

Rick Warren and Saddleback Church

Several years ago, we wrote about the training program for ministers at Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois (*Going to Willow Creek [WM-1003-1004]*). It is a large Sundaykeeping church near Chicago. At the time, a statement was made in the *Review* that a very large number of Adventist ministers were taking that training course (*see box at bottom of this page*).

In 1999 alone, 76,000 pastors and leaders from other denominations attended meetings on the campus of Willow Creek. Any church can join the Willow Creek Association for \$249 a year. Over 3,300 local churches in America are members, including many of our own. They go there to learn how to talk more people into becoming church members.

The latest training course our pastors are attending to improve "church growth" are the seminars at an immense Sundaykeeping church in southern California. It is the Saddleback Church, in Lake Forest, California. *The remainder of this report will be about Saddleback.*

40 DAYS OF PURPOSE

We recently wrote about Rick Warren's "40 Days of Purpose" which was presented over a period of six weeks in Adventist churches throughout the nation.

"Over 8,000 churches from all 50 states and 19 countries have now participated in 40 Days of Purpose."—*Saddleback Church brochure.*

During those consecutive Sabbaths, our people read through, and heard, sermons about Rick Warren's latest book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. (His earlier 1995 book was *The Purpose Driven Church*.)

From another Saddleback brochure, we learn that 40

Days of Purpose was publicly endorsed and used in a large number of denominations, including the following: Assemblies of God, Baptist, Church of God, Evangelical Free, International Pentecostal Holiness, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Nazarene, Vineyard, along with many others.

Church growth seminars teach visiting pastors how to bring more people in off the streets and get them to join the church in droves. Church growth seminars teach that doctrine and standards should not be emphasized. Music, sociability, and excitement are key factors in bringing in and holding the multitudes, but not religious beliefs.

THE SADDLEBACK CHURCH

What is the Saddleback Church like? This is from one of Saddleback's brochures:

"Our task is to equip pastors all over the world to plant and renew churches to become balanced, grow healthily, and reproduce . . . Rick Warren has taught the PD principles to more than 108,000 pastors on the campus of Saddleback Church alone. Satellite-based simulcast events increase that number to more than 160,000 pastors. Add international events—Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Amsterdam—and the number rises to over 180,000! . . .

"We are working on publishing and distributing several PD tools in multiple languages. This includes the International Workshop on DVD (currently in 18 languages), study guides, and class materials, to name a few."—*Saddleback Church brochure.*

THE DECEMBER 18, 1997 ADVENTIST REVIEW ARTICLE

"What to do with Willow Creek?"

"**Fact:** America's most attended church, a noncharismatic nondenominational church in suburban Chicago, continues to shape not only its immediate community but, more notably, the 2,200 member churches from 70 denominations participating in the Willow Creek Association. WCA endeavors to "help the church turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ.

"**Fact: Adventists, both pastors and laypeople, consistently make up one of the largest groups at Willow Creek's half-dozen annual seminars—including church leadership conferences in May and October and a leadership summit in August.**

"**Fact: The three latest Adventist churches to divide or depart [separate from the denomination]—Oregon's Sunnyside, Maryland's Damascus, and Colorado's Christ Advent Fellowship—were clearly influenced by Willow Creek's ministry hallmarks** (small groups, spiritual gifts discovery, friendship evangelism, contemporary worship), if not its congregational status.

"**Fact: Many Adventists who haven't been to Willow Creek are sick of hearing about it** from Adventists who

have been to Willow Creek. In some cases **local members have divided over how "seeker-sensitive" their church services should be.**

"**What to do with Willow Creek?** . . . I'm grateful for Willow Creek. It was there that my former academy church, Forest Lake, got intentional about worship; that Adventist friends and relatives recognized their natural abilities—from drama to maintenance—as natural ministries . . .

I've never exited the \$34.3 million [Willow Creek] complex without positive thoughts.

