

A New Opportunity to Build an Ethos of Community/ Michael B. Knight

Ethos is defined as “the fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, and practices of a group or society. It is the distinguishing character or disposition of a community, group, or person. To simplify, an ethos is expressed through spontaneous, recurring patterns.” As Erwin McManus says.

At Catalyst 2002, Erwin McManus stated, “I’ve become convinced over the years and through experience that the primary role of a leader is to create and shape ethos.”

At the National Church Planting Office (NCPO) our mission is to build new churches that will transform the modern architecture of the church. The Church of God has been a powerful movement and the salvation of my family and my ministry have benefited from its strength.

When I think of the 175 million Americans who are not currently attending church anywhere I think about you, the Church Planters of the Church of God. Why? The un-churched in America are returning to church. They are not returning because of great preaching, wonderful choirs, or magnificent buildings. They are returning for the moral education of their children and because they are lonely and detached. They long for what we call true biblical community.

God is calling Church of God church planters to build a new community ethos—a community of American Missionaries who are the Sons of Issachar. They understand the times they live in and know what to do about them. Yet, they also have learned how to create an ethos of community in their leadership styles as well.

Kononia Pneuma

There are missing links to our Pentecostal experience. I am a huge advocate for the use of the gifts of the Spirit, the anointing, the baptism of the Spirit, etc. But Pentecost was more than that. It was rooted and grounded in a body of believers who experienced the gifts but some how had this incredible loyalty and love for one another. In the book of Philippians 2:1-4 it says:

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.”

The moving of the Spirit was connected to, and a direct bi-product of, true biblical community. You can not divorce the two. According to Dr. Owen Weston, church planters fail first because they feel lonely or detached from everyone else. We are setting the stage for future church planters in our movement. We have as one of our national goals to make sure we create this synergy, this network of connected church planters. Paul said in Philippians that we should take this “fellowship of the Spirit” and develop a movement of church planters who really actually love one another, leaders who express the incarnation of community. True biblical community is about communication, distribution, contribution, communication, joint participation, intimacy and participation. These elements are the proof of fellowship. They are what the Psalmist was talking about in 119:63 when he stated that “I am a companion of all that fear you, and to all who follow your precepts.” Dr. Bilezikian from the Willow Creek Association, and Bill Hybels’ mentor, said that the “early church came to know each other in a new way through the quality of communal life that RESULTED from Pentecost.” He said, “Only the Holy Spirit can create such an open environment where mutual edification, mutual caring, and mutual accountability make it possible for the strong to help the weak survive in a hostile world and for all to attain mature oneness in Christ”. (Eph. 4:13).” Isn’t it ironic that Jesus last prayer, “Father make them one as you and I are one” (John 17:11, 21-22) is preceding the Acts of Pentecost? Dr. Bilezikian goes on to say, “The prayer of Jesus for his followers to become a community received spectacular vindication at Pentecost. Overnight, a group of distraught and shiftless disciples became a bold, motivated, organized, and united movement energized by God’s power.” Acts 2:42-47 is actually a brief summary of the changes that occurred among the disciples **after** the impact of the Pentecostal experience.

In Acts 2: 4 we seem to glance right past that comment about how they were all in “one accord” so we can get on to the “good stuff.” Maybe that’s why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 that if you don’t have love, your tongues will do you no good. Maybe, they spent a 120 days together in the “upper room” not because God wanted to make them wait, but because God wanted to fuse them together as one united instrument in

His hand. Maybe, the Pentecostal experience requires community to truly be effective. It sure seems that way to me.

Ethos Leadership

Erwin McManus says “Uniting a crowd into a community requires spiritual leadership, and what emerges in the process is the generation of a common culture built upon commonly held beliefs, values, and world views. There is no more significant reason to be a pastoral leader than to awaken an apostolic ethos. To embrace the God-given task of connecting the local church to the first-century church is an extraordinary responsibility.” He goes on to say, “You can talk all day long about the importance of servant hood and service; or you can work from the pattern of Jesus and exalt those who humble themselves, giving positions of greatness to those who are willing to be the least in the kingdom.” We need to build leadership in our new churches that value humility. Brian McLaren believes that “we must learn humility in order to engage in respectful dialogue.” We must create an ethos of leaders who place a premium on authenticity and transparency. If my memory serves me correctly, it was Jesus Christ who couldn’t stomach un-authentic people.

As Dr. John Maxwell says, “Leadership is influence.” But this isn’t modernity, it is post-modernism. Influence doesn’t come from titles. It comes through the conduit of relationships. When we build leaders in any other way than the New Testament model of servant hood, we inherit the world’s way of leading: organizational politics. It is the “use of power to modify or protect an organization’s resource distribution and those in formal authority” says Dr. Shafritz and Ott in their landmark work on *The Classics of Organization Theory*. They go on to say that “politics involve the exercise of power to get something accomplished, as well as those activities which are undertaken to expand the power already possessed or the scope over which it can be exercised. It involves intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups.” As Lead Pastors, we need to lead from a biblical mandate. Erwin McManus in his new book *Stand Against the Wind: Awaken the Hero Within* says, “Our courage directly affects the speed at which the future unfolds.” He goes on to say that “In the most dysfunctional of human relationships, we see people as existing for our benefit.” We need to see leadership as an act of servant hood, not political power. According to Gibbs and Bolger, “We need to become a people rather than a place and a community rather than a meeting.” They continue, “If a church begins to look like a family, then all its institutional practices will undergo change. Church as family is primarily about relationships.” In a world where solid Christians who are

faithful for the long run is an oxymoron, we need to embrace the fact that commitment is relational more than institutional.

According to Gibbs, "any attempt to join in a community presents a challenge for individuals who have been nurtured in the culture of modernity, in which independence, individual rights, and privileges are the norm. Such people are often disturbingly silent when it comes to their corporate responsibilities." Here is the cold, hard and very difficult truth. We are our brothers' keepers. Unfortunately, much of the church today is a modern institution in a post-modern world. Is it possible that the twentieth century church which was already hierarchical and rationalized in existence, actually mimicked Henry Ford's hierarchical, assembly-line construction to maximize its own productivity? The end result was dehumanization and disempowerment. That is exactly the reason we have a modernity culture of tired shepherds and silent saints. As leaders of local churches we may need to rethink our inherited ways of administering church. You are only going to be as effective a leader in your church plant as you are effective in the arena of relationships. Gibbs and Bolger state, "In religion, authority shifted from external sources to internal ones." Today, institutions are required to serve the individual. Your church exists for people, not the other way around. I love what Shane Claiborn says in his book *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*, "We need to grow smaller and smaller until we take the world over." Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community." Today, leadership itself demands a relational community.

Conclusion

Yes, God is calling us in the Church of God and its church planters to dream dreams of ancient visions. It is an apostolic ethos of community. It is a way of life that exists organically and relationally. It is one that is marked not by our attendance, buildings, or state reports, but by our love for one another. It is possible for our new churches to be known for their fellowship, love, servant hood, and humility in leadership and giving. These are key elements of church planting and will fuel evangelism. As Erwin McManus says, "You are never closer to the kingdom of God than when relationships are your priority." What seemed impossible is becoming normal. Bonhoeffer said, "It is by seeing the cross and the community beneath it that men come to believe in God." Amen Dietrich!