

CONCLUSION

The decline of American mainline protestant churches is alarming. Churches are responding to this crisis through creative initiatives in this turbulent, unpredictable, post-modern, post-Christendom era. A culture shift is taking place to move away from the *consumer church* mentality in which the church is seen as a dispenser of religious goods and services only.¹ A shift to the *missional church* vision is one in which the church is seen as a body of people sent on a mission to serve, who gather in community for worship, encouragement, and teaching from the Word that supplements what they are feeding themselves throughout the week in their solitude and biblical community.²

First Lutheran Church has intentionally concentrated over the last five years to facilitate a major culture shift based on this paper's thesis that biblically and theologically sound strategies can be developed to make, mature, and mobilize Christians for apostolic discipleship. FLC has focused on four primary transforming transitions for this culture shift. FLC uses a change process that no longer just anticipates incremental change but is aware of the implications of chaotic change. A continuous transition involves overcoming a passive membership mentality to growing a passionate spirituality. A third transformational transition involves a shift from enabling a barn mentality centered on

¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 95.

² Ibid.

“us” to instilling a harvest heart reaching out to others. The fourth transition employs flattening the hierarchy of clericalism thereby creating one priesthood of all believers mobilized as apostolic relational networks in Jesus’ name.

Theological foundations communicated via sermon series and small group studies have prepared the way for moving from vision to action. Intentional discipleship and equipping ministry strategic plans have developed from creation to advancement to refinement to execution stages over the last five years. FLC now has a clear and flexible strategy in making, maturing and mobilizing disciples into apostolic mission.

The fruits of FLC’s labor can readily be seen through the significant portion (two-thirds) of the regular worshipping congregation participating in small groups and currently incorporating into their life The Circle of Life Discipleship Journey rhythm of study, Sabbath, and service. New growth areas have emerged to FLC’s attention through this five year process that demand immediate concentrated efforts towards improvement. Among these concerns include a need for increased effectiveness in ministry towards teenagers, young adults, pastoral care and visitation of mature generations.

All churches need to integrate a process that includes an evaluation of their current reality, craft action steps to address areas that need attention, track progress, and continually cast a vision of the intended future. FLC’s next steps currently involve an in-depth Revision³ process using surveys and consultants to build a five year master plan based on mission, vision, and values. This analysis will expand the NCD eight quality characteristics by looking critically at the micro level of each ministry. Aligning staff,

³ Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, *Revision*, (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2000).

leadership, ministry teams, and ministries with a clear vision and action steps for direction will greatly enhance and sustain FLC for many years to come. This paper has clearly demonstrated that biblically and theologically sound strategies can be developed to make, mature, and mobilize churches for apostolic discipleship.