



The Church List for the Rest of Us

2013 • ISSUE #1

MEADOW HEIGHTS CHURCH • REVOLUTION 216

CHAPELWOOD UMC • FLOOD CHURCH

visionroom.com/unique19



The Story Behind the List

We all love great stories. And if you are a church leader, you especially love fresh stories of our Savior-King, Jesus.

A few years ago, I began to grow weary of church success stories that were exclusively about worship attendance. Don't get me wrong— we celebrate, as readily as anyone, the work of God that explodes with numeric fruit. But we all know that Jesus is moving in ways less visible— or should I say, less platformed— across North America.

So the Auxano team decided to create “a list for the rest of us.” We want to salute the hard work of creative and faithful visionaries that will never make the “100 largest” or “fastest growing” list. We want to inspire worship of Jesus, the chief visionary and kingdom entrepreneur whose follower-leaders are taking small towns and niche communities by storm. We want

to stoke vibrant imagination in every pastor and see new models emerge where photocopied strategies have kept us stuck.

We hope you enjoy the first release of the Unique 19. Every year we will highlight the 19 churches we have selected for that year. Month by month we will give a peak under the hood a few at a time— different sizes, distinct locales and various faith tribes. What unique vision has God given to these pastors? What bold values and emerging strategies have come to life? How are leaders redefining the scorecard of business-as-usual church?

May these stories stretch your mind and strengthen your heart.

– Will Mancini

The Unique 19 is a resource brought to you by Auxano, a vision clarity consulting group founded by Will Mancini, the author of Church Unique. Auxano is committed to helping local churches become local movements by guiding them to discover and live out a unique mission.

● **Chapelwood UMC, Houston, TX**
A Grace-soaked culture leads to Grace-soaked lives

● **Revolution 216, Cleveland, OH**
The hip hop church where misfits fit

● **Meadow Heights, MO**
An unstoppable force in an improbable place

● **Flood Church, San Diego, CA**
Reaching an unreached generation

Northwest Bible Church, Dallas, TX
Where it's OK not to be fine

Mosaic Church, Little Rock, AR
Pursuing unity to create real community transformation

Redemption Church, Tempe, AZ
We can accomplish more together than we can apart

360 Church, Sarasota, FL
Building a courageous church with a 1-to-1 relational mindset

St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Newport Beach, CA
Redefining the Good Life

Renovatus, Charlotte, NC
A church of people under renovation - liars, dreamers, and misfits

