

Big Deal
The Church Deal
April 15, 2012

PRELUDE – Great God Who Saves
Worship – Great God Who Saves / Alleluia
Feature – Our God’s Alive
Drama – Life Cycle

Good morning, everyone. Would you pray with me?

God, thank you for this morning. Thank you for the time to just think about what your word says, what’s in your heart, what’s in our hearts. I just pray that you would bring clarity to us on this issue of the church. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

As Kitti said, last Sunday we talked about why Jesus is such a big deal to Christians. And we did that because last Sunday was a

very special day. Not only was it Easter, it was also the Sunday on which more people who are *not* Christians will attend a church service than on any other day during the year.

As I thought about that a few weeks ago in preparing, I realized there would be a lot of people showing up at NHCC who just don't "get" the whole "Jesus thing" and the whole "church thing."

So, I decided that I wanted to take two weeks and, in the simplest terms possible, explain, first of all, why Jesus is such a big deal. But not just in some "cosmic spiritual sense" (you know, he died on a cross and rose from the grave and he forgave our sins – although that *is* a big deal) but also why he is a big deal in a way that's very relevant *personally*. That is what we did last Sunday.

Why *Not* Church

Today, as Kitti said, we're going to shift the focus to the second "thing" that a lot of people just don't get ... the "church thing." And just like Jesus, to a lot of people, church seems irrelevant, unnecessary and maybe even a little counterproductive.

1. For one thing ... most people in this day and age tend to think of faith as a very personal and private matter between you and whatever sort of higher power you acknowledge.

That's why one of the questions I hear most often from people who are thinking about Christ or thinking about the Christian faith is ... "do I really *need* the church? It seems kind of like this add-on, an unnecessary appendage to Christianity. After all, once we get the deal right between us and Jesus,

once we accept Him as our savior, as our teacher, as our leader, as our friend – then we're good to go, right? What else is there?"

2. Another reason why church seems irrelevant or unnecessary for a lot of people is that, at one time or another, they've been *part of a church* (or they know people who are currently part of a church).

And from their experience, they would have to say, "Quite frankly, the people who are really into church aren't that much different from everyone else. They're selfish, they're petty; they gossip; they form little cliques; they look down on people who don't have it all together. They sing together in worship then cuss each other in the parking lot. They serve together in ministry, someone gets their feelings hurt and they don't ever resolve that tension." (And that's just what

goes on between the staff members! And, the church people, themselves ...)

So, a lot of people look at that situation and say, "You know, I already get enough of that kind of drama at work or at home. I don't need the church to add any more."

3. Yet another reason some people question the value of being part of a church goes like this: "well, you know, really," they would say, "the most important part of a church service is the teaching. That's why they give the pastor 30-40 minutes each weekend to do his message."

"But honestly, most pastors of the churches I've attended have only been able to bring a good message about two out of four weeks (at best) and you just have to suffer through the other two weeks. On top of that, a lot of times they talk about things that don't really

apply to what's going on in my life right then, so it's kind of a waste of time."

"That's not to say that I don't *need* someone to teach me things about God and the Bible and all that. But these days, you can get so much good teaching via the internet or Christian radio. Every week world-class communicators – pastors who are far more gifted; far more educated; far more interesting and relevant than the guys and gals in churches around here – put their messages out there. So, I can just tune into them for what I need ... I can sort of 'skim the best and leave the rest' ... so, I'm not sure of the value of being connected to a specific church in my area."

4. Finally, there are some folks with a little more theological sophistication who say, "I'm not really opposed to the church itself. I'm just more into advancing *the*

Kingdom in general than I am any church in particular. After all, Jesus came preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God, didn't He? That's what matters most."

"So, I kind of see myself as connected to *all* churches and *all* ministries that are about advancing the Kingdom. In fact, from time to time, I actually participate in *several* congregations at once, depending on what the pastor is preaching about or what programs are going on at the time. And then, other times, if it doesn't interest me, I don't have any involvement at all."

Have you ever thought these things? Are you keeping score so far? All the reasons why "church" seems irrelevant, unnecessary and maybe even counterproductive?

Here's the list if you want to take notes.

