

Easum Training Session November 3, 2007

“Guiding Christian Leaders for Ancient Mission in the Contemporary World”

These are Nick Strobel’s notes on the talk by Bill Easum at St Paul’s UMC for the District Training Day in the first part of November 2007. Bill Easum is a nationally-recognized consultant on church growth and the future of the church. These are Easum’s recommendations about what the church needs in the 21st century. You’ll find some of his recommendations controversial but they are worth serious discussion. (In fact, if you aren’t uncomfortable about any of the things he says, you haven’t read it carefully!)

He began by saying that most United Methodist churches today are still living in the 1950s or at least the 20th century. We focus on order and conformity and are sluggish to respond to new pressures. The 21st century world is very diverse and changes rapidly. They looked at 2000 churches last year and found some common threads among the thriving churches and some other common threads among the declining churches.

Thriving churches exist to transform lives and the surrounding community and world.

Dying churches exist to maintain the institution and the status quo.

Declining Churches	Thriving Churches
Chaplain Pastor (takes care of the church members)	Entrepreneurial Pastor (trains the church members to do the ministry and looks for new ways to minister to the world outside)
Committed to Church	Committed to Christ
Traditional worship	Indigenous worship (relevant to culture of surrounding community)
Focused on internal needs [inward focus]	Focused on community needs [outward focus]
Managing committees	Deploying missions
Holding offices	Doing ministry
Making decisions	Making disciples
Membership training	Life learning
Focus on money	Focus on people
Doing church work	Personal fulfillment
Retiring from church	Personal growth
Loyal to each other (members first, then others outside)	Drawn to strangers
Info-oriented faith	Experience oriented
Perpetuate heritage (“we’ve always done it this way”)	Visioning a future (“what new things can we do”)

Two Systems Stories:

One system has a top-down, command and control, stifle story

Other system has bottom-up, out-of-control, innovation story

The key to profound change is to unfreeze the system. Nine unfreezing moves:
1) Solid community of faith; 2) community shares a Biblically sound and cultural DNA (we all agree on the key mission); 3) Indigenous worship (our worship adapts to the changing culture of the people around us); 4) Mobilized congregation (not building centered); 5) Redemptive missions; 6) Organized around DNA; 7) Hire servants not pros; 8) Place and space are metaphors (not physical things); 9) People exhibit radical generosity (beyond what is comfortable).

The Effective and Faithful Church of the 21st Century will be more like the First Century than the 20th Century.

Secrets of the Early Church

Life was meant to be given away. In the book of Acts we read of the early Christians giving things away to others. The early Christians existed to pass on the Good News. “We are here for the world, not the world for us”. The church was an incubator for the new believer. Today it takes 150 Methodists to make 1 new Methodist. In the early church it was 1 person to make 1 new Christian. The early church did not tolerate grumbling and discontent. The church dealt with conflictors by showing them the door.

Most of us grew up with in a “National Park” sort of world: bland, slow-moving, protected. Since 1965, the mainline churches have seen decline every year as the world outside has changed into a “jungle” that changes fast and filled with lots of predators. Easum likens what happened to the church in the 1960s as entering a wormhole—not knowing what the future holds and playing by different rules than the past.

Today’s World

In today’s world, everything is set on *speed*. Internet will be king. Everything is set on *blur*. A speedy world makes all of the rules blur. All of our values are getting blurred. Everything is set on *flux*. By the time you get things figured out, the world outside has changed. What worked last year will not work 2-3 years from now.

See Tap Scott’s book on Digital Culture. Old linear world vs. new loopy world views (note the plural!). Easum showed a scene from the computer game *Myst* as metaphor for what’s going on today. There are 5 worlds in *Myst* each with their own set of rules that you have to figure out. People don’t need to go to church in today’s world to worship. Worship can happen in all sorts of places—not building centered. Our worship places will have to have lots of imagery because we live in a digital, visual culture.

