

TWO

## The Simple (and Not-So-Simple) Church in Action

To be simple is to be great.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Both of us own houses in Florida. Florida is great, especially South Florida (Thom/Naples, Eric/Miami). The culture is rich. The food is amazing. The water is beautiful. The list goes on and on. The weather. Beaches. Palm trees. Sun. Fishing. Fresh fruit. Florida lobster. Great college football. Stone crab. Snorkeling. The weather.

Did we mention the weather?

The weather is the trump card. Click on [weather.com](http://weather.com) during the winter and check out South Florida before you shovel snow, put on a flannel shirt, or take your cold medicine. Sorry to rub it in. Just speaking the truth in love.

The pictures do not fully capture the great weather. You cannot get the real feel from the travel channel or guidebooks at Barnes and Noble. Words and images fall short. You have to experience it. You have to observe it up close. The cool wind off the ocean. The breeze whistling through the palms. The refreshing air. The warm sun. The weather has to be tasted, smelled, sensed, and felt . . . in February.

The weather is the trump card.

Except during hurricane season. Floridians now speak Greek—not because they are active in a church where the pastor preaches from the original text. They know Greek because the Greek alphabet was used to name hurricanes. Recent hurricane seasons have been the worst ever.

An active hurricane season makes winters in the Midwest or Northeast desirable. Well, almost.

The news reports do not fully capture hurricane weather. The anxiety. The waiting. Watching the cone of error (or cone of death) on the news. Wondering if it is going to hit and where. Putting up shutters. Stocking up on

water. Getting gas for the generator. Hurricanes are a pain even before they hit.

If a hurricane hits, life is altered. More than can be understood by watching CNN or FOX News. More than can be grasped by reading an article. More than can be sensed by browsing through some pictures online.

People who lived through Hurricane Andrew in Miami in 1992 still talk about it. It is a marker. There is life "before Andrew" and life "after Andrew." Andrew was a category five hurricane, the worst possible. Only three category five hurricanes have impacted the United States since hurricane measurements were implemented. Andrew was also the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history before Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

The pictures and the news reports could not possibly capture what the people experienced. A night of terror. The howling of wind. Tornadoes. The sound of houses tearing apart. The rising of water. The morning after when nothing was recognizable. Weeks without power. Months without a roof. The loss of everything.

Words and pictures fall short.

To grasp fully the great or horrifying Florida weather, you have to experience it. It is the only way you can really "get it." Experience leads to understanding. Many things in life have to be observed in action to be fully understood. To understand completely you have to be there.

*You just had to be there.*

Have you ever used that phrase to describe something you experienced? Something you experienced but could not quite describe. The moment was so powerful. It was clear and vivid. It resonated deeply within you. Yet you were having a hard time articulating it. So you gave up trying to explain it. You summed it up with, "You just had to be there."

Such is the case with the simple church.

You just have to be there. You have to see it. In action.

## Seeing Simple

We have seen it. We have observed the simple church in action. We want you to see it too. We want you to be there. The research and the

implications will make more sense to you if you could see it. The data will resonate more with you if you could just be there. So you are invited.

We are inviting you to join us on a church consultation trip. You will see a simple church in action. And you will see a not- so-simple one.

Some church consulting can be accomplished through phone conversations and electronic communication. Recommendations on issues like parking, staff planning, program implementation, and community analysis do not necessarily require an on-site visit. For example, there should be enough parking to handle full capacity in the auditorium and the education space (including children and youth). On average, 1.8 persons use one parking spot. The church should make plans to provide parking options based on this estimate, so that parking does not become a lid that prevents growth. A consultation like this can occur over the phone.

This type of church consulting, however, has its limits. Reports and pictures fall short. The culture of a church does not come out on paper or over the phone. Church culture is sensed. It is perceived. It is felt, sniffed, tasted, and observed in action. It can only be accomplished through a site visit.

