

Dear Friends,

In about two years I will be stepping down from the National Director's role that I have filled for the last ten years. You will be hearing more about this and the succession process that the Board will follow to find and install a new leader. What I am going to do in light of my decision to step down is to write a series of pastoral letters on issues that are of concern to me as I turn the reins of leadership over to a new National Director. While addressing pastoral issues in these letters I will give you a picture of what I understand the role of the National Director is, what has been accomplished in the Vineyard over the last ten years, what my concerns for the future are, the special challenges that a National Director has to face, and other issues that surface in my final months of service.

In this letter I would like to talk about an issue of importance to all of us - the issue of the diversity in theology and practice in the Vineyard movement. From time to time I hear expressions of concern from people both inside and outside our movement. These concerns focus on things that Vineyard pastors are teaching, who they have speak in their churches, or some particular practice that the complainant believes should not be allowed in a Vineyard church. Quite often the complaint simply highlights the fact that the Vineyard is a movement of great diversity in theology and practice and always has been. It is also growing in cultural and ethnic diversity. We have many occasions for disagreements. We are so diverse that if we were not a work of the Spirit, we would have imploded, divided, fragmented and self-destructed many years ago.

Diversity is always messy and movements are always diverse with a mix of good and evil.¹ I wrestled with the Lord for some time before officially bringing the church I pastored in Houston into the Vineyard because I knew the movement was messy in practice and lacked theological development. Having been raised in the early years of the Pentecostal movement, I knew what it was like to be a part of a marginalized, messy sect. I wasn't sure that I wanted more of that, and I knew that if I joined the Vineyard, that is what I would get. I had conversations with John Wimber about my concerns. Not once did he give me any assurance to assuage my concerns.

But as I wrestled with God, He spoke to me through this proverb:

"Where there are no oxen in the stalls, the stalls are clean, but there is much power in the oxen." (Pro. 14: 4 KJV)

I paraphrase this as "There is no power without oxen and oxen poop. If you want the power, you must also accept the poop." It's not that you let the poop pile up. You get the

¹ Jesus in the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) and in the parable of the net (Matthew 13:47-51) acknowledges the mixed condition of the Kingdom of Heaven in this "between the times" era and warned against being too anxious about cleaning up lest the good be destroyed in the purifying process. Further, one need only look at the New Testament church or at historical revival movements to confirm this assertion.

shovel out, clean it up, and perhaps use it for fertilizer. But don't expect the stalls to stay clean if you have pooping oxen in the stalls.

Since the Lord spoke to me through this Proverb, I have reflected long on the people of God in the Old and New Testaments and on the history of the church in light of what I call the "mess factor." Without exception, the people of God have always been a people with tremendous diversity and mess. I have come to the following conclusion: When God is most powerfully at work among His Spirit-drenched people, there always seem to be stinky mangers and ugly crosses. There is also theology that needs adjustment and practices that are questionable. All of this results in confusion, dissonance, tension, and extremes. Messy movements are not good places for purists and perfectionists, but they seem to be what God chooses to work through. So I embrace the power, even if it is shrouded in a mess.

What are some of the tensions we have in the Vineyard that make us a messy movement? It's a challenge to go through the litany of differences we have without making mistakes in wording and definition. I probably haven't stated some of the positions well, on the one hand, and I am equally convinced that there are issues that might concern you that I have left out. So, though this document is written to address an important issue in the Vineyard, it is neither comprehensive nor definitive. I am not speaking *ex cathedra*.

You will also notice that I have framed most issues in terms of contrast. This could lead one to believe that the Vineyard is deeply divided on all of these issues. That conclusion could not be further from the truth. The fact is, we have few ideologues or theological purists. Most Vineyard leaders do not live in the world of black and white in terms of theology or practice, but rather in the gray that is the reality of church life.

I am aware of my personal limitations to address such a difficult topic, so as I heard someone once say, "If my attempt to create an elephant turns out to be a mouse, gentle critics will at least admit 'tis a beast."

