



# Future Church

Ministry in a Post-Seeker Age

BY

Jim L. Wilson

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☞ Littleton ☛

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When Archimedes discovered the principle of the fulcrum and the limitless possibility of the mechanical lever, he said, “Give me a place to stand and I’ll move the world.” That’s exactly what I wanted to do—move the world. God gave me a place to stand—the Monterey Peninsula, but I needed to find a lever to impact the world for Christ. Should I transition the church I was serving from its traditional roots into a contemporary church? Or should I leave it as it is? While I sought the answer to those questions I discovered another lever, a third alternative—the *Future Church*.

The word *contemporary* means “up to date, current”—but not in Christian circles. We use the word to denote a church movement that began and takes its characteristics from the 1980s—the Seeker Age. If contemporary no longer means “current and up to date,” then another term must emerge to capture that idea. So what term describes a church that is up to date and current? Erwin McManus, lead pastor of Mosaic in Los Angeles, California says his church is “in the future.” Ron Martoia, founding pastor of Westwinds in Jackson, Michigan says, “The future arrived yesterday; if you wait until tomorrow you are already too late.” The future is now!

Young adults, those we once called “the church’s future,” are attending these churches—today, they are the *Future Church*. It is as relevant to the post-seeker age as the contemporary church was to the seeker era, but its message resonates more with the doctrine of the traditional church. I liked what I was discovering and began taking steps to lead the church I serve into the future. This book is the product of my journey. It shows the seven fulcrum points *Future Churches* use to move the world and how we are effectively using them in the church I now serve.

Welcome to the journey!





# Foreword

By Sally Morgenthaler

The new Church is here. It came imperceptibly, like a waft of first spring musk at the tired edge of winter: barely distinguishable, yet blowing into the subconscious a sense of much-longed-for visitation. Ah, something new, something that we did not create!

Thus the new Church arrived—unannounced and unstrategied. How ironic. After two and some decades of trying to manufacture the new Church with the wind machines of formula and program. It came anyway, and with it, a deep and humanly resonant re-examination of American Christendom. From theology, anthropology, and ecclesiology to praxis, nothing has escaped deconstruction. We may not be ready, but I can assure you, God is. And the reality is this: the Future Church is already here, in seminal form, but here. And it is this fresh reality—this untamed, messy genesis—that Jim Wilson describes in this volume.

In the past few years, the new Church has at least been recognized as existent. Most often, it is viewed by established ministries as renegade overflow, an upstart rivulet trying to make a place for itself alongside the wide, placid banks of aging seeker-style ministries—an adolescent phase of “real” church. Dismissed as either generational identity crisis or philosophical fad, what is clear is that the new American Church has now

grown from a trickle in the mid-nineties to significant run-off at the turn of the millennium. What it will be in five or ten years is uncertain, yet we would do well to take notice. After all, the Grand Canyon was carved by one well-placed, persistent rivulet.

Many of us launched our boats on the Mississippi of church growth in the past two decades. We dutifully set them afloat in the world of big and simple. We followed those who had built massive riverboats, along with the equally massive paddlewheels of programs to propel them. But the landscape shifted beneath our feet. From big and simple, we entered the postmodern topography of small and complex, transforming American culture from homogenous demographics, seeker-believer compartments, easy answers, and fill-in-the blanks to diverse neighborhoods, ubiquitous spirituality, paradox, and tell-me-your-story. The boats we need now are kayaks, but having spent our ministry years building and operating riverboats, some of us find ourselves not only up a creek without a paddle, but without the expertise to use one if it were handed to us.

Into this crisis of change, Jim Wilson offers a journalist's crucial perspective: here's how otherwise ordinary leaders are navigating the unpredictable waterways of change. He provides a "Narratives From the Headwaters" for those of us on the delta.

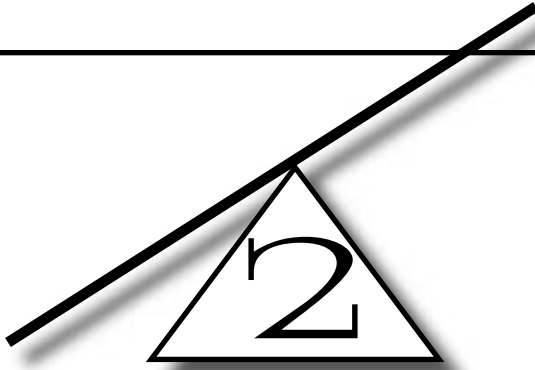
There are, by now, scores of books on how the new waterways were formed. (Check for the word "postmodern" in

the title.) There are even a few books on how to operate kayaks. But here's one about the new navigators themselves: those self-taught kayakers who were upstart enough to say, "Hey, we're not on the Mississippi anymore!"

