birth pangs of the regeneration movement — developed contemporary worship services. Pastors attended a conference, got excited about the potential results, and returned to their churches announcing that the traditional service was now ending: “We are bringing in guitars and are going to start clapping hands and singing choruses.” Then they stepped over the “sacred” line and said the hymnal was no longer needed because “we’re providing a screen.” These well-meaning pastors had not taken a course at seminary on being effective change agents. Good ideas, bad strategy. Many of these pastors woke up one day looking for another job. Others persevered and watched their churches divide. Books were written on the so-called “worship wars.”

Other pastors, with a strategy reflecting elements of a good change agent, attended the same conferences, returned to their churches, and processed the information. Then they asked if anyone would object if another service was started at a different time, perhaps in a different place — and sometimes on a different day. These pastors, in their wisdom, also pointed to the missional

dimension. However, they did not superimpose the worship style on those who have a traditional heart language style of worship service. These pastors introduced change by addition rather than substitution — a really smart move!

This is not a wholesale criticism of those who have a passion for mission and choose the strategy of blowing up the church. They have the right goal, just the wrong strategy. If you follow New Testament outreach, as Christianity matures, you will notice a subtle but dramatic change in the approach. Later in the movement you see the Apostle Paul preaching in the marketplace and on Mars Hill. He is not being run out of town quite so often, though there are always risks from those who are “offended” by the Gospel. As a Christian Movement moves into another stage, the strategy seems to change. When it does, the results are easier on everyone.

Superimposing Culture

There is a deeper, theological issue at stake concerning this strategy. Most consider the issue of maintenance or mission as simply a preference of priority. In working with many churches, I have learned that this is a cultural issue. It represents values, beliefs, priorities, attitudes, and worldviews that drive behavior. *Those who are mission-minded represent a different culture than those who are maintenance-oriented.*

This is not to judge their relationship with Jesus. There are many very fine Christians who read the Bible, worship regularly, and serve in areas of the church who simply are not at a level of caring much for the lost. In a corporate sense, they are concerned about the Great Commission, but have a subconscious worldview that it's the pastor's job, or the calling of a few evangelists. Their main focus for the church is to "keep on keeping on." These are people who are forgiven by the grace of God, will die one day and go be with the Lord, and will spend most of their days on this earth missionally impotent. They will support the church financially so that "someone, somehow, might do missions," but they have not internalized it for themselves. Yes, they should be constantly challenged. That is not an issue. The issue is this: should maintenance-minded believers be run out of the church? Do we as Christian leaders have that right? Is that, spiritually, a good option?

In Acts 15, the first apostolic council centered on the issue of whether people of Gentile culture must become Jewish (in culture) in order to become followers of Jesus the Messiah.² It was a critical point in the early history of Christianity. It was not a small issue for the Gentiles. Gentile men would have to be circumcised — not a small issue, considering the mode of circumcision in those days. It was also a huge issue for Gentile women who never learned to operate a kosher kitchen. The apostles focused on the right strategy: does the Christian Movement have the right to superimpose culture, as a requirement?

The outcome of this apostolic council in Acts 15 would have enormous impact on the ability of Christianity to reach the Gentile world. The council decided that you could become a Christian — a believer — without changing cultures. The implication was that if you wanted to be missionally effective, it was not necessary, or helpful, to superimpose one culture on another. Who knows, perhaps the serious debate, thinking, and praying that occurred in Acts 15 had some impact on the strategy of the Apostle Paul.

If you accept the reality that missional people are really a different culture from maintenance-oriented Christians, then the question arises of whether, based on Acts 15, you have the right to superimpose (by force) missional culture on maintenance-oriented Christians. Once again, to clarify, this does not argue the point that maintenance-cultured Christians shouldn't be challenged to become missional. But do we have the Christian right to run them off? To blow up the church?

