

Vineyard Ministries

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity: Vineyard Ministries is a Pentecostal denomination founded by former leaders of Calvary Chapel in California. It has grown rapidly throughout the United States, Canada, and beyond. Headquarters: Association of Vineyard Churches, P. O. Box 17580, Anaheim, CA 92817.

Founders: Kenn and Joanie Gulliksen and John Wimber.

Statistics: Currently, there are about 500 Vineyard churches in the United States.

History: The movement known as “Vineyard Churches” or “Vineyard ministries” originated in the 1970s when Kenn Gulliksen, an associate pastor of Calvary Chapel (founded in the 1960s by Chuck Smith) in California, began to promote Pentecostal teachings such as healing, spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues.¹ Since the pastor and leaders of Calvary Chapel were not prepared to support this new emphasis, Gulliksen and his wife left to serve a congregation in Los Angeles. Gulliksen decided to call this congregation the Vineyard to distinguish it from Calvary Chapel. John Wimber, another Calvary pastor and a former pianist for the Righteous Brothers, merged his congregation with that of the Gulliksens after discovering their friendship and common teachings. Vineyard Churches was founded in 1982. Under Wimber’s leadership, the Anaheim Vineyard, a large mega-church complex, was built with a 3000-seat capacity. During the 1980’s a number of Calvary Chapel churches, as well as some other evangelical and Pentecostal groups, linked up with this new umbrella movement. The diversity within the movement is reflected in the numerous names attached to the Vineyard movement: “Power Evangelism” (reliance on the powers of the Holy Spirit to effect salvation); “Signs and Wonders Movement” (meetings featuring the workings of miracles); The Third Wave (after a third large detectable manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s movement). The Vineyard is also known as Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Association of Vineyard Churches.² The name Vineyard became a denominational title in 1988. The movement has grown rapidly through the 1990s to the present, spreading to more than 70 countries. John Wimber died in November, 2001. It remains to be seen what direction the Vineyard Ministries will take in the future, given its relatively brief organizational history.

Controversy arose in the 1990’s when one of the Vineyard Churches in Toronto, Canada, started manifesting what became known as “Holy Laughter.” Rodney Driver Brown, a South African evangelist, had been teaching that one of the Holy Spirit’s manifestations was uncontrolled fits of laughter. When the Toronto church went beyond the laughter to animal noises, John Wimber concluded that the new manifestation was not of God. In 1994, after much deliberation, the Toronto Airport church was dismissed from association with the Vineyard Movement. The “Toronto Blessing,” as it came to be called, became a separate movement.

Texts: *The Bible*. Magazines such as *First Fruits*, *Equipping the Saints*, and *Voice of the Vineyard*. Newsletters such as *Cutting Edge* (a quarterly missions publication), *Seeds* (also a missions newsletter), and *Vineyard Frontlines* (testimonial newsletter).

¹ Most of the information provided here has been supplied by Rev. Larry Nichols, chairman of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s former Commission on Organizations.

² <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/Vineyard.html>

Beliefs and Practices:

- The doctrines of the Vineyard Ministries are essentially evangelical, Protestant, and Pentecostal: traditional teachings on the Trinity, the inspiration of the Bible, salvation by grace, etc., with special emphasis on Pentecostal gifts.
- One experiences salvation by “receiving” Jesus Christ, usually at a call for repentance (altar call) or prayer time at the conclusion of the service. This “new birth” or “born-again” experience precedes a second blessing or work of the Spirit called the “filling of the Holy Spirit,” manifested by speaking in tongues. In addition, Vineyard Ministries stresses the importance of all spiritual gifts described in the Bible.
- The style of worship most often attracts those who join the movement. Traditional liturgy and historical hymnody is generally absent. Popular evangelical music (e.g., Maranatha Music) is sung and is usually accompanied by a praise band and song leaders. Following the song service (often featuring times of testimony and sharing), the preaching takes place usually with the spontaneous use of “free texts” and as “the Spirit leads.” Then follows the third and final aspect of a Vineyard service, the time for prayer and ministry when the minister may emphasize a time for salvation, for healing, or for some other manifestation of the Spirit. Not uncommonly, a person is said to be “slain in the Spirit”—that is, overcome in a spiritual euphoria and falling to the ground in spiritual ecstasy after being touched by a minister.
- Vineyard pastors tend to avoid the label Pentecostal. They prefer instead the term “third wave” in contrast to Pentecostal groups that generally describe the move of the Holy Spirit in two waves (the first on the Day of Pentecost [Acts 2] and the second the move of the Spirit on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 when the modern day Pentecostal movement was born—known in Pentecostal circles as “the latter reign” of the Spirit). The Vineyard Ministries arising in recent decades is viewed as “the third wave” of the Spirit.

A Lutheran Response

Lutherans recognize that the Vineyard professes belief in the traditional Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the fallen condition of humanity, the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, and the inspiration of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Vineyard appears, however, to understand the Bible more as a literal sourcebook for instructions in godly living and holiness. Accordingly, the emphasis seems to be on helping persons themselves make a choice in coming to salvation, and this ordinarily through an altar call and “personal decision for Christ” leading eventually to a more fully sanctified and holy life through the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Lutherans, however, teach that God creates and nourishes faith only through the means of grace, the Gospel proclaimed and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper administered. Prior to conversion, human beings cannot by their own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him (Luther’s Small Catechism, Explanation to 3rd Article of the Apostles’ Creed; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1; Rom. 8:7).

The Vineyard seems to hold that God promises every Christian, following Baptism, such spiritual gifts as tongues and healing as part of a “full” or “complete” Gospel, as if to imply that Christians are in need of something beyond what God promises to give in Baptism. Lutherans confess that the fullness of the Gospel is realized in and through Jesus Christ, and that when Christians become one with Him through Baptism they receive all of His spiritual blessings (Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 1:30; 3:21-23)—and not through a “second blessing” or a “second grace” bestowed at some later time. In contrast to Vineyard, Lutherans believe that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are true means of grace through which God imparts forgiveness of sins. Lutherans, therefore, practice infant baptism (Vineyard does not) and believe in the Real Presence of Christ’s body and blood in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper (Vineyard does not).

The Vineyard generally practices free and spontaneous worship without the use of liturgy or creeds. Lutherans generally use liturgical form in worship. This is because historic liturgies embody the Word of God, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the means through which God bestows forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

The Vineyard and Pentecostal churches in general lean toward Restorationism, the view that in the present day God is "restoring" the church to what it once was during the time of Jesus and the apostles—since the church somehow lost the true message of Christ. Lutherans reject Restorationism³ and its premises, speaking rather of the external church's need for reformation or correction. Lutherans strongly affirm that from the time of the apostles to the present wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered Christ's true church is present and expanded. (For additional discussion of Restorationism, see the International Churches of Christ evaluation on this website.)

For Further Reading

Chandler, Russell. "Vineyard Fellowship Finds Groundswell of Followers," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 October 1990, late ed., A1.

Mead, Frank S. and Samuel S. Hill. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, 290.

Melton, J. Gordon. *Encyclopedia of American Religions*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1999, 391-92.

Maxwell, Joe. "Vineyard Founder Wimber Dies." *Christianity Today* (January 12, 1998): 58.

Perrin, Robin D., and Armand L. Mauss. "Strictly Speaking . . . Kelley's Quandary and the Vineyard Christian Fellowship." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32 (June 1993): 125-35.

Links and Websites

www.avc.vineyard.org/avc-home.html

www.vineyard.org/

www.churchonline.com/usad/vy/vy.html

³ See articles on "Restoration Movement" and "Primitivism" in the *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 1005-1008; 940-41.