

December 2009



HAPPY NOTES *at home*

for the Vineyard Church family



The Vision Gets Another Leader

by Happy Leman

Introduction

Wow! 2009 is quickly disappearing. With several commitments in November, my trip to the Middle East, and Christmas fast approaching, I can't remember a year that has gone more quickly toward the end than this one. On top of all that, we've had several interesting developments here at the church that have made everything seem to move at hyper speed.

Ben, Tina, and Church Planting

Most of you have heard us talk about our 10x10x10x10 vision. We believe God has asked us to plant 10 churches, launch 10 multi-sites, send 10 missionaries, and double our size in the next 10 years. We realize this is a huge undertaking in terms of personnel and finances, but we believe God has challenged us to this task.

When I first shared the vision, little did I dream that Ben would be one who would step out in faith and choose to become one of our church planters. Currently he and Tina are entertaining the idea of taking the bold leap of faith, moving to Peoria, and starting a new Vineyard in the spring of 2011. We as a leadership team believe this is a direct affirmation of the vision that God has given us. (More details at the end of this note.)

While there's still a lot that needs to happen between now and a final decision, Ben would be obviously missed if he leaves. He has done a marvelous job here for over 30 years and would leave a big hole. However the move creates opportunities at the new site as well as here.

Finding Your Role

As 2009 winds down and we face 2010, I encourage you to look at what God is asking you to do. As we've often said, we believe everybody gets to play in the Vineyard. Most of us are doing far less than what we're called to do. I encourage you to be bold, seek the Lord, and find out what He has for you in the next year. I believe it will both bless you and bless our church.

Our Future as a Church

We believe the best is yet to come for what we're doing here at this location and with our Central Illinois multi-sites. God has given us a big vision and it is not dependent on any one human being – it is dependent on the Holy Spirit. While we would really miss Ben and Tina, God has many other qualified men and women who can step up and fill the roles. God has challenged us to a large and dynamic vision within which each of us has a part to play.

My request from each of you is that you embrace the future, pray for continued vision, and pray for the right people to go with Ben, to stay here, and to fill all the roles that are necessary to keep us as a thriving body of Christ. This could be one of the most exciting times that we've ever faced as we go further and further into our 10x10x10x10 vision.

Holiday Blessing

Dianne and I would like to wish you a very wonderful Christmas and an even better New Year. This is a great time of year to reflect on all that God has done and joyfully recommit your life to Christ the King. Di and I have enjoyed our 30 years of serving you and look forward to many

more. We appreciate your faithfulness, your prayers, and your generosity. Without you as partners, we could not have come this far.

Christmas Eve Service

One special way to celebrate the season is to attend our Christmas Eve services at 3 and 4:30 on December 24th. This is an excellent time to bring friends or that family next door that you've been meaning to invite to church. Most people leave the Christmas Eve service refreshed and reinvigorated as to why they love and serve Jesus Christ.

More about Ben and Tina

The following is an email that Ben and Tina sent to the Leadership Team a few days ago. It gives more explanation of what they're thinking about and their possible plans for the future. While losing Ben and Tina will not be easy, we as a leadership team see this as a positive thing. Our blessings are on Ben and Tina as they proceed.

Dear Co-Laborers in the Vineyard Church Family,

One of the beautiful and powerful things about the Advent season is its repetition. Year after year, in many traditions and varied ways, we celebrate the Christmas story. We laugh, we cry, we pout, we ponder. We get excited and hopeful and quietly pleased. We get frenzied and frustrated and even a little mad. And we do it again and again and again. In the Hoerr household, Christmas Eve means attending the worship service together, sharing a candlelight fondue dinner, and then gathering around the fireplace where we read the story (again!) and then each take a turn reflecting on the past year and expressing our hopes and dreams for the next. When it comes to Tina's and my turn this year, we both have something very significant to talk about. Here's the story.

We have not regretted one single moment of our last 30 years of serving here at the Vineyard. It's been a rich time of seeing God do incredible things in the lives of so many people – here, near, and far away. Frankly, we have never really given the thought of doing something else much serious consideration. Until the last several years.

Ever since Tina's battle with cancer in early 2007, we have been challenged by the Holy Spirit to re-consider everything. (Seems that a brush with death will do that.) That experience has changed us in ways we cannot quite fully describe. In particular, we've more fully embraced a deep conviction that our future is God's to spend however he chooses. And recently we've been wrestling with the sense that His calling on our lives might be to plant a church in Peoria, IL.

