

# WIDENING THE FUNNEL IN EXTERNALLY FOCUSED CHURCHES

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Good Deeds Build Good Will, Becoming a Catalyst for Good News

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*by Alexandra McNabb*

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A powerful transformation is happening as churches across the nation are realizing a potent truth: God is at work extending His reign through acts of service to local communities. These acts of service are making a deep-rooted impact.

Consider what happened one Saturday morning as several hundred people assembled in front of three public schools, dressed ready-to-paint in



threadbare tee-shirts and old jeans, and armed with scrapers, rollers and tape. The classrooms and hallways now bereft of echoing voices lay empty in a paint-peeling, neglected state. These schools in Boulder, Colorado—one elementary, one junior high and one high school—represented the bottom of the

barrel, the facilities least likely to get support from their school district.

The laborers from **Calvary Bible Church** ([www.calvaryboulder.org](http://www.calvaryboulder.org)) stood there before the schools in a move of unprecedented scale to love their neighbor, a neighbor with needs for the painting of 84,000 square feet of hallway and classrooms, the washing of countless windows, the landscaping of entrances and playgrounds, and the extraction of 200 pounds of gum. This was a daunting task for any church, especially one like Calvary Bible. Its historical identity was more about being a refuge *from*, rather than a blessing *to* the city, as Pastor Tom Shirk explains:

*“The amount of work that rank amateurs got done at these 3 schools was miraculous. We looked back and thought ‘How did we paint 84,000 square feet of space with this few people in this short amount of time?’ I think the Lord helped us accomplish more as we worked together and worked with joy. It was both weird and exhilarating. It was one of those spiritual experiences where God helped us do an extraordinary amount of work in a short amount of time. God joined us, we were blessed by Him because what was produced was so far beyond who was there.”*

The first result from this ambitious and God-blessed activity of service was an amazing refocus of attention. The myopia disappeared that breeds complaints and mires a church in chronic self-focus, giving way to the joy of collaboration and work. Another result was a change in the city’s view of the church, from animosity to gratitude. Calvary Bible is now considered to be a champion for the schools. The church’s supportive role even led it to receive the 2004 Governor’s Colorado Cares Volunteer Service Award.

But greater than any award is the fulfillment of God’s purpose in the city of Boulder. It began with good deeds and resulted in good will, becoming a catalyst for spiritual good news and transformed lives.

A new type of church is emerging. These unique congregations can be found from a small country town to a bustling metropolis. Some are small, others gather in the thousands, but all have one common understanding: good deeds build good will, which in turn, opens the door for sharing the good news. These churches are externally focused.

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Like many churches, Calvary Bible did not begin externally focused. Why do churches like Calvary Bible change? What is leading to this transformation in many churches like Calvary Bible?

For churches striving for outward focus, a foundation of prayer, compelling vision, and intentional process are three of the key components needed to develop a new paradigm.

### **Prayer: A Catalyst for Change**

Whether a church is young and began externally focused, or much older, facing the challenge of shifting paradigms and redefining itself, prayer is an undeniable foundation for this process. In his own personal journey, **Dan Nold of Calvary Baptist Church**

([www.calvarysc.org](http://www.calvarysc.org)), State College, Pennsylvania, examined the book of Acts, quickly becoming convinced that something was missing from the modern-day church:

*“What was taking place in communities in our country wasn’t anything close to what I was reading. Maybe individual churches would grow—ebb and flow—but no wholesale community transformation was happening like in the book of Acts. That left me with three conclusions: Either God was just using the book of Acts as a carrot on a stick to get us to keep doing something that really wasn’t attainable; or two, the Holy Spirit has grown tired after a couple thousand years; or three, we were the ones doing something wrong in the church.”*

Dan discovered that a central component of Acts was a passion for prayer. That passion preceded great works of God and solidarity among the churches. “I discovered that there was a passion for prayer and a greater degree of ‘John 17 unity’ that resulted in a church of and for the city,” he says, referring to Jesus’ prayer for the church: “...that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21).

