Stride Excerpts – Ken Willard & Mike Schreiner

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 Excerpt 1

First the good news: we do not have to worry about building the church. Jesus will take care of that. Remove that burden from your shoulders. Over the past twenty plus years there has been a lot written and said about the state of the church in the United States (and many other nations). People point to various causes for the decline of the church, and some very smart and godly experts have given us numerous ways to turn things around. We believe it is time to turn building the church back over to Jesus. Church at- tendance, membership, and even baptisms (along with many other church metrics) are wonderful things for us to measure to see if we are heading in the right direction, but they all make terrible targets.

Excerpt 2

Jesus gave all his disciples, past and present, very clear instructions about what he wanted us to do. This passage of scripture is known as the Great Commission:

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I my- self will be with you every day until the end of this present age.” (Matt

28:18-20)

We are to make disciples. This is the mission of all churches who follow Jesus Christ. Thus it is also the mission of all clergy, church staff, laity lead- ers, and everyone who claims to be a Christian—to make disciples.

The disciples we make will in turn start or continue many wonderful ministries such as leading Sunday school classes, going on mission trips, helping those in need, feeding the hungry, singing in the choir, taking meals to those who are sick, hosting a small group in their homes, greeting people at church, working in the nursery, visiting the homebound, organizing va- cation Bible school, and many more. However, it is critical that we are clear on which comes first. There is a great quote in Mike Breen’s book *Building a Discipling Culture*, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”3 Where is the focus in your church? Are you mainly focused on church activities or on making disci- ples? The intent of the Great Commission is for us to share the Good News with those who have not heard it or do not have a church home (evangelize) *and* to mature those who are currently in our churches (edify). This involves the process of intentionally helping people move forward from wherever you find them, lost or saved, along a continuum toward Christian maturity (also known as sanctification).

Excerpt 3

In the United Methodist tribe, we have a membership vow that says, “I vow to support my local church with my prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.” This is another good model for what should be included in our target. If your church is part of another denomination or a non-denom- inational church, what church traditions do you have which might aid the team in determining how to communicate the target of your discipleship process to the congregation?

The discipleship process team should spend time studying spiritual dis- ciplines. There are many great resources available. We have already men- tioned a few in this book. Each book, theologian, seminary professor, and Internet site will have a slightly different list of spiritual disciplines. We encourage you to focus more on the similarities and less on the differences. The team, in partnership with the church pastor and other key leaders, should talk about where you feel the church and your discipleship process should focus—not to the exclusion of other disciplines, of course, but in an attempt to focus your efforts and increase your efficiency. Here are the spir- itual disciplines we usually encourage churches to focus on initially: prayer, Sabbath, scripture, worship, serving, witness, generosity, and Sunday school or small group. Imagine for a moment what would happen if everyone who called your church home were to take a small step in each of these areas next year. Wow! God’s kingdom would truly start advancing. Note: while all spiritual disciplines are “good,” there are a few we feel catalyze growth as a

disciple. The three we highlight are: reading and reflecting on scripture, serving others, and generosity.

Excerpt 4

There is a quote from the business world that applies here: “People soon discover the level of performance that their managers will settle for and gravitate to that level. Managers then assume that’s all that people are capable of achieving, so they accept it as fact and quit challenging their people to get better. So, each reinforces what the other believes.”1 In his book *The People Principle*, Ron Willingham calls this the “Law of Limited Performance.” How many of our churches have this same scenario being played out with those who attend there each year? For example, the pastor wants everyone to attend worship every week. But the average attender only comes once or twice a month. The pastor never says she expects everyone to be there every week for various reasons. (She is afraid to push anyone away, or make people feel guilty, or maybe she is making excuses for people as to why they cannot be there every week.) The family who is in worship every few weeks or so feels like this is okay in today’s culture and makes no effort to be in worship more often. So each reinforces what the other believes. As you are working on designing and creating your discipleship process, this is a great time for the pastor, church staff, leaders and the discipleship process team to clarify expectations for each area and how to best communicate and explain those expectations. We strongly encourage you to include the following areas in some form as components of your discipleship process:

1. Reading and reflecting on scripture. In *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, the authors, Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, share that this one discipline had the greatest effect on helping people at all stages of their spiritual journey take their next step. Please do not assume people who attend your church are reading the Bible, or even that they know how to read the Bible. Many people struggle with this foundational disciple.

2. Praying daily for the pastor, church, leadership, and its ministries.

3. Participating in a small group of some type. Whether you call it Sunday school, life groups, men’s group, women’s ministry, cel- ebrate recovery, or any other type of class or group, the important part is that everyone involved has an opportunity to share life together and be accountable to others on the journey with them. This happens best in groups of less than twenty people. (Twelve is a great number to use.)

4. Regularly attending a worship service.

5. Serving at the church at least monthly in some ministry area.

6. Giving financially to support the ministry of the church.