A site visit is a multiple-day trip to the site of a local church. The church is analyzed on paper before the trip so that the time there may be maximized. Staff meetings, worship services, and people interaction are all observed. Personal interviews are conducted with staff and volunteers. Analysis is conducted on the health, culture, and the potential of the church.

In this chapter you will join us for an extensive on-site consultation with two churches. One of the churches is a simple church. The other is not. They are of similar size and are in similar communities. Both of these churches are real, but their names have been changed.

You will see what we see and hear what we hear. Look beneath the surface. Observe things with a fresh set of eyes. Write down your observations in the margins. Think critically. Analyze and evaluate. Be there.

## First Church

Our first visit is to First Church. First Church has been in existence for over forty years. They are recognized throughout their denomination for being a solid church with great programs. In fact, other churches have emulated their community Christmas program. They are also known for having

talented and popular staff members. They have the type of staff members who speak at events, pray on the platform at conventions, and write articles.

The church has been at a standstill for five years. The church has not grown, and minimal numbers of people have come to know Christ. While things are not great, they are OK. The church has experienced some staff turnover but no major turmoil. There has been some unrest in the congregation but no major rift. In other words, they have not hit a point of crisis.

And without a point of crisis, it is difficult to change.

### Cross Church

Our second visit is to Cross Church. Cross Church is not that well-known. We had not even heard about the church until the consultation. It is in a less-known part of the country than First Church. We recognized none of the staff members' names.

The church has been in existence for just under twenty years. Over the last several years, the church has grown a lot. The initial analysis was exciting. People have come to know Christ, and they have stayed at the church. They have gotten plugged into ministry and are contributing to the body of Christ.

### First Church Statements

On the drive to First Church, we review several documents the church has sent us. Most churches have these types of documents: church bulletins, newsletters, staff manuals, annual budgets, brochures, and ministry booklets. We read them, seeking to discern the focus of the church, the top priorities, and the ministry approach.

Most churches have a lot of information to communicate, but First Church also has a lot of statements. There is a mission statement, a purpose statement, a vision statement, and a strategy statement. Each statement is different from the other. And long.

Looking more at the brochures, we notice that each ministry department also has different statements. Each statement is intended to describe the focus or direction of the church. There are more than ten different statements on the materials we are reviewing.

What does it mean?

The mission statement listed in the bulletin is "to lead unsaved people to become fully devoted followers of Christ." Obviously, someone has been influenced by the ministry of Willow Creek. The purpose statement printed on the church brochure features five "M" words: *Magnification, Multiplication, Maturity, Ministry, and Mission*. Some leader had been impacted by Rick Warren and the purpose-driven movement. The vision statement highlighted on the church stationary is "loving this community to Christ." Or maybe that is the strategic statement.

Nevertheless, it was *another* statement.

It would be easier to memorize the book of James than to memorize all the statements . . . and much more profitable.

Do the statements have anything to do with one another? Are they reflected in how the church actually does ministry? Or are they just placed on top of an existing paradigm and structure? The confusion with the multiple statements indicates that there may be a multiplicity of ministry philosophies and approaches existing in the same place. It is especially unclear how all these statements fit together.

We are unsure of the real focus of the church. These documents do not make it clear. Perhaps the upcoming interviews with staff and key lay leaders will enlighten us. We pull into the parking lot. You are grateful to be here . . . alive. You think to yourself, *Thom is a really bad driver*.

### Interviewing the First Church Pastor

We meet briefly with the pastor of First Church. He is gracious and excited about the time we will have together. You can tell he wrestles back and forth between giving the perception that everything is OK and admitting that he is frustrated. He has grown increasingly bothered and tired with the activity in his church. Not because he is lazy but because it is not producing the spiritual fruit he longs to see.

He also hints that he feels the church is disjointed and headed in multiple directions. He is excited about the great things that are happening in different ministries in the church and does not want to pour cold water on the energetic staff who lead them. At the same time he senses that not everyone is on the same page.

We ask him *what* his desire for the church is. *What* does he believe God is calling First Church to do? He speaks of a church where lives are changed.