Scum of the Earth, Denver, CO
A church for the right-brained and left out

Trinity Grace, NY, NY
Joining God with the renewal of the city

The Cove, Mooresville, NC
1000 Neighborhood Campuses in Race City, USA

WordServe, Fulshear, TX
Typical Suburb, Totally New Scorecard

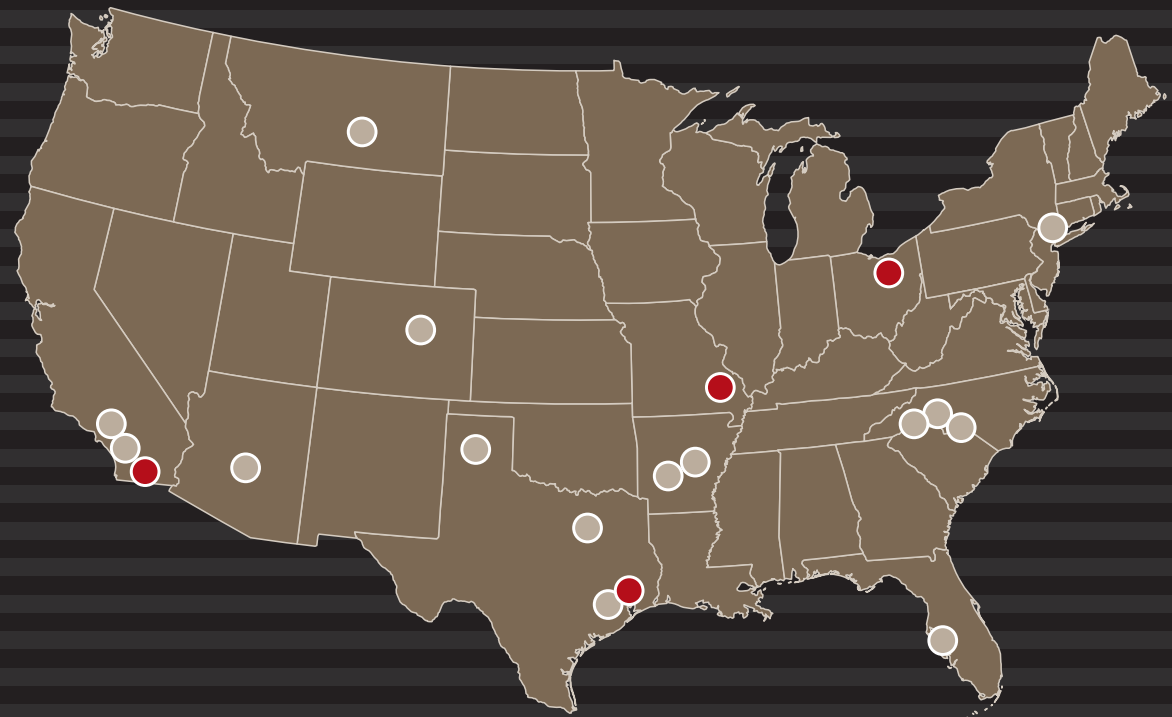
LakePointe Church, Little Rock, AR
Making it harder to go to hell in Hot Springs

Harvest Christian Fellowship, Plainview, TX
After the father's heart amid the independence of west Texas

New City Church, Los Angeles, CA
Bringing together the forgotten and the fortunate across Los Angeles

Good Shepherd UMC, Charlotte, NC
Deweirding the Holy Spirit

Harvest Church, Billings, MT
Living the Way of Jesus, Out of the Way





FREDRICKSTOWN, MO



MEADOW HEIGHTS CHURCH

"AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE IN AN IMPROBABLE PLACE"

Rural America isn't the destination it was when the west was won. The opportunity of the frontier has been replaced by the familiarity of stability. Today, most small towns are struggling to hold onto their population as a slow and steady stream of people seemingly evaporate to larger cities.

The situation might not be so bleak as Radiator Springs from Disney's hit animated movie *Cars*, but the ministry landscape in small towns is now more characterized by denominations fighting to keep church doors open than it is by the entrepreneurial church planting efforts which helped establish those same churches in days past.

MEADOW HEIGHTS CHURCH

"...to be an unstoppable force of God's love that changes our world."

In small town America, innovation is viewed with suspicion, risk is deemed unwise, and Big Dreams are quickly dismissed as improbable. But every now and then, a church seemingly does the impossible, bucking the trends by leading with a drive and passion for rural community.

Enter Meadow Heights, a small town church that dared to imagine the impossible and lived to tell about it. They, like most rural church plants, started out in 1963 as a typical, program-driven, small town church. After years of transition, however, they launched their first multisite campus in 1998 in another small town (with a population under 4,000). Now in 2013, Meadow Heights continues to dream big by launching their third campus in their largest town yet, with a 16,000 person population.

Meadow Heights is passionate about understanding the contours of ministry in their context: small towns and the rural setting. They recognize that small towns may be behind the curve in some ways, which means the church leaders know they need to adapt "best practices" designed by and for leaders in urban and suburban areas to fit their context. They know they can't just copy what's worked elsewhere; they have to be open to progress and students of the transition between the present and God's preferred future for their communities.



The economic landscape of small towns typically makes significant financial extension unwise. Ministry leaders recognize their budget has to be "mean and lean" when compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. This reality has only encouraged Meadow Heights to leverage the most valuable resource in their context: the established credibility platform of local leaders.

