



leadership

“The more we reach out in the community in faith-based organizing, the more people come to our church.”

— BISHOP ROY DIXON, FAITH CHAPEL, SAN DIEGO

a MINISTRY OF THEIR OWN: FAITH CHAPEL

“Let’s not be so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good.”

— BISHOP ROY DIXON

Bishop Roy Dixon used to own a dozen Taco Bells. Now he and his congregation at Faith Chapel own the “Faith Chapel Organizing Ministry” that is growing the church membership rolls and addressing social injustices in the community. In 1985 Bishop Dixon started Faith Chapel in the boardroom of his business with six people. Over 1,500 people, mostly African-American, now call it their faith home.

In 1986, Bishop Dixon attended the national training offered by the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO), where he learned organizing principles and practices like the benefits of relationship-building, using power to influence public officials, and the need for accountability. No stranger to political power (he is a staunch, outspoken Republican, a prominent businessman, and the overseer of 30 Pentecostal congregations in the San Diego area), Bishop Dixon was convinced by the PICO training and organizers from PICO’s local affiliate, the San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP), that if he was to accomplish real congregational development and community change, he needed to develop people from his congregation to lead the organizing work. He began sending potential leaders to national training. They returned empowered to hold one-to-one meetings, to speak in public, and to hold one another and the pastor accountable.

With their first civic victory — the construction of a sidewalk for their children to walk to school safely — the growing team of leaders and other congregational members caught a glimpse of the power and politics of change, and the power in numbers. And they’ve been organizing ever since. Bishop Dixon and his leaders credit SDOP for the rewards of these sustained efforts — a larger and stronger Faith Chapel and an organizing ministry truly owned by the whole congregation that influences public life at the neighborhood, city and state levels.

Stephanie Gut, lead organizer of SDOP, believes “Most congregations have mercy and charity at the center of their ministry — we suggest they add justice. Now Bishop Dixon sees it as a central tenet to who he is as a pastor, and as a person of faith.”

