

# A Vision of Christian Servanthood

## Our Vision Today

Our vision for advancing in the cause of Christ through Xenos today should still, as it has in the past, center around the formation, nature and composition of our work force. Instead of focusing in the first place on what we do, we should focus on what we are. Before we become concerned about what our function should be, we should define and agree on what our values are. Before we can worry about the size or accomplishments of our church, we should focus on the quality of our work force.

If we reverse this, and include specific accomplishments as part of our vision, we end up describing a wine skin as part and parcel of our vision from the Lord. Then, if we need to change, there is a sense of selling out on our vision. Instead, we propose that our vision should center on what type of people we should become; on the consensus regarding Christian living which should animate our activities.

Xenos has always been viewed as a church with an extraordinary work force. However, today the values which have brought us this far are not as clear as they should be, and a general sense of confusion and disagreement has settled over the church.

Also, besides the loss of some consensus from earlier years, there are some moral values that may never have received a proper level of attention. Today, we have to decide whether we want a work force that is divided, demoralized and immature, or a work force whose way of life reflects godly values and which is responsive to the leadership direction of the elders. The following principles are those we propose as the consensus understanding in Xenos regarding our vision.

- I. At the heart of our vision today is our work force. We believe the Lord would have our church set about the task of building up a godly work force which can do his bidding. This work force is not the same as our leadership, but it should include all our leaders. In addition, there are those who are Christian models--examples of mature and righteous living, perhaps without the gifting or suitability for leadership. These people may be involved in prayer ministries, healing ministries or service. They live the same values we want modeled by the leaders and have gained maturity and experience in serving God. Therefore, they should be considered a part of our committed force of servants of the Lord. While valuing all roles in the church, leadership training and recruitment will remain a high priority because good leaders are needed and rare.

An authentic servant force of the right sort is a potent tool in the hands of the

Lord. Whether it is winning the lost, serving the poor, planting churches or foreign mission work, nothing will accomplish these aspects of our mission more than a godly and mature work force. The consensus of the church also arises from this work force, and all sense of vision and unity emanate from this group. Committed servants draw motivation and edification from being with like minded people. When we are intent on the same purpose and united in spirit, there is fellowship which is nourishing and refreshing to those involved. The mission of Xenos is well known. What we need is the quality work force to carry it out. As Watchman Nee says in *Normal Christian Worker*, "It's not the method but the man that matters."

Today the elders are setting out to establish a Servant Team made up of those who will take upon themselves the burden of following the Lord at the highest level. These are Christians from all ministries who understand what God wants, and who have denied self to accomplish his will. Behind the Servant Team are two entities:

- II. The stable supportive church community - The community should be functioning in a suitable facility that allows growth, fellowship, nurture and training. From this community we should be continually recruiting and discipling additional servants who will join our central force. The church community needs to see their mission as supporting and enabling the work force of the church through the participation of every member, including regular attendance at meetings, prayer and financial support. They, in turn are empowered and equipped by the work force. The whole church community should see winning the lost and establishing them in their Christian walk as their personal responsibility. The work force is there to enable the larger church body to grow and accomplish God's will. They are role models and equippers for the saints.
- III. The central leadership of the church. The leadership of our church is the elders and the upper level staff. Our leadership needs to be strong, confident that they are obeying God's will for our church, and un-apologetic for their direction. The central leadership should go about the formation of the Servant Team at the same time they provide for and manage the nurture and equipping of the larger community. They will not be concerned in the first place with the size of our church, but with establishing our work force, upgrading the quality of the work force, and providing a good environment for growth to those who want it.

Stated succinctly, this is how we see God's vision for our church.

"Xenos should set out to build a highly trained, sophisticated, caring, leadable, cohesive, committed and flexible force of Christian servants who continually strive to operate for the right motives--namely, serving the Lord and doing his will."