Old linear world most Methodists grew up in vs. the new “loopy” world of today:

Old Linear World	New Loopy World
Propositional truth—doctrines agreed upon, intellectual truth.	Embodied truth—people live out the truth, heart truth
Dualism—good/bad, secular/religion	Dualism rejected
Ultimate values	Situational values. (How do we preach the gospel in that world?)

This kind of world calls for a new type of leader and church that draws upon the ancient early Christian world. The problem facing the church today is that there is just enough “National Park” left for church leaders to try to hide in the past.

Faithfulness Myths

Faithfulness should be how we *live* out the gospel. Instead we operate under these myths:

- “Faithfulness is about survival. If we just hang on, we’ll be considered faithful.”
- “Faithfulness is about being a witness in the inner city even though everyone drives in from the suburbs.”
- “Faithfulness is paying our apportionments.” Apportionments are only a small part of faithfulness, not the major measure of our faithfulness.
- “Faithfulness is about right belief.” (Head vs. heart truth)
- “Faithfulness is about knowing the Bible.” We can know scripture but not follow the way—not get out in the real world. Easum noted that church goers get focused on Bible studies and stay there in the groups without being transformed to go out into the world to change other lives. Also, note that in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness story, Satan could quote scripture.
- “Faithfulness is about being a good United Methodist”

Effectiveness Myths

- “Effectiveness is about taking care of our members” (Inward focus)
- “Effectiveness is meeting our budget”
- “Effectiveness is about growing in numbers”. You could be just getting disgruntled people from other churches—that may not be a good thing!

But What Did Jesus Say?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and all your strength”. This is the Great Commandment. “Go make disciples of all people groups”. This is the Great Commission and this too: “Be my witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world”. Jerusalem is a metaphor for our spiritual home. Judea is a metaphor for your community, city. Samaria is a metaphor for the people you don’t want in your church, the “them” who don’t fit into our orderly, faith club.

The Biblical definition of faithful and effective churches are those that spend all of their time, energy, and money fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission: transformation of your people and the world. You can’t do one without the other and be faithful.

Effective Churches Measure Results

Churches are notorious for not measuring the results of their ministry. What you measure tells who you are. If you could measure one thing, what would it be? That is a question that would be worth having a council meeting about. Big box churches measure adult baptisms. Did you know that 80% of Californians have not been inside a church?

Some measurables to consider:

Conversions and baptisms; number in worship; number of people involved in small groups; number of new leaders; changes in the community; number of visitors; retention rate (repeat visitors—only 5% in most churches); number of “servants”—those who will do whatever they are asked to do; radical givers—those who give so much that they can’t do some other things (a millionaire giving 10% of their income can still live comfortably while a person living in poverty giving 10% of their income is really sacrificing); harmony and unity.

For “harmony and unity” measure: Do the board members go to meetings with fear or with anticipation of good? Are staff meetings fun? Ask people “what’s the purpose of this church?” If they *all* say the same thing, that’s unity. Ask your visitors how they feel about the group or congregation.

Faithful and Effective Church

A faithful and effective church is Biblically grounded. It uses scripture to base its decisions.

A faithful and effective church is culturally relevant. It understands its community.

Average person under 45 years of age does not like hymns.

A faithful and effective church exists to transform lives

A faithful and effective church’s ministry is driven by the needs of the mission field, not the member’s convenience. Membership is not entitlement. Members should pay *more* for a service, non-members pay less.

A faithful and effective church mobilizes and equips the laity.

A faithful and effective church is a community built on trust.

A faithful and effective church is structured to grow disciples. “Non-members come back because we love them so much.” We need to ask ourselves, “Is our church making any difference in our community?”

Modern day Christianity’s two major problems: our misunderstanding of what it means to be the church and our misunderstanding of the role of God’s people. Most views of the church are flawed. Most see the church as a machine or place. So many decisions we make are centered on the building or the institution.

