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CREATIVE CHURCH BUILDING DESIGN Translating Mission into Brick and Mortar

Westwinds Community Church Jackson, Michigan

The following is an interview taped October 16, 2000, with Dr. Ron Martoia, senior pastor of Westwinds Community Church. Carol Childress, Leadership Network's Information Broker, conducted the interview.

One year ago, Westwinds moved into their new building that is being recognized for its creativity in design and reflection of the church's mission, "We exist to lead everyone to full life development in Christ."

For more information on Westwinds, visit their web site at www.westwinds.org.

CC Tell me a little bit about the history of the church...how did it begin and then we'll move to the design of the building.

RM When my wife and I came back to Jackson, I was finishing my masters at Trinity in Deerfield and had no intention of being a pastor. I was on my way, I thought, into academics. Five families that were part of a Bible study I had started in high school said, "We really want to see a church started. Let's ask Ron if he wants to do it." To be honest with you, I didn't even pray about it or think about it. I just outright said no. I didn't have an idea at all about pastoral ministry and certainly knew nothing about church planting. So basically as Westwinds launched, we did only what I knew to do, and that was what we did in the early 1980s. We had some praise choruses with a couple of guitars, I taught for 35 or 40 minutes, and that was a Sunday morning church service. This went on for almost seven years. We were meeting in a small grade school and grew to about 130-140. I came to the conclusion that if 125-130 people and 11 converts were what Westwinds was about, I was going to move on because there had to be more to the Kingdom than that. I didn't understand what to do or how to do it, but I needed to figure it out. So we began a journey toward a major philosophy of ministry change.

We moved what was going on Sunday morning to a once a month Sunday night service where we had more expressive praise and worship and much more in-depth Bible teaching. On Sunday morning, I preached much more "felt need" messages. It was a 12- to 18-month process that we completed about six years ago. The transition was a huge grow-up experience for me. So, while the church is 14 years old, realistically it's more like seven or eight years old.

CC Describe the context of your community.

RM Jackson is a community of 40,000 proper in the city, about 80 to 90,000 in the county. It has an older, declining population base and is a community that has a lot of small mom-pop manufacturing firms that supply the Big Three automotive companies. It's becoming more of a suburb community for Ann Arbor or Lansing. Our church is quite different than the demographics of Jackson. We have about 80 percent college educated and the average age of our congregation is 38. Since we've moved in our building, the single fastest growing segments of our church are 20-somethings and 60 and older. I can't point to any single factor for the 20-somethings but the growth of the 60 and up is due, I think, to the fact that we finally moved into a permanent facility.

CC And what are you running now in attendance?

RM We're running somewhere between 750 and 850.

CC The new building is about a year old. How did you frame its design?

RM Our architect of record is Godwin and Associates, of Springfield, Mo. but a member of our congregation, Dave Driscoll, was a major player in the process. An award winning architect, he literally moved into our office cluster for six months, and I got a short class in architecture. Knowing our philosophy of ministry and desire to use the arts, he said, "I've always tried to think through the question, 'What would a 21st century cathedral be like?' What he really meant by that wasn't so much the grandeur of open space in a cathedral as it was 'What would the embedded symbolism in a contemporary space look like?' So, from bubble diagrams all the way to finish elements, our design team, made up of laypersons, Dave and I, spent six months dreaming and thinking and planning and reconfiguring. Dave did lots of 3D modeling for us so that we could really see the space before we moved into it. He helped us think through all the questions that emerged from the main question. For us, that question was "How can we take our mission, 'to lead everyone toward full life development in Christ,' and allow the journey of life development be reflected in the building?"

CC Who comprised the design team?

RM We had thirteen laypersons on the building design team and they all had a sense of creativity, a sense of vision, and a sense that we were really going to build our mission. We knew it would cost us more than if we just put up a barn, but we were convinced that God wanted us to do something like that. Dave and I probably met three times a week for six or eight months and then the design team took what we were working on and was really kind of the court of appeal. Our Board had financial oversight to it.

