

# Church for the Unchurched

## By George Hunter III

### Chapter 1 – The Rebirth of the Apostolic Congregation

#### Modernity

The Enlightenment taught that:

- human beings are basically rational.
- people are basically good.
- people could base morality on reasoning alone, without the aid of revelation or religion (Western people no longer expected miracles).
- we could build and manage cities and societies on reason alone, without reference to revealed values or church leadership.
- all problems are solvable, and therefore progress is “inevitable”.
- all religions are essentially the same.

#### Our New “Apostolic Age”

The shape of the Church’s emerging opportunity that looks like this:

- Christendom is largely dissolved.
- The Enlightenment, which produced the worldview for the secular West, is a spent force. Consequently, people are increasingly receptive to, and searching for, a satisfying worldview.
- We are, once again, in an Apostolic Age – much like the age that early Christianity engaged.

#### Defining the “Apostolic” Church

- Their leaders believe that they and the church are “called” and “sent” by God to reach an unchurched pre-Christian population.
- Their theology and message center upon the gospel of early apostolic Christianity, rather than upon the narrower dogmatism, or the more vague “inclusive” theism or the conventional moralism found in many traditional churches.
- These churches adapt to the language and the culture of their target population.
- They are remarkably similar to certain key features we find in early apostolic Christianity.

## **Top Ten Features of the “Apostolic Congregation”**

1. They take a redundant approach to rooting believers and seekers in Scripture.
2. They are disciplined and earnest in prayer, and they expect and experience God’s action in response.
3. They understand, like, and have compassion for lost, unchurched, pre-Christian people.
4. They obey the Great Commission.
5. They have a motivationally sufficient vision for what people, as disciples, can become.
6. They adapt to the language, music, and style of the target population’s culture.
7. They labor to involve everyone, believers and seekers, in small groups.
8. They prioritize the involvement of all Christians in lay ministries for which they are gifted.
9. They receive regular pastoral care. They are in regular spiritual conversation with someone who is gifted for shepherding ministry.
10. They engage in many ministries to unchurched non-Christian people.

## **Chapter 2- What People Can Become**

### **The Goals for People in Traditional Churches**

- To be religious
- To believe “like us”
- To behave “like us”
- To have an experience “like ours”
- To become “like us”
- To be good citizens
- To “share our politics”
- To support the institutional church
- To prepare people for heaven
- Have explicit “sacramental” goals

### **The Goals for People in Apostolic Churches**

Willow Creek Community Church’s strategy for helping people “to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ” focuses on these four goals for Christianity:

1. Regular worship in the believers' service
2. Involvement in a small group
3. Involvement in a ministry for which the Christian is gifted
4. Friendship building and witness to unchurched pre-Christian people

The leaders of New Song Church have developed an impressive set of articles:

### **Five Vital Signs of Growth**

1. I am growing in my intimacy with God and faithfulness to His word.
2. I am growing in real relationships with others in a small group.
3. I am growing in my service to God and others.
4. I am growing in reaching my pre-Christian relationships for Christ.
5. I am growing in my sensitivity toward the training of leaders and planting of groups and churches.

### **Chapter 3- A Case for the Culturally Relevant Congregation**

### **Chapter 4- How Small Groups Shape an Apostolic People**

#### Reformation Precedents for Small Groups

Wesley ... observed that certain normative behaviors were characteristic of life in the primitive church. They met together "to stir up one another to love and good works...encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Wesley did not see such behavior in his Anglican church. One of the causes of this, he believed, was the lack of small groups.

Wesley ventured a revolutionary hypothesis: that *the occurrence of the first phenomenon* (faith, hope, power, and so on) *depends on the second*. That is, as you gather Christians and seekers together to confess their sins, encourage one another, rejoice together, and so forth, the life, faith, hope, and power of the Apostolic church emerges.

Small groups meet the needs reflected in the theme song of the television show *Cheers*:

*Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.*

*Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot.  
Wouldn't you like to get away?*

*Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name,*

*And they're always glad you came.*

*You want to be where you can see our troubles are all the same.*

*You want to go where people know people are all the same.  
You want to go where everybody knows your name.*

New Hope Church is built on over 600 "Tender Loving Care" (TLC) Groups.