"From this perspective I offer these sentiments:

"Adventists should give Willow Creek a fair shake. As a people often prejudged, we should avoid prejudging others . . . Adventists should continue gleaning from Willow Creek . . . Willow Creek has its place in prophecy too. Granted, it's a different place. But we can learn from each other . . .

"I think of Mountain View church in Las Vegas; of the freshly planted New Community in Atlanta; of my home church, New Hope, in Laurel, Maryland; and of other churches mature enough to incorporate Willow Creek principles . . .

"We can learn from each other."—*"On Willow Creek," Adventist Review, December 18, 1997 [bold print ours].*

Here is more on Warren and his Sundaykeeping church:

“Rick Warren aimed to first build one great church, then show others how to build theirs. He has devoted decades to teaching 300,000 pastors his principles for revival and renewal . . . *Christianity Today* dubbed Warren ‘America’s most influential pastor’ in a cover story last fall . . .

“Saddleback Church has grown from a Bible study in his condo in 1980 to 15,000 baptized members today. Another 70,000 people who’ve attended at least one service are in the church’s database.

“Every weekend nearly 19,000 worshipers choose from among nine ‘venues’ as varied as the 3,000-seat sanctuary, the coffee bar or the ‘beach hut’ for high-schoolers. Built into the landscape—designed by theme park experts—are settings for 40 Bible re-enactments, including a stream that can part like the Red Sea.

“From everywhere, but the acres of asphalt parking, a visitor can see, live or on tape-delay like GospelTiVo, Warren at the pulpit, expounding on the Bible’s script for your life . . .

“In the pulpit, Warren delivers 40 minutes of preaching. Then, mid-sermon, he literally chills out for 20 minutes, behind a bank of fans or in his icy office, to avoid blackout headaches from a rare adrenaline disorder. Another of the church’s 13 pastors carries on until Warren returns for a wrap-up . . .

“Warren is part of the ultra-conservative Southern Baptist Convention, and all his senior staff sign on to the SBC’s doctrines . . . yet Warren’s pastor-training programs welcome Catholics, Methodists, Mormons, Jews and ordained women . . .

“His 1995 book for pastors, *The Purpose Driven Church*, was all about surfing pop culture’s waves to draw in the unchurched.”—*USA Today*, September 21, 2003.

If strange, new things are happening at your local church, it maybe because your pastor has studied at the feet of Sundaykeepers at Willow Creek or Saddleback. Or maybe it is because he learned new techniques at a local conference ministerial retreat, under the direction of men carefully trained under the direction of non-Adventists who have no respect for obedience to the law of God, at one or both of those churches.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

This Willow Creek / Saddleback type of revival is actually religious marketing! Bill Hybels and Rick Warren rely on marketing strategies, psychology, polls, opinions, compromise, business and psychological consultants, and business research findings.

Their places of business are “worship centers.” Their mode of operation is Biblical words and phrases, and lots of modern musical styles in order “to get people connected” and touch their “felt needs.”

The real problem of people is sin in the life. They need to return to God in heartfelt repentance and, in Christ’s enabling strength, put away those sins and keep God’s commandments. But such things do not matter to these men.

Instead, modern entertainment methods are used to attract and hold the people, self-help books are provided to keep them contented, and leadership conferences are given to lure other pastors elsewhere to copy their methods.

Astoundingly, books produced by those new-style churches are widely advertised, sold in our own bookstores, and used in our churches.

Rick Warren’s marketing consultant is CMS, “a full-service custom marketing and communications agency headquartered in Covina, California,” which is skilled in aiding the Church Growth Movement.

“At CMS, we view it as our mission to help our clients grow their businesses. We do this by working with each client identifying opportunities and developing innovative, creative and profitable services which assist them in the execution of effective marketing, sales and communications program . . . We are best able to serve clients when they allow us to act as partners . . . CMS is made up of a team of talented individuals whose dedication and expertise have earned them a solid reputation for creating results.”—*CMS website: christian-ministry.com*.