Church Backgrounds

We have tensions that arise out of the fact that we have come out of a variety of spiritual traditions. We are not old enough as a movement to have many leaders who came to the Lord and were raised up in the Vineyard without a prior religious association. We don't have exact figures in our database regarding the spiritual and ecclesiastical origin of all of our pastors. But we do have the backgrounds of all the churches that have adopted into the Vineyard. The majority of these adoptions have come from an independent Charismatic background with all the diversity that implies. The rest of the adoptions were formerly in the Assemblies of God, Southern Baptist, Calvary Chapel and Christian Church traditions.

There are many other Vineyard pastors on whom we do not have data in regards to their former religious association who are either Vineyard church planters or who became Vineyard pastors in established Vineyard churches. My personal knowledge of these

men and women leads me to assert that these represent an even wider diversity than is reflected in the case of adoptions. We have former Anglicans, Methodists, Nazarenes, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and all varieties in between. We also have those who would consider their theological roots as Reformed, Calvinist, Wesleyan, Armenian, Catholic, Evangelical, Post-modern, Post-Pentecostal/Charismatic - you name it.

Then we must add to this the fact that some from the Charismatic/Pentecostal backgrounds were endeavoring to flee from what they perceived as excesses and sometimes the theology of that tradition into the safety of the Vineyard, while some who came from mainline or Evangelical churches were coming into the Vineyard because it was more Pentecostal/Charismatic. These groups came together in the Vineyard. This is the rich diversity of spiritual, theological, and cultural roots out of which we have emerged, highlighting the challenge of walking together in unity.

Theological Diversity

When I was a part of the group that put together our present *Statement of Faith*, I asked John Wimber why we didn't call it the *Vineyard Confession of Faith*. He responded without hesitation, "Because we are not a confessional movement." He then went on to explain what he meant. He said that a confessional tradition, in his understanding, was shaped by the idea that members must agree with the entire confession to be in good standing with that tradition. The "Confession of Faith" was an outside boundary that one must adhere to if he/she wants to be a part of that community. He further explained that our *Statement of Faith* was not designed to serve in that way. It was not designed to keep people out of the Vineyard. Rather, it served to identify us as a movement within the general, basic, framework of orthodox and Evangelical Christianity.

This explanation has been very helpful to me in counseling people who want to come into the Vineyard but have questions about something in the *Statement of Faith*. I have from time to time had people say, "You know, I really want to be a part of the Vineyard, but I have some difficulty with the language that is used in certain parts of the *Statement of Faith*." I then relate the conversation I had with John and assure them that, unless what they believe is in violation of the historical Christian faith as mediated to us through the broad Evangelical tradition, there is room in the Vineyard for them even if they have some reservation on the way a particular statement is worded.

What are some of our theological disagreements? The following positions are not hypothetical. There are Vineyard pastors I know who hold each of them. We have some from the Reformed tradition who believe that once saved people cannot be lost, while others from the Wesleyan/Arminian position believe it is necessary to abide in Christ to be safe. We have some who believe that the Lord's Supper is primarily a memorial of Christ's death, while others believe that Jesus is really present in some way in the meal and that the Supper is thus much more than a memorial. We have some who believe that Jesus will come and take the church out of this world to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb before the great tribulation while the world goes through a time of testing never before known (dispensational premillennialism). We have others who believe that the Bible

knows nothing of this scheme and that Christ will come to inaugurate a thousand year reign before the final consummation (historic premillennialism). Still others hold that there is no literal thousand-year reign and that Revelation 20:1-8 is not to be interpreted to provide the foundation for either a dispensational nor a historic premillennial framework (amillennialism).

We have some who believe that there is a second work of grace that happens after conversion. This experience is called the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Some who hold this position maintain the classical Pentecostal doctrine of “initial evidence,”² believing that the initial physical sign of this baptism is speaking in an unknown tongue. Others believe that one is baptized in the Holy Spirit as part of the conversion experience and that there are additional fillings as one goes along.

