

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



*Future Home of
Posada Wonder Springs?*

Community teams

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Have you ever stopped to think about how all teams are organized?

The team roster for the Seattle Mariners consists of twenty five players. Everyone is grouped into small groups of 5-8 with different functions. There are 11 pitchers, five are starters, six work out of the bull pen. They list six infielders and five outfielders. There are two catchers that when playing dictate much of the game's situations and of course Edgar Martinez, the designated hitter, who you could consider the overall team leader, or in a class by himself. The manager, Bob Melvin, has six coaches that report to him, plus an additional staff of eight, but only six of those are really in the dugout during the game. Then they have the mascot, the Mariner Moose, who does his own thing.

Basketball teams are even more organized into these groupings. Only five can play at a time. Five starters and five come off the bench. The team usually carries another five who are either injured or waiting in the wings for their chance to play, gaining experience in practice, or working to return to their position after some injury. A lot of basketball teams also have five coaches who have expertise in various aspects of the game.

Football is similar, only the playing team is eleven, roughly divided equally between very big guys, and smaller faster guys. So it goes for all the team sports and even many of the individual sports.

Does the average church pastor function more like Bob Melvin or the Mariner Moose?

Most established churches have a coaching roster of assistant or associate pastors of five or six, and a staff of similar numbers, but after that there is no organization. Then every Sunday and Wednesday evening the pastor puts on his appropriate church mascot suit and by various enticements, exhortations, humor and use of other gifts, tries to bring others to play on Jesus' team. That's cool, but what position are these people supposed to play? Without a real game or organizational plan, the pastor is forced to become more like the Mariner Moose, who leads the cheers for Team Jesus, than to function

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in his God given office. The church acts like sheep, not the redeemed of God, because they are organized like sheep, not the justified children of God Almighty. Then again, the Mariner Moose never says anything, but we won't go there.

Probably one of the biggest lies propagated by modern society is the myth that being a member of a close community brings with it a loss of personal identity. But going back to sports, teams made of individuals do not succeed. Over the years the Seattle Mariners, got rid (or lost) their super stars and became a team. Only then did they begin to win consistently.

Under prevalent church organizational structures, it is impossible, for a pastor to lead a hundred through several thousand to be anything but a successful cloister, or sheep herd. Sure people are busy, but they have time to watch the Mariners on TV and occasionally go to a game. But to watch a baseball game takes about three hours. One game a week would equal time spent in church. How many games (of all sports) does the average Christian man watch in a week?

Then, what position is the typical Christian man and woman expected to play in their real job, in the home, in the church?

Let us make the assumption that success with God leads to success in the ultimate sense. Success with God doesn't begin with the church, it begins with the Bible.

I've noticed that many of the commercials during the Mariners games depict men as lazy, absolutely stupid, gross, and without taste. Therefore, the way to move beyond the personal synopsis portrayed in these commercials is being actively engaged in something productive, rather than developing your belly in front of the tele.

It's an absolute guarantee that if the commercial man replaced one game a week with just reading the Bible, his life would change, but what would that do for him? Would the church organization change to fit this changed man looking for a position to play on God's team? Not all are gifted in athletic ability to play sports at a high level, but even with that ability it still takes good coaching, strong competition, and teamwork for a few to reach that level. God has a unique position for each person, but the same principles of organization apply. You need good coaching, play in a good competitive league, with other members of a team to achieve ultimate personal success.

It is the responsibility of church leadership to provide that organization. We need church teams for things other than softball and temporary missions.

I have never watched completely the movie, "A Field of Dreams." But in the corollary concept of the movie, if "They will come" to a corn patch converted into a baseball field, "They will come" to a church that allows everyone to play to the limit of their own ability. The point in the movie, lost in the church, is the conditional first part of the movie plot, "If we build it,—they will come."

In the movie they built a grand baseball diamond and the legends of the game came. It took a time of intense work, trial, and discouragement before the field was completed. They didn't walk out into the middle of the cornfield and say, "Oh, Jesus, perform a great miracle and turn this cornfield into a superb baseball field."

Building a baseball field is basically engineering and materials. To a certain extent we seem to view building a church much the same way. The results are the same, with one you end up with a baseball field, with the other we end up with a grand edifice. What makes them come? The results should be the same, in the movie and in the church, to be part of something grand, Without that sense of a community greater than yourself, all you have is organized dirt and sticks.

This is the opportunity of the church, the opportunity missed. Participation at the highest level beyond what you can obtain with your own abilities. But in order to get there you still need the same team development. Practice, organization, and hard work are still the keys, along with being part of a good successful program. Developing the team concept within the church is not that complicated, any sports team, or military organization will serve as a model.

So what is the missing concept in this article so far?

Discipline. All teams are built on discipline, both individual and team. That includes both the players and the coaches. To try to build a team driven church, or any organization for that matter, on the principles of sloppy agape, or cheap grace, and nothing will ever rise above the level of the mediocre.

I have written this weekly column for over four years now, basically because I need the Godly discipline. The last couple of months have probably been the most difficult in that time. I have really struggled to complete a number of these articles and when they were sent the only satisfaction I could muster seemed to be, "it is finished."

In this article, I ran out of things to say and it didn't feel finished, so I decided to go shoot some baskets. In the month since I was told by my cardiologist that I could do anything I wanted, I have tried to focus on gaining strength in my upper body again. Shooting hoops is one of those things that adds to that strength and flexibility. As I got in the car to drive to the park with the basketball courts, the idea of discipline came into my mind.

At the court I shot for a while, then decided to play the little game against myself where you have to make a basket from different points around the key. I played left hand against right hand. The lefty won one, the right won one. I was too tired to make it 2 out of 3. It took a whole lot longer than I wanted, I missed a lot, but the exercise was good discipline.

When I got out of the hospital my resting heart rate was in the nineties, and never got into the seventies. Now my resting heart rate is in the low seventies and sometimes in the sixties, something just a month ago I would have thought impossible. It has all come about by trying to get some type of exercise six days a week. We are not talking about what they call real cardiovascular exercise yet, just exercise to get the blood circulating, and develop a little strength in long unused muscles.

Many years ago I ran one marathon. What I learn from that experience is that running the marathon was much, much easier than the training to run a marathon. At my pace the marathon took about four hours. Marathon training takes a minimum of six months starting from a low level and required disciplined training at least three days, one to three hours at a time, not counting the getting ready.

Developing a community driven church will make training and running a marathon look like going out for pizza, but I am convinced that the effort for everyone who participates will be life changing. Even with God's provision to make this field of dreams a reality, it will require real people to show up to play, not just ghosts from the past (or present), and no one can take their seats in the stands until their life is over. But if Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption, it is not too much to ask His justified followers to build this dream, even if to us it is impossible.

Seeds for Prayer

I learned late last week the renter who was in the house I inherited from my mother, disappeared, potentially moving back to Seattle. That means this week I have to go over to Eastern Washington and see what needs to be done to the place, for some end. As far as I am aware, no one has spent a dime on anything since before my mother went into the nursing home. So that has to be at least six years. The question is, should I move over and fix it up and live there while I do some other projects and put the community missions house on hold for a time. That seems to be the path, but this has been an unseen development. Please intercede for the immediate direction and well as long term direction.

But praise the Lord, only a couple of weeks ago I would not have thought I could do the type of work this fixing may require, so close to my operation. I now know it might just be the discipline I need.