



THE CHICAGO CONNECTION

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Visionary, Victim or Vanished

By Mike Kwasniewski

This is an exciting time for the Chicago Church of Christ. We're coming out of a period that has left us changed, matured and ready to do God's will. And tonight, we begin the process of unveiling our 10-year plan and vision. How will we respond to this vision? Let me suggest that there are three ways we can respond to the vision—as a visionary, a victim or vanished.

The Visionary is the disciple who is eager to exercise his faith, to be a part of something bigger than himself and to be useful to the Lord. **The Victim** is a disciple who hasn't recovered from past wounds and hurts. This disciple has open wounds that haven't healed, wounds that leave them very emotional and reactionary. They haven't realized that the trials they've undergone were used by Satan to hurt their faith, as opposed to the visionary who used these challenges to become stronger in their faith and more determined than ever to serve the Lord. **The Vanished** are disciples who've allowed their faith to become dull and flat and therefore have vanished from making any impact in the church. They'll still come to church every week and have a few relationships in the body, but they've vanished from the possibility of God being able to use them to promote His glory. If you're finding yourself to be a victim or a disciple who's vanished, here are three points of inspiration:

1. Break Up Your Unplowed Ground

Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord. (Hosea 10:12)

I've often noticed that, after a harvest, the farmer will till and churn the soil to prepare for next season's planting. This is necessary to prepare the ground to be more fertile for the seed. Hard ground will not allow seed to grow. And in a similar way, an unplowed heart will not allow God's Spirit to work. Many of those who are a victim or who

have vanished must decide that it's time to plow the ground of their souls because their top-soil is used up, spent and dead. The only seeds that can grow in an unplowed heart are the seeds of cynicism, pride, apathy, suspicion and independence. Sadly, there are many who used to be in leadership or who served in incredible ways in the Chicago Church in the past who have now become disconnected and disenchanting.

On the other hand, the Southland Region is so inspired by people like Aaron and Julie Breford. They had served in the full-time ministry for many years, and had a challenging time stepping out a few years ago. Yet they still are true visionaries. Not only did they not stop serving in leadership, they've fostered and cultivated a dream to evangelize Northwest Indiana. They lead a group of 25 disciples who are determined to glorify God by building family and saving souls in that area. Aaron is an executive in a pharmaceutical company, is doing a great job in helping to raise his two kids (one of whom suffers from autism) and he and Julie are planning on adopting in the near future. Truly, the Brefords and others like them in the Chicago Church define visionary hearts!

To help you gain or maintain this visionary spirit found in disciples like Aaron and Julie, here are three simple ways to begin plowing the ground of your heart:

- Put some variety in your quiet times. Do whatever is necessary to avoid having lifeless, dull and boring times with God and make them more exciting.
- Truly believe that God isn't done with you yet. Write down new goals and dreams for your spiritual life, commit them to prayer and share them with other disciples.
- Decide once and for all to get rid of that defeatist attitude. Believe once again that, with God, all things are possible!

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Member Article: Southland Region

My name is **Tina Konieczki**, and I've been a disciple since 1998. I was an insurance agent helping people understand the importance of life insurance when God allowed a disciple to share with me another kind of insurance—eternal insurance. Within a few weeks, my husband, Jerry, and I were baptized. We were on fire for God and made it our personal mission to do all we could to help save the world. Satan was quite annoyed with us and began to upset our world shortly after we were baptized. He attacked our marriage by reminding us of our past, one which almost resulted in a divorce. But through much prayer and love from other disciples, we overcame the challenges and now have a wonderful marriage. Thankfully, we will have been married for 22 years in October of this year.

Our faith was tested over and over again and we continued to battle, fighting against Satan's many schemes. As a young disciple, my husband blew his knee out and was out of work for several months. It didn't take long before we went through our entire savings. We were in the process of losing our home, our food supply had depleted and we were behind on paying all of our bills. We didn't know what we were going to do. But God reminded me about the poor widow who gave Him all she had, so I decided to trust God and give Him all we had. It was a very scary thing to do, but I knew that God could do much more with the little that I gave Him than I could. What was so amazing was the series of events and blessings that followed. Before I left church that Sunday afternoon, the amount of money I gave (and more) was returned to my purse anonymously. Our home was able to be refinanced that same day and the flood gates of heaven opened up with food and other necessities. It truly was amazing to watch God bless us in abundance.

There were a whole series of events that followed. Our physical health was attacked again and again. My husband almost died due to an intestinal parasite, my family was in a major car accident, my husband had to have an emergency appendectomy, my son Jon broke his shoulder and elbow, I was hit with secondary lightning, my son Jerry was in three car accidents and my husband severed his ankle ligament and broke his leg. We felt like God was dragging us back and forth through the fire every time we faced another of these challenges.

