

SLIDE 1**Community Matters**

Every person is infinitely valuable to God; we value people & what each person brings to the table. We welcome the curious, disillusioned, and the skeptic. Faith is an adventure to be lived; we are here to help each other on that journey. We intentionally seek to serve one another & the surrounding community in the practical love & message of Jesus. Our decisions together are based on faith, risk, and love. We are a prayerful community, led by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. We are externally focused, engaging the surrounding community mainly through *their* established avenues of service. Our commitment to community drives us to plant new families of faith as far as we can reach.

SLIDE 2 In the first few episodes of LOST survivors organized. People gravitated to leadership positions, establishing roles for the groups survival, all to sustain life & health in a crisis. No one person any more important than another, all vital. They formed an undocumented institution dedicated to survival & rescue with clear roles, leadership & structure for the sake of people, community & life. There were certain things some wanted to do, that may have been good, but they couldn't because it didn't benefit the whole. They did fairly well for a while. Later on though, for some, institutional power became more important than the people for which it existed. Personal desires & preferences trumped community. They splintered into small factions due to the selfish desires of a few.

SLIDE 3 Remember Enron? An institution. A corporation, good in it's basic sense & purpose, created to bring heat to homes & businesses among other things. Created to bring jobs to people, over 20,000 people on staff. In the end the institution was abused for the selfish end of certain individuals. An institution which could have, and did, do a lot of good, became destructive by the misuse & pride of a few. It not only fell, but took down the accounting firm of Arthur Andersen with it, one of the top 7 in the country. It devastated thousands.

The church can be the same, the local church can lose its purpose & be misused in the hands of people for personal gain or pride. **SLIDE 4** But it isn't the institutions fault, it's the loss of the moral compass of a few which corrupts the institutional whole. (Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner)

SLIDE 5 As we're going through our current series, 6:8@Six:Eight, we come to our first value today, Community, which we read earlier. If we speak of a local faith community, then we're speaking of the local church. We're setting ourselves against the backdrop of Micah 6:8, our signature verse, where we see the Israelites thinking more in individualistic terms, than as a communal whole - they had become corrupted due to individual desires. The system God put in place was not at fault, people were. As a result God calls them to do justice, love mercy & walk humbly - all communal/institutional initiatives, back to the goodness of the institutional structure to which God had called them. God calls them to think beyond themselves as individuals, but as a community under one head, walking humbly, doing justice & mercy as the character of God is

reflected through them to other nations. God calls them to live as community reflecting him; to do that they must live as a Godly institution, a church as we know it today.

Let me read you a story...

The church was old. Young urban professionals came only to buy the property, not to worship. The pastor declared a full-scale capital fund drive. Older church members opened their wallets for the new plans calling for a modern building, a wellness center, coffee bar & park. Campaign slogan: "Build it & they will come."

The wrecking ball swung. The staff poked around the rubble, reminiscing. Nothing remained but the original foundation. A pastor picked up a brick. Scrawled across it were ancient Hebrew letters. Another stone had Greek lettering. Each foundation stone bore the name of a prophet or apostle.

Then they found the cornerstone, it of course said Jesus. The leaders sat together on cinderblocks discussing the passion which had drawn them to ministry. Construction engineers wandered by & joined in. There were tears & testimonies. They passed a Diet Coke & Moon Pie, as the pastor recited the words of the communion service. There among the debris, rose a new temple, an invisible one, that seemed to reach towards heaven, or maybe the other way around. For this is only the beginning of a story first told in Ephesians 2...

(Catalyst Groupzine, p119-120 with a few changes)

SLIDE 6¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners & strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people & also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles & prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together & rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. ¹

The Ephesians were once foreign to God, each other, before they were called into the family of God. That family has a long history & tradition of being built up & formed by the teaching & direction of apostles & prophets (leadership), and which is held together by Jesus. Jesus is cornerstone of the Church - the first stone laid down for a building & the one by which all other stones are measured off; the one which determines the final strength & footprint of the building.

Cultures have historically made many different kinds of sacrifices which are buried under cornerstones to ensure the strength of a building. Some of these are blood sacrifices (even human). So, the image for us is that Christ, through his sacrifice, became the stone in which the whole Church is joined together & rises to become this holy temple. Our foundation is built on the blood of Christ. A temple which speaks of community, rather than individuals - a temple by which God dwells in Spirit. The individual Christian is sealed in the Holy Spirit, and has God the Holy Spirit within

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Eph 2:19–22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

them which dictates that we're part of the Temple which is the Church - a communal whole. God's witness is shown much more through all of us, rather than any one individual.

SLIDE 7 We need desperately to shift our focus off the me & onto the we; off the I & onto the us. To realize, God fully resides in the *local church*, that we as a whole are God's portable temple with clearly defined leadership, structure & direction. This morning isn't 'church', this is a worship service of the local church, Six:Eight. The local body of Christ, a defined local institution of God.