CMS clients include Quaker, Isuzu Motors America, the City of West Covina, Saddleback Valley Community Church, Purpose Driven Ministries (a Saddleback subsidiary), Smalley Relationship Center, and Walk through the Bible (Bruce Wilkinson’s Prayer of Jabez organization).

Do not expect Moses’ presentation of the Ten Commandments or John the Baptist’s call to repentance to be included among those management skills. Instead, you will find polls, tracking surveys, and management skills aimed at producing satisfied customers who keep returning for more of the product offered by the business. In other words, give the customer what pleases them.

“Collecting, organizing and managing data is essential to understanding, evaluating and planning of any successful promotion. That is why we developed our CMS Intelligent Redemption System. It is sophisticated proprietary software that allows us to program and initialize data . . . Our purchasing standards and fulfillment procedures build-in tracking and accountability . . . CMS Fulfillment Center specializes in direct mail projects, new product introductions, and promotion launches.”—*CMS website*.

Warren has an internet site for pastors throughout the world, called *pastors.com*. It is “a global internet community that serves and mentors those in ministry worldwide.”

In addition, Warren has a weekly online newsletter, with an immense following. “Over 60,000 pastors subscribe to Rick Warren’s *Ministry Toolbox*, a free weekly email newsletter” (*pastors.com*).

Ministerial students in seminaries everywhere (probably including our own) are required to read Warren’s books and learn his principles.

“Rick’s previous book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, has sold over a million copies in 20 languages. Winner of the *Gold Medallion Ministry Book of the Year*, it is used as a textbook in most seminaries, and was selected as one of the *100 Christian Books That Changed the 20th Century*.”—*pastors.com*.

“Rick Warren is well known as the pioneer of The Purpose-Driven Church paradigm for church health. More than 250,000 pastors and church leaders from over 125 countries have attended Purpose-Driven Church seminars in 18 languages. Peter Drucker calls him ‘the inventor of perpetual revival.’”—*Ibid*.

Warren is deeply admired by Peter Drucker, because he is also a marketing strategist. The commercial methods

of selling products seem to work as well for selling religion as anything else.

In a 2002 article in *Business Week*, Drucker's plans and purposes are described:

"He brings a communitarian philosophy to his consulting . . . He said that what he's all about is this search for community, the search for where people and organizations find community for noneconomic satisfaction . . .

"A lot of his ideas have become so accepted that it's hard for anyone to understand how original they were at the time he introduced them. It's sort of like Freud and psychoanalysis. Peter was the first, for example, to help managers understand that they had to define their businesses from a customer's perspective."—Ken Witty, "Peter Drucker's Search for Community," *Business Week Online*, December 24, 2002.

Rick Warren follows the same plan: Design the worship and the music and everything else—to appeal to the comfort of the people who live in the community.

Rick Warren believes that what he is doing is infallibly guided and has the fullest approval of God; for as he says, "Never criticize what God is blessing" (*Purpose Driven Church*, p. 62). Whatever the methods may be that bring large crowds in the your church, they are right; that is, if the large crowds come. Focusing on the "customer's perspective" brings success and the approval of God.

The key, according to these men, is to make the people living in the town happy. For Warren, this means focusing on the felt needs of unbelievers rather than the true needs of God's family. The marketing experts call this the "dialectic process." Here is how one person describes it:

"In this movement, it is imperative that unbelievers are brought into the church; otherwise, the process of continual change cannot begin. There must be an *antithesis* (unbelievers) present to oppose the *thesis* (believers), in order to move towards *consensus* (compromise), and move the believers away from their *moral absolutism* (resistance to pagan changes). If all members of the church stand firm on the Word of God, and its final authority in all doctrine and tradition, then the church cannot and will not change. This is common faith."—Robert Klenck, *The 21st Century Church*.