The challenge comes not so much when maintenance-oriented people become uncomfortable with all the change and transfer to another church. The real issue is directed toward our approach to the "weaker brothers and sisters" about whom, according to Scripture, we are supposed to be sensitive and not offend.³ Often, these younger or infant Christians not only feel rejected by their church, pastor, staff, and leaders, but feel rejected — in their limited understanding —

by God. Some of them do not transfer to another church, but become spiritual casualties in the process. This is the key theological issue: do leaders have a responsibility for this "collateral damage?" We think we do, particularly based on values of New Testament Christian culture and what was chosen as the best strategy in Acts 15. This is especially true if there is another strategy that limits this kind of damage. And there is.

CHAPTER TEN

STRATEGY #2: THE EXTENSION MODEL

The extension model is the approach of a spiritual pilgrimage. It represents an intentional effort to help churches move toward regeneration. The extension model is reflective of those who, in the days of introducing contemporary worship, added a second service. It is change by addition rather than substitution. It is respectful of those who are not (yet) missionally-minded. It is reflective of Jesus' approach, "I only do what I see the Father doing,"¹ even in people. It begins with those who are ready.

This model follows the strategy of extending a ministry *within* a church. This strategy taps into those the Spirit has ready, who want to grow and become missional. This approach asks only for the willingness to allow them to grow — a willingness easily accepted by the rest of the congregation. It is a strategy launched without disturbing the church life of those who — to say it best — are

not yet ready in their thinking and their values to move to the missional level. This, literally, is a movement approach inside the church. It is a Kingdom approach. As Jesus said, "The Kingdom is like leaven in bread."²

This extension model is focused on those who express "spiritual restlessness" and "holy discontent." This spiritual condition signals they are ready. They may include all of the present leaders of the church, or only a few. The political system of most churches is not always synonymous with who the Holy Spirit chooses to pioneer an awakening of regeneration. With the cultivation of those who have the entrepreneurial spirit to experience regeneration, God can grow a spiritual movement. Those who are ready — the spiritual entrepreneurs — actually invest, financially, for the guidance of the spiritual pilgrimage. This represents their ownership. They contribute a small amount, above and beyond their tithes and offerings, each month, for 24 months. They are a Vision Community. They become the first learning community. They gather for training, using DVDs. As they experience biblical paradigm shifts that produce missional fruit, they are challenged to pray for, look for, find, and invite others from their social networks in the church. This new group begins another learning community, and "recycles" the use of the DVDs. Each group multiplies another group. For most churches, a critical mass occurs at the sixth multiplication. It is like when you throw a pebble into a pond. The sixth ring out is a tipping point for most churches. The change is organic (like growing a

garden). It is gentle, bottom-up growth. It takes time. It changes most everything. At the tipping point, people say, "We are a different church!" The momentum continues to grow. This is a movement *within* your church.

This type of change by extension is a biblical concept for Kingdom growth and regeneration. The extension model has also helped secular companies innovate and change. In fact, it is found in the most creative and productive companies in the business world. Many years ago, Tom Peters, in his research for the book *In Search of Excellence*,² studied the most productive companies in America. His description of change by extension was described as "skunk works." (I reference this to recognize that many corporations end up with the same traditional roadblocks you see in churches.) Peters identified several companies that allowed what he called "half legal/half illegal entities at the edge of the corporation." They weren't actually illegal, but experimental groups that were allowed to dabble in the invention of new processes. If these groups were required to be streamlined through the corporation, they would never have a chance against the naysayers of the corporate world. The "old guard" of the company would be the first to say, "We've never done it that way before." Anyone familiar with church life can easily see the parallels.

One of Tom Peters' examples was the 3M Corporation, which allowed such a group to function and experiment. They were empowered to grow, without

being under the close scrutiny of the traditionalists who might scold them for what might seem like new ideas that “will never work.” Pioneers don’t always get it right in the eyes of the traditionalists and Pharisees alike. One of the “mistakes” the “skunk works” developed at the 3M Company was the Post-It pad. This is a business example of an extension model that is allowed and encouraged by those who promote innovation and change. Yet, the innovators do not upset or divide the traditional group. This works in the church, also.

