

A Business Plan for Crossroads

Colossians 1:11-20

In each generation, followers of Jesus face a similar challenge. It is not *what would Jesus* do, but how will we follow Jesus in our own time and circumstance. Early Christians found God in the face of Jesus. They found meaning for their lives in the teachings of Jesus. In the life of Jesus, and through his death and their experience of his presence with them, his first followers found victory over fear and death. They found peace and oneness with God. They found a clarity of purpose and came to understand why they were alive -- what was their purpose and direction of their lives.

Since that first generation, followers of Jesus have found an essential need to return to basics. Who are we? Where do we go to follow Jesus here and now? In this generation once again our task is to ask what was the meaning of Jesus' life and teaching? What does it mean for us today?

The early Christian writer of the New Testament to the Colossians gives us an inspiring image of life organized in Jesus. "In Christ, all things hold together." In more contemporary and familiar language, Christ was their vision. In Jesus, they knew who they were and where they were going. The Christ in whom "all things hold together" was the source of their organization as the church.

Let us fast forward twenty centuries and a few thousand miles to middle America in 2007, to Kansas City. Crossroads, like any other church, is a hybrid. We are both a mystical communion of saints and also an organization. We have one institutional foot in the world of ministry and one in the world of business. Being a mystical communion in the Spirit is what makes us church. Institutional health, strength, and effectiveness are what enable us to do the work of church -- ministry.

So, one of the questions we face is this: "How can we organize ourselves in Jesus -- have Christ hold everything together -- and still take care of our responsibilities both to minister and to sustain our integrity as a small business? In other words, what do we need to do to have the best chance to do the ministry we feel called to do as a faith community? The bottom line is: how we will shape our approach to being church so that we are *Christ* to each other and to the world so that the results of our life together reflect the visions and dreams that we desire -- that are our greatest passion.

Last Sunday and through this week lots of dreams have been shared and many visions offered in response to my invitation. These are statements of what we want to see happen at Crossroads and through Crossroads. They are very specific results of our being church and doing the work of church as we envision it. Our goal is to be church so that these results we envision and dream have the best chance of becoming our results -- the product of how we approach being church. Achieving this goal with these results will take a good plan -- the right *business plan* for us. We start with the with the results we envision in the form of the seventeen statements of vision you shared last Sunday. Then, we'll work backward -- back through a process to see what inputs are needed to result in the desired outputs. It's essentially a business plan, but one that is organized in and held together by the Spirit of Christ.

This idea of looking at our approach to being church using the model of a business plan is a way of illustrating how intentional we need to be in our planning. But my hope is that it won't just be a sermon illustration. I hope that we will take what we share today and make it a step in developing an actual business plan for this congregation to achieve the vision we are beginning to see.

I've taken the liberty of grouping the seventeen statements of vision into three broad categories. These represent desired *outputs* for our business, our congregational life and ministry. The categories are: outreach for growth, outreach for service, and to improve what we offer. We need to decide what is needed for results we want.

What do we need to do to reach people who will then become part of Crossroads Church? This includes people who have been rejected or hurt by the Christian Church. It includes people who want a place where they can ask their deepest questions and seek the answers that are right for them. How do we reach these people? (**responses**) We reach them with publicity and by offering programs that raise our level of visibility. We reach them when people in our congregation invite people outside our congregation. Of course, a lot of publicity and programming requires money.

What do we need to do to touch more people with ministries of service and social justice? This includes people around us in this community, those who are or might become part of this church, and people who in other places whom most of us might never meet personally. It includes people who will benefit from social and systemic reforms we help bring about. How do we touch more people? (**responses**) We touch them through people here who feel called to serve, by helping them clarify their sense of call and supporting them to act on it. We touch them by committing ourselves to grow spiritually and to act in our lives based on that spiritual growth. We touch them through tangible financial support of ministry.

What do we need to do to improve what we offer here -- our programs and our facilities? This includes continuing to be creative and life-giving with how we worship, learn, minister, and live together as church. We need to make it possible for more people to participate in church as we experience it at Crossroads. We need to support our vision for being church with the money that is needed to upgrade this facility and the money that is needed to support the programs that will effect peoples' lives.