Discovering this dire need for prayer and unity, Calvary Baptist, along with 400-500 people from a dozen other churches, joined together with Harvest Evangelism ([www.harvestevan.org](http://www.harvestevan.org)) to become lighthouses of prayer for their neighborhood. Prayer for the city resulted in a five-year span where churches found lasting partnerships and significant growth, key components that drove Calvary Baptist to understand what it meant to be externally focused.

Likewise, a few years ago, **Hempfield United Methodist Church** ([www.hempfieldchurch.org](http://www.hempfieldchurch.org)), Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was not an externally focused church, and was faced with a mindset that needed to change, as staff team leader Tom Nealley explains:

*“The idea we taught people over the years was that if they gave money to missions, they*

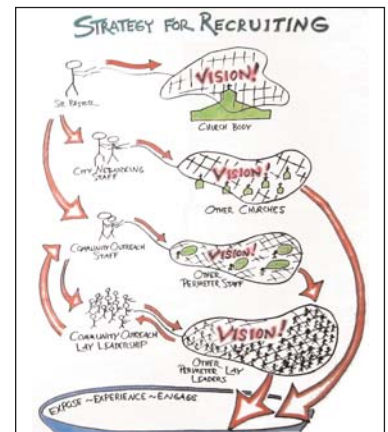
*fulfilled their duty; that real missionaries go to work overseas and that we don’t have to do that here. Changing that mindset was frustrating, but it did come following 6 to 8 months of prayer, discernment and teaching.”*

Prayer has unquestionably been the beginning point for all churches that desire to become externally focused. **Imago Dei** ([www.imagodeicommunity.com](http://www.imagodeicommunity.com)), Portland, Oregon, a young church whose initial vision was to begin externally focused, discovered it could not begin to love the city without a season of repentance, as Pastor Rick McKinley describes:

*“There must be a paradigm shift in the church from ‘It’s for me’ to ‘It’s for them,’ and ‘serve us,’ versus ‘service.’ We began with pretty skeptical believers because the evangelism card is thrown down so often—loving people as an ulterior motive. And believers are not taught or shown that the gospel can really transform people. We had to begin by asking God for a changed heart to repent of sins of omission—the things we were not doing and did not want to do for the people of the city.”*

## Vision: An Open Door to Faith

Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* says that to pray is to change, and prayer is inexorably linked to transforming our passions to God’s passions: “to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.”<sup>1</sup> It is this act of prayer that connects us to the immense vision God has for his world, and opens the door to the far-reaching possibilities ahead, transitioning the church from a “serve us” mindset to a service attitude.



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**Understanding the Love of God and Being Unleashed For Irving Bible Church** ([www.irvingbible.org](http://www.irvingbible.org)), Irving, Texas, the pursuit of God and his purpose is foundational to the vision that carries the people of Irving Bible outward into the city. Steve Roesse, Executive Pastor, explained that there are two key components to being externally focused—understanding God’s love and being unleashed:

*“If people really understand the love of God and love Him, so many things flow out of that rather than trying to push them into it. We see that in giving of financial resources, giving of time and giving in passion. You can’t help but have impact if the motivation is an understanding of God and a love for God.”*

Irving Bible feeds an ethos of being unleashed. The focus is not on the vision or plans of the church staff, but the unique vision and plans God has for each individual. Steve Roesse explains that the job of the church is to help each person achieve his or her personal purpose:

*“We’re not a church about coming in and saying, ‘Here’s 10 ministries, find one that you fit in.’ We’re more about asking, ‘What is God saying, what is God calling you to do and how can we help you accomplish that?’”*

Unleashing people gives them the freedom to find their purpose, to work through it and express it by serving others. The outcome gives Irving Bible a unique impact in its city. Growth was slow at first. It was born out of prayer, formed by a culture of grace and fed by an understanding and love for God. After 15 years, the outcome is a diverse aggregate of ministries church leaders would never have thought of by themselves. From a crocheting ministry to organic gardening as an evangelism tool, Irving Bible’s passion and outward expression to the city has grown so much that it can hardly keep up. As Steve Roesse says, “We get the joy of standing back and watching it happen!”