The Strategy of Extension

There are several dimensions to the strategy of extension. Consider this: if God is the author of this regeneration movement, would you be surprised to find that He is already placing in the hearts of individuals the seeds of this new phase of Christianity? Based on our experience with churches, these spiritual entrepreneurs already exist in most churches. At this point, they have nowhere to go and nothing to do. If the church moved into a transition model, they would be the first to sign up to “change the church at any cost.” They would be the strongest voices in support of the leadership to superimpose change on the church. They would also be the most damaged as the church unraveled — getting pushback from those who aren’t ready to change.

The extension model provides a platform for regeneration pioneers to follow

God's vision. It gives them permission to be innovative and follow their hearts. They can move forward without disturbing others at church who are not yet at that point in their spiritual journey.

The extension model provides an "awareness window" for the rest of the church. As the Holy Spirit grows that awareness in others — each at a different level, moving at different speeds — this missional regeneration remains an option, as well as a magnet of attraction. It is available for them — when they are ready.

This is a common dynamic as you look, once again, at the change toward contemporary worship. When new worship styles were introduced, people of all ages made the personal choice to continue worshipping in traditional services. However, over time, some, for one reason or another, attended the contemporary worship service. Perhaps it was a grandchild in their teens who found contemporary worship more inviting, and asked the grandparents to attend with them so they wouldn't have to sit alone. Perhaps it was an issue as simple as being out too late the night before and choosing to attend the later service, which happened to be contemporary. They discovered it "wasn't so bad." In every church there are those who, in their own time, at their own pace, have gravitated to contemporary worship. Likewise, there are people of all ages who, for whatever reasons, still gravitate (though at smaller numbers) to traditional services. All of this happens without conflict, by the choice of the

individuals, because the extension model provides alternatives. No forced culture is superimposed. This is a movement approach. This extension model works. But it's not the only model that is possible without conflict. Sometimes God works through the birthing of an organic church. This could be a model in your church's future.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

STRATEGY #3: THE ORGANIC CHURCH

The organic model is similar to planting new seeds in a garden. In this model, a core group of “brand new Christians” are discipled for a significant amount of time. This is what Jesus did with His disciples. It was the development of a new movement. If you are working with those from a Christian background, they have to be “deprogrammed.” They experience reconstruction of their traditional, maintenance-oriented approach to Christianity. This approach could be called organic regeneration. In the pure form of this model, however, the organic church begins with those who have no Christian “baggage.” Their spiritual pilgrimage is a regeneration from unbeliever to missional Christian. The organic church model is focused on starting new churches “from scratch.” God is also blessing this extraordinary movement. It can even be a next step, down the road, for your church.

Jaeson Ma, author of the book *The Blueprint*,¹ has followed this strategy among university students. Developing “simple churches,” Jaeson, like Neil Cole, establishes small groups of new Christians who operate with almost none of the baggage carried by traditional Christians. This is also the model God is predominantly using in China. They are experiencing explosive growth beyond anything anyone can measure.

Organic by Steps

In the development of the church in Toledo, Ohio, Tom Schaeffer began with an extension model, but changed to an organic approach. To develop Threshold Community, Tom began with an extension model that met beyond the physical building of a traditional church in Maumee, Ohio. Sensing the call to reach people most churches don't normally reach, Tom started the 10:35 Church, worshipping in a local theater. He started with a core group of Christians. Meeting at 10:35 on Sunday mornings, this church did reach some unchurched people. However, Tom sensed that some of the Christians from the traditional church were unintentionally slowing down the progress and, at times, unknowingly bringing unhelpful baggage into what he was trying to accomplish.

Trusting God at an extraordinary level, Tom shut down 10:35 and spent two years discipling those who primarily came from non-Christian backgrounds. The

few who came from a Christian background, and who stayed for this organic approach, had already deconstructed their baggage and reconstructed their new values on a regeneration level. Those who were new Christians were most receptive, and helped the traditional Christians continue to make the change. When a critical mass was reached, Tom launched Threshold Community.

