

"THIS THING WAS NOT DONE IN A CORNER"

Gary McDade

A parachurch organization currently known as MUM (Memphis Urban Ministry) was formed in 1994 for the purpose of planting new churches in Memphis. It was then called MCPM (Memphis Church Planting Ministry) and was “led by a full-time coordinator/church planter, Ron Cook, and by a steering committee representing congregations involved in church planting.”¹ *Mission: Memphis* was a quarterly newsletter designed to inform and involve people in MCPM, which is now, MUM.² Subsequent publications such as *Vision for the City* published by the Highland Street Church of Christ which sponsors MUM and *Up Close and Personal: Embracing the Poor*³ written by Harold Shank, Anthony Wood, and Ron Bergeron about their experiences in MUM have continued to publicize MUM and the churches under its canopy of organization.⁴ The published “Vision Statement” of MUM is “The goal of Memphis Urban Ministry is to involve area churches of Christ to establish ethnically diverse city churches, locally led, to holistically serve and evangelize their communities.”⁵ *Harding* magazine, an internationally circulated periodical, published in August of 1995 the story of the Downtown Church in Memphis.

The Raleigh Community Church opened its doors June 15, 1997, as announced in *Mission: Memphis* in the winter edition of the same year, page 3. It was in the spring of the following year when *Mission: Memphis* carried the background of the new church’s beginning. Sadly, it has taken all these years for some brethren in Memphis to become concerned about whether or not MUM and its predecessor MCPM is scriptural. As more and more unscriptural actions are taking place in MUM churches such as testifying, women leading in prayer in the assembly, and women waiting on the Lord’s table, some who have been involved and apparently cannot or will not decide whether they are for or against MUM are claiming earlier exposures of their support are misrepresentations. The tract I wrote in 2000 on *The Community Church* is said to contain a misrepresentation on page 23 of the activities of the Boulevard and Chelsea Avenue congregations’ participation back then. Please, bear in mind that the information quoted in that tract is taken verbatim from *Mission: Memphis*, the newsletter of MCPM, which is now, MUM.

If Boulevard did not organize “an area-wide fundraising dinner” and if the Chelsea Avenue singers did not hold a “special concert to encourage Raleigh Community members and inspire seekers,” then they need to take that up with Ron Cook and MUM because he is the gentleman who reported these practices for all to see through his newsletter. Quoting Paul before King Agrippa, “This thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26).

The objections that observant, concerned brethren and I have raised come not from misunderstandings about private, personal differences but from well-established, publicly published sources such as those mentioned earlier. Matthew 18:15-17 applies to the former, and I Timothy 1:3 and II Timothy 4:2 applies to the latter. The only time anyone currently associated with MUM ever came to me in private was in the early 90’s when Ron Bergeron came to my office at the Gragg Avenue Church of Christ one day to ask me what we did to start the Horton Gardens Church of Christ. When I told him we taught and preached the gospel through Bible correspondence courses, personal home Bible studies, a two-week tent meeting, and gospel meetings, I never saw or heard from him again. Exposures of MUM churches and the Cordova Community Church have been made not on private conversations with its leaders but on publicly published and widely circulated printed materials, i.e., books, periodicals, newsletters, bulletins, and websites, that they themselves have made available “to involve area churches of Christ.”

In view of the upcoming area-wide youth conference slated to be held at the Raleigh Community Church of Christ in 2003, perhaps fewer congregations will be drawn into this movement by seeing a review of the church’s doctrinal stance that is a matter of public record and refuse to promote or participate in advancing the unscriptural MUM churches. People are asking the question, “What’s wrong with it?” The following four items are listed for investigation: (1) The wrong name, (2) The wrong terminology, (3) The wrong pattern, and (4) The wrong organization. (The wrong worship was touched upon earlier).

