

1. BOULDER, CO: TOWARD RADICAL SOCIAL CHANGE

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Who Would Ever Have Thought It Possible

That a city could make such rapid progress toward radical social change in such a short period of time

Everyone knows that Boulder is known for its

Liberalism politics and lifestyles

Fortress mentality they call themselves the Republic of Boulder

Occultism it has been one of the last bastions of occultism in the state

Anti-Christianism even the newspaper editor would take on pastors and churches by name in caustic editorials

What Has Changed?

The climate has entirely changed. The Church of Boulder has become a friend to the city. Sought after by both public and private leaders for counsel and for service, the Church has earned a place at the table of public policy and has won the hearts of community leaders. When the Church is in the news these days, and it is frequently, it is to report its acts of service to its community and the difference the Church is making in the lives of others.

How Has The Climate Changed?

Pastors throughout the city are preaching about the importance of getting out of the Church and into the community.

Their catch phrase is becoming Externally-Focused & Community-Based, and it is working.

Over 2000 more church members are involved in community service than two years ago

Several churches have completed 1000 Acts of Service to the community in the course of a single month

The Church supports city and community human service agencies that provide quality service with volunteers, referrals and finances

The Church provides volunteers for mentoring programs, service projects, and school service

The County Juvenile Diversion Program is now a faith-based program

The Church is involved in service to HIV/AIDS victims and family members through the Boulder County AIDS

Projects. And one of the evangelical pastors has been invited to serve as the Projects Chaplain.

Several prominent public leaders have professed faith in Christ and others are turning to Christ as relationships between the Church and community are strengthened

Public service and community involvement have become common place. Church leaders are beginning to ask each other What are you doing in the city? rather than how large is your church?

How Did This Change Occur?

This Is The Real Story

Three years ago the pastoral leaders of the city of Boulder were introduced to a vision of the Church working together for the spiritual and social transformation of their community.

The turning point came at a Prayer Summit attended by Boulder area pastors. While most were praying against the sins and problems of the city, one pastor was moved to read from Jeremiah 29, seek the peace and prosperity of the city Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

The 10 person leadership team for the emerging community transformation initiative admitted that they did not know their own city. They organized a Magic Bus Tour taking them to eight human service agencies in the city. The day produced an awakening for them.

These pastors discovered depths of human need they had no idea existed in their city and a quality of human care that stunned them. Rather than competing with these existing agencies that were doing such good work, they committed to channel personnel, finances and referrals to community agencies that met a minimum baseline of being morally-positive and spiritually neutral (The local homeless shelter met those guidelines whereas Planned Parenthood did not).

One of the pastors of a larger church took a film crew back to each agency the following week and produced a 60 minute video that has now been used in many Church services. He initially used each segment to support a sermon series on Christ in the City that led to an immediate response by Church members from across the city volunteering for community service.

The firsthand experience of this team of leaders touched their hearts and compelled them to further action. In an effort to provide a similar experience for other church leaders a local Christian business man with great influence in the community personally invited the top leader of the 12 major sectors of community life to each meet with pastors over a twelve month period: The President of Colorado University, the mayor, the police chief, the district attorney, the editor of the newspaper, the fire chief, the school superintendent and others each met with the pastoral community.

Each lunch gathering led to the same three questions being asked of each leader:

- a. What is your vision for our community through your sphere of influence? This helped develop a basis for common vision and collaboration between the Church and key sectors of the community. Pastors began to consider what they could contribute toward that vision through their sphere of influence.
- b. What are three issues you face in your sphere of influence for which there is no earthly solutions? This provided a prayer focus and specific opportunities for service in responding to some of the greatest needs the community faces.
- c. What are three issues you personally face that the faith-community can pray for and encourage you through? This provided a powerful personal and relational base of support for community leaders that may lead to personal life change.

The first question brought the realization that these community leaders want many of the same things that pastors want. Each minimally wants safety for their children, economic opportunity, fairness in the judicial system, and quality education accessible to all. Pastors wanted more, but they wanted no less for their community than did these leaders. This led to a number of intersecting points of common interest that opened the door for collaboration between the Church and each sector of influence in the city.