This kind of credibility is based on a trust relationship, which is why Meadow Heights works to raise up their own leaders from within the local communities. Their challenge is to activate improbable people by

helping them explore, experience, and express God's dream for their life, the lives of other people, and those around them in the world.

In order to dream big, Meadow Heights uses "Big Dream" as their non-familiar, non-religious language for the truth of God's coming kingdom that changes everything. The Big Dream transforms reality and pulls the future into the present. For this big-thinking, small town church, the Big Dream includes improbable people in improbable story of God's love and movement in their communities - and the world.

"The Big Dream includes improbable people in improbable story of God's love and movement in their communities."

Dreams characterizes everything they do. They value things like: Dangerous Dreams, Radical Risks, Enthusiastic Engagements, Multiplied Momentum, and Strategic Simplicity. Meadow Heights church campuses celebrate when this contagious language shows up in conversations and catalyzes personal alignment with God's dream for humanity.

Meadow Heights is developing their own customized disciple-making tool built around their Explore, Experience, Express strategy. This discipleship tool is currently in beta testing and is going to be deployed next year. They've designed it to make disciples that have a missional lifestyle within the context of a local church, where organization works without unnecessary tending to the business of church.

They're calling each other to Enthusiastic Engagement through "WeMe" goals. Church is only as effective as each individual "me." But when they all join together as a collective "we," the resulting momentum is powerful. This personal/collective engagement is the key to bringing their passion for planting new church in rural towns to life.

Their Big Dream is "to be an unstoppable force of God's love that changes our world." It's a dream that mirrors the Great Commission mandate to go and make disciples, and it's just the kind of big dream that could only start in a small town.

You might think that small town churches are behind the curve, but pull up a map to Meadow Heights and you will see a church that is setting their own growth curve out on rural Missouri State Hwy J.

REVOLUTION 216

Intense Love, Intentional Community, Radical Service



REVOLUTION 216

"THE HIP HOP CHURCH WHERE MISFITS FIT"

Take a journey and visit a young church in a rough part of Cleveland, Ohio and immerse yourself in the experience of this neighborhood-changing Christian community.

As you approach the club in this rougher part of Cleveland, the bass line from the song being played inside is so loud that the sidewalk thumps under your feet. You make your way inside, past people milling about, absently taking the small piece of paper offered to you by guys handing out cards promoting another event. The song ends and the MC introduces the next artist.

Turns out, it's a popular local hip hop singer named "Big Cleve". When he hits the stage, you know why he's earned this moniker: he's a towering six foot, six inches, and looks like he means business.

As Big Cleve begins his unique rap, it's obvious that the crowd obviously loves the guy. You absently look at the promo card handed to you when you walked in. It's only then that you realize it's not a card promoting an event, but the calling card for a church. The name on the card is Marques Evans (aka Big Cleve), pastor of Revolution 216, a different kind of church.



CLEVELAND, OH

REVOLUTION 216

"To see the beauty and full expression of God, you need a lot of puzzle pieces."

Clearly, this is not your grandpa's church; unless your grandpa happens to be Flavor Flav or one of the guys from the 80's rap group Run DMC. If that was the case, he'd fit right in. Planted on the west side of urban Cleveland, Ohio, Revolution 216 is a church marked by vision clarity. Their mission is so unique, it's become a clarion call for this new church: to be a community where misfits fit, who heal while being healed through Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you pay attention to what they're doing, how they do it, their three values of "Intense Love, Intentional Community, and Radical Service" shine through. But if you really want to understand the uniqueness of Revolution 216, you need only to listen to Marques. His powerful mix of passion and lyricism make Big Cleve one part Martin Luther and one part Kanye West, all in a Michael Jordan-sized body. Big Cleve doesn't mind telling you about his church, so it's easy to listen to him.

