



Rudy Rasmus

As a church, we've been judgmental about who should be granted access or empowerment, instead of providing God's **Unconditional Love**. Until the church can accomplish this, it will be a second or third option, behind Starbucks, the couch, or the mall.

Who are the people in the most pain in your community? If we are going to be truthful, we need to ask this question, and it requires us to look at the mission in which we should be involved. When I ask church members this question — whether they are from a rural, suburban, or urban community — I always get the same answers.

- 1) Youth are in trouble — e.g., pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, etc.
- 2) The economically disadvantaged are challenged to find employment in their community.
- 3) The church is not viewed as a necessity in the community.

Yet, wherever there are people with problems, there is an inherent necessity for the church to address those problems. The church will not be successful, though, until it moves from an internal to external focus.

The fact is, many churches are in trouble.

- 1) With the repopulation of urban centers, a movement is taking place whereby the historically indigenous populations — which are also historically impoverished — are being displaced.
- 2) In suburban areas, residences are in one of two economic predicaments, which makes church secondary. They are financially stable with much disposable income and free time, or they are exhausted from long days and long commutes. In both predicaments, church is no longer the locus of suburban life.
- 3) In rural areas, depopulation, the challenge of earning a livable income, and the lack of available services are causing hardship and affecting the church.

So the denomination has a challenge and an opportunity. Churches that are intentionally engaged in the needs of their communities are having a positive effect on those communities

and experiencing growth. Churches ignoring the needs of their communities are experiencing decline. This should be a lesson for our denomination. To be successful as the church and as a denomination, we need to T-O-U-C-H our communities.

T — We need to be **Truthful** with ourselves and others. If our denomination is a ship, we have hit an iceberg. We're taking on water. If we fail to respond and change, we'll no longer be effective in our ministry. Right now, we're rearranging deck chairs, telling the band to keep playing, and sinking because we're not being truthful about our condition and ministry.

O — We need to be **Others-focused** and decide if we'll be a church in the community, to the community, and with the community. Our churches were built when they were vibrant and vital to a community, but when demographics shifted, the churches didn't change. Churches need to invite people inside the walls and become places where the indigenous community becomes the church.

U — As a church, we've been judgmental about who should be granted access or empowerment, instead of providing God's **Unconditional Love**. Until the church can accomplish this, it will be a second or third option, behind Starbucks, the couch, or the mall.

C — When we tell the truth in love and focus on the person on our doorstep, then we can transform the **Community**.

H — When all these elements come together in a Jesus kind of way, there will be **Hope** for our communities. Show me a community with a vibrant, vital church at its center, and I'll show you hope for the community.

Rudy Rasmus is co-pastor of St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston, Texas.



Milan Lorinc

Two years ago we held a public evangelistic gathering in Kosice, the second largest town in Slovakia. United Methodists from Texas were amazed that we preached the gospel so publicly. They said they don't have the same freedom, which was a shock to me. In earlier decades, the United States brought many blessed fruits and I assumed it was a nation of great freedom. It seems the reality is not so pretty.

The United Methodist Church has diverted from the direction set by John Wesley. Present day Methodism is more concerned with ceremonies, orders, structures, and secular social projects than it is to reaching lost people. Early morning meetings, regular fastings, strong evangelism and mission initiatives, and the emphasis on holiness and Christian perfection are missing.

When Christians in local churches genuinely followed Jesus, Wesley gave them full membership rights. Of course he was wise and sound in executing discipline. He preferred quiet personal communication (Galatians 6:1) and correction in Christ's spirit. Compare the Church today with Wesley's emphasis on holiness, Christian perfection, and applying discipline with the practices of The United Methodist Church. Who would now dare excommunicate a successful man who committed adultery? Most would not want to lose his financial support and they would fear losing favor with the congregation.

How many United Methodists really want a world-wide revival movement, that God promised through prophet Joel in the last days (Joel 3:1)? *Are we content with a beautiful Methodist heritage?*

I long for a United Methodist Church that is hungry and thirsty for God's word, a church that uses all of its resources to preach salvation to the lost, and a church that worships Jesus in spirit and in truth.

Milan Lorinc is pastor of mission work in Gelnica, Slovakia district.