A lot of people question the need to be involved in a local church congregation ...

1. Because of the belief that faith is primarily a private matter.
2. Because of the fact that "church people" (including the leaders!) are often a mess.
3. Because of the ability (thanks to the internet and Christian radio) to "skim the best and leave the rest" when it comes to teaching.
4. Because they see themselves only as "Kingdom Christians."

I'm curious as you look at this list, do any of these ring a bell for you personally or for someone you know? They seem like

reasonable ideas – good reasons to take a pass on getting involved with a church at any level, including this one. So, why bother? Why is church a big deal? Or why *should* it be?

That's a really tough question, and I've got to tell you the answer is so complex I don't know if I can boil it down. I don't know if I can simplify it enough or say it in a direct enough way that it will make sense.

But I'll try really, really hard. Are you ready? Here's why church *should be* a big deal ... here's why it *is* a big deal.

Church is a big deal ... because it's a big deal to Jesus.

Man, that was hard. Let me say it again. Church is a big deal because it's a big deal to Jesus. Let me explain the reason why I say that. Actually, there are two reasons why I

say that.

One day Jesus was having a discussion with his disciples. It says he was questioning them, saying, "as you listen to the conversation of the community and the people around you ... who do people think I am? Who do the people say I am? ... and, more importantly, who do you say I am?" The Bible tells us that Peter answered back to Jesus, "You are the Messiah, you are the Son of the Living God."

Jesus replied, "Flesh and blood didn't reveal that to you, Peter. That insight came to you from my Father in Heaven."

And then He added:

"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all

*the powers of hell will not
conquer it.”* *Matthew*
16:18 (NLT)

“Upon the people who acknowledge that I am the Messiah, that I am the savior of the world, I will build my church,” Jesus said.

And just to be clear, when he said that ... He didn't mean we're going to go over here, get some bricks and mortar, and build a facility. He meant the concept of church in general. In fact, in the Greek text the word translated "church" is the word "ecclesia" which simply means "gathering." So, what Jesus is saying is "I am going to build a bunch of little gatherings of believers in me, of Christians – ecclesias, churches – all over the world, all through time – and I'm going to build them on people like you, Peter; people who aren't perfect but who acknowledge that I am the Savior, the Messiah."

Obviously, if Jesus came to build *that*, then church must be a big deal to him.

But another reason why church is a big deal to Jesus is that, in the heart and mind of God, church and Christ are inseparable. How do we know that?

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the churches in the city of Ephesus, he's describing the incredible nature of Jesus and what He accomplished in his life, death and resurrection.

And at one point, in verse 21 he says ...

He (Jesus) is far above every ruler, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

You cannot get any higher than Jesus, Paul

is saying. He is ruler of all. But check out what Paul says is the implication of that lofty position.

God has put everything under the Messiah's feet and has made him the head of everything ... for the good of the church ... [now get this part] the church is his body, the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way.
Ephesians 1:21-23 (ISV)

Now, think about this: Paul says that *the church is the body of Jesus* and if you've been around church for any time at all, I'm sure you're familiar with that metaphor. I'm sure you've heard a pastor teach that "church is the body of Christ and just like in a human body, all the individual parts are necessary and important no matter how big or small they are. So, find your place in the body and hook up and serve ..." which is

what Paul actually writes in several of his other letters.

In this passage, that is not what Paul is saying. In *this* passage Paul is using the "body metaphor" to say something else. Paul is saying that the church – the body of Jesus – is the fullness of Christ. What does that mean? It means that Jesus, who is no longer in this world in his own flesh and blood, is somehow present in the relationships and activities of churches, of this church and every other legitimate church you can name. It means that we, and all the other churches – we are his body – we are his hands and feet on this earth.

Church is a big deal because it's connected to Jesus just like our bodies are connected to our heads. Separate your body from your head and neither can function any longer. It works the same way with Jesus and the

church. You cannot have Jesus without the church.

And I don't think that point can be emphasized strongly enough. If you're a follower of Jesus or you're thinking about following Jesus, "church" is a part of His plan for your life, not an optional add-on. Jesus didn't come and give his life on the cross and be buried and rise again just to be your own personal teacher, leader, friend and savior. I mean, he is your personal savior, teacher, leader and friend, but he came to be *more* than that. He came to build a bunch of little gatherings – little communities of believers – who together, would experience him as their teacher, leader, friend and savior.