Many different organizations are reinventing themselves in order to follow the established tracks of corporate America. They may call their particular version of this system "Total Quality Management," "Outcome Based Education," or "Purpose Driven Churches"; but all follow the same pragmatic blueprint: "Aim for *measurable results*." Use Teams, dialogue, facilitators, "lifelong learning," contracts, and continual assessments of "progress" toward the planned outcome. All involved must conform or leave the system.

THEOLOGY

"Quietly whisper the prayer that will change your eternity: 'Jesus, I believe in you and I receive you.' If you sincerely meant that prayer, congratulations! Welcome to the family of God! You are now ready to discover and start living God's purpose for your life!" (*Rick Warren, in Foundation Magazine, March-April 1998*).

No repentance. No sins to put away. Nothing in the Bible to obey. Just celebrate, come to church and sing and celebrate.

"Knowing your purpose focuses your life. It con-

centrates your effort and energy on what's important. You become effective by being selective."—*Ibid.*

Instead of repent, confess your sins, believe, and obey; as Warren describes it in his writings, this new-modeled faith teaches: Accept Christ, focus your life, increase motivation, and begin an eternal celebration. Here are Rick Warren's five purposes for your life:

"You were planned for God's pleasure. You were formed for God's family. You were created to become like Christ. You were shaped for serving God. You were made for a mission."—*The Purpose Driven Church, p. 1 (contents)*.

According to Warren, all you need to know are your five purposes and you can forget the rest.

"Knowing your purpose simplifies your life. It defines what you do and what you don't do."—*Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, p. 31*.

Notice that *you* do the purposes. You do them all by yourself. And none of it requires obedience to Bible truth.

Surely, somewhere Rick Warren says something about sin. Yes, he does. Here it is:

"All sin, at its root, is failing to give God glory . . . Refusing to bring glory to God is prideful rebellion . . . The Bible says, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.'" —*Rick Warren, quoted in Foundation Magazine, March-April 1998, p. 55*.

Warren here confuses cause with effect. We fall short of giving God the glory by sinning. A failure to bring Him glory is the effect, disobeying His commandments is the cause.

What is the best kind of worship? Warren explains it is essentially the kind you like the best.

"Worship must be both accurate and authentic . . . The best style of worship is the one that most authentically represents your love for God, based on the background and personality God gave you."—*The Purpose Driven Life, p. 102*.

"Many Christians seem stuck in a worship rut—an unsatisfying routine—instead of having a vibrant friendship with God, because they force themselves to use devotional methods or worship styles that don't fit the way God uniquely shaped them."—*Ibid., p. 102*.

Warren then proves his point by quoting the Bible; but his proof text comes from a radical modern translation. Instead of quoting "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (*John 4:23, KJV*), Warren quotes the verse in *The Message*, a paraphrased Bible translation by Eugene Peterson: "That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship" (*ibid., p. 103*).

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Rick Warren is careful to quote the most way-out translations of the Bible, because they nicely water down obedience and generally omit it entirely.

In one of his sermons, instead of quoting the KJV of John 3:36 ("He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."), Warren quotes *The Message*: "Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever!"

Warren urges his hearers to only use new translations: "We often miss the full impact of familiar Bible verses,

not because of poor translating, but simply because they have become so familiar! . . . Therefore I have deliberately used paraphrases in order to help you see God's truth in new, fresh ways."—*Ibid.*

In the same source quoted above, instead of "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (*Matt 6:9, KJV*), Warren quotes a modern version: "Our Father in heaven, reveal who you are" (*Message*).

Instead of "My Father is greater than I" (*John 14:28, KJV*), Warren quotes "The Father is the goal and purpose of my life" (*Message*).

Instead of "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (*Romans 8:6, KJV*), Warren quotes "Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life" (*Message*).

MUSIC

In order to better understand the seriousness of this situation, you should be made aware of the fact that Rick Warren calls his church, "the flock that likes to rock." He is referring to the music at Saddleback. According to Warren, every possible type of music is good, as long as it has Christian words!