#### **Vision as “Imagine This!”**

Ten years ago, it was the dream of a small group of people from Katy, Texas, to begin a church where every person could find God and discover how to live life with purpose and meaning. Today, that dream has ripened into reality

as the **Fellowship at Cinco Ranch** ([www.thefellowship.org](http://www.thefellowship.org)) seeks to become an indispensable blessing to the city. Its vision for 2010 is a set of goals expressed as five “imagine” statements built upon a foundation of prayer:

#### **Fellowship at Cinco Ranch’s Vision for 2010**

##### **1. Imagine...1000 Transformed Lives**

*As we become a church of spiritually transformed people we will share our stories with those God has put into our lives who are seeking and who are far from him. We are praying that God will transform the lives of 1,000 of our family, friends, neighbors and associates by 2010 through his grace and forgiveness and through our faithful prayers, deeds and words, that they may find Christ and his love for the very first time.*

##### **2. Imagine... The Fellowship on Every Block**

*As we become a church with small groups on every block we will have over 150 Life Groups that are serving as missional outposts to the neighborhoods where they live; meeting weekly with neighbors and friends to experience genuine community. There will be a LIFE group accessible to every person in every neighborhood and community within a 5-10 mile radius of our campus.*

##### **3. Imagine... Having Everything We Need**

*As we become a debt-free people we will see greater resources available for Kingdom purposes. We will build 3 out of our 4 buildings for a 7-day-a-week campus to serve our community! We will cast a vision to our church and our community of debt free living. We will seek to help our church, communities, and city break the bondage of debt and to learn to live a generous life experiencing God’s blessings while freeing up resources for God’s mission and vision.*

##### **4. Imagine... Making a Global Difference**

*As we become a church planting*

*church we will start planting new churches to reach specific groups of people in this community and around the world. We will plant at least one new church every year beginning in 2006. We will prayerfully identify an unreached people group (UPG) where God would allow us to have an eternal impact through nation building, community ministries and church multiplication, beginning an indigenous church planting movement among this UPG.*

### **5. Imagine... A Thankful City**

*As we become an externally focused church we will be an indispensable part of the life of our city and communities. We will mobilize our adults, youth and children to serve the hurting, the poor, the widows and marginalized of our culture, offering them good news while sharing God's love through selfless acts of service! We will infuse ourselves into the need-meeting agencies and ministries of our city and communities, seeking to demonstrate God's unconditional love for them.*

#### **Putting the Vision to Paper: A Call to Brainstorm**

When **LifeBridge Christian Church** ([www.lbcc.org](http://www.lbcc.org)), Longmont, Colorado, considered building a new facility, God gave it a broader vision: to not only consider the needs of the church, but also the needs of the community. To accomplish this, the congregation was asked two questions, "What does our community need?" and "What are the facility needs of the church?" Then the congregation was given the opportunity to brainstorm ideas on how they could serve the community by being good stewards of their land. After 12 nights of brainstorming, more than 1,200 people had contributed over 5,000 ideas about the county, city, schools, neighborhoods and communities. In correlation, a task force from the church met with nonprofit organizations, city officials, the health department and other government representatives to ask, "What does our community need?" When the brainstorm results and task force list were compared, they were beautifully congruent, and many of those ideas are successfully being incorporated today.



PRAYERFUL BRAINSTORMING CAN BE ENERGIZING!

