

## Inspiration Multiplies! – *Part One*

### Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on [Let the Band Play: Multiplying Disciples and Churches](#) by Larry Walkemeyer  
in Light + Life Magazine, April 2021

This study is the first of two parts. Be sure to download [part two](#) as well to continue the conversation.



#### What Inspires You?

We experience inspiration in three ways. When we are in the presence of anything exemplary, we are inspired. You have likely already imagined a theatrical performance, sporting event, piece of art, a sunset, observing nature, or oratory masterpiece that ignited your heart. We are also inspired when we are part of that exemplary display. Knowing that we took part in something exceptional is inspiring! However, when one imparts their inspiration to another person so that it becomes shared, that heightens the experience for everyone.

In your group, share some moments where you were in the presence of something magnificent. How did it inspire you? Can you describe your feelings?

Now share a time where you were able to help someone live into their potential. Did you teach a skill, share an insight, or share an experience? How were you inspired by taking part in the inspiration of another person?

Let's read through *Let the Band Play: Multiplying Disciples and Churches* by Larry Walkemeyer and discuss how we can become people who multiply the power of the gospel in our towns and cities through leveraging this idea of inspiration.

Our first (OK, our only) trip to Paris had Deb and me checking into our Airbnb early in the evening. We were hungry so we went walking through the neighborhood when suddenly we heard simple, yet captivating music. We followed our ears to a quaint street with a few tiny cafes where a four-piece band was joyfully playing for a group that had gathered to listen.

As we were swept up in their music, I recalled a news piece I had seen previously describing groups such as this. The clip reported on a four-piece band that was part of the [Orchestre de Paris](#), yet played in the streets far more than in the concert hall. Even more impressive was their commitment to teach ordinary students of all ages how to play their instruments. They encouraged their students to "play in the streets." Their mission was to multiply music throughout the city.

My thoughts then turned to our mission as Christ-followers. The gospel is the most exquisite and transformative music under heaven. Our culture is starving for its melody, and we must multiply the band members who play it.

In 1890 B.T. Roberts, our denomination's founder, seemed to forcefully say, "Let the bands play." Roberts was an ardent supporter of the Free Methodist Pentecost Bands. These were small groups of zealous evangelists and church planters. These bands primarily consisted of ordinary lay people, both women and men, and especially young people. Their faith, creativity and passion were contagious. These bands were rapidly bringing the "music" of salvation and holiness to unreached people.

## A Wake-Up Call

Long before the Azusa Street revival that led to what we now know as the Pentecostal Movement, Vivian Dake, a Free Methodist preacher launched the Pentecost Bands. Larry mentions them in his article so let's pause to gain some insight their significance.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of the Pentecost Band movement traces back to July 1882 when Vivian and Ida Dake began a revival at Mankota, Minnesota. That first band was soon dissolved, but the concept took permanence in the form of the Parma Pentecost Band, designated Band No. 1, in Parma (near Spring Arbor) on July 25, 1885. Its ministry began with a street meeting and an evening service. Dake led the opening service and preached, then left the work in the charge of four young women: Carrie Kimball, Emily Nelson, Lizzie Ball, and Mary Primmer. Thomas Nelson noted, "As the workers prophesied for the first time in public, the Spirit applied the truth spoken and God set His seal on the work at once, pouring out His Spirit in convicting and converting power."

Soon a second band of young women was holding meetings in nearby Hanover. A little later the first band of men was formed. Thus Dake quickly established his band pattern: Small groups of young men or young

women; a high degree of mobility, with bands moving quickly from one site to another, often being replaced by another band; and members of one band, as soon as they had gained a little experience, becoming leaders of new bands.

B.T. watched these developments with great interest. He wrote on July 31, 1885, "Organize your bands. Push out. Be as aggressive as the Salvation Army, but more holy, more serious and have no nonsense about it. Let the Holy Spirit take the place of tambourines to draw the people.... We must not let the Free Methodist church become a feeble imitation of the M.E. church." Within seven years thirty bands were operating, with women outnumbering men by nearly two to one. The total number of band workers appears to have been about 125 in 1892.

