



EQUIPPER

The monthly e-magazine from the Church Administration and Development team of Grace Communion International.

December 2012

Volume 7, Issue 12

MinDev.gci.org

Dear preacher of good news:

This month, we celebrate Advent and look toward a new year, rejoicing in the stunning *good news* that Jesus is Immanuel (God-with-us).

In worshipful amazement, we look back at the miracle of our Lord's Incarnation leading to his birth in Bethlehem nearly 2,000 years ago. We also face our present circumstances and peer into the future, grounded in the sure knowledge that the Incarnation was not a temporary arrangement, but the permanent union of God with humanity. That, as we know, is *great good news* for all people!



As 2012 ends, I want to express heartfelt thanks to you for faithfully proclaiming and exemplifying this good news. It is a high calling to participate with Jesus in what he is doing, through the Spirit, to share the good news with the world. Jesus not only *proclaims* the good news, he *is* the good news, made present through his incarnate life and ministry.

We sometimes hear people urge the practice of ministry that is "incarnational." By that, they mean relational ministry. That is fine, though this idea can leave the false impression that we are called to "be Jesus to people," as though Jesus was far away and had sent us in his place.

However, the good news is that Jesus is not far away and our ministry is not one of standing in for him. Rather, in ministry we stand *with* Jesus, sharing actively in what he is doing through the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Father's mission.

I thank God for the growth in understanding that he has granted us, and for the relational, gospel-focused ministry that flows from that understanding. Let us join in committing ourselves to ministry with Jesus in 2013.

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Serving with Christ and you,

Dan Rogers

Director, GCI Church Administration and Development, USA

PS. The entire CAD team joins me in wishing you and yours a joy-filled Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Catalyzing Christian Community

by Ted Johnston, CAD ministry developer

As we look toward a new year, a fruitful leadership exercise is to gather your team to consider what you will do in 2013 to join with Jesus as he works in the world, through the Spirit, to gather God's children into *Christian community*.

Eric Byrant, in a recent Eli Church Planting blog post, refers to this as “catalyzing community” (read his post at www.elichurchplanting.com/2011/12/7-ways-to-catalyze-community/). I like his way of viewing ministry as fundamentally relational and community-oriented, and his definition of the outcome of ministry as helping people experience what the Apostles Creed calls “the communion of saints.” Though Christian community is not the *source* or *cause* of our salvation (only God saves), it is within Christian community that people experience and thus are enabled to live out the salvation they have in Christ.

So what will you and your congregation be doing in 2013 to be a church that reaches out to draw into Christian community those children of God not yet in such community, and then help those who are “grow deeper”? Bryant offers the following seven principles (which I have adapted slightly):

- **Cause creates community**
Do your leaders and members understand that a focus on God's mission (our “cause” as Christians) powerfully creates (catalyzes) community? A shared mission draws people together!
- **Meet the needs of those around you**
Does your congregation seek to meet the physical, emotional, economic and spiritual needs of those around you? Does the environment you provide facilitate change in the individuals you are reaching? A key issue for every congregation is having clarity concerning their outreach “focus group.”
- **Reach out with hospitality**
Hospitality means loving strangers. A similar word, “hospice,” means “a safe place.” Are our homes, businesses and churches safe places where strangers experience kindness and love?
- **Develop authentic friendships**
Are we loving, serving and influencing our family, neighbors, co-workers and friends? Jesus was a “friend of sinners”—willing to ruin his reputation to reach out to others who were far from God.
- **Allow people to first belong, then believe and become**
Are we allowing our convictions to become a litmus test for friendship? Or are we joining with Jesus in actively pursuing friendships with all sorts of people – including those with whom we may disagree. The message we want to send to people is this: “Come as you are, and you don't have to stay that way!”
- **Multiply leaders for the harvest**
In raising up new leaders (including your own replacement) do you think in terms of leaders who will be able to catalyze community with people beyond your church? Make decisions based on who is not yet here rather than simply who has been here the longest.

A related resource that we in CAD find quite helpful in addressing these issues is the book *Transformational Church* by Ed Stetzer and Thom Rainer. We urge you to read it in 2013 if you have not done so already. We also recommend *Missional (joining God in the neighborhood)* by Alan Roxburgh.

May your journey with Christ in 2013 be fruitful in blessing many!