

Unit 5: The Third Wave of Cell Innovation
Lecture: Ginghamburg United Methodist Church

SE: Michael Slaughter, *Spiritual Entrepreneurs: Six Principles for Risking Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994). *Quotes from the book are in italics.*

I first met Michael Slaughter at the Illinois Area School for Evangelism at MacMurray College shortly after *Spiritual Entrepreneurs* was published. I had never heard of him; I was there to hear the other speaker, a seminary professor well known for his expertise in evangelism through publication of more than a dozen books. I was standing among some other fans in a circle around this great man when an intense, edgy thin man joined the circle. Within a minute he asked the professor: “Wouldn’t you agree that an expert in evangelism loses his understanding of what’s truly important within a year of leaving the local church?” Who was this guy?

Michael Slaughter told stories about his appointment to Ginghamburg United Methodist Church, a little brick church in a hamlet of twenty houses on a county road north of Dayton. The nearest post office is Tipp City, Ohio, with a population of 7000 in 1994. Ginghamburg Church still there, operating out of two locations on that same rural road, having grown from an attendance of 90 in 1979 to over 2100 in 1994 and now over 4000 in 2008. From 1974-1979, Slaughter’s predecessor Jim Worley had built the little two room church from 20 to 90 by encouraging the understanding that *everything the church did needed to be centered around a commitment to the person of Jesus Christ, within the context of a loving supportive fellowship* (SE: 14). The people began to meet weekly on Thursday nights for a potluck and once a month in someone’s home. Renewal flows out of a commitment to being faithful to the will of God (SE: 15). Slaughter’s theology of renewal presented in this book is centered around six principles, each explained in a chapter. He claims that these six principles are present in every revival in history.

Principle #1: The Lordship Principle: a clear focus on Jesus Christ as the object of faith.

Jesus is Lord. *Renewal is much more than adding a little more Jesus to the mix. A little more Jesus won’t work. Jesus must be the absolute focus* (SE: 35). *Luther felt that the focus and authority of the church had shifted from the person of Christ to the institution* (SE: 32). *Wesley was quickly branded an enthusiast by the church for his zealous insistence upon conversion through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Pulpit and pulpit was closed to him because he called the people to repent of their dead institutionalism and return to their first love in Jesus Christ* (SE: 34).

On a visit to Germany, Slaughter discovered that German has no separate word for “Lord.” They use “Herr” which can also be translated as “Mister.” *I was openly sharing my frustration of having to refer to Jesus as “Mister Jesus” instead of “Lord Jesus” and commented that the word was totally inadequate in expressing Jesus’ true identity. A young man ... stood up in the back of the church and called out ... “We may not have a separate and distinct word for Lord, but you Americans might as well not have. You have forgotten what it means.” He was right ... when we say “Lord Jesus,” we really mean no more than Mr. Jesus. In the New Testament church, the meaning was clear.”Lord” mean the one who had absolute authority.... Many Americans have difficulty with the concept of obedience* (SE: 36-37).

The conviction that Jesus is Lord has been the key theological factor of every awakening (SE: 43). In the years since 1972, Ginghamburg Church has displayed a radical, intense obedience of Jesus

as Lord and they credit this obedience as the primary cause of their growth as a church.

Principle #2: The Biblical Principle: scriptural truth as the primary source for what we believe and do.

The Bible is the word of God. Slaughter opens this chapter with the story of the discovery of a dusty book, unused, unread, discovered in the renovation of the temple described in II Kings 22. It was the bible - probably the book of Deuteronomy. *It's message had gone unheard by the people for decades. When the King heard the words of the book, he realized that they had drastically deviated from God's plan... Josiah had the people gather at the temple to hear the words of the book that had been found on a dusty shelf. The result was radical revitalization! The people turned from dead institutionalism to the living God. Renewal grows out of rediscovery of biblical truth. The church rediscovers the lost book.... The Bible becomes the standard for faith in the midst of a sea of voices crying to be heard in the philosophical and moral wilderness (SE: 48).*