Good. We ask him *how* his church is set up to make that happen. He struggles to answer. He indicates this is the reason he has asked us to come.

### Interviewing First Church Leaders

During interviews with key lay leaders, we ask what the focus of their church is. We get a myriad of responses:

"Providing great worship services and big events for people."

"Excelling in our ministry to children."

"Taking care of the needs in our church family."

"Addressing social and political injustices in our community."

"Having small groups that are relationally structured."

"Having small groups that teach the Bible."

Of all the vision/mission statements we read in the car, not one is mentioned by the staff and other church leaders. Not even close. The people in the church have not internalized those statements. They are really hazy on what the church direction is. We ask the staff to quote their vision or purpose. Few are able to do so. Despite all the fancy brochures with well-crafted statements, there is not a clear *what* at First Church. The church is not united around a singular purpose.

If the *what* of First Church is unclear, the *how* is not even on the radar. If the purpose is hazy, the process for making the purpose happen has not entered the picture. When we ask the staff and key lay leaders what the church's process for discipleship is, we get blank stares. Confused looks. We rephrase the question. Several times. How do you structure your church to make disciples? How do set up your ministry programs to move people toward spiritual transformation? More blank stares. Some stuttering.

The best response: "Basically, it just sort of happens."

Unfortunately at First Church, what is supposed to *just sort of happen* isn't.

## Cross Church Statement

On the drive to Cross Church, we review the same type of documents. The number and types of brochures, newsletters, bulletins, and other documents are about the same. The quality of the brochures and bulletins is similar. The graphic design is comparable.

One major difference emerges. There is only one statement—just one.

While First Church has a lot of statements, Cross Church has one. There is one overarching theme. One statement. It is short. Though it is adapted for each age group, the thrust is the same. It is clear that Cross Church is all about "loving God, loving people, and serving the world." Simple.

Their focus is to lead people to love God, love others, and serve the world. It is clear and concise, and it is reinforced on all their communication pieces. But we wonder if this is really in the DNA of the church. We wonder if this statement is embedded in the culture of Cross Church. Is it reflective of reality? Is it directive of the ministry? We pull into the parking lot eager to interview staff and key leaders to find out what is behind this one statement.

## Interviewing the Cross Church Pastor

When we meet the pastor at Cross Church, we tell him we noticed right away that there is a lot of consistency with the "love God, love others, serve the world" theme. He indicates that this is what the church is all about.

You are feeling bold since this is your second consultation. So you jump in and engage in a dialogue with the pastor.

"So, that is your purpose, right?"

"I guess you could say that."

"Talk to us about your process. How do you make your purpose happen?"

"Love God, love others, serve the world is our process."

"I thought you said it was your purpose."

"It is both. Our purpose is a process."

"Oh."

Interesting. Genius. Simple. Instead of a chasm of separation between their purpose and their process, the two are one in the same. Instead of distancing the *what* and the *how*, Cross Church has combined them. The purpose and the process are married at Cross Church. The two have become one. Their purpose (loving God, loving people, and serving the world) is a process.

We ask him to explain what led to this. Here is what happened.

Several years ago the pastor knew that something was missing. Each year many people visited the church, joined the church, or became Christians. Yet the church was not growing. As many people were leaving as were coming. The back door was as big as the front door.

More importantly, people were not being transformed. The church was not healthy. New programs and special events were constantly implemented to remedy the problem, but the busier the church became, the more the problem was amplified.

Problems are always bigger when everyone is tired.

He began to ask some hard questions. He decided to step back and see the big picture, to see the forest and not just the trees. He became convinced that what was missing was a simple process that moved people toward spiritual maturity.

He knew both biblically and experientially that spiritual transformation is a process. He desired to design a simple process that would facilitate the process of spiritual transformation in people. He committed to developing a process for making disciples, a process that pulled everything together and executed the purposes of the church.