Some believe that humans consist of three-parts, while others believe that the idea of “parts” is a Greek understanding of humanity rather than a biblical one. Some in the Vineyard believe that the penal theory is the primary theory of the atonement, while others say that some of the other theories such as the *Christus Victor* theory are primary and that the penal theory was not really central until the Middle Ages. Some believe that God foreknows all future events and, thus, is omniscient. Nothing can extend beyond the knowledge of the One who is Sovereign over all creation and history. Others believe that God has chosen to limit His knowledge in regards to eventuality. He has guaranteed the outcome and He will win, but He has chosen to give humans real freedom to act in regards to some of the events in history. They say this divine self-limitation and human freedom has consequences, making prayer significant and humans responsible for their actions.

Some emphasize that the Bible is inerrant in every part in the original manuscripts, while others maintain that the real issue is the authority of Scripture, not the nature of inspiration. An authoritative text does not require an inerrant manuscript. Both perspectives have a high view of the authority of Scripture.

Some believe the world was created in six, twenty-four hour days. Others believe that there could be an evolutionary aspect to creation. Some believe that Genesis 1-3 is divinely-inspired Hebrew poetry and that it should be interpreted as poetry and not as answering twenty-first century scientific questions. Others would take it as literal, scientifically accurate statements describing the first six days of creation.

There are a number of hermeneutics used in the Vineyard from proof-texting to various levels of engagement with the historical-critical method. There are also differences of opinion on epistemology. Some are foundationalist, others are critical realist and others would identify themselves as post-foundationalist. These epistemologies affect the way they interpret the Bible and the attitude they bring to the theological task.

² It would be interesting to know how many are in the Vineyard as a result of their disagreement with the position of the Pentecostal denominations that one must ascribe to the doctrine of “initial evidence” or to a “pretribulational” eschatology to be in good standing in their denominations, or who are not in Calvary Chapel because of their dispensational position.

There are some in the Vineyard who want to do battle with modern science and others who believe we need to engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue with the scientific community. There are some who see other religions as demonically-inspired, containing no truth, while others who believe that there is truth stated in other religions and that we should, through dialogue, find common ground while refusing to surrender the exclusivity of the gospel. Yet, no one in Vineyard leadership, as far as I know, believes that there is another way to the Father other than through Jesus Christ.

There are some who are Christian Zionists who believe that there are two people of God - Israel and the Church - and that political Israel as we know it today is the people of God. Others believe that there is only one true people of God. The remnant within Israel in the Old Testament was the people of God and was the true Israel. Jesus is the true remnant and all that are in Him are now the true people of God, and thus, the true Israel.

These are but a few of the topics on which we have differences of theological belief in the Vineyard. Sectarian churches who believe they have the pure doctrine of God, separate from the rest of the church to become fortresses of faith and bulwarks against heresy. They would never allow this kind of diversity. But diversity characterizes most churches today. You can find representatives of all of these views in the Evangelical community as seen in the National Association of Evangelicals and in other groups that hold to a high view of Scripture and to a vital experience with God. These are some of our theological disagreements, but we have an equal number of differences in the area of practice.

Difference in Practice

Some believe that mega-churches are the most successful churches in Christianity today. On the other hand, others believe that cell churches are the true biblical church and that buildings, professional leaders, and programs in mega-churches are more the fruit of Christendom than the river of life seen in the non-institutional, New Testament church. Some believe that the freedom of the Spirit in worship means that there is very little control over the expression of the gifts. Others believe that gifts are important, but their expression in worship service must be carefully governed. Some see their church as seeker-sensitive, while others are not overly concerned about what the unchurched think about them. Some are quite open to whatever phenomena might happen in worshippers or those receiving ministry, while others believe that all experience must be closely evaluated lest Satan deceive us or we unnecessarily offend the unreached.

