Marching to the Beat of a Different Drummer

One of the things that draw people to a parade is the marching bands. The spectators enjoy seeing the bands in their uniforms; they enjoy hearing the bands play their music as they move in sync down the parade route. A big hit at parades is when the United States Marine Corps Marching Band begins to play and move down the street. They are, in my opinion, the epitome of disciplined marching, and synchronized movement. If while the Marine Corps Band is marching down the street, playing a patriotic tune, a Marine is observed marching out of step, out of sync with the rest of the band, and if the Marine does not get in step, and continues out of step, we would wonder what was wrong with that Marine. The Marine knows what the band is supposed to do, so why is he or she doing their own thing? It would seem the Marine was marching to the beat of a different drummer.

Many ministries have a mission statement, a philosophy of ministry, or a vision for their ministry, these things are used to define, give clarity, and direction to their ministry. It becomes who that ministry is, it is who they are. When we speak of a person’s character, we are speaking of those things that make that person who he or she is. It is those qualities that reveal who we are, and ultimately what we do.

A ministry’s character is those things that make that ministry who it is. And like a person’s character, a ministry’s character are those qualities that reveal who that ministry is, and what that ministry does. In other words, what its calling is. The same way a person who has not understood who they are, can flounder through life; so a church if it has not understood who they are or what they’re supposed to do, will struggle through ministry.

My analogy about a Marine marching to the beat of a different drummer can happen within ministries, it can happen in Victory Outreach. What do I mean? Sometimes someone joins the Marines, gets the training, wears the uniform, looks like a Marine, but in time there are signs that the Marine does not value what the U.S.M.C. stands for. The U.S.M.C. is clearly defined, they know who they are, what makes them who they are, what they must do to continue to be who they are, they uphold their principles and values, and are inspired by their history. The few, the proud, the Marines, continue to build on their tradition, on who they are. What has kept the Marine Corps
marching to the same beat is their tenacious zeal to remain who they have been commissioned to be.

Forty-one years have passed since God called Victory Outreach into being. In that time, we have grown and our character has developed; we have looked in God's mirror and we like who we have become. We have passed through different stages of growth, from infancy to adulthood, and we know who we are and what we must do to continue to be God’s anointed ministry.

The Word of God is our principle guide for life and ministry. We are motivated by God’s charge to evangelize and disciple the hurting people of the world. And even though our history is a mere forty-one years we are inspired and encouraged by the footprints we have left as we keep moving forward. But if we are going to keep marching to the same drum beat, we must listen very carefully to the drummer, we must tenaciously, stubbornly, firmly keep in step, in other words, remain who God called us to be.

Victory Outreach has entered into a generational shift; the first generation is still around, but a second generation is in place and a third is in the wings. This is where the danger is because of the generational gaps that exist between Victory Outreach’s first generation and its second and third generations. There is a great love that exists between the Victory Outreach generations because we are family. The family bond is very strong, as is the vision bond, and the blood of Christ bond. These bonds make us one, make us strong, and unite us. But this generational difference could pose problems for the character of our ministry, or who we are and what we do.

We are facing challenges that we have never faced before we cannot call them growth challenges, they are age challenges. Our ministry now has generational children, grandchildren, great grand children, and the family tree continues to grow. We understand our children will not look exactly like us, and that’s the dilemma and the potential problem for our ministry. How different can the newer generation look from the first generation? What can the new generation implement without changing who Victory Outreach is? The old guard would see some methods as change, and protest, “Don’t change who we are!” The new guard would not see methods or innovative new ideas as changing who Victory Outreach is; they would see it as adding to who Victory Outreach is. Two ideas, two positions crying out: one crying “It will change us” and the other “It will add to us,” these opposing views immediately create ministry misunderstanding, ministry conflict, and even
ministry suspicion. An old church with first generation leadership may clash with the open-minded views of their younger leadership. A young church with young leadership would seem to be out of step with the organization.

How much and what kind of change will the second generation want to implement? If it does not look like a Big Mac and doesn’t taste like a Big Mac is it a Big Mac? It is not! If it does not look like a Victory Outreach church, and it doesn’t taste like Victory Outreach is it a Victory Outreach church? That’s the question and the concern. This is a legitimate concern. I believe one of the reasons there is a concern is that the first generation stands on one side of the generational gap and second and third generations stand on the other side. Hence, their upbringing, world-views, and culture are different.

In general, I believe older generations have always had a difficult time understanding younger generations. And younger generations have always argued that “they were not understood” and that “things are different now,” this is their persistent claim. It seems that in the last one hundred years change has never happened so fast and in the last twenty-five or thirty years it has increased at an even more incredible pace. Those born in the last twenty-five years have no problem with change it is part of their life. However, those who are older, who grew up in a time when change was slower, for this group, change can be disturbing and disruptive.

Two pastors one from the first generation and the other from the second generation; they both love God, they both want to build their churches; they grew up at different times and have lived and experienced life differently and as a result they see life, ministry, theological and moral issues from different perspectives. You and I are saturated through and through by our culture. Our culture’s standards, its morals, and its values affect us. Our culture prompts how we think, how we do things, and what we excuse or prohibit. Our culture is always running alongside our doctrinal and theological positions, whether it is a traditional position or an inclusive tolerant position. All of this will determine how those two pastors will see and do ministry.

The question is “How do we keep our ministry from changing? We do not want our ministry to go through a makeover evolution that will transform it to something that looks nothing like Victory Outreach. We want to uphold who we are while still being able to improve, progress, and upgrade; we do
not believe being cutting-edge, meeting the needs of people means having to change who we are. Everything around us is changing, but Victory Outreach does not have to. I believe we can change out-dated ministry methods that do not work without changing who we are.

The first generation needs to continue securing the future of our ministry by teaching what made Victory Outreach the ministry it is today; the first generation needs to explain why we should protect the character and continuity of Victory Outreach. It will not only take heart, and spiritual regard for who we are to preserve the character of our ministry, it will also take policies and procedures. Policies and rules guide, and curb the waywardness of those who would want to take Victory Outreach in another direction. Therefore, it will take, vision and law to insure that Victory Outreach continues to march forward to the beat of The Drummer, who started our ministry stepping out in faith over forty years ago.

Our prayer for Victory Outreach is that the fire of the Holy Spirit continues igniting our men and women to preach the Good News. Our prayer is that the God who sustains heaven and earth sustain, in the heart of our next generations the vision God gave us in the beginning. Our prayer for an enduring ministry is that Jesus Christ always be the center and focus of Victory Outreach. And finally, our prayer is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be the anointing, bridge, and fire from one Victory Outreach generation to the next.