

## *PK's Perspectives...* Whatever It Takes

I'm concerned that the North American church has forgotten why it exists. The church, and by "church" I mean the Body of Christ wherever it meets under whatever denominational banner it flies, in North America has enjoyed a majority standing in American culture for so long that we have lost touch with the mission-minded, pilgrim mentality that is part and parcel of the Body of Christ. The church was created to be the people of God to join Him in His redemptive mission in the world. The church was never intended to exist for itself. It was and is the chosen instrument of God to expand His Kingdom. The church's union with Christ is designed for reproduction, the growth of the Kingdom. Jesus does not teach His disciples to pray, "Thy church come." The Kingdom is the destination. In its institutional preoccupation the church has gradually forgotten its real identity and reason for existence.

God did not give up on His mission in the Old Testament when Israel refused to partner with Him. He continued on with His great mission to woo fallen humanity back to Himself. We do not need to be mistaken about this: if the church refuses its missional assignment, God will do it another way. In many cases the church has, and He is. God is pulling end runs around the institutional North American church to get to people in the streets. God is still inviting us to join Him on mission, but it is the invitation to be part of a movement, not a religious club.

Many congregations and church leaders, faced with the collapse of the church culture and the loss of a majority standing, have responded by adopting a bunker mentality. This is the perspective reflected in the approach to ministry that withdraws from the culture, that builds the walls higher and thicker, that tries to hang on to what we've got, that hunkers down to wait for the storm to blow over and for things to get back to "normal" so the church can resume its previous place in the culture. The bunker church's answer is to live inside the bubble in a Christian subculture complete with its own entertainment industry. It focuses on cleaning people up, changing their behavior so Christians (translation: church people) can be more comfortable around them. Bunker churches evidence enormous self-preoccupation. They deceive themselves into believing they are a potent force.

The world has spent 17 anxious days concerned about the fate of 12 youth soccer players and their coach trapped in Thailand's Tham Luang Nance Non cave. Rescue efforts involved several innovative and collaborative strategies. Today, all thirteen people have been rescued from the cave. As the players/coach emerged from their ordeal, so did the story of their survival. One key element was their decision to huddle together to stay warm and in touch with one another in the cold, wet darkness of the cave.

The church in North America far too often resembles this soccer team. Having lost their way in a culture no longer inherently Christian, church members are huddling together in the dark, holding hands, and praying for God to rescue them from the mess they are in.

Instead, God wants His church to see themselves as the rescue workers on the surface. The rescue workers in the Thailand cave story refused to quit – even though one of the divers died in the process, refused to surrender hope for a full rescue, worked 24/7, and were willing to go to Plan B or whatever it took to affect a rescue. That's it! Right there – that's a depiction of the church on mission, followers of Christ displaying a "whatever it takes mentality" to lead people trapped in the darkness of sin into the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Cya in Sunday School & Worship, PK.