We have differences on how to pastor the sinners in our church. How do we pastor addicts of all kinds? How do we pastor those who are sexually broken? How do we pastor the serially remarried?³ How are people like this to be treated? What is to be condoned? What is to be accepted? What is to be condemned? How much can these people be

³ I was raised in a denomination that would ordain a divorced and remarried person under certain conditions. Pastors from a sister Pentecostal denomination used to call us the “the adultery denomination” due to the fact that Jesus said that if a husband divorces his wife and she remarries, he has caused her to be an adulteress. Matthew 5:32

involved in the church? The reality is, we have disagreement on the issue of how to pastor certain types of sinners.⁴

Some think the church should be involved in social justice,⁵ protecting the environment (tending the garden), pushing for immigration reform, fighting sex slavery, addressing racism, and resisting war.⁶ Still others think the church should confine its efforts to saving souls, healing the body, and perhaps feeding the poor.

Some think that God intends certain roles of leadership exclusively for men. Emphasizing a particular interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, they maintain that what is essential to womanhood is to submit, and what is essential to manhood is to govern. Instead of basing certain leadership roles upon gender, others are advocates for gift-based leadership, interpreting relevant passages through the lense of Acts 2:16-18, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and Galatians 3:28.

Some use a prayer book, while others pray only extemporaneously. Some have worship services that are exactly fifty-nine minutes long, while others are not that concerned about the clock. Some are for more institutional forms, and others see institutional structures and denominations at best as unhelpful and at worst as demonically inspired. Some are concerned that we are on the slippery slope to the hot hell of liberalism and others that we are sliding down the hill toward the icy cold river of fundamentalism.

Actually, I know of no true theological liberals in the Vineyard. As a matter of fact, classical liberalism with its questioning of the supernatural and emphasizing the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man has pretty much been waning in the church in general. Neither do I currently know of any hard core fundamentalists in the Vineyard as fundamentalism could never tolerate the kinds of diversity we embrace.

Other Mixtures

Other movements and personalities have had significant influence in the Vineyard and thus, have added to our diversity. Some have been disciples of Bill Hybels and Rick Warren and other mega-church leaders. This has quite often led them to embrace ideas from the church growth movement, popular leadership and business management theory.

We have followers of emerging or emergent church leaders such as Brian McClaren, Dan Kimball, Rob Bell, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Phyllis Tickle and Erwin McManus. Others

⁴ This is a far cry from the issues the church debated when I was a kid. The question then was what to do with people in the church who smoked, danced, went to movies, or, in the case of women, cut their hair. Oh, for those simple days.

⁵ “Social justice” as used by most people in the Vineyard simply means love applied to public policy. This means that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

⁶ Though there is a diversity of opinion on the matter, it should be noted that these are all issues that the denominational leaders in the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) encouraged all Evangelical churches to address. This was fleshed out in the paper produced by the NAE, *For the Health of the Nations: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility*.

are equally influenced by the writings of Clark Pinnock, John Sanders and Gregory Boyd who are advocates of open theism, a position that philosopher/spiritual life writer Dallas Willard leans toward, as well as scientist-theologian John Polkinghorne.

We have people who hang on the writings of John Piper, D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, J. I. Packer and J. P. Moreland. Others are more comfortable with the more progressive Evangelical writings of Scott McKnight, Stanley Grenz, Gordon Fee and Roger Olson.

We have a few who read theologians like Rauschenbusch and Schleiermacher with some approval. A few more read Barth, Pannenberg, and Moltmann with appreciation. Many more are deeply grateful for Evangelical writers such as N. T. Wright, Miroslav Volf, Eugene Peterson, Alister McGrath, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Ben Witherington III. All Vineyard leaders should have been influenced by G. Eldon Ladd's writings on the Kingdom.

We have leaders who are high on Benny Hinn and others who would not be caught dead in his meetings. We have people in our movement who are very excited about what happens at IHOP, Brownsville, Redding, or other "renewal movements." We have others who are accepting, but not approving of these movements, and others who don't like them at all.