The Future Church is here. After you read these stories, you just may want to grab a paddle—any paddle—and get wet.

*Sally Morgenthaler is the author of Worship Evangelism and founder and president of [Sacramentis.com](http://Sacramentis.com).*



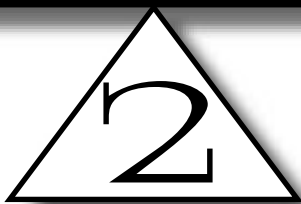


Fulcrum Point 2:

Get Spiritual



*Conventional wisdom says that one religion is as good as another. Christians are often viewed as mean-spirited, narrow-minded bigots. Gurus, mystics, and psychics are as legitimate as priests, rabbis, and ministers in today's super-charged spiritual environment. What is the Church's response?*



In the post-seeker age, *Future Churches* are not as concerned with marketing services for unbelievers as they are in ushering people, believers and unbelievers alike, into the presence of God. Intentionally, they do not water down their teachings or ratchet down the intensity of a service to make it more appealing to unbelievers.

*Future Churches* did not make this shift to attract the unchurched, but it turns out that the unchurched are not as interested in “seeker services” as they once were and are attracted to the intense worship experiences of *Future Churches*. At a Barna 2000/2001 seminar, George Barna explained that the unchurched may not respond as positively to a mega-church that

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sings praise choruses in a seeker-sensitive service as they might to a smaller, more traditional church. His recent research indicated that the unchurched view the ideal church size to be between 100 and 200 people; they prefer traditional hymns with contemporary instruments and arrangements. They prefer the hymns because they know some of them. “They’ve never heard praise and worship choruses,” Barna says.

Barna estimated that 15-percent of the unchurched are likely to return to the church in the near future, but that they usually only come back to church when they receive a personal invitation. “Only one fourth of the unchurched have been invited [to a church service],” Barna says. “Among all unchurched adults, just 4-percent were invited and attended church.” The “sit back and wait for them to come” or send them impersonal invitations via the mail approaches may not work in the future. According to Barna, when they return, they don’t expect the church to put on a show for them. They want to observe the church being who it genuinely is.

“They have to sense the presence of God,” he continued. “They know there is something significant about the presence of God.” The trends are pointing away from seeker services. “The primary objective of seeker services is not to expose them to the presence of God,” Barna says. “Experiencing God does change people” (Barna 2000/2001 Conference, San Jose, California, November 6, 2000).

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Ron Martoia, the founding pastor of Westwinds Community Church in Jackson, Michigan, affirms Barna's findings. He says that the fundamental reason people return to church is that they have experienced God in a service and find the experience so compelling they want to investigate further. "Most people don't return because of a great talk, music, media, or art. Those are merely vehicles; they come back because of a deeply moving experience with God."

The *Future Church's* battle cry is a return to biblical spirituality, one that impacts the daily life of the Christian and his church. "The churches that will cease to exist are not those that are doctrinally errant, but those that are spiritually errant," says Erwin McManus, the lead pastor of Mosaic, in Los Angeles, California. "You can't get away with it anymore. You can't just talk about what the Bible says, you'd better flesh it out or you are dead. It's not about structures, strategies, programs, or patterns. If you don't rediscover the apostolic, you'll die!"

The church must live what we say we believe. "There is a difference between knowing the good news and being the good news," says Dieter Zander, church planter in San Francisco. "We are the evidence! Everything counts—all the time. With previous generations, a strong preacher could give a good message, even if the church was hypocritical and critical and people would still get saved, but not any more."

Biblical spirituality is not another version of the pop spirituality of our age or a new strategy for reaching the un-

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churched—it is the life and breath of the church—it is its future.

### Portrait



“Moving with the Spirit”  
Mosaic, Los Angeles, CA

As we walked down the stairs, I held onto the rail while my eyes adjusted from the bright Los Angeles summer sun to the darkened room. Hanging from the ceiling was one of those “Saturday Night Fever” reflector balls. At the back was a mirrored-wall with the different colored bottles on the glass shelves. Elevated tables and chairs surrounded the dance floor, and several living room settings flanked the outer walls. *Hmm*, I thought, *this is what a nightclub looks like*.

The crowd meandered in, some sat on the floor, others on the permanent furnishings, some stood, but most of the 300-plus in attendance sat on the chairs on the dance floor. This was the first time my wife and I had ever been in a nightclub, but surprisingly we felt right at home. We weren't there to

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drink or dance, we were there to worship the creator God with the people of Mosaic. Mosaic has four services every weekend that draw 1,200 people a week. Three of their services are in their church building on Brady Street, and one is in Soho, a nightclub in downtown Los Angeles.

