

## **“A Measure & A Vision”**

*By Bill Ferguson,  
State Youth Pastor and Coach*

*“More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets. It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but you truly love them.”*

- Henri Nouwen, *Gracias*, pp. 147, 148

I remember the day I realized that I was taller than 5'7". That was a great day. Also, I remember the day I passed 6'2". That was a glorious day! I had measured taller than my mother and father, respectively. To get a full picture (vision) of who I am and to assess my growth and impact as a person, it is important to look at more than my height. Further, to challenge me to grow fully as one whom God has created and called to make a difference in the lives of people and in the world, there are many more important aspects on which to focus than what can be physically observed.

As I think about the vision and impact of a church immersed in culture -- where fewer and fewer people are moving towards places of worship in order to find spiritual help and engagement with God -- I'm asking myself about the measurements and indicators that will guide us into the future.

The days are quickly passing when measuring weekly worship attendance, or giving totals, or the number of people at an altar of prayer following a weekly service, will give an accurate indication of the church's effectiveness and guide us into culture. Please don't misunderstand me ... money is important. The gathered community of believers is important. Personal and corporate transformation in Christ is essential. However, I don't think that these markers will motivate us to “go” and engage our culture. Conversely, these markers have compelled us to spend large amounts of time and money in marketing to people who aren't initially interested. Honestly, our over-emphasis on attracting people to church has created congregations filled with passive “consumer Christians” who are disengaged from those outside the church. I question whether this was Jesus' intent for the church.

***In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church and in secular culture, I think it is important that we get back to making connections and building relationships with those outside the church to fulfill our calling.*** I'm not talking about finding ways to get them to “come to us,” I mean finding ways to “go to them.” We must find ways to move the body of Christ from its holy gatherings into the world. I see the church as a dynamic engaging people who share life with seekers and share resources to meet the needs of others in the name of Christ.

Let me share some ideas for moving a church to immerse itself in its culture ... For starters, pastors and teachers might speak to board members and other leaders about raising awareness of the growing disconnect between the church and culture.

As catalysts, church staff members could take the lead in building relationships! What if staff were expected to model this way of life and measure connections? Quarterly reports to boards and committees could begin (because it is most important) with an accounting of time spent building relationships, identifying difficulties in making connections, stories of tangibly blessing and serving others outside the church.

What connection might be made if members were encouraged to write “thank you” cards consistently

throughout the year to medical professionals, police and firefighters, administrators, business leaders, politicians, etc., who are participating with God in healing and serving the community?

What about measuring the number of bagels given and notes of encouragement written each month to teachers of a local school? How about logging hours spent reading to students or the number of books given to local elementary children? These are only a few ways of moving a church to immerse itself in culture, to build relationships and spread the love of Christ. What are your ideas?

To support believers in making connections, sermons could be built around topics like --“Real-life Issues Confronting Everyday Joe and Jane” (purpose: stir compassion to act lovingly rather than with condemnation); “Important Things I Am Learning from Those Unacquainted with Christ;” “Listening More than You Speak” (alternate title: Why God Gave us Two Ears and only One Mouth); “How to Serve Others in Need.”

***My vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> century church effectively immersed and engaging culture is of a body of believers who gather each week for worship, encouragement and support and then scatter into culture to such an extent that there is as much activity going on outside the church in relational, community and people building, as there is going on inside.*** Consider setting a 10-15 year vision for the church, where 50% of congregational/personal time is spent within the body and 50% of the time is scattered in culture -- building relationships, blessing and serving. What would have to happen in 1, 2, 5 & 10 years to see this vision become reality?

I believe that the church that consistently makes connections and builds relationships with people in culture will be the church that thrives in this century. I pray that God will give you the courage and vision to be that church in your community!

That's my 21<sup>st</sup> century vision for the church.

If you would like to interact and discuss these thoughts further, please email me at [billf@flcog.org](mailto:billf@flcog.org).