

The Gathering Way

(A vision for a new way of being the church in the new world)

by Dr. David Foster, pastor of The Gathering

"Now you are no longer strangers to God and foreigners to heaven, but you are **members** of God's very own family, citizens of God's country, and **you belong** in God's household with every other Christian." (Eph 2:19)

The Gathering is a part of a *Christ-centered, biblically based, people-loving, life-changing, world-wide* movement aimed at advancing a Jesus agenda in the brave new wireless, wallless, worn-out world. As a participant in **Leadership Summit**, you will learn what differentiates The Gathering as a unique and important mission to the world.

Attending one of our weekend services, you have discovered that The Gathering is not like any other church you've attended. Everything we do (even the things we avoid doing and saying) have been thought through carefully. This "*crash course*" is our effort to let you look behind the scenes to learn what makes us tick. As we get started, let's **imagine a place where . . .**

- "*come as you are*" says more about your heart condition than what you wear.
- The moment you walk in you feel wanted and welcomed, not watched or worn out.
- Religion is exposed for what it is - man's attempt to boss God around.
- Religion is replaced with a real relationship with God that makes a difference in your everyday life in the real world
- No one is ever judged by his or her skin tone, lifestyle, past performance, or political preference; only as a person who matters to God.
- Simplicity and sincerity characterize everything you experience.
- You need never fear of being embarrassed to bring your friends.
- It's OK to not be OK.
- You'll be challenged to rethink all of your life in light of the radical, revolutionary love of Jesus.

- Sounds of joy and laughter fill the atmosphere as happy people gather to encourage one another and find real hope together.
- You feel 100% more hopeful and encouraged than when you first arrived.
- We look out for each other and watch each other's back.
- People love each other and show it with their words and actions.

Our mission

The Gathering is a movement whose mission is . . .

. . . to create environments and experiences which *help nonreligious people connect to God and each other* for the purpose of changing the world.

We're not interested in building an institutional church . . .

- **Defined by bricks and mortar; open one day a week.**
- **Where respectability is more important than the revolution.**
- **Which looks more like a walled garden than a city on a hill.**

"You are the world's light--***a city on a hill***, glowing in the night for all to see. Don't hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father." (Mat 5:14-16 TLB)

Our 4 core values

1. We value **truth** and the *freedom* it promotes.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32; NIV)

2. We value **people** and the *potential* they possess.

“Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.” (Luke 15:7; MESSAGE)

3. We value **hope** and the *future* it promises.

“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Is. 40:31; NIV)

4. We value **joy** and the *strength* it provides.

“. . . the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (Neh 8:10 NIV)

Our philosophy of ministry

- To keep it **simple**.
- To keep it **sincere**.
- To keep it **scalable**.

Our advance strategy

I was raised in the “**go to**” **church** generation. This was my parents’ generation. It was a time of entitlement for the American Church. Going to church was the thing to do. At church you made your social contacts. If you were a business owner, you went to church with other local business owners.

That world died after the 60’s and in the early to mid 70’s we entered the “**go do**” **church** generation. Church attendance was in the decline and the problem was “how” we were doing church—boring! This was a revolution of methods and meaning and lasted up until 2000. It saw the rise of mega churches (churches of 2000 in attendance or more) across the country.

By 2000, we entered another era I call the go be the church revolution. It is called by many names (the emerging church, missional church planting). It is a new emphasis focused on not the methods of doing church, but the message of what it means to “**go be**” **the church** in the brave new world.

The American church is suffering from 3 chronic diseases:

1. **Agoraphobia**; *the fear of the marketplace of ideas.*
2. **Xenophobia**; *the fear of people not like us; therefore a drift into irrelevance.*
3. **Mission myopia**; *we do not know who our customers are, therefore development of the **small church pie mentality**.*

It is the mission of The Gathering to live and thrive outside the church slice of the people pie!

How do we advance the church in the brave new world?

