

The Rector's Reflections

by The Rev. Dr. Gregory A. Tournoux, Rector
Christ Episcopal Church, Springfield, Illinois



Over the past six months, we've been discussing the evangelization of Post-moderns through holistic cell groups. Lastmonth, I introduced the Upward, Inward, Outward, and Forward values of God's Kingdom. We'll begin a more in-depth discussion of the Upward value this month.

Upward

History has carried the culture into a world which is Postmodern. Increasingly in this pre-Christian society the human community is marked by a:

High percentage of unchurched; family fragmentation; lives that are out of control; increasing number of victims; more and more stress; lack of genuine relationships; loss of "small town" community; need for authenticity; [and] desire to make a tangible difference (Robert E. Logan and Thomas T. Clegg, *Releasing Your Church's Potential*, 7-3).

Consequently, the Upward value (Mark 12:30) of focusing on and experiencing the living presence of Jesus Christ in a cell group (Matthew 18:20), is powerfully evangelistic for this troubled Postmodern era. How can this be?

First, the parts of a healthy cell group will always contain an empty chair. The empty chair serves as an outward and visible sign that a group is continually open to other persons who are pre-Christians. Lyman Coleman writes:

Place an empty chair in the group as a constant reminder that your group is open to others: who are on their way back to God; who are hurting and need a place to belong; [and] who are hungry for spiritual fellowship . . . An empty chair: the highest and most beautiful form of evangelism (Lyman Coleman, *Serendipity Training Manual – 6 Sessions – Basic Training for Small Group Leaders*, 24).

Furthermore, without question, the building of God's kingdom on earth through the church is God's work (I Corinthians 3:1-15). Dale Galloway writes:

Prayer is the breadth and depth of a Christian life. Every study of growing churches reveals that the dynamic churches—where it's happening—have in common the fact that prayer has a central place in their ministry.

No church can begin to accomplish what God is calling them to do without a power center of prayer. It's simple. You cannot do God's work without God. Yet, so many of us keep trying to do it on our own (Dale E. Galloway, *20/20 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church*, 57).

Moreover, praying for Postmodern pre-Christians to fill the empty chair cannot be underestimated. After all, the Bible teaches, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). When cell group members, individually or in the context of the cell, steadfastly pray (Acts 2:42; I Thessalonians 5:17) for their list of Postmodern friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors (F.R.A.N. Network) with the intent of inviting them to the cell, the Holy Spirit works in the pre-Christian's heart preparing his/her heart to respond in an open and positive manner to the invitation of attending a cell experience. Once again, Dale Galloway makes a keen observation:

Where do people come from? Build your prospect list by writing down anyone and everyone you can think of as a prospective member. In our set up, we have the prospective leader or leaders meet with the District Pastor and work at building the prospect list together. In our church we have thousands of prospects who are divided on our mailing list into the zip

codes. Most of those starting a new TLC group can receive almost unlimited prospects from the District Pastor and work at building the prospect list together. In our church we have thousands of prospects who are divided on our mailing list into the zip codes. Most of those starting a new TLC group can receive almost unlimited prospects from the District Pastor, taken from the mailing list of the people [sic] who live in that zip code.

However people are not required to attend a Tender Loving Care group in their particular zip code area. The leader may invite anyone whom God has laid on his heart.

Here is the three-part formula that will work every time: build-up your prospect list—pray your prospect list—and work your prospect list (Dale E. Galloway, *20/20 Vision: How to Create a Successful Church*, 150).

Join me next month as I continue discussing the Upward Value of God's kingdom.

Faithfully in Jesus Christ,

Greg J