Erwin McManus, the head pastor at Mosaic, was born in San Salvador, Central America, and raised in Miami. During his college years he was on a philosophical quest for truth. He was an atheist part of the time, an agnostic some of the time, and uncertain the rest of the time. In the midst of his quest, something broke through and shattered his disbelief—God revealed Himself to him. Under the ministry of Jim Henry and the First Baptist Church of Orlando, FL, McManus surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and answered a call to ministry.

Wanting to fully prepare for his future, McManus moved to the Dallas Metroplex to enroll in Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and continue his ministry there. He was convinced that if the message of Jesus were true, it would work in the worst situations, so he focused his efforts among the urban poor. He and his wife Kim worked side jobs to support their ministry among the people no one wanted—drug dealers, prostitutes, and the homeless. While still in seminary, he traveled to California for a week as a part of a “Pioneer Penetration” team. He was hooked. He wanted to return to California.

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### God's Timing

McManus shared his burden for California at a prayer meeting at Wedgewood Baptist Church. “God is telling me to go to California and I don’t know how or why.” A member of the group responded: “I just got a call from Monty McWhorter, the director of Summer Evangelism Teams in California. He needs preachers to come and speak in California churches this summer.” That night, McManus talked to McWhorter and literally, within an hour, he had an invitation to go to California for the summer.

One summer evening, as he drove from Los Angeles to San Diego, God spoke to him through the city lights. He felt God saying, “Come give your life to the city.” God called McManus to believe Deut. 2:36, “there was no city that was too high for us; the Lord our God delivered all over to us” [NASB]. When the summer was over, McManus returned to seminary and his ministry among the urban poor, but in his heart he knew he would be back.

About the same time, God was at work in George Luke’s family. (George is the owner of the night club where Urban Mosaic meets.) His mother-in-law was dying. Searching for comfort, she opened a Bible that a missionary from Mainland China gave her years before, “happen chance” to the story of Hezekiah. After reading the story, she asked her daughter Susan what it meant. Overcome with emotion, Susan

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said, “You’re going to live 15 more years.” Of course that was a comforting word to her mother, but she had another question, “What’s the second half of the promise mean, ‘that you’ll be a salvation to the city?’” That was a question that Susan couldn’t answer. And she wouldn’t know the answer to it for fourteen more years.

After ten years in the Dallas Metroplex, McManus packed up his family and moved to Los Angeles and continued his ministry as a futurist and consultant to various Christian ministries. Tom Wolf, the pastor of the Church on Brady, had previously asked McManus to consider becoming the pastor of his church. McManus said no. “Anybody who reads anything that Lyle Schallar has written,” McManus says, “knows you don’t follow a 25-year pastorate because you’re destined for failure.” He did agree, however, to serve the church as a consultant one day a week after he arrived in LA.

Later, the Elders of the church approached McManus with the same question. This time McManus said he would become their pastor if he got a unanimous call. Knowing that no pastor gets a unanimous call in a Southern Baptist Church, McManus felt safe. When the votes were counted, there wasn’t a single one dissenting. After a period of transition, McManus became the pastor of the church and Wolf moved into a position with Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, CA.

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With a passion he learned serving the urban poor, McManus built on the mission spirit of the Church on Brady to lead the people into the future. He changed the ambiance of the worship center to feel more like a café than an auditorium. Sprinkled among the traditional seating they set up mosaic tables and sofas and chairs.

Another thing he changed was their name. An artist creates a mosaic by taking pieces of broken and fragmented glass and arranging them to make a beautiful design that is most attractive when light shines through it. The name “Mosaic” is a metaphor that describes their church. God, the master artist, has placed broken and fragmented people together to form a work of art that is made even more beautiful when the light of Jesus Christ shines through it. Like other metaphors, this one has many nuances. Their church has many shapes and colors in it. The church is multi-ethnic, multi-generational, and multi-cultural. Among the 100-plus people a year the church baptizes are Communists, Buddhists, Hindus, and members of the gay community. The church attracts Asians, Hispanics, Anglos, Blacks, and just about any other ethnicity that lives in the area. They shatter the homogeneous unit principle and include everyone. The most frequent criticism McManus hears about the name comes from those who see it as a reference to the Mosaic Law. He just tells them, “The Mosaic law is a historical declaration that God reveals Himself to us and that true religion

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is our response of humility to His initiative.” He doesn’t mind the connection at all.

To understand this church, the church is going to have to stand back a little, as they would if they were viewing a mosaic, to really appreciate it, especially if they ever want to understand why one of their services is in a nightclub.

McManus continued to hear the cry of the city. He wasn’t satisfied with getting the city into the church; he wanted to get the church into the city so he went looking for property in the business districts. He found a perfect location that was for sale, but it was ten million dollars out of reach. When they heard that someone purchased the property, McManus and one of his elders made an appointment to talk to the new owner, George Luke. McManus didn’t waste any time in the meeting. He looked Luke straight in the eye and said, “We want to invoke the presence of the Living God in this nightclub and make it the center of hope for this entire city.”