The results of this flaw: These assumptions lead to the belief that all congregations follow a similar pattern of birth, growth, decline, and death. Congregations have a lifespan that can be fixed. After that is death. Fatalistic view. Leaders expect that churches will eventually die. Focus is on institutional survival (stave off death as long as possible). However, we can’t regulate something that’s organic. You can’t *fix* a church but you *can change* a church.

The Biblical View: Christianity is a salvation movement of God throughout history, not the growth or health of organizations. There are no healthy congregations, but lots of faithful congregations—people in *need* of salvation who know it and will help others grow in their trust of God. Both the prophets and Jesus chastised the religious leaders for focusing on the institution and turning inward. Christianity is a *movement*, not a cluster of churches. God’s people are chosen in order to be a blessing to others (we are “blessed to be a blessing to the nations”). The spirit of God flows *through* us, it does not stop with us.

The Role of the Church

God called Abraham to be a blessing to all the earth. That covenant was continued on down to Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. But Israel turned inward and felt entitled. Instead of feeling special because she was chosen, Israel felt she was chosen because she was special. Jesus took her to task over her feeling of entitlement. Jesus told Peter, “*Upon* this rock I will build my church”, not that “I will build my church”. Church leaders are like Israel when they feel entitled to the pastor’s time.

The church is missional: *missio dei* = people on the way. Churches don’t need a Missions or Evangelism Committee. Where there is mission, there is the church. Where there is no mission, there is no church, no reason to exist. The church exists to be light, salt, and leaven in the people around it. This is what separates church from pseudo-churches. Easum used the analogy of hospice vs. church. One thing often missed in the Emmaus story of two disciples walking to Emmaus after the resurrection is that Emmaus was a Roman garrison, i.e., a place of non-Jews. They were on the way to those who haven’t heard the good news! How might that change how you view the story?

The church is the instrument of the Gospel and the witness of God’s saving mission to *all creation*, not just people. As such the church can find its justification only within the mission or sending of God. We are a representative of Christ first but also a representative of your church. The church needs to understand that ministry doesn’t have to take place in the church building. We need to move away from viewing the church building as the hub of the community. We need to go out into the community and minister there rather than waiting for people to come to us. We need to feel that we’re responsible for being Christ in *their* midst. Are your church members the same way as they are in the world? What does your church do to call attention to the gospel? Can your church leaders answer the questions, “What difference does God make in your life? Why are you a Christian?”

The Difference between the Mechanical Way and the Organic Way:

For the **mechanical way**, picture a hierarchical organization chart with boxes and lines showing who report to whom, etc. The emphasis is on checks and balances, policies & procedures, and micro-management. Accountability is paramount. Groups operate in silos with committees not talking to each other.

For the **organic way**, picture a spider web with “mission, vision, values” at the center. The emphasis is on permission giving, mission statements, and clear boundaries. There is a singular purpose around a given mission.

More on a Movement vs. a Religion

Movement	Religion
Has a leader (see below for more on that)	Is suspicious of leaders
Way of life	Belief system—head knowledge
People of the way	People of the Book: the Bible and the Discipline
Principle	Rules
People have a cause. We're not here to be Methodists but to follow Christ.	Is the cause.
Mobile	Stationary
Common person	Elite insiders "we're entitled"
Servants	Entitled
Cult in the sense of people who are very committed	Religion

Movements Follow a Leader. For the first three centuries, the person and work of Jesus Christ dominated the conversation. Who was he? What did he do? Why does he matter? Jesus was all that mattered.

Imagine: You're on the mission field and you meet another Christian for the first time in months. What do you do? How do you feel?

Movements Embody the Spirit of Their Leader. Christians were first called "Followers of the Way". Obedience is not to a set of rules or policies or a religious group, but to a person who embodied the "Way". There is a serious commitment to the one who led the way.

In Religion, **Jesus is Substituted for:** 1) Commitment to our churches or denominations; 2) "People of the Book" (note that the apostles did not have a Bible); and 3) Performing rituals.

Movements are Guided by Mission: No longer a right way to do anything (no cookie cutter or magic program that will solve all our problems). We need to ask ourselves, "What is right for the mission in this particular circumstance?" We need to break the rules when the mission is in jeopardy. Movements *are fueled by* a cause, while in institutional religion, the religion is *the* cause.