And that's why church is a really big deal.

The Three Dimensions of "Church"

Of course, at this point, some people would say, "that's nice, Rick. Thank you for sharing some really good theology with us this morning. We appreciate that. But I still don't see why church is relevant to me personally. I mean, I *get* the idea that if Jesus says so it must *be* so and so I should pay attention. But, honestly, I'm still not connecting the dots with this in my everyday life."

Well ... maybe it will help if we talk about what Jesus intends for the church to be and to do.

Years ago, I heard a pastor explain this in a way that really connected the dots for me.ⁱ And I want to share it with you this morning in hopes that it will do the same for you. He said that, when you study the New Testament examples of what church was like in the first century and you understand the

theology of the church (like we just did), it becomes clear that church exists in three dimensions: *church is a cause, it's a community and it's a corporation.*

Let me explain what each one of those means.

1. Church is a cause ... and by “cause” I mean it has a mission, it has a calling, it has a goal, it has a task. And that mission, that calling, is to turn irreligious men and women into fully-devoted followers of Jesus.

The church has been given the task of connecting with people who are distant from God and explaining to them how Jesus can be their teacher, leader, friend and savior and then as they make that decision to let him have that role in their lives, to help them grow and mature in that relationship. It's part of what it means for the church to be the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth.

And, by the way, this is not a job that the early church leaders dreamed up all on their own and handed down from generation to generation. This came straight from the top, from the founder of the church himself, Jesus of Nazareth. As he was returning to his Father in Heaven following his resurrection, he gathered his followers together and told them:

"Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."

Matthew 28:19-20 [NLT]

In other words, teach them how to know me better, how to follow me.

Jesus gave this mission, or more accurately,

this commission, and he created and defined the cause for which every church, including this church, NHCC, exists.

So, church is a cause. That's clear ...

2. But church is a community ... where people are known, loved, served and celebrated (and where they, in turn, know, love, serve and celebrate others) just as they are.

Church is about relationships between people who come from different walks of life, different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, different educational levels, different everything. In fact, this was one of the key defining characteristics of early Christianity.

Listen to the story of the very first church that formed right after Jesus defined the cause and the mission:

Acts 2 says that ...

All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's ...

... Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:44-47 (NLT)

They were a radically generous family that loved and cared for each other so well that other people wanted in on the deal. They were a community in which social, political,

economic and racial barriers meant nothing.

I like the way Dr. Mark Roberts describes this. He writes that ...

In the ekklesia of God, Jews and Gentiles, so often separated in Roman society, shared life together as brothers and sisters. Slaves could also be full participants in the Christian gatherings, enjoying equality in Christ with non-slaves, even with their masters. Women could actively participate in the gatherings just as long as they didn't engage in the scandalous behavior of the pagan cults. (Basically, women who were leaders in the Greek cults were often prostitutes).

Roberts continues:

The theological truth that in Christ

“there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female” was lived out in the Christian assemblies (Galatians 3:28). They were, indeed, a kind of alternative society, one that implicitly rejected the domineering, separatist, and elitist values of the Roman world.ⁱⁱ

See, that’s what it means for church to be a community as well as a cause.

3. But Church is also a “corporation” – and by that word, I don’t mean the legal entity that is recognized by the government. I mean an evolving organizational structure that enables the first two dimensions of cause and community.

Without it, those two dimensions are going to grind to a halt ... which is what almost happened in the very first church.

After Jesus commissioned his followers to

spread the word and they did; after this great Christian community was formed that we read about in Acts 2, guess what happened? It says, a couple of chapters later ...

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent.

Uh-oh! Discontent in a church? Hard to believe, isn't it?!

Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

Now, let me give you the picture of what was going on here. It says that they sold property and people were very generous. They were donating money, putting it aside and saying,

"We're going to use this pile of money here to take care of the widows and orphans who are part of this community." So, apparently, as they were distributing, some of the widows felt like they were not getting their fair share and this conflict came up, and they were kind of like, "what are we going to do to solve this problem?" The Bible says ...

