



## Leadership Principles

# Marks of Churches That Grow—2

by Jack Spender

In the last issue, we started to list 10 marks of churches that grow, and finished through #7. After completing the list, I'd like to suggest some ways for a group of concerned elders to proceed.

8. *Spiritual vision for the future is not limited to the Lord's return.* Some assemblies have become so discouraged, that they have virtually given up all hope for growth or outreach and think only of keeping the meetings going until the Lord returns. Now the Lord's return is our blessed hope—but He Himself said: "Occupy till I come" ( Luke 19:13 KJV).

According to Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." Some writers labor to show that the word "vision" means no more than "law" or "word," but the Hebrew word was chosen carefully and emphasizes the idea of something seen. Certainly there are serious dangers and misuses of the word today, but why abandon a good word because some misuse it?

Think of the early church at Antioch in which spiritual men were ministering to the Lord and fasting (Acts 13:2). Suddenly the Lord disclosed a plan for the future that led to what we call "missionary work" today! These men all were firm believers in the imminent return of the Lord, but grasping a vision of exciting things ahead was not inconsistent with this. There are tremendous opportunities all around us; we cannot do them all, but the Lord can grant us a vision (or spiritual insight and foresight) into His will for us if we are willing.

9. *Take people's needs seriously.* In His first public ministry (Luke 4:16-18) the Lord Jesus affirmed that His calling was to needy people. Poor people and prisoners are no more needy than other lost souls and yet He singled them out for Good News and help. Repeatedly we read that He was moved with compassion for them. The church must be the same.

Sometimes the needs may be temporal or social. True, the gospel must not be replaced with social programs, yet ministering to the needs and hurts of people often opens doors for spiritual progress in the soul. All missionaries know and practice this. Ask yourself when was the last time those in leadership offered to pray for sick or disheartened people as part of Sunday's busy schedule of meetings. How much of the church's income is spent helping the needs of young families or

people out of work in our fellowship?

10. *Facing and clearing up problems.* Relational problems are barriers to unity and answered prayer. The Lord Jesus spoke of unity as the great key to outreach (John 17:21-23). Over the years elders can become callous to problems and paralyzed to clearing them up. Yet the Lord has made this process so simple.....confess (admit) and move on!

In addition, as we saw in a past series on the work of elders (ESN: March – November 2000) that this matter called "oversight" is one of the chief responsibilities of elders. Indeed very often the failure to deal with problems is the reason the assembly has dwindled. May the Lord give us courage to face and deal with problems quickly.

### What Can Elders Do?

It will not help to over-simplify complex problems. But neither can it be right to neglect the victory that overcomes what the world may call "hopeless," namely, our faith (I John 5:4). God can do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think..." (Eph. 3:20) Wouldn't it be wonderful to see Him work this way in our midst? Are we willing to pay the price? It's not the sacrifice of money He wants, but a humble and contrite heart.

Let me reduce the subject to two suggestions well within reach of even the smallest company. *First*, repent! Begin right where the Lord Himself told us to start. Now I am not referring to a process so lengthy and emotion filled that few could achieve it. On the contrary, one simple heartfelt prayer will serve: "Lord, we have taken a wrong turn, and we want to make it right." Is this unrealistic today?

Consider that in His counsel to seven of the earliest Christian churches (Rev. 2-3) the Lord Jesus warned five of the seven to repent. That works out to about 70% of the group He was addressing churches that had been in existence for about 50 years and fell into such a condition before the close of the first century AD! When was the last time you heard a church repent?

*Second*, elders lead! Begin by spending time in the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4) to seek the Lord's help. Then practice loving communication among those seeking to move forward, all willing to listen, all free to share ideas, blame rejected as a solution to anything. Strive to be both faithful to God and relevant to the needs of the flock.

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# Leadership Principles

## A Community of Spiritual Elders

by Rowland Ik Forman

“Community happens when there’s a sense of relationship, regardless of the activity,” says Wayne Codeiro, of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu. “It happens when each gathering takes on the atmosphere of a family reunion, where hugs are abundant and bursts of laughter come easily. It happens when people enjoy just being with one another and where the atmosphere is more than just friendly.”

Is that how you would describe the sense of community in your eldership team? Do your elders’ meetings have the feel; of a family reunion? Are your ministry team meetings more focused on the activities at hand, or on the relational bonds among its members?