Acts 15 provides a nice illustration of what Easum means. Paul was in trouble with the Jerusalem because he wasn't making converts to the Way Jews first. "You, Paul, are not doing things right". Paul told them that people were being saved. Peter sided with Paul and that ended the dispute. People are more important than traditions. Paul and the Jerusalem Church is also our story. The guiding principle: if it transforms lives, you do it because the redemption of people is more important than keeping institutional traditions. Break the rules on the side of people rather than on the side of the institution.

Fresno District Training – Bill Easum Nov 3, 2007

All of the growth in the United Methodist church today is in just 10% of the congregations. We should put all of our resources into planting new churches instead of consolidating old churches.

Movements are Mobile. Christianity is tethered to its physical moorings. The 21st century church is not tethered to place, property, or tradition. If you were planting a church today, would you plant it where it is today? Think of house churches, café churches, storefront churches, cyber churches, multiple-site churches.

The Mission Field:

- Is in our backyard. The United States is the second largest mission field in the world.
- Does not afford us the luxuries of stability, location, status quo, and familiarity.
- Nor does it allow us to try to separate reality into sacred and secular, and thus focus on sacred space. (Remember in the “loopy world” we now live in of page 2 above that dualism is rejected.)

The Organic Movement Model

The people of the church go wherever they need to go to be with Jesus on the mission field. They don't wait for the people to come to them. They explode and hive off into other congregations—the church has multiple sites. The people give less thought to their own institutional preservation and more to the growth of the Kingdom.

The measure of a faithful church

The measure of a faithful church is how willing is it to follow Jesus into the mission field. It asks, where is Jesus going? It is beyond its walls. When a faithful church can no longer connect with the public it: begins a radically new ministry; it relocates or has multiple sites; sends all its people out to plant a new missional output—can't stay static.

The Biblical Definition of Church: “A community of people who are called by God to take part in the movement of God in history led by people who are passionate about the movement.” Its people ask, “where is God working in the city?” If all of our time, energy, and money is spent on us, we have ceased being the church!”

What do we do now?

We become open to change. There is more possibility of thriving if we do so. We begin to award innovation rather than punishing or worrying about failure. We break and change the rules. We challenge the status quo (will your church say it's okay to have a screen in front of the cross?). We become people on the Way with Jesus.

The Role of God's People

Ephesians 4:11–12: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,”

Today we are confused about the roles of clergy and laity. This distinction didn't exist until the 3rd century. We used to understand the role of the laity on the frontier. They did all of the pastoral ministry. Until the 1960s, this distinction wasn't a problem. After that time, people thought that we hired certain people to do the ministry for us (so we wouldn't have to do it). Now the distinction between clergy and laity is deep and wide. Paul tells the Ephesians that the clergy are to *equip* the laity. The clergy do not do the ministry. The more people revere ordination, the less laity will work in ministry. It is a *gift* issue, rather than a formal training issue. Easum notes that it takes 5–7 years of hard work to change a church's way of doing things.

The Results

The results of our confusion about the roles of clergy and laity are: Our people haven't “gone on to perfection” (spiritual maturation); Pastors are expected to be chaplains and hit persons (“Mr or Ms Fixits”) and care-givers. “Laity Sunday” is a testimony to the depth of our misunderstanding. It destroys the “ministry of the priesthood of all believers”.

The secret of Methodism's genius was the class meeting (Covenant Discipleship groups) but we're given them up. We need to answer for ourselves, “what is it about Christianity that I can't live without?” Growing churches have members who go to church to make friends with a stranger rather than to socialize with our friends. Where Christianity is a life and death issue, the church is growing, there is real commitment.

Easum noted three things about what he called “conservative” churches (not necessarily, the same as right wing): 1) Jesus is the most important part of the lives of their members; 2) They exist to convert people to their faith; 3) They are not wishy-washy about things—they are dealing with issues of eternity. The good ones are not bigoted (thinking they're better than others), they are grace-filled churches.

