



# INTERCOM

January/February 2008

Minnesota Church Ministries Association

Volume 12 Number 1

## LEARNING WILLOW CREEK'S LESSONS

The evangelical blogosphere has been spinning since last fall when Willow Creek Community Church, under the direction of Pastor Bill Hybels revealed the results of a major study about the efficacy of their programming at the much heralded suburban Chicago congregation. The research showed their initial expectations thirty years ago were not realized. From the beginning they believed that plugging people into regular activities and service in the church would produce spiritual maturity. Hybels admitted that they had poured millions of dollars into programs that did not result in any greater spiritual growth than for those who did not participate in the programming.

The response to all of this has ranged from admiration from some who think Hybels and the Willow leadership were brave in admitting failure...to others who think that the Church owes millions of Americans an apology and maybe even a refund!

Willow's experience, however, does reflect the general findings of Thom Rainer's Southern Baptist researchers in their recent release, *Simple Church*. The findings here are that Churches who have a palpable spiritual vitality are not those that are highly programmed. Instead they are simple in structure and clearly articulate the simple process of moving toward spiritual maturity that is in place in the church's ministry.

No one should quickly take smug comfort in the above findings. There are many churches in the land that have had very simple structures for many years but are not going anywhere! Church leaders who have a visceral disgust for the mega church too often jump to an "I told you so..." conclusion on these kinds of disclosures.

In fact, Bill Hybels' ministry has made major contributions to the wider church with or without the findings of a sociological survey. Promoting sensitivity to seekers in churches has been a positive thing. Development of spiritual gifts and voluntarism in the Church has been equally important. These and other dimensions of Willow's ministry will no doubt continue and will also be an ongoing challenge and blessing to the Church at large.

In the end, however, whether you consider Willow's study or Thom Rainer's findings, there is a bottom line ingredient in all church ministry that must not be forgotten: *Spirit-indwelt human personality!* One of the reasons that there are not more churches that have developed like Willow Creek is that there is only one Bill Hybels. His vision and approach for ministry is not absolutely transferable to other people in other settings. God has used His unique giftedness to lead his church to where it is today.

There is no way to wring the human personality dimension out of the equation. There is no Purpose-Driven Church that is driven quite like Saddleback is by Rick Warren himself, for instance.

In the end, it is only the leader (or leaders as the case may be) at your church that God will use to mold the personality and direction of your ministry. Churches need leaders that recognize the uniqueness of their own situation and bring their own particular style, substance, and passion to the party. There is no sterile formula for success or series of steps that must be taken. All ministry is relational and thrives when there are flesh and blood human beings who people want to relate to! Leaders therefore must communicate compelling ideas, engage folks in meaningful service, and love the people deeply over the long haul. Unless the power of personality is evident it is unlikely that obvious vitality will result in any one local assembly. That is not a call to a kind of personality cult...it is a call to simplicity: a simple recognition that God works through credible and compelling leadership.

*Timothy A. Johnson*, Exec. Director

## **The Association At Work**

**MCMA Africa's 11th mission trip** was staged in November with **Tim Johnson & Mary Anderson** traveling to Nigeria and Ghana for 14 days. Very good conferences were held that were an encouragement directly and indirectly to thousands. The work on the ground continues to develop under the leadership of **Bishop Success E. Samuel**. Executive Director **Timothy Johnson** received a **Doctor of Divinity** degree from St. Thomas a Becket University in Canterbury, England on this trip.

◆ **Exceptional & Transformational Worship** is a dynamic 1/2 day seminar featuring MCMA friend, Christ Atkins and a faculty of first rate worship leaders from around the area. Excellent ideas on both worship philosophy and weekly practice. Saturday, February 23rd at Edinbrook Church in Brooklyn Park. Call for full program details or registration!

◆ **Other On-Target Seminars** will include: **One-On-One: Developing Mentoring Ministry in the Church** on April 12th at Rosehill Alliance Church in Roseville; **Clergy360** on pastoral evaluation at Crosspoint Church in Bloomington on April 17th; and **ConnectNow** on follow-up on first-time visitors on April 26th at Church of the Nazarene in Brainerd.

◆ **REGIONAL INSTITUTES** will be held in Duluth on March 1, St. Cloud on March 8, and Bemidji on March 29. Full program information is available now...call MCMA!

◆ **MINNESOTA CHURCH EXPO** at Edinbrook Church on Sept. 27 will include Bill Allison, Al Gallmon, and Many More!

**PRAY – PRAY – PRAY!!!**  
Keep all aspect of MCMA's ministry in your prayers!

# MCMA

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**MINNESOTA VESPERS**  
Sundays at 4:30 PM  
*Hymns, Gospel Songs, Scripture  
& Meditations In Traditional Style*  
Enjoy ten of your favorite hymns  
and Gospel Songs at each service.  
*Excellent special music.*  
Meditations by MCMA Executive Director  
Timothy A. Johnson

**January 13 - St. Louis Park Ev. Free Church**  
6801 Minnetonka Boulevard  
Organist - Gary Nyquist; Pianist - Connie Nelson  
Special Music - Twin Cities Men's Trio  
Meditation - *Dealing With the Illusion of Change*

**February 10 - Crosstown Covenant Church**  
5540 - 30th Avenue South - Minneapolis  
Organist & Pianist - Dr. & Mrs. E. Morris Faugerstrom  
Special Music - Crosstown Chamber Singers & Bell Choir  
Meditation - *Our Fulltime Calling*

**March 9 - First Evangelical Free Church**  
5150 Chicago Avenue South - Minneapolis  
Organist - Gordon Ahlquist; Pianist - Gary Nyquist  
Special Music - Trinity Alumni Quartet  
Meditation - *If We Are Not Our Own, Then What?*

**April 6 - Bloomington Covenant Church**  
10150 Xerxes Avenue South  
Organist - Gordon Ahlquist; Pianist - Connie Nelson  
Special Music - Bloomington Covenant Choir  
Meditation - *Curing Affluenza*

**May 4 - Trinity Baptist Church**  
2220 Edgerton - St. Paul, MN  
Organist - Charles Erickson; Pianist - Gary Nyquist  
Special Music - Trinity Baptist Choir  
Meditation - *Taming the Terrible Tongue*

*Calling All Pastors, Teachers, & Church Leaders – Don't Miss the*

## CHURCH MINISTRIES INSTITUTES

*"Unleashing the Church's Potential!"*

*Saturdays in March 2008*

Mar. 1—Lakeview Covenant—Duluth, MN      Mar. 8—Discovery Church--St. Cloud, MN  
Mar. 29—Evangelical Covenant Church--Bemidji

*Inspirational Opening & Closing Sessions – Training – Resources – Continuing Education*

For complete program information contact MCMA: 952-934-6777 - email: [information@mcmaonline.org](mailto:information@mcmaonline.org)

*Helping Churches Build a Generation of Confident Leaders and Teachers*