

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6: 16)

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THE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Gary McDade

PREFACE

It is an honor and privilege for me to know and serve with Gary McDade. He and I, along with John Shannon, the evangelist for the James Road Church of Christ, have labored together on the "Friend of Truth" television program for several years in Memphis, Tennessee.

Gary is a Christian gentleman who speaks the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). I appreciate Gary for being faithful and fearless in the proclamation and defense of New Testament Christianity (II Tim. 4:1-2; Phil. 1:17). He earnestly desires to speak "the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4:11). And, his willingness to preach "the whole counsel of God" serves as a great example to all who preach or aspire to preach (Acts 20:27).

While the Community Church concept is garnering attention and gaining momentum among some of our brethren, Gary has done an invaluable service by analyzing this movement in light of God's holy and inspired word (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Pet. 1:3-4; I Thess. 5:21). In compliance with Romans 16:17-18, Gary marks those who are propagating the movement and isolates their pattern for change. This monumental work seeks to stem the tide of digression among us and uphold the pristine beauty of the New Testament church, the body of Christ.

I humbly commend this publication to all who read it. May God be glorified and his church unified through the truth (Eph. 3:21; Jn. 17:20-23).

*Mike Hixson
Memphis, Tennessee*

FOREWORD

The Community Church has invaded churches of Christ as a movement permeating into the body of Christ from market-approach driven denominational churches weary of lagging attendance and faltering financial support. The models being followed by

those enamored with the Community Church approach to church organization and methodology being Willow Creek and Saddleback have become well known within denominational circles, but the churches of Christ to this point in time have seen little in print on them. Reviews of the Community Church movement have fallen behind in regard to bibli-

cal refutation of the error it presents. This tract attempts to fill that seeming void.

This material has been placed into tract form for ease of disbursement. Much of this material earlier has appeared in lectureship books, brotherhood papers, and bulletin articles, but the compact size and focused content of a tract may be more easily handed out to those who question what the Community Church movement is within churches of Christ. Already requests have come for information to give friends and relatives in other states experiencing the drastic changes which attend the movement that shows something of its origins and dangers.

The names of those leading the brethren into the Community Church movement have been supplied without trepidation. It is not enough to acknowledge the disturbing of the brotherhood in general and faithful congregations in particular by the Community Church movement. In order to expunge its evil influence from churches of Christ someone needs to be specific about the people, institutions, and congregations of the churches of Christ who are advancing the departure from heaven's way. This task is lovingly undertaken in the pages which follow. Ample endnotes document the evidence presented so the reader personally may investigate the exposure.

Perhaps the departure, especially of the younger Christians, into the

Community Church movement can be stemmed by making the information of its origin, nature, and current expression within churches of Christ available. Whatever the future holds for the Community Church movement among churches of Christ know this, a valiant army of faithful brethren, preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, and members alike, who follow no captain other than Jesus Christ (Heb. 2:10) unflinchingly are standing in defense of the soul saving gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:17).

Gary McDade
Memphis, Tennessee

THE COMMUNITY CHURCH

THE COMMENCEMENT

In New Testament times doctrinal error tended to crystallize around specific groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Judaizers and around specific individuals like Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermongenes, Alexander the copper-smith, and Diotrephes. It is no different today. This investigation will expose the doctrinal error that has crystallized around the Community Church as this form of religious expression is being adopted by some churches of Christ and some specific congregations and individuals who are the source of the problem. Additionally, an approximation of the current size and apparent strength of the movement will be offered.

God inspired men to warn the church of imminent danger in the first century. Today, those who follow the apostles' doctrine will too. The Ephesians' elders were told, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:28-31).

The Holy Spirit has informed the church that in the latter times some will depart from the faith. Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in


Instead of accepting and following the Divine pattern, the word of God, the manmade Community Church pattern has been substituted. In most cases the same brethren who consistently have rejected following the word of God as a pattern, stressing that strict conformity to it constitutes legalism, ironically have replaced the word of God with the Community Church pattern and are meticulously loyal to it.


hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Tim. 4:1-2). It is particularly sad when many of the ones departing from the faith have been friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and even family members. This pain should yield voices of concern not sheepish silence.

THE CORRECT PATTERN

A pattern is "a form or model proposed for imitation." [1] The use of the word as it appears in the New Testament received twenty-five pages of attention in Goebel Music's book **Behold The Pattern**. [2] A summation of the pattern as used in the New Testament suggests, "The

gospel is the mould; those who are obedient to its teachings become conformed to Christ...Christian teaching as a mould and norm.... In context, the teaching can be described as the mould and norm which shapes the whole personal conduct of the one who is delivered up to it and has become obedient thereto." In short, it is "an example to be copied." [3] The apostle Paul urged conformity to Christ not the world in Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

The Epistle to the Romans not only affirms that a pattern or form exists which God has carefully planned and announced through the gospel of Christ but that this pattern must be obeyed. Paul said, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:16-18). In the life of a faithful Christian, a "pattern of good works" must emerge (Titus 2:7). An abiding conviction of these truths should promote the proper response of earnestly contending for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

THE CORRUPT PATTERN

Instead of accepting and following the Divine pattern, the word of God, the manmade Community Church pattern has been substituted. In most cases the same brethren who consistently have rejected following the word of God as a pattern, stressing that strict conformity to it constitutes legalism, ironically have replaced the word of God with the Community Church pattern and are meticulously loyal to it. In following the false pattern of the Community Church these brethren have

espoused that which they formerly renounced, that is, the validity of following a specific form of doctrine or teaching.

