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The Secret to Growth

by Rick Bezanson

Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. Mark 10:29-30

Two years ago, I had a conversation with my good friend Jim Widney, a former truck driver with a burning passion for Jesus Christ. As we talked, Jim shared his heartfelt desire to minister in the Maricopa County Jails. I responded that I too, had felt the Lord leading me into jail ministry. At this chance (Spirit led) meeting, we decided to pursue the mission of planting a church in the Maricopa County Jail Complex.

Our church council at Amazing Grace in Glendale, Arizona, approved the plan and provided financing. We are a church whose mission is: *TO LOVE ALL PEOPLE TO CHRIST...* hence, we decided to take the risk and provide the needed resources.

Missional churches go where the wind of the Spirit blows them. Erwin McManus describes this best when he writes:

The world looks different when you understand yourself to be a child of the wind. You realize, when your sail is up, God’s wind blows you to places you never imagined, at just the right moment for someone else. The apostolic ethos is an environment in which all of God’s people are guided by the wind. If all are not apostles, at least all are together on the apostolic mission.”¹

Rick Bezanson

Pastor of Amazing Grace Christian Church in Glendale, AZ for the past 6 years, Rick is passionate about reaching out to the disenfranchised. He and his wife Robyn have 2 sons and a daughter.



Jim Widney preaching at Lower Buckeye Jail

We were united in the mission to plant a church in the jails. After our first year we had three jail churches—with an additional three jail churches added in the second year, including one Spanish church. Where the Spirit leads, there is growth. The growth was not only numerical, although both the jail churches and Amazing Grace did grow. There was also tremendous spiritual growth in the inmates, who went back to their pods and formed prayer circles and Bible studies that brought others to know Christ.

The greatest surprise for me as the pastor at Amazing Grace was to see the spiritual growth of our members as a result of our jail churches. This was stimulated by the congregation taking personal prayer requests from inmates as well as the inmates praying for Amazing Grace. As released inmates became members of our church, the members of the local church matured even more in their faith.

As a result of our jail churches, the members of Amazing Grace grew in many areas—worship attendance, Bible study attendance, prayer life, and stewardship. When we heard the testimonies of the released inmates who attended our church, we grew in

our openness and willingness to tell our own stories and to share prayer requests.

What started out as a mission to love the inmates to Christ backfired. Instead, we found ourselves being transformed by the love of Christ overflowing from the inmates. We started by giving away financial and people resources, which is risky business for an urban church, but we discovered the Lord abundantly blessing us.

Friends, the key to growth in the local church is simply giving it all away! Take a risk for Jesus and be blessed!

¹ Erwin R. McManus. *An Unstoppable Force*. (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 2001), 168.



Left to right: Morgan Shepherd, Jim Widney and John “Bull” Bramlin witnessing to inmates