CC What is the size of the facility and how much did it cost to build?

RM The building has 22,000 square feet and cost \$2.45 million.

CC How did you translate your mission into the design?

RM The first part is the ascent beginning at the south end of the facility and coming up the steps. The first doors enter into the designer studios or basically the staff offices. The idea of a designer studio is built around the fact that we are co-designers with God, co-laborers with Christ. We wanted to start down at the end where those who help design and interact with God on the process of life development are located. This is the fountainhead of where vision happens, where prayer happens, and where the process of life development is thought through and implemented.

When you leave the design studios and come through the doors into the main space, you find yourself in "cathedralesque" axial corridor that leads to the auditorium where you will meet God. It is 175 ft. long, 28 ft. tall, and 18 ft. wide so there's a lot of volume to it. Along the way are life development studios for the kids, where age appropriate experiences with God take place. It's an opportunity for parents to get offline on their journey and interact with the teachers that facilitate learning for their children.

We wanted the hallway to be interactive space. One feature is that the minute you walk into our building, you see this very earthy, chunky, fantastic slate tile that came from India. It wraps around from my office into the hallway of the designer studios, then into the main axial corridor and terminates in a large steel mosaic, which then goes into our auditorium. The slate is deeply meaningful for us because our church is involved in mission work in India, working with orphanages there, doing pastoral training and church planting. In the children's studio area, they painted the tiles that are in the hallway. The tiles terminate outside the auditorium in a big mosaic designed by a member of our church, Steve Sells, who is an industrial designer. He did a lot of our steel structure work, steel sculpture and painting. Our information tables in the lobby and tape ministry table, for example, are all steel.

The interior is very dramatic. Our office complex or designer studios are done in terra cotta colored walls with black and gray circular patterns. We picked up on the eternality circular theme from Len Sweet. We have a big plate in the designer studio entrance that has quotes from Len Sweet and Steve Sells on it.

There are a few interior details we still want to finish. There's a big interactive touch screen that we are getting for the entrance so people can walk up to a kiosk and explore the things they want to about Westwinds.

CC What about the use of fabric and materials? You've talked about the glazing, the tiles, and the steel. What else?

RM Color is very dramatic here. The exterior is in a couple of shades of taupe and then trimmed and accented in deep burgundy that migrates inside. The main areas are a kind of a taupe with dramatic black, gray, and burgundy glazing. We have kept fabric wall covering and wallpaper out of the facility in a permanent way because we wanted the flexibility to constantly change. When we use fabric, it's because a set or a design goal calls for it.

CC What kind of visual connections do you have? Do you use video?

RM We'll use video clips every month...man-in-the-street interviews, whether those are used from another archive or we've created them. But more often, we use large visual tactile props or art pieces that we project for meditation, and reflection. We try to create an aesthetic experience that is overall not just a media piece, but is a combination of a number of things. For instance, our Sunday evening service once a month is called Encounter. Last Sunday, we had probably 100 candles on stage and rosemary oil being burned in the space, so it had a very definite fresh scent to it. Neither one was usual but the service happened to be very reflective and pensive. We had an art montage created out of PhotoShop and we played on a double image of "I want to focus on you, God," and "the eye is the entrance of the body" from Matthew 6.

We have a prop team that does nothing but create artistic large tactile visuals. We just finished a series called "Mending the War Within" where we were doing an overview of Ecclesiastes. Our prop team built an eight-foot heart that had what looked like stitches in it, and big safety pins trying to hold it together. It conveyed what are the things that we try to do to fill the gaping hole in our heart? It's a huge piece that has been hung on our wall and spotlighted through the entire series the past five weeks.

CC Who is on this prop team?

RM Oh, they are all volunteers. Our creative design team is composed of eight people and one of the point leaders on that team is a guy who can translate our ideas into get-it-done visuals. He's got a team of about 30 and they are unbelievable.

CC What about educational space?