We have graduates from Ivy League schools such as Yale, Princeton and Harvard and from classic Evangelical seminaries such as Fuller, Gordon-Conwell, Asbury, Wheaton, Trinity, and Regent College in British Columbia.⁷ We have a growing number of graduates from VLI, VBI, and VCOM. We have alumni from Evangelical universities and Bible colleges, and we have pastors who have little formal theological training except what they have received from influential people in their lives or what they have read. This mixture of educational experience represents another source of diversity.

We have left-leaning political liberals and right wing ultra-conservatives - people who supported Obama and people who voted for McCain and love Sarah Palin. There are some who believe that you cannot be a truly Bible-believing Christian and be politically liberal, and some who believe that it's difficult to be biblical and "right."⁸

The Vineyard is increasingly racially diverse and we have potential divides between Latinos and Anglos, African Americans and Caucasians. We experience geographic diversity between the north and the south, urban and suburban, urban and rural residents, university city dwellers and small town residents. We also have national diversity between Americans and non-Americans, and generational diversity between those older than boomers, boomers and post-boomers.

What I am endeavoring to say is that we are a people of many influences and cultural and

⁷ And, of course, my alma mater, Nazarene Theological Seminary.

⁸ Does all this make you dizzy or crazy?

theological backgrounds.⁹ We did not cease to be what we were when we came into the Vineyard. We brought it all with us. We cannot change our beliefs by being told to do so or that we have to change them; rather, we must be patiently and lovingly convinced. We are a macrocosm of our past, yet we are being shaped into a new people. While our current diversity and the process of being formed as a people can be disorienting and uncomfortable, this is the Vineyard.

How Did We Get Here?

What brought such a diversity of belief and practice into one movement? How could this happen?

First of all, we became a diverse movement by a work of the Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who drew us in from all kinds of theological, ecclesiastical, cultural, and political backgrounds. We came together “warts and all.” It was the Holy Spirit who molded us into a people. We were hungry for God. We didn’t want to put on religious fronts or give ourselves to hype. We wanted to walk in integrity without pretense. We wanted to experience the Kingdom of God. We wanted to do the works of Jesus. We wanted to prophesy and heal the sick. We wanted to walk in freedom. We loved the King and we loved His Kingdom. That’s what brought us together and has kept us together.

God’s Spirit has brought us into this family. We are not Vineyard by choice, but were conscripted by God. God placed us together. He did this by placing desires in us regarding the church. We wanted to be a part of a group that preached the gospel - who believed the words of Jesus and did the works of Jesus. We wanted to plant and grow Kingdom churches that were reconciled and reconciling communities. We wanted to be a people where everyone gets to play. We wanted to be essentially missional through being culturally relevant. We wanted to experience God and not just think great thoughts about God. Those are the things that brought us together and continue to keep us together nearly thirty years later.

Nobody in Vineyard doubts that our Lord is a triune, eternal God. No one doubts the death and resurrection of Jesus or justification by faith. No one doubts the authority of Scripture. No one doubts the need to preach the gospel. No one in this community questions the validity of the gifts of the Spirit. No one questions the necessity of a changed heart and personal conversion. No one in the Vineyard doubts that there will be a consummation of history when Jesus visibly returns. These beliefs have never been a problem. In this sense we have been truly Evangelical.¹⁰ But we wanted more than just good theology. We wanted historical orthodoxy in the power and experience of the Spirit. We were called to this movement - in all of its diversity. God’s call brought us together and God’s call will keep us together.

⁹ The interesting thing is that according to Mark Noll in *The New Shape of World Christianity*, this diversity is a characteristic of emerging Christianity around the world, especially where the winds of the Spirit are blowing.

¹⁰ To understand the diversity that is within Evangelicalism, I encourage you to read Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston’s *The Variety of American Evangelicals*.