In each weekly meeting, there is:

- Sharing
- Conversational prayer
- Biblical application

In *20/20 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church*, Galloway offers this prescription for starting a specific group:

1. Determine who will be the leader, assistant leader and host or hostess.
2. Build your prospect list by writing down everyone you can think of as a prospective member.
3. Build your prospect list – pray your prospect list – work your prospect list.

"The Saddleback Strategy"

**Seeker Sensitive Services**

**Affinity Groups**

**Driven by Purpose**

**Defined Target**

**Life Development Process**

**Every Member a Minister**

**Behavioral Preaching**

**Authentic Leadership**

**Climate of Acceptance**

**Keep the Structure Simple**

## **Four Components of Small Group Life**

Willow Creek defines what its groups do together in terms of four verbs:

- Love – Group members caring for another ...
- Learn – Group members experiencing a growing knowledge of God ...
- Decide – Group members making decisions about curriculum ...
- Do – Group members participating in an activity ...

## **Small Groups for Seekers**

### **Saddleback Valley: Lighthouse Bible Study**

Rick Warren invites interested people to joint a Lighthouse Bible Study, with three qualifications for joining a group:

1. You are not a Christian.
2. You have some serious doubts about the Bible.
3. You are intellectually open and honest enough to discuss it with other people.

The Lighthouse training for leaders emphasizes two objectives of the Bible Studies.

1. To communicate the love of God, so that others will be drawn to Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. Help new Christians grow spiritually so that they can better communicate the love of God to others.

The training provides some classic “Don’ts” –

### **Don’t**

- Pray at the Bible Study
- Play religious music
- Talk about religion or your church
- Knock religious groups, or even discuss them
- Have people read
- Call on people by name for comments
- Clique with friends
- Talk to others in a whisper

The leader distributes a modern translation to each person, reads it aloud, and then helps the participants process the passage with questions like the following:

1. What significance does this have for us today?
2. What does this mean to you?
3. How does (or will) this affect your life?
4. What do you think this passage means?
5. What can we learn from this passage about God, Christ, ourselves, our responsibility, our relationship to others, and so on?
6. Can anybody relate to this?
7. Is there anything you do not understand about the passage?

### **Willow Creek: Seeker Small Groups**

- Seekers need to be:
- Accepted as they are, and not judged
- Free to identify and investigate the faith, primarily with other seekers
- Listened to and understood
- Drawn out patiently

### **The Church on Brady: Discovery Bible Studies**

Brady people ultimately started a congregation in Huntington Park, one of the poorest communities in greater Los Angeles, by beginning with a door-to-door survey asking six questions:

1. What do you think are some of the needs in this community?
2. What do you think are solutions to these needs or problems?
3. Do you think the Bible has anything to say about this?
4. Have you ever read the Bible yourself?
5. Would you be willing to join some neighbors in a Bible Study, to discuss some solutions to problems people face?
6. (If “yes” to number 5) Would you be willing to open your home to host a group?

## The Six Questions of a Discovery Bible Study

1. What did you like?
2. What did you not like?
3. What did you not understand?
4. What did you learn about God?
5. What do we want to do in response?
6. What phrase, thought, or sentence would you take home with you?

In their leaflet promoting their recovery ministries, Saddleback Valley Community Church uses irony to confront people who still believe they are “in control”:

### The 12 Steps of the Addicted and Compulsive Person The Reviled Standard Version

Step 1 I (not we) declared that I was in complete control of my addiction/ compulsion, that my life was fine and dandy – thank you very much.

Step 2 I always knew that there was no power greater than myself, but all of you needed to be restored to sanity.

Step 3 I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of my addiction/compulsive behavior, because it was the only thing that understood me.

Step 4 I made a superficial and paranoid immoral inventory of anybody but myself.

Step 5 I admitted nothing to nobody – ever.

Step 6 I was entirely ready to have god punish you for all your defects of character.

Step 7 I humbly asked Him to bug somebody else.

Step 8 I made a list of all persons who had harmed me and became willing to take revenge upon them all.

Step 9 I took direct revenge whenever possible, especially when to do so would harm or injure them or others.

Step 10 I continued to take other people's inventory, and when they were wrong promptly told them so.