This is how we understand this statement in more detail:

1. Servants of the Lord should be highly trained and sophisticated. Xenos has demonstrated particular strength reaching and training thinking students and adults, although recently the area of classes and training has not been emphasized as much. We believe we should re-focus on this area again, building on our earlier emphasis by keeping a strong focus on the truth of the

word of God. Training is particularly important for the work force of the church.

A work force made up of those who have to be given detailed instructions for every situation, and who cannot reach judgments about complicated ministry situations, will not go far. Mature servants also need to have the ability to discern truth from that which is either error or unproven. Gullibility is common among the immature, but Scripture teaches that the mature have their senses trained to discern (Heb. 5:14) and are not tossed about by winds of doctrine. (Eph. 4:14) We believe the level of training often found in the established church today as inadequate. We want to stick by our higher standards of learning. (II Tim. 2:15)

2. They should be caring. The fact that our work force is well-disciplined and tough should never mean they are uncaring or unmerciful. God's servant is to be gentle and patient when wronged at the same time he or she should be firm and immovable on the truth, including "correcting those who are in opposition." (II Tim. 2:24-26) A godly Servant Team would be welcoming and open, helping others to reach their full potential for God.
3. The work force should be leadable. Christians should be responsive to leadership if they are to conform to the biblical picture of a godly work force. At the very least, a group that is not leadable would be highly unreliable. The Bible teaches that those who want to serve God should also be prepared to loyally follow the legitimate leadership in the local church. (Heb. 13:17) Human leadership is biblical, and Christians who cannot be led are manifesting either confusion or a personal problem.

There is confusion on this point today in some sectors of our church. Some believe that church leadership is only authorized to call for things that are also specific commands given in Scripture. In fact, church leadership also is authorized by God to direct the operation of the church. We would not feel comfortable telling leaders or anyone else what to do with their houses or who to marry. However, when it comes to church policies and rules relating to how ministry is done we will call for leadability, with or without dissent. Dissent also must be within legitimate bounds (see below). The principle of rebellion is the principle of Satan, and we cannot do God's work using Satan's principle.

Leadability implies an internal decision to support the direction set by the leadership of the church. It often includes setting aside one's own judgments in non-moral areas, particularly with regard to the operation of the church, in favor of the views of those responsible unless there is clear biblical imperative to the contrary. If our conscience forbids us to acquiesce to the direction set by our leadership, we need to find a church where we will be able to do so.

4. They should be cohesive. Scripture is clear that we are to be united in spirit and intent on one purpose. (Phil. 2:2) We are to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:3; I Cor. 1:10) This means that mature servants of the Lord have a strong desire to be cohesive as part of a team. Paul cited the presence of jealousy and strife as sure proof that those in the Corinthian church were acting as "mere men." (I Cor. 3:3,4) It also means mature servants elect to practice inter-personal disciplines which will increase unity. Specifically:

- a. Mature servants are fair minded in their handling of disputes in the church. They will be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. (James 1:19) They will not take up the offense of another when they have not heard both sides. They will insist that those with complaints resolve their problems maturely. (Prov. 3:30; 26:17) Mature Christians realize that unqualified repeating one-sided stories of disputes is destructive gossip.
- b. Mature workers are gracious. They will avoid unrighteous judgments of colleagues or others. Judging motives is one type of unrighteous judgment. Scripture commands us to "not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." (I Cor. 4:5; Rom. 14:10) Unrighteous judgment is also evident when we second guess decisions which were judgment calls (i.e. not moral or truth decisions) without knowing the factors that went into those decisions.
- c. Cohesive workers prize unity over personal issues. They will handle dissent in an appropriate way so as to avoid ruining the unity of the church. (Gal. 5:15) They will go to the leadership and discuss problems they are having rather than sharing their problems with those who cannot help. They will not resort to power tactics involving inciting others to rise up against their opponents. They will not threaten or menace others. Such tactics destroy trust and break down the ability of a group to work together. (Eph. 4:31; Tit. 3:2)
- d. Those who dissent from leadership directions, and feel their dissent is serious should seek understanding or compromise with the leadership of the church. If they cannot obtain agreement with the leadership of the church, they need to consider 1) ignoring the difference and serving in harmony with the leadership's direction 2) finding a church more in agreement with their own point of view or 3) resigning their position as part of the Servant Team if they plan to actively oppose the direction of the church.
- e. We believe every Christian worker should find a church where he or she can be supportive and cohesive. If no such church exists, they would be better to start their own new church rather than stay, fighting and unhappy. (Phil. 2:2)
- f. Mature workers will also consider it mandatory that they learn to forgive those who wrong them *without exception*. Col. 3:13 says we are to be "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." There are pockets within our church which are racked with unforgiveness today, sometimes for incidents years old. There is no place for this kind of selfish immaturity in the ranks of a godly work force.