RM We have education space, but not nearly enough. We don't have any space for junior and senior high. They meet on different evenings or different time locations. There is a brand new charter school next door and we are going to contract with them. We had anticipated when we moved in that in a year we would be able to go to two services. The day we moved in, we had to start two services and next Saturday night, we will launch our first Saturday evening service. So then we will have three services.

CC Is there any difference in the services?

RM Not at this time, but we have tremendous flexibility on that front. We might change the configuration of the auditorium a bit. We built a three-tiered floor that can take twelve roundtables so if we want to do dinner theatre, for example, we can. Each one of those tiers is wired in eight locations with computer hookup so if we wanted to do rounds with computer interactive terminals, we can.

CC How far out do you have to plan your services?

RM Months, but we deviate if necessary from the plan. When Peter Jennings did the series on the search for Jesus, for example, we stopped at midstream in our planned program and launched a four-week response.

CC Let's go back to the building. What has been the response of the people?

RM Let me give you the response of the people inside and outside. Initially, the inside response was one of skepticism. "Do you really think we can do something like this?" There was a tremendous sense of "I don't know if we can pull it off." But as the building began to go up and people started to get a vision for what the building design team had seen, they started to get excited about it. Now that our people are in it, the feeling is "Wow, this is a place where people can encounter God in ways that you just couldn't in a plain old building." The space really does help define the experience.

CC Please elaborate on the phrase, "the space helps to define the experience."

RM The programming edict that our creative design team has is really quite simple. At a Leadership Network forum, one of the speakers was Donald Miller, who had just written his book on new paradigm churches. He said that out of his research had emerged a sense that growing churches, even beyond the three main groups he had explored in the book, were mediating or facilitating – I don't remember his exact words – deeply moving experiences with God. I thought a lot about what he said. Is that really what we do? Are we really facilitating and mediating deeply moving experiences with God? And I had to walk away and say, "I don't think that's really our primary goal at Westwinds." In the three years since that meeting, that's one of the things that we have spent a tremendous amount of time working through.

We've augmented the phrase a little bit. We want to mediate deeply moving experiences with God that foster health because we obviously want them Christ-centered. We want people to move towards wholeness. The upshot of it all is that the facility helps to define the experience. Whether we're using aromatherapy oil or candles; whether it's media this week, or a reflective time of journaling; whether it's a fifth century healing service where people are washing feet in basins and then being anointed with oil and dried off with a white towel by an elder or whatever it happens to be, the space really helps to define the experience. Our auditorium is the only place where dramatic painting and glazing is not used so that every time people walk into the auditorium it can be configured differently.

CC You are very creative and intentional in your use of art. How have people responded to that?

RM On one hand the introduction of art into worship is obviously a very ancient thing. There's nothing particularly contemporary about it. Yet, in contemporary nondenominational and mainline churches, the reintroduction of art seems to be fresh and new and somehow vibrant and different. We have been very intentional about it. It has allowed people to explore their faith in the context of ambiguity. For instance, the PhotoShop created art that we did last month for Encounter allowed people to have a little bit more expansiveness, a little bit more bandwidth and then be able to encounter God and say, "OK, I haven't been pushed into a kind of prescribed rut here. I'm having to engage God in the midst of taking a look at this visual or watching this slideshow that maybe evokes in me something quite different." Art provides an ambiguity that verbal communication does not. So we've been very careful to try to create some of those types of experiences. It really boils down to us saying that our worship services are "moment collections." It is up to us to steward those moments because it might be in a transition that somebody hears God's voice. It might be smack dab in the middle of art, media, or

music. It might be upon entrance. It might be upon exit. Regardless of when it is, we have to steward those moments.

CC What is the next step beyond this facility?

RM The auditorium was designed and laid on our property in such a way that the north wall can be moved and we can double the auditorium to 1,200. When we do that and add education space to keep the ratio right and parking, we max out this property.