Step 11 I sought through alcohol/drugs/relationships/food/sex/and so on to maintain unconscious contact with myself, praying only for what I wanted, when I wanted it and the power to get it.

Step 12 Having had a spiritual death as a result of these steps, I tried to carry this message to other addicted/compulsive people and take as many of them as I could with me.

In another leaflet, Saddleback shares the true and liberating 12 steps, and includes scripture references that suggest the congruence of the 12 Steps with scriptural insight.

### **Chapter 5 – How Lay Ministry Advances the Christian Movement**

John Wesley came to perceive that the Holy Spirit has gifted many lay people for all sorts of ministries.

So Wesley evolved into the understanding that the Church's ministry to Christians, and to non-Christians, is primarily entrusted to the laity.

Lay people did virtually all the ministry that took place in, and out from, every Methodist society.

Wesley did not leave to chance the organization of lay ministries.

Leaders selected people for various ministries with care.

Wesley believed in the movement's, and the people's, possibilities.

### **The Volunteer Model: Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church**

Frazer's approach to the deployment of lay people in ministry is based on a number of distinctives and innovations.

The first of two central principles in Frazer's system is **volunteerism**. Frazer's chief method for helping people volunteer for a ministry involves the circulation, every November, of a "Ministry Menu" – some 190 options. When a new member joins the church, the orientation session for new members has one fundamental agenda: to secure, using the Ministry Menu, their involvement in a ministry. It is not primarily the responsibility of staff to do ministry (though the staff are "playing coaches"), but to train, coach, and facilitate the ministry and mission of the church's lay army.

Another facilitation approach involves the frequent use of **testimony**. For example, many church services feature a layperson who speaks briefly on what God is doing through his or her ministry.

Frazer Church has 3 methods for discovering needs for which ministries need developing.

1. A lay task force whose members research and network the city to discover unmet needs.
2. Individual members, through their networks of contacts in the city, discover needs and report them to the church.
3. People fill in a blank line on the Ministry Menu of a ministry they would volunteer to help start.

### **The Seminar Model: Willow Creek and Saddleback Valley**

Willow Creek Community Church's "Network" approach features three phases: teaching, consultation and service.

The teaching phase is an eight-hour seminar designed to help people discover their passion, spiritual gifts and personal style.

Saddleback Valley Community Church – seminar to help each person discover their S.H.A.P.E. – Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, Experience.

### **The Rise of an Entrepreneurial Laity**

Saddleback Church policy states that any member may begin a new ministry as long as they follow four guidelines:

1. You don't expect the staff to run it.
2. You are in philosophical and doctrinal harmony with the church.
3. The ministry will not harm the testimony of the church.
4. You do not do any fund-raising.

### **Vineyard Community Church of Cincinnati**

Five discoveries empower service evangelism:

1. People listen when I treat them like friends.
2. When I serve, hearts are touched.
3. As I serve, I redefine the perception of a Christian.
4. Doing the message precedes telling the message.
5. Focus on planting, not harvesting.

## **Will Traditional Churches Release Their Laity in Ministry?**

For the apostolic renewal of our churches to happen while most of us yet live, many clergy and denominational leaders would need to experience a major paradigm shift related to John Wesley's alleged problem of seeing too many of his "geese" as "swans". That is not our problem. Too many of us see our swans as geese, and our geese as chickens or turkeys – or as mere geese who lay the golden eggs that fund the ecclesiastical machinery.

### **Two Questions**

1. Will our people ever rise off their pews and share their faith with people who have not yet experienced it? The correlation between lay ministry and witness is very high, perhaps the highest of any of the correlations?
2. Will our people ever experience the power and the fulfillment that comes only from experiencing the action and making a contribution in the lives of people, and is never experienced sitting in the sidelines?

## **Chapter 6 – How Apostolic Churches Reach Secular People**

### **Ten Pioneering Principles of Outreach in Apostolic Churches**

1. They prepare their people in multiple ways.
2. They clarify the goal of outreach. Apostolic congregations view their mission fields as John Wesley once faced a nation of mere nominal Christians in eighteenth-century England; he regarded England as, for all practical purposes, a "pagan land". He regarded his nation's nominal Christians as not "one jot about the pitch of a Turk or a heathen."
3. They understand evangelism as a process.
  - 3.1 Lost people were first awakened.
  - 3.2 Awakened people were enrolled in a Methodist class.
  - 3.3 In time, awakened Methodists were justified, they experienced God's acceptance.
  - 3.4 In time, some justified Methodists were sanctified, they experienced the completion, in this life, of the gracious work God began in their justification, and were now freed

and empowered to live by God's will and by love for their neighbors.

