

# Building An Externally Focused Church

Tom Rawls – July 2008

One of the most empowering moments in Proclaimers journey of transition & change occurred a few years ago when as a church we moved from one facility to another – actually we were kicked out! But that is another story.

I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. These are the words that still resonate in my spirit: "Until you get your focus OFF of the people who are disgruntled, unhappy, unsupportive, and resistant to the direction God has called you to go, and ONTO those who are excited, supportive and on board, you will NEVER gain momentum and see a new culture created in your church."

That statement set me free. It really did. In fact, I can remember our team making several tough, but GOOD decisions that literally sped up our momentum by leaps and bounds.

**Some of those decisions had to do with things we were going to STOP doing.**

**Decisions that:**

- We were NO LONGER going to try and get people to stay at our church who weren't happy.
- We were going to stop spending time and energy trying to get the grumblers "on board" when it was very evident that most of them were not going to support the new direction
- We were going to stop allowing some of the "small things" to continue just to keep a few people happy (You know those programs and committees that are OPPOSITE of where you're headed, but you're keeping in place just to keep 12 people happy? Yeah, those...) Youth group, Ardent and Passionate

**We also made some decisions about what we going to START doing or focus on being more intentional about.**

**Decisions that:**

- We would stay focused on God's vision and mission for Proclaimers NO MATTER WHAT. Even if it were just the three of us in the end!
- The focus of our leading and teaching would be turned towards the people we were reaching and those who were excited about where we were headed.
- We would only engage in ministries, programs, and events that aligned with our mission - regardless as to whether or not every other church in town was doing it or not. The mission would dictate everything - not what was "popular" or even what programs or events might have seemed "successful" in the past.

It wasn't easy, and yes, we lost people. But....it eventually created a momentum that led towards reaching the people that God had called us to reach. We have grown from 100 to 600 in three and a half years.

**Here are some of the principles we used to get where we are today.**

**1. It's not plug and play:** There is a plug and play concepts for church life as opposed to fundamental long term commitment to a process of development

(a) Plug and play mouse – easy – uncomplicated, no thinking required – but won't work in the life of the church – it is not enough

(b) Diets we all know don't work it needs to be a lifestyle change for permanent weight lose and healthy living – diets are great but they don't work long time

(c) Revivals occur during the course of the church throughout the world but we don't need to wait for a revival

The need is for a process – a lifestyle change for our churches – it is another way of looking at church – from programming to culture creation. For us it was the subtlety of language – how to speak because language creates culture how we spoke was of vital importance.

It's all about pulling our 7 days a week church apart at the seams and seeing what's there – what's good and what's just religious trappings. Finding out what is integral like worship, preaching and giving of offerings. Getting rid of some stuff that has no real impact and rediscovering the mandate of the church.

Let me tell you why you're here ...

**1. We had to refocus on the power of salvation** – that it was miraculous and supernatural – no greater miracle in all the world. We had to understand afresh that it is the will of God for all to come to salvation – angels rejoice when one person comes to Christ. We had to rediscover how to preach the good news – I am not ashamed of the gospel it is the power of God to salvation – people coming to Christ was a supernatural miracle.

We had to reinvent our calls for salvation so we could celebrate peoples search and let them understand the power of the journey – we would put no pressure on people coming to Christ if they weren't ready but give people time to belong before they believe. The reason so few come to Christ is they are not issued with an authentic invitation to do so.

**2. Being motivated by the cause of Christ** – what is the cause of Christ – **Luke 19: 10** says that Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost. Is this what motivates us? Our challenge was to make this cause our motivation – why? Because this is the heart and mind of Christ – not an experiment – not a model – not a style – but the heart of God for His church

**3. We had to deal with cultural issues:** Cultural issues: Keys to develop an externally focused church and showed we were doing what we needed to do and freed God up to do what only He can do.

**Intentionally and deliberately creating culture:** Culture is created by intention or by default – if you don't create it others will – be the intentional force within your church who creates and sets the culture – learn the power of being a Cultural Architect – carrying, communication and connecting others to the culture of the house.

Some of our cultural distinctions have been: Servanthood, understanding the power of flowing together, generosity, the pursuit of excellence and becoming a people who were motivated by the very cause of Christ – serving the agendas of God and devoted to His purpose in all the world.

We worked on concepts like placing Godly value back on to the local church and away from para-church organisations – being planted in the house, passion, having a whatever it takes mentality, no titles for leaders, the fact that we live to see people coming to Christ, we have serious discussions on maturity – babies drink milk, adolescents feed themselves and adult feed others.