Luke didn’t know what to say. He went home and told his wife Susan about the strange meeting he had with a pastor. When he told her what McManus said about invoking the presence of the Living God in the nightclub and making it the center of hope for this entire city she suddenly understood what the second half of Hezekiah’s promise meant, “that you’ll be a salvation to the city.” The first half of the promise was being fulfilled. Her mother was in her fourteenth year. And now Susan understood how God would fulfill the second half of

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the promise. This time Luke called McManus. “We’ve decided to let you use the nightclub,” he said, “could you pay \$100 a week for cleanup?” For the first two months, McManus spent Sunday evenings “spiritually cleansing” the nightclub and invoking God’s presence in the place. When he opened the door, people responded to his invitation to come and worship the creator God—in a nightclub.

When McManus came to the Church on Brady, it was contemporary, following an 80s model of ministry. In fact, it was a leader in the contemporary church movement. But even though it was a contemporary church, it was time-locked in the 80s. Los Angeles had moved into the future while Brady remained behind. Any church with fixed structure in a fluid environment will become outdated and irrelevant. What the church was calling “contemporary” wasn’t. So McManus began leading them into the future.

Mosaic’s services are definitely in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The music ranges from “Santana smooth” to the distinctive sounds of “urban alternative.” Worship leaders weave drama, music, dance, and MTV-style video clips into the texture of the service. In the audience, artists are working on sculptures and paintings while McManus speaks. “I’m committed to Mosaic becoming a place where creativity erupts from every level, from every person,” says McManus. Witnessing the creative process helps put the audience in the frame of mind to hear the message. McManus sits on a stool for part of the delivery, but stands

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most of the time and preaches his prepared message without notes. The sermons are biblically based with a radical flair. “Our message isn’t based on ‘felt need.’ The driving texture isn’t ‘how-tos.’ Most of our messages are calls to revolution—to turn the world upside down. LA inhales the nations and it can exhale the gospel. We’re here for no less reason than to impact the entire planet. If we capture LA, we will capture the ears of all the nations.”

Obviously, Mosaic isn’t a “McChurch” but neither is it “Church Lite.” The standards for membership are high. According to McManus, “You can’t join our church unless you are willing to live a holy life, be actively involved in ministry, have an evangelistic lifestyle and at minimum, tithe.”

What Mosaic is doing isn’t about innovation, technology, intelligence, or strategy. McManus explains, “It is really about putting our hearts next to the heart of God and feeling His heartbeat and doing what He wants. Then everybody calls it creativity, innovation, and strategy, but we know deep down inside that we’re just moving with the Spirit and presence of God.”

And that’s the Church’s future.

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### Going Vertical

“Pastor, we’ve really got to start pushing church camp, we’ve spent a lot of money renting the cabin and if you don’t push it, we won’t have anybody come.”

“We need to recruit people for the church choir, the participation is going down, but if you’d say something from the pulpit, I’m sure it would help.”

“We’re starting a new class in Discipleship Training, can you promote it today?”

“Why didn’t you say anything about the Mission offering this morning? People aren’t going to give if you don’t say something!”

I heard these four questions from different church leaders on the same Sunday morning. Not, “Pastor, we’ve been praying for a unique visitation from the Lord today and that God would use you as an anointed vessel.” Or “I couldn’t wait to come to church today to stand together with you in the presence of the Lord.” But, “Can you use the limited time you have to speak to God’s people to promote something I care

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deeply about?” On one level, I sympathize with their concern for their ministries and their enthusiasm to promote them. But on another level, when I reflect on their questions, I start to feel the way I did when I was a college student, sitting in my boss’s office.

When I was in college, I worked at a furniture store on the delivery crew during the week and on the sales staff on Saturdays. One afternoon, the owner of the company called me into his office for a chat to talk about my future with the company. He had plans of moving me on the permanent sales force, which would be a good deal for me, but before he made the change, he wanted to discuss a few things with me. “What church are you going to Jim?” He asked. *Cool*, I thought, *he’s concerned about my spiritual condition*. “I go to College Heights Baptist Church,” I replied. In a million years I couldn’t have guessed what he was about to say. He cocked his head to the right, looked off into the distance, as though he was deep in thought. He stroked his chin a few times, then turned back to look me straight in the eye. “First Baptist is a larger church, and thought of more highly in the business community, I think it would be good if you’d start going to church there. It would be good for business.” I didn’t say a word. Perhaps he took my silence as an understood compliance, but if he did, he misunderstood me. I wasn’t about to prostitute a worship service for my personal gain. Deep down inside, I knew it was wrong to

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use a worship service to promote a furniture store. Worship has a higher purpose.