The latest tests we've had to endure involved our children. We have prayed for our children since they were very young, and we strive to do our best to teach them God's ways, hoping that they will not turn from it. But God showed us that He is ultimately in control. My oldest son Jerry became a disciple at the age of 14, Jon was baptized at the age of 15 and my daughter Jasmine, now 10, will hopefully want to pursue a similar path. Jerry wanted to

join the Marines because he felt a calling from the Lord to reach men who needed God. He was in college, co-leading a Bible Talk, helping with the campus ministry, had a great job and a beautiful girlfriend. Our biggest question was simply "why". We were able to endure the testing of our faith with our financial and health challenges, but the thought of losing our children physically or spiritually were new levels of testing.

After a year of praying and seeking advice, Jerry left for the Marines. We cried for two months straight. We stayed humble before God, begging Him to protect Jerry and to let us know that this truly was of Him. God answered our prayers. He allowed the Marines to find much favor in Jerry. He was scheduled to serve in Iraq, but instead was recruited to be an Honor Guard in Washington, D.C. He was displayed on the first page in Time Magazine and was watched all around the world as he carried President Ford's casket. Wow! Now that is only by God's design. Jon began to go through his own series of trials and decided to rebel against God. Jerry and I struggled and wrestled with God for our son's salvation. Jon was raised in the church, so this was a very hard thing for us to go through as parents. During this time, we could do nothing but lean on God. I think we both aged several years over a period of six months. Through everything, we continued to love our son and trust God. And Jon was baptized in June of 2006, another glorious victory!

We've learned that God allows us to go through trials for His glory to be revealed. In every situation, God brought us to our knees to where all we could do was rely on Him. It has made our family stronger. And in hard times, He reminds us of all the blessings we've received through the trials, and it allows us to rejoice.

Do You Remember When...

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we will occasionally take a look back at some of the defining moments and events in our congregation.

1987 — *606 people baptized* in calendar year of 1987

1988 — *Roger and Marcia Lamb* move to Boston

1989 — The church takes responsibility for helping with the work in Bombay, India and *collects \$700,000* to help support the work there

1989 — Marty and Chris Fuqua move from Chicago to lead a church in Buenos Aires, Argentina; *Bruce and Robyn Williams* move from Boston to assume leadership of the Chicago Church

Reviews and Previews

HOPE *worldwide* Project Day

On Saturday, April 28th, more than **500 volunteers** served others in their communities facing hardships. They became home repairmen, landscapers, painters, gardeners, window washers and gutter cleaners to spruce up five group homes for seniors in Lake Zurich, Naperville, Lombard, Downers Grove and Elmhurst, and four senior's homes in Evergreen Park, Worth and Oak Lawn. Others visited three nursing homes in Wheeling and Chicago. Volunteers played dominoes and games with seniors, made crafts, baked cookies, shared pot-luck lunches and even brought along pets for entertainment. Eighty-three adults, teens, pre-teens and children cleaned up the Illinois Prairie Path. Still others moved a family, painted a house, prepared a community garden for planting, organized books for an adult education program, cooked and cleaned at the Ronald McDonald House, made a dozen house warming baskets for Chicago youth in transitional housing and even donated blood! We trust all who participated had a rewarding experience. Thank you for bringing hope and smiles to so many faces!

Women's Inspiration Night

This upcoming Friday, women throughout the Chicago area will be enjoying a time of fellowship and Bible study at the **2007 Women's Inspiration Night**, entitled *Do You See a Light?* This event will take place on Friday, May 11th at Bryan Middle School, located at 111 W. Butterfield Road in Elmhurst. Fellowship and light refreshments will begin at 6:45 p.m. and the devotional will be held at 7:30 p.m.

Congregational Outdoor Worship

The entire Chicago Church will join together on Sunday, June 17th for an **Outdoor Worship, Concert and Play Day** to celebrate our 25th anniversary! The day will begin with a 10:00 a.m. worship service to honor God for all He has done and is continuing to do in our fellowship. Later, a concert will feature special musical guests Jon Augustine and 'Big City' Goodwin. There will be plenty to do throughout the day with giant inflatables, games and many other fun activities. This event will be held at the Schaumburg Flyers Stadium.

Northwest Indiana by Aaron Breford

Ever since it's release in 1986, *Hoosiers* has been one of my favorite movies. I love movies that are based on true stories and I love movies that bring to life the David and Goliath story—the underdog winning in the end. Two years after its initial release, I was still enjoying this great movie because it seasoned just about every lesson taught by my campus minister in Boulder, Colorado, in 1988. However, as I sat listening to those wonderful lessons in the late 1980's, little did I know that I would one day be living out the kingdom version of this story!

