

5 Ways We Can Build Up the Church

There's nothing silly about it. Geese cooperate with one another in a way that often puts humans to shame.

We in the body of Christ like to use metaphors. A metaphor is a comparison that enhances our understanding of a subject. Lately, for example, we've heard a lot of talk in the church about bees. The cooperation and exchange between different streams in the body of Christ has been compared to the cross-pollination produced by bees, resulting in greater fruitfulness and harvest.

Years ago we went through a sheep phase, when it seemed as if everyone was talking about the church's likeness to a herd of sheep. We learned a great deal about sheep—and about the church—in those days. And we found out that when Jesus likened us to sheep, it was not necessarily a compliment!

Today I want to suggest a new metaphor. It has actually been circulating throughout the corporate world, but I believe it has much to teach us about relationships, positions and leadership in the body of Christ.

FLYING HIGH I believe when the church is operating correctly, it is like a flock of Canadian geese. Have you noticed how geese fly in a near-perfect "V" formation?

Scientists have studied the flying patterns of geese and have come to understand why they position themselves this way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following it; thus, the whole flock has a 71 percent greater flying range than a goose flying alone!

Do we in the body of Christ have as much sense as a goose? The truth is, as a community of believers flowing and working

together, we have the ability to encourage one another and lift one another up. And we can go a lot farther together than we can alone.

Each of us has the ability to impact the people around us more than we think. I remember walking into a worship service at a women's conference after not having had much sleep the night before. I wanted to get into the spirit of the service, but I was weary.

Then a little "flapper" came into view. The young woman was dancing and worshiping with her whole heart, and suddenly this old "goose" began to respond to the lift. Soon I was worshiping, too, with everything that was in me.

Now I know there are people who have never learned to flap. They've always been satisfied to rise on the wind of others.

But I think God is calling everyone to flap. It doesn't matter how we feel; somebody needs us to flap! And as we do—as we praise and worship the Lord—we are changed, along with everyone around us.

Basic Truth No. 1: Believers need one another. By sharing a sense of community, we can get where we're going easier and quicker because we're benefiting from one another's thrust.

NO MORE FLYING SOLO Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone. Quickly it gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation. If on the other hand we demand to be exclusive or are determined to fly solo in our ministry, we will be in for a rough ride.

I believe the Lord is going to demand an end to flying solo. If we're out there on our own, the first wind current is going

to take us far out of sight of everyone else—and we'll be useless to the body of Christ.

This is a day when the Lord is demanding that all of us have roots somewhere. If you don't have a local church, you need to find out why. Is there not one good enough? Is there not one pretty enough?

This is not the church's problem; it's yours. Each of us must pray until we know that we know that we know that we are in the place where God wants us—and not so that we can correct it or change it, but so we can get in the flow and fly in formation with other believers.

Basic Truth No. 2: We need to stay in formation with those who are headed in the same direction we're going.

ROTATING THE POINT In a flock of geese, when the head goose gets tired, he rotates back into the wing and allows another goose to fly point. We need to be able to do this in the church, too. That's why training and mentoring are so important in the body of Christ.

Not just any "goose" can be put in the point position—only one who has the maturity and training for it. If you told your kids you needed a break and asked, "Who wants to make dinner tonight?" the 4-year-old would be the one to raise his hand. But it would be disastrous—for him and your home—to set a 4-year-old loose with a frying pan and a hot stove.

Some people sit in the church and pout for years because they volunteered to "fly point" and weren't allowed to. But I wouldn't trust a 4-year-old in the kitchen, and I wouldn't trust an immature believer with a leadership position in the church.

It doesn't matter how long he's been a Christian or how long he's been in a particular congregation. We all know people who have been in churches for years but are still "4." They are

typically the ones who are angry and miffed when others who have been Christians for less time—but who have humbled themselves and submitted themselves to mentoring and training—are given a leadership spot.

It's important to train up others who can move into the "point position" when leaders need to step aside for a time. How many leaders have stayed too long at the point, burning themselves out, because there was no one prepared to keep the flock moving on track?

