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Introduction

As churches in America looked for more effective ministry models, two options emerged based upon the size of the existing church. The Organic model emerged as a popular option for church planters who were seeking the success of the early church. Often referred to as the “missional” church, these church leaders sought to grow their churches through the relationships of the people and had a focus on seeking explosive multiplication in member numbers based upon the robust connectivity that relationships empower. The Hybrid model has grown in larger churches that valued the relational impact of small groups; yet, had extensive facilities and meaningful programmatic ministries that existed or were within their reach to develop. These leaders of larger churches also wished to see explosive growth and had the resources to deploy to create an active disciple-making ministry. This paper will consider the organic model and the hybrid model and reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of each model. The paper will then describe this writer’s church, the model it utilizes, and ways to help improve the model to allow the church to be healthy.

Analysis of the Organic Church

The Organic Church has grown in recent years as church planters searched for a model that did not pursue the structures that support the Traditional Church or the Attractional Church. These leaders sought to establish a foundation that allowed the church to attain multiplicative growth rather than addition growth. This kind of church usually was established in home-based groups, which would grow to invite those they knew. This approach allows the church to reach non-church individuals, rather than attempting to grow by transfer of believers from other churches.

The leadership of these churches is less likely to have seminary training. One core value is that there is not a tiered hierarchy of leadership.¹ Each member is considered equivalent in importance and expected to lead a group in their own right once they have become capable. Disciple-making is a core value of these churches. Each believer is expected to mentor new believers so that they become proficient in inviting their friends to the church and then minister to them. As they spend relational time with their friends, they answer questions these individuals have about Jesus and stand ready to disciple them once they decide to submit their lives to His lordship. Rather than focusing energy and financial resources on marketing strategies or maintaining large staff and buildings, these churches actively encourage their members to establish relationships with others and invite them to gather with the church when they are ready.

These churches often will have limited financial resources due to their size. Because of this, often, the pastors are unpaid or bi-vocational. Large financial projects are also challenging for these types of churches to facilitate. Trained leaders are not available, so the opportunity for biblical error is elevated; however, many people are diligent students of Scripture, and these churches have the opportunity to deal with false teaching in the context of relationships. Some of these churches have experienced remarkable growth, but most have not. This strategy has the potential for explosive growth, yet it does not seem to be easily accomplished.

Analysis of the Hybrid Church

Another form of church is called the Hybrid Model. This structure utilizes aspects from the traditional model, the attractional model, and the organic model. As the church moves to integrate these models, it creates a great deal of complexity. Earley and Dempsey commented, “The hybrid model seeks to adopt the best of all models. However, many times it does not reduce

¹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, (B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), p. 263.

its complexity.”² This model will typically be used by rather large churches and will maintain large staffs so that they can address the complexities that are inherent to the challenges they seek to tackle. They will have large facilities for worship and seek to gather people by utilizing a variety of marketing methods to attract unchurched individuals. The preaching often targets “felt needs” of the audience and is primarily evangelistic. They will seek to create a relational community by emphasizing the importance of small groups and actively enlist attendees to join a group. They will also provide programmatic ministries that focus on specific needs. Each ministry can require unique training to teach or lead properly.

Given these skill requirements, hybrid churches often employ seminary-trained staff as well as professionals from other backgrounds. Managing larger staffs and more sophisticated infrastructure requires a well-defined management hierarchy, and the lead pastors of these kinds of churches often operate with a similar skillset as attractional churches. In truth, the hybrid church is often the next step in development as an attractional church matures. The need to grow a healthy church weighs upon the leadership, and they will seek to develop ministries that help the members grow to become disciples who make disciples. They also usually will seek to put in place compassion and mission ministries that seek to help others and expand the Kingdom. Since Hybrid churches often have thousands of members, they have plenty of financial resources to deploy to fund ministries.

The challenge for Hybrid churches is similar to attractional churches in that their size can become a limitation to developing meaningful relationships between the members. It is common for the attendees and members to become passive and simply attend services rather than

² Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, (B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), p. 273.

becoming involved in ministries themselves and seeking to reach and develop others as defined in the Great Commission.

