

## Is Leadership a Question of Growth or Control?

The church has been on the front lines of some of the greatest humanitarian crises of the past few decades. The church has 2.3 billion people worldwide and is the biggest institution on the planet.

You might look at those numbers and ask yourself, “Why isn’t the church making a bigger impact in the world?”

I believe one reason is because the most creative people in our congregations must go outside of the church to start new ministries.

Why are they doing this?

Because the church wants to control them.

Instead of working within a church, many of these leaders form a 501(c)(3) to tackle the pressing issues of their communities. Today, there are tens of thousands of nonprofits in America doing what the church did for generations. We’ve structured these ministries right out of the church.

To broaden the ministry impact of your church, you will need to make the difficult choice to give up control.

You can choose control, or you can choose growth. But you can’t choose both.

Choosing growth over control means looking for ways to say yes when someone wants to start a new ministry. I believe most churches need to make it easier for people to start and serve in ministries, but this doesn’t mean I don’t believe there should be standards. I simply believe we shouldn’t bury new ministries with procedures and policies, or committees.

**At Saddleback, anyone can start a ministry as long as:**

**1. They don’t expect the staff to run it.** I call this the “You’re it” principle. When someone suggests we start a new ministry at Saddleback, I tell them, “Great. You’re it!”

You’re looking for people to own the ministries they’re suggesting; you’re not looking for people who expect someone else to do it. If a person has an idea for a ministry but doesn’t want to lead it, ask them to pray for God to inspire someone else to lead it. You won’t have a ministry without a minister.

**2. It fits our church’s goals, strategy, and culture.** Some ministries just won’t fit. If someone wanted to start a political ministry at Saddleback, it wouldn’t fit our culture or strategy. It’s not that we don’t believe elections are important. It’s just that a political ministry doesn’t fit our culture. You can give your people freedom without giving them a free pass.

**3. It doesn't harm the witness of the church.** Failure happens in ministry. I don't want to say no to a ministry just because it might fail. That's choosing control over growth. In fact, a church without failure probably has too much control.

But failure that damages your church's witness is a problem. It would confuse the people we're trying to reach about what we believe and who we are. We can't let that happen.

**4. They don't do any fund-raising for the ministry.** We don't allow any independent fund-raising for ministries at Saddleback. You simply don't want every ministry in your church sending out appeal letters to your members. It's chaos, and it'll wear out your congregation.

You can't have a unified church without a unified budget. You'll have the best-marketed ministries getting the most funding, rather than the worthiest ones.

A huge reason why Saddleback has grown through the years is that we allow people to be as creative as they want to be when starting new ministries.

I could tell you story after story about the ministries started at Saddleback. Most of our 800 ministries weren't started by staff members. They were started by people who saw a need and had a creative idea to meet it.

Celebrate Recovery® is probably our best and most well-known example. No one on staff started it. Instead, we received a 13-page letter by John Baker, a layman in our church. He told us about his own journey with alcoholism and his vision to start a Christ-centered recovery ministry.

Today that ministry reaches far beyond Saddleback. There are more than 35,000 churches around the world with Celebrate Recovery. Celebrate Recovery step studies have helped more than 5 million people worldwide.

All of that has happened because God inspired a layman to start a ministry in a church where we choose growth over control.

***What could happen if your church did the same?***

## **Questions for Self-Evaluation**

- Do you have more volunteers now than you did a year ago? Why or why not?
- How many volunteer-led ministries does your church have?
- Do your volunteer leaders have the freedom to fail? When was the last time that happened?
- If a volunteer wanted to start a ministry, how long would it take? Have you defined a simple process?
- Specifically, how is your church caring for—not just equipping—your leaders?

> [Read more from Rick.](#)