Forgiveness must be the controlling ethic of our mature team of Christian servants, specifically ranking higher than avoiding hurt or wrongdoing. This is because avoidance of hurt is not always possible,

but forgiveness is always possible. We are all prepared to accept grace from God for our own sins. We should therefore be willing to extend grace to others for their sins. (Mt. 18:21-35)

5. Christian servants should be committed. Commitment is more important than gifting or seniority for servants of Christ. Those who have matured in the Lord understand that total commitment to the things of God is our perfectly reasonable service of worship. (Rom. 12:1) We will continue to hold that believers can express their worship to the Lord in a variety of ways, including corporate worship, and we will resist narrow definitions of worship which lead to unrighteous judgment of others and division.

Committed Christians are regular in their personal and corporate prayer lives. They are eager and regular in joining into Christian fellowship, in-depth Bible study and in sacrificial giving. (1Tim. 2:1; Heb. 10:24,25; Gal. 5:6,13)

Commitment in this context also includes commitment to our particular church, and the mission and vision of our church community. Our commitment to God can be lived out in any local church, but it is important that mature servants of God find one church where they can give themselves to God and others. Such commitment to a local church is never uncontingent or unqualified, but it should be sincere. In the case of those in our Servant Team, the church of choice is Xenos Fellowship.

Giving of ourselves should include not only time and energy, but also financial support of this church's general fund, the building fund and our over-seas missions. (11Cor. 8:7) This is important, first because the worker believes in the cause of our church, and second as a role model for others to follow. For our Servant Team, the terms for qualification for the Fiscal Support Team would be the very least level we could accept as a reasonable commitment. Most of us should be *well above* these levels. Of course, there are provisions for those with special financial situations to be accepted into the Fiscal Support Team even though they are unable to give at a normal level.

Commitment also means that servants in our force are committed to the direction and vision of this church as a whole, and not just to their particular role in it. (1Cor. 12:14; Rom. 12:10) This sometimes implies the willingness to let one's own ministry decrease that the Lord might increase. (Jn. 3:30) Self-effacement and humility include the willingness to sacrifice our ministry position for the overall good. In sports, the coach has the right to put players on the bench or on the field at a given time, or to change their position, and he should be able to make these decisions without being attacked by the players. Likewise, we need to accept constraints or change at times, often for reasons we do not fully understand.

Commitment to our mission includes the idea of regular attendance and prayerful concern for meetings like the Seekers' Meetings and other fellowship-wide meetings where participation lends power and edification to everyone there. Serious workers should show up at such events every time they are able.

Commitment to this church carries the connotation of loyalty. There is nothing wrong with forming earthly loyalties, especially when we believe that the people to whom we are loyal are engaged in serving the Lord. We can be

loyal even when we don't agree on every point, and in fact, especially when we don't agree on every point. When we agree on every point, we don't need any loyalty because nothing challenges our involvement. Only when disagreements surface are we confronted with the need for loyalty. Anyone who is unable to deliver such loyalty will find it difficult to play an effective role as part of the team.