THE CONCEPTION OF THE CORRUPT PATTERN

One of the sources from which this departure from the truth comes is a book written in 1992 by Rubel Shelly and Lipscomb University professor Randy Harris entitled, **The Second Incarnation**. In a review exposing this diatribe, Curtis Cates wrote under the heading, “No Pattern Exists For The Church:”

This latest philosophy of brethren Shelly and Harris demands that one abandon the “deep rut” error that the New Testament is a pattern for the church; they reject that pattern. They write that man seeks a “paradigm for imitation,” which they will give in their book, they say (p. 5); yet, they write, “We reject a rigid ‘pattern theology’” (p. 31). Anyone can see that this is double-talk. I take it that they feel that putting such self-contradictions far enough apart in their book will disguise these opposing, irreconcilable, and unbelievable statements from the readers; however, one recognizes that the word “paradigm” means pattern! Are they saying God will not / does not give a pattern but they will? How presumptuous! We are not fooled; we will not follow these blind leaders in rejecting the New Testament pattern to concoct a “paradigm” of their own.[4]

The catechizing effect of **The Second Incarnation** by Shelly and Harris is proven by an example which appeared in the church bulletin from “The Family of God at Brownsville Road, a Church of Christ.” The pulpit minister there, Mark Claypool, wrote an article titled, “A Tale Of Two Churches” in which he contrasted two imagined churches, one called the “Institutional Church of Christ” and the other called the “Incarnational Church of Christ.” In the article, following the New Testament pattern of organization is castigated while following the incarnational model as suggested by such heretics as Shelly and Harris is elevated to sublime heights. “A Tale Of Two Churches” is a story told in epic tradition, but the caustic criticism of the New Testament pattern

is painfully plain.[5] Therefore, it becomes clear that brethren are following some form of doctrine as a pattern to be imitated. Whether the pattern followed is the New Testament or a manmade pattern, a discernable, identifiable system of teaching is being followed. In the former instance, the churches of Christ are emerging; in the latter case, denominational churches are emerging.

THE CENTER OF THE CORRUPT PATTERN

Handbook Of Denominations In The United States written and edited by the late Frank S. Mead is a classic work on the subject and was revised in 1995 by Samuel S. Hill. The entry on the Community Church bears the heading, “Community Churches, International Council Of.”[6] Community Churches began around the mid 1800s and nationally were organized first in 1923. The historical Community Church presently has about 250,000 members in about 400 churches. The **Handbook** says, “...Each church is adjusted to the needs of a different community,” so “...there is much variety among Community Churches...” What is of particular interest in searching for the background of the Community Church pattern that is the source of much unrest in churches of Christ today is the stated purpose of the historical Community Church. Again, the **Handbook** says,

...These churches are a result of the desire to eliminate overchurching [sic] in some communities and solve attendant economic and staffing problems; to replace the restrictiveness and divisiveness of denominationalism with self-determination and Christian unity; to refocus primary loyalty from organizations outside a community to the community itself and, by addressing specific needs there, to effect a more relevant religion.

It appears that a historical Community Church is a freelance denominational church which may or may not have national or international ties with others of the denomination. Therefore, the earliest traceable roots of the Community Church pattern are sunk deep in unrestricted

denominationalism with a needs-based approach that seeks “to effect a more relevant religion” than is offered in main line denominationalism. However, the historic Community Church lacks the glamour and appeal of the megachurch model furnished by the contemporary pattern for the Community Church.

THE CONTEMPORARY CORRUPT PATTERN

The danger and propensity of preferring and following man’s way over God’s is a theme thoughtful students of the Bible readily recognize. The Messiah was mandated because man has a tendency to go astray from God’s way. Isaiah wrote, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). Jeremiah said, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). And, the Proverbs teach, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12). Down through the history of man one truth is consistent and that is that man is not consistent in obeying God’s will.

A reminder of a well-known departure from the truth will help establish the reason for the concern at hand over the Community Church pattern now being espoused. Two decades ago a movement threatened the churches of Christ on a worldwide scale. Today it is known as International Churches of Christ which is the Multiplying Ministry of the Boston Church of Christ. Then it was first known as the Crossroads movement out of Gainesville, Florida. Now it is headed up by Kip McKean, then it was spearheaded by Chuck Lucas. The hotbed of the movement was college campuses across the country, especially those where local churches of Christ drew attendance from the respective student bodies. Young people displaced from their families were subjected to nothing less than rudimentary mind control tactics from savvy Campus Ministers. The hurt suffered by the bride of Christ is now legendary. But, the source of the pain was discovered and revealed just as the Community

Church pattern is now being exposed. Perhaps informed brethren will recall **The Master Plan Of Evangelism** written by Robert E. Coleman. It was first published by this Nazarene preacher in 1963 and by 1982 boasted a circulation of more than three million copies and translation into more than seventy languages. It provided the basis for the movement. It is the essence of the writings of Milton Lee Jones, a member of the Church of Christ whose little books have brought “The Master Plan” into the Lord’s church far and wide. Coleman’s little 126 page book has been sufficient to inject the body of Christ with a poison lethal enough to kill entire congregations in various places around the world. Just as the source for the Crossroads/Multiplying Ministry or International Churches of Christ error was isolated in the early to mid 1980’s, even so the source for the Community Church pattern needs to be isolated today so the error it espouses can be fully exposed and defeated.