1. That is **walless**. Meaning . . .
 - a. The death of distance
 - b. Bricks and mortar become limiting barriers
 - c. Interconnectedness and mobility redefine and expand sacred space
2. That is **wireless**. Meaning . . .
 - a. Anyone
 - b. Anywhere
 - c. Anytime
3. That is **worn-out**. Meaning . . .
 - a. The complexity of choice
 - b. The complexity of change
 - c. The complexity of family dysfunction
4. Creating the brave new world of **free agency**. Meaning . . .
 - a. The break down of institutional loyalty.
 - b. The break up of brand identification.
 - c. The desire for frontline ministry and impact.

Our simple 3-part plan

1. We will gather to go.

We gather, not just to worship God, but to learn how to worship God everywhere else.

Everything is worship, therefore work is worship, loving my family well is worship, resting is worship, even play is worship. We will learn how to live in the sacred now, wherever we are, and what ever we are doing.

2. We will grow together, up, out, and more.

Why is it everyone wants to grow, but few do?

- *Living things grow.*
- *Growing things change.*
- *Change creates friction*
- *Friction creates fear*
- *Fear creates dis-ease*

The 4 signs of a healthy non-institutional church:

1. It is a place where we grow **together in love**
2. It is a place where we grow **up into Christ**
3. It is a place where we grow **out through ministry**
4. It is a place where we grow **more through conversion**

3. **We will give our lives to advance a Jesus Agenda**

We give what we've been given, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor in order to **create solutions and systems** that glorify God and advance the good motivated by love and the desire to be . . .

way-makers in a *crazy, dangerous, uncivilized, risk-taking MOVEMENT* whose mission is the fueling and funding of a global revolution aimed at the radical reclamation of the human heart, driven by a relentless, passionate pursuit of the divine scandal—namely . . .

every life matters to God.

"So I am eager to come to you in Rome, too, to preach God's Good News. For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles. This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.'" (Rom. 1:15-17 NLT)

"I do all this for the **sake** of the gospel, that I may SHARE IN ITS BLESSINGS." (1 Cor 9:23, NIV)

Our simple 3-step process

"Any enterprise is **built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense**, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts. A wise man is mightier than a strong man. Wisdom is mightier than strength." (Prov 24:3-5 TLB)

Step 1: Weekly; we will gather to worship God in order to go worship God everywhere else.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD." (Psa 122:1 KJV)

"We met on Sunday to worship and celebrate the Master's Supper." (Acts 20:7 MSG)

"Every Sunday each of you make an offering and put it in safekeeping. Be as generous as you can." (1Cor. 16:2 (MSG))

"**We should not stop gathering** together with other believers, as some of you are doing. Instead, we must continue to encourage each other even more as we see the day of the Lord coming." (Heb. 10:25)

We will welcome everyone as someone . . .

"Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all **GATHERING around to hear him**. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered." (Luke 15:1-7 NIV)

- *worthy to be known*
- *worthy to be loved*
- *worthy to be celebrated*
- *worthy to be redeemed*

We will worship Jesus with joy & without apology. . .

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.' (Mat 16:16-18 NIV)

We will gather for worship and the word . . .

"'Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.' The woman said, 'I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.' Then Jesus declared, 'I who speak to you am he.'" (John 4:23-26 NIV)

*in an atmosphere of celebration . . .
where the spirit of God and the word of God
feeds the hungry and heals the broken, the bruised, the
burnt, and the bored. The result will be life
transformation, freedom, and great joy.*

Step 2: Daily; we will grow together, up, out, & more.