So we're in the process of trying to say one of two things. We either need to start thinking through what a relocation would look like or we need to start thinking about a multi-campus where maybe we do something more down in the city. If we undergo relocation, does this become a youth wing or maybe a training center? All of those things literally are on the map right now. We had a board meeting last week where we're just sorting through the question, "What next, God?"

CC With the benefit of hindsight, what would you have done differently?

RM Obviously, we would have built bigger. At the time, our team thought we were OK. I don't think we paid nearly enough attention to the fact that we're having increasing amounts of single parents in our culture coming back to church and probably looking for help and support. As a result, our children to adult space ratios are off now, so I wish we'd thought through that a little better. Also, we probably needed to think through having a lot more large spaces that we could subdivide. We've got a number of children's classrooms that are good size but still far too small for us to do large group programming. More of our model of ministry is moving to where we'll have a large group of kids for a production and then break them down into age, grade, and small groups.

CC What were the key takeaways for you in the process?

RM I am really thankful that we said we are going to build something that's artistic, that will bespeak our model of ministry, and be in harmony and consonance with that. Having someone who deeply understood our model of ministry was an absolute key. I am convinced that we could not have gotten what we wanted any other way. I learned a lot about teams. As a church, we have never voted on anything--a budget, an elder nomination, building design decision, any of that. We have always had consensus, and I think if there was ever a time that we could have gotten to a place where we had to vote and wrangle out differences, it could have been in this building program. We committed at the very beginning to do what we've always done here, and eventually come to consensus.

Westwinds Community Church









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COMPLETE INTERVIEW WITH RICH NATHAN, SR. PASTOR, THE VINEYARD CHURCH OF COLUMBUS.

The following is an interview between Rich Nathan, senior pastor of the Vineyard Church of Columbus, OH and Dave Travis, Senior Vice-President of Leadership Network about Nathan's new book, [Who Is My Enemy?](#), published this spring by Zondervan.

TRAVIS: Rich Nathan is the Senior Pastor of the Vineyard Church of Columbus, Ohio. I have enjoyed getting to know Rich and his team over the last few years and even got to visit their congregation a few years ago. Though the Vineyard movement began in California, some of their largest churches are in the Midwest. Not only is their church large, but it also very aggressive in church planting.

Rich was raised in a Jewish home but came to Christ as a freshman in college. From there he was on to law school and then taught business law at Ohio State. He had a growing sense that the Lord was calling him to leave his position at Ohio State and to begin to pastor the church. The leaders of the church also felt the same. In 1987 he began his pastorate of the Vineyard. The church was about 150 in 1987 and now has a little over 6000 in attendance in 2002.

A few weeks ago I got to interview Rich about his new book.

TRAVIS: Well, tell me about your new book, Rich.

NATHAN: Well, it's titled, "Who is my Enemy? Welcoming People the Church Rejects."

The reason that I titled it that way is that I think that the conservative church in America has mislabeled our enemy. If you are a part of the conservative church, we definitely have a set of enemies that are clearly identifiable and they would include gays, liberals, feminists, new agers, postmoderns, everyone on the cultural left. We have misidentified the enemy.

If you look at the way Jesus related in the first century, the Romans were marching through the streets of Judea, they had their pagan standards, they were involuntarily conscripting Jewish young men into their armies, were taking Jewish daughters into wealthy Roman homes to serve as servants and cooks. They were taking the best of the crops of Judea, they were taking taxes.

Jesus never said the problem of first century life is the Romans. He never said that the problem of first century life in Judea was the amoral people that are ruining our culture. What He continually said was the problem that we have as Jews in the first century is that the people of God have failed to act like the people of God. The salt has lost its saltiness.

And that's revolutionary in terms of the way that the church relates to the world. Because we sincerely in the church believe, at least in the conservative part of the church, that the problem of the world is those immoral people out there or those folks who don't share our political views or those folks who are ruining our schools rather than that the people of God, that is the church, are not acting like the people of God.

TRAVIS: Why did you decide to write this book?

