

Unit 5: The Third Wave of Cell Innovation

Lecture: Saddleback

When Rick Warren was praying about a place to start a church as a seminary student, he was drawn to Orange County, south of Los Angeles, which was rapidly growing with new communities. New communities need new churches, he reasoned, and he was right. People who relocate far from their kinship networks are very open to forming new networks with others who show them care. This was the beginning of Saddleback Community Church in 1980.

As a Doctor of Ministry seminary student, I visited Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, five times for classes. In 2003 a group of my classmates, also from out of town, decided to worship at Saddleback on Sunday morning and there was room in the rental car for me. I believe their weekend worship attendance at that time was averaging 18,000. My first thought on seeing the campus was that it reminded me of a theme park; wide walkways connected outlying parking lots with the main buildings. Lots of people in casual clothes walked with us from the outside to the inside. In southern California, it's always warm, so a different climate had resulted in different church buildings: one expressly designed for children, one for youth, one for fellowship that reminded me of a University Union, and the sanctuary. Wide walks lined with trees for shade provided a giant outdoor narthex or lobby for people to visit; I seem to remember park benches for those who would like to sit. The area outside the worship space was particularly open, large and welcoming.

Inside the worship space, I was reminded of a university gymnasium, only with better acoustics. The 3200 seat auditorium was simple rather than fancy. We were early enough to get seats six rows from the front of the platform, right in front of the guitars and drums set up for the band. I remember thinking, this isn't that impressive of a building. As the service began, we sang.

The first surprise was special music; it was Jaci Velasquez, who used that service to debut her new album, *Unspoken*. At this time she had already won six Dove Awards, and issued over 3 gold albums and 2 platinum albums. Jaci went on to sell over 3.5 million albums and appear on more than 50 magazine covers. A larger church can access the best talent, and there is a lot of talent in Los Angeles.

The second surprise, I came to learn, was a Rick Warren trademark: the shared sermon. In the middle of the sermon, Warren will introduce someone else who will bring a part of that message. As the theme that Sunday was volunteering to make a difference in the community, that particular Sunday in 2003 as a part of the sermon we heard from Mrs. Rick (Kay) Warren on her experience of volunteering in Africa, Robert K. Goodwin (President and Chief Executive Officer of former President Bush's Points of Light Foundation), and the African director of an orphanage supported by Saddleback that had been flown to LA for the service. The shared sermon is one aspect of a frequently quoted phrase at Saddleback: "It's not about you." I was impressed that the focus of the worship was not the preacher, Rick Warren, but upon the people of God - including Rick Warren.

A third surprise explained the tables set up outside in the large outdoor narthex. We were all encouraged to visit the various community service agencies and ministries, each with their own table, and sign up as a volunteer **before we left that day**. Not some day, but that very day. A key theme of these churches is the work to intentionally eradicate hypocrisy. This was my first experience with a

Saddleback “Ministry Fair.” A few minutes later Rick Warren walked up to me and my fellow students and chatted with us, welcoming us to Saddleback. It was certainly an astonishing day.

Rick Warren has pointed out that the world appreciates the attempt by Purpose Driven people to live out the values of Christ and that criticism will always come not from sinners but from saints. The New Testament describes a time of rapid growth and upheaval in traditional Jewish religious values. The changes brought by the early church were systemically resisted in patterns that are being replayed today as sincere, committed Christians work to resist the changes of the Purpose Driven movement and other movements that are attempting to win the lost to Christ.

The same patterns of resistance are seen throughout church history, right from the beginning. Jesus said clearly, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matthew 10:24-25). The first person to admit that Rick Warren is less than perfect is Rick Warren.

Generally, most methods of leadership for change derived from corporate America inflame resistance to change and deliberately sow the seeds that lead ultimately to failure in transition. Many attempting to implement the Purpose Driven design do not carefully prepare for transition. One solution is the *Diffusion of Innovations* understanding of change and transition. A great deal can be learned from studying the problems and successes of helping traditional churches become faithful to the Great Commission in a way that works in actual numbers of conversions.

Bill Beckham’s “Eddie” is alive and thriving in many churches and very unhappy when the focus shifts away from the church meeting his needs. Perhaps the most telling example comes from Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Church*, p. 82:

If you ask typical church members why their church exists, you’ll get a wide variety of answers. Most church do not have a clear consensus on this issue. Win Arn, a consultant to churches, once told me about a survey he took. He surveyed members of nearly a thousand churches asking the question, “Why does the church exist?” Of the church members surveyed, 89 percent said, “The church’s purpose is to take of my family’s and my needs.” For many the role of the pastor is simply to keep the sheep who are already in the “pen” happy and not lose too many of them. Only 11 percent said, “The purpose of the church is to win the world for Jesus Christ.”

Then the pastors of the same churches were asked why the church exists. Amazingly the results were exactly opposite. Of the pastors surveyed, 90 percent said the purpose of the church was to win the world and 10 percent said it was to care for the needs of the members. Is it any wonder why we have conflict, confusion and stagnation in many churches today? If the pastor and congregation can’t even agree on why the church exists, conflict and disagreement on everything else is inevitable.

This survey by Win Arn, a church growth expert, is even more interesting in that the churches surveyed are likely to be conservative and evangelical. What would be your answer? Is the purpose of the church to take care of you and your family? Or to take care of the needs of a lost and suffering world?