Secondly, we came into this diversity because we are first and foremost a Kingdom of God movement. We are a people committed to the message and experience of Jesus. His message was the message of the Kingdom of God and His experience was the reality of the Kingdom. From beginning to end Jesus was all about the Kingdom of God. As it was with Jesus, so it is with us. The message and reality of the Kingdom is our highest value and is what holds us together. Thus, the Kingdom of God is our central theological motif. This theological motif informs and shapes our practices. The King and the Kingdom are at the center of our centered-set. We will go anywhere in theology or practice that the Kingdom leads us.

Therefore, we cannot simply add the theology of the Kingdom to another theological system. The Kingdom is not an appendage to other theologies. It is the central motif that shapes all of our theology, understanding, and practice. Just as the idea of the sovereignty of God shaped Calvinism and the love of God shaped Wesleyanism, so the idea of the Kingdom of God shapes all of our theological reflections.

It was this message that initially drew me into the Vineyard. It is my passion to help us become a movement that is truly committed to and shaped by Kingdom theology and practice in terms of the already/not yet that keeps me going. I want a movement that is neither given to Charismatic triumphalism nor to Spiritless orthodoxy. It is that desire that drew me in, and it is that same desire that has shaped the Vineyard in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

There is a third thing that has made us into a mosaic of diversity. We are diverse because we have always been committed to being a centered-set movement. John Wimber taught on the “centered-set” many times. In the July 1995 - February 1996 *Vineyard Reflections* he fleshed out what he meant by that term in an article entitled “Staying Focused: The Vineyard as a Centered Set Movement.” The point that he made in this article is that we are not a movement that draws stiff boundaries in theology or practice.¹¹ The question is not whether a pastor or a church is in or out. The question is, “What way is a church or pastor going?” Are they going toward the Kingdom? Is their center Christ and His church? Are they going toward the work of the Spirit? Are they going toward the Vineyard core values? If so, then they can be in if they want to be. I recognize that John’s metaphor has its limits, but it is useful in helping us understand why we are so diverse and how we got to where we are. We have never been a movement of fences. We have endeavored to stay focused on the center and move in that direction. All were welcome who were going in the same direction. The centered-set idea opened the door to the diversity we now experience in the Vineyard.¹²

¹¹ In other words, we are neither a confessional nor a liturgical movement.

¹² I think most would agree that this is not meant to, in any way, suggest that scripture does not also include many bounded-set statements. So, for example, Jesus said in John 5:24, “*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death into life.*” Being in Christ clearly involves the crossing of boundaries. Likewise, the present possession of eternal life and being in Christ fits more neatly in bounded –set thinking as opposed to centered-set thinking. Since centered-set language has played such a significant role in our theological diversity, it is evident that we must give more attention to what this means. I certainly would include in

Finally, we got here by the fact that individual pastors and churches are free to do pretty much what they want and remain in fellowship as long as they are headed in the same direction and have the same center. Each church is free to become all that they desire to be and to work through the issues of theology and practice within the limits of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Each church is free to host the speakers that they desire. Those freedoms have only limited exceptions.

It is expected that if a church wants to be a part of the Vineyard family, they will indicate that desire by minimal commitments. It is expected that Vineyard churches will be committed to Vineyard core values and in general to the Vineyard *Statement of Faith*. It is expected that they will help support the Vineyard USA family financially by giving three percent of their gross income to the movement. It is expected that every pastor will attend Vineyard events and participate in trans-local Vineyard life. These are family obligations that go along with being mature, responsible members of the family. These are the minimal requirements.

Legally and pastorally, the National Board has the right to set other stipulations and requirements on churches that carry the Vineyard name. The National Board is the legal Board and functions as the senior pastoral leadership for the movement. It has been given a special stewardship of the movement. As steward, for example, it could require 4% giving from the churches, or that all Vineyards receive approval from Vineyard USA before appointing a new pastor. It could also tighten up the theology or limit the practices of churches carrying the Vineyard name. That is its right.

The Board exercised this right when it required that all Vineyard churches sign the Trademark agreement. The Board is the steward of the name so this requirement was placed on all Vineyards for the good of the whole. We had a few churches which refused to sign the Trademark, and thus the Board asked them to remove the Vineyard name.