Yet, there have been times when I felt that was exactly what I was doing since becoming a pastor—not promoting a furniture store, but promoting a business just the same. Yes, it is the one time when the most people are in the same room and it makes great logistical sense to take advantage of that time to promote the ministries of the church or the church itself. But is promotion worship? No, it's not announcements per se I'm concerned about—I know that in moderation, they are a necessary part of the service—it is a mentality that views the gathering of the people together as an opportunity to build something. Even if what we are building is the Lord's work, can't that mentality turn the worship service into an infomercial?

Sometimes the pressure I feel to become an infomercial host doesn't come from without—it comes from within. Especially when I succumb to the temptation to impress “church shoppers.” The pressure is self-imposed. No one would say, “Now Pastor, I've got some friends coming this week, so you'd better put in a little extra time on the sermon, and make sure the service runs smoothly.” This demon is my own. It isn't a church program I feel like I have to promote—it is the church itself. And to my shame, I'll have to admit that more than once I've been more concerned about what a pro-

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spective member thought about a worship service than what God thought.

“If you’ll join our church, not only will you get a well-educated pastor that is thoughtful, caring, and dynamic, but we’ll throw in a choir that blesses you with their anthems and a youth program that will keep your teenagers off drugs and out of your hair.” Is that the purpose of a worship service? Should I really try impressing “church shoppers” so they’ll come back to the church instead of going to a church down the street with a better pastor, programs, or facilities? Whether I am trying to please a church leader who wants me to promote a program or to impress a prospective church member enough to return, there is a problem. The service has become horizontal in nature—primarily concerned with what people think. To sum it up, that’s the whole problem with a horizontal orientation in worship. It asks the question, “What do people think?” instead of “What does God think?” In horizontal worship, those on the stage are the actors, the people are the audience, and God is a distant observer.

## Prostitution

Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Fellowship in Seattle, calls this mentality “raping American consumerism.” He describes it this way: “Churches are competing against each

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other, trying to gain a larger market share. Since the customer is always right, they do market research, discover their target, then advertise to them and service their needs. It is prostitution, turning the church into whatever the market demands it to be.” Prostitution is a strong word. But if a church ceases to teach what it is supposed to teach just so it can attract more people, the word may not be strong enough. Are we living in the time Paul described in 2 Timothy 4:3? “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (NIV).

In all fairness, the contemporary church didn’t tilt the church to a horizontal orientation; before the seeker movement the traditional church was already horizontal. The traditional church’s focus was on believers’ spiritual needs and curiosity. Great Bible teachers emerged who made the deep truths of the scripture understandable. Churches distinguished themselves from one another by their stands on theological issues and used their worship services to teach their particular views and show why they were “right” and everyone else was “wrong.” In some ways, the traditional church was living out another passage in 2 Timothy: “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7 KJV).

When I was in high school, I met a girl at the drive-in movie theatre and asked her out on a date. She agreed to go out with me, but said her church was in revival so we’d have to

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go after the service. Innocently, I suggested that we go to the revival first and then get something to eat. A big mistake! She had no way of knowing, but the guest preacher spent the evening explaining why the Baptists were wrong and the Church of Christ Churches were right. At the end of the worship service, she was embarrassed and I felt more than a little uncomfortable. The service was hostile. But in all fairness, the same thing could have happened in reverse. Baptist and Church of Christ don't see eye to eye on much, and in those days that's what they talked about when they got together. And it wasn't just a denominational thing. Even within the same groups, issues such as eschatology, predestination, and the gifts divided people. This approach did not resonate with non-Christians who didn't care about the issues or understand the terminology or have a background to interpret the ritual. To them, church was boring, dry, and irrelevant. But that really didn't matter to the traditional church, they weren't really trying to attract non-believers; their services were geared to believers who agreed with them. Occasionally, the church would have evangelistic meetings and encourage the congregation to invite their "lost friends." The mood was a full-throttle, Bible thumping "turn or burn," we're right and you're wrong, aggressive sales pitch. The church thought that if the preacher only could convince the lost people to believe what the Christians believe, then they would become Christians, too.

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Sometimes the tilt toward the believers was so obvious that we were downright rude. When I first started pastoring, if any strangers were in the audience I'd ask them to stand up and introduce themselves to the congregation. The ushers would give them a card that asked for personal information with a red ribbon that could detach from the card for them to put on their lapel so everyone would know they were visiting and could greet them. At the time, I thought we were being friendly, but today I think we were incredibly rude. What a way to treat a guest! Not only did we put them in a room full of strangers, using a language that only the initiated could understand, we also asked them to stand up and speak. Then we asked them for information that was nobody's business and put a lame red ribbon on their lapel so they would stand out like the sore thumb we made them.