My son, Jonathan Hunter, planted an organic church, called a missional cluster. His call was to develop a regeneration church for students at Sheffield Hallam University, in England. Jonathan reached out to a university where 3% of the 40,000 students claim Christianity as their faith on their registration forms. Most of these Christians are nominal. As students were reached for Christ, they were disciplined to reach others. They are the core group working with Jonathan to reach more unchurched students. This development of a regeneration church with a critical mass of students is another way to utilize the organic model.

For many established North American churches, it is too early to use the organic model with the luxury of critical mass. It is not too early, however, to start house churches or invest in new Christians, without baggage, who can be disciplined with regeneration values.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CULTURAL ISSUES: THE PILGRIMAGE DNA

Transformational change originates around cultural issues. While most churches dabble in symptoms, programs, and activities, the key to moving into regeneration is centered at the cultural level of the church. Once again, the elements of culture include values, beliefs, priorities, attitudes, and worldviews. Regeneration is based on the spiritual formation of individuals within your church. A spiritual pilgrimage is a process that focuses on nine critical, spiritual growth areas. In the process of working with a variety of churches from different denominations, lifestyles, and sizes, these nine cultural areas are consistent. They are also measurable. Most ministries do not measure the “fruit” of change. These nine areas of regeneration can be measured. Using anonymous questionnaires given to those in worship before the spiritual pilgrimage begins, and six months later, significant gains are documented in each of these areas. They represent the foundation of regeneration. It works,

and the results are measurable.

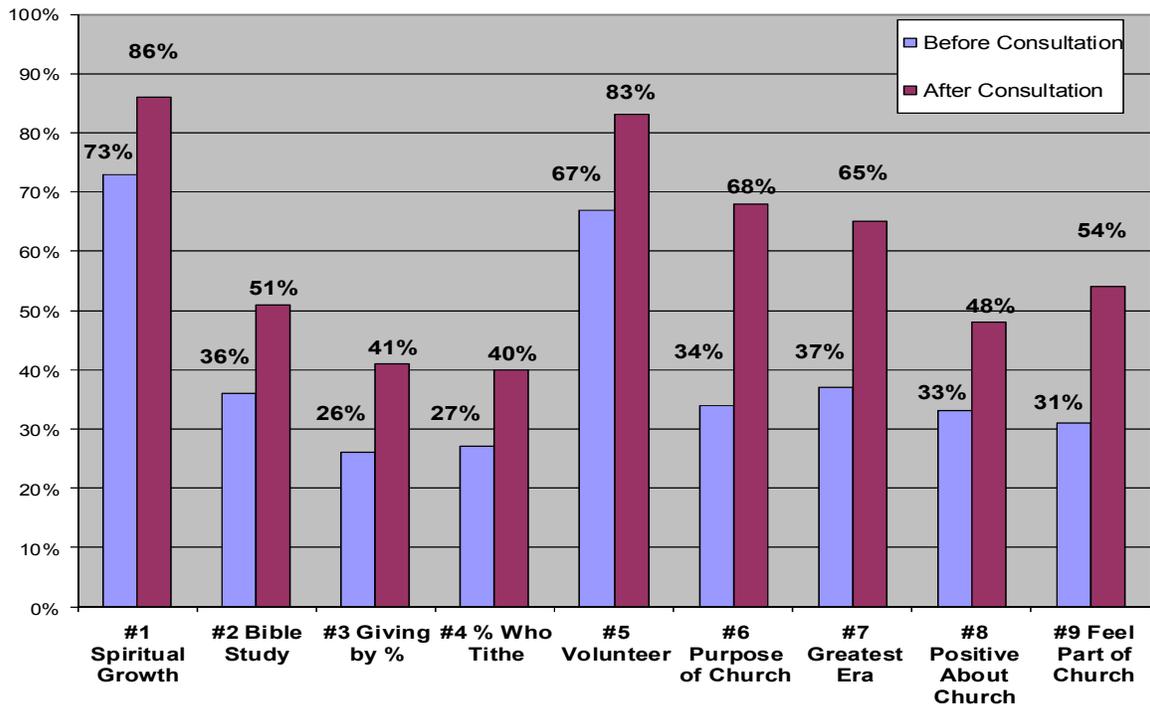
Collectively, these nine areas represent a movement of regeneration in your church. Increases in these nine areas indicate the soil of your church becomes more fertile for regeneration. For many congregations, these changes provide a tipping point of critical mass that empowers the church to move in the direction from maintenance to mission, without division, turmoil, or tension.