Since moving to Northwest Indiana three years ago, I have felt much like the Apostle Phillip must have felt as he approached Nathaniel and heard these doubtful thought about Jesus: "*Nazareth! Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" When I tell people I live in Schererville, Indiana, that's usually the kind of response I get: "Schererville, are you a part of the church? Where is that located anyway? Why would anyone want to live in Indiana?" But I'm excited to tell you that God is moving powerfully in Northwest Indiana.

Ironically, just about the time *Hoosiers* was hitting the box office, a young mother of four, **Gloria Mojica**, was praying for her husband and other family members to join her as a disciple. Not too long after that, her husband

listened to the call and **Bill Mojica** was baptized. They lived then, and still live, in Crown Point, Indiana, and for nearly two decades, they have served God faithfully—praying for their family, impacting their community and commuting more than an hour to church every Sunday and Wednesday.

About three years ago, God opened the floodgates in their lives in response to their persistent prayers—Bill and Gloria's son, **Scott Mojica**, and his wife, **Mary Mojica**, were baptized. Around the same time, the Indiana group began to form and have their own midweek services, thus eliminating the nasty commute on I-80 during rush hour.

Fresh out of the water and on fire for God, Mary Mojica began to share her faith with her family and, as a hairdresser, with her clients as well. Two of Mary's clients (**Becky Reiter** and **Georgianna Rogers**) were baptized a short time later. Gloria Mojica was not only

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Conversion
Corner

Welcome New Baptisms!

Greater Westland

- Jaimaisha Johnson

North

- Maggie Mueller

Visionary, Victim or Vanished (Cont.)

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2. Go in the Strength You Have

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14)

Gideon was unsure of himself and his abilities. Yet all God wanted him to do was to simply use what he had. Too often, we look at being radical as defined by our younger years as disciples. Most of us are now older, perhaps married with kids, and the thought of plugging into the radical vision of God can sometimes seem overwhelming. Yet our definition of radical is often too narrow and too humanistic. A radical vision in many of our minds means wild, evangelistic runs through the mall or handing out 100 invitations to church every day. Yet God's vision of radical is for you to simply go in the strength you have.

In the Southland Region, we have an elderly disciple named James Irving who is in constant pain with multiple ailments and is homebound much of the week. Yet he is definitely someone whom I consider to be radical. He hosts a daytime house church in his home every week. And should you happen to attend, you would be greeted by a kind, warm-hearted couple (James and his wife, Linda) every Wednesday afternoon. Much of the time, James is suffering, yet you wouldn't know it. He possesses a genuine humility and a deep level of gratitude that teaches and inspires us all. Now that's radical!

Too often, the victim or the vanished individuals look at their lives and conclude they have nothing to give to the Lord or His church. Too often, the victim and the vanished excuse themselves by letting their hearts get triggered by old terminology or unpleasant memories. And too often, they miss out on some of God's greatest adventures. Yet all they need to do is to offer their five loaves and two fish

and watch God work. Do you trust God with your loaves and fish? Remember, that's all He needs.

The visionary may have little time, low energy and tough circumstances to overcome, yet they still give it all to God. And just like God has done with James, He will take the "small offering" of the visionary and turn it into an incredible feast of blessings.

3. Be Completely Different

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

A big challenge with those who are victims or vanished is that they're afraid to be completely different. They're afraid of being transformed, of becoming more like Jesus.

This is one of the saddest realities I see in some people's lives today because one of the greatest joys of plugging into the vision of God is enjoying the transformation.

Sometimes we need to take a hard look at ourselves and draw the conclusion that we could use a spiritual makeover. Yet victims and the vanished largely refuse to travel on this thrilling road. The victims are adamant that they're not the ones who need changing, and the vanished frankly don't want to put the necessary energy into the process. Not so with the visionary! This disciple relishes each new adventure God takes them on in their spiritual lives. They believe that to be different in their marriage, different in their house church and different in their faith are all exhilarating propositions.

In closing, let's trust the Lord whom we serve and become a visionary. Let's put aside being a victim or one of the vanished. If we do, I am confident that God will be truly glorified!

The visionary may have little time, low energy and tough circumstances to overcome, yet they still give it all to God.

Conversion Corner (Cont.)

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able to see her daughter-in-law saved, but they were now able to work as partners in the gospel. Mary took a page from her mother-in-law's book and began to pray for her family. Recently, two of Mary's sisters (*Nicki Fitusis* and *Kelly Buckley*) were baptized into Christ and their mother recently attended the Mother/Daughter retreat with them.

Just three short years ago, there were just a handful of disciples in Northwest Indiana, similar to the movie where

the Indiana school barely had enough players to field a team. But through God's power and mercy, there are now more than 25 disciples in Northwest Indiana striving to lift up the name of our great God! The church meets in Indiana for midweek services as well as two Sunday mornings per month. God is moving in a powerful way in the Hoosier state. Please continue to pray for us as we strive to build our part of the wall in the Chicago Church of Christ.