

HOLY HELPS

STATIC CHURCHES AND SAND-BOXES

I love to walk on sandy beaches. However, when walking in deep sand you have the feeling that you are not making progress. That is the feeling many church leaders have as they plod on week after week in the sand-box called "church."

This is a challenge to church leaders and non-growing churches trapped in the sand-box of "same old, same old" without any sense of really accomplishing the primary purpose of the Head of the Church Who said, "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" (Luke 19:10) While wading in ecclesiastical sand can be tiresome, fulfilling the mandate of the Master is always fulfilling. Why? We're talking about seeing souls dead in trespasses and sins come to life through the Gospel!

That which has life reproduces after its kind. Static churches are non-reproducing churches. A church that is not reproducing needs a spiritual revival. I am not talking about adding to the local church membership those who are already saved and who move their membership from one local church to another. I am speaking about new births into God's family.

Adding to church membership rolls those who are already saved is not increasing the Family of God. The only way that God's Family grows is by births - when there are new-born ones added. It is easier to count heads added to the local church membership by transfer than it is to count souls added to God's Family by transformation!

In the New Testament, church growth occurred when people were being saved: "*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*" (Acts 2:47) There is much to distract the church from its God-given, primary purpose in the world. In order for a church to recover its focus several steps need to be taken.

Step #1 – Outline.

Outline a plan of procedure by strategizing and organizing the church to accomplish its task. The average church is organized for everything except its central purpose. They are organized for worship, and what changes we have seen in the worship formats of many churches in recent years; we are organized for music and what splendid singing groups we have; we are organized for Bible study, with great classroom buildings and curriculums; we are organized for recreation, and how our gymnasiums hum with activity! We are organized for finance and can give account for every penny received or spent. How we are organized!

But when it comes to the central purpose of the church, that for which it may be said that the church primarily exists, many churches are almost completely minus any organization, as bare of organization as though it never even entered their thoughts – and perhaps it hasn't! It is a matter of priorities, isn't it? Its "back to the basics!" Strategize, organize, agonize (in prayer!) evangelize and realize new babes in the Body of Christ!

Step #2 - Outlook.

Jesus said, "*I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.*" (John 4:35) Every church needs an occasional eye check-up by the Divine Optometrist! We are

prone to growing near-sighted spiritually. We enjoy seeing the “insiders” in the family of God so much that we become blind to the “outsiders.”

Church growth is stimulated by vision. *“Look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”* A considerable portion of the membership of a typical church seems to believe that their full duty has been done if with fair regularity they attend the morning service of the church and make some contribution for current expenses. But we must not overlook the fact that if churches cease to grow numerically, it is almost indisputable evidence that such churches have lost the spirit of evangelism without which they will shrivel and die.

Why are Christians in this world? To shine heavenly light and sprinkle heavenly salt. Not just to grace the countryside with a beautiful edifice, or to occupy tax-free property, or to raise money so that others may go halfway around the world to do what Jesus Christ said to do everywhere and that is to witness of Him. If the church is not true to its purpose it risks the removal of its “lampstand.” (Rev. 2:5)

Most churches die when they lose their evangelistic outlook and emphasis. Occasionally a church gets tangled up in programs for the programmed, in a building expansion or other internal matters and lose sight of the purpose of their existence. The church that becomes wrapped up in itself is introverted. To such Jesus said, *“open your eyes and look at the fields.”* Outlook should lead to outreach.

Step #3 - Outreach.

My advice to churches in sinking sand is this: think about the connections to the community that you have. Hand out paper and have people start listing the church’s connections to the population area in which the church is located. If people never drive your street how will they know you exist? Make a list of ways you are actively connecting with your community. Make two lists: (1) What outreach assets does the church have? and (2) How, specifically, are you using those assets to connect with your city.

Many churches are disconnected from their communities. They are a salt box with a steeple on top and their mentality is: “If you want what we’ve got, come and get it.” The mandate of the Lord is: “Go and give it!” Churches must build bridges from the saved to the unsaved; the churched to the unchurched.

Think of the church as a “Business.” Indeed, we are a Business! The Master’s Business! Jesus said, *“I must be about my Father’s business.”* (Luke 2:49) People need to know where we are, what we are, who we are, what we have that they need or want. One of the best ways to attract attention is for the consumer to meet a satisfied customer!

Step #4 - Outdated? - Update!

I am not talking about message here. I am talking about methodology. Not only am I talking about updating recruiting techniques but I am speaking about retaining those who are reached. Let me