### Why Should Elders Embody community?

#### *God Is Committed to Community.*

God’s commitment to life-in-community is captured in Psalm 133: “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (NIV).

Authentic community, according to this Psalm, is brothers and sisters doing more than living under the same roof—it is “living together in unity.” It is like a family in harmony. And it is “good and pleasant.” It is good in its source, nature and effects to God, other and us.

Church leaders must settle for nothing short of harmonious community. We need to trumpet the excellence of living together in close fellowship. We need to be like happy bands of brothers and sisters who love being together! Community, of the sort described in this psalm, is pervasive—“like precious oil poured on the head” (fragrance is implied in the words, “precious oil”)—and abundant (it flowed down from Aaron’s beard onto the collar of his robes). More than that, it is refreshing, like the dew on Mount Hermon falling on Mount Zion. Mount Hermon was proverbial for its heavy dew, and in this case the refreshing drops were metaphorically enjoyed even on little Mount Zion.

When church leaders extol the virtues of community and then model it, the influence on leaders-in-training and the whole congregation will be pervasive, abundant

and refreshing. The level of community experienced in any organization will be directly related to the level of community experienced by the highest level of leadership in that organization. That was true in King David’s day, and it is true (though sadly uncommon) in ours.

Psalm 133 concludes: “For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore.” Where genuine community exists, God is pleased (I’m tempted to say, obliged!) to pour out His blessings. The accent here is on God’s initiative—the Lord commanded the blessing.”

If you want God to breathe life into your elders’ team, then start where God starts, love what God loves—authentic, loving community among the leaders—then watch it flow to other leaders and to the church body at large.

#### *The Church is a Community.*

What is the church? For all our talk about the church as the people of God, our language betrays us. We talk about the number of churches in our district and invariably refer to the buildings. We talk about “going to church” as if church were equated with a worship service.

Biblically, the church is God’s called out people in community. It is God’s new community, where dividing walls such as race or status have been smashed down. Listen to Stanley Grenz’s description of the essence of what a church is: “Consequently, the community of love which the church is called to be is no ordinary reality ... Our fellowship is nothing less than our common participation in the divine communion between the Father and the Son, mediated by the Holy Spirit.”

As a fellowshiping people, the norms are:

- Barriers that once existed between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, have been abolished by Christ’s work on the Cross.

- Reconciliation has been extended through Christ’s being made sin for us at Calvary.

- We still experience conflict with each other, but on the basis of the walls crumbling and reconciliation being extended, we gladly forgive fellow sinners. As Matthew 18:15-35 teaches, greatly forgiven sinners forgive greatly.

If the church is, at its core, a closely-knit community of love and a less-than-perfect community of forgiven sinners, what does this mean for teams of elders? We need leaders who embody what the

church is. We need leaders who model community and develop other leaders in community. We must settle for nothing less than genuine community.

### How Can Elders Achieve Community?

#### *1. By Practicing the “One-Anothers”*

As Psalm 133 hints, community needs to be exemplified from the top down. It must be lived out before it is lectured on. Budding leaders need to observe seasoned leaders enjoying community together. They need to see the “one-anothers” of Scripture worked out on a daily basis. Consider this selection of one-another statements and ask if it is true of your leadership team:

“**Members of one-another**” (Romans 12:5) Does each member of your elder team know that they belong?

“**Devoted to one-another**” (Romans 12:10) Have you expressed a covenant-like commitment to each other?

“**Accept one-another**” (Romans 15:7) Do you accept other elders for who they are, or for what you would like them to be?

“**Admonish one-another**” (Romans 15:14) Do you gently, yet firmly warn fellow-elders when they are going off track?

“**Greet one-another**” (Romans 16:16) Do you notice one other and find appropriate ways to express intimacy?

“**Bear one another’s burdens**” (Galatians 6:2) Do you know each other well enough to share burdens?

“**Encourage one-another**” (1 Thessalonians 5:11) Do you regularly speak words that put wind into the sails of your fellow-elders?