If you want God to bring regeneration to your congregation, consider these basic realities of change:

1. Change does not happen in an event, but through a process, which is a series of events.
2. Change happens best through the added influence of a catalyst, an apostolic force, a guide.
3. One catalytic form is intervention by a team of outside specialists who understand change and process.
4. Change must occur on spiritual and cultural levels.
5. In time, cultural change will reach a tipping point of critical mass.
6. The nine areas represent, collectively, the key areas for spiritual and cultural change.

Nine Key Areas

The following nine areas may seem familiar. Some of them may seem surprising.¹ Collectively, these nine areas represent the spiritual fruit God uses for regeneration in a church.



Here is a short commentary on the nine areas displayed on the graph:

1. Spiritual growth. This area represents those who indicate that, through the ministry of their church, their spiritual life has grown in the past year.
2. Bible study. Related to spiritual growth, those who are involved in a regular, structured Bible study, either at church or off campus, are more

likely to grow in missional values than those who are not.

3. Proportionate giving. Since ministry requires financial resources, the biblical worldview of proportionate giving is critical. To whatever degree more people in the congregation practice proportionate giving, the financial giving of the church will increase.
4. Tithing — those who give 10% or more to the church. This is the tangible measurement of the resources the church will have available to implement significant change.
5. Volunteer ministry. When involvement in ministry increases, it provides a critical mass God will use for the church to move to missional regeneration. This is particularly helpful in conjunction with a clear vision of the church's purpose.
6. The purpose of the church. This area is fundamental as people identify, articulate, and operate from a worldview that describes the purpose of the church as the Great Commission, to make disciples.
7. Future-oriented thinking. When members are asked to identify the greatest era of the history of the church, there are those who remember "the good old days" and those who feel the next 10 years will be the greatest time in the church's history. Those who have a future-orientation are "early adopters." They are open to innovation and change. As Christians change from remembering the past to envisioning the future, the church will reflect spiritual regeneration.

8. Positive attitudes. An increase of those who feel good about the church — and will tell others about the church from a positive perspective — has an impact on their ability to move outward, with missional impact on their social networks.
9. Ownership. Feeling like you are a part of the church provides the attitude for giving, serving, and reaching out to others. As this grows among others, it provides the tipping point for momentum to move to regeneration Christianity.

The Dawn of a New Day

A mass movement of regeneration has begun. It is already here. God is moving. This will happen with or without you, with or without your church. This is based on evidence that this movement is spontaneously occurring around the world — among people who know nothing about each other. Those on this spiritual pilgrimage have the culture of the New Testament Church. This supports the conclusion that this is a move of God, not an effort manufactured by humankind.

In your church, this is not an issue of whether “we have to do this to survive.” Surviving as an institution is not a biblical goal of the church. Nor is this a primary issue about your church becoming missional, to get more people. There

is nothing sacred about getting larger. This is about being faithful. This is about a coming revival, renewal, awakening — a regeneration that has already begun. The issue before you is simply this: do you want to be a part of what God is doing?

It seems that some churches are destined to serve their members until the last one dies, and then close. These churches may be faithful to God and meet the spiritual needs of the people, but may be beyond the willingness to take the spiritual pilgrimage toward regeneration. Perhaps their legacy will be resources for new churches.