More specifically, it feels to us like “God is pulling up our tent stakes” (while we keep trying to hammer them back into the ground:-). We are experiencing this in a few significant ways:

- A growing desire to more directly leverage (or steward) both our natural/spiritual gifts and experience.
- The itch for a fuller expression of the passion to create, build, and lead something new, especially with a team of others similarly envisioned.
- An awareness of the encroaching need for our church staff to attend to succession planning. This is no longer a luxury "out there somewhere" but an approaching necessity that affects us all as we deliberately transition our leadership team over the next 8 years (cf. Happy's 10-year plan). We really believe that it is in our church's healthiest interests that we no longer serve when a new senior pastor (and team) are functionally in place. We wonder, too, if perhaps our willingness to leave and plant a church – or at least seriously consider it – would serve as God's catalyst in this process.
- God's sovereign, providential direction. In literally dozens of ways, we believe that he is leading us to consider church planting: God's prompting through his word, prayer, fasting, supernatural dreams, and journaling; an emerging connection with young adults; and what God has done and spoken through the events of this year (which include our 40-day period of fasting through Lent, the TAG process, our National Conference, our Staff Pastor's Retreat, another 10-day fast this fall, and our staff re-organization).

- Finally, over the last 6 months, my specific responsibilities working with the multi-site campuses and church planting have catalyzed a desire to do this ourselves. It has been a great joy to serve our two campuses and see them grow and prosper. Nevertheless, every time I am in Sullivan or Danville, I think something like, "I would do this. Or, I would do that." We've begun to get excited about the possibility of being a vital part of our 10x10x10x10 vision (10 multi-sites x 10 church plants x 10 missionaries x 10 year doubling of this campus) ourselves – just not in the capacity that we imagined at first. Instead of just working with the multi-site campuses, we would actually become one of the 10 church plants!

We've talked at length with Happy and Dianne and have their full blessing to begin to "process" this decision more openly – fully understanding its ramifications. I shared with our Pastoral Staff and the PAC last week, and no doubt word has begun to "leak" around since. Because we deeply value our relationship with the Leadership Team here, we have felt it would be most appropriate to take an opportunity to share with all of you as well and invite you into the process of contemplating the future.

Our current conviction is that discerning the will of God on this issue is more like an "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us" type of decision (Acts 13,15) as opposed to a "Jesus appears and knocks us to the ground" type of decision (Acts 9 – which type of guidance we are willing to receive if he chooses:). And for us, an essential part of accurately discerning his will would be God's calling of a team to join us in the plant. We are not interested in, nor do we believe it's a viable model, for a few people to pack up and head to a new city. That model may have worked in some cases in the past, but we have no interest or desire for that approach. We are, however, very excited about the possibility that God would raise up a team of 25, or 50, or even 70 people to go! Wow, can you imagine that? So God may confirm the direction of church planting through raising a team, or He may close the door on it all if no team emerges. If such were the case, we would continue to serve in our current capacities with thankfulness.

In the meantime, we would like to invite you to intentionally reflect on your future in God's kingdom by asking: "As we give very serious consideration to the possibility of planting a church in Peoria as a vital part of the 10x10x10x10 vision, might God's call on your life include being a part of this church planting team?"

Regarding timing, here are our "blue sky" ideas: over the next several months, we determine the level of interest in a team, enabling us to make an intelligent, rational, and Spirit-led decision about planting. If God seems to be in it, then we would spend the spring and summer months of 2010 envisioning and recruiting our full team. We would spend the fall and winter months conducting core meetings, crafting our mission, vision, values, and 2-year plan. Then spring of 2011 would see the team preparing to leave: transitioning our jobs here (no small feat), selling houses, securing employment and housing in Peoria, and the like. We would move in summer of 2011, launching parties and small groups in the fall! Obviously, there are still a thousand questions that remain unanswered in this scenario, but it's a start. Wow, all of this seems incredibly exciting and terrifying at the same time. Doing life with a team of committed radicals, providing a large, multi-generational church life like that to which we've grown accustomed in another city, seeing God's kingdom come in new and fresh ways, even planting new churches from that base . . . that has appeal. At the same time, I am not so naive as to think this is a cake walk. If it were easy, there would be lots more churches planted. But every church that exists had some one (or a team) that was willing to pay the price. As John Wimber used to ask so powerfully, "Are we willing to be spare change in God's pocket?" We look forward to talking with each of you in the days and months ahead. In the meantime, we have lots to do as we "continue the work of Jesus" right where we work, live, recreate, and go to school. We hope that your Advent season and New Year are filled with God's favor and blessing.

With sobriety and passion to "do everything that Jesus asks us to do" (John 17:4), Ben and Tina

Happy Notes at Home are a monthly reflection of community life at The Vineyard Church and are produced by Happy Leman.