The second question provided not only an opportunity for fervent compassionate prayer for those needs, but also led Church leaders to conclude, We can do something about that. So lets do it. It was out of the District Attorneys impassioned and desperate report regarding juvenile crime that prompted a proactive response by the Church to work with the DAs office, to design and implement a faith-based juvenile recidivism program that has had great success in the county.

The third question provided an opportunity to pray directly for the personal needs of these key leaders. A number broke into tears while they were being ministered to deeply and compassionately by the pastors. Several of these twelve have come to Christ in the following months and for each of them they now see the Church as a friend and ally.

Three Years Ago

The Boulder city Church was a front page item, but they were not receiving the press they receive today. At Christmas time 2000 the Church was under attack for its evangelical views and the editorial headline read Keep Your Religion to Yourself. On December 25, 2003 the front page headline read Three Churches Take Kingdom Assignment to Heart.

The lengthy front page article told the story of three prominent Boulder churches who each challenged their members with a three part Kingdom assignment patterned after the Parable of the Talents.

Their story began one Sunday morning in the summer of 2003 following the morning message pastors invited volunteers to come forward for a special Kingdom assignment. Between the three congregations 280 volunteered. Each was given a crisp \$100 bill provided by an anonymous local businessman. The assignment was to multiply the \$100 in 90 days and report back to the church in a similar message to the movie Pay It Forward. \$250,000 was raised and all of it given to Boulder County human service agencies.

A 10 year old boy took \$1 (that is all he felt he should take) and printed flyers advertising his services for lawn care earned \$273 for the Orphan Boys of the Sudan now living in Boulder. A couple bought soap and buckets and held a dog wash for donations, raising \$13,000 for the Boulder County Safehouse. A business man simply asked his coworkers, friends and family to match his \$100 and raised \$5,000.

This fall the three churches embarked on Kingdom Assignment 2. The rule was: Sell a personal possession worth at least \$100. Another \$250,000 was raised from within the three churches. One member sold a Sony 32 inch television. One woman said, I thought of the TV in the bedroom. I figure I can use my time better to either strengthen my marriage, pray or read the Bible the bedroom should be a sanctuary, not an ESPN zone. Several members downsized their luxury cars while another sold an expensive watch that he said symbolized climbing the corporate ladder. As before all the money raised was given to human services agencies caring for the needs of Boulder county residents.

The article concluded by stating that these three congregations were just beginning Kingdom assignment 3: Give 90 minutes of service in 90 days. Everyone is energized waiting to see what will be produced by this assignment in meeting the spiritual and social needs of the people of Boulder.

And now other Boulder churches have begun Kingdom assignments in their churches creating a movement of service and good will. One pastor said, Parishioners are feeling a new sense of empowerment and churches are exploring new partnerships with charities the year has been catalytic spurring unity within the church and a movement outside our four walls.

The Church in Boulder has come along way in just three short years from a front page attack to front page praise. City officials have just acknowledged Boulder churches as the single largest contributor of personnel and financing of human service agencies and needs in the County.

This story goes on and on with examples of community service and impact multiplying with every month as the Church of Boulder lives in unity and peace with one another and collaborates with leaders of community influence to make the city and county a better place to live both spiritually and socially.

Pastors and people are serving in the Boulder County AIDS Project by supplying meals, monitoring medications, providing transportation and building relationships with AIDS patients and family members. Through these relationships credibility is being earned by the Church, lives are turning, hope is returning and some are turning to Christ as their hope for tomorrow.

One large church decided to forgo their annual Church cantata and its effort to get the community into the Church and instead decided to get the Church into the community through 1000 acts of service performed during December.

Three months later when a student at the local high school committed suicide, it was the Church and its people, which were invited to spend three full days on campus ministering to the kids and to their many fears and questions.

Other churches have become deeply embedded in daily ministry on elementary, middle-school and high schools providing various daily services, mentoring, leading band, staffing libraries, and so many other roles they are too numerous to list here. In every instance and through all kinds of services the Church is modelling the presence and love of God, people are increasingly open and inviting to the Church's presence, and many are awakened to the spiritual realities and joy of following Christ.

The story goes on and on and on!

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