

This Church Doesn't Use Titles, Logos, Egos—And the Results Are Miraculous

A Spirit-filled event in Zimbabwe may have shifted the course of the entire nation. Despite more than four out of five Zimbabweans claiming Christian faith, many live without discernible spiritual fruit. Their faith certainly hasn't led to monetary blessings, as the nation's economy has been marked by hyperinflation and turmoil. Even among the devout, churches have experienced little unity and are sometimes even hostile toward one another.

Tommy Deuschle, pastor and leader at Celebration Church in Harare, Zimbabwe, had a dream to change all of that. But he'll be the first to say he couldn't do it alone. He and other rising young leaders in Zimbabwe teamed up over the last couple years to put together Stadium Worship, interdenominational events dedicated to fostering unity among the country's divided churches.

"The event was really just to say as a church body in the nation [that] we are together under one name," Deuschle says. "We want to see a kingdom nation, not a Christian nation. We want to see the actual power of God move in our stadium, to see a shift in the nation."

But to participate in Stadium Worship, Deuschle issued a challenge to pastors: No titles. No logos. No egos. Leave behind all self-promotion and come with a humble heart to exalt Jesus alone. The impact of prayers and sermons will be felt, but the names of those giving them will not be heard.

"We're not going to announce anyone's name, and we're not going to announce anyone's church," Deuschle explains. "So when we have different speakers come out and do an

exhortation, or different singers, they don't even announce the name. We just let it start. You don't hear about that in Africa—in Africa, it's all about apostle so-and-so or prophet so-and-so.”

At Stadium Worship, nobody gets to be the hero but Jesus.

Divided Nation

Deuschle's been involved in ministry his whole life. His father, Tom, was an “unconventional missionary” who dropped everything to go to Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), without any missions agency or funding, in the middle of a civil war. When he arrived in 1979, he had nothing except a guitar and \$700, but his ministry grew because of his love. He reached out to people on both sides of the civil war, planted a church of six people in his living room and preached the gospel. Today, Celebration Church—which grew out of Tom's humble church plant—has 141 campuses across Southern Africa.

Tommy Deuschle attended and graduated from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a degree in business. Today, he's a pastor and leader at Celebration Church and the creative director of CMedia Africa.

CMedia Africa was formed after Deuschle led the change to transform his church's media department into a full-fledged commercial company. Named Zimbabwe's Most Innovative Company in 2015 and 2016, CMedia Africa has created TV shows that have aired across Zimbabwe and works on media campaigns with the country's leaders to paint a picture of positivity and vision for the nation.

That positivity and vision is often necessary in Zimbabwe, where Deuschle says distrust, pain and suspicion run high. He doesn't believe the division was intentional, but rather the vestiges of historical trauma and broken relationships in Zimbabwe's past. From July 2016 to November 2017, protests in the nation erupted against President Robert Mugabe, who had

ruled as a functional dictator for over 35 years and whose socialist regime was responsible for widespread human rights violations. Zimbabweans had been through a lot—and trust had broken down, even within the church.

Before Stadium Worship, Deuschle says, “Our churches were divided. We weren’t talking. In fact, a lot of people were speaking badly about each other.”

Deuschle saw the lack of unity in Zimbabwe but didn’t know how to fix the problem. Then he received a vision from the Lord.

“God showed me this picture of a stadium filled with young people, crying out to God with their hands raised, and God lighting a fire on the insides of a generation that we’re in,” he says. “It just really touched me.”

He says God told him, “Where there’s unity in my people, then there’s going to be a command of blessing”—a paraphrase of Psalm 133.

Stadium Worship

Turning that vision into reality was no small feat. To succeed, Deuschle knew he needed to get the other leaders on-board. Thankfully, having a shared project helped foster deep cooperation between leaders.

“Instead of just saying, ‘Hey, let’s get united,’ there was a vision and a goal and an event that let everyone participate,” Deuschle says. “Through that participation, we were like, ‘Wow, we really do believe in the same Jesus and it’s the real Jesus. It’s not religion.’ That was great. We could be on the same page.”

Grace Kapswara, pastor at New Life Covenant Church in Harare, agrees this was a message the Zimbabwean church needed.

“The kingdom of God for me would be unity, where everybody is involved,” Kapswara says. “It is not about a person. It is not

about a church. But there is that unity. The Bible says where there is that unity, the Lord commands a blessing, and we desire a commanded blessing from the Lord. We're so desperate for it right now."