He invested months praying through his dream for the church. He was expecting something new and profound to emerge. Nothing new or profound came. There was not a big, holy, goose-bump moment. He went back to praying and reading. He settled on an old dream, an old vision: Make disciples.

Just so you know, he stole that from Jesus. A plagiarized biblical vision is always a good thing.

The pastor's dream was not original or unique. It was simply to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19), disciples who would be mature in Christ (Eph. 4:13). This revelation led to deeper thinking and more questions. What does

a mature disciple look like? He spent a lot of time in Scripture wrestling with this question.

He believed God wanted disciples who would walk intimately with Christ, live in community with others, and serve both the church and the world. Those several aspects of discipleship fascinated him. He also believed that this was a process, that people did not become this kind of disciple overnight. He began to meet with others about structuring Cross Church to help people become this kind of disciple.

The group met and prayed. They wanted a vision that the church could really grab hold of. To eliminate confusion, they decided that there would be one rallying cry that would feature the discipleship process. "Love God, love others, and serve the world" best captured it.

The pastor explains that the statement emphasizes that discipleship is a process. First, someone loves God. This first step is the most basic and essential aspect of discipleship, but it does not end there. After someone enters into a love relationship with God, he or she begins to love others. The person commits to grow in community with others. After loving God and others, the natural result is to serve people. And the process continues. It is ongoing.

### Interviewing Cross Church Leaders

After the meeting with the pastor, we interview some staff and key leaders. The vast majority of the people to whom we speak talk freely about loving God, loving others, and serving the world. The people at Cross Church have grasped the process. We discover that it is discussed regularly in staff meetings, lay leadership meetings, and is referred to frequently in worship services. There is a diagram of the process in the office, and every staff member can say it with ease. It is in the DNA of the church.

Cross Church is committed to loving God, loving others, and serving others. It is great that it is on paper and in the minds of the people. But how do they make this ideal happen? How is this vision translated to regular church life? We began to ask leaders these questions.

One church member responds by saying, "The worship service helps me love God more, and my small group is where I learn to really love others. I am also a greeter which I know is a small thing, but I feel like I am serving others in that way."

One church leader says, "We ask people to do three things a week here. Come to a worship service to fall more in love with God and His Word. Go to a small group to love others in community. Serve in a ministry to impact others. Love God, love others, serve the world. We really try to keep it that simple."

A longtime staff member comments, "We believe our process and programs have to be in partnership. We discussed what the best programs were for each level of the process, and we committed to doing only those things." In other words, they decided to set up the weekly programs sequentially. Therefore, people could move through the process simply by moving from one program to the next.

### Programming at First Church

We learn a lot by walking around First Church for several days. Watching the preparation for the programs. Talking to people who are passionate about what they are leading or attending. We observe a lot because there is a lot to observe.

Each week First Church has a Sunday morning worship service, a Sunday night worship service, Sunday morning Sunday school, Wednesday night discipleship classes, home groups, Tuesday morning men and women's meetings, and Thursday night visitation.

In case you lost count, that is eight major programs. Eight programs in seven days. This lineup is just for adults. It does not count what all the different age groups offer, things like youth choir and children's choir. This is each week. Every week. The normal stuff. The stuff normal people are supposed to do.

We wonder how First Church members can know their neighbors, the unchurched next door.

We sit in on some of the programs. They are good. People seem to enjoy them. It is hard to say which ones should be eliminated. However, it is clear that attention is divided. It is hard to be excellent when you are focused on so much. This reality shows up in the small things. Everyone is short on leaders. Sound guys are pulled all over the place. Some rooms are not cleaned. Some people complain their ministry is not publicized enough.

While walking around, we ask staff and leaders some basic questions. "What is the program that you expect the majority of your guests to attend?" Or,

"What program do you teach your people to invite their friends and neighbors to?" We get unclear answers. Some leaders say every program. Others debate over which program it is.

There is no process, so it does not surprise us that there is not a beginning point. There is also no connection between all the statements we read and the programs that are offered.