The results of our confusion about the roles of clergy and laity are: many have become sidetracked into irrelevant offices and tasks. Dialing for people to fill slots; endless rounds of meetings; powerbrokers instead of servant leaders; and few if any see their primary ministry happening after they leave the church building.

The Biblical View of Both Roles: The role of the elders (clergy) is to equip. Note to the pastors: when you have equipped the people, they don't need the pastor. Laity aren't complete until equipped. Pastors steal the essence of "sainthood" when they "do" ministry.

The elders (clergy) of the church have primary spiritual and administrative oversight. We have too many checks and balances. We are afraid of strong, biblical leadership. In our desire to keep bad things from happening, we have ensured that nothing good can happen.

The Biblical Role of Leadership: Laity are the ministers. The role of the laity is to be the priesthood of God, serving one another and ministering to the unchurched.

Christianity is a "lay" religion. The ministry of the laity is no different than that of the clergy. Both are equally called.

Note that in today world titles are meaningless. Authority and respect have to be earned. They do not come with the position.

In the traditional view of leadership, there is a top heaviness of administration by many laity with a few staff doing the ministry. The 21st Century view of leadership tips that over: there are just a few staff doing the administration with a lot of laity doing the ministry.

Rules of Engagement for the 21st Century Church

- 1) The Church always focuses *outward* rather than *inward*
- 2) The entire church is an incubator for discipleship
- 3) Multiplication is the key (not addition)

Church Focuses Outward

Easum's prescription for a worship service that appeals to the young adults. The church should have a great entrance/lobby/gathering space that is half your worship space. The worship service starts the minute people walk in---there should be gathering music going on as people enter. The worship should be indigenous to the culture of the people around your church; indigenous to people under 30 and that encourages transformation. Rock music and multimedia, choir or band that is present year round (choir can't take the summer off). Don't change times in the summer. Most visitors come during July and August. If you open the worship service with announcements, your church won't grow. If you open with the choir (music), you'll grow. Put the announcements elsewhere in the service. Ask yourself how fast is the service; it shouldn't be slow! Are there at least 2-3 choir pieces even in the traditional service? The more quiet time you have in the worship, the smaller your church. Remember that music is the soul of a culture, so have lots of music!

On sharing of joys and concerns:

Worship is vertical (from individual to God), not horizontal (person to person). Sharing joys and concerns is horizontal. That should be done in small group gatherings, not during worship—it is more meaningful in small groups because the people of the small group know each other well, whereas in a large congregation, not everyone would know the persons raising the joys/concerns. Small groups are where lives are changed. Is your worship service programmed to keep the congregation small or is programmed so that it can grow into a larger congregation. If your church congregation was 5X your present size, could you continue doing what you're doing now?

New people come because they're hurting and want an answer, not to hear about others' problems. The church focuses outward, not to already "in crowd". Sharing joys and concerns in worship drags on too long for our fast world. There are also no pastoral prayers in growing churches—drags on too long (sometimes become mini-sermons) and the clergy should not be set up to be our official pray-ers (see the discussion of clergy and laity above).

The church focuses outward: need good curb appeal with parking lot attendants who help people find a spot. There should be plenty of directional signs (how easy it is to find where you're going if you're new?). There needs to be fewer committees and instead nominate people to *incarnational ministries*, ministries in the community outside your church. Each church leader needs to ask him/herself, how heart-broken are you over town? How do we reach our city? They don't know God, so how do we reach them?

Pastors: The pastor calls the new visitors Sunday afternoon and visits them that week. The preaching should be focused, passionate, authentic and relevant. The church should have a signature outreach ministry, something you do better than anyone else in town. See http://easumbandy.com/resources/faqs/u/unchurched/ways_to-connect for figuring out ways to connect with your community.

There needs to be an "assimilation system" for new laity: identify → invite → discerning, equip → deploy → coach.