The background development of the Community Church pattern emerges out of the so called new hermeneutic or unity-in-diversity movement that has enjoyed widespread acceptance. The new hermeneutic was discovered to be nothing more than a rejection of understanding that the Bible authorizes by means of direct commands, apostolic examples, and implication. Those who became embroiled in the new hermeneutic had no standard to follow. Dominant personalities set the pace. But, even among the likes of Rubel Shelly, Randy Harris, Carroll Osburn, Mike Cope, Jeff Walling, and Lynn Anderson no system to tie the movement together was suggested to replace the one they rejected. These men knew that just as soon as their new system of supposed Bible interpretation was presented to the brotherhood that allowed the things for which they stood, such as open fellowship with the denominations, corruption of the worship, and a virtual eradication of evangelism, they would be taken to task just as scholars among us like Curtis Cates have done in refuting Shelly’s **Second Incarnation** and Osburn’s **Peaceable Kingdom** to name only two. It

does not take long for departures from the truth to crystallize around personalities or favorite teachings. Paul illustrated this in First Corinthians chapter one at verses twelve and thirteen, “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” To young Timothy Paul said,


The singing, dancing, and dramatic skits performed at Willow Creek have all the color and pizzazz of a Broadway show. Rubel Shelly’s church has recently employed a minister responsible for planning and presenting dramatic skits for the worship services of the Woodmont Family of God. Ruble’s [sic] church is a “bootleg” version of the Chicago denomination. His insufferable ego drives him to leave the impression that he is the “genius” who has created this new model (paradigm).


“...Charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (I Tim. 1:3b). John wrote of “the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” in Revelation 2:15. At least part of this new hermeneutic or unity-in-diversity movement has now crystallized into the Community Church pattern.

The model or pattern for the contemporary Community Church advancing beyond the historical Community Church is the Willow Creek Community Church in South

Barrington, Illinois. The pastor, promoter, and prelate of this megachurch is Bill Hybels. It has been featured on the Public Broadcasting Station as the wave of the future in religion. Its methods are promoted in seminars which broadly are advertized across the nation. Prominent preachers in churches of Christ like Wayne Kilpatrick have visited Willow Creek Community Church and returned to sing its praises.[7] “Change agents” within the churches of Christ today publicly have stimulated interest in the Willow Creek model. (The term “change agents” aptly was coined by brother William Woodson in his book exposing their agenda titled **Change Agents and Churches of Christ, A Study in Contemporary Problems with Change Agents Among Churches of Christ**; Athens, Alabama: School of Bible Emphasis, 1994). How prominent are these “change agents?” Dr. Gary Holloway is Director of Graduate Bible at David Lipscomb University, now Lipscomb University, Bible Department in Nashville, Tennessee. J.E. Choate, who has performed a valuable service in utilizing his vast historical knowledge of the restoration movement to provide both accuracy and truthfulness in articles which challenge the perilous putrefaction of the “change agents,” wrote in the **Yokefellow**, September 16, 1996, about a paper Holloway read in May of 1995 before the Disciples of Christ Historical Society which later was published in **Discipliana**. He said,

Dr. Gary Holloway presented his proposals for this new denomination before an assembly of the radical Disciples of Christ whose pulpits are open to gays, liberals, etc. Does Holloway think to gain favor with DLU alumni and patrons when these facts become know [sic] to the rank and file of the churches of Christ?

The first option: The Willow Creek Community Church model based in the Chicago area is presented as the first of three options proposed to replace the apostolic pattern. This is the “razzle dazzle hoopla” type of high church entertainment with brass bands, special music, dramatic skits, etc.[8]

J.E. Choate further has written, “We are familiar to some extent with the contemporary ‘church growth’

models which are finding their way into post modern Churches of Christ in Nashville. They are the number one choice Willow Creek Community Church....”[9] In this same article written in April of 1998 brother Choate said,

Only the Hendersonville Community Church elects to fly aloft the “Community Church” banner first lofted by Bill Hybels. However, the worship and practices of the Woodmont Hill [sic] Family of God more closely imitate the worship spectacles of Willow Creek. Other Nashville churches in the contemporary worship services also feed at the trough of Bill Hybels’ Willow Creek Cult.

Choate also suggested an insight into the meaning of contemporary worship and its source:

The best way to understand what goes on in the “contemporary worship services” in post modern Churches is to look again toward Willow Creek. Whatever the popular evangelical theology of the Chicago based Willow Creek church is, a major emphasis is on entertainment.

The singing, dancing, and dramatic skits performed at Willow Creek have all the color and pizzazz of a Broadway show. Rubel Shelly’s church has recently employed a minister responsible for planning and presenting dramatic skits for the worship services of the Woodmont Family of God. Ruble’s [sic] church is a “bootleg” version of the Chicago denomination. His insufferable ego drives him to leave the impression that he is the “genius” who has created this new model (paradigm).[10]

THE CORRUPT PATTERN CLOSE BY

The presence of the Community Church in Memphis is directly attributable to two institutions: The Harding Graduate School of Religion and the Highland Street Church of Christ. **Mission: Memphis**, a quarterly newsletter for the Memphis Church Planting Ministry which is sponsored by Highland Street Church of Christ, in the winter of 1997 told of its beginning,

In the spring of 1994, a group of leaders from Highland Street church of Christ studied the need to establish new churches in Memphis. The result of the two and a half year

investigation was the forming of the Memphis Church Planting Ministry (MCPM) whose purpose is to reach the spiritually lost in Memphis by forming new, reproducing congregations.