When we ask what program they attempt to move new members or guests to, we get more confused looks. Some people get defensive. People are accustomed to defending and justifying the existence of their particular program. The programs are ends in themselves. They are not used as tools to move people toward spiritual maturity.

We also learn about all the special events. There are a lot of them, but the main one is the Christmas program. It is huge. It is a big budgeted item, and people spend months preparing for it. They begin in August, and it involves everyone. And lots of animals too. Not stuffed ones either. They are really proud of the live animals. But some of the staff members are bitter about the Christmas program because they say it burns everyone out until March.

We ask some members how effective the Christmas program is. We could tell that is an odd question to them. We are assuming the goal is to reach people in the community, so we ask how many guests come. And how many of the people who come don't go to church. We find out that the attendees are mostly people from other churches. "But it is such a great tradition."

There is a story in the Gospel of Mark about traditions and about a program being the focus. Jesus was picking some grain, and the religious people fussed at Him. He was hungry, but they were upset because He was "working" on the Sabbath. The Sabbath had been given for man to rest, but these religious leaders changed the focus. In their minds, the Sabbath as a program had to be protected. The focus became the day itself and not the result that was intended for the people.

Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Programs were made for man, not man for programs. If the goal is to keep certain things going, the church is in trouble. The end result must always be about people. Programs should only be tools.

## Programming at Cross Church

We learn a lot by walking around Cross Church for several days.

The simple process is experienced weekly through the programs the church offers. The weekly programs are tools to help people love God, love others, and serve the world. If the programs were not used to move people through the process, then the vision/process statement would be meaningless.

The first step in the process is to *love God*, and the weekend worship services are used to help people do so. The worship service is where guests, new people, and nonbelievers enter the church. It is also the weekly event where believers draw close to God through inspiring worship and dynamic biblical teaching.

The second step in the process is to *love others*, so the next program in the process is designed to help people connect relationally. The weekend services do not connect people to others very well. Like most churches, people sit facing forward and have little interaction with one another.

The staff concluded that small groups were the best environment for people to love one another in biblical community. Some small groups are on campus on Sundays or Wednesdays. Some groups meet off campus in homes or restaurants. People are encouraged to plug into one group.

The third step in the process is to *serve the world*, and ministry teams engage people in ministry. People enjoy camaraderie in a team environment while experiencing the joy of serving others. Some of the teams focus on the church while others focus on the community. New members are told at the new member's class that they should not join the church if they do not plan on serving.

At Cross Church, there are three main programs. One for each phase in their process. They are placed strategically and sequentially along their process. The goal is to move people from program to program so people naturally progress through the process of spiritual transformation. People who attend worship services are encouraged to move to a small group. People in small groups are challenged to serve on a team.

It seems to be all they do. Three weekly programs. It is a simple design.

## Staff Meetings

During the site visit to both churches, we are invited to attend the staff meetings. On both occasions we sit in chairs pushed back from the table. We are just here to observe.

Both First Church and Cross Church have their ministry staff meetings on Tuesday. Both meetings begin with a devotional thought and a time of prayer. Both meetings are about the same length of time. Both meetings have an agenda. Both meetings are in the church conference room. From a distance the meetings are similar.

Up close the meetings are very different.

A lot can be learned by sitting in these meetings and comparing them. We observe some stark differences in some common facets of church staff meetings.

### The Calendar at First Church

If you serve on a staff, you are familiar with "the calendar." It is a part of every staff meeting. First Church and Cross Church both have calendars. We all do. Even Floridians. They will always exist. Reviewing them in staff meeting is necessary no matter how boring the time is.

First Church spends a lot of time in the meeting dealing with the calendar. This activity, however, does not seem to be wasted time. It is a necessity because so much is on the calendar. Management of all the activities requires skillful coordination and oversight. The facility space has to be juggled, the communication pieces have to be crafted, and the cleaning of the campus has to be scheduled differently each week.