SLIDE 8 There's an anti-institutional sentiment out there these days. Some might say we need to get back to the purity of the gospel before the institutional church was formed. **SLIDE 9** To that we say two things; the early church WAS an institution. They WERE local institutions with very clear leadership, structure & vision. And secondly, any sustainable, survivable movement must institutionalize. Institutions are necessary & vital to us as relational creatures. Institutions are good & God ordained. God designed society to function essentially in institutions. When we, or God for that matter, want to get something done, we form an institution. Would you ever want to live in a country without the institution of law? To put your money into a bank which did not have an organized institution to protect it? Or, your child to be put into a school without clear direction of learning, nurture, rules & authority? No.

In the garden of Eden Adam & Eve were placed into the institution of marriage. We're all born into the institution of a family. **SLIDE 10** Institutions which run well, give emotional support. They root us & give direction for the future. Without them things would devolve merely to the present moment; no roots, no past, no thought of passing anything along to the young into the future. Anti-institutionalism is destructive socially, spiritually, emotionally & physically - they are established to pass on values, customs, practices & faith. (Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner)

Like LOST or Enron, it's not the institution which fails - it's the people within the institution who lose sight of the institutional purpose. We corrupt the local church when we misuse it to our own selfish gain, rather than for that with which it was established.

SLIDE 11 Many might say the early church was not institutionalized. However, if we read the book of Acts we see that when Paul arrives in Rome there's a clear institution already established. Local churches had leadership, organization & sacraments - they were going forward together. Jesus set out to build that, He set the ball in motion & knew exactly where it would lead. He's not sitting up in heaven looking at the Church saying, "Oh you guys screwed it up, I meant for you to be a bunch of unorganized hippies!" He began this, **SLIDE 12** ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. ² Institutional statements, building a church means building an institution.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Mt 16:18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

SLIDE 13 Now some may not have a problem with church as institution, but they might say, “I belong to the Universal Church, but not a local church.” They don’t see the validity of rooting themselves into a particular local church, submitting to its leadership & direction, when they are connected mystically to the greater Body of Christ. We must remember, we’re called in a historical line of people & tradition, to be members of, not only the Universal Church, *but first & foremost the local church*. What that person is really saying is, “I don’t want the authority of the local church over me.”

SLIDE 14 In the NT the primary focus is on the local church - and the full expression of church community is seen in each local body. The local church is not an incomplete part of the whole, we don’t have part of Jesus until we are mystically united with the Universal Church. Rather the local body of faith has the whole of Jesus embodied in it; it is why Jesus says, **SLIDE 15** ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” ³ He is embodied in the crowd in a unique way. The local church is the local expression of a future reality in a particular physical space & time. The Universal church is something which images a future reality (a proleptic community). *At this moment the local church is the ONLY way we experience that future hope now.* And that local body is an institution with clearly defined direction, vision & mode of operation. **SLIDE 16** Calvin said, “He who does not have the Church for his mother cannot have God for his father”. (Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner) Calvin saw the necessity for the local church authority as an institution.

So, the local church for the true believer, is not something you shop around for in order to meet your needs. Where you come to choose from a plethora of items, take what you want, and go home for yourself. Or split yourself between bodies, choosing something from this one & something from that one, not submitting fully to one. And likewise, the local church is also not something you attend on Sundays & go do ministry by yourself on the side disconnected from the local church body because you are ‘spiritually a part of the universal church’.

As a pastor I am occasionally confronted with the person who shows up in the room & says, “We should celebrate what God is doing in individual lives”. Sounds good, right? In some cases it is. However, what they’re usually saying is that Joe/Jane Smith is over on the side doing something he/she is calling ‘ministry’ which is absolutely disconnected from the vision & direction of the local body. It may look good from the outside, but when explored there are some problems. It’s unsustainable & incomplete since it is the work of one person (expound - ministry is holistic/gifts of the Body). And even though it may be valid in some time & place it’s something which derails the communal vision & ministry of the local body - it’s not where the local church is going. Many times it’s not actually a work of God, but a work of pride, since it was started because this person feels ‘the church’ is doing it wrong & they’re going to do it right - but a work of pride never lasts. Now, sometimes that work is good & should be folded in. However, that person

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Mt 18:20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

needs to be willing to fold that under the authority of church leadership allowing the body to engage with it - yet what usually happens, because it's a prideful work, is that they hold onto it like their baby & don't want to allow the churches communal authority to direct it. In the end, that person leaves the church, goes to another, and another, and another because local church leadership sees through these things eventually - they may entertain the person for a while, but pride always comes to light & is confronted.

SLIDE 17 The local church is something you devote yourself to, you plug into, a local institution with a direction & purpose which you engage in. It's not something you come to & tell them how it should be done. You join the crowd, the crowd doesn't join you. It's essential to your spiritual walk with Christ, it's something you die for, because Jesus died for it. The local faith community is the avenue of glorifying Jesus, and in which we come into the fullness of life in Him. In other words you can't church hop. To say I am a part of the Universal Church without being committed to ONE local body of believers is unacceptable & doesn't work. Paul mentions being 'in Christ' something like 164 times in his Epistles - and that term is largely in reference to the local church body.