So, Highland Street’s two and a half year study of the need to establish new churches resulted in the establishment of a new organization called the Memphis Church Planting Ministry (MCPM) which is led by a full-time coordinator/church planter by the name of Ron Cook. Ron Cook’s unabashed affinity for denominationalism is presented in **Mission: Memphis** when he said, “Growing denominations are planting churches; denominations that have reached a plateau or are on the decline are not planting churches.” When denominations are used as the pattern, it sounds like the way of the MCPM is the only way to keep from declining. It certainly is a wonder that any churches ever came into existence in Memphis before the MCPM was organized. Observe, the way the apostles “planted” churches in the first century was by preaching the gospel of Christ as is recorded within the inspired Book of Acts, but the Coordinator/Church Planter of the MCPM has a better model after which to pattern. And, what is that pattern? Growing denominations. Is an undisguised appreciation for denominationalism really present within the MCPM? Hear the Coordinator/Church Planter once more from the pages of **Mission: Memphis**, “Thank God for...the Frayser Christian Church who have provided free use of their classrooms for three months of weekly group Bible study.” What churches has the MCPM “planted?” The Raleigh Community Church of Christ was the first plant and the Frayser Community Church of Christ was next. The MCPM is not essential to the emergence of these denominational Community Churches because Highland Street had already “planted” the Downtown Church. Perhaps the reason the MCPM does not claim the Downtown Church as its own creation is because that is a “planting” also conceived by the Harding Graduate School of Religion.

The details of the origin of the Downtown Church in Memphis were applauded in **Harding**, public rela-

tions magazine for Harding University, in the summer of 1995. The abstract for the article in the table of contents read, “The church in the hood. Plant a church in inner-city Memphis? Six students from the Graduate School of Religion have done just that — and they’ve moved in to make a difference.” Scott Morris wrote the article which said, “The impetus behind the forming of this congregation in downtown Memphis is Dr. Evertt Huffard, professor of missions at the Graduate School.... Most recently, Huffard has helped to oversee the development of a new master of religion degree in urban ministry for the Graduate School.” The Downtown Church has borrowed from denominationalism by employing the use of a praise team to replace the song leader, the clapping of hands during the singing, the presence of icons in worship, and testimonials from the congregation. Again, Morris said in the article,

Offsetting the harsh realities they face in their world, the church members recently joined together to add a touch of serenity to the inside of their building. They painted a mural that represents to them the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It serves as their focal point during worship services. Designed by a young child, the mural features a 25-foot cross on which hangs the crucified body of Christ. The body is painted a variety of colors, symbolizing that Christ was a man for all people.

Morris added, “The worship assembly includes a time of testimony during which members express their thanks for things most people take for granted.” The Lord’s supper (I Cor. 11) is given by Christ through the apostles’ doctrine to remind and represent the death of Christ, not a 25-foot mural like the Catholic Church has promoted to the elimination of the truth of God for centuries. The word of God is to be preached in the worship (II Tim. 4:2), not the personal testimonies of the people like the denominations have used for years to heighten the emotions of those assembled (II Cor. 10:12). The pattern followed by these churches clearly is not the New Testament but the Community Church pattern.

The fact that the intention to continue to follow the Community

Church pattern is present may be realized in yet another article in **Mission: Memphis** (Spring 1998),

Raleigh Community Church was started through the cooperation of churches. Boulevard Church made a financial contribution and offered volunteers. An area-wide fundraising [sic] dinner, also organized by the Boulevard Church, was attended by Christians from numerous congregations. Southeast Church offered advice from church planting experience. The Downtown Church loaned folding chairs and helped with a workday. Highland Street Church, the sponsoring congregation, provided oversight, some working fund and supplies. Highland's Women's Ministry donated resources through a baby shower for the "baby church." Singers from the Chelsea [sic] Avenue Church held a special concert to encourage Raleigh Community members and inspire seekers. The story of the new Frayser church plant will be the same.

While it is disturbing that such activities could ever once take place by those who were affiliated with the churches of Christ, the foreboding is exceeded in the promise contained within the last sentence, "The story of the new Frayser church plant will be the same." The collection for the saints (I Cor. 16:1-2) was augmented by "an area-wide fundraising [sic] dinner." The apostate Southeast Church offered its corrupt advice from its sad experience in departing from the truth. Highland's Women's Ministry gave a baby shower to the "baby church." And, the church choir from Chelsea Avenue supplanted the congregational singing the word of God ordained (Eph. 5:19) for the purpose of encouraging and inspiring seekers to follow them into denominationalism. Then the grand announcement, "The story of the new Frayser church plant will be the same."

Six Community Churches that remain affiliated with churches of Christ currently have a presence in Memphis and vicinity. They are the Downtown Church, the Southeast Church, the Raleigh Community Church of Christ, the Frayser Community Church of Christ, the Cordova Community Church, and the Wonder City Church of Christ in West Memphis, Arkansas. The Cor-

dova Community Church illustrates a point that was made earlier. The presence of the Community Church in Memphis is attributable to two institutions: The Harding Graduate School of Religion and the Highland Street Church of Christ. It was begun by John Mark Hicks, professor of Christian doctrine at the Harding Graduate School of Religion, and Gary Ealy, member of the


*In the rage for large numbers of people and dollars, perhaps the motivation to follow as a pattern a book like **The Purpose Driven Church** is suggested in its "Part Four: Bringing In A Crowd." The heart of the success of the model is to target the type of people desired in the church and stylize the church to fit them.*


Highland Street Church of Christ in October of 1997 with its first worship for the public April 12, 1998, on what was billed as Easter Sunday following denominational doctrine. The new group meets in the facilities of Harding Academy, which is sponsored by churches of Christ throughout the Memphis area. Hicks and Ealy authored "A Theological and Strategic Statement for a New Church Planting" for this Community Church which contains overall fourteen items of their unique creed. Like almost all creedal treatises written by men, theirs contains some elements of truth and many elements of error. Jesus Christ said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Two excellent, scholarly articles recently have appeared in the **Yokefellow** published by the Memphis School of Preaching and written by Mike Hix-

son, preacher for the Macon Road Church of Christ in Memphis, which devastate the error advocated by Hicks and Ealy (Sept. 4, 1998; Oct. 21, 1998).