NATHAN: The book is intended to be a bridge book. I'm not interested at all in being politically correct or in drifting with the culture or simply being an echo in the culture. I want to have a very firm anchor in scripture, but also have my arms and the arms of the church open as wide as the arms of God are to the world.

It seems like in the church world today, you've got one of two opposite alternatives. On the one hand, in the main line church, there is an attempt to be welcoming, but the welcome is often merely an echo of the culture. So it's a welcome without grounding. It's a welcome without an anchor in scripture. On the other hand, conservative churches frequently will have an anchor in scripture, but their posture and manner of relating to the world is one of rejection. And what the world picks up from the conservative church is: "We're not welcome here. We know that people like us are not going to be welcome in your church."

TRAVIS: You've talked about several topical areas that you've felt need addressing. How do you address those in the book?

NATHAN: This book springs out of my own life and the life of our church. I open the book with an illustration of an incident that happened with my son was playing baseball when he was in high school. He was a good baseball player and one summer when he was fourteen or fifteen he played in a tri-state league. His team played an 80 game schedule and we used to drive from Ohio to Michigan to Indiana. Marlene, my wife, and I saw this as an opportunity for us to get outside of the walls of the church and be real people with a dozen or fourteen other couples, all of whom traveled to watch baseball. Every evening we'd all have dinner together, then line up our lawn chairs on the first base line. Everybody had their coolers and we talked.

There was one Christian couple that used to literally sit about fifteen feet behind the dozen or so other couples and they didn't interact. They found out that a couple of the fathers had brought beer to the parking lot and then they discovered a rule that said that you aren't allowed to bring alcoholic beverages within 150 feet of the ball field. Somehow they either measured it or found out that the distance was 128 feet and petitioned the league for a ruling. A ruling came down: no beer. Then they pressured the coach of the team to strongly warn the parents to not drink beer. The last portion of the season I had to listen to non-Christians, with whom I was attempting to build relationships, just curse Christianity. You know, those blankety-blank Christians, they can take their morals and shove them, that kind of thing. This was a sincere Christian couple that was attempting to live out their convictions but they did so in such an unappealing way that they slammed the door of the Kingdom in the face of those who might have been entering. I think we can do a better job.

TRAVIS: So how then, do you teach what it means to be and act like the people of God? How do you teach some of these things to your church?

NATHAN: Well, in the book I have lots and lots of practical examples. One of the major things for us in the church is that we need to learn new categories for where we place people. We tend to categorize people as either in or out. So that you're in Christ; you are outside of Christ. You're in the church; you're not in the church. And that sure is a biblical way to categorize. I mean Paul uses language of being "in Christ."

But that is not the only way that the Bible categorized people. In the east, especially in Semitic countries, there is a tendency to categorize people by the orientation and the direction of their lives. In other words, where a person is facing with respect of the center of a set. And so, Jesus would frequently say that the prostitutes, the tax collectors, who are far away from the Kingdom, will enter before the Pharisees, who were near to the Kingdom. He is recategorizing things. He's not saying, who's in, who's out? He's saying that once a direction of a person's life, these tax collectors and prostitutes, are far away, but the direction of their lives were towards the center, towards Jesus. And they were going to make it in.

On the other hand, the Pharisees, who were near to Jesus, theologically, religiously, the direction of their lives was moving away from Christ and, eventually, the trajectory of their life would take them out of the Kingdom. When you start recategorizing people, concerning the direction of their life and how they're doing in terms of movement and motion, it radically changes the way you see people. There was a gal who came to our church who was practicing Wican. She wore all black; she was pierced up, long black hair hanging in her face. You look at someone like that and you think she is just far out. She is unreachable. One of our interns, who has heard me teach over and over on this

principle of the centered set, looked at her and said, "You know, she wouldn't be hanging around here at all except that God is at work in her life. And I believe that the trajectory of her life, even though she is far away, is in motion towards the center." And as he began to reach out to her, she more and more moved towards the center and now she is a center going Christian. So instead of looking at a gay person, a person who is a radical feminist, or a new ager and saying, well, they are out. What we want to begin to say is, do I see any evidence at all of God working in their lives drawing them towards the center?