### Courtesy

In a strong reaction to the believer orientation of the traditional church, the contemporary church shifted the target of the worship service from the believer to the non-believer. In many ways, it was a needed correction. The church isn't a private club, "for members only." The seeker movement reminded the church that our visitors should be treated as honored guests. There should be signs that direct traffic, greet-

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ers that provide logistical information, clean restrooms, comfortable rooms, adequate child care, and the services should be “user friendly.” These corrections were needed, but the seeker movement didn’t change the horizontal orientation of the service at all; all it did was change the target from believers to non-believers. If all that has happened in the last 20 years is that preachers can wear polo shirts instead of a suit and we sing short songs (contemporary choruses) instead of long songs (hymns) and the atmosphere is casual instead of formal, what was really accomplished? Yes, I’ll be the first to agree that the services shouldn’t have been believer-focused, but neither do I think they should be seeker-focused. Worship services should be God-focused. We need to go vertical!

## Looking Up

When we gather for worship, we stand beside one another in the presence of God. We are the actors and God is the audience. Our focus should be on Him. God’s holy word is not a book of principles for successful living; it is a powerful revelation of redemption, grace, and reconciliation. We don’t gather to promote a program or the church, we gather to worship. And when we do, we express our brokenness before God—“Woe is me,” Isaiah said. We experience grace and celebrate redemption. In song, in dance, in readings, in laughter,

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through tears, we brush up against the grandeur of God, and when we do we are changed—“Here am I,” Isaiah said, “send me.” Believers and non-believers alike need that experience.

A church with a vertical orientation isn't formal or casual. It is intense. Sally Morgenthaller, author of *Worship Evangelism* says, “Worship is fully divine. The church doesn't need to make any apologies for the spiritual content and activity of the worship service. The worship service is also fully human. We ask people to respond to the divine with their right and left brains, with all their senses, and out of their reality.”

It isn't about whether the church uses a praise band or a choir, sings old songs or new ones, dresses up or dresses down. That stuff is all window dressing. A church can use whatever liturgy it chooses, that isn't the point. The point is that worship is all about God. It isn't about the way people dress or what style of music they like. The key question is, are they going horizontal or are they going vertical?

That shift changes the moment worship leaders understand that a worship service has to be a no ego-zone. Worship leaders need to check their egos at the door. How else can God be the focus? Worshipers need their leaders to have the spirit of John the Baptist when he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30 KJV). It isn't about the singers who hold the microphone or the actors who are in the sketch or the preacher in the pulpit or the instrumentalists in the band. All these people are important, but only as a medium that enables

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the worshiper to experience God. But neither is it about the believer or seeker in the audience. Worship is about God who is on His throne.

Making sure it stays that way begins by understanding that the place of worship is a “no ego-zone,” but it also includes sensitivity that there are believers and non-believers present. That doesn’t mean that the church must exclude meaningful ritual, but it does mean that the leaders must explain what they are asking the congregation to do and why they are asking them to do it.

“While connecting with ‘the holy’ is the focus of worship,” says Ron Martoia, Pastor of Westwinds Community Church, “we need to use language that the uninitiated can understand, but we challenge them with the awesome power of God and allow them to navigate that instead of using all their energy to decipher practices and language they don’t understand.” Rituals are important, but not when they become routine. “Rituals are acts of the past, conducted in the present with life-giving meaning,” says Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Fellowship. “Routine is doing what we’ve always done because it’s been here a while.”

It isn’t about the elements of worship either. In the *Future Church*, the human elements of worship include ambience, music, art, dance, drama, film clips, preaching, solitude, reflection, silence, and ritual. Those elements help the worshiper respond to the divine. But all of those elements can

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be present and the church will still miss the mark if it doesn't have a vertical orientation. But when they go full-tilt vertical, it will transform the lives of those who are present, believers and unbelievers alike—because we all need God, and need to worship Him.



“Vintage Christianity”

Clusters of people form a maze in the hallways. Some of them are on their way home after attending the 6:00 service; others are just arriving for the 8:00 service. Their laughter and conversation emit electricity into the air. Inside, the curtains to the elevated stage are closed and portable black curtains surround the perimeter of the large auditorium to give the space an intimate feel. A smaller, temporary stage sits in front, on the same level as the audience with one large PowerPoint screen directly above it and another one on either side of it. The room is dark, giving context for the candles and the images on the screen.