The first Stadium Worship event took place May 27, 2017, in Harare's Glamis Arena. The gathering drew over 15,000 people, including William McDowell. Deuschle invited McDowell, a Grammy nominee who pastors Deeper Fellowship Church in Orlando, Florida, to help lead worship that night. But even McDowell didn't get his name announced.

Drene Bismark, chief operations officer at New Life Covenant Church and Jabula New Life Ministries International, says the event painted a powerful picture of Zimbabwe's future.

"We have so much more in common than what keeps us apart," Bismark says. "...Everybody's being allowed to function in their gift with no agenda other than seeing God be lifted up, Jesus be lifted up, and this thing be a success and an example of a platform for more collaboration on that level."

The first Stadium Worship event went so successfully that the church held a second, even larger event in 2018. The second event kept the emphasis on unity, with an added focus of considering what it would take to transform Zimbabwe into a kingdom nation.

"Stadium Worship did something in the hearts of a generation of leaders that I think is going to put Zimbabwe on a pretty big step," Deuschle says. "We had like 18,000 people who opened their stadium just worshipping Jesus. People were getting healed and just wrecked by the Holy Spirit."

United Future

The most obvious effect of the first Stadium Worship event has been renewed interchurch unity in Zimbabwe. Ministries and denominations began working together for the first time in

years.

“Right now, we are on such good terms with all the pastors in the nation, and everyone’s trying to say, ‘How can we help you?’ instead of viewing others as competition,” Deuschle says. “I don’t mean to take credit; none of that was me. All I saw was a vision and I said yes to it, because they were so broken it didn’t feel like anything could have changed the brokenness. [But] the Holy Spirit’s just working.”

Pheim Guti, grandson of Ezekiel Guti, founder of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, says the increased unity in the body of Christ creates a picture of heaven on earth.

“The relationships that we have here on earth are supposed to be a direct reflection and direct mirror of the kind of relationship that God wants us to have,” Guti says. “So when we bond as a body, when we have a real relationship, that’ll give us a picture of how to have a relationship with God and how to relate to Him—not from that servant perspective but to be sons and daughters.”

Some have even suggested Stadium Worship dramatically changed Zimbabwe’s course as a nation. In November 2017—just six months after the first Stadium Worship event—Mugabe was overthrown in a nonviolent coup d’etat. Emmerson Mnangagwa replaced Mugabe as the new president of Zimbabwe.

“I do believe significantly that there was a shift in the atmosphere and God definitely responded in November,” says Moffat Langevelde, who serves at River of Life Church in Harare. “We saw a lot of unity between cultures, denominations coming together, and even now [I feel] the positivity within our nation and the sense that something great is going to happen is still there.”

Similarly, pastor Yasha Chireseri says, “Stadium Worship was a precursor to some of the things that happened in the nation in November and going forward. I believe Stadium Worship will

definitely play an impact in the way things will operate in this nation.”

Deuschle is less apt to directly connect Stadium Worship with the nonviolent coup, but he says he doesn’t believe it’s coincidence that the nation’s trajectory shifted after the church united.

“Now is an interesting season, right?” Deuschle says. “It’s weird. I see foundations being rebuilt, and then I also see new foundations being laid. ... There’s a battle in Zimbabwe right now. We could really be a light to many nations and be a kingdom nation. There’s enough godly people who want to see it move forward.”

So what’s next for Stadium Worship? Deuschle says he doesn’t know. After the first event, he would have said, “It’s over”—but then God led him to do a second. He’s received offers to replicate the event in neighboring countries like South Africa, but he’s still praying about it.

“I’m just kind of opening it up to the Lord and saying, ‘God, what do you want to do with this?’” he says. “If it’s never again, I’m fine with that. If it looks like something different, I’m cool with that too. So we’ll see what happens.”

After all, this isn’t about his own success or his ministry’s success. Deuschle says his challenge to the American church is the same challenge he gave at Stadium Worship: Don’t make this about any individual or group being the hero or “the one.” Surrender your ego and cooperate. It’s not an easy challenge.

“That’s tough, because all of us have this desire to be acknowledged,” Deuschle says. “But we’re not going to make this a grand church thing; we’re going to make this a Jesus thing.” {eo}

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