The Stairway to "Fully Devoted Followership" at New Song Church

Pre-Christian  
 Potential Christian  
 New Christian  
 Growing Christian  
 Reproducing Christian  
 Fully Devoted Christian  
 Extended Christian

4. They regard outreach as a lay ministry. Traditional congregations assign outreach to the pastor, but apostolic congregations assign it to a prepared apostolic laity.
  5. They train their people for outreach. Willow Creek's Impact Evangelism Seminar has four – two hour sessions with four important themes:
    - Being Yourself
    - Telling the Story
    - Making the Message Clear
    - Communicating Effectively
  6. They practice social network evangelism.
  7. They offer the "faith once delivered to the saints." Their mission is to meaningfully communicate the biblical message to the pre-Christian people to their generations. Consequently, apostolic congregations pay the price to understand their target population, and they take them seriously.
  8. They address the "life concerns" of pre-Christians (and Christians).
  9. They use the language of the target population.
  10. They represent the gospel with generational relevance.
- P.S. They know that "God gives the increase."

## Ten Ways That Apostolic Churches Communicate the Gospel

1. They often begin with “active listening”. Tim Wright teaches the people of Community Church of Joy to listen especially to people’s stories. Story-listening conveys unconditional love and empathy and helps Christians to infer their needs implied in their stories.
2. They begin where the people are.
3. They teach “Christianity 101”... (leads into point 4)  
Our target population no longer understands elementary Christianity. We advance the clarity of our truth claims more through story and analogy than through theological abstractions and arguments. We have learned in adult education about the need to get adults “involved” in their learning. The group leader is more facilitator than teacher. As group members raise questions about, says, Christianity’s understanding of God as a “Trinity,” the facilitator lends two or three participants some resources from the church library and these participants do their homework and present this Christian teaching at the next meeting.
4. ... From a reduced canon. We share from a functionally reduced biblical canon in our early conversations.
5. They practice the “miracle of dialogue.” The ministry of caring, intelligent conversation – especially conversation around their questions and doubts – helps to open more secular people to the possibility of faith than any other single approach I know.
6. They cooperate with the principle of “cumulative effect.” No one “gets” the message from one exposure. It typically takes weeks or months to come to adequate terms with the gospel’s meaning.
7. They practice the principle of “creative redundancy.” The effective gospel communicator develops the capacity to say the same thing in a dozen or more different ways.
8. They assimilate seekers before they believe.
9. They permit Christianity to become “contagious.” Secular people are more likely to “catch” the faith inside the Church than outside it, more likely in a seeker service than a traditional

service, more likely in small groups than in the larger church, more likely from a two-way conversation than a one-way presentation, more likely from lay Christians than from clergy, more likely from multiple experiences than from a single experience. They are more likely to catch faith by getting involved with the message, or a fellowship, or in service than by detached observing.

10. They invite an “experiment of faith.” Sam Shoemaker, decades ago, often invited people to conduct “an experiment of faith.” This experiment meant living for a season, doing the things Christians do, as though Christianity is true.

### **What Churches Discover When They “Go Apostolic”**

1. The churches that decide to “major” in reaching unchurched pre-Christian people discover the reality of “prevenient grace” – that in every season God’s spirit is preparing the hearts of some people to receive the gospel and experience saving grace.
2. Churches who begin to receive secular people into their ranks typically discover that these people bring their problems with them – often a different set of problems than the church is used to.
3. Such churches discover the faith for themselves in new depths.
4. They no longer miss the “home field advantage” of the Christendom period. Apostolic congregations are like the Notre Dame football team – who would rather play on the opponent’s field because, as Coach Lou Holtz once explained, “It presents the greater challenge to our commitment, our character, our courage, and our community.”
5. They often experience a life, meaning, excitement, power and contagion that more traditional churches seldom experience.