Basic Truth No. 3: We need to be prepared to "take turns" in leadership, allowing some to rest and restore while others step up to the challenge.

HONKING ENCOURAGEMENT Canadian geese honk. The honking has a purpose: to encourage the ones up front to keep up the speed. But do you know it's the birds in the back that do all that honking?

Do we have as much sense as a goose? I think it's tragic that the people Moses gave his life for were the cause of his failure to go into Canaan. They never learned how to honk and say to him: "Keep going, keep going. Do it God's way. We trust you, leader. Whatever you say, we're behind you all the way. Keep this caravan moving."

Today we call meetings and vote and discourage our leadership. We need to honk instead. Most of us have no idea what it would mean to a leader who is starting to slow down a bit, for us to go up and say, "Oh, you blessed me today. You did the right thing. You were so sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Thank you for that word."

One group of leaders who could use some honking is pastors' wives. They may not be on the platform, leading in an overt way. But they have a tough, often thankless job.

Many times when I've visited a church I have gone up to the pastor's wife after the service and said, "You're such a blessing." Typically she is shocked and asks, "Me? In what way did I bless you?"

And I explain: "Just watching you listen as your husband spoke and seeing you laugh at his jokes, the ones I know you've heard 8,000 times—that blesses me. When he says, 'Let's turn to page such-and-such' or 'Let's go to this passage,' you open your Bible once again and you go with him. There's something about you that is so supportive. That blesses me."

Basic Truth No. 4: We need to honk encouragement to those God has placed in leadership ahead of us.

WATCHING OUT FOR ONE ANOTHER It's a fact that when a goose gets sick or is wounded by gunshot and falls out of formation, two geese leave with him and follow him all the way to the ground. Then they stay with him to protect him until he either gets well or dies.

Do we have as much sense as a goose? Why is the church known as a place where we shoot our wounded? We have to learn to take care of one another!

Some time ago, I went through a very difficult situation in my life. People didn't understand—and when people don't understand, they try to identify the problem. They try to find a box to put it in. Many false things were said or surmised about me. This was hurtful, but I tried hard to rise above the hurt and keep going.

During this time I was invited to speak at a church in Texas. By God's grace I was able to minister above and beyond my hurts. But the pastor was very sensitive.

Recognizing something, he came to me and said: "Iverna, you don't know me well. But if you ever need to talk heart-to-heart, or if you ever feel discouraged and think you want to

quit, just give me a phone call. I'll pay your way to come here, and the two of us will sit down."

Then he added, "I probably wouldn't have any counsel for you, but we'll just sit together." I cannot tell you the healing balm that flowed over me at that moment.

You see, we don't need to use a lot of words. In fact, when someone's hurting very deeply, he really doesn't want to listen to a lot of words. If he's been in the church for a while, he knows the Scripture as well as the rest of us.

If we go to him and say, "You know, the Bible says God will give you beauty for ashes, joy for mourning and a garment of praise for that spirit of heaviness," everything within him will want to scream, "Drop dead!" Honestly, haven't most of us been there?

Another thing he doesn't need is more buckshot. You know how we add to the buckshot? When we get riled up and say: "Who shot you? Hey, I know them, those creeps." We're not helping—we're only shooting another bullet in.

What hurting people need most is someone to simply sit with them—to fly down to where they are and be there for them, to watch out for them, to believe for them and maybe to flap his wings a little bit in praise.

Basic Truth No. 5: We need to take care of one another and be sensitive to one another's hurts.

Do we have the sense of a goose? May we have that much sense and more! Metaphors are good as far as they go, but the truth is the church is much more than a flock of geese. We are a family, a body, each a part of the other. Let's stick together, encourage one another, and help and support one another. Let's get in formation, flap our wings together—and see how far we can fly!

Iverna Tompkins *has preached and taught the Word of God with powerful prophetic insight for more than 30 years. One of the hallmarks of her ministry is a commitment to leadership training, equipping others to fulfill their destiny in God.*