The 4 directions of spiritual health:

1. To be healthy we will grow together in love.

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."
(1 John 4:20-21 NIV)

2. To be healthy we will grow up into Christ.

"Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times--speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly--and so **BECOME MORE AND MORE IN EVERY WAY LIKE CHRIST WHO IS THE HEAD OF HIS BODY, THE CHURCH**. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."
(Eph 4:15-16 TLB)

3. To be healthy we will grow out through ministry.

"Some of us have been given special ability as apostles; to others he has given the gift of being able to preach well; some have special ability in winning people to Christ, helping them to trust him as their Savior; still others have a gift for caring for God's people as a shepherd does his sheep, leading and teaching them in the ways of God. **Why is it that he gives us these special abilities to do certain things best? It is that God's people will be equipped to do better work for him, building up the Church, the body of Christ, to a position of strength and maturity**; until finally we all believe alike about our salvation and about our Savior, God's Son, and all become full-grown in the Lord--yes, to the point of being filled

full with Christ. Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth." (Eph 4:11-14 TLB)

4. To be healthy we will grow more through conversion.

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.**" (Acts 2:41-47 NIV)

The 14 ways in which we grow together, up, out, & more:

1. Growth groups
2. Serving teams
3. Mission projects teams
4. Church planting projects
5. Multi-site advance teams
6. Marketplace ministry groups
7. Frontline community action
8. Renegade Roadshow events
9. Media teams
10. Book Study groups
11. Parenting support groups
12. Recovery ministry gatherings
13. Men mentoring men
14. Women mentoring women

Step 3: Continuously; we will give to advance a Jesus Agenda.

Our 3 Non-negotiables

1. Everything we do we do for Jesus.
2. Everything we do we do with quality.
3. Everyone we do it with will be applauded and appreciated.

Our 4 views on Volunteerism

1. We believe that there is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer on a mission for God.

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being **LIKE-MINDED**, having the **SAME LOVE**, being **ONE IN SPIRIT AND PURPOSE**. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in **humility consider others better than yourselves**. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Phil 2:1-4 NIV)

2. We want every volunteer to feel that what he or she does is an essential part of the whole.

"Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." (Rom 12:4-5 TLB)

3. We want every volunteer to get more than they give.
4. We want every volunteer to have a "movement" mindset.

Our philosophy of Leadership

1. Leadership is about **relationships** not positions.
2. Leadership is a **responsibility** not privilege.
3. Leadership is about **including** not excluding.
4. Leadership is about **innovation** not limitations.
5. Leadership is about **influence** not power.
6. Leadership is about **results** not activity.
 - The old paradigm—*the mission is the ministry*. Highest value; activity.
 - The new paradigm—*the ministry is the mission*. Highest value; results.
 - To be worth doing, the ministry must **advance** the mission

Our core beliefs

The Gathering is an interdenominational, Christ-centered, people-loving, joy-filled, hope-giving movement whose reason for existence is the relentless, relational, and resourceful pursuit of *helping nonreligious people connect to God and each other*. Our mission is based on the following foundational beliefs:

- **We affirm** the Holy Bible as the inspired word of God, as truth for every generation and as the standard for all ethical and moral decisions in faith and life.
- **We believe** God has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures and has made Himself known through the incarnation of Jesus the Christ.
- **We celebrate** the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the central event of history and the sole ground of hope for human redemption.
- **We teach** that a person comes into a right relationship with God, not by religion, but by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Leader of our lives. *Real life is in Christ alone and is accessed by faith alone.*
- **We affirm** that authentic faith in Jesus will evidence itself in a "new life" which seeks full devotion to Jesus Christ. Obedience to the teachings of Christ found in the Sacred Scriptures leads to freedom expressed by loving service to God and others, and spiritual fruitfulness is normative as empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **We invite** seekers to become finders. We encourage finders to become keepers who demonstrate a great commitment to the great commandment (loving God and loving your neighbor) and the great commission (as you go, share your hope with everyone).
- **We seek** to build community where God is honored as people are invited to belong and become, to know and be known, to serve and be served, as well as celebrate and be celebrated.

Where do we go from here?

How can I get Connected at The Gathering?

"Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others." (Rom 12:4-5 TLB)

Ways to get Connected...

- Kids Gathering (baby – 4th grade)
- Our Space 2 Gather (5th grade and up)
- Set Up
- Take Down
- Greet/Usher
- Welcome/Prayer before Offering/Announcements
- Music
- Sound
- Prayer Team
- Outreach
- Coffee Shop
- Welcome Center