SLIDE 18 To be 'in Christ' means you're 'in one local body of Christ' - they're synonymous. Catholics get it right with the idea of 'Parrish' (expound), it's the reason your physical presence in the gatherings of church is important. Hebrews 10:25 urges us to continue to meet together. That is why when you get in the habit of showing up only when it is most convenient, only when you want to at the worship service, community group, other gatherings, or showing up to only one thing & not others, it's detrimental to the whole. Because it's not about the individual, but the local body. The Body needs all its members present & active. You need to be here not because these sermons are so great, but you need to hear & experience where we're going as a body. You need to understand what your role is in the communal whole. From tithing to engagement in the initiatives of the church, is all vital to us moving forward as the local body of Christ in this area. That can't happen with inactive body parts or those that are split in their affinity to another. Think about it, a hand cannot be a part of two different bodies, and that's the imagery Paul uses to illustrate the body of Christ.

We're still platonic in our view of these things. We perpetuate a dichotomy between the spiritual & the physical worlds where we think we can have a spirituality without it being linked to our bodies in geographical proximity & in commitment to others. Our faith is linked not only to some mystical union with Jesus in the Universal Church, but also to the very physical reality of our bodies & the other bodies right around us in geographical community. **SLIDE 19** Faith is grown, worked out, and developed in relationship with other people right around you; the local church. In no other way can it happen. You have to be here to not only know others, but to be known by them, and therefore, to know & be known by Jesus. Only when you show up, engage & allow others to know you, encourage you, challenge you & participate in the communal vision of the local body are you being church; are you being 'in Christ'. You have to humbly show up willing for local church leadership to say no, and redirect you because they are the ones charged with setting the communal direction of the local body. (Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner)

SLIDE 20 The local church is always 4 things, which I think we see in Six:Eight:

1. **ONE** - a Local Church can't isolate itself & not connect with the Universal Church. We must be one with the Universal Church in the present. What we do & teach affects them & visa-versa.
2. **HOLY** - It's a community birthed & set apart by the Spirit. The presence of God must be there, it must be a community of the Spirit.
3. **CATHOLIC/UNIVERSAL** - which means we are tied to the past, tradition, creeds, prophets, apostles, etc. We don't make up the faith, we listen to the teaching & voices which have formed us, we stand in unity with the history of the Church on the non-negotiable issues that all Christians have agreed upon through the centuries.
4. **APOSTOLIC** - 'To be sent' - God is a missional god sending his local church out into their community - being true to the past, relevant to the moment & a revelation for the future. Mission exists because worship doesn't. Which is why we do not focus on a building, but on Mission. Bert Wagoner says, mission to the church is like hydrogen to water. The church is sent as a local body, not just as individuals. (Cutting Edge, Vineyard USA, Vol. 14 - The Church Local, the Church Universal, Bert Waggoner)

I realize you guys understand church isn't a building, it's the local body of believers. We're living stones built up in Jesus with Him as our cornerstone. But it still must be taught because our language & attitude always revert back to, "I'm going to church" where we can occasionally show up Sundays & disconnect ourselves from community. We should say "I am building block in the local church, I am a part of a community measured off of Jesus, I'm committed, I am going where they're going despite my personal preference". The first generation of Christians met in the Temple courts, and in homes, no church building, had leadership & direction & knew this very well.

SLIDE 21 And it says this about them...⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.⁴ They listened to local leadership & practiced what they were taught right out in the middle of their surrounding community. They ministered to each other in order of the mind, heart, body & spirit - they completely devoted themselves to one another with communal vision & the end result was that they were... **SLIDE 22** enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.⁵ And Paul, like us, **SLIDE 23** identifies the local church as the body of Christ, with our spiritual gifts defining his hands, feet & voice in the local community. (Catalyst Groupzine, p122) That is how church works, that is how community works as a body, not as individuals who come when they want, hear only what they want, then go do what they want.

This is why community matters at Six:Eight. We value highly the local church as the body of Christ being his hands, feet & voice using our gifting & love to bear witness to this local physical reality we find ourselves in as a holistic body. This is the reason so many people moved to Ardmore when we planted Six:Eight which combines our church

⁴ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ac 2:42). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ac 2:47). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

home with our geographical home - so we can be physically close to each other & the surrounding community; united under one Head, and reaching out through local community initiatives (our Temple courts) all driving the same vision. As a part of this body, Six:Eight, you are one with the universal church. We strive to be holy & filled with the Spirit of God. We are Universal (not universalists) as we are rooted in Christian tradition & foundation. And we are Apostolic, in that we go out to our local community to be the hands, feet & voice of Jesus to them.

SLIDE 24 Remember the old adage, what you win them with, is what you win them to. Do we invite people into a corrupt structure which is marked with infighting, personal gain or pride? A place that is just putting on a show & going out as individuals doing incomplete work? Or, do we win them to the living local body of Jesus? A faith & Spirit filled body operating out of grace, love, forgiveness & power? A place driving in unity towards one vision which realizes that if we try to focus on everything we will get nothing done - but if we can focus on a few together we will see this area change? A place which follows the authority & leadership which God has put in place?