TRAVIS: Tell us how your views have affected your church.

NATHAN: The book springs from the life of our church. The church is one of only two agencies in our city, for example, that works with people who have Aids and who are HIV positive. The other is the Aids Task Force. In our city, the Aids Task Force almost exclusively works with white, middle, upper middle class gay men. If you're not white and you're not middle or upper middle class, you don't get served. If you are a minority, if you live in the inner city, if you're a woman, if you're a child, all those folks come our way.

We have hundreds of people that we are working with in the Aids community. We have what we call "Faithful Friends," and there are over a 100 individuals in the church who have paired up with somebody in the community that has Aids. They go to their homes; help them clean. Many of the folks are really sick so they can't do some of the basic tasks. They cut their hair, they watch television with them, they play cards, they go shopping together, and they're just faithful friends. In the course of that friendship, there is opportunity for spiritual discussion as well. We haven't had one person in 15 years die of Aids without first receiving Christ. So in a number of the areas that I am talking about we have actual ministries or outreach that extends to a particular group of folk. The book expresses how to put wheels on the welcome.

TRAVIS: You had a previous book, "Empowered Evangelicals." How is that book different from your current one?

NATHAN: It's a bridge building book as well. What I attempted to do with that book was bridge the gap between the evangelical and charismatic worlds. I took 8 or 9 dimensions of church life and tried to communicate here's where the conservative evangelical church would come out generally regarding spiritual gifts, worship, or the way that we look at reality and here's the way that the charismatic Pentecostal worlds would tend to view those areas. What I attempted to do was assess the plusses and minuses and forge a radical middle.

TRAVIS: How could a pastor use this new book in their ministry?

NATHAN: It's a book that would be extremely useful for small groups. It includes lots of study questions. It's a great discussion starter as a church is trying to wrestle through the issue of women in ministry or the issue of how are we going to relate to homosexuals in the community or the new age. There's enough here that a person or a small group could get together, discuss it, and debate the issues. A number of small groups are already using it.

It's also a great book to hand to somebody who has a lot of issues with the church. Especially if they are coming from a more liberal perspective and they're just used to disagreeing with the church's stances. It presents what we believe, I think, in a more winsome way and also veers away from a conservative, right agenda.

It would be a good book for university students as well who are continually faced with the issue of Christianity equals homophobia or Christianity is anti-woman.

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A LESSON ON HOW TO BE HOSPITABLE TO OTHERS BY BILL EASUM

In June I attended a workshop on "Managing Creativity" sponsored by Leadership Network and the Disney Institute in Orlando. Although I didn't get to see much of Disney during the day and half I attended the workshop, I was introduced to enough of it to have some interesting thoughts. Here are some of them.

After less than two hours at Disney I thought "Wouldn't it be exciting if our churches cared enough about welcoming strangers as does Disney?" Every Disney employee I met welcomed me as if they really were glad to see me. Of course I knew why they were glad to see me....I was paying their salary. Perhaps it is time to regularly train our staffs and the leaders of congregations to welcome the stranger.

After a few hours, it was apparent that everyone who works at Disney knows the Disney story... how it got started, what Walt dreamed of creating, and what role they play in creating the Disney drama each day. Every person understood that they were a cast member of a giant play. What would change in your church if every leader understood that they were a cast member in the great drama of divine intervention into this world?

It was also soon apparent that Disney had a code of conduct such as not smoking or chewing gum on the premises, saying "Good Morning," "Good Evening," "Good Afternoon" instead of "Hello," or upon seeing someone taking a picture of their family asking if they could take it for them so the family member could be in the picture. Simple things, but things that showed the people of Disney were prepared to make anyone's trip to Disney an experience they would not forget. What if our church leaders were prepared to make Sunday morning an unforgettable experience?