"We're a church where misfits fit," he begins, "and everybody is a misfit in some way or other. A lot of people don't fit the mainstream. That doesn't mean they can't be loved. That doesn't mean they can't be in community. It's like a puzzle. To see the beauty and full expression of God, you need a lot of puzzle pieces. As a church, we look for people who don't fit. We've got people who like rap. We've got people who like rock. We've got people who like classical music. And they're all in the hood! It gives us a beautiful picture of God. We've got Liberians and Asians. We've got Caucasians and lesbians. We've got all kinds of puzzle pieces," he concludes.

You're not sure why he paired lesbians with Caucasians, and want to ask, but before you can get your question in, Big Cleve continues:

"Even though everybody's got hurts, even though everybody's got pain, instead of waiting for everybody to get everything together – which they never will – we tell people we don't want you to wait till you become perfect. There are hurting people next to you, so facilitate healing in other people's lives, while you are being healed."

You wonder what that looks like, practically, but he's just getting started:

"Everybody deserves to be loved. I love love. And if there's one thing I believe in, it's that everybody deserves to be loved. We had a girl walk in and announce, "I'm a lesbian." Before she sat down she was hugged by 75 people," he continues. "We've got 20-30 Liberians! They all started

coming because the pastor is a rapper! Did you know Lil Wayne is a hero in Liberia?" he asks.

"Well, he is. And these Liberians come because the pastor is a rapper, and we get to love them to Jesus. We had another lady come, she is a 52-year-old white woman. She is 100% Caucasian."

At this, you have to interrupt: "100 Caucasian?" you ask, amused but befuddled.

"Yes, she is 100% Caucasian. She is totally white. Her daughter became a Christian and started asking her, "Mom, why don't you go to church." So she came to ours and she loved it. She's now given her life to Jesus and is engaged in our discipleship process."

You ask Big Cleve what he means about their discipleship process, and he's only too glad to tell you about it.

"Most churches allow people to hide. We don't. You have to go through our process, because I have to decipher whether you are who you say you are. People who have been in church and never had accountability hate it and leave. Most churches love people on Sunday. That's cool, but we created a process that allows us to be in each other's lives during the week. I hear about Bible studies throughout the week, radical service events like feeding their entire neighborhood Thanksgiving dinner and the church giving offerings away for Christmas instead of taking an offering."

He pauses for a microsecond before shifting gears to tell you a story about Fred.

"Fred is a well-known musician in Cleveland. We met about 7 years ago when I recorded a CD at his home. Then Fred lost his mind. He was an alcoholic. He started having multiple affairs. His wife divorced him. Then one of the brothers in our fellowship invited him to our discipleship group. He was blown away. He came back. One week to two weeks. Two weeks to a year. He gave his life to Jesus and to the process of discipleship. Today he's remarried to his wife and a father again to his three boys," smiles Big Cleve as he makes his point.

"See, we love people through their process instead of killing them while they're struggling. We're out on the streets man. It's dangerous. You can get killed in our neighborhood. But we keep going out on the streets because people need to see us. They need to see the misfits together. The misfits who fit."

HOUSTON, TX



CHAPELWOOD

United Methodist Church † Embodying grace.

CHAPELWOOD UMC

"A GRACE-SOAKED CULTURE LEADS TO GRACE-SOAKED LIVES"

You walk into the church building and it feels like a museum. Not because it's old and dusty but because there is art everywhere. The art, however, isn't on the walls; it's on the people. The many tattooed people have made their skins into canvases. And they wear their varied piercings with pride; the way people in other churches might carry their Bibles. You also notice that all kinds of ethnicities are represented.

CHAPELWOOD UMC

"The brokenness of addiction makes grace addicts out of believers."

So you assume this must be one of those new, non-denominational, edgy churches. But here's the surprise: you've just walked into Chapelwood, a 65-year-old Methodist church!

The birth of Chapelwood never would have suggested what it would become. Thirteen people met on October 2, 1948 to discuss the need for a Methodist church in their neighborhood in suburban Houston. Soon they were canvassing the area looking for Methodists to join them. They found six, and in December nineteen people gathered for the first worship service of Chapelwood at a Boy Scout camp. The church grew and had some success, but nothing out of the ordinary or meriting a place in a list of unique churches. That changed in 1994.

