

Calling for DNA Transformation in the Church of God

By Doug Talley, Indiana Ministries, Guest Columnist

Every five years, the Church of God holds a strategic planning conference where approximately 150 leaders gather to look to the future. At the recent 2011 conference, Rev. Milton Grannum, Senior Pastor of New Covenant Church of God in Philadelphia made a statement that gripped everyone. He said *“The Great Commission has never been part of the DNA of the Church of God.”* When I heard those words, my first thought was, “I can’t believe someone of his stature in the Church of God finally admitted that.”

In the Church of God we have dabbled in the Great Commission. Historically, we were more of a movement to reform the church rather than a tribe focused on making disciples. I have heard stories of Church of God folks picketing outside churches of other tribes on Sunday mornings, urging attenders to come out of Babylon and become part of the Church of God. Even if this was not common practice, we have tended to lean more to proselyting than winning people to Christ.

From the moment of hearing Dr. Grannum’s statement, there were several of us who knew that this might be the last chance for the Church of God to make a much-needed transformation. As a church group we are on the backside of the life cycle. More and more of our local congregations are becoming disconnected from the larger tribe. It appears to me that the rate of congregations closing is higher than it has been in the last few decades, and I am hearing other Regional Pastors make the same observation. Many of our congregations are struggling, primarily focused on survival, and spend a lot of time and energy arguing about things only important to them. (As I write this I am doing a consultation for a church that has declined from 400 to 60 over the last couple of decades.) If we keep doing business-as-usual, our impact for the Kingdom will diminish. Vision is needed to launch a new life cycle (state, nationally, and locally), and the Great Commission has to be at the center of that vision.

The Great Commission is about much more than doing church things, attendance figures, budget reports, serving on boards and committees, attending services, business meetings, special church events, church programs, and the like. I’m not saying those things are totally unnecessary, but they are not the heart and soul of the mission God has called us to.

The Great Commission is about expanding God’s influence and Kingdom in the world. It is about lives, marriages, families and communities being transformed by the power of Jesus Christ. It is about being the hands and feet of Jesus as we demonstrate his amazing love and grace in redemptive service. It is about setting people free from whatever keeps them from reaching their potential as a child of God. It is about people connecting with God in a way that their lives are changed to such an extent that they’ll never be the same again. It is about spiritually, emotionally, and relationally healthy lifestyles that reflect God’s image in us. It is about growing ever increasingly into the likeness of Jesus and His holiness characterizing us more and more.

Transforming DNA is incredibly difficult. It takes a bold leader to initiate the change. Which means that the leader must first be transformed into a catalytic change agent before the organization or church can be transformed. This kind of leader must be very passionate, focused, and priority driven.

When an organization or a church moves down the backside of the life cycle, people engage in denial. We often do not want to admit what is really happening. We ignore reality and reach for what Jim Collins (How the Mighty Fall) refers to as a silver bullet – a quick, painless fix. Denial reigns because we are afraid of the remedy; the action steps that are needed to launch a new life cycle and move in a new direction.

I love the Church of God. I love local congregations. While I love our history, I want to be part of a new vision rooted in the Great Commission that changes today and tomorrow for Christ. The Church of God emerged because some bold and courageous leaders were not satisfied with the church doing business-as-usual. God planted a vision in their hearts of a new future where God's Kingdom reigned. I want to be as committed that to new future as our pioneers. **Will you join me?**