One service Ealy and Hicks unwittingly have rendered is to reveal the source upon which they are dependent for their Community Church. It is the wildly popular book written by Rick Warren, a Southern Baptist preacher, titled **The Purpose Driven Church**. This book is to the Community Church Movement what **The Master Plan of Evangelism** was to the Crossroads/Multiplying Ministries Movement or International Churches of Christ. The "Foreword" indicates what may be produced from following the pattern of **The Purpose Driven Church**,

In 1980, Rick graduated from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and moved with his wife to southern California to begin Saddleback Church in the living room of their home. He began with just one family. Now, fifteen years later, Saddleback Valley Community Church is recognized as the fastest-growing Baptist church in the history of America. It averages over 10,000 people in worship attendance each week on a beautiful, spacious seventy-four-acre campus. This is sufficient evidence that Rick Warren knows whereof he speaks. In 1995, Saddleback was selected as the Key Church of the Year by the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.[11]

In the rage for large numbers of people and dollars, perhaps the motivation to follow as a pattern a book like **The Purpose Driven Church** is suggested in its "Part Four: Bringing In A Crowd." The heart of the success of the model is to target the type of people desired in the church and stylize the church to fit them. Warren wrote,

For your church to be most effective in evangelism you must decide on a target. Discover what types of people live in your area, decide which of those groups your church is best equipped to reach, and then discover which styles of evangelism best match your target. While your church may never be able to reach everyone, it is especially suited to reaching certain types of people. Knowing who

you're trying to reach makes evangelism much easier.[12]

Notice how the pattern of **The Purpose Driven Church** breaks with the pattern of the word of God. Jesus Christ taught that the word of God is the good seed of the kingdom that is to be sown into the hearts of men (Luke 8:4-18). God is the one who determines the increase, and the sowing of the seed places one as a "laborer together with God" (I Cor. 3:6-9). The great commission is preaching and teaching the gospel to every creature not just to those who fit a preferential "demographic" and "psychographic" profile. James taught, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:9-10). The type of people Rick Warren's church is trying to reach are described in his book.

...We've named our composite profile "Saddleback Sam." ...We discuss him in detail in every membership class.... His age is late thirties or early forties.... He is well educated. He likes his job. He likes where he lives. Health and fitness are high priorities for him and his family. He'd rather be in a large group than a small one. He is skeptical of "organized" religion. He likes contemporary music. He thinks he is enjoying life more than he did five years ago. He is self-satisfied, even smug, about his station in life. He prefers the casual and informal over the formal. He is overextended in both time and money.[13]

While the Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California is desirous of drawing that sort of smug individual, the word of God teaches, "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:6-7). And, Jesus spoke of the essentiality of humility for those who would entertain the notion of eternal life, "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

The word of God transforms the

life of the believer. Paul strongly made this point when he said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:1-3). No one is added to the kingdom of God who will not willingly submit himself to the righteousness of God. Again, observe the teaching of the Bible on this point, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3).

But, proof that brethren Ealy and Hicks have patterned the Cordova Community Church after **The Purpose Driven Church** model needs to be presented. First, in their "Strategic Statement" they wrote, *This new church plant will target the younger generation of Baby-Boomers (1955-61) and the whole of "Generation X" also known as the Baby-Busters (1962-82). This is the first "Post-Christian" generation. They have experienced the breakdown of their homes, corruption in government, and a materialistic society. Cordova is populated by this generation and they are mainly married couples with young children.[14]*

The Purpose Driven Church is not unique in suggesting targeting a group to evangelize, but clearly it is integral to the pattern it proposes.

Second, in their "Strategic Statement" they follow **The Purpose Driven Church** model which calls for structured levels from large groups down to "cell" groups. Again, they wrote,

The first level is the celebration level.

Here the church gathers weekly as a whole body to worship. It celebrates the work of God in Christ and it laments the fall [sic] of the world....

The second level is the fellowship level.... The third level is the cell. This is the heart of the "cell church" structure, and it is where the intimate ministry of the church is conducted. This is a small group of 8-16 adults who gather weekly to share, pray and study the Bible. The group serves both the relational and spiritual needs of its members, and it seeks to evangelize friends and acquaintances through their group meetings. This would serve as the primary point of entrance into the body, and it would be the primary environment in which Christians would care for each other.

The church plant will begin with a set of trained core members who will lead various home cell groups. These cell groups will provide the context for and means by which new members will be assimilated and equipped for ministry.[15]

The Purpose Driven Church discussed "The Core" members, "The 'Core' is the smallest group, because it represents the deepest level of commitment. They are the dedicated minority of workers and leaders, those who are committed to ministering to others." [16] Compare **The Purpose Driven Church's** explanation of the "cell" groups with the "Strategic Statement" of Ealy and Hicks:

One of the sayings I quote to our staff and lay leaders repeatedly is, "Our church must always be growing larger and smaller at the same time." By that I mean there must be a balance between the large group celebrations and the small-group cells. Both are important to the health of a church.

Large group celebrations give people the feeling that they are a part of something significant. They are impressive to unbelievers and encouraging to our members. But you can't share personal prayer requests in the crowd. Small affinity groups, on the other hand, are perfect for creating a sense of intimacy and close fellowship. It's there that everybody knows your name. When you are absent, people notice.[17]

Third, in **The Purpose Driven**

Church Rick Warren gave a copy of a letter he sent out to the Saddleback area of Orange County, California. This letter is reproduced in its entirety followed by a letter Ealy and Hicks mailed out to the Cordova area. The letters are the same, only the names have been changed thereby proving the Cordova Community Church's dependence on **The Purpose Driven Church** as a pattern or model to be followed.