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At Graceland, worship begins the moment you walk in the room. The service is earthy, with plenty of room for worshipers to respond to God's movement. It contains two or three worship sets that feature hymns, original songs, and new releases. Most of the music is loud and celebrative, but some of it is melancholy and pensive. There is space to celebrate God's grace and mercy in community, but there is also freedom to encounter God in solitude. Josh Fox, Graceland's worship leader says, "At some point in the night, I like to have a time where people can just confess stuff." Sometimes, the confession takes place in a thick silence—not an awkward, self-conscious silence, but a silence where the gentle breeze of God's voice speaks. At times, it is easy to forget that anyone else is present—anyone, that is, except God. Some worshipers stand before His presence, others sit in their chairs and quietly bow their heads, still others walk behind the curtains and go into their private "prayer closet" where they are free to be expressive—to bow, sometimes literally, before a Holy God.

What makes Graceland unique isn't the PowerPoint, the music, the art, the candles, or the curtains—it isn't the techniques or the ambiance, it is its spiritual essence. And it begins with the pastor.

When Dan Kimball, the pastor of the "Graceland" church services at Santa Cruz Bible Church, walks to the microphone, he seems like just another guy—he could be any one of the people in attendance. And it's not just his casual dress. A

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preacher can be condescending in a golf shirt as easily as he can in a suit. It's his humble persona. He's a peer preacher—a man preaching to his peers.

Maybe it's because of his journey. A “Jesus freak” witnessed to Kimball on the streets in New Jersey in the late 1970s. “You're going to hell and will perish in a lake of fire if you don't repent,” the man said. Kimball had never heard that before. As a child, his mother did drop him off at a Dutch Reformed Church, the same one George Washington attended, but Kimball never really paid attention. He knelt with the street preacher and received Christ. But Kimball didn't attend church until he graduated from college and started going to a small church in London while playing in an 80s rock-a-billy punk band. Because he didn't have a church background, Kimball didn't understand the church terminology the pastor used, but under the influence of the Bible his life began to change. A year later, he was baptized in the Jordan River. After Kimball's band folded, he headed off to Israel to see the land of the Bible. He joined a Kibbutz, picking grapefruit in the mornings for five dollars a week plus room and board. The rest of the day belonged to him and he spent it reading his Bible and exploring the lands he read about. Later he attended Bible college and seminary, but he spent his formative years in a self-guided, spiritual quest. Kimball relates to his audience. He was one of them. He is one of them.

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Or maybe it's because of his philosophy. In many churches pastors look and act like businessmen, not spiritual "holy men." In his January/February 2002 column for *REV Magazine*, Kimball contrasted the persona of the Christian pastor with Buddhist priests. "As pastors we talk of our busy schedules, and proudly carry our cell phones, Palm Pilots, and laptops, often using modern business lingo to describe church ministry," Kimball says. "And we sure do like using business titles to describe our pastoral roles—such as 'executive pastor,' 'senior pastor,' 'associate pastor,' and 'director of ministries.'" In contrast with the pastor's ethos, people often describe Buddhist leaders as "holy men." When the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan Buddhist leader, visited the Bay Area recently, Kimball observed people's reaction to him. School children described him as "a man of love and peace." Local college students called him "a wise and holy man." Parents brought their children to hear him speak because they said he is "one of the last living symbols of purity and goodness" (*REV Magazine*, Jan/Feb, 2002, p. 78). Unfortunately, many churches are better known for their organization and efficiency than their spirituality. Don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with being organized, but there is something wrong with being spiritually deficient.

The Christian message is inherently spiritual. It will be well-received by a generation seeking a spiritual experience. That's why the church must not strip the message of its spiri-

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tual essence. “Isn’t church the place where people meet God?” Kimball asks. “*The Future Church* is raw—‘here’s Jesus, we’re here to worship Him.’ Emerging generations are looking for spirituality and expect a spiritual experience in a church. We don’t have to hide what we are doing anymore. This is a post-seeker age. It’s back to the basics.” It is “Vintage Christianity.”

Graceland isn’t a church; it is the church services of Santa Cruz Bible Church (SCBC) for the emerging culture. They don’t use the phrase “a church within a church” to describe who they are because that would imply that there are two bodies within one body—a theological impossibility. The average person who attends Santa Cruz Bible Church’s other services probably would describe Graceland as the services where a lot of young people attend—a fairly accurate description—but it is more than that.

### Unplugged

Until the mid-90s, SCBC was doing a full-throttle youth event with high-energy music, colored lights, disco ball, video clips—the works. For the longest time, it was effectively reaching unchurched youth, but by the mid-90s mostly Christian kids were coming and when they graduated from high school they weren’t coming to church anymore. The youth leadership began experimenting during the summers, trying to find a

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way to reach the emerging generations. After exploring several options, they decided to go “unplugged.” They darkened the room, lit some candles, and arranged the chairs in a circle, creating a more “spiritual” environment. The teens, churched and unchurched alike, responded positively to the approach.