They should be flexible. God expects mature servants to be willing to cooperate with change in ministry. This acceptance of change is not a one-time event. It should be a willingness to change as often and as much as needed in order to remain effective in the Lord's service. Christians who are bound to traditions and external forms are ill-equipped to follow the Lord. While the immature will usually complain and resist change, mature servants should work for change when appropriate without undue complaining and should trust God for their security.

They must operate on the premise of serving the Lord, and doing his will. We have the opportunity, as Christians to serve God. When we serve him, we draw our reward from the knowledge that we have obeyed his will and furthered his purposes.

Paul puts the alternatives of serving God and serving man as antithetical choices. (Gal. 1:10) This means godly servants do not operate based on wrong motives such as egotism, appreciation from others, recognition, power, loneliness or any other sinful motives for ministry. Although we will always have some wrongful motives mixed in, we should strive to see God advance us in this area. We will be found out by the Devil if we have those in our work force who are serving in general for the wrong reasons.

We are here to serve God. As such, we can't claim we need have our feathers smoothed or personal care from other humans at every step. These claims may apply to some extent to the new and immature believers, but cannot be claimed for leaders or other models of Christian living which make up the Servant Team. A servant who requires constant emotional support from other leaders in order to be able to serve can only be trusted at the *lowest* level of responsibility. Such a person is dependent on higher human leadership for their stability. If all our servants were this way, the outer limit of ministry for the church would be contiguous with the ability of the eldership to care for workers individually. God want those to serve him who will move forward whether there is human affirmation or not. This is only possible when we operate from internal motivation which we draw from God, rather than external motivation drawn from others.

Godly servants of the Lord need the toughness that only comes from denying self and picking up their cross to follow Christ. Such servants of the Lord have to be prepared to suffer dreadfully at times, and insufficient encouragement would be one of the least of these trials.

In a similar vein, the servant of the Lord knows that what others do, or don't do, is not the reason for their spiritual state. The one who attributes quitting, defection, distance from the Lord or personal sin to the actions of others is revealing wrong motives for ministry. Such a view suggests undue dependency on others and inability to draw one's life from God. We cannot accept such a verdict. Each of us has been let down by leaders and

colleagues, and this is never an excuse for turning aside from the path the Lord has for us.

We cannot agree that others made us fall from the Lord's way, nor that we can only get up when these others do x, y or z. If we have diverged from God's way, we are the only ones to blame, and we must rise up to serve the Lord and leave off viewing our ministry horizontally and sociologically.

## **Conclusion**

Christian servants at Xenos have enjoyed rich times of fellowship and mutual encouragement with each other in the past. Nothing is sweeter for Christians than gathering together with like minded servants to enjoy what we have in common from Christ. Today, we need to establish anew who is prepared to join us in such a consensus, and we look forward to the rich encouragement such a consensus will provide.

No church can be any better than its work force. If we want to do all that God wills, we should not find ways to call for less from our work force, at least in the moral realm. God is a moral being, and those who would serve him must accept the moral dimensions of ministry in his name. We should call others and ourselves to rise up to the level Christ wants for us.

There are important things we will be able to accomplish for the Lord if we have consensus at the level of our work force. I can see the following themes as likely practical outworkings of our vision:

1. We could become a church strong at winning and incorporating the lost.
2. We could complete the acquisition of our facility and use it as a headquarters for our activities.
3. We could regain our strong position in student outreach and acquire a facility specifically for student outreach. A student building would be good for outreach, alternative entertainment and training of students.
4. We could become a leading center for learning. With our gifted and well-trained work force, we could be in a position to offer expertise even to those outside our own church. Our new facility would make training seminars and work-study programs feasible.
5. Xenos could become one of the great sending churches for missions in America.
6. Xenos is already becoming a national role model for effective ministry to the poor. We could become outstanding leaders in this area.
7. The church in America is failing at home fellowships and adult outreach. Xenos is in a position to demonstrate effective spiritual approaches to these trouble spots.