March 20, 1980
Hi Neighbor!

AT LAST!

A new church designed for those who've given up on traditional church services! Let's face it. Many people aren't active in church these days.

WHY?

Too often...

- The sermons are boring and don't relate to daily living
- Many churches seem more interested in your wallet than you
- Members are unfriendly to visitors
- You wonder about the quality of the nursery care for your children

Do you think attending church should be enjoyable?

WE'VE GOT GOOD NEWS FOR YOU!

SADDLEBACK VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH is a new church designed to meet your needs in the 1980s. We're a group of friendly, happy people who have discovered the joy of the Christian lifestyle.

At Saddleback Valley Community Church you

- Meet new friends and get to know your neighbors
- Enjoy upbeat music with a contemporary flavor
- Hear positive, practical messages which encourage you each week
- Trust your children to the care of dedicated nursery workers

WHY NOT GET A LIFT THIS SUNDAY?

I invite you to be my special guest at our first public celebration service **EASTER SUNDAY**, April 6 at 11:00 a.m. We are currently meeting in the Laguna Hills High School Theater. If you don't have a church home, give us a try!

DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE!

Sincerely,
Rick Warren, Pastor[18]

Now, compare the letter Ealy and Hicks mailed to the Cordova area:

March 26, 1998

Hi Neighbor!

AT LAST!

A new church designed for those who've given up on traditional church services and stuffy settings! It's true, isn't it. Many people aren't active in church these days.

WHY?

Too often people feel . . .

- sermons are boring and don't relate to daily living
- many churches seem more interested in your wallet than in you
- members are unfriendly to visitors
- uncertain about the quality child care activities
- churches are self-centered

WE'VE GOT GOOD NEWS FOR YOU!

CORDOVA COMMUNITY CHURCH, a church of Christ, is a new church designed to meet your needs into the 21st century. We're a group of friendly people who have discovered the joy of the Christian lifestyle.

At Cordova Community Church you will:

- meet new friends and get to know your neighbors
- enjoy meaningful worship with a contemporary flavor
- hear positive, practical and relevant messages of encouragement
- involve your children in various activities
- serve the disadvantaged in our city

WHY NOT GET A LIFT ON EASTER?

We invite you to share our first public celebration service **Easter Sunday**, April 12 at 10:00 a.m. We are currently meeting in the Cordova Harding Academy gym. If you don't have a church home, give us a try! Nursery provided.

SHARE THE EXCITEMENT!

Sincerely,
Gary Ealy (garyealy@aol.com; 737-9330)

John Mark Hicks
(hicksjm@hugsr.edu; 761-1350,

ext. 124)

The format of the letter which appeared in **The Purpose Driven Church** has been retained by Ealy and Hicks with only slight changes to the wording to accommodate the identity of the Cordova Community Church. These brethren are brazen in following the pattern of denominational preachers while dealing disparagingly with the Lord's pattern in the New Testament for the churches of Christ.

THE CONSENSUS CLOSE BY

A recent development that has passed by unnoticed by most members of the church in Memphis is a clear statement of general acceptance of fellowship with the Cordova Community Church by several local congregations through announcement of and participation in a "Day of Praise." The "Day of Praise" was held Sunday, April 2, 2000 at Harding Academy on Cherry Road Ken Young and the Hallal Singers were the featured praise team. A statement within the published announcement that should be of particular concern in this present study is: "Sponsored by White Station, Highland Street, Sycamore View, Brownsville Road, and Cordova Community." [19] Other area churches which participated in promoting the "Day of Praise" in addition to those sponsoring congregations already mentioned were: The Goodman Oaks Church of Christ, [20] the Great Oaks Church of Christ, [21] the Park Avenue Church of Christ, [22] the Raleigh Church of Christ, [23] and the Ross Road Church of Christ. [24] This marks the coming out event of joint participation among the churches of Christ in Memphis with the Community Church. The precedent has now been set; all who now speak out against the Community Church may expect to be anathematized by the majority of the congregations in Memphis.

THE CURRENT COLLABORATION OF THE CONSPIRATORS

The Christian Chronicle is published by Oklahoma Christian University. It is Edited by Bailey B. McBride. Glover Shipp is the Senior

Editor. It is published monthly and has a worldwide readership. In the March and April 2000 editions a four-part presentation strongly favoring the Community Church was given. A summary of the Community Church movement shows that currently the best known expression of the Community Church is the model of Bill Hybels out of Barrington, Illinois near Chicago called The Willow Creek Community Church. Along with his wife, Lynne, Hybels has written “the story and vision of Willow Creek Community Church” titled, **Rediscovering Church**. However, a Baptist preacher named Rick Warren while denying cloning Willow Creek has built The Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California which closely parallels Willow Creek and has written a more understandable guide for duplicating the Community Church titled **The Purpose Driven Church**. These works are acknowledged within **The Christian Chronicle** feature articles as the sources from which the Community Churches are finding expression among churches of Christ today.

