



URBAN CURRENT

40 Years, 40 Things

This July I mark, celebrate, and praise God for 40 years serving my church family.

I have been privileged to shepherd the Armitage congregation in Chicago for a generation. The wild rollercoaster ride of highs and lows, twists and turns, springtime and harvest, winning souls, baptizing disciples, organizing, administrating, leading, buying property, battling hostiles, capital campaigns, renovation, construction, and finding paths through times of transition and change has been extraordinary.

The year I began pastoring, Chicago saw a number of murders that has never been exceeded: 970 in the year 1974. Our neighborhood was a significant section of the battlefield. The number fell for a few years and then rose again to 943 in 1992. Since then, the numbers have steadily declined. Though Chicago street violence continues to command national headlines, our reduced murder rate has more to do with shifting demographics than with nicer people or better police work.

A striking shift in the spiritual landscape has occurred. In the 70s, the handful of non-black evangelical churches in the city was shrinking. The tiny number of non-black Baptist churches dwindled. In the last ten years, a wave of young church planters has arrived. Presently, there are at least 150 church planters in the Chicago area. Such a thing was unthinkable even a dozen years ago.

I have watched mayors come and go. Richard J. Daley, Michael Bilandic, Jane Byrne, Eugene Sawyer, Harold Washington, Richard M. Daley, and now Rahm Emanuel.

Four decades have changed our world radically. Chicago is a completely different city. Our neighborhood has gone from jungle to hipster-ville central. Our ecclesiastical ship has ridden crests and troughs in the deep blue sea of demographic shifts, political storms, and church life cycles.

As the years pass, one thinks he is learn-

ing lessons. Come to find out, many of those lessons have to be learned again and again, over and over. So I think the process is not so much "lesson learned, move on" as it is "lessons we are learning." I wish I was learning more, but I think the following represents all I can handle.

40 Things I think I'm Learning

1. God is on the throne. No, really!
2. Jesus loves His church more than I ever can.
3. The Spirit is at work even when you think He isn't.
4. The worth of an excellent wife is far above jewels.
5. Mistakes, bad moves, and poor judgments are part of the journey.
6. The local New Testament church on the march, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is a terror to Satan.
7. In the city, everything is magnified, multiplied, and intensified — the good, bad, and ugly.
8. God called me to do what I do.
9. Everyone leaves — it's just a matter of when.
10. Encouragement at a low moment, PRICE-LESS.
11. Being at the right place at the right time is just the best.
12. Sometimes success is simply refusing to quit.
13. The Spirit led Paul to plant churches in cities because cities are amplifiers and distribution engines.
14. Ministry is brutal.
15. Ministry is exhilarating.
16. Some deacons are demon-free. Thank God ours have been.
17. God's people are amazing.
18. Keeping the main thing the main thing takes relentless effort.
19. Good people can disagree *and* be good friends.
20. Not everyone who thinks he can, can.
21. Often, the best man for the job is a woman.
22. Men rally when RALLIED.
23. Christ can change anyone, even me.
24. If you're not at the table, you have nothing to say.
25. Urban ministry is like tent camping in a hurricane.
26. Desperate straits are God's set-up for a miracle.
27. Preach the announcements.
28. Loyalty is scarce stuff.
29. It is wonderful and high drama when the church family declares forgiveness in response to public confession.
30. Democrats are crazy.
31. Republicans can't be trusted.
32. God brings unexpected allies.
33. God may not come when you want Him to but He's always on time.
34. When God gives a vision, He's serious.
35. The rewards are in the long haul.
36. Today's surge doesn't mean tomorrow's a cinch.
37. God's Word is even more amazing than I had imagined.
38. A vision can be realized even as dreams are deferred.
39. Reach the city and you will touch the world.
40. Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.



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