

CHAPTER 5

A Future Expression of Church

The next couple of decades will bring a tsunami of change to the American church. As baby boomers pass from the scene, finances will tighten making it more difficult for churches to own large campuses or manage expensive programs. A left-leaning political climate will pass laws rendering it more difficult for us to do business as usual. We've already seen local zoning laws impede the development of properties, future changes in tax laws and the codification of "politically correct" speech will affect the way we present our message. In short, change is upon us whether we prepare for it or not. Prepare we must! The good news is that the Jesus-driven church is up to the task.

A Lower Profile

The church of the future will adopt a lower profile in two ways. First, the cost of church as we've known it will require a less-expensive and more relational approach to meetings. Consumer-oriented Christianity will become more difficult. This is actually a good thing as it appeals to Millennials and "Generation Z" which is already in its teen years. The second reason for a lower profile is the antipathy of the larger culture toward Christ-followers. We will be forced to make disciples outside the church as an invitation to attend services is met with rising hostility. Today many companies hold policies prohibiting the discussion of religion in the workplace. Such attitudes will demand that we build friendships before sharing faith or inviting someone to attend a church meeting. Our world will look more like that experienced by first-century Christ followers or believers in nations where Christianity has long been a minority faith. Any longing for a sense of Christendom will be only a false hope.

Boutique vs Franchise

Leaders resolving to redirect toward Level 5 multiplication will need to think about the difference between a network and a movement. This is a difference between a well-oiled franchise at Level 4 and a messy movement at Level 5. Make no mistake, the franchise offers an easier path than the boutique approach. However, boutique churches can serve in places where "homogenized" franchises cannot.

If you aim for Level 5, you abandon branding and control for penetration into the cracks and crannies of society. There is no single template for every church plant. The Great Commission

calls for measurement, and you're in a numbers game. If you begin to count congregations, your ultimate numbers skyrocket from thousands to hundreds of thousands, even millions, if you choose the looser, value-driven multiplication Level 5 model. If you franchise, at Level 4, you'll still be more productive than if you choose Level 3 addition, but not as fruitful as if you pick a Level 5 boutique model.

Franchise

Twelve years after we planted the first church, my family and a team of 26 others moved to Oahu to plant a bunch of churches. Until the move, we operated as a franchise—one central unit training and governing the others. Cloning wasn't the focus, but centralization was. The church I pastored reproduced successfully. We were a strong Level 4 congregation. I fell into Level 4 leadership because everything centered on me. We operated in an open-handed manner, but I was still the lid holding things down.

We weren't using the terminology at the time, but we would have described ourselves as a Level 5 congregation producing unique “boutique” church plants. We were, however, a Level 4 church operating a network as a franchise system. Every church plant looked like us. We added capacity by adding churches. While at Level 5 you multiply churches thereby multiplying capacity to multiply further. The fear of losing control two generations out causes some leaders to stop at Level 4—they build a franchise, or network. Good, but not optimum.

Boutique

Upon relocating to Hawaii, our team felt that God called us to bring one percent of the state population into churches we started,

or helped to start, within 10 years. That forced us to think in Level 5 terms. We had to reproduce pastors who would reproduce pastors and churches. We went from reproduction to multiplication on our first Sunday via the simple announcement of our goal and the necessary logistics that came with it...

Making disciples who made disciples who made disciples and multiplying pastors who multiplied pastors who multiplied pastors were necessary to evangelizing 10,000 people in 10 years. The unique geography and high land costs in Hawaii held us back from thinking of big churches. When we described our vision, we told people, “Imagine planting just 100 churches of 100 people.” Then we informed our audience (72 people assembled on a beach without a permit) that some of them would become pastors who would disciple other pastors, or we would fail.

A series of accidents, some geographic and some denominational, kept us from retaining enough control to brand ourselves or operate as a franchise (remember, we start churches in other people’s denominations). Control is the defining difference between a franchise and a multiplicity of boutique operations.

We transformed into a Level 5 movement of boutique multiplying congregations, almost without realizing it. Looking back through the lens of Exponential’s *Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church* has helped us understand the dynamics of our own history. Crossing oceans is great, but you need to allow cultural freedom at home to succeed. We would never have reached our goal at Level 4, but Level 5 made it a near no-brainer. Those were the days before email, so difficult communication was a problem (blessing). Long story short, what I would have controlled as a franchise grew beyond me. I had to release the

reins to reach not only Hawaii, but also into (mostly freelance missionaries) Japan, the U.S. mainland and several places in Asia.