#### **Worship Extends the Vision**

Imago Dei has been a church with an externally focused mindset since its founding. One way it casts vision is by encouraging people to encounter God in the community. This is done through what it calls the worship learning experience. It takes people outside the walls of the church to journey into a different environment. The goal is to create a climate where God may challenge preexisting notions of who He is and how He is at work. Areas of focus for a service may be social or environment justice, creation, family worship and creativity in the arts as described by the Imago Dei website:

*"Service actively seeks to increase our awareness of the Kingdom of God as seen in our daily environments, thus allowing our hearts to be drawn into worship of Him. We also seek to deepen our understanding of what worship is and expand the horizons of how we worship. Our hope is to behold these new insights, both of the facets of God in our everyday world and our expanded understanding of worship, that they may naturally flow into how we walk through our daily functions, as we passionately live in constant praise of a great and loving God."*

## Adding a Process to the Vision: Not a Job for Buffalo Bill

Just as a strong vision and investment in prayer is foundational, creating a process to train and manage, motivate and recruit people to extend God's work is also imperative. Many church leaders grapple with questions on volunteer management, beginning with recruitment. Marlene Wilson's book, *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, describes the indiscretion of choosing

wrong volunteers for the wrong task out of desperation to fill spots, which she calls the "Buffalo Bill" method of recruitment:

*"That means riding into a herd of buffalo and, as they scatter, looking for the stray that lags behind because it is not fast or*

*cunning enough to get away—and lassoing it. We look for those members who haven't learned how to get away, and we snag them into doing what we need done, regardless of whether the job has anything to do with their gifts or interests. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of truth in this observation."*



MARLENE WILSON

### Recruiting Volunteers

To stay away from the "Buffalo Bill" modus operandi, carefully constructed job descriptions should be created prior to recruiting volunteers. Job descriptions help break down the organization's goals and objectives into smaller, feasible tasks, varying in responsibility, time, and commitment. Also, as Marlene Wilson notes, these job descriptions should be reexamined each year to ensure they are still relevant in the context of goals and objectives.

Imago Dei has come up with creative solutions in its effort to utilize stay-at-home mothers, as Rick McKinley describes a possible idea that creatively encourages the participation of stay-at-home mothers:

*"It may just be cheaper for us to pay for day care and have a resource of moms come in and get a lot of work done, than to pay for one mom to do a little work. It's a greater return to pay for one sitter to watch four kids and have four moms contributing."*

### Managing the Data

One of the greatest difficulties is managing the sometimes overwhelming amount of information on volunteers. Tracking volunteers is essential to keeping the volunteer connected, showing them they are valued and appreciated by keeping track of their progress. The last thing a church wants to do is have a volunteer get lost in the shuffle, but without an intentional process, it is too easy to lose a valuable opportunity, as David Schlup of **Flatirons Community Church** ([www.flatironschurch.com](http://www.flatironschurch.com)), Lafayette, Colorado, discovered in the early phase of managing data:

*"We had stacks and stacks of people that were not called. It was devastating. When you get a name, you identify, call and follow through. I think we get into a busy mode and miss a huge resource of people."*

### Christ Community Church

([www.christcommunityomaha.org](http://www.christcommunityomaha.org)), Omaha, Nebraska, found itself in a similar position. It researched several church database companies until suitable software<sup>3</sup> was found for use as a system for tracking and processing its volunteers. Now the church is able to track and collect valuable information, never letting one volunteer fall to the wayside.

### Increase Volunteers Without Increasing Paid Staff

Because additional volunteers can create increasing management needs on a church, it becomes even more vital to maximize each volunteer through assets like leadership development and the utilization of career professionals. Calvary Bible Church has found an invaluable resource through high-level executives who volunteer their professional skills to train other volunteers. This resource offsets the need for increasing paid staff, and provides high-quality leadership and training.

Another key component in multiplying volunteers is to create a culture within the church that seeks to care for each other above relying on the pastor or paid staff. This is sometimes accomplished through the use of small groups who are trained to be self-sufficient, shepherded by a volunteer coordinator who is accountable to the staff. **Faith Reformed Church** ([www.frchurch.org](http://www.frchurch.org)), Traverse City, Michigan, makes no distinctions between paid staff and nonpaid staff. It involves volunteers in every aspect of the church and reinforces the

concept that members are missionaries every day, infusing a culture of service throughout the church.