This is not about the institution, it's about the Kingdom of God. The good news is that we Christians stand at the precipice of a new era. Unlike those who experienced Pentecost and began the New Testament Church, we are experiencing the first time in human history when the entire world is becoming networked so that world revival can actually occur. That's exciting! If the faith means anything to you, it will mean something to others. That vision, that hope, that possibility, can give you God's strength to join a spiritual pilgrimage. If you do, by God's grace, you will experience an exciting move of God — regeneration!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kent Hunter leads Church Doctor Ministries, a team of church consultants, coaches, authors, and teachers dedicated to helping churches become more effective in a rapidly changing world. He is author of several books and the spiritual architect of SEND North America and the *Healthy Churches Thrive!* Spiritual Pilgrimage.

www.churchdoctor.org

NOTES

Introduction

¹ Matthew 9:17.

² John 4:35.

1. God Watching

¹ Blackaby, Henry, Richard Blackaby, Claude King. *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008, revised).

² John 5:19.

³ I have written about this in the book *The J-Dog Journey: Where Is Life?* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2011).

⁴ Cole, Neil. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

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² John 14:6.

³ Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1997).

⁴ Green, Michael. *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004, revised).

⁵ Naisbitt, John. *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 1988).

⁶ Bacon, Karen, as quoted by Leonard Sweet in *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001, pg. 409).

3. Not Your Father's Church

¹ Proverbs 12:15.

² Romans 12:1-2.

4. Thinking Toward a Different Focus

¹ 1 John 4:8.

² Hunter, Kent R. *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up With God's Vision* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002, www.churchdoctor.org).

³ _____. *70 Days of Vision Campaign Resource Kit* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2008, www.churchdoctor.org).

⁴ _____. *Discover Your Windows Questionnaire* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2003, www.churchdoctor.org).

⁵ Matthew 5:14.

⁶ Acts 1:8.

5. Redefining Outreach

¹ Luke 10:6.

² Mark 2:16.

³ This does not imply that an opportunity to witness will never occur in a conversation on a plane, subway, or in Starbucks. You should always be ready to "share the hope that is within you" (1 Peter 3:15). It just may not happen often.

6. A Biblical Form of Decision-Making

¹ I have written about these in the white paper *Restructuring the Church: Congregational Government That Works in the 21st Century* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2007, www.churchdoctor.org).

² *Church Government Consultation Process* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, www.churchdoctor.org).

³ Matthew 18:15.

⁴ Ephesians 4:15.

⁵ Breen, Mike and Steve Cockram. *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2009, pp. 57-76).

⁶ _____, p. 64.

⁷ Galatians 5:9.

7. Mobilization

- ¹ Ephesians 4:11.
- ² Matthew 25:21.
- ³ Genesis 9:7.
- ⁴ Matthew 28:19.
- ⁵ FORM, www.stthomascrookes.org/training/
- ⁶ SEND North America, www.sendnorthamerica.com

8. Facility: From Retreat Center to Launch Pad

- ¹ Community Christian Church, 1635 Emerson Lane, Naperville, IL 60540; www.communitychristian.org.
- ² North Coast Church, 1132 N Melrose Dr., Vista, CA 92083; www.northcoastchurch.com.
- ³ I have written about this in my book *The Jesus Enterprise: Engaging Culture to Reach the Unchurched* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).
- ⁴ "Missional Communities: The Buzz, the Blessings, and the Blow-Ups." *The Church Doctor Report* (Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, Volume 7, Number 5, September/October 2011; <http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs002/1102418459813/archive/1107205272665.html>).

9. The Strategy Makes the Difference

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- ² Acts 15:8-9.
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10. Strategy #2: The Extension Model

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Church Doctor Ministries
1230 U.S. Highway Six
Corunna, IN 46730 USA
800-626-8515
www.churchdoctor.org
info@churchdoctor.org

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