The staff jockey for a position on the calendar, wanting a particular event to be the only event for a specific day. They use the typical calendar request form system, and the staff member who submits the form first declares that day sacred for his or her event. A lot of time is spent coordinating specific ministry calendars with the overall church calendar.

### The Calendar at Cross Church

The calendar viewing time is different at Cross Church. Cross Church's staff spends less than five minutes looking at the calendar. After first observing the staff meeting at First Church, this contrast seems absurd.

Are they poor managers? Are they just ignoring all the details that need to be handled? Why does it take so much less time to deal with the calendar?

It is not that they are unable to coordinate; it is simply that the calendars are pretty empty. A staff social is the only nonweekly event on the calendar in the next month. The time First Church staff spent on calendaring, Cross Church staff devotes to discussing the weekly ministry programs. During this particular meeting, the staff evaluates how the weekend worship services are working as part of the discipleship process.

### Numbers at First Church

During staff meeting both churches look at the numbers of people attending. That is surprising because typically nongrowing churches rarely do. First Church has not grown in several years. Each staff member at both churches gets a weekly report that shows how many people attended various programs. However, the analysis of this report is different. You must not miss the distinction.

First Church looks at the numbers of people involved in each program. Each program is viewed separately from the whole. Each staff member checks the number of people in his favorite program and declares things are great. For the youth ministry, it is the Wednesday night event. For the worship pastor, it is the number of people in his choir. For the children's ministry, it is the number of children at the Sunday morning program.

### Numbers at Cross Church

Cross Church looks at the numbers of people at different stages in their ministry process. They evaluate how many people are at the *love God* stage (worship service), the *love others* stage (small groups), and the *serve the world* stage (ministry teams). They look at a quarterly report that shows the increase or decrease in these programs as it relates to their process.

During this staff meeting they are concerned that the *love God* stage (worship service attendance) has increased 10 percent over the last quarter but that the *serve the world* stage (ministry teams) has not increased proportionally. Their simple process is designed to move people from worship services to small groups to places of service, so this report alarms them. They discuss ways to encourage new people to begin serving.

Did you see the distinction?

Here it is. Read this carefully. First Church staff members view the numbers *vertically* while Cross Church views them *horizontally*.

First Church analyzes the numbers of each program apart from all the other programs. They look at each program in isolation from all the other ones. Analysis is on the programs, not an overarching process. Each staff member or ministry leader has tunnel vision about his or her program. They look up and down, not side to side.

Cross Church staff members see things differently, from side to side.

Cross Church has set up their programs to move people through their process. They monitor this movement through their attendance patterns. When they look at reports, they focus on assimilation. They are looking for movement. Movement is horizontal. Cross Church looks at the numbers to analyze the movement of people through the process.

## New Ideas

New ideas and new opportunities often surface in staff meetings.

Where there are passionate leaders and passionate volunteers, there is always an abundance of new ideas. Combine this passion with the many needs that are prevalent in the lives of church members, and you have the equation for new programs and special events.

You have seen it. Everyone knows there is a need. And it is a legitimate need, not just a perceived one. Maybe it is that people are not being financial stewards, or marriages are falling apart. God lays it on someone's heart to do something. So far so good. What happens next is what separates a simple church from a complex one.

During the consultation with First Church and Cross Church, we observe both firsthand. Both staff teams are concerned about the marriages and the families in their church. During both staff meetings new opportunities for equipping families are discussed. They both offer a solution. One is complex. One is simple.

Observe the difference.

## First Church and New Ideas

First Church is hosting two special events this month. One is an all-day Saturday marriage conference. The other is a two-day parenting seminar. The children's ministry is hosting the parenting seminar. The adult ministry is hosting the marriage conference.

No one wants to admit the two events are competing for the time of many of the same people. Ironically, some do not even see this is a problem. They don't see the two conflicting with each other because the events are on different weekends. They think that families should be willing to give two entire weekends to church programs in the same month. And they should be plugged into all regular weekly programs as well. So much for family time.