Times were changing. During the seeker era, churches were trying to overcome the idea that church was boring and Christianity was irrelevant, so a stage-driven, entertainment-based liturgy emerged. In the post-seeker era, the typical unchurched person doesn't think church is boring—most don't have a clue what church is because they've never been. But they do have an idea who Christians are, and it's mostly negative. Recently, Graceland interviewed several students at University of California Santa Cruz and asked them, “What comes to your mind when you hear the word Jesus?” They had great comments such as “beautiful,” “wonderful,” “good teacher.” Then the interviewers asked the students, “What do you think about Christians?” They responded, “they are angry,” “always blaming people for things;” everything they said was negative.

Changing times demand changing methods. Instead of putting on a “big show” to entertain the youth, the church was learning that they needed to introduce them to the basics of the faith in a raw, stripped-down, spiritual environment. They knew they were on to something, but didn't know what they should do next. Should they plant a new church? Or should they start something within the church that would target the

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age group that was dropping out of the church? After discussion and prayer, in the fall of 1996, SCBC replaced the church's college ministry with "Graceland." Specifically, Graceland targeted people from 18 to 30 who wouldn't normally attend the other services of SCBC but who would relate to the texture of Graceland. Attendance exploded.

Within a year, Graceland grew to around 200 and was expanding beyond its "college ministry" boundaries. When some teens and adults over 30 started attending, they began to learn that the issue wasn't so much about a specific age group as it was about a specific mindset—a post-modern world view. So what should they do? Should they "card" people at the door and turn them away if they didn't fit the initial profile? Or should they welcome whoever came? A year after Graceland began as a college ministry, it became a church service and opened its doors to people of all ages. They began offering communion, baptizing their converts, and receiving offerings. A little over a year later, the service grew to the point where they had to move it from the chapel into the main auditorium, and a year later they went to two services. Today they are discussing the possibility of adding a third service which will meet off-site on Sunday mornings.

Graceland's services have a distinct personality, but they have the same doctrine, elders, and ministries as the Santa Cruz Bible Church. Gracelanders are a part of SCBC and join together with those who attend the other services to minister

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to their church family, their community, and their world. They are definitely one church.

### Reaching the Young, Respecting the Elders

Dan Kimball says, “So many younger churches miss out on the older mentoring the younger. What works well with us being part of Santa Cruz Bible Church is that there are people who lead our small groups that don’t attend Graceland—they love having the young people in their homes. This is a critical thing that the church as a whole needs to do, because we’ve become so compartmentalized.”

In many ways, Kimball stands between two generations. Definitely, he has a passion to reach the emerging generations, but he loves and respects his elders, too. Hanging on his office wall are the pictures of three elderly men, placed side-by-side and mounted in a single frame. On the left is Stuart Allen, the 83-year-old pastor in England that gave Dan his introduction into church life; in the middle is 90-year old Dr. Mitchell, the founder of Multnomah who met with Dan every week while Dan attended seminary; and on the right is his 80-year old father-in-law, Rod Clendenen, who met with Dan every Wednesday night in a mentoring role when Dan first starting attending SCBC.

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“These are guys who made it through their entire lives,” Kimball says. “They finished well. We need to be honoring people with gray hair more. We’re so into just promoting the young, but what about people that walked with God their whole lives?”

Yes, Graceland is predominately younger, but because it is a part of SCBC, Gracelanders are able to interact with other generations in the church’s ministries and in their small groups. “Our home groups are assigned by age, but the leaders are intentionally older,” Kimball says. “When relationships are made, people will hang out together.”

“I like the concept of diverse worship experiences in a church,” Kimball says. “You could have a worship service that is hymns and organ for people who are drawn to that, but that is just a small part of what the church is.” The church is much more than that—it is more than styles and preferences and textures of services. Kimball says, “We over-estimate the value of putting on a really cool, funky weekend thing. Graceland can have 900 people there, but that doesn’t mean it is authentic [worship].” Worship isn’t a performance or a techno-demonstration—it is connecting with God—it is a spiritual experience. “It’s not whether we are using art in the service, it is whether we are making disciples,” Kimball says. Really, the church is much more than its services. “We are placing more value on what happens during the week—things like how many people are in home groups, how many go down and

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feed the homeless on Friday nights, and how many come to the prayer meetings.”

Graceland is a place where people enter a community and encounter God’s love in others, where they experience God through worship, explore truth in the scriptures and express their faith to the world around them. It isn’t “cool” Christianity, “techno” Christianity or “artsy” Christianity—it is “vintage Christianity.” “We need to be heartbroken over people, and we need to weep for them, and educate other Christians to do the same,” Kimball says. “Hopefully, we’re creating a culture where people can fall in love with God and His word, and are developing disciples who are ‘self-feeders,’ going deep into the word, saturating their mind with its pages and embodying its teachings to the world. People who pray. People who are really in love with God.”

At Graceland, they are calling on their people to be holy—to be “Vintage” Christians.