One, the wrong name. Identifying the church as a “community church” gives it the wrong name. In the March and April 2000 issues of *The Christian Chronicle* the Community Church movement as it has emerged within churches of Christ across

the United States was presented. The use of new sounding names like “New Covenant Christian Fellowship,” “Christ’s Community Church,” “Oak Tree Church,” “Servants of Christ,” and “Grace Church” were said to break the barriers of prejudice with the “unchurched” and make them feel less threatened by “traditional” names. This paper has a circulation of 103,000, so it is not surprising that some churches of Christ across the country who are not hearing preaching on the identity of the church from the Bible and are being told “this will help us grow” are adopting these new names. Rick Warren wrote in *The Purpose Driven Church*, “The spiritual terminology that Christians are familiar with is just gibberish to unbelievers.”⁶

The vanity of seeking the traditions of men over the word of God is legendary (Matt. 15:9). Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). The church of Christ is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-33). How should a husband feel when his wife finds excuses not to wear his name? One thing all those in the “Community Church of Christ” whether it is Cordova Community Church of Christ or Raleigh Community Church of Christ have in common is to add or subtract the phrase “of Christ” depending on their surroundings like an unfaithful wife might take her wedding ring off or put it on depending on who is in the crowd.

Two, the wrong terminology. An article published in *Vision for the City* by Jim Harbin, preacher for Raleigh Community Church, bears the title “Purpose Driven Evangelism.” The term “purpose driven” is trademarked by Rick Warren, a Baptist preacher known for founding the Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, California.⁷ Additional books of his are *The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* and *The Purpose Driven Life*. How could someone claim no affinity with the Community Church movement who is publishing not similar terminology but trademarked terminology coined by one of the foremost leaders in the movement? Obviously, brethren need to be reminded about I Peter 4:11, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.” How much light did

Isaiah say was in them if they spoke not according to the word of God? (Isa. 8:20). Is the brotherhood forgetting that the Lord alone has “the words of eternal life”? (John 6:68).

Three, the wrong pattern. In the article “Purpose Driven Evangelism” Jim Harbin displays a reliance on Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose Driven Church* by using it as the pattern followed in their evangelism. Compare the following:

The Purpose Driven Church

By Rick Warren

1. What do you think is the greatest need in this area?
2. Are you actively attending any church?
3. Why do you think most people don't attend church?
4. If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?
5. What could I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?⁸

“Purpose Driven Evangelism”

By Jim Harbin

1. Are you currently attending a local church?
2. What do you think is the greatest need in this community?
3. Why do you think some people don't attend church?
4. If you were looking for a church in the area, what would you want?
5. What advice would you give to our minister?⁹

Now, does anyone actually believe Raleigh Community Church is not looking to Saddleback Community Church for its pattern?

Four, the wrong organization. The opening paragraph gave the organizational structure of MUM and those familiar with the New Testament readily see why MUM is unscriptural. By its own admission, it has (1) a full-time leader, (2) “a steering committee representing congregations involved in church planting,” (3) a unique mission statement, i.e., “The goal of Memphis Urban Ministry is to involve

area churches of Christ to establish ethnically diverse city churches, locally led, to holistically serve and evangelize their communities,” and (4) five local congregations under its control.

In contrast, the New Testament presents no organizational structure larger than the local congregation. The elders of each local congregation are answerable only to the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (Acts 14:23; I Pet. 5:1-4). Unlike the Church of God in Christ with its worldwide headquarters in the old Chisca Hotel downtown and the lesser known Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ with its worldwide headquarters on White Station Road in East Memphis, the church of Christ has its headquarters in heaven (Phil. 3:20). The split in the American restoration movement that was noted in the United States Census Report of 1906 was propagated from two basic issues, mechanical instruments of music in worship and the American Christian Missionary Society. Hard lessons learned from this type of unscriptural organization presently could stand investigation and review.

What to Do?

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (II John 9-11). “And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and

knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 3:14-22).

ENDNOTES

¹Ron Cook, “Memphis Church Planting Ministry,” in *Mission: Memphis*, Ron Cook, ed., vol. 1 (winter, 1997), p. 1.

²*Ibid.*

³The commendations of the content of the book on the back and in the flyleaf are from such personalities as Lynn Anderson, Maxie D. Dunnam, former Senior Pastor of Christ’s United Methodist Church in Memphis, and Max Lucado.

⁴These churches are known as The Downtown Church, Raleigh Community Church of Christ, Frayser Mission Church, Wonder City Church, and the Hispanic church at White Station Church of Christ (cf. *Vision for the City*, Anthony Wood, ed., September, 2000, pp. 1-8.)

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven™ Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 189.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

⁹Jim Harbin, “Purpose Driven Evangelism” in *Vision for the City*, Anthony Wood, ed., September, 2000, p. 3.