

Rebuild



Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

Ingredients of Community (Part 3): The Need for Focused Leadership - Seeing Community as God's Chief Intention for The Church

Christian Community does not just happen. Community can't materialize without a deliberate commitment to a number of specifics. First, people must commit themselves to other *people* – and this commitment must be *returned* by them in identifiable ways. Second, unless there is a consistent, practical, intentional teaching emphasis on how we are to love one another, this commitment will collapse like a tent without poles in a hurricane. People must be called on to serve one another, and serve those outside of the Community as a loving Family. Of course, this will not happen by merely taking "good notes", love must be pastored, modeled, and constantly encouraged among the people. And this will not happen without the third necessary ingredient - a leadership that sees the building of intentional Community as the Church's *chief* and *primary* call, above and before all others. Without such a focused, and defined leadership, Christian Community will be nothing better than a dream.

Some might object at such seemingly narrow goal, "Christian community may be important, but the *chief* and *primary* call of the Church?! That is going too far. There are other things of equal – if not *greater* – importance." These people might continue to make their case by posing the following:

"How can you say Christian Community be the *first* priority? What about evangelism? Isn't the Church here to bring the gospel to the world? How can it give itself to saving souls if it is all pre-occupied with relationships? And what about worship? Can you honestly tell me that Community is more important

than the worship of Almighty God?"

"And what about the other ministries of the Church? What about counseling, the need for men's groups, women's groups, various kinds of Bible studies, intercession teams, political activism, and outreaches to the poor and homeless? Community may be important, but to say that it is the *chief* ministry of the Church is to get off center. OK, let's do community, *but* let's be involved in *other* ministries too."

Sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Who can argue against balance? What sane person would advocate an over-emphasis on one thing to the neglect of other essentials? And who can say no to "diversity?" Why get hung up on only one key when there is a whole keyboard to play?

The problem with these arguments is that they confuse style with substance. The question is not, "How *many* ministries should we do?" but, "What is the Church's chief ministry, i.e., what is the Church primary reason for being?"

Putting this in the form of an analogy, the argument is not whether a doctor should not limit his or her prescriptions to penicillin when there are thousands of other drugs available. The key question is, "What is a doctor? What is the doctor's primary purpose?" The doctor is there to heal people. If we answer that question by listing all the things the doctor *can* do (prescribe medications, give examinations, perform surgery, make people wait in the reception areas, etc.), but fail to focus what they are there for we have confused activity for identity, doing for being.

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Why is it so important to make a distinction between doing and being? We will be confused about what the Church should do, if we do not first know what it is.

And what is the Church? The Church is "God's household," a People who have taken up residence with God and one another, believers who show the world what it means to love and be loved the way God loves (see Ephesians 2:19; John 17:20-24). The Church is not just supposed to be busy doing "good" things, it is to *be* God's loving Community – a reflection of Himself. If we are not clear on this, we may succeed in getting a lot done - and may do it "well" - but in the "doing" ultimately contradict God's overriding purpose.

Another analogy: A construction crew may be great at hammering, pouring cement and shingling roofs, but these activities may not make them a good construction team. What if the supervisor of the crew returns to the site to see a long stretch of sidewalk going nowhere, four little roofs scattered around the lot with beautifully ornamented with cedar shingles, and a three guys intent on driving hundreds of nails in one three by four? He would not look at that mess and say, "My oh my, what a tremendous bunch of men I have!" No, he would say, "Who in the heck

spiked their thermos' with hallucinogenic drugs?"

Unless we *first* understand God's intent for the Church, we can be prescribing all sorts of wonderful things to people we are ministering to, and be doing lots of "good work" (for the Lord), but in the end find few healed and not build anything God would feel comfortable moving into.

Perhaps once we stop asking, "What can we *do*?" and begin asking, "Who has God called us to *be*?", we might start seeing that the issue is not which ministry should come first, or how many ministries the Church should be involved in, but that the Church itself is Community.

Community is not a ministry which must wait its turn in line like all the rest; it is not "a" ministry, but the identifying profile of the Church. To pit "community" against other "ministries" is like pitting the call to "be family" against the things a family does. No one would ask, "Which should come first, 'being a family' or 'raising children'?" No one would answer, "Well, we must be careful to keep things in balance. Its fine to be a family, but we must also make sure that we raise children too." Huh?

But can we put it the other way around? Can we say that raising children is the same thing as being a family? Not exactly. The headmasters at *Stars and Stripes Boarding School*

for *Young Patriots* can accurately be called "mom" or "dad" by their students, even though they instruct, nurture and train them. What's the difference? For one, if a pupil failed to live up to expectations (failed, did not pay tuition, became too rowdy in class, etc.), the child would be thrown out on the campus front lawn, outside looking in. But relationships are not based on what one does in a genuine family. If Don Jr. doesn't do his chores, he is not thrown out in the street with his suitcases. Don Jr. is *related* to his family, the students of *Stars and Stripes* have a business relationship.

We must admit it, we in the American Church often relate more as clients than we do as family. We have become confused about our identity, thinking that what we do (or what is done to us) says more about who we are than who God sees us to be. This is not a minor oversight. The fundamental purposes of God are compromised by such a distorted vision.

All these issues circle back to the need for clear, focused leadership. If those in leadership are not clear that the Church is *first* to be family, the people will not begin to relate like one. In absence of such a focus, the leadership will adopt a "democratic" style and give all ministries a chance at the helm in the name of balance, and fair play. As a result, the church will be busy raising and lowering sails, scouring the decks, and making sure

that the ship in good working order as it makes hurried, zig-zagged circles.

God has given gifts of leadership to the Church to help His People understand who they are, and how to live as His Family. God knows that if His People are not called to this vision, they will "scatter" (Proverbs 29:18) under the weight of the competing visions of a culture that continually screams at them to achieve rather than form loving, committed relationships.

Defined leadership is a necessity for Community. Consider all of the missiles the average Christian must dodge while on the road to community:

- People's fear of intimacy (most have been burned in the past).
- The "American theology" that tells us we do not need others (God is enough), that we do not need the Church (it's just an institution), and that our choice of congregations is matter of consumer choice more than it is a matter of covenant love
- The inherent societal trends that challenge the possibility of maintaining term relationships (20% of the country moves each year, 50% divorce).

Wouldn't it just be easier to "balance" ministry, to *do* family things, rather than *be* family? Sure. But that is not God's idea for the Church. ... And it will not be an idea God's people will adopt without focused leadership.

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