The primary work of the bands was evangelism and church planting, first in North America and later overseas. Typically a band would ride the railroad

<sup>1</sup> *B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists*. Abridged Edition of *Populist Saints: B. T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists*, Sponsored by the Committee on Free Methodist History & Archives, Marston Memorial Historical Center, Light + Life, Indianapolis, pp. 195-196

into a Midwestern town, rent a vacant store or hall or set up a tent, and hold meetings for several weeks. Door-to-door visitation, tract distribution and street meetings and marches attracted crowds to the evening services. There, demonstrative worship, singing, and fresh personal testimonies and exhortations increased

the interest. The bands were almost entirely self-supporting, living from offerings or gifts of food or clothing generated by their ministry. Anecdotes about Band members often recall their going without food, or subsisting for days on donations of potatoes or vegetables while holding meetings and visiting house

Larry says, “In 1890 B.T. Roberts, our denomination’s founder, seemed to forcefully say, ‘Let the bands play.’ Roberts was an ardent supporter of the Free Methodist Pentecost Bands.” Thinking of your local church, do your “bands play” mostly in the concert hall, or on the street?

As a group, discuss the questions that Larry asks of pastors in light of your own church. What do they

## But then...

But at the 1890 General Conference, new leaders sought to squelch the work of the Pentecost Bands, which [Vivian Dake](#) founded. Roberts argued to “let the bands play,” and he was deeply disillusioned when they were regulated instead.

As equally disappointing to Roberts at the 1890 conference was the narrow defeat of his resolution to [ordain women](#). These sisters who had been so instrumental in spreading the gospel and establishing new churches, were relegated to a second-class status in the mission. Since that conference, the full empowerment of women has been a significant, yet inadequately confronted, barrier to multiplication.

Perhaps Roberts felt so passionate about these two issues because he saw in them the shift from gospel movement to church institution, from multiplication

to maintenance. While reflecting on the results of this 1890 decision to legislate the Pentecost Bands, [David McKenna](#) writes in “[A Future With a History](#)” that “the fires of aggressive evangelism that characterized Free Methodism during the first 30 years of its history were banked, if not snuffed.” Dake died in 1892, and Roberts died in 1893 — one year before the next General Conference.

McKenna’s analysis is convicting and instructive: “The action of (the 1890) General Conference symbolized the shift of the church away from the risks that must be taken and the creativity that must be exercised to sustain the energy of aggressive evangelism.” More than ever, this season demands the recovery of the risk, creativity and gender inclusiveness of the Pentecost Bands.

Why do we tend to shift movements into institutions? Do you know of an institution that has successfully shifted into a movement?

Consider for a moment the double effect that regulating the Pentecost Bands and denying the ordination of women had on the church at that critical moment. How do you see the lasting effects of the 1890 General Conference at work still today? What can be done to undo the damage that was inflicted over 130 years ago?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Give careful consideration to something you see in practice within the church today that you think opposes the encouragement and command given in this verse. What can we do to ensure that we are allowing the Holy Spirit to have freedom in our church?

Jesus' model of ministry was one of "going" and "sending." His "Pentecost Bands" are described in Luke 10 when He sent out the 36 pairs of anonymous disciples to evangelize. It was a movement that multiplied disciples, leaders and eventually churches. It empowered ordinary people to take the music to the streets. Jesus transformed fishermen, tax collectors, business women, former prostitutes, and tradespeople from listeners to street musicians to instructors.

Have we overly focused on our concert halls, the role of conductors, and the precision of our performance instead of "letting the band play"? My experience indicates we have.

I often ask the pastors that I minister to across the nation:

- "Who have you personally shared Christ with in the past three months?"

- "Who are you intentionally discipling with the agreed-upon goal they will disciple someone else?"
- "Who are you investing in to replace your leadership role?"
- "What new ministries outside of your church have recently been launched by the lay people in your church?"
- "How soon will your church plant another church?"

The usual response to these questions: Silence. Crickets. Then, rationalizations.

These are gospel multiplication questions. These are "launching the band to the streets" questions. These are the questions that must be answered differently for the Free Methodist Church to become a movement again.

As a group, discuss the questions that Larry asks of pastors in light of your own church. What do they reveal?

## Pray

Close your time in prayer around these themes:

1. Lord, help us to become a *movement* again in our town or city!
2. Lord, help us become:
  - a. People who inspire others to know you and love you!
  - b. People who risk starting new ministries.
  - c. A church that will plant another church.