An Incubator for Discipleship

For discipleship to occur in today's world, the church must be thought of as an incubator of faith. Most new people don't have a clue. We need to help them find clues on how to live and how to put their lives together. Many people in the pews are clueless, clueless on how to be good husbands and fathers, clueless on how to be good wives and mothers.

Discipleship today requires a "farm system", in the way that football teams have farm systems. They have a clear understanding of what leadership is and start growing leaders. (Farm system is described more fully below.) The problem is that most churches have a class system for the staff, volunteers, and others. Discipleship requires every person to be seen as a potential servant leader.

Discipleship Requires a Farm System:

Leaders ask not “what must I do today?” but “who will I equip today?” Instead of a “to do” list, leaders have a “to be” list. The heart of this is small groups. Small groups are about raising up future leaders and learning how to live your life. A Bible study group can be a small group but the real issue or reason for the group is not the Bible study. The real issue or reason for the group is: 1) Figuring out how to make life work and sharing life (a support or healing group); 2) Raising up leaders; 3) Inviting our friends. The small groups will multiply into other small groups.

A Farm System

A farm system is a way of watching how people perform with small tasks in order to entrust them with more significant ministry. An example is the New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu; see www.enewhope.org. Easum told a story of a visit to New Hope. Each Saturday night, early Sunday morning the worship leaders have to set up the worship space from scratch (putting up all of the sound equipment, banners, seats, etc.). This often can take well into the wee hours of the night/early morning. Near the end of one long night’s set up, one of the tired leaders snapped at one of the other people. The pastor told the person to go home and that the person would not be helping with the worship and set up again. This seemed a bit harsh but the pastor said that “if you are trustworthy in a few things, you will be put in charge of many things” (Matt 25:21)

Farm System Requirements

The congregation has to be an incubator of faith. A conflicted congregation can never develop a farm system. A farm system requires that people are regularly fed. The Leader must function as a shepherd. Shepherds don’t feed the sheep. Shepherds make sure the sheep are in a pasture so they can feed themselves. The Leader must function as a scout, looking for new leaders.

Leaders must realize that different levels of leadership exist

- Leaders of Leaders—highest level
- Leaders of Systems—Lay mobilization
- Leaders of major ministries—Small group system
- Leaders of programs, short and long term—Sunday School or VBS
- Leaders of committees—lowest level of leadership
- Apprentices in training—key to multiplication
- Visitors—the quicker to serve the better. New Hope has new people take up the offering. At least half of those who take the offering are visitors.

All staff has to support and work the system. What if each staff person identified thirty-five new leaders for the coming year?

Multiplication is the Key

Church planting—totally new church; or Multiple sites. Your church won’t survive if it can’t do either one of these.

Returning to Our Historic Roots

- Organic Lay Movement. Discipleship is a life-long journey.
- Evangelism and Social Justice: always go together. Does no good to give someone a glass of water but not give them God.
- Focus on Changing the City
- Leadership Development
- Class Meetings: small groups where people are held accountable and can explore their faith without fear of reprisal. Work on behavior modification—How do I apply my faith to my life outside? How do I live my life?

21st Century Questions

- Are we committed to Jesus Christ or to doctrine, church, and denomination?
- Do we speak of Faith as an experience or as a heritage to protect?
- Is ministry making disciples or making decisions?
- Do we design ministry for the public or the needs of the church members?
- Do we quickly grasp unexpected opportunities or worry about rules and procedures?
- Do we promote mentoring relationships or nominate people to offices?
- Do we grow small groups or wrestle with power cliques?
- Do we expect newcomers to be invited or wait for them at the door?
- Do we value changing lives or belonging to the institution?
- Do we worship with expectancy or worship to discharge a duty?
- Do we ask for radical commitment or expect little of our people?

What Your Responses Mean

If you affirmed most of the questions, you are ready for the 21st century. If you affirmed some of the questions, you have discovered what you need to work on. If you affirmed most of the alternatives, you are ready to retire or try something else.

THE END