Iwa Insights
Conversations with Iwa Staff, August 2000

The Closed Set versus The Centered Set
Part III: Implications for Churches with a Centered Set Approach

When this change of perspective takes place, then everything we do is evangelism. What changes a purely fellowship activity, like a golfing trip, into being an evangelistic one? It's the mentality and the motivation of the Christians who are there who are golfing. And it's whether non-Christians have been invited, and whether those non-Christians are in relationship to the Christians and have been invited and brought on the trip at some point in this relational centered set process. It's not leading with the program, attracting them to the golfing and that's the only reason they're there, for sports and social reasons.

We talk about "seeker-sensitive" worship. We even talk about "worship evangelism" now as being the next step. We talk about evangelizing through worship. The same thing is true that we have the skills already to know how to do good small groups with Christians, or to do Bible studies, and to do sports events or fellowship activities. The actual skill sets are the same if we made those seeker-sensitive or evangelistic. Seeker-sensitive activities are the same as other fellowship activities. The difference is whether or not we are motivated to reach out, and are sensitive to non-Christians.

So with a centered set approach, we're going to see a lot of the same activities. It's just that those that are primarily Christian activities are going to be seeker-sensitive. And we're going to see interspersed and preceding those, similar activities that are focused on non-Christians and engaging them in a place to invite them that is non-threatening, like having a Thanksgiving dinner at the community center versus the church. Choosing to bring Christ into secular holidays like Thanksgiving and Memorial Day, rather than Christmas and Easter, at a cultural or community center is the kind of bridging activity we can do. We may think we don't know how to do evangelistic activities, but skill set-wise, we do. It's just the focus and motivation are not there. The faith, the belief level is not there. We don't think of all these other things as being evangelism, and yet it can all become evangelism or evangelistic.

Each and every person in the church has to get to know Jesus better. We need to fall in love with Jesus. Jesus must no longer be a doctrine, He must be a real person. We have to know Him and fall in love with Him so that when someone asks us, "What have you been up to?" We can say, "Man! I met this guy and let me tell you about Him. Wow, I'm just on cloud nine and I just love Him so much." That's the first thing the whole congregation has to do and then everything else, their desire to share and evangelize, will just come because "I want you to know this guy!"

That's the key to getting us out of ourselves, which is our biggest hang-up as Japanese Americans. We're afraid of promoting ourselves if it's our faith. We don't want to talk about ourselves. And that's what we are afraid of when we think of evangelism, of promoting ourselves or putting ourselves under scrutiny. We're this conforming culture which says that the nail that sticks up is bound to be hit, or don't stick up or stick out. We try to be as invisible as possible. The thing that will get us out of ourselves is when we're not talking about ourselves. It's like when we brag about the Lakers. When Jesus becomes a real person, it's not our faith in Jesus we're telling about, but we're talking about Jesus. It's not about our walk with Jesus or how religious a Christian we are, or how good a Christian we are that we're talking about. But we're just talking about Jesus. Then it gets us out of ourselves. So evangelism isn't a part of our good Christian life and doing. It's not a duty. It's not a responsibility. If we really are excited about Jesus, then certain things do take care of themselves.

A speaker at a graduation ceremony at Fuller this year expounded on Acts 1:8. His whole point was that the Lord said we will be his witnesses all over the world--Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. And He said, "That's not a command. That's a promise." He said that that's what's going to happen to us after the Holy Spirit comes upon us. So he was just saying as a matter of fact, "When I drench you with my Spirit, when I flood you with my Spirit, when you're filled with my very being, you're going to be my witnesses all over the world." That's the outcome. And so, what he had contention with, and how he'd started the message actually, was that whole thing about if you were brought to trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? He says, "No, you're not on trial. Jesus is saying, 'I'm on trial.'" He looked at "witness" as someone who has experienced something or encountered something. And so the witness is actually evidence to what happened. He re-interpreted the passage by saying that what Jesus said was, "You will be my evidence in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world." We have to begin having the confidence that Jesus is going to give us the experience so that other people will see the evidence, will hear the evidence and will be drawn to Christ and want to know him for themselves. And the only way to get that confidence is by allowing him to reflect himself through us. I guess what we're saying is that we don't want to underplay that and again go to methods and programs. As far as the skill sets of knowing how to do the methods and programs go, we know how to do them. The difference has to do with our relationship with Jesus and our understanding of evangelism.

Iwa's theme for this year is "Follow me...." from "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." The way we're looking at that is that "follow me" is an invitation by Christ to be in relationship with him--kind of a side-by-side relationship with him where we're with him like the disciples were, 24 hours a day, seeing what he does, how he responds to people, knowing how he thinks and feels, getting to know him and being in a relationship with him that way. The result of that is that Christ makes us fishers of men. The invitation first is to relationship. And out of the relationship comes this transformation of being like Christ. Jesus is The Evangelist--everything he did was evangelism. So we would be like him--fishers of men. It's like a promise that he would make us that way. As we've been saying, we need people to come into that deep intimate relationship with Christ where they fall in love with him. They know him deeply and intimately. They get excited about him. They want to talk about him with other people and bring other people together with him. That's kind of a natural process that takes place. So I don't know that we can emphasize enough that it is something that happens inside of us, that changes our attitudes, and causes us to make a paradigm shift.