"There is no such thing as 'Christian' music; there are only Christian lyrics. It is the words that make a song sacred, not the tune. There are no spiritual tunes."—*The Purpose Driven Life, p. 66.*

"You must match your music to the kind of people God wants your church to reach . . . The music you use 'positions' your church in your community. It defines who you are . . . It will determine the kind of people you attract, the kind of people you keep, and the kind of people you lose."—*Warren, Selecting Worship Music (July 29, 2002).*

So that is how our pastors, who have attended Rick Warren's seminars, determine what kind of music to use: the kind which will reach the most people in the community!

Now you can better understand why your local church is changing on Sabbath morning.

"God loves all kinds of music because he invented it all—fast and slow, loud and soft, old and new. You probably don't like it all, but God does! If it is offered to God in spirit and truth, it is an act of worship. Christians often disagree over the style of music used in worship, passionately defending their preferred style as the most biblical or God-honoring. But there is no biblical style!"—*The Purpose Driven Life, p. 65.*

Warren emphatically teaches this to Adventist ministers and thousands of other pastors who attend his seminars. Music is a driving force in the Church Growth Movement. It brings the world into the church very fast; and that is a much-valued objective to "church growth" pastors.

"Now at Saddleback Church, we are unapologetically contemporary . . . I passed out a three-by-five card to everybody in the church, and I said, 'You write down the call letters of the radio station you listen to.'

"I wasn't even asking unbelievers. I was asking the

people in the church, 'What kind of music do you listen to?' When I got it back, I didn't have one person who said, 'I listen to organ music.' Not one . . . So, we made a strategic decision that we are unapologetically a contemporary music church. And right after we made that decision . . . Saddleback exploded with growth . . .

"I'll be honest with you, we are loud. We are really, really loud on a weekend service . . . I say, 'We're not gonna turn it down.' Now the reason why is baby boomers want to feel the music, not just hear it . . . God loves variety!"—*Rick Warren, quoted in Foundation Magazine, March-April 1988.*

At SuperConference 2003, "over 13,000 ministers and students" heard Rick Warren speak at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Virginia. His message was "*Attracting a Crowd to Worship*." He introduced the talk by saying that it was aimed at those who were "stuck in the past."

"I believe that one of the major church issues will be how we're going to reach the next generation with our music . . . To insist that all good music came from Europe 200 years ago; there's a name for that: racism! . . . Encourage members to re-arrange and rewrite. New songs say God is doing something awesome!"—*Rick Warren quoted in sunlandneighborhoodchurch.com.*

Jesus said, "Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (*John 15:19*). But Warren has a different view of the matter: Find out what the world loves, and give it to them in your church. By so doing, you 'will achieve the great goal of your ministry: jamming your church with wall-to-wall people from off the streets. Forget those old-fashioned ideas about standards, beliefs, and doctrines.

"[We use] drums, clashing cymbals, loud trumpets, tambourines and stringed instruments . . . Saddleback is unapologetically a contemporary music church. We've often been referred to in the press as 'the flock that likes to rock.' We use the style of music the majority of people in our church listen to on the radio."—*Rick Warren, Selecting Worship Music.*

RELATIONSHIPS

It is not standards or doctrines that count. Instead, use relationships to bring everyone in the church into conformity with what is believed and done in the local church:

"God says relationships are what life is all about."—*Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, p. 125.*

"For unity's sake we must never let differences divide us. We must stay focused on what matters most—learning to love each other as Christ has loved us, and fulfilling God's five purposes for each of us and his church. Conflict is usually a sign that the focus has shifted to less important issues, things the Bible calls 'disputable matters.' When we focus on personalities, preferences, interpretations, styles or methods, division always happens."—*Ibid., pp. 161-162.*

Every member must sign a covenant to make unity above everything else (*ibid., pp. 166-167*). Saddleback is basically a very friendly, entertainment church. —*vf*