Reading the New Testament as a teen, Slaughter became fascinated with the Jesus of the Gospels. *The bible is the word of God with the small "w" that points us to the living Word, God with the capital "W." The focus is not the Bible; the focus is Christ. (SE: 52).* Radical obedience in 1979 led to an ongoing understanding that "love thy neighbor as thyself" was meant to be obeyed literally; this meant that when you buy a pair of shoes for yourself, you buy a pair for someone needy. When you put braces on your kid's teeth, you put braces on the teeth of a child in poverty. *Renewal broke out at our church when the people began to actively do what we had been reading in God's written Word. Jesus was taking us past the **information** to the place of **transformation** (SE: 56). It is the business of the church to enable people to come to this point of biblical understanding, where transformation results (SE: 57).* The Bible brings obedience into focus.

Principle #3: The Liturgical Principle: discovery of new worship forms.

Just as at Willow Creek, people visiting Ginghamburg focus on the new worship forms and miss the deeper significance of obedience to Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. Ginghamburg became a pioneer in multimedia worship and utilizing indigenous musical styles. The freedom of the unchurched to hear and express their new faith in ways that they find meaningful is key. *The agenda of Jesus is not the preference of the church, but the needs of the unchurched. If the church is to experience a new movement of the Spirit, we need new worship forms to hold the new wine (SE: 68).*

Principle #4: The Covenant Principle: commitment to the integrity of membership.

The covenant community of the church has gates which define when one is inside or outside. Jesus called *people to become part of a covenant community, a counter culture. Membership would involve forsaking individual goals and agendas for the sake of a higher purpose - the kingdom of God. This call upset many of the institutionally religious (SE: 70).* Slaughter refers us to Luke 9:23, 9:58, 14:26, John 6. *Many churches today see membership in the church in the same context as membership in a community club or organization. The church is just one of several organizations with which we are affiliated that has officers, committees, dinners, dues, and money-making projects. We give the church equal or even less priority than other responsibilities in our lives.... the Son of God did not give his life for this institutional concept of church membership. It is far more costly to belong to the body of Christ than to any other human organization (SE: 70-71).*

True to this concept of obedience to Jesus as Lord, Ginghamburg adds stringent requirements to

membership. Members must complete a 13 week class¹ and go through an interview process. *Questions are concerning faith journey, the lordship of Christ, giftedness, service, small-group participation, and stewardship. Attendance is tracked. People are contacted by letter or phone when they miss three weeks of worship... Inactive members are contacted and asked about their intent to continue the covenant of membership at Ginghamburg (SE: 72-73).* Wesley had similar, even stricter demands of the early Methodists.

To be a member of Christ's body means that you recognize him as Lord. Lord means absolute authority - owner... I am no longer in charge... (SE: 77). One of the mottoes of Ginghamburg is that "if Jesus would vote yes, you **cannot** vote no." Ginghamburg does not dictate what Jesus requires; that is the responsibility of the individual believer's study and prayer, but obedience is not optional. *It costs something to be a follower of Jesus Christ. In times of renewal, the Church rediscovers this important principle. The integrity of membership cannot be divorced from the cost of discipleship. Jesus is calling disciples, not club members (SE: 80).*

Principle #5: The Priesthood Principle: equipping the laity for ministry.

What is the business of the church? Slaughter contends that the priorities of God identified in scripture are frequently ignored by what the church culture considers to be important. Jesus had the same complaint (Mark 7:5-13). *Releasing the laity for ministry in the world is the key to the success of Christ's mission.... This principle was at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. Luther reaffirmed this new covenant strategy - that there is but one high priest, Jesus, and all of us are priests, ministering the same body under his authority (SE: 83).* Slaughter identifies other examples of the "priesthood of all believers" in Methodist history in England and America. *There are no superstars in the Body of Christ. Not one of us has all the gifts. I am limited in what I can do in ministry... We are meant to function in interdependent relationships with one another, as the Spirit works through us (SE: 85).* Ginghamburg is nationally recognized for the quality of opportunities that have been developed for laity to do real world, exciting, meaningful ministry within the church and within a hurting world. Links to many of these amazing programs can be found in the proper Workshop Materials folder for this unit. Determining one's gifts and calling is a significant task in adolescent life, spiritual and otherwise, and working in ministry is a significant cause of spiritual growth.

