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Book Review: Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement by Will Mancini

Elizabeth Montgomery
Breach Restorers

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Mancini, Will. *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2008. 271 pp. \$16.96.

Reviewed by Elizabeth Montgomery. Elizabeth, BBA from University of North Texas and MBA from Southern Methodist University, is the founder of Breach Restorers in Greensboro, North Carolina. Breach Restorers is an organization that supplies congregations with strategic planning and team building resources.

Church consultant Will Mancini introduces a new way of defining and proceeding through the visioning process in *Church Unique*. He redefines what it means to implement the strategic planning process. This book is a valuable tool for churches and their leadership seeking to discover their potential as the body of Christ by discovering their unique God-given attributes and parlaying that into a missional mandate that taps into God's creative genius. Mancini takes the reader through the process of creating a Vision Pathway for the church that can be practiced daily and be made manifest through the people who are the church inside and outside the walls of the church. Mancini provides sound biblical doctrine to support his central thesis that churches must move away from a static vision process to one that is organic and preemptive in its ability to capture opportunities to take the church to the places of God's blessing literally and figuratively. Mancini bluntly states, "The church in America has no vision. It has programs and institutions and property and ministers and politically correct hymnals, but no vision" (167). He calls the church to a higher standard for realizing God's vision for each uniquely gifted church.

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Mancini spends some time helping churches and church leadership to understand their unique, God-given path, building on the church's current culture, gifts, heritage, experiences, and tradition to lay the groundwork for a new missional reality and identity. He starts by explaining why traditional strategic planning and working with a static vision does not work. He identifies the fallacies that undermine strategic planning, resulting in incongruent programming, overwhelmed congregation members who have no clear path to follow, and churches that can only look to a future that is an extrapolation of the past.

While giving an appreciative nod to Donald McGavran as founder of the Church Growth Movement, he claims that these ideas for church growth may no longer be relevant as metrics for church health in today's non-Christian, secular environment. He calls on churches to *be* the church rather than to *do* church—on being missional and incarnational rather than attractional. Thus, living and

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sharing the gospel is a natural part of everyday life, and what the church does is defined by the church's Kingdom Concept. He emphasizes the importance of churches changing from the "inside-out," of their being rather than their doing.

Mancini describes the Vision Pathway as the route that the church takes as it moves from discovering its Kingdom Concept, to developing a frame for the vision proper, and finally to delivering the vision daily. He advocates a process of discernment and then simplification, as churches dig for the nugget of imperative truth for their congregations. The complete process is not one that a church can take in a matter of months, but rather entails an intentional and thoughtful process, whereby stories are gathered, new culture is cultivated, and synergistic opportunities are seized. The church becomes as one on a mission to fulfill its God-given mandate every day through the focused lens of its Kingdom Concept. As Mancini describes it, "It takes you to the heart of God's divine design of your church. It equips you with a 'community intelligence' to meet the real needs around you" (106).

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While strategy is seen as an important component of the Vision Frame, it is not the end in itself. Other components include the church's mission, measures, and values (mission motives) that enable a church to advance the Vision Proper. The strategy becomes a missional map that guides and directs in a highly simplistic and focused fashion that all congregation members can easily grasp. Mancini provides examples of these maps and the effective ways they can be communicated to serve as vision navigation tools for the congregation. Mancini also spends some time exploring the concept of discipleship as the ultimate measure of a church's health. He encourages churches to look at what kind of Christian they are trying to produce (153) and to define ways of measuring progress against this defined ideal.

Mancini takes great pains to explain the importance of clarity, passion, and immediacy when communicating the church's vision, using multiple communication avenues and venues, with the ultimate goal that the congregation can articulate and live out the vision daily. He cautions against defining vision as a long-term dream, and instead describes the vision as "God's better intermediate future." He seeks to move the church from tired, unmemorable statements to catalysts for forward movement using dynamic vocabulary. He further looks at vision-casting opportunities, and the ways to overcome those obstacles that seek to undermine the process, as well as the ways to obtain vision alignment in the church.

Mancini concludes his book with a beautiful prayer that churches might be "unleashed" to realize their God-given destiny. While the book can be overly complicated, with multiple steps and even subsets and characteristics of each of

Montgomery: Book Review: Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Ca those, it provides a valuable tool for churches courageous enough to embark on this process of discovering their own “Church Unique.” His honesty in looking at the state of the current church and the call for change to reach the least, the last, and the lost is refreshing and inspiring if not a bit daunting. I would not advise any church to rely solely on the contents of this book to effect the wholesale change it calls for without the careful assistance of a trained consultant. Just the time investment alone might be enough to sway many churches from the perseverance and objectivity needed to complete the process. The book is also valuable in that it advances ideas designed to alter our perspective on the way we look at church. The value, though, is not in the ideas but in the rallying cry to act on and to follow what he proposes, as we all seek to live out God’s vision for our lives daily.

Vernon, R.A. *Size Does Matter: Moving Your Ministry from Micro to Mega*. Cleveland, OH: Victory Media & Publishing, 2011.

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A review by Jeremy Upton, pastor of City of Refuge Church in Miami, Florida. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and Dallas Theological Seminary (Master of Theology). He has completed postgraduate study in preaching at Oxford University in England.

Among the many criticisms leveled at churches in North America in general, and the megachurches in particular, are charges that the churches are too focused on money, are too personality-driven, and are not doing enough to help people in need. Vernon seeks to challenge the current crop of pastors and church planters to address these issues in creative and community-oriented ways. His missional approach grows out of his theological construct, which was informed by the history of the African-American church and influenced by the liberation theology of James Cone.

Being forced into church planting, in 2000 Vernon founded The Word Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Since that time, The Word Church has seen over 30,000 people either come to Christ or join the church. The church has grown to five worship locations and over nine weekend worship services. He has built The Word Church on a strong commitment to outreach and impact for Christ in the community. In thirteen years, Vernon has balanced a fast-growing church with an expanding family, and he has completed three degrees, culminating in his D.Min. from Ashland Theological Seminary. His commitment to contextualized and creatively relevant ministry is evident in the impact that The Word Church has had on the greater Cleveland area.