The Board and John Wimber also exercised this right when it asked the Toronto Vineyard to cease to call itself Vineyard. This decision was made on the basis that the practices at Toronto were not being pastored adequately and, due to the fact that Toronto was quite well-known, the unpastored phenomena were hurting Vineyards throughout the United States. Therefore, the action taken resulted from a studied conclusion that this was what was best for all of the churches in the movement.

But in general, the requirements listed above are the only stipulations the Board has placed on local churches. Perhaps, in the future, the Board in its role as pastor of the Vineyard movement and as legal guardian of the name will come to the conviction that other limits on the local church are necessary. If so, those changes must be done prayerfully and carefully, as to do so would possibly mean that some would be shut out. But more fences could be necessary in the future.

that center the triune God, the deity and humanity of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, the need for regeneration by the Spirit, original sin and salvation by grace alone, the authority of Scripture and all that is stated in the ecumenical creeds.

This raises the question, “But what about the decision of the Board to empower women in leadership at all levels of leadership in the Vineyard?” This is an important question as it highlights one of the primary functions of the National Board. It is responsible to set and enforce policies that have to do with the way Vineyard churches relate to one another trans-locally.¹³ It could have said that “any church carrying the name Vineyard in the United States must agree that leadership in the church is based entirely on gifting and not on gender.” This was within its legal right. It could have done that. Rather it chose, after intense study, reflection, discussion and prayer, not to place this requirement on any local church or pastor. No church or pastor has to accept that position regarding women in leadership. That women will be empowered to serve at all levels of leadership in the Vineyard is the position the Board has taken at a national level and defines how we will function nationally, but it is not a position required in local churches. This policy, as difficult as it is to administer, again reflects the desire of the Board to respect and protect the freedom of the local church.

How did we get here? We are a movement of the Spirit that brought together a people from all kinds of backgrounds with all kinds of theology and practice. We found our center in the theology and practice of the Kingdom of God. We were committed to being a centered-set movement, and we took on this diversity out of a commitment to minimize restrictions on local churches. Thus, today we are a mosaic of many colors. I choose to believe that God made us this way and therefore, we embrace our diversity.

Is Theology Important?

I don’t want to leave the impression that we are a fuzzy-set movement in which anything goes. Neither do I want to imply that theology is unimportant or that truth is relative or community dependent. I don’t want to imply that all are equally right and that those issues in which we have diversity are unimportant. I believe that we must have a clear center which includes a deep commitment to Scripture and the “deposit of faith” that has been passed down to us from the time of Christ.¹⁴ We do not have a right to reinvent the faith. Rather, we are to be stewards of the faith that has been passed down to us. This makes theology extremely important for us as a movement.

But theology is not absolute, timeless, or inerrant. Theology is the attempt of the church to articulate the faith of the people of God in a particular culture and time. And since the meaning of verbal symbols is culturally conditioned, theology must continually be revised to speak within a culture. Times change; cultures change; languages change. Theology, like the translation of the Bible, must be continually in revision or in time it is no longer relevant, fresh, or meaningful, and thus, loses its prophetic role in the church and in the world.

¹³ As we noted in the case of the trademark or the Toronto Vineyard.

¹⁴ The “deposit of faith” is an important concept particularly in the Pastoral Epistles. It is to be guarded, defended and passed on through the teaching and life of the church. 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12ff; 2:2, 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; cf. also 2 Thess. 2:15, 3:16; Gal. 1:9, 2:2, 9; 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3; 2 Cor. 11:3f; Rom. 6:17; 1 Tim. 4:6; Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23.

All of our practices should be informed by our theology. Practices, like theology, are continually in a state of flux, especially in times of great cultural upheaval like we are experiencing today. This flux challenges us to continually work out our practices from a theological perspective. We are not free as leaders in Christ's church to take the latest leadership theory or the most recent thinking from psychology, sociology or the hard sciences without passing these through theological reflection. But neither should we be afraid to enter into dialogue with these disciplines. This dialogue might assist us to better understand and articulate our faith as it is to be lived out in our time, and through that dialogue we might influence the disciplines with which we interact.

