



FaithSoaring Churches
A Synergy of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Management
A Travel Free Learning Article

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Summit Heights is a *FaithSoaring* Church. Christ the King is not. Nesmith, a smaller membership congregation, is a *FaithSoaring* Church. Lake Avenue is trying to be. We do not know yet if Midtown will be a *FaithSoaring* Church. Trinity once was a *FaithSoaring* Church, but not anymore. First is struggling to understand what *FaithSoaring* is all about.

FaithSoaring Churches are congregations who choose to soar with faith beyond ordinary ministry toward extraordinary ministry in a quest to achieve exceptional ministry. They respond to the pulling of God and journey to places of inspiration, imagination, and innovation. They lead their congregations through processes of missional formation and engagement that continually transforms the capacity of congregations to reach their full kingdom potential.

They are willing to go to the end of all known light or revelation and leap into the darkness because they know God has gone before them. Leaps of faith and extraordinary commitments are commonplace to *FaithSoaring* Churches.

Like Abram in Genesis 12 they gather up their possessions and go on a journey into the unknown because of their faith in God's leadership. They are enabled to soar because of their faith response.

Who Are *FaithSoaring* Churches?

For many years I have described these congregations as faithful, effective, and innovative congregations. They are faithful to the core Gospel and the ethos of their denomination or affinity movement. They are effective in missional formation and engagement, and pursue excellence at every opportunity. They are innovative and ever-changing in methodologies; always seeking new and relevant ways to tell the never changing true story of Jesus.

These are the leading edge congregations in every denomination or movement. According to a principle I learned from management guru and churchman Peter Drucker, they are less than 20 percent of congregations. They must make progress for the other 80 or more percent of congregations, as a group, to make progress.

I have also referred to *FaithSoaring* Churches in a typology of congregations as Perfecting Congregations. [The other categories are Pursuing, Preparing, Providing, and Presiding.] Perfecting congregations are those already on a journey to achieve their full kingdom potential. They know who they are, what they value and believe, where they are headed, and how they are getting there. They are continually perfecting their journey.

Three words which describe *FaithSoaring* Churches are success, significant, and surrender. They are successful in their congregational endeavors. They address significant kingdom issues. They fully surrender to God's leadership.

What I propose is that *FaithSoaring* Churches are those with a continually transforming synergy of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Management. I consider these the four organizing principles of a congregation. They are simple. Synergy is tough.

***FaithSoaring* Church Characteristics**

What are the top ten characteristics of *FaithSoaring* Churches?

1. *FaithSoaring* Churches walk by faith rather than by sight in the spirit of 2 Corinthians 5:7 and Isaiah 40:31. 2 Corinthians 5:7 admonishes us to walk by faith rather than by sight. Isaiah 30:31 challenges us to mount up with wings as eagles and soar. Thus, *FaithSoaring*.
2. They focus more on Vision and Relationships than it does on Programs and Management. Yet it has all four and has the proper alignment of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Management.
3. They are captivated by an empowering Vision from God that is cast by leadership and broadly owned throughout the congregation. That Vision is not so much a statement as it is a movement to be experienced. It is not words that are memorized, but a focus and actions that are second nature.
4. They focus on congregational strengths rather than weaknesses; what is right about the congregation rather than what is wrong; what is good about the congregation rather than what is bad; what is loving about the congregation rather than what is unloving.
5. They also have strengths-focused leadership in the spirit of **StandOut** leadership in a new book by this title by Marcus Buckingham that is the next generation of strengths-based leadership popularized in the *StrengthsFinder* inventory. Strengths is part of the leadership trilogy of spiritual calling, strengths, and preferences.
6. They seek to reach their full kingdom potential by following God's unique leadership of their congregation. Rather than emulating others they seek to build their own style of *FaithSoaring*. They are continually innovating; always seeking to perfect what they are doing.
7. They committed to the highest possible quality age/stage programs, discipleship processes, and missional engagement that reach the real needs of real people in real time. Significant kingdom impact rather than success of programs, processes, and engagements is their goal.
8. They are missional in nature. They focus on the expansion and extension of God's kingdom more than on themselves. They focus on going rather than staying. They balance renewing the core with extending the ministry. They are contextually relevant to geographical community, or target or affinity groups they are called to serve.
9. They have high expectations of the people connected with the congregation. They are seeking to engage them in an intentional discipling journey. They expect people connected with their congregation to attend worship regularly, be in an ongoing discipleship group, build deep friendship both within the congregation for support of what they are doing in the marketplace to be salt and light in God's world, and to have a place of ongoing service within the congregation or its areas of missional engagement.
10. They build on a foundation of worship experiences that are a true encounter with God rather than simply a cultural gathering. Worship as a part of spiritual discernment is a hallmark of their praise and adoration toward God. Prayer, as a part of worshipful relationship and discernment of God's Vision, is of the highest priority in their congregation.

A Synergy of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Management

Suppose the journey of your congregation—a Spiritual Strategic Journey—could be characterized as a road trip in a luxury sports utility vehicle. Let's say a Lexus SUV. Then let's suppose that the four passengers in the vehicle of Vision, Relationships, Programs, and Management.

Who's driving? In *FaithSoaring Churches* Vision is driving. Who's navigating? Relationships are navigating. Programs are in the back seat behind Relationships providing excellent programs, ministries, and activities framework within which Relationships with God, one another, and the congregation's context can soar with faith. Management is in the back seat behind Vision providing the administrative infrastructure to free Vision to soar with faith.

Vision fuels the journey. Relationships flavors the journey. Programs and Management play essential supporting roles. All four must be present in the vehicle for a successful and significant journey that ultimately leads to sacrifice in favor of God's leading.

The synergy the four passengers can produce is essential to becoming a *FaithSoaring Church*. This means that not only is their presence in the SUV essential, but where they are seated in the vehicle is non-negotiable for *FaithSoaring Churches*.

FaithSoaring or Falling?

Karl Wallenda, patriarch of The Flying Wallendas high wire circus act, fell 75 feet to his death March 22, 1978 while walking a cable strung between the two towers of the ten-story Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Reflecting on his death, his widow stated that during the months preceding the fall Karl transitioned from an attitude of confidence and courage, to one of fear and precaution. He morphed from an aerialist who lived to soar, to a hesitant high wire actor who was consumed with the fear of falling.

This fear of falling is now known as The Wallenda Factor. It refers to situations where the fear of failure smothers the joy of soaring. It refers to situations where problem-solving erases affirm and build processes, where counting the "No" votes is more important than counting the "Yes" votes, and negatives are more important than positives.

Too many congregations cannot experience *FaithSoaring* because they are more afraid of falling than they are encouraged to walk by faith rather than by sight. They fear the possibility of failure more the exhilaration of success. They focus on fixes rather than solutions. They are short-term rather than long-term in their thinking. They do not engage in *FaithSoaring*.

The Wallenda Factor is also expressed in congregations when a threat of some type is present. People are afraid the threat will become a reality, and the congregation will be harmed. Dialogue is often around the possibility of something negative happening to the congregation, rather than the opportunity for *FaithSoaring*.

Is your congregation a *FaithSoaring Church*? What is the evidence?

Important Things to Know



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