Here are some practical factors to attend to if you want to practice the community implied in the biblical one-anothers:

#### *Invest Time Together*

In our elder teams we need to plan for things that facilitate community. These plans may be formal, such as aiming to meet once every two months for breakfast, or informal, like a spur-of-the-moment invitation to a rugby game. One eldership I served on was transformed relationally when we scheduled a luncheon one Sunday a month in the spacious home of one of the most hospitable elder couples I have met. Sometimes it was couples only; other times we invited their children as well. “Transformed” is the word. We morphed from a cold, business oriented group to one that felt like family. It all started with something as simple as a scheduled lunch (this lasted six months).

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## Practical Application

# Are You A Volunteer or Are You Called

by Rory Noland

“**W**hen God has put His call on you, woe be to you if you turn to the right hand or to the left. He will do with you what He never did with you before the call came: He will do with you what He is not doing with other people. Let Him have His way.” (Oswald Chambers)

“Your calling is the place where your deepest joy and the world’s greatest needs cross.” (Frederick Buchner)

1. A volunteer looks upon ministry as another commitment he’s been obligated to fulfill, but someone called of God looks upon ministry as another opportunity to be used of God.

2. A volunteer looks upon any constructive criticism with indignation, but someone called of God is grateful for feedback because he wants to be the best he can be.

3. A volunteer puts in minimum effort, but someone called of God puts in maximum effort.

4. A volunteer sits back and complains about this and that bothering him, but someone called of God leads a personal campaign to improve that which needs improvement.

5. A volunteer feels threatened by the talent of others, but someone called of God feels secure in God’s direction of his life.

6. A volunteer does no additional study or preparation (after all he’s just a volunteer), but someone who is called of God comes to class as prepared as possible.

7. A volunteer wants to quit at the first sign of adversity or discouragement, but one called of God digs in and perseveres.

8. A volunteer is oblivious to the needs of his ministry, but someone called of God prays over the needs of his ministry.

9. A volunteer is more prone to jealousy of others, but one called of God praises God for distributing gifts and talents as He chooses.

10. A volunteer shrinks back from resolving relational conflict, but someone called of God seeks to resolve all relational conflict to preserve the “unity” of the team with which he serves.

11. A volunteer’s main source of fulfillment is his talents and abilities, but someone called of God knows that being used of God is the most fulfilling thing you can do with your life.

12. A volunteer can’t handle being put into situations where he is going to be “stretched,” but someone called of God responds to God’s call with humble dependence on Him.

Excerpted from “*The Heart of the Artist*” by Rory Noland. Used by permission.



## A Community of Spiritual Elders (cont. from page 2)

### Attend to the Spiritual

If we are going to exemplify community in our eldership teams, we may also need to address the shape and tone of our meetings. I like the title of Charles Olsen’s book on elder boards - *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders*. One factor that he highlights is the inclusion of worship in our leadership meetings. In my experience, that simple addition can transform a sterile meeting into a spiritual oasis. One of my favorite memories is of a ministry board I served on that loved to sing (it helped that we could create five-part harmony!). We would pray, sing, attend to an item on the agenda, thank God for His wisdom, sing again, laugh about some trivial matter, attend to more business, and so on. In the process we would accomplish more in one meeting than in the multitude of more serious meetings I have attended in my leadership lifetime. We were like a band of happy siblings. More importantly, we were functioning like spiritual leaders. Rather than the sense of dread I have sometimes experienced when my calendar tells me an elders’ meeting is coming up, I couldn’t wait to attend those gatherings.

### Allow No Clouds

The sample of one-another statements above also screams out that elder-teams should keep short accounts with one another.

All believers need to accept one another, admonish one another and “forgive each other” (Ephesians 4:32). Elders and leaders must do no less. The trickle-down effect that Psalm 133 addresses, applies to the need for reconciliation and forgiveness as well. As less-than-perfect individuals, church leaders will periodically sin against each other. The temptation is to allow small sins to fester—to hope that grievances will resolve themselves over time. A better way is addressing the hurts honestly, saying sorry, and administering forgiveness in light of God’s amazing forgiveness. Community would then be practiced as a fellowship of greatly forgiven sinners!