However, in the four articles there is not one word of refutation of their erroneous origins. As evidence, read the inflammatory opening statement where **The Purpose Driven Church** is introduced written by Flavil Yeakley, who is a “professor in the College of Bible and Religion at Harding University, Searcy, Ark. He directs the Harding Center for Church Growth Studies. He began preaching 50 years ago and has been involved in church growth research for 30 years.” He wrote:

*Then the big one — Rick Warren’s book **The Purpose Driven Church** tells the story of the Saddleback Community Church, Orange County, Calif. Rick is a Baptist, and his church is a Baptist church, but he wanted to reach out to the unchurched and felt that the name “Baptist” might be a barrier.*

This approach is a step in the direction of non-denominational Christianity, and I think that Stone, Campbell and other Restoration Movement pioneers would rejoice to see this development. It is not enough, but it is a step in the right direction.[25]

“Non-denominational Christianity” has now been redefined by the church growth expert to mean increased subtlety through hiding denominational doctrines and practices by generalizing the name from Baptist to Community Church. Truly, anyone seeking “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus” would be hard pressed to be drawn to a church wearing the name “Baptist” which is nowhere found in the Bible. Surely, an imposing barrier has been erected by those who wish to advance their cause under that unscriptural banner. Why would anyone familiar with God’s word or in the process of examining God’s word accept the

—————

The name Church of Christ has been opposed by denominationalism all across the years, and one of the apparent reasons for it is due to pride on the part of those wearing unscriptural names in religion. Simply put: They cannot find their names in the Bible.

—————

Community Church name which likewise is absent from the pages of inspiration? How easily some are toppled from the correct and eminently Scriptural name “the churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). The name Church of Christ has been opposed by denominationalism all across the years, and one of the apparent reasons for it is due to pride on the part of those wearing unscriptural names in religion. Simply put: They cannot find their names in the Bible. It is a mark of undisguised compromise to retreat from the name of the Lord Jesus Christ which inspiration has applied to his blood-bought church. What an egregious oversight since the church is the Lord’s bride and since for the

church he died, if he failed to give her his name. That is one obvious nightmare with which denominationalism has been struggling since its inception.

These are denominational churches loosely affiliated with the group from which they came which merely have shrouded themselves with the name “Community Church.” The cardinal rule among them is to appear non-traditional. They are characterized by a casual dress code, “contemporary” music, non-distinctive public speeches which endeavor to focus the attention of the assembly on a celebration-type atmosphere, inter-denominational acceptance, small group organization, personal testimonies, praise teams, and in their beginning stages a brazen acceptance of financial support from churches they intend to take over.

The Christian Chronicle speaks in the most glowing and favorable terms of the Community Church with only the exception of a very few scant references to the contrary. Of the six articles on the subject in the March edition only one writer ventured to ask a few questions and even he dared not speak one word of criticism, just alarm while advising a “wait and see” posture. Also, of the writers selected one has helped plant a Community Church in Searcy, Arkansas, another presented the view that “this change is our historical commitment to nondenominational Christianity,” another said he believes their purposes to be “God-given,” and yet another currently is the minister for a Community Church in Amarillo, Texas. In the April edition no less than fourteen Community Churches are referenced not counting multiple references to Willow Creek and Saddleback. Among the names are Christ’s Community Church, Oak Tree Church, New Covenant Christian Fellowship, Servants of Christ, and Grace Church. States in which the churches mentioned in the articles are located are Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Tennessee, and Texas. A more complete listing of Community Churches may be found in Mac Lynn’s directory of churches of Christ for the year 2000, but Lynn has dropped “Church of Christ” from the individual listings making the

number of Community Churches difficult to find. Also, he has not offered a designation in the front of the directory noting those who are Community Churches like he has with non-institutional, one cup, etc. An array of preachers following the Community Church pattern were promoted in the April article including those who split a church in the Dallas Metroplex. Additionally, the editor of the feature, Lindy S. Adams, provided the web site addresses for Willow Creek and Saddleback facilitating their use. Two of the writers are professors at Harding University, one is adjunct instructor for Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, one is president of Rochester College in Michigan, one is connected with Lipscomb University, one is a retired faculty member of Southern Christian University, two are self-styled church growth experts, and, as mentioned earlier, several are ministers for Community Churches. The selection of people with connections to schools supported by churches of Christ who will not oppose the Community Church to write the articles facilitates the movement by lending the impression of acceptability to the articles.

The editor of the features is laboring under at least two misconceptions regarding the church of Christ. One, in the introduction Adams wrote, "...the church they worked diligently to create..." Men did not create the church of Christ; it is of divine origin (Eph. 3:9-11; 4:1-5; 5:23-25). Without doubt this misconception is why such liberties are being taken with regard to the church. The view seems to be if men created the church of Christ and it is not now what men want it to be, then just simply change it to fit the wishes of men today. Two, denominational church growth models can be adapted and altered to cause the churches of Christ to grow. The church of Christ is not a denomination (I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:4). The one responsible for its growth is God himself (I Cor. 3:6-9). The method of its expansion is the preaching and teaching of the word of God (Mk. 16:15; Acts 6:7). The church growth expert who teaches at Harding and has helped start Covenant Fellowship Community Church wants the

readers to believe these Community Churches are "still within the 'Church of Christ mainstream.'" How can anyone expect that to be so when they do not even so much as retain the name church of Christ? Their attempt at worship and congregational organization is a departure from the truth, yet they demand their followers to insist that they are center of the strait and narrow road. A Christian may have no fellowship with the unfruitful division of denominational darkness (I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 5:11). Their means and methodologies have nothing to offer


When the leadership of a local congregation is dedicated to the planting of Community Churches all of the members of that congregation are responsible for the planting of the Community Churches. By withdrawing personal and financial support from that congregation the movement will be thwarted.


the Lord's people (I Thess. 5:5). Light and darkness have no communion (II Cor. 6:14). Brethren need to wake out of sleep, get back to teaching and preaching the word of God, and Christ will give all the light needed to advance his cause (Eph. 5:14).

THE CRUSHING OF THE CORRUPT PATTERN

Four suggestions are offered on how to defeat the Community Church movement.