How Do We Maintain Unity in All of this Diversity?

As I said earlier, I have been serving the movement as the National Director for ten years. One of the greatest challenges I have had is to lead through all of this diversity.¹⁵ I have always believed that one of the primary responsibilities of a National Director, as it has been historically with the bishops in the church, was to pastor theological development and ecclesiastical practice. But how does one do that when the movement itself is made up of so many theological streams and traditions? It is not easy.

Can we walk together in all of this diversity? Some, in the past have answered "no." They made a decision that they could not maintain fellowship with those who held one or many of the views articulated above, and thus, left the movement.¹⁶ Though I disagree with their conviction that these differences are a basis for breaking fellowship, I do not sit in judgment of them or their decisions. They must walk with their convictions.

Breaking fellowship is, thus, one of the alternatives. Perhaps it is the only one for people who cannot live in the tensions that diversity creates, but it is not the only answer. Let me suggest five guidelines that will help us maintain unity in diversity and diversity in unity:

1. Recognize that unity is not something we create. We are already, with all of our differences, one in Christ. Our unity is not found in uniformity of doctrine or practice. It is found in the fact that we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus, we have been made new by the Spirit, we have been brought into fellowship with God the Father and we have been made members of the body of Christ. I don't agree with everyone in the Vineyard. There are some who do things that I would not do and think ways I do not think. But I believe that every leader in the Vineyard has a deep devotion to Christ, His Word and His church.
2. Respect those with whom you disagree. Don't put them in a theological box and use emotive negative labels to demonize a sister's or brother's position.

¹⁵ That's the reason I have so much gray hair – or no hair.

¹⁶ Eleven churches left the movement over the position the Vineyard took on women in leadership. Many more left as a result of the decision John Wimber and the Board made regarding Toronto. Of all the reasons for disassociation, most left because they did not want to support the movement financially or were not committed to our core values.

Remember, this is your brother or sister with whom you are disagreeing. It is not wrong to disagree; it is wrong to be disagreeable.

3. Be quick to listen and slow to speak. Take on the attitude of a learner. It could be that you are wrong. It could be that you need to change your thinking or your practice. It could be that the person with whom you disagree has thought through the issues and come to a better position than yours. Even if others are wrong and you are right, you will never influence them to change if they do not believe you care enough about them to hear them out.
4. Engage thoughtfully and carefully in robust dialogue about matters of the faith. Mature movements require engagement on the issues. But taking on the role of engaging others requires that you are willing to read, reflect, listen, be challenged, and at times have the grace to say that you were wrong. Again, diversity demands honest, frank, forthright dialogue between brothers and sisters who see matters of faith differently. We will need to continue that dialogue until Jesus comes and the Kingdom is fully inaugurated.
5. Recognize the role of the teacher/scholar in the church. God has placed in the church those whom He has gifted to teach. Paul states that He has given:

“... some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” [Ephesians 4:11-13]

It is this “until we all” that gives me hope. Someday we will all think perfect thoughts and do perfect deeds. Someday all the weeds will be removed.¹⁷ But right now we live in the “already/not yet.” One of the resources God has provided in the church to help us work through the difficult challenges of living out our faith is the gift of teachers. We need the prophets, we need people who are apostolic, and we need evangelists. These are all very necessary. But we also need the teachers among us, the Spirit-filled scholars who help us sort through the issues of our faith and thus, equip us to be Christ’s body to a broken and hungry world.

Play Nice

John Wimber often exhorted the movement to “Play nice!” I want to close out this rather lengthy epistle with the words of another John who fleshed out what “playing nice” means. His words are very important for a diverse movement like the Vineyard:

¹⁷ Matthew 13:32

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.” [1 John 2:3-11]

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” [1 John 3:11]

Blessings,

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