

From Cow-Tipping to Gourmet Burgers

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Elevation Church in Charlotte NC has recently gone “cow-tipping”. Before you get excited and call the SPCA, “cow-tipping” in this case has to do with the sacred cows we find in churches. You know - the things everybody wants to know about but nobody talks about.

When I first heard about this topic, my mind went to another cow reference: “Sacred cows make the best burgers”, a quote attributed to Mark Twain. A sacred cow is one immune from criticism or attack. In some places in the world, sacred cows are more important than people, causing some people to literally starve to death while surrounded by cows.

This happens in the church, too, as making decisions and controlling what happens is more important in many churches than making disciples.

Being a former staff member for over two decades in a church, I was no stranger to that line of thinking. In my worst times, I was part of the controlling going on. In better times, I began to realize that there was a different way. About fifteen years ago, a new idea began to circulate – permission-giving churches.

In his book *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers*, noted church consultant William Easum developed the concept of permission-giving churches. Permission-giving churches believe that the role of God’s people is to minister to people, in the world, every day of the week, by living out their spiritual gifts instead of running the church by sitting on committees and making decision about what can or cannot be done.

Permission-giving churches:

- Encourage autonomous, on-the-spot decision making by collaborative individuals and self-organizing teams
- Encourage ministry to be delivered any time, any place, by anyone, no matter what
- Have leaders who are secure enough to equip others for ministry and then get out of their way and let them develop their ministries even if it is not something in which they might participate
- Do need boundaries
- Develop a flat organizational structure that encourages and facilitates ministry instead of coordinating or managing it

Gourmet Burgers was the first of many resources that influenced my ideas of what church had become – and what it could still be. As an associate pastor and leader, I began to ask a very different question:

How am I going to use my spiritual gifts today to encourage someone else to help the Body of Christ to grow and mature tomorrow?

Fifteen years later, I’m still asking that question – and am continually amazed at how God answers that in His people.