It also occurred to me that the code of conduct gave Disney the appearance of direction. Church Mission Statements are comparable to the Disney code of conduct. They help guests understand what your church is all about and where it is going, not to mention they give direction to how your church makes decisions. Consider how it would change the stranger's view of your church if every person they asked, "What is this church all about?" was able to give them the same response?

I experienced the power of direction while visiting Trinity Church in Chicago (pastor Jeremiah Wright). Every person I asked to describe the mission of church, including a six-year-old, gave me the same answer: "We are unashamed black and unapologetically Christian." Anyone who visits that church has no trouble discovering its mission.

Disney also confirmed the ancient/future thing that many of us futurists talk about. The old and the future exist side by side at Disney, from pavilions to visit to old bricks running into new forms of pavement. It's not unusual to see postmodern churches that are experimenting with blending the old and the new. I don't mean that they throw a few praise choruses in with the hymns. Far more than that. I mean candles, creeds, art, stained glass, video clips, projection systems, surround sound, hymns, Pearl Jam, Gregorian chant, etc. all mixed throughout a service.

The Disney presenters referred to the importance of leaders letting the "inner child" out. In the context of "Managing Creativity" that means that creativity is often a product of getting in touch with the child within us and exploring the meaning of things around us. What if your leaders constantly asked "why".... "Why isn't this working?" or "Why can't we try that?" So much of the creativity at Disney comes from people who have a playful attitude. Could the same be true for our churches?

One more thing about the inner child. The ability to let the "inner child" out is one of the main things that separates most people born after 1945 from most people born before 1945. Consider this response from one of the young pastors on my Listserve: "This (the inner child comment) hits me right where God has led me over the last 6 years since seminary. I struggle with how to do this in the

context of leadership - I know when to be serious and when to goof, but because I have been set so free to be the kid I am and God is creating me to be, it seems that for others it is difficult for them to accept me as a leader. (I may be projecting my fear of failure onto them, but I don't think so.) Are there any 'kid leaders' who would be good mentors/encouragers who have seminars, books, videos, whatever?"

Over and over, the Disney presenters focused us on the phrase "Yes, and...." instead of "Yes, but...." Their emphasis was on providing an atmosphere in which teams are encouraged to expand on one another's idea, adding a creative touch to the original idea. Idea strings (one good thought often leads to another in the right environment) are one of the primary benefits of teams that say "Yes, and..." instead of "Yes, but..."

"What happens in your church when someone comes up with a new idea? What systems do you have in place to encourage new ideas? Is your church a permission-giving or permission-withholding environment?"

Disney demonstrates that the experience begins in the parking lot. All along the pathway from the parking lot to the entrance, speakers played the Disney music, helping guests get in the mood. The parking lot was immaculate. Everything played to a theme. The landscaping was incredible.

I had my beliefs-in paying people to make mistakes, promoting staff horizontally and letting them choose different ministries every year or so, and doing away with job descriptions-reinforced and confirmed at the Institute. Many of the people at Disney have had multiple jobs over long-term tenures. One of the persons who trained us had been with Disney for twenty-five years and had held numerous jobs including starting out driving a tram.

Why not do away with job descriptions and free people up to make mistakes from which they can learn instead of asking them to fulfill a prescribed set of tasks? We are discovering that Gen Xers rarely will not do the same job over and over for years. Six months to a year is tops for most of those with talent. So if they excel, let them have "roaming" jobs and cross-train them for many ministries and let them flow in and out of them over time.

One of the ideas that was generated in our group discussions was the possibility of using "touch" video walls in the church lobby. All people have to do is touch the part of the screen that they wish to know more about and it instantly displays the information. Of course, we must remember that if you use high tech you must be sure to give high touch.

I walked away from my Disney experience quietly praying - "God, what will it take for your people to care as much about sharing Jesus with strangers?"

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NEXT recently interviewed George Cladis, author of *Leading the Team-Based Church*, about his book and what he learned in the process of writing it. This book is the first in a series for 21st century church leaders copublished by Leadership Network and Jossey-Bass. Cladis is the senior pastor of Noroton Presbyterian Church in Darien, Connecticut. To order a copy of the book, call 800-956-7739 or contact your local bookstore.