They say there are no atheists in foxholes. Fear of war, of live ammo flying, makes believers out of atheists. They could also say that there are no legalists in alcoholic anonymous meetings. The brokenness of addiction makes grace addicts out of believers. In the last few decades, one of the most inspiring voices of grace was famous author Brennan Manning. Manning eloquently and powerfully spoke of God's love for ragamuffins, that God loves you as you are, not as you should be. Increasingly throughout his life Manning shared his struggles with alcoholism. No wonder he was so obsessed with grace.

It was in 1994 that Chapelwood hired a new pastor, Jim Jackson, a recovering alcoholic who readily identified with Manning's grace-soaked teachings. And so it was 1994 that grace changed everything at Chapelwood.

One of the first visible signs was the launch of Mercy Street in 1997. Mercy Street is a Saturday night contemporary worship service focused on those in recovery. It's where you'll find the aforementioned crowd of the tattooed and pierced. At Mercy Street people began revealing everything, praying over people who were struggling, celebrating loudly with people who were overcoming their struggles. It was a new day for Chapelwood ... and the people that were a part of Mercy Street.

Look around Chapelwood and other signs of the grace revolution are everywhere. A contemporary worship service called "The Upper Room" featuring interactive prayer stations, and another called "The Table" where young adults are encouraged to dialogue around tables during the service.



There's a ministry to the Hispanic community called "Esperanza" and on Wednesday nights you'll find the "Circle of Friends" where about a hundred developmentally disabled adults come together to learn how to pray, and to pray together.

But grace is more than the inspiration for or the vibe at some programs; grace saturates Chapelwood. It's difficult to find an official sentence that doesn't mention or allude to grace. The mission of Chapelwood? "To embody God's grace as we receive it to those who need it." Their discipleship pathway? Experience grace (in worship). Grow in grace (in groups). Share grace (in ministry). The three mission questions they use to make sure they're maintaining the mission focus? "Since last week, how have you received God's grace?" "Who have you encountered recently who needs grace?" and "How have you embodied grace?"

Grace saturates Chapelwood, and grace has changed everything. It's changing lives. An example of this is a man named Steve. He'd just been released from prison and had heard about the Mercy Street ministry. Rather than go there to find healing, he went to break into cars. Moving through the parking lot Steve heard music coming from the building and decided to peek in. He saw there were lots of people, and lots of unattended purses. He slithered into the room then noticed something else – the people's faces. There was a joy, and peace, and contentment he had never seen. It was something he didn't have, and couldn't steal. So instead of stealing purses and getting out of the building, he stayed. And instead of walking away with some cash and never coming back, he walked away with Jesus and today is a leader in the Mercy Street ministry.

Steve went to break into cars, but grace broke open and into his heart. That kind of thing happens a lot at Chapelwood.



FLOOD CHURCH

SAN DIEGO, CA



FLOOD CHURCH

"REACHING AN UNREACHED GENERATION IN SAN DIEGO"

flood (n)

a great flowing or overflow of water, especially over a land not usually submerged

There's been a lot of conversation in recent years about a missing demographic in many churches. Where are the 18-35 year-olds? And especially, where are the 18-35 year-old singles? We've all heard the statistics about the large percentage of young adults that want nothing to do with Christianity or organized religion.

FLOOD CHURCH

And we've all heard stories about how it's hard to connect at church if you're single. I bet the leaders at Flood have heard those statistics and those stories, too. But not at Flood.

If you were to attend a Flood service, you'd go to either Kearney High School or Hillsdale Middle School. Right away you'd notice the laid back atmosphere and a certain raw quality to the service. You'd notice it for sure. But for the young adults at the service (including 75% who are unmarried), they don't notice it at all. It's just natural.