So the Twelve [the Apostles who had been appointed by Jesus, minus Judas] called a meeting of all the believers. "We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program," they said.

"Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of

this business.” Acts 6:1-3
[NLT]

“We’ve got to develop some kind of a structure here,” they said, “or the knowing, loving, serving and celebrating community we’ve built is going to implode. We need some kind of an organization here or we are going to lose the ability to carry out the cause.”

And so they put a dependent-on-the-need-of-the-hour organizational structure in place. (By the way, if you look closely at the New Testament, you see that’s the principle everywhere, in all of the churches – different organizational structures that are fluid and evolving, dependent on what the need is at that location and time).

And in this case, as we read, they appointed seven guys to be in charge of it, and these

seven guys worried about things like “do we have money to buy the food? Do we have a place to store the food? Do we have the volunteers to distribute the food? How often should we give out the food?” All these kinds of things that seem so archaic but are the exact same issues that churches deal with today: what are you going to do about money? What are you going to do about a facility? How are you going to plan things? Do you have enough volunteers? What about your leadership structure?

By the way, here at NHCC, we have a leadership structure as well. And part of that leadership structure is what we call our Advisory Council. And since I’m talking about this, I want to let you know that we recently appointed a new member to our Advisory Council.

Some of you know Ben Seibert. He and his

wife Abby have been part of NHCC for quite a while and we're really happy to have him as part of our Council.

And since I mentioned it, let me go ahead and quickly introduce you to all of our council members and explain what they do.

This is a picture from our Council meeting last Tuesday evening. (They look way too happy!)

This group of seven people serves a very unique function in our church. Their job as the Advisory Council - none of these people work for the church; they're not related to anyone who works for the church - their job is to help you guys and help the pastors in the leadership structure, in the organizational structure of the church, by advising and protecting and giving consent. And what that means is that when we have decisions we need to make, like the kinds of questions we just talked about here in the

scripture, when we as leaders have questions, we go to them and say, "This is what we think we should do – what's your advice? What do you all think?" And sometimes they will warn us and say, "You guys need to be careful about this." Or, sometimes they'll even protect us from angry church members. That's part of their role. And, they give consent: they are the ones who sign off on the budget. They are the ones who have the right to hire and fire the Senior Pastor. Just so you know, that's a little bit about our structure, how our corporate side of things works.

Getting Personal

So, there you have it. Church is big deal because it's a big deal to Jesus. He has appointed it to be a cause, a community and a corporation.

And I know some of you are thinking, “well, Rick, that makes a *little* more sense ... but, honestly, it’s still not connecting all the dots for me. I mean, I can kind of see how the community part might apply, but the rest of it ... not so much. I’m still not seeing the relevance of church.”

Ok, let me try one more thing. Let me talk to you about why church is relevant *to me*, personally; why it’s a big deal *to me*. And I know your first thought when you hear that is, “well, duh – it ought to be a big deal to you! It’s your job. Come on!”

And that’s true, it is my job, but church has been a big deal to me personally since I was about 15 years old. Church is where, as an irreligious and slightly rebellious teenager, I heard about Jesus and invited him to be my teacher, my leader, my friend and my savior. It’s not an exaggeration to say that without

the churches I've been part of, long before I became a pastor, I would not be who I am today or where I am today.

But I want to explain, specifically, how the church being a cause, community and corporation is relevant to me personally. And maybe this will help you see how it's relevant to you, as well.

1. Because the church is a cause, I have had help in reaching out to the irreligious people around me.

Because the church is a cause, it has helped me in reaching out to irreligious people who are part of my life. And some of you can relate to this, for me, my life has been so positively shaped by Jesus and the church that I just want others to know what I know and to experience what I've experienced as a Christian. I mean, I look around and see what people go through, the mess they're

trying to struggle out of, and the things they are suffering from other people or things they've done themselves, and I think, "how do people go through this without Jesus and without the church?" It's a burden on my heart. And, again, this was a burden for me long before I was a pastor.

