

**Multi-Site Conference  
The Gospel-Centered Church  
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March 2007**

**To get the most out of this please do the following:**

1. Mark what you find especially helpful or important with a "!".
2. Mark what raises questions for you with a "?".

**INTRODUCTION**

**Our Purpose**

One of the most important questions you can ask about ministry is: What kind of church does Jesus want? The answer is not a "multi-site church". No! Multi-site is a strategy—an effective model for doing ministry, but it is only one model. Far more important than the question of model/strategy, is the question: What is our theological vision for the church? What kind of church are we seeking to plant, grow and be? This question is important for anyone involved in Christian ministry. It is especially important for anyone seeking to plant, grow and be a multi-site church. For the multi-site model not only brings advantages, it also heightens challenges such as: maintaining unity, mobilizing missional living, and involving more people in ministry. These challenges can only be addressed through clear, biblical thinking about: What kind of church does Jesus want? The purpose of this paper is to challenge you to think clearly about what kind of church you are aiming for, by presenting how we at Harbor Church are thinking about this.

**Our Approach**

The approach has been greatly influenced by John Frame's tri-perspectivalism. John writes: "The knowledge of God's law, the world, and the self are interdependent and ultimately identical" (The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987, p.89). "Human knowledge can be understood in three ways: as knowledge of God's norm, as knowledge of the situation [environment], and as knowledge of ourselves. None can be achieved adequately without the others. Each includes the others" (p.75).

**Our Application**

In thinking about Harbor from a tri-perspectival approach, we think about what makes Harbor distinctive in its relationship to God's Word, the world, and our selves. In relation to God's Word, Harbor is a Gospel-centered church. In relationship to the world, Harbor is a missional church. And in relationship to our selves, Harbor is a grace renewal church. Let's look of each of these.

## **A GOSPEL-CENTERED CHURCH**

### **Conviction: The whole Bible is the Gospel of Christ!**

Luke 24:20-27 – "...they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more...some of our women...told us...he was alive..." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:44-47 – He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Genesis 3:15 – "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

1 Corinthians 1:22-24; 2:2 – Jews demand miraculous signs [power] and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God... For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

### **Commitments**

1. We resolve to read the Bible as the Gospel.  
Since the central theme of the Bible is—the sufferings and glory of Christ, we resolve to read the Bible as the story of salvation, not moralistic lessons.  
We resolve to see how the law, the ceremonies, and the history all point us to their fulfillment in the coming of the Deliverer promised in Genesis 3:15 and throughout the Bible.
2. We resolve to preach and teach the Gospel to believers, not just unbelievers.  
We become Christians and we grow as Christians by grace through faith in Jesus. Therefore, we resolve to preach the Gospel as the means to grow, not 'biblical principles for living' (which means 'the law') to believers.
3. We resolve to preach and teach the Gospel in every sermon and every lesson.  
The most desperate need of both unbelievers and believers is to hear and appropriate the Gospel to their lives each and every day. Therefore, we resolve to point people to the Gospel in every sermon, lesson, small group meeting, etc.
4. We resolve to receive the Gospel as the "milk" and the "meat" of God's Word.  
Since the whole Bible is the Gospel and Christ crucified is the wisdom and power of God (1Cor.1:22-24), then we never move beyond the Gospel to something

deeper. There is nothing deeper than the Gospel. Therefore, we resolve to view the Gospel as both the A-B-C's and the A-to-Z of Christianity.

5. We resolve to view the world and the church through the lens of the Gospel. Since the Bible is our ultimate authority and the Bible is the Gospel, we resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1Cor.2:2). This means our understanding of the world and church and how to address its needs and problems will be based on the Gospel.

## **A MISSIONAL CHURCH**

### **Conviction: The Gospel calls us to be "for" the city/culture/people!**

John 17:18-19 – [Father] as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Matthew 28:18-20 – Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Acts 1:8 – You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 8:1,4 – On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – 19Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

What does it mean to be missional?

Bottom-line it means: We are a church "for" the city/culture/people where God has placed us and through it the world.

Some churches are "of" the culture. They so embrace the culture that they lose their distinctiveness.

Some churches are "against" the culture. They so oppose the culture that they lose their relevance.

And some churches are "above" the culture. They so "super-spiritualize" life that they lose their point of contact.

On the other hand, a church “for” the culture engages the culture in order to transform it.

A Key Missional Concept: Centered-set vs. Bounded-set

### **Commitments**

The following commitments are based on Tim Keller’s paper entitled “The Missional Church” (June 2001).

1. We resolve to learn and speak the language of our culture.  
We resolve to avoid speaking ‘Christianese’, ‘holy-huddle’ talk, pious prayer language, in-house ‘jargon’, and ‘super-spiritual’ talk.  
We resolve to avoid technical theological terms, unless we explain them.  
We resolve to avoid ‘we-them’ language, language that puts down people of different political, spiritual, social positions, or is disrespectful of those who we disagree.  
We resolve instead to humbly admit our weaknesses and failures, while demonstrating the hope and joy the Gospel gives us.  
We resolve to never talk as if non-Christians weren’t present.  
We resolve to do this not as a strategy but as the result of a Gospel-changed life.
2. We resolve to sincerely listen to people and their ‘stories’.  
We resolve to understand, love and respect them no strings attached, and serve them by showing them how the Gospel meets their deepest longings.  
To do this we resolve to have a knowledge and appreciation of the culture’s movies, books, music, etc., in order to understand the culture’s hopes, dreams, stories, and fears. So, we can show people that only Jesus can fulfill their greatest desires.
3. We resolve to be a Christian community that is counter-cultural/intuitive.  
We resolve to show the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to relationships, sex, money, power, and suffering.  
Regarding relationships: We resolve to celebrate diversity and cultivate unity—to radically love each other—so that the world will see the difference Jesus makes.  
We resolve when there is conflict we will not just walk away but we will actively work at reconciliation with one another.

