

## OUR JOURNEY

First Presbyterian Church Valparaiso

By:

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### What

For the past 10 years, I have been saying that 80% of what I (Wayne) learned in seminary is no longer relevant. I began my parish ministry in the waning days of Christendom. Our method of evangelism was biological growth and the denomination had lost out reach growth from its consciousness. I was trained to be the pastor of Christian people. This has been called the Chapel Model. Today, we live in a Pre-Christian world. We are ministering to people who have no memory of the Gospel. We are ministering to more people who have no religious background and we are doing more adult baptisms. When I began my ministry, the non-churched were indifferent to the Christian paradigm; today, they are hostile to the Christian paradigm.

I have found the following to reflect the difference.

**Chapel Model**

**ME**

**CHURCH**

**WORLD**

**Missional Model**

**ME**

**CHURCH**

**WORLD**

The Missional model can be defined in the following ways: Bless and Add; Kingdom thinking instead of denominational thinking; form follows function; Disciples who make Disciples; Life and Death issues; Servant Leadership; may your tribe increase; spiritual gifts; and relationships are primary.

### How

Let us share what we have learned in the last eight years. Most of these best business practices, we discovered through workshops, are our multiple failures. First, becoming a missional church is not a program, but a process. There are several paradigms that can be used. We opted to be a Presbyterian Church of Purpose, People, Prayer, Power, and Presence (Purpose Driven Presbyterians). We would encourage you to read, E. Stanley Ott's, *Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church*. He does not offer a system, but he identifies markers.

Second, it doesn't matter what system you use, find a system and work it. Execute your system but run to the daylight. We have seen at least 4 ministries develop that were not part of our plan, but they seem to be a part of God's plan. Third, the Soviet Union fell apart doing Five Year Plans. We are in our third round of redefining our vision and setting our 18 to 36 month goals. We do not believe that you can look much further down the road. Fourth, visions leak and have to be re-stated on a regular basis. Tell the faith stories of your congregation and keep a diary of your success. Our history is being reconstructed for us as part of a dissertation. This PhD Candidate has culled our newsletters and began to see a shift in tone as well as the quality and quantity of our ministries.

Fifth, visit teaching congregations on a regular basis and slowly build and educate your leadership team. The leadership has to see it, and then adjust it to your size and Reformed Theology. There were two of us who attended our first teaching congregation conference; I came back with a task list of 27 items. We have been to a total of seven workshops and have had consultants with us on three occasions. Last fall, we took a team of six leaders, and we came back with tools for a major shift in the way we do small groups and our preaching cycle. Be willing to learn from all sources, we have even slipped into two United Methodist Teaching Churches. (P.S. - avoid sending a solo representative to a teaching conference). Ninth, "do it wrong until you do it right." We have had consultants who helped us and consultants who did not. We started small groups by throwing mud against the wall and hoping it would stick. Surprisingly it worked for a while. We are still not developing small groups as well as we know how. Tenth, develop a growing prayer ministry. We have learned from Dr. Thom Rainer that this usually begins with a couple of women in the congregation. We have reached a new level that is led by a handful of members.

### Pastors

Let us speak to you off of the record. First, do what it takes to pay the rent so you have enough "disposable income" to begin a new direction. We have members who do not like our direction, but our pastoral care to them has convinced them that our hearts are in the right place, even if our thinking is wrong. We have 166 members over the age of 65 and 16 members over the age of 90. Second, when you are openly reaching out to the broken and bored, the lost and the lonely, the battered and the bruised, they will not be an immediate asset to your congregation. They will not impact your budget. In fact, they will drain you of resources. We have a member who is gifted at bringing people to our church with broken wings. We worked with one couple for six years before they began to show some stability. Recently, we have gained another couple with broken wings. Second, the centripetal force of a congregation is always stronger than the centrifugal force of a congregation. We are always struggling with reminding the

church to be the church. We have a residue from Christendom the Church tends to bring Christ into their world view rather than to bring our world view to Christ. Third, systems work at bending the leader to its mold. This means that you cannot do this alone. Meet and debrief with other pastors on a regular basis. We do a non-blaming autopsy every Monday morning. We probably take one full day every quarter and debrief. When we don't do this, the congregation begins to lose its direction. Give us a call, we are always glad to tell people the mistakes that we made. Fourth, you can do this on the cheap. Eight years ago, we could not find a \$1,000.00 to initiate the Purpose Driven Life campaign. Gretchen was naive enough and I was arrogant enough to believe that we could pull this off. We borrowed from other congregations and have learned that you have to adapt every program to the culture of our congregation. For example, we have learned that in our culture it takes around 18 months from the first discussion of a new ministry to the implementation. Fifth, relationships are primary; however, the people who bring your congregation to one level may not be able to take your congregation to the next. Like a three stage rocket, you will lose boosters along the way and you will re-grieve that loss. We would encourage you to read Carl George's article on "The Berry Bucket Theory." Sixth, build around the edges and avoid a frontal assault unless you have no choice. Seventh, creating a new DNA begins with a core of committed leaders and soaks into the congregation. This takes time. For the next several years you are going to be doing ministry in parallel universes within your congregation. There will be conflicting expectations of you and the new direction. Eighth, I (Wayne) am grateful that I did not know how emotionally and spiritually draining this was going to be; otherwise, I would have been tempted not to do the right thing. Gretchen is clear that if she had known, she would not have gone on the train. We think that every pastor is limited to one or maybe two transformational ministries in their gizzard. We are enjoying the fruits and struggles of our continual transformation. If you are ever offered the choice between transforming a congregation or planting a congregation- pick up the shovel! Ninth, for the past eight years, our prayer has been, "Lord you are at work here, please keep us from messing it up."