In fact, long before we started NHCC, I came across a poem that, for me, captured this sentiment. It's called *I Stand By the Door*. It was written many years ago by Samuel Moor Shoemaker, the pastor who started AA. Many of you know it because I've read it before but, I want to read it again to help get this clear in your head.

I stand by the door. I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.

The "door" is the most important door in the world – it is the door through

which people walk when they find God. There's no use my going way inside and staying there when so many are still outside and they, as much as I, crave to know where the door is.

All that many ever find is only the wall where a door ought to be. They creep along the wall like blind men, with outstretched, groping hands, feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door, yet they never find it . . . so I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world is for people to find that door the door to God. The most important thing anyone can *do* is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands, and put it on the latch – the latch that only clicks and opens to the person's own touch.

Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die on cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter - die for want of what is within their grasp. They live, on the other side of it because they have not found it ... and opened it, and walked in, and found Him . . . So I stand by the door.

There is another reason why I stand there. Some people get part way in and become afraid, for God is so very great, and asks of us our all. Somebody must be by the door to tell them that they are spoiled for the old life - they have seen too much of the new! "Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any more." Somebody must be watching for the frightened who seek to sneak out just where they came in, to tell them how much better it is inside. So for them, too, I stand by the door.

It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is. I admire the people who go way in ... who inhabit those inner rooms, and know the depth and heights of God and call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is. *But I wish they would not forget how it was before they got in.* Then they would be able to help the people who have not yet even found the door. Or the people who want to run away again from God. You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long and forget the people outside the door.

So, as for me, I shall take my old accustomed place. Near enough to God to hear him and know He is there, but not so far from people as not to hear them and remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door – thousands of them; millions of them. But – more important for me – one of them, two of them, ten of them whose hands *I* am intended to put on the latch. For those I shall stand by the door and wait for those who seek it. I would rather be a doorkeeper. So I stand by the door.ⁱⁱⁱ

I think, friends, a lot of us feel that way. A lot of us look around and see the people and think, “oh gosh, if I could just lead you to the door of Jesus.” But a lot of us are like that gal on the exercise bike in the drama. We have friends and acquaintances who we want to share our faith with but it’s hard; it’s scary. Quite frankly, I’ll be honest with you, I’ve never really been that good at doing that kind of thing on my own.

For me, personally, church – specifically, *this church*, NHCC – *has helped me* reach out to

people in my life who are not followers of Jesus just yet, people like my trainer Jonathan, because this is a safe place to invite people. I know we're going to be real. I know we're going to be excellent. I know you guys are going to be friendly. And this is something that we all share.

Because church is a cause, I don't have to do the "great commission" deal on my own and neither do you. We have help. I have help. And I love that.

2. Because church is a community, I have had people in my life who accept me just as I am, but who also encourage me to be more than I am.

And it's been that way since the very first time I got involved in church.

In fact, a couple of months ago, I got a special request from a lady named Jackie

Byrd, who, many years ago, was the youth director at church I was part of as a teenager. Jackie's mom, Maxine, who was the wife of the pastor of the church, was about to celebrate her 80th birthday, and Jackie was asking all the people who had known their family through the years to write a letter - just kind of reminiscing about what they remembered of her and her husband, Jack, who passed away many years ago.

So, I sat down and thought about it a lot – how all three of these people, and the church, had affected my life – and this is part of what I wrote.

Maxine, Thank-you for the great and godly influence your family has had on my life. Even though we've not communicated very often and our lives have taken different courses, many times I think back to my teenage years

at Grace Baptist Church and the impact of those days.

At a most crucial time in my life, you all shaped me into the person I am today. Sometimes, I wonder who and where I would be if I hadn't found that youth group because it was there I learned not only what it meant to belong to Jesus and to follow Him, but also what it meant to be part of a group of people – a church – who together belonged to and followed Jesus. That experience created in me a life purpose and a love for the church that remains to this day.

I never had the chance to say thank-you to Pastor Dean for starting GBC, but as a church planter myself, I understand some of the challenges both of you had to have gone through and I am so grateful that you didn't quit. I can't

remember a single sermon he preached, but I do remember that he and you loved Jesus and all of us kids. I can remember sometimes getting to come to your house on Mabank for lunch after church and also getting to sled down that wonderful hill. Thank you!