Regarding sex: We resolve to avoid the extremes of idolizing sex and fearing sex. Instead we will hold a glorious view of sex in marriage as a pointer to intimacy with Christ. We also resolve in regards to people whose sexual lifestyles are different than ours, that we will show love rather than hostility or fear.

Regarding money: We resolve to be radically generous in our giving of time, money, skills, and relationships to working for social justice and caring for the poor, weak and needy.

Regarding power: We resolve to share power and build friendships between different races and classes. We resolve to be more involved in deeds of mercy and social justice than traditional liberal churches and at the same time more involved in evangelism and church planting than traditional conservative churches.

Regarding suffering: We resolve, in our suffering and struggles, to demonstrate gospel irony—when we are weak, then we are strong—by being authentic both about our weaknesses and struggles, and the hopeful, joyful difference knowing Jesus makes.

4. We resolve to live out our Christianity in our work and recreation.  
We resolve to learn together how to think, do, and be distinctively Christian in our work and recreation.  
We resolve to learn: a) what in our culture is good and can be enjoyed and celebrated, b) what in our culture is anti-Gospel and must be rejected, and c) what in our culture can be renewed and adapted for good.  
We resolve to encourage and celebrate Christians who are advancing the “kingdom of God” in various vocations (callings).  
We resolve to show Gospel love and tolerance toward those with whom we strongly disagree with. One of the biggest criticisms of Christians is that we are intolerant. But since we are saved by grace, we should be the most humble, tolerant people in society. And so we resolve to be.
5. We resolve to demonstrate the unity of the church in the city.  
We resolve to celebrate what God is doing in other churches, instead of criticizing other churches.  
We resolve to develop alliances with other like-minded churches in order to serve our city together.  
We resolve to cooperate and develop meaningful relationships even with churches much different than us. Although this may bring challenges and tension, we resolve to head in the direction of cooperation.

### **Case Study (Tim Keller)**

The following case study by Tim Keller helps us to see that being missional isn't about having an evangelism committee, but rather re-tooling the whole church so that everything we are doing engages the culture by demonstrating the kingdom of God.

“Let me show you how this goes beyond any 'program.' These are elements that have to be present in every area of the church. So, for example, what makes a small group 'missional'? A 'missional' small group is not necessarily one, which is doing some kind of specific 'evangelism' program (though that is to be recommended). Rather, 1) if its

members love and talk positively about the city/neighborhood, 2) if they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language, 3) if in their Bible study they apply the Gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture, 4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically, 5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, 6) if they do not bash other Christians and churches-- *then* seekers and non-believing people from the city A) will be invited and B) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these marks are not there it will only be able to include believers or traditional, "Christianized" people."

### **A GRACE RENEWAL CHURCH**

**Conviction: We live and grow by grace through faith in the Gospel of Christ.**

Galatians 3

1You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 2I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? 5Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Galatians 5

1It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

2Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Romans 1

16I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Colossians 2

6So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive

philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

### **Commitments**

1. We resolve to live in on going grace renewal.  
To that end, we resolve to preach the Gospel to our selves, love our neighbors, and pray it forward through kingdom centered prayer—all done in a community of grace.
2. We resolve to be “new” people, not “nice” people.  
The Gospel is out not to reform people but to transform people. Churches that preach for behavioral reformation tend to elevate middle-class values to the level of biblical norm and focus on external change. We resolve to seek transformation at the motivational and character level, not merely behavioral modification.
3. We resolve to believe that the Gospel can change anyone.  
Since we are saved by grace, there are no hopeless cases and no hopeless situations. Since we are saved by grace, we resolve to have great respect and great hope for every unbeliever.
4. We resolve to motivate with grace, not guilt.  
The Gospel is the power of God to motivate us. Those gripped by the Gospel are compelled by the love of Christ (2Cor.5:14) to serve, give, and witness. Therefore, we resolve not to motivate people through guilt trips driving them to obey out of fear. But rather we resolve to motivate people through the Gospel that sets us free to love unconditionally out of gratitude for God’s grace.
5. We resolve to solve all problems (personal, church, social) with the Gospel.  
The root of all of our problems is that something other than Christ is serving as our functional savior. Therefore we neither tell people: “You shouldn’t act like that--stop it!” nor “You need to accept yourself as you are!” Rather, we call them to repent of their idols and trust in Christ who through his life and death is the only one who can give them all they are longing for.

### **Discussion**

In groups of three discuss the following:

1. What did you find especially helpful or challenging?
2. What raised questions for you?
3. How will you apply this in your ministry?
4. Pray for one another.