One question that arises is whether a church can have the same level of expectations for a volunteer leader as paid staff. Christ Community Church has found that its volunteers have no problem fulfilling their responsibilities with the same level of quality. Likewise, Tim Keller, Director of Volunteer Led and Resource Ministries from **Mariners Church** ([www.marinerslighthouse.org](http://www.marinerslighthouse.org)), Irvine, California, finds leadership multiplication through empowerment:

*“How do we do more with less? It has to do with how we can empower more volunteers to get more people involved. We see that the real growth in Lighthouse will come from volunteer-led ministry. We need to make sure we have a process in place to empower people to go out and start something they feel God is placing on their heart.”*

### Training Volunteers

The importance of empowering, training and coaching volunteer leaders who move within their passion cannot be overstated. Giving guidance and affirming freedom to be creative rather than providing a restrictive structure allows God’s vision for the poor and needy to develop through the people he calls. Taking the time to develop leadership skills in volunteer leaders, helping them understand what reasonable expectations are, and helping them develop plans and set goals, establishes a healthy foundation for growth.

A useful tool for the training process comes from Wilson’s *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*. “The Training Process” list, edited here for quick review, provides a simple breakdown of the steps needed:

1. *Identify expectations. Use job descriptions.*
2. *Assess learning needs. What does the person doing the job need to know?*
3. *Determine objectives. Prioritize and select the needs to be dealt with.*
4. *Develop content. Decide what skills, knowledge and attitudes the learners need.*

5. *Design the learning experience. Select methods and materials, and the most effective approaches.*
6. *Obtain instructional resources: persons, media, materials and place.*
7. *Conduct training. Create and maintain a learning environment.* <sup>4</sup>

At Lighthouse Ministries of Mariners Church, high value is placed on leadership training. One person oversees and shepherds volunteers with the task of evaluating and developing long-term plans, setting and measuring goals for specific teams. To accomplish this, he meets with each group twice per month, then once per month, splitting their meeting time between tactical and spiritual leadership. Another method to encourage consistency in training is the creation of binders—updated yearly—that outline the process and goals of each ministry or event. This consistent information helps leadership assess the health of ministries by having a clearly defined purpose and set of goals from the beginning.

### Sustaining Volunteers

*“Service that is duty-motivated breathes death. Service that flows out of our inward person is life and joy and peace.”* These wise words from Richard Foster illustrate the importance for churches to create an environment that allows people to connect to their passion.

In a brainstorm together, some externally focused churches developed a list of factors that contribute to the encouragement of a volunteer and explored the importance of celebration as a motivator for volunteers:

#### **Ingredients that sustain volunteers:**

**Limits:** *to prevent burnout*

**Job Descriptions:** *carefully written and specific*

**Off-ramps:** *options for the volunteer to change jobs and be placed into a better fit*

**Goals:** *clarified expectations and flexibility*

**Leadership:** *coaching, shepherding*

**Teams:** *groups offer encouragement and momentum*

**Recognition:** *letters, celebrations, parties, your presence and observation*

There could not be a more influential sustainer for a team of volunteers than a good celebration. Too often volunteers are taken for granted, not thanked or appreciated for their contribution. Also, it becomes easy to lose big-picture perspective, focusing on what needs to be done while forgetting what has been accomplished. Frequent celebrations, whether large all-church events or small team gatherings, are an encouragement and reinforce vision by recognizing the work God has been doing. The Fellowship at Cinco Ranch has found the importance of making celebration an integral part of serving others, as Jerry Edmonson explains:

*“It’s important to celebrate when it happens; the closer the celebration is to the event, the more it is reinforced; makes celebration a part of the church’s DNA.”*

