



Birthing a Church

Last year I heard author Edwina Gateley share in a keynote address that “women are called to be birthers of healing and hope in a broken world.” For centuries Christian women have struggled to nurture the lives of the downtrodden and marginalized, and more recently they have begun birthing new churches as the ultimate institution for healing and hope.

Those women who feel that God has called them to go forth to plant, pasture, and grow a church in what is still a predominantly male world are exploring alternative models of doing so. They feel the necessity of moving beyond the highly touted, (generally white) male models of such megachurches as Willow Creek, Saddleback, and the Dream Center.

When a woman named Sherri Story shared her model with me, I knew it needed to be passed on to a wider audience. One of a team of five women and two men who last year birthed Generations Quest (www.generationsquest.org), an emerging church in Virginia Beach, Va., Story seeks to reformat church using a feminine perspective. She believes that women who venture to plant churches need to look within themselves to find an altogether new model in order to reach today’s unchurched population.

The team at Generations Quest uses an egg metaphor to illustrate their infrastructure, describing it as “living, inter-

active, and porous to the community around it.” Whereas the male approach to leadership is traditionally hierarchical, with one person dictating to others and information traveling down from the top of a chain, the feminine approach features shared leadership, with communication occurring around a table in a more relational, household type of model. Titles are not important in this model; community and holistic integration of all aspects of life are.

One particularly exasperating question that is frequently asked of female church birthers is “Does your church attract males?” Story responds with understandable annoyance, “Do we ask male pastors if they attract women? Our gatherings are focused not on men or women but on people in the Kingdom. We’re all in this journey together. We’re all in the process of becoming whole.”

I was particularly intrigued with the Generations Quest model for church birthing because I myself am a female church “birther,” and while I’ve heard many women (and men) talk about establishing new churches I had never heard anyone approach it from this perspective. Story compares a new community of faith to a newborn child and feels that women are especially suited to nurturing such a body. “Most women know the joys and pains of birthing. We know how to give birth and then nurture something new, sensitive to all the nuances of a newborn. It requires much of the same tender and relational characteristics.”

Like Story, I agree that those who

feel called to establish a new church need to have alternative models for doing so. Women will be encouraged to know that their feminine nurturing and relational skills are transferable to this area of ministry as well. “By reimagining how churches can be birthed,” explains Story, “women ministers may see, feel, and hear a new hope to lead and feed communities of faith that they have birthed.”

In addition, the team aspect of this model provides an excellent way for women to partner in birthing a church, especially those who are finishing seminary or graduate school but haven’t received a denominational invitation. In this way we can use our God-given creativity as well as incorporate the social-justice aspect of ministry that Jesus modeled for us.

Story and her colleagues and the men who support them did not wait until they were invited to start a church community. They knew that the “line” they were not supposed to cross existed, but they realized the wall was not erected by God but by man. Thus they chose to obey the Great Commission to “go and make disciples.” In that obedience a new church is emerging. Story admonishes women to feel the fear of God’s call but to respond to it anyway: “We have the call, we have the ability—we just need a new paradigm which fits us.” ■

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