If you're like me, you've seen plenty of (or even been a part of) "authentic" services that are meant to appeal to "the young people." That's not what Flood is doing. They're simply putting on a service for their friends. They ARE young people and Flood is their place to gather for worship, to connect with each other, and to be a part of something that matters.

Flood began in 2000 as a ministry of College Avenue Baptist Church, in response to the large and growing population of young adults in San Diego. For 5 years, their unique approach to gathering for worship had attracted hundreds of young adults. In 2005, Flood officially became an independent daughter church of College Avenue Baptist.

They unashamedly focus on young adults. It's the reason they exist. Matt Hammett, the lead pastor, has been and continues to be driven by a single question: "What is the Church doing in our city to reach a population segment that is largely disconnected from God?" Flood is definitely part of the answer to that question in San Diego.

One story is of a disconnected young man pastor Matt met five years ago at a Newcomers event, which is Flood's monthly party that demonstrates the heartbeat of who they are as a church. This young man came to Southern California to go to school, but instead found himself diving deep into the surfing and party scene. At Newcomers, he connected with others on their own journey and began to explore issues of faith. Then came the life-changing moment: he went on a bimonthly missionary trip to nearby Tijuana to serve at an orphanage connected with the church, he surrendered his life to Christ. Once disconnected from God, this young man now serves in a key role on the Flood ministry staff.

And before you put Flood into a pre-made category in your mind, take a few minutes to experience one of their worship gatherings online. They're not playing cover tunes from the latest "secular" bands. They're worshipping.

"Flood is THEIR church,
not their parents' church..."

The creative elements in the services and the message from the pastor are not watered down or ambiguous so as not to offend. They wrestle with the real issues of life with the Bible as their guide. They respond with raw, heart-driven worship that flows out in creativity and power. Their values of grace & truth, wholeness, mission, and creativity are woven throughout everything they do.

Not only do they meet at Kearney High School, they run the after school programs. They provide food for struggling families of students at the high school as well. They have teams that are ministering to the large refugee population in a section of the city. They work with an orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico (just 25 minutes away from San Diego), sending teams at least once a month.

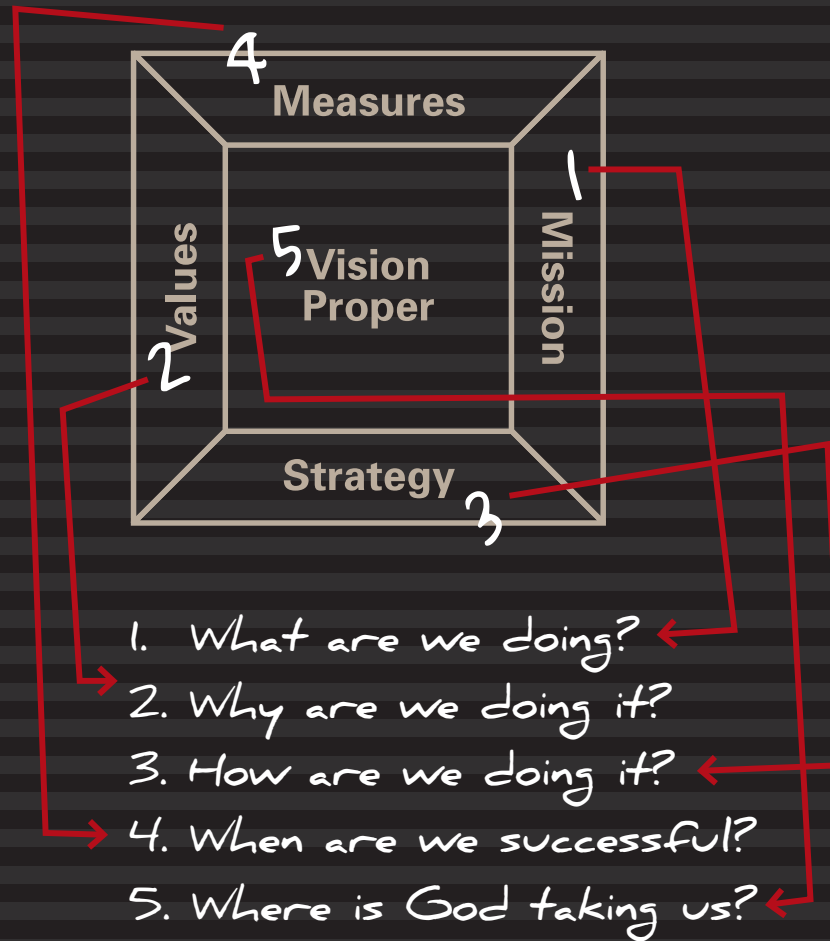
"The leaders at Flood have taken the risk to build bridges to the culture."