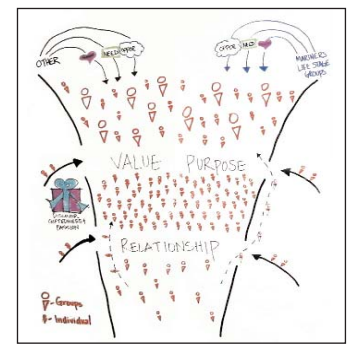
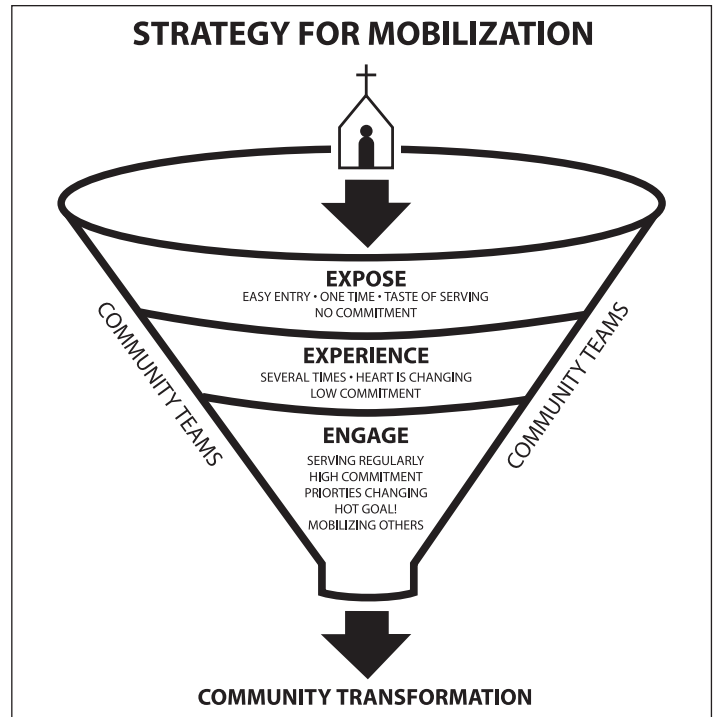
The proper recruitment, training and sustaining of a volunteer, and the management of data have a direct impact on a church’s effectiveness. One practical way to communicate how vision and processes fit together is through a visual model.

### A Model for Process: The Funnel

Many churches use a funnel model to describe their member-development process as an externally focused church. The top of the funnel represents **events** that serve as wonderful introductions to serving. These simple activities take little commitment or screening, and they expose the volunteer to a need in the community.

As volunteers step through the funnel, they are pulled into **tasks of greater commitment**, they experience **greater personal growth**, and they develop **deeper relationships**.

One way to show how the funnel works is to use Mariners Church’s ministry, Miracles in Motion, as an example. Miracles in Motion connects Mariners with families in the community who, impacted by the high cost of living and minimum wage jobs, live month-to-month in local motels. The intent is to build relationships, to see the world through the eyes of those who have been less fortunate and to model successful life skills. Through these relationships the motel families



FUNNEL MODELS ILLUSTRATE THE HELPFULNESS MANY CHURCHES FIND FROM A FUNNEL ANALOGY. FEATURED ARE PERIMETER CHURCH, DULUTH, GA; (TOP) MARINERS CHURCH, IRVINE, CA; (LOWER LEFT) AND CHRIST COMMUNITY OF OMAHA, NE. (LOWER RIGHT)

find that they have a place in God’s family, and both the volunteer and motel family experience life change together.

### Starting at the Top

Many churches put a lot of effort into creating and executing a successful large event, like a community carnival, for example, but unfortunately, do not take advantage of the unique opportunity this event has in pulling in a new wave of volunteers. If there is not an intentionality to reconnect those volunteers to other areas of service and passion, that resource



could be lost. The funnel provides a visual example of how one can capture new volunteers and walk them through a path of greater commitment and deeper relationships.



The widest part of the funnel represents any one-time event that exposes the volunteer to a **need in the community and engages them in a fun, simple activity**. The goal of a first-step event is not that lives are dramatically changed, but that volunteers are exposed to a need and serve, often, for the very first time. One of the first-step events for Miracles in Motion is called Funapalooza. Buses travel to various motels in Orange County and pick up kids, taking them to a sports complex for games and play. Following the play an athlete gives a testimony and kids come to accept Christ. Of the 80 volunteers that assist, for half of them, it is the first time they've



TOP-OF-FUNNEL IDEAS ARE RELATIVELY EASY TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP.

ever volunteered. The light commitment, a one-time event, and simple responsibility, playing basketball, connects people to kids with needs. Many volunteers are surprised at how easy it is to serve, and quickly become empathetic to the children they meet. It's common to hear statements like, "These kids are great! I love doing this!"