Multiplication with minimal control systems produces more, though seldom uniform, results. Think of a photocopy machine. But, consider making copies of copies for several generations. The copies become fuzzy images of the original. At this point, you've already noticed that doctrine can become fuzzy if you multiply. However, if you believe in the power of the Word and the Spirit, you can entrust this to God as Paul did when he addressed the church at Rome long before he met them, "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14 NIV).

We sport one string of disciple-making disciples that runs at least nine levels deep. I had close contact with the first two pastors, met numbers five, six and seven years later (I only remember one name) and will meet the others when we get to Heaven. On a recent teaching trip to the United Kingdom, I bumped into a church planter who launched more than 300 churches in Mozambique. He came from Hope Chapel Cary, North Carolina. Until then, I had only heard his story. It was a joy to meet someone in the fourth generation in a chain of disciple making—I discipled a guy who discipled a guy who discipled this man. The chain has even more links in Mozambique.

The beauty of this is that the Kingdom of God grows without my permission. There are good reasons for building franchising networks, but a fluid movement will get into places you might otherwise overlook. This is another reason to move toward a microchurch planted and pastored by lay-trained, single-salary, freelance individuals.

Immediate Sustainability

Call me a pipe dreamer (because only pipe dreams open new territory). If churches could reposition themselves as entry platforms for church multiplication the possibilities are endless. Vast potential awaits at the intersection of single-salary freelance pastors and microchurch movements.

Microchurches are immediately sustainable. The combination of a locally disciplined pastor, no rent, and a salary from outside the church combine for sustainability. They also cost the parent church very little. The planting pastor and family can remain part of the multiplying congregation if we use the Sri Lankan model that I referenced earlier. The launching congregation won't even lose the tithes from that family because microchurch requires no money.

Microchurches eliminate the three primary drivers behind our current "high cost per baptism": formal theological education; buildings; and staff salaries. Take these out of the equation, and Level 5 church multiplication is a no-brainer. A Level 3 church with huge operational costs could experiment with microchurch without jeopardizing its budget. A small congregation can obviously do this when you consider that 20 percent of all conventional church plants get launched by churches numbering fewer than 100 members.

What is necessary is someone with a full understanding of the New Testament to set off a disciple-making chain that results in every church member becoming a potential church planter. Most will never plant a church, but this paradigm lifts every member of Christ's body to a higher level of productivity.

Randy Ishida observes, "With small churches struggling to keep finances straight, it seems logical not to be a burden and

expect the church to support pastors. Freelance pastors also live in the ‘real world.’ Having a full-time job outside the church gives the pastor opportunity to disciple unbelievers.”

I think of my friend, Wayne Ching. He leads an independent microchurch that came from Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay via one of our church plants. Wayne earns his living as an engineer. The church he pastors emphasizes tithing. However, no one brings their tithe to the church. Members set aside 10 percent of their income to give to people in need or outside ministries. Each member functions as a tiny mission agency.

Ching brings an interesting thought to the table about salaried pastors; he doesn’t take a salary. In fact, though he is a successful microchurch pastor, he sees himself as a career businessman: “I never considered myself a pastor, even part time,” he says. He leads the church in obedience to Christ. That is his primary reward and calling.

Ching is frustrated that the church has never reproduced. But at least he’s frustrated by that— such frustration is often a down payment towards eventual multiplication. Meanwhile, he’s happy about the climate inside their group. Describing microchurch potential, he says, “Your people will grow by leaps and bounds. They will understand and embrace the line ‘we are the church’ better than any sermon could convey. They will take responsibility for feeding themselves spiritually, as you would expect any child would do with food, after the age of four. The statement ‘I wasn’t being fed’ will sound absurd. We are in a culture where the consumeristic expectation from church is to ‘feed me,’ ‘entertain me,’ and ‘meet my needs.’ While these can happen in a microchurch, people realize that what they bring to the spiritual potluck is what’s served.”

Contrast this to the prevailing model for planting mid-size churches (the one I've used throughout my life). Planting teams include a significant portion of our membership (between five and 20 percent). We lose leaders, money and size whenever we plant a church. We underwrite the projects financially. This is effective but expensive. Enthusiasm over the plant usually restores the losses very quickly. But, a congregation reproducing a church for the first time would understandably shy away from these expenses.