Everything that Flood engages in is connected to their unique understanding of, and commitment to, their specific context. What does it look like to reach young adults within the San Diego culture? The leaders at Flood have taken the risk to build bridges to the culture—not through compromise but through authenticity. They've created a gathering FOR young adults. Flood is THEIR church, not their parents' church. It's a place where they are being changed by God's grace ... and sharing that transformation with others, too.

Transformation recently happened for two brothers, now in their early 20s, who suffered abuse from their father. They took that abuse out on each other, and worse, their younger siblings. Though a connection with friends, they began to attend Flood and came to faith in Christ and joined one of the church's "core groups" that meet and serve together. Once embittered against each other, these brothers are now each other's best friend and supporter. They now work together on everything, starting with an accountability pledge to each other and their group about their generational dysfunction: "This ends here."

The unique focus that Flood has committed to—reaching young adults in San Diego—has not limited their impact, it has expanded it. They are deeply connecting with a generation that is known for being disconnected from God. This group that is "not usually submerged" is being saturated with the truth and love of Jesus. That's Flood.

Churches that live out their vision with laser-focus make up the Unique 19. These churches are able to answer the five irreducible questions of leadership with clarity and conviction. How about you?



Use these stories to enrich your own.

When I read stories of unique vision, I feel as though a window has been opened to let a fresh breeze in. The wind that blows is the freedom and the passion that comes when you know what you have been called by God to do. Can you feel that God-confidence in the story of Meadow Heights? Are you moved by the pulsing enthusiasm of Revolution 216?

We hope the testimony of these churches takes you a step closer to a liberated leadership. Too many churches are stuck in the proverbial strategy of "being all things to all people." So may I ask you... Do you sense a deep-down-in-your-soul kind of the conviction that comes from stunningly unique vision? Do your leaders share it? Have you ever named it with just the right words? (Like Chapelwood does with their mission or Flood Church does with their values?)

If these questions prompt you to progress, consider engaging the following team exercise:

Distribute the Unique 19 to your leadership and have them read it in advance of your next meeting. When you get together, follow this guide for dialogue and application:

TEAM CONNECT QUESTIONS

- What story inspired you the most? Why?
- What church reminded you most of your own? In what way?

TEAM CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

- Which one of the following terms best describes what you wish you had more of in you personal leadership? What about in our team leadership? Share a story that illustrates the word you selected.

Freedom | Confidence | Passion | Momentum

- What is the single greatest barrier to experiencing more freedom, confidence, passion and momentum as a team? Make a list on a white board.

TEAM ACT QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions and related actions steps in order to remove your identified barriers:

- How have we relied on photocopied vision (another church model) from a book or conference instead of discovering our own? What can we give ourselves permission to "stop doing" some things as a church right now?
- How have we been "running too fast" on a ministry treadmill as leaders? Do we need to take dedicated time away to reflect, pray, dialogue and discern our unique vision? If so, when is that time?
- Do we need more than a day away in order to fully discern the what the next chapter of our ministry will look like? If so, calendar even more time.
- What is the best thing that God is doing in our church or ministry right now. How are we joining with him? How are we talking about this? How can we put more energy in this?

May God richly bless your vision from Him and for Him!

– Will Mancini





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