### Debriefing Leads to the Next Phase in the Funnel

Debriefing volunteers who have served at a first-time event allows for the capture of people who have the passion for serving in that specific area and places them immediately in another opportunity to serve, as Tim Keller explains:

*"We'll say something like, 'Now that you've met these kids from the motels and you see that they have a greater need, maybe you can make a commitment once per month. Let's talk about it.' They have already learned it is*

*not that difficult to serve and that experience tugs at their heart. They feel compelled to do something and we give them the opportunity. They are asked to show up one night, without a commitment, but a relationship soon begins and the volunteer becomes a regular visitor.*

*They start by saying, 'I'm going to do a Thursday visit. I'm not going to say I will do it "forever" I'm just going to show up on Thursday and see what happens at the motel.' All of a sudden, the volunteer is going to the motel, taking food or doing a Bible study and they meet a child that changes their heart. Relationship building makes the volunteer turn into a regular, weekly volunteer. Then they're heard saying, 'You know what? It's not enough for me to come for one hour on a Thursday. I'm not meeting the needs of these kids. I'm able to talk to them but I'm not developing relationships. I would like to take it to the next level.'*

### Next Step: Mentoring

For those volunteers who desire to make a greater commitment to a motel family, Mariners offers the opportunity to consider mentoring. This represents another step toward changed lives and relationships, and is farther down the funnel. A network of coaches helps equip the mentor to work with at-risk youth, adults and families through four comprehensive training sessions throughout the year. Sessions are provided through a partnership with the Orangewood Foundation<sup>5</sup>, a nonprofit that seeks to provide long-term solutions to issues of child abuse and foster care. The mentor is asked to contribute a minimum one-year commitment that involves monthly supervision, two monthly visits and weekly phone calls with the family or individual—an undertaking the mentors regularly exceed.

The goal for the mentor is not changed behavior in those being mentored; rather, it is the opportunity to bring real hope and life change through relationship. Real life change will come through a change in peoples' convictions and values: how they think about themselves, and how they see the world around them. The mentor empowers the one mentored to become self-reliant by being a good role model, by motivation

in healthy directions, by offering a strong and continuous voice of encouragement, and by providing support in times of conflict. During each visit, the mentor seeks to address each one of the following areas: Body (needs and wants), Mind (attitudes and beliefs), Soul (explanation and demonstration of God's unconditional love and purpose).

An important issue to address with the funnel model is whether or not a particular ministry needs to encompass each part of the funnel. For a large ministry, like Miracles in Motion, they have the ability to provide volunteer opportunities at each level from a one-step event to one-on-one mentoring. But some ministries like a community carnival may play only the role of a first-time event. The important component is an understanding of the role each ministry plays, and a deliberate intentionality to move people forward as they serve.

### Results at the End of the Funnel: The Transition from Good Deeds to Good News

According to *The Externally Focused Church* by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, "When the people who talk about a loving God demonstrate love, the gap between doubt and faith is narrowed, and the people around them often find themselves wanting to believe."<sup>6</sup> Volunteers become laborers for the harvest when they combine the good deeds with the good news. And this good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is what brings transforming, real life change—the pinnacle of the funnel—where God desires people to be. Having a process in place along with a solid vision and foundation of prayer allows ordinary people to extend the life-changing hope of God to the world, a journey that changes both the servant and the served.