One, expose the error of the Community Church and those favorable to it. It is right to be "*set for the defense of the gospel*" (Phil. 1:17).

Paul left Titus in Crete to set things in order, hold fast the faithful word, exhort and convince the gainsayers, stop the mouths of the gainsayers, and rebuke them sharply (Titus 1:5-13). Jude 3 still calls for an earnest contending for the faith.

Two, refuse to fund the Community Church movement by withdrawing personal and financial support from those congregations and schools promoting the Community Church. Philippians 1:5 and 4:15 proves that those whom we support financially we are fellowshipping. If one is contributing into a church treasury, he is in fellowship with that which is supported out of that treasury. When the leadership of a local congregation is dedicated to the planting of Community Churches all of the members of that congregation are responsible for the planting of the Community Churches. By withdrawing personal and financial support from that congregation the movement will be thwarted. The Community Church begins as a parasite feeding off a thriving organism. A paradoxical phenomenon is occurring with the Community Church. Older, established churches of Christ are funding the vehicle of their demise when they support the Community Church. It is very sad to note that if this continues, the children and grandchildren of members of the churches of Christ will not know the truth about the church of the Bible because the Community Church advocates are changing everything about it under the pretense of church growth.

Three, evangelize the lost (Matt. 28:19, 20). No matter what the problems and challenges faced by the churches of Christ, the gospel of Christ must continue to be preached to a lost and dying world. Many problems and challenges besieged the early church, yet the gospel was advanced to the point that Paul could write in Colossians 1:23 that every creature under heaven had the opportunity to hear it. The method authorized by God to reach lost souls is preaching (I Cor. 1:18-21). Imagine if *The Christian Chronicle* were dedicated to such a noble purpose instead of promoting the latest denominational craze. The millions who could be taught the Bible through that paper who are instead

being coaxed into error make these developments all the more a shame.

Four, edify those who are Christians (Eph. 4:15-16). Paul said that by edifying “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14). Through edification the Christian dons the whole armor of God in which he stands against the methods of the devil (Eph. 6:11).

THE CLARION CALL TO THE CORRECT PATTERN

God has always had a pattern he has expected faithful men and women to follow. Hebrews 8:5 reads, “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.” The apostles’ teaching must be followed as a pattern of righteousness. Paul wrote, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (I Tim. 1:16). Even the righteous living of the Christian must conform to God’s revealed pattern. Again, Paul said, “In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity” (Titus 2:7). Christians must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29; Heb. 5:8, 9; Gal. 1:10).

THE CONCLUSION

The Community Church pattern with its erroneous doctrine poses a threat to the churches of Christ. At a time when society in general seems to be moving farther and farther away from receptivity to the Scriptures, some brethren are appealing to denominational successes to glean numbers and dollars in the false assumption they are thereby bringing glory to God. Perhaps this exposure of the pattern now being used and some of the brethren following this false way will serve as a call for some to return to God’s way and a

solemn warning for all to “speak as the oracles of God” (I Pet. 4:11).

ENDNOTES

[1] **Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, MA: G.&C. Merriam Company, 1980), p. 834.
 [2] Pages 18-43.
 [3] **Ibid.**, pp. 38, 39.
 [4] **The Restoration: The Winds Of Change**, Jim Laws, ed. (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1993), p. 509.
 [5] **FOCUS**, church bulletin of the Brownsville Road Church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee better known as The Family Of God At Brownsville Road, A Church Of Christ; October, 1998.
 [6] Pages 122, 123.
 [7] **Heaven’s Imperative or Man’s Innovations: Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?**, Curtis Cates, ed. (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching Publication, 1995), p. 711.
 [8] Page 3.
 [9] J.E. Choate, “Hendersonville Community Church of Christ Celebrates Yom Kippur,” **The Plumline**, Wayne Coats, ed. (Vol. 2, No. 9), p. 1.
 [10] **Ibid.**, p. 3.
 [11] **The Purpose Driven Church**, Rick Warren (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 11.
 [12] Page 157.
 [13] Pages 169, 170.
 [14] “A Theological and Strategic Statement for a New Church Planting,” Gary Ealy and John Mark Hicks (Unpublished, October 5, 1997), p. 2.
 [15] **Ibid.**, p. 3.
 [16] *The Purpose Driven Church*, p. 134.
 [17] **Ibid.**, p. 326.
 [18] **Ibid.**, p. 194.
 [19] **Server**, A Weekly Publication of the Church of Christ at White Station, Volume 47, No. 13, March 29, 2000, p. 1.
 [20] **The Oak Leaf**, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, March 27, 2000, p. 3.
 [21] **Notes**, Vol. 9, No. 13, March 29, 2000, p. 3.
 [22] **Park Avenue News**, Vol. XXII, No. 7, March 27, 2000, p. 4.
 [23] **Raleigh Memorandum**, Vol. 37, No. 6, March 15, 2000, p. 3.
 [24] **In Touch**, March 2000, p. 3.
 [25] **The Christian Chronicle**, Volume 57, No. 3, March 2000, p. 18.

Editor’s Note: This lesson on the Community Church was delivered by brother Gary McDade at the 15th Annual Seek The Old Paths Lectureship in July, 2000. This material needs to be spread far and wide. For that reason, it is now available in a tract. You may order it from the Getwell Church of Christ, 1511 Getwell Rd., Memphis, TN 38111. Ph. (901) 743-0464.

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"Thanks to each of you for defending the true word of God. I tried to read each article in the *Seek the Old Paths*. I've gained much knowledge from them. I regret to ask you to remove my name from you mailing list. My prayers are that God will bless you in your much needed work for the cause of Christ. I do appreciate all your good work. May

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