The vision we see for Crossroads Church is not an end in itself. The quality of our programs, our outreach in service, and our growth is not the ultimate purpose for our existence as a faith community. The bottom-line vision for Crossroads Church is that we are a means to an end. The purpose of Crossroads Church, our ministry, and our life together is to produce transformed people who will change the world in partnership with the Spirit and according to the vision we perceive in Jesus. This is who we are and where I see us going.

Two of the key ingredients we need to be successful in making our vision for Crossroads Church become tangible and visible are people and money. That brings us back to this idea that this church is also a business. To get people and money, any business needs to pay attention to three

components: marketing, sales, and product. What would you say is our product? (**sharing about our product?**) You would correct in seeing our product as including worship, learning experiences, small group support, social justice work including involvement in MORE2, musical theatre and drama, and others. Again, I suggest that our primary product is transformed people who will change the world.

What about sales? That is the means for helping people transition from “just visiting” to being involved and committed. It happens as old folks connect with new folks and that wonderful gift of hospitality that is very strong in this community is shared freely. It happens as people develop new relationships or find something meaningful and life giving in small groups, worship, and Sunday School. Participation in a Seeing Yourself @ Crossroads session often marks the decision of people to move from just visiting to being more committed and involved.

Finally, or actually initially, marketing is that means of first contact with people. It is touching people and allowing them to begin to touch this congregation. Hopefully, there will be follow-up contacts and a developing interest and people begin to see a place here that meets some of their deepest needs. It might lead to someone actually visiting us for worship or it might begin with someone attending an event we sponsor.

We will need to touch a lot of people so that some will stay and eventually become involved and committed. If as many as half of those who visit us for worship come to participate in other aspects of our church’s life, and if half of those eventually become involved and committed here, then we need to have four visitors for every involved and committed member we want. To reach our stated congregational goal of ten percent growth, that would be an increase of fourteen or fifteen people who are involved and committed at Crossroads. That means we need to have about sixty visitors a year – just over one per week. That doesn’t sound too hard, does it? The upcoming Advent-Christmas season is a great time to invite people to visit.

What about money? With an average household at Crossroads giving close to \$3000.00 annually (based on general fund giving divided by the number of households), the amount of additional income we need to do what we are trying to do as church will be a matter of how many new households, giving at the congregational average, are needed. It can also include finding a way to increase the average giving per household. If we need an additional \$50,000 per year, that means we need an additional sixteen or seventeen average giving households or combination of new households and current households giving at an increased level.

You can see how that works. There is a premium on finding ways to touch and invite people. It is important for us to invest time, energy, and money in getting the word out. It is vital for those of us who believe in how we do church to invite others. The business side to church is very important. Thinking of what we do here using the images of marketing, sales, and product can be very helpful. Seeing what we are trying to achieve in terms of business goals does not make them unworthy goals. This is definitely part of the picture of being church -- exercising good stewardship of people, money, and vision.

The most important output or result of our church is people transformed within who are living out your faith in the world. We are being successful as the church of Jesus when you and I, in

the living of lives, are showing the face of Jesus, sharing the love of God, and growing up in the Spirit. The season of Advent begins next Sunday. As you and I prepare for Advent, we need to consider seriously how the life and teaching of Jesus changed everything. How will you and I -- Crossroads Church -- follow Jesus here and now? How will we transform the world with the love of God?

I invite you to join me and work at the business side of our church – improve our product, our sales, and our marketing. Let’s work in very practical ways to make the results of our visions become the natural outgrowth of our church. Join me as well in taking our place within the mystical community – the communion of all saints – by confessing to each other and to the world that we all live within God – that we are connected with all life through God’s Spirit. And let us live each day like we really believe it!

Questions for Reflection

What do you see as the essential meaning and message of Jesus?

How do you plan to follow Jesus here and now?

In what ways do you see yourself in the process of transformation now?

What transformation do you want to see in your life?

As a transformed/transforming person, how will you change the world?