Principle #6: The Leadership Principle: spiritual entrepreneurship.

Slaughter notes that every historical renewal involves a leader functioning as a catalyst for change. *God has always used a human instrument as the agent for change (SE: 101).* He then repeats of common understanding of the need for leaders rather than managers; leaders have a vision that drives the people forward toward change; managers excel at efficiently repeating the familiar. The manager's tendency to function as a facilitator of group process *fails to take into account one very critical problem: It is in the nature of people to want to go back to Egypt. It doesn't matter that Egypt represents slavery. Egypt is all we have ever known. Here, Egypt represents the way we have always done it in the past. There is no freedom or opportunity in Egypt, but life there carries minimal risk and is predictable... If you put it up for a vote, you will go back to Egypt! Or you will bring Egypt to you by building a golden calf in the wilderness (SE: 105).* This is an excellent summary of the problem of resistance to change; the diffusion of innovations suggests that 84% of a congregation is uninterested in change. Slaughter states: *It is my goal to keep as few key leaders as possible in meetings and place the majority of them in*

¹The current "A Follower's Life" membership class is 12 weeks.

the direct front-line of mission, reaching the lost and setting the oppressed free (SE: 112).

The Discipleship System at Ginghamburg.

_____ Ginghamburg's strategy is one of assimilation and invitation as a come structure attractive to unchurched persons. It begins with a first contact at worship and brings a person through concentric circles to participate in the **healthy core group** of persons in active ministry. Between worship and the core group of servants is the circle of Sunday School and the circle Ginghamburg calls *cell* (SE: 120-05). Sunday School is a learning opportunity outside of worship, one of which could be the 12 week membership class. Derived from the metachurch model, Ginghamburg perceives the purpose of the cell or small group experience to be the place *that real fellowship, or what the bible calls koinonia, takes place. The cell is the place of accountability and encouragement... It is in this environment of unconditional love and challenge that I discover the freedom to be real and open myself to the healing process of the Holy Spirit. True depth of discipleship can happen only at this level... From the cell, persons are encouraged to identify their "burning bush" and begin to use their gifts and talents in ministry. The cell groups's purpose is both to encourage by throwing gasoline on burning bushes, and to hold accountable by asking hard questions* (SE: 122-123).

Despite their use of the word cell, Ginghamburg does not utilize the aggressive evangelism techniques, equipping tracks or management structures used in cell churches already studied in our class. They call their small groups cells but "only as a living group, doing life together, we don't grow and split or limit the time together, we want our groups to do life together for the long term."² There is no hierarchical network of connecting "coaches;" at this time; the emphasis is on upfront training for "new groups, new leaders and to just help existing active groups as needed." Groups are set up into geographical districts; monthly, non-mandatory trainings for group leaders are also offered. "We do promote discipleship and accountability and service in our small group ministry approach. It is our most decisive form of discipleship here at Ginghamburg. Our small groups are not evangelistic or outreach in nature at all (although that happens). But our small group formation is around peer-to-peer leadership instead of heavy top-down leadership. I will say we promote and heavily push a 'putting the sermon to application' approach where we create sermon based curriculum for the cell groups to use and give all our people daily devotions based on the sermon theme for the week following."

Ginghamburg is a very inspiring and interesting church. What I find most interesting is that their theology is more in tune with the high commitment beliefs of the cell church movement than any other church I know of at this time; when I read or listen to Slaughter, he shares a vision that is very clear, appealing and satisfying that I believe would be inspiring to any cell church member anywhere. Yet, while their work in small groups is evolving and developing as guided by the Holy Spirit, they are satisfied with a methodology of doing cell which includes very little of what other churches have found effective. On the other hand, what they do is working for them and their record of fruitfulness and faithfulness is significant within the United Methodist church.

²Comments in quotes are from a 3/28/08 email from Kevin Applegate, Ginghamburg's small groups pastor.