In his book, *Kingdom Come*, Allen M. Wakabayashi describes two categories an ineffective church has the tendency to fall into.<sup>7</sup> The first is to pull away from the outside world out of fear. The other is to seek transformation in the world through power: "Even today, it is disconcerting to me when Christians wave their fists in the air against the world's ungodliness and talk about forcing the 'pagans' to shape up. They seek societal and political power

not to love and serve but to coerce the world to do what they think is right."<sup>2</sup>

But the externally focused church is evangelistically effective. Authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson illustrate the intersection between good deeds and good news as the "Transformational 'Sweet Spot'" in *The Externally Focused Church*. This intersection is where the needs and dreams of the city merge with the mandates and desires of God and the calling of the church:



RICK RUSAW



ERIC SWANSON



*"Service is something the community needs, God desires, and the church has the capacity to do. The community may not care much about salvation, but it does have needs. It is in meeting those needs through service that meaningful relationships develop, and out of relationships come needless opportunities to share the love of Christ and the gospel of salvation."*<sup>3</sup>

Service continues to be a bridge to salvation and engages the church with people they would not normally connect with. For the Mentoring Program at Mariners Church, this means a new joint venture between the Newport Mesa Unified School District.

For Imago Dei, it has developed through an important connection through service to a local drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. It developed in the most unusual way:

Almost four years ago, three women in Portland, Oregon, were walking down a common city street. They were in prayer about adopting a low-income housing complex. They came upon an ordinary building. Curious, they learned that it is an intensive residential alcohol and drug rehab treatment center for poverty level women who are pregnant and/or parenting young children. After prayerful consideration, they asked to volunteer and were given the simple task of holding the babies while their mothers were in classes and therapy.

Quickly, a year went by. The women volunteered once per week but found themselves desiring more: a better connection and interaction with the mothers they served. To bridge this gap, they created special events for mothers, their children and the volunteers—opportunities where they could build relationships together. After the second year, the ministry expanded. A few more women from Imago Dei joined and they began to gather every Sunday to pray for these mothers and their children. Their prayers raised questions about the next step: how God could enfold these women into Imago Dei, considering the facility was a locked-down residence with a very structured and controlled environment?

An answer came when one of the volunteers was hired to work at the facility, opening the doors to deeper relationships with the residents and staff. The mothers at the center began to ask questions about Imago Dei, and began to use their limited number of exit passes to come to church. So many wanted to come, in fact, Imago Dei had to set up a rotation and develop a transportation ministry to support the need. Today, several women from the rehab center have been baptized, and Imago Dei, through serving, has created a direct bridge to salvation, and laid the foundation for healthy relationships and support for these special women.

*“He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...”*<sup>18</sup> Neither Imago Dei, nor the mothers themselves, may ever know—here on earth—what impact this connection will have in the years to come. Certainly, God’s reign will be felt in the hands and feet of healthy, drug-free children, and the generations to follow. Without a doubt, God’s reign is being experienced today by the mother who may never return to her bondage of slavery because of one simple act of service.



WILL YOU JOIN THIS WORK OF GOD?

### The Final Question

To extend the reign of God requires vision, prayer and risk. If churches truly take God seriously—loving him passionately and serving their neighbors—limitless life change is in their hands. It can represent change that transforms the drug addict to a loving parent, a mediocre Christian to a mature servant, or a skeptical city into a thankful partner. Following Christ’s example as an obedient servant reaps more rewards and enacts more change than most people think possible. God is at work, across our nation and world, transforming people and cities. The final question left to ask is: how will your church join this vital work of God?

<sup>1</sup> Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline; The Path to Spiritual Growth*, San Francisco, CA.: HarperCollins, 1998, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, Marlene. *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> The church uses Shelby Servant by [www.shelbyinc.com](http://www.shelbyinc.com)

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, Marlene. *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers*, Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> [www.orangewoodfoundation.org](http://www.orangewoodfoundation.org)

<sup>6</sup> Rusaw, Rick and Swanson, Eric. *The Externally Focused Church*, Loveland, CO.: Group Publishing, 2004, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Wakabayashi, Allen M. *Kingdom Come; How Jesus Wants to Change the World*, Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2003, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 61:1, NIV



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