

Integrated Pentecostal Paradigm of Worship and Discipleship
“The Invisible Post-Modern Church of God”

There is much talk about today as to what is “Post-Modern.” You can read books and articles from Leonard Sweet to Peter Wagner and get as many variations on that theme as you read. To suffice for this article, a “post-modern” approach to ministry is one that is anything but what you have been accustomed to. Unfortunately, many of our traditions keep us from even being able to conceive of a variation to our own repetitious themes. The church has strived for so long to become “modern” that our identity has become lost in two areas. First, our identity becomes lost in the things which we have brought into our beliefs merely for the sake of seeking acceptance from the world. Secondly, our identity becomes lost in things which we hold on to that do not help us progress forwards with our mission. What we need today is a “Post” modern approach that will enable us to let go of poor traditions, cling to what is vital to keeping us on course, and adaptable enough to allow new methodologies into our practices that will enable us to reach a more diverse culture.

Today’s church desperately needs to break away from the traditional models of ministry in order to be able to meet the needs of today’s society. For Pentecostals, many traditional ministry models do not facilitate the discipleship of Pentecost. From the earliest movements of Pentecost, the experience of the Holy Spirit Baptism has been one of radical transformation in the daily lives of individuals. The experience transcends the form of a weekend expression and strives for worshipping God with daily obedience. To measure the progress of Pentecostal discipleship, one can not merely observe the expressions of a weekend service, but rather how well the ministry on Sunday effects lives throughout the week. Pentecostal discipleship must focus on how effective our

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ministry efforts change the daily lives of our members. Measuring giving, weekend attendance, and the enthusiasm of the service alone will not provide an accurate measure to Pentecostal growth. True Pentecostal growth occurs when the power of the Holy Spirit enables individuals to overcome sin, stand underneath the oppression of the world, and evangelizes the community. Traditional terms, forms, images, models, expectancies, and goals all hinder the spontaneity and freedom of God’s Spirit to move in a non traditional manner. Every aspect of the Azusa street revival was completely contrary to the traditional models of ministry. From this experience we can see how traditional views disable discipleship efforts. Many traditions, or various denominations, renounced the move as being heretical. Those traditions not only moved further away from the means by which God wanted to meet the societal needs, but drew deep dividing lines among the body of Christ. Only today, nearly one hundred years later, are those traditions searching and trying to understand the move of God’s Holy Spirit like in the Azusa street revival. The very obstacles that hindered the church then, are the very obstacles we face today. Our inability to allow our traditions to be challenged keeps us from refining our practices and remaining potent. When the minister blindly holds to traditions, the risk of not understanding a new move of God is great. In fact, we too may lead our tradition into a one hundred year wandering. Our practices and traditions should keep us on course even when the course changes. There needs to be a balance in holding to the traditions that keep you on course and grafting in the new forms of ministry that will become a continuing part of our present tradition.

In our efforts to develop a Pentecostal model of discipleship, we face many traditional barriers. Some of the obstacles that prevent fresh ideas and approaches to

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ministry models in our community can be seen in the following example. Our church has placed its emphasis on children’s ministries. Our children’s outreach ministry is one that is almost impossible to identify to the traditional church member. Because the structure of this ministry is so uncommon to the tradition of ministry development, it is overlooked as insignificant and sometimes even rebuked for being put side by side as a ministry. There are five elements to this ministry that are in contradiction with the traditional structure of ministry development. In these differences we can identify obstacles that hinder the development of fresh ideas and approaches to developing church wide ministries that meet the needs of our community.

The first obstacle that makes this ministry unfamiliar is the time in which these children are ministered to. These children gather together Monday through Friday during the middle of the day. From the traditional perspective church is held on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night along with revival services and prayer. Services that are held during the midweek, and especially during the day, are viewed as only supplemental meetings but not to take the place of a Sunday service. During our weekly meetings, which are comprised of 80% unchurched souls who have never been to a Sunday service; we have bible devotions, bible studies, prayer, praise and worship, and preaching. There are many different kinds of services provided for this group that they would never receive because they do not attend a traditional church meeting. There is even a full time proficient children’s pastor who oversees the ministry to these children.

The second element that diminishes its ministry role is the age of those being ministered to. When you ask someone what kind of church they have you usually get descriptions such as numerical growth, worship styles, preaching styles, income level of

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the people, tithing record of the church and the demeanor of the people. The concept of having a church that is composed entirely of children is a hard model to accept. Even as the attendance of the children’s outreach ministry is over 200 children many people have a difficult time viewing it as a respectable ministry.

The third element that hides its role in ministry is that the acts of ministry are not in view of the religious community. Since the bulk of the church ministry is on Sunday, the large majority of congregational members are not aware of the progress of many other ministries. This places the importance of this ministry out of sight and out of mind.

The fourth element shows how our church government system is dated. The reports that measure a churches progress reflect attendance on traditional meeting times only. The fact that there is no consideration for ministries outside of the traditional meeting times reflects where the emphasis is placed for church growth. After two years of trying to get these children on a Sunday service and failing, we decided to take church to them during the week. Consequently, they are never accounted for in our governmental reporting system. This form of accountability actually funnels a minister’s efforts to fulfill the means by which they are measured.

The fifth element is the terminology and image. The name of our children’s outreach ministry is “The Church of God ‘Child Care’.” The fact that the outreach ministry is in the form of a day care center immediately causes many to dismiss the idea of it being a legitimate ministry. In our search for a full time children’s pastor we found two applicants out of twelve who where willing to consider the job. The others could not see the “Day Care” as a legitimate children’s ministry and wanted a job where they met on Sunday and Wednesday only. Some of the applicants actually mentioned that they did

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not want to “get out of the ministry.” I sometimes refer to this satellite church of ours as “The Invisible Post-Modern Church of God.”

The primary function of this ministry is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the children in our community through daily devotions, scripture studies as well as praise and worship. Once per week we have a full church service for the children. For the large majority of the children it is the only church service that they have ever experienced. We have prayed with more than 250 children to accept Christ as their savior and have ministered to more than 1,000 children. Even with the opportunities we have had with this ministry, we still see the challenges to overcoming the bonds to traditional ministry development. Bonds to traditional ministry development remove the possibilities of your imagination and cripple your ability to adapt and change. How many ministry opportunities could we dream of if we only had the ability to dream?