### **We became quite deliberate and intentional about**

- the language we speak because language creates culture –
  - ✓ we never take up an offering – we receive an offering because we don't want to take anything for people
  - ✓ our first time visitors are called guests because you are expecting them
  - ✓ we have hosts not ushers because we are inviting people to our house we will host them from start to finish not just greet them at the door
- The way we advertise and market our church on either print, web or media – we are dedicated to see the church from the perspective of the outsider
- The song we sing – modern not old fashion, song that require minimal explanation – hosanna and “lamb of God” songs
- The worship styles we allowed – short, engaging, fresh
- We became obsessed by explaining the why behind the what in areas like hosting, hospitality and the environment we worked hard on creating each Sunday –
- Being a friendly church – you need to ask people who don't attend your church – people who don't normally go to church – ask them – our goal was to get a wow within the first 10 to 15 minutes of people arriving
- We were extreme on the emphasis we would place on welcoming and assimilating people through Sunday church – assimilation is an important team
- We spent a lot of time on teaching our church the power of being a bringer – more than an invitation – bringing people to church was better – getting people to belong before they believe is important
- We will spend days and weeks developing creative and regular events rather than special crusades – moving from a crusade mentality to a lifestyle of seeing salvations in the house – from a revival mentality to a process driven mentality – we stopped doing Alpha because we were seeing more people saved over a weekend than over the 15 weeks of the program. We spend a whole week and a bit every year to prepare a 12 – 18 month preaching plan and work on creative and attractional series titles with good tag line and powerful media components for advertising – we are a church that maximises Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas and Easter – and other great days

### **Becoming an externally focused church will require sacrifice:**

What are you willing to sacrifice to become an externally focussed church? Paul circumcised Timothy so Timothy could be relevant – it might hurt to become relevant – for some it will be a cutting experience – for some you'll have to remove some elements from your world to reach the world more effectively.

### **Some areas of sacrifice:**

- Your dress styles: Not wearing your Yves Saint Laurent ties as often and wearing some casual clothes maybe jeans and a cool shirt – you'll attract people by what you wear and turn off others by your dress sense
- The extra 10 minutes of worship maybe your flags, the older ladies who wear the lycra tights and do interpretive dance during your worship – it might look cute to you but brands us a strange to those who have not yet connected with Christ.
- The singing in the spirit, the use of old favourite songs and hymns may need to be replaced with modern, poetic and meaningful songs of today with a today sort of feel.
- Stop speaking christianese and work hard at developing relevant language when you speak publically – stop wasting words and learn to manage your words more carefully stop using words that come from a Christian default – word like fellowship, may the lord richly bless you
- The extra 15 minutes of preaching who gave you permission to talk too long, most people don't remember the sermon if it goes for more than 20 – 25 minutes – you'll need to sacrifice time in being better organised with media and songs to work with your message, work on the title, having creative elements added to increase the power of the communication
- Shortening your services from 2 hours to 1 hour and 20 minutes – place more value on the time people give to church by valuing their time in church
- Getting rid of the ministries that aren't reaching any one – i.e. women's ministry,
- Stop developing a needy mindset by regular altar calls for church people – you don't do pastoral care from the front church at altar calls, pastoral care is a lifestyle issue of the church done through teams
- Get rid of the microphone at the front where anyone can speak, prophecy and tell us about what they have seen, stop the weird factors, the cringe factors,

**Need to sacrifice your Sunday morning teaching** ministry and exposition of the word and start speaking with an external focus – to speak evangelistically as well as seeking to make application to all

**You'll need to sacrifice church members** who aren't interested in reaching the lost (they are often older and regularly pay their tithes)

### **You'll need to sacrifice time –**

- to be more organise for Sundays – run sheets, thinking through the service layout, working on better transitions
- to be more intentional and more creative in your preaching content and style – making it externally focused by thinking through what you're going to preach about – develop a 12 month or 18 month preaching plan – come up with attractional series titles and talk through the kind of multimedia you'll use to brand the series, talk through various style of communication – tag team preaching, rising voices, discussions or the interview style with a moderator or the late show forum with three guests

### **You'll need to sacrifice your comfort to give a call for salvation when no one responds –**

- it challenges the church – some people feel a bit embarrassed –

- nothing changes until it is confronted – no one will respond without an invitation to respond
- you'll need to sacrifice your sense of comfort and in some places sanity, as you in every service make a call for salvation and say the prayer – until it becomes the culture of the church and an integral part of who you are

### **Sacrifice money on technology – to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century Church**

- Microphones, media, computers, screens, projectors

### **You'll need to sacrifice parts of your life you thought were sacrosanct –**

- the books you read – read to grow and read to develop your perspectives on the world, social trends and pop culture, theology, philosophy, current church leaders and their comments on church life, wealth and finance – I still like reading Ann Rice and Clive Cusler – I just need to read other stuff too
- the music you listen too – listening to the top 40 to find a song that resonates the message of Christ – “keep bleeding” Leona Lewis
- the TV Shows you watch – CSI – Who are you by the Who – Heroes I was born for something more than this
- the movies you go to – Sex and the City about a woman's need to find identity – Iron Man with a strong sense of redemption running through it
- going to see more art in galleries
- All in an effort to see the signs of Christ in pop culture today

### **You'll need to be willing to sacrifice your leadership style to develop the leadership required for a bigger and ever growing church**

- Train leaders – develop their capacity
- Trust leaders – by delegating
- Commit your church into the hands of Jesus – Jesus will build His church
- Learn to lead through your team
- Develop assimilation teams
- Have welcome teams
- Make your church be open and friendly to guests
- Have great hospitality
- Become the creative power house of your church

If you don't do this you will fall prey to being relevant for relevant sake and be guilty of being self indulgent and in turn return to being an inwardly focused church