For more excerpts from the interview with George Cladis, please check out [NetFax, issue 120](#).

***NEXT*:** What were the origins of the book?

Cladis: The origins were my own experience as a senior pastor and subsequent study of management in relation to Christian theology and worship. As the church I was serving began to grow and the size of our staff increased, I realized that I didn't have the tools to capably lead the staff. As I read about organizational and business reform that seemed to me to match biblical and theological themes, I saw parallels between certain things we believe in Christianity and the themes of the business and organizational reformers such as Peter Drucker and Margaret Wheatley. I became interested in probing into the links between organizational reform, and biblical and theological concepts. It seemed to me that the Church could benefit from many of these reforms and understanding of postmodern culture – as it relates to what we believe about God, Jesus Christ and the nature of the Church.

***NEXT*:** You mentioned the growth in the size of your staff. What did you learn in that process?

Cladis: As the church was growing, we added staff on the basis of the skill and experience of the potential staff member matching the needs of the church. We didn't consider how we would build the community of the staff or how the various personalities of the people we were hiring would fit with the basic orientation of the church and its developing philosophy of ministry. While we hired people on the basis of credentials and experience, we made assumptions that everyone was on the same track about what we were trying to accomplish as a church. We were essentially creating "tents of ministry" or separate ministry centers with very capable leaders, but we weren't all on the same page trying to accomplish the same goals. The result was conflict and some of the staff departed in anger and it resulted in hurt all around. I personally felt a failure and wondered, "What did I miss? or "What did we miss as a church?" How could we create a staff community that works in greater harmony, rather than one resulting in that kind of conflict and pain?

***NEXT*:** There is a belief on the part of some that the church has sold out to the consumer culture. How do you understand the culture in order to minister to the culture and yet not be owned by the culture?

Cladis: In the book I was walking a tightrope on this point. Pastors generally like to condemn culture as fallen and the need for the church to be countercultural, and I think this is always the case, particularly in obvious moral and ethical issues. However, I found that some of the cultural trends today actually seem to encourage a more biblical way of leading in the church. And there's a certain irony about that. This seems to be because Christendom is over. The church now needs to approach Western society -- really all of the world-- as a mission church so that we are all dressing like the culture we are in, learning the language so we can communicate in the vernacular, learning the music, etc. We need to be learning the very culture itself, not to become identified with it, but in order to draw people out of it

and into the Kingdom.

NEXT: Were there any unexpected learnings for you in the process of writing the book?

Cladis: Yes. I thought theological conformity was the most important characteristic in choosing staff, provided the individual was personally mature and emotionally healthy. What I learned instead was that one's philosophy of ministry or practical way of carrying out ministry, is really more important. You can have theological diversity, to a degree, on a church staff and be in relative harmonious relationships if you have a matching philosophy of ministry. But if you have theological conformity and divergent views on the philosophy of ministry, it can spell disaster.

NEXT: What's the unasked question you want to answer?

Cladis: I think it is, "Come on, George, does this really work? You paint a beautiful picture of pericoretic fellowship, but the reality is that there's still a lot of disharmony and anger that's latent on church staff. Does this really work?" Yes. To state it negatively, the concepts and practical steps in the book really do work to manage dysfunction. To state it positively, one tries to create a deeper and more enriched community, which hopefully becomes more grace-filled and a little more honest. The problems of sabotaging ministries and backbiting and so on still exist to some degree, but if you practice the model in the book, I believe you minimize them and it's less likely you'll have a total meltdown. Sometimes when I speak on this topic at conferences, I'm introduced as an "expert in team ministry." The first thing I say is, "You know, that's like being introduced as an expert in parenting. Being a father of three teenage children, I know the difficulties of parenting and that no one really has all the answers." Building leadership communities and teams is just plain difficult.