Hybrid churches often seek to expand by opening satellite campuses, thus leveraging their systems to support another operating outpost. This approach is driven by the desire to keep the same “DNA” that the founding church established and expand its impact in a region. This is driven by the desire to reach the lost, grow the efficiencies that occur due to size, and to increase the revenues that are available to fund ministries. There is also a desire to have paid ministry leaders that will consistently handle doctrine and minister according to standards that have been established in the founding campus. This usually means that hybrid churches perpetuate the clergy/laity separation. Earley and Dempsey asserted, “Most hybrid churches are starting satellite churches, but they are not multiplying leaders.”³

Characteristics of this Writer’s Church

The Crossing Church, where this writer serves, began as an attractional model church and has transitioned to become a hybrid model church. The leadership of the church is driven to reach the lost and has recognized the need to develop the members to become healthy disciples who make disciples. The church has a staff of seventy individuals, many of whom are seminary or Bible college trained. The church also has several hundred volunteers who serve in differing areas of ministry. The church leadership often identifies individuals who have the capacity for leadership and invite them into a multi-week training that exposes them to how to minister to the body of the church as well as develop themselves individually. The church is in the process of developing a three-tiered discipleship structure to help individuals on their journey to spiritual maturity. Church leadership has proposed to the members that people can be considered to be

³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, p. 273.

“littles, middles, and bigs” in their spiritual journey. The church feels responsible to help them move along in that growth model. The first tier is a series of seven videos that a new believer can view from their phones that exposes them to the fundamental concepts that a new believer will need to embrace their spiritual maturity journey. The next tier is a set of books that have been written to bring definition to each of the seven concepts. These books are meant to be read along with a mentor and two other new believers. They gather at meetings and discuss the concepts learned and how to apply them to their lives. The final tier is supported by a bible college that the church has established that specifically targets working adults. This wholly on-line college brings courses on theology, prayer, books of the Bible, biblical counseling, and other useful studies that will aid a believer to become a “big” by the church’s definition. After their studies, the member should be ready for training to share their faith and disciples those they have seen the Lord move to regenerate.

The church has worked hard to establish a biblical community among the members by encouraging the growth of off-campus small groups. No groups are allowed to meet on-campus to push the idea of relational small groups that meet in homes or other venues. The church has established two new campuses in the last five years and plans to open two more campuses in the next three years. The church utilizes streaming technology to provide live preaching from the broadcast campus as well as serving over five thousand viewers each week in the on-line campus.

The Crossing’s leadership is not satisfied with the lack of spiritual maturity of the members and accepts the challenge to develop meaningful ministries that support the non-paid ministers (the members) in reaching the lost and developing disciples. An on-going effort is

being made to cast vision, empower the members, provide training, and remove obstacles that keep the members from becoming healthy, maturing disciples.

Application of Cole's "Back to the Future" Chart

Neil Cole prepared a chart that outlined vital distinctions between what he defined as "Church 2.0 and Church 3.0."⁴ The overarching difference that he describes is that the church would transform from a ministry focused on those who come to the buildings to be taught knowledge academically by paid ordained staff to a church that does ministry outside the walls of the church and focuses on empowering the people to reach others for Christ and to do so based upon the relational equity they have by being friends with those outside the church.

This writer has seen the relatively weak impact that a massive church with thousands of attendees can have when the people simply sit, watch and wait on the ordained pastors do as they seek to serve the Lord. That model is not life-giving to the attendees or the ministers. It is better to spend the time developing ways to empower the body of the church to be highly effective ministers of God's Word and to be empowered to perform ministry rather than being constrained by their perceptions or the ordained pastor's opinions. A strategy that seeks the Spirit's direction and aligns with what God's Word speaks is the pathway to releasing the church to effective ministry.

The current ministry that the writer services are working to enhance the biblical community, empower the members, and develop the ability to become a disciple-making church. These are all significant challenges yet worthy goals. There is much work to be done, but the ministry teams are actively working toward these goals. Over time, leaders believe the "cost of ministry" will go down as the body of the church becomes empowered. The percentage of

⁴ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

dollars currently used for staff and facilities will fall and those dollars can be redirected to support the efforts of ministry beyond the existing walls of the church.

Conclusion

The Organic model and the Hybrid models both value evangelism. They also value building relational equity among the people of God and those that they come into contact with outside the church. Each has practical ways to succeed. Dave Browning expressed, “If you are seeking a perfect expression of church—all upside, no downside—you will be disappointed.”⁵ This simple statement provides the balance that pastors need as they evaluate how to structure their local church.

Not every pastor will be able to apply either model adeptly. God will place some in positions where the Organic model will thrive. Other pastors will be tasked to serve in the complexity of a Hybrid model. In either case, the wise pastors will seek God’s guidance and align their will with what the Spirit reveals to them so that they can serve God’s people well.

⁵ Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church* (Jossey-Bass ,2010), p. 37.

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