Of course, I should also say "thank you" for having such a wonderful daughter, Jackie, and for the influence she had on me and so many other kids. She loved us and made us all feel so valuable not only to her but to God. I didn't realize it at the time but that was life-changing for me.

Honestly, there's more to this and it got really mushy and I'm not going to read that to you, but I could write letters like this to lots of people at lots of churches that I've been a

part of. Because church is a community, I have had people in my life who accept me just as I am, but who also encourage me to be more than I am.

3. Finally, because church is a corporation, I have been able to invest my time, talent and treasure in ways that directly impact eternity.

And again, I'm not talking about my job here. I could make a case that the reward for my job is my paycheck. You guys pay me to do a job, and there's more to it than that. If you want to compare apples to apples, we could look at it that way. What I'm talking about is that I've had the opportunity through my life to make investments of time, talent and treasure that go beyond the role of an employee of NHCC. Even long before this church. And even in this experience, Kitti mentioned, we've been through this process called Accelerate. We're remodeling this

building. And this opportunity to participate in Accelerate, for most of us, is a financial commitment beyond maybe anything we've ever done financially. And, for me and Jetta, it's been the opportunity to say, "we're going to invest in this structure of the church that needs to be built in ways that are going to directly impact eternity." Because church is a corporation, we get the opportunity to do that.

And some of you are doing that right now. And some of you haven't yet joined in on that and you're wondering what this Accelerate thing is all about. Well, as Kitti mentioned, this afternoon we're having a meeting to talk about the plans for remodeling. And, so far about 130 adults have come to the meetings last Wednesday and Thursday nights. And again, this is your last chance tonight, from 5pm-6:30. I hope you'll be there.

By the way, let me add one more thing, on the seat, when you came in today, was a little yellow volunteer information sheet, and if you would like the opportunity to invest some of your time and talent in a way that will directly impact eternity ... you can look at that sheet – it has some high-priority volunteer needs that we have in our church right now. Some things that you can get involved in, that you can, in the same way, invest in ways that will impact eternity. This church is a corporation. I could go on but I'll stop.

Closing

Well, that's why church is relevant to me – at least, part of why it's relevant.

I've had ...

- Help in reaching out to the irreligious

people around me,

- People who accept me for who I am, but who also encourage me to be more than I am.
- And I've been able to invest my time, talent and treasure in ways that directly impact eternity.

Those things are extremely valuable to me. That is why church is relevant to me. And I want to encourage you as we close this morning, that you could have those same things in your life, too, if you want them, if you'll receive them. The door is open. Jesus said, "Whoever will do so may come." And you can come to Jesus, and you can come and be part of this church. Or, if this is not the church for you, I mean, you go, "yeah, you guys are kind of weird, and you do some weird things," there are lots of great churches in the Northland and all of these things can be yours wherever you are. You

can be part of the group that says to the world, "Jesus is real. He is relevant. And, His gathering, his body, his church is relevant. Your life can be living proof of what happens when people make Jesus their teacher, their leader, their friend and their savior, and, then become part of the cause, the community and the corporation that is the church.

And that's my hope for you this morning. Let's pray to that end.

God, I lift up this group of people to you and I know that there are folks sitting in this auditorium who are at various stages of engagement and relationship with you, and engagement and relationship with the church. God, I pray that the light would go on for some of us and that we would say, "yeah, I really want Jesus to be more of my life,"

and even connecting the dots on how that affects our involvement in church. Some of us need to take a deeper step into our involvement in church. Some of us need to make the decision that this is our church and we're "in." Some of us need to make the decision that this is not our church and we're "out." But go find a church where we can fully engage and we can be part of that living proof, your body on this earth. The fullness of who you are expressed in us, and in the congregation and in the *ecclesia* of which we are part. God, I know that is your dream for us, and I pray that you would lead us to that in this church or whatever church. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Feature – The Living Proof

Endnotes

ⁱ Jim Dethmer, who at the time was an associate pastor at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/whatisachurch.htm#oct206>

ⁱⁱⁱ See www.acbibliography.com/dickbhtml/article10.html