

The Entrepreneurial Movement Within the Church

Kendra Creasy Dean and Mark DeVries are both part of the “think tank” of Princeton Theological Seminary. Kendra spoke about finding new ways to go about things, otherwise known as innovation. Mark spoke about the what ifs for churches: What if we find out that the church can’t be fixed? I’ll touch on both of these lectures in this article since they are both either side of the same coin.

Innovation and becoming entrepreneurial within the church needs to be based on love, not money. Kendra said, “Love makes me an inventor; anything else makes me a hack!”

The church used to be the trendsetter, the innovator. The first church entrepreneurs developed beer, the clock, cheese, and wine. The early leaders saw that innovation was risky and that it must be developed with baby steps until the dream becomes stable enough to be a mainstay or a staple.

In the generation described as the Millennials, 54% are entrepreneurs. They are motivated to earn money, in new, innovative ways. They have creative aspirations and divergent thinking. They invest in community engagement. Having an entrepreneurial movement within the church doesn’t look or feel risky to them. What if church “felt” like the world they live in?

Why should the church become involved in missional innovation or entrepreneurial movement? Operating in this way combines our faith lives with our everyday lives and jobs. It is like going on a mission trip, only staying at home. Operating in this way uses the gifts within the church for the betterment others. Our life’s work becomes shared with others.

How do we get the church to begin an entrepreneurial movement? Teach people to listen to what God wants them to do and then let them do it, supporting them in it. It will not have been done that way before, and that is the point of entrepreneurialism and innovation. Community Development Corporations (CDCs) help to fund innovation and entrepreneurialism within churches. They help support pilot projects in “old thinking” churches. The church needs to understand that we need to get innovation going. We can try things out to see how they go. We see what worked and improve upon it, adjust as we go, leaving what didn’t work behind.

Mark used a true story of a man driving his roadster into the desert. The young man was told not to drive in the area. He drove around the checkpoint and after a long drive, the car broke down and he became marooned. The car couldn’t be fixed. Was he just to stay there and die with dignity? He waited for awhile to see if someone would rescue him, but no one came. He finally disassembled his car and created a motorcycle that he drove out of the desert on.

How does this story relate to the church? We ask ourselves how we can get more kids to youth group. We say the answer is to get a rock star leader for no money. We ask ourselves

how we can keep our church going. We even accept that we will die with dignity. Or... we can wait for someone, a young family or a new, young pastor perhaps, to come in and rescue us. Studies show that millennials will give a lot of money to missions they love, but they are not willing to pay off the mortgage of a church. We can decide to tweak something we have already done. This is like polishing junk.

Maybe we can't be fixed! Maybe we have to be recreated into something that can get us out of our jam.

High school freshmen today will have jobs that haven't been developed yet. That is how quickly the world is changing. The church wants to do something like it did before? It needs to recreate itself in order to weather the fast-paced, changing world. If we only focus on what is wrong, we will miss out. (Go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) Type in "selective attention test" by Daniel Simons and see how too much focus makes us miss something.)

Mark suggests the church needs to be better at adaptive leadership. A coach can be helpful to churches in this regard. A coach can help us to create a new system and then we innovate from there. We don't have to trash everything we've ever done, but use a guide to help us move forward with the positive things we have.

Two missional entrepreneurial projects were highlighted. One is called Mowtown Teen Lawn Care. Matt Overton uses a portion of his work hours as a youth pastor to do landscaping jobs within the community. The other workers are youth in the area. He feels that working side by side with the youth gives him the opportunity to be real with the kids. He can tell them to go back and do the job over again to make it right. He can teach them how to have satisfaction from doing a good job. You can read about his work at www.faithandleadership.com.

Another missional entrepreneurial project is called Try Pie Bakery in Iowa. Megan Barnes Tensen is the youth leader. She works in a church that lies between two neighborhoods divided by gangs. The pies in the bakery are baked by girls from both neighborhoods. At the end of each shift, the girls describe what another worker did well during the shift. It is reconciliation in action. There are four parts to the pie-baking business. In addition to baking pies, they teach job skills, teach about the financial stewardship, have classes about reconciliation and have an hour of faith development each week. The youth put in a 7-hour work week, in addition to attending high school, and get paid \$7.00 per hour to participate. One paid hour is the faith development portion. You can read more about their project at www.linkccd.org/try-pie.

These new ways of working with youth are an example of using adaptive leadership skills. We don't need to wait until we know everything before we get started. We need to trust God to fill in the blanks. We also need to remember that Jesus is the hope of the world, not youth group.