### 2. By Creating Learning Communities

I’ve been an elder in five churches in my ministry career. Let me describe the elder meetings in four out of the five. We prayed at the start of the meeting and someone would share a devotional thought from the Scriptures. Then we would proceed to discuss agenda items for two or three hours and say a quick prayer at the conclusion. In one of the churches we met twice a month. One of the meetings was more church-business related and the other one was for “Word and Prayer.” We used CBTNZ (Church-Based Training NZ) *Elders and Leadership Field Guide* to give us structure and a well-thought-out curriculum. Here’s what an elder friend Earl said about some

of those times together: “When I think about the meetings we held in an elder’s home, with food on the table, a coffee cup in the hand, and dynamic discussions using the CBT materials, I realize that learning in community took place. There was a supernatural component – as if the Holy Spirit delighted to be present when, as church leaders we met in unity to learn and grow together.”

Earl’s words reminded me of Psalm 133:3—“For there the Lord bestows the blessing, even life forevermore.” If God is withholding His blessing from your assembly, maybe you need to start with your elder group and consider:

- The level of community and any blockages to authentic community
- Steps you need to take to become a team that lives together in unity
- How to inject a learning-together-in-community approach to the significant role you play as an under-shepherd in your local church.

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# The Delight of Loving My Husband

by Mary Gianotti

The chapter was entitled "The Delight of Loving My Husband." Confidently I started reading thinking it would be a simple review. But one thought from the pages has stuck with me. "Are you enjoying your husband or are you too busy serving him?"

Most of us are good at feeding, clothing, and picking up after our husbands. When Golde was asked by Tevey "Do you love me?" in *Fiddler on the Roof*, this was her reply: "For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned your house given you children, milked the cow..."

All these acts of service are good and in many regards are an expression of our love but what does Scripture say? What kind of love are we to be showing our husbands

Women are encouraged in Titus 2:4 to love (Greek: *phileo*) their husbands. Of

all the different kinds of love the Lord could have used to instruct us, He chose the word that describes the love between very close friends. We know husbands are called to a sacrificial love but we wives are called to a different kind of love. The love that exists between two very close friends is an affectionate, friendly, warm, kind and respectful type of love. Does this describe you and your husband? Do you enjoy spending time with him? Is his companionship something you long for and you help make happen? In general friendships take work, they are not always convenient and do not always come naturally. The same is true of our relationship with our husbands.

At this point in my writing I am interrupted. It's my husband, he has some errands to run that will take a couple of hours and he'd like me to join him. My

quick answer is "no", as I am in the middle of writing this article. "Maybe I'll go with him another time." Just before he walks out the door alone it hits me. "What am I doing saying no! Friendship love is not always convenient, didn't I just write that?" The words of my godly mother dash through my mind, "If he wants you to go with him, go." I add, "...even if it is to Home Depot!"

It's practical, it's biblical and it honors the Lord. We need to be developing a friendship love with our husbands.

One of the best books written on Titus 2 and the source for some of these thoughts came from is entitled *Feminine Appeal – Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother*, by Carolyn Mahaney (Crossway Publishers). I highly recommend it for your summer reading. Then consider getting some women together and doing it as a study in the fall. 

## Marks of Churches That Grow (cont. from page 1)

The list of ten marks provided above may ignite some ideas or at least lead to some open discussion. Incidentally, as one point of discussion, did you notice how many of these marks depend directly on good leadership? Don't be afraid to test ideas. New applications to timeless principles can be evaluated to see what the Lord may do.

### A Final Suggestion

If I had to choose just one mark from the list of ten, I would work on #7, fellowship. The potential in this one word to revitalize a struggling group committed

to one another and to the Lord is absolutely beyond calculation.

I remember one small assembly that instituted an informal "family fellowship time" between the breaking of bread and the Bible hour on Sunday mornings. "Get a cup of coffee and a snack, and let's all gather around and talk about what the Lord is doing in our lives and our families. At the close, a brother will bring any needs before the Lord." The effect was amazing. People loved the time and began to open up.

It was not surprising that some visitors hearing about such a time "in a

church," actually came just for this one half hour, but they came! And the Lord blessed it because it was genuine fellowship. One of our favorite hymns begins this way: "Great the joy when Christians meet; Christian fellowship how sweet...."

Recently I heard someone say "Fellowship is not something we do, but something we have." I protest! Fellowship is both and the "do" part has gotten lost in the dust. "But to do good and communicate (literally "fellowship" Gk. *koinonia*) forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Hebrews 13:16). 

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