The promotion of both events is occupying a lot of time. Secretaries are spending half of their time making phone calls, working with vendors, and mailing out publicity pieces. Ministers are spending time organizing the event and begging people to come.

Registration is low. Frustration is high. Appropriate time is not being invested in the weekly programs. Most people don't see how much time is spent. They only see the final product.

## Cross Church and New Ideas

Cross Church has the same needs. The staff is deeply burdened for the families at the church. Just like the staff at First Church. Marriages are falling apart. Parents need instruction on how to raise their children.

Cross Church responds differently. While they are using similar curriculum to First Church, they offer it in different venues. There are no special events on the calendar. Instead, they choose to meet the needs through their ministry process. They choose to offer the content through their existing programs.

Cross Church has started several small groups that will deal with these issues. Not only is the content presented, but the participants engage in a small group. They get relationally connected to people experiencing the same type of struggles.

Cross Church seeks to move people from their worship services to small groups, and these special groups are helping make that happen. People are getting both the content and the small group experience at the same time.

More people respond because they are not away from home an entire weekend.

Registration is high. Frustration is low. The staff is using their time to organize and promote programs that are within the process. The people are not bombarded with too many options. There is no inward competition. Cross Church is able to move people through the discipleship process and meet these specific needs simultaneously. It is a win-win.

## Staffing Decisions

Spending time with staff during a consultation always leads to key insight, especially hallway conversations. One of the most common hallway questions church leaders ask is, "Where can I find a minister to lead this ministry?" Both First Church and Cross Church are looking for staff. During the conversations about possible people to fill a vacancy, some key insights emerge.

## Staffing at First Church

First Church is looking for the best staff possible. Makes sense, right? This reality is clearly stated by the leaders involved in the search for new staff. The goal is to assemble an all-star type staff, the best available in each role. The assumption is that this will make the greatest impact on the church and the community. The assumption has the appearance of wisdom but is faulty.

It has proven faulty for First Church. Their present staff is full of gifted people, but they are running in different directions. The stated philosophy is "hire thoroughbreds and let them run." Sounds good. But the more we talk to the staff, the more we realize there were multiple ministry philosophies on staff. Hiring the best did not pull the team together. Each person came aggressive and passionate for his or her own ministry without a commitment to the whole. People were not recruited and hired to join a coherent and unified movement.

The problem is not a lack of interviewing or reference checking. The problem is not a lack of passion. First Church does extensive interviewing, and the staff apparently walks with God. The problem is that there is no overarching process to recruit and rally staff. Recruiting talented staff with different

ministry philosophies or approaches is a foundation for frustration and disaster.

Here is a snapshot of the First Church staff (the names have been changed). Pastor John is the pastor responsible for the student ministry. Pastor Bill is responsible for the adult education including Sunday school/small groups. Both are passionate about evangelism. It is what they both have focused on throughout their ministries. They have been known for building evangelistic ministries. It is what attracted the pastor and search team to both of these staff members. Sounds like they would get along. Seems like they would be a great team.

Not exactly.

The two agree theologically. Their eyes widen when talking about evangelism and the call to make disciples. Both believe lost people must hear the gospel. However, they are not on the same page philosophically. They approach evangelism differently. Pastor Bill believes in formal evangelism training. He has built his ministry on this approach. Pastor John believes in servant evangelism, and he has built his ministry on this approach. On paper the two coexist. In reality, the two philosophies bump heads.

On Thursday night, Pastor Bill offers formal evangelism training. He invites the entire church. He is always promoting it. He gets the senior pastor to mention it from the pulpit. He also does not understand why Pastor John does not encourage the students to be there. On Saturday mornings Pastor John offers servant evangelism opportunities. Adults and teenagers serve people in tangible ways.

Bill's supporters believe John's approach is shallow. John's supporters believe Bill's approach is cold. Some parents who attend Bill's group do not want their teenagers to attend John's group. The two groups are in a constant unspoken competition. Bill and John are theologically aligned but not philosophically. They were the best available in their fields, but they both struggle with being on staff, partly because of the other one.

They smile in the hallway and hug each other's families, but there is a big distance. Neither one is wrong. Neither one is less godly. They are just different at the core. And the pastor does not want to play referee.

Staffing at Cross Church

Cross Church is also looking for staff, but their questions are different. What they are seeking is different. Like First Church, they want people who are blameless in character and competent in their ministry calling. However, they are also looking for people who are on board with their ministry process. This is important to them.

Each existing staff member was recruited on the *love God, love others, serve the world* process. Some talented and highly recommended staff members were not considered because they had their own pet programs. And these programs fell outside of this ministry process. So the potential staff person was not considered.

Cross Church is more concerned with having a united staff than an all-star one.

If they are seeking a student minister, they are seeking one who will lead students to love God, love others, and serve the world. If they are seeking an adult pastor, they are seeking one who will lead adults to love God, love others, and serve the world. They are rigorous about this during the interviewing. They are that passionate about their process. And that consistent.

The staff members to whom we speak do not feel restrained. They feel free. They feel free because they are also passionate about the process. It is not just something they signed off on but something they longed to be a part of. They are thrilled to be involved in a church that views ministry the same way they do. Some helped create the process. Others committed to it before coming on staff.

The bounds are clear, and they are encouraged to implement and execute the ministry process with creativity and freedom. The existing staff members are not carbon copies of one another. They don't dress alike or talk alike. They don't like the same types of music or read the same type of books, but they are on the same page about how ministry happens at Cross Church.

## The Announcements

It may seem strange to end this chapter with the announcements. However, most worship services end with some version of announcements.

We have learned that the announcements given during the worship services can tell a lot about the church. They typically are a good indication of the priorities of the church. During the announcements, people hear what is

going on in the life of the church. People are asked to participate in something else.

Both First Church and Cross Church give announcements. Both use a pastor to do so. Both give them at similar times in the service. The content of the announcements is where the difference lies.

### First Church Announcements

First Church gives a lot of announcements. People are invited to everything. The Sunday we are here, they announce eight different things. All with passion. All with the "this will change your life and you must come" tone. It is an infomercial, without the 800 number.

As the announcements roll on for several minutes, we look around. We wonder how these people are going to decide which program to go to next. We wonder what is in their minds.

It is an appropriate summation of our visit to First Church.

There is a lot of activity. A lot of busyness. And a lot of complexity. All of it can be justified by the right spokesperson. It just does not fit into a big picture. There is no big picture, no process that guides the ministry.

### Cross Church Announcements

The announcements at Cross Church last about four minutes. There are three announcements. Here they are:

There is a guest reception for first-time guests. There is a new members' class next week for people who are interested in joining the church. And for those ready to try a small group, there is a small group information booth in the hallway.

Each announcement is about movement to the next step. People in the audience know exactly what they are invited to next. They are not bombarded with too much information. Three announcements. Simple. But what else would we expect?

It is an appropriate summation of our visit to Cross Church.

There is a lot of focus. A lot of clarity. Everything fits into the big picture. Everything is guided by their simple process for making disciples.

## The Simple Church Experience

We leave First Church impressed with the staff and the members. Their commitment to Christ is real. But so many of the people at First Church are tired and confused on how to "do church."

Likewise, we leave Cross Church impressed with the people and the members. But we did not see weariness and frustration on the faces of the people at Cross Church. Instead we saw excitement, joy, and anticipation.

Two real churches. Two very different experiences.

Is your church more like First Church or Cross Church?

Would you like your church to be more like Cross Church?

Is it possible for your church to make such a radical change?

To those questions we now turn.

### **GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How are we like First Church?
2. How are we like Cross Church?
3. Which church would you rather serve? Attend?
4. What advice would you give the pastor at First Church?
5. Describe the concept of process. Why is it important?
6. How can a ministry process help us eliminate some things?
7. How can a ministry process unite a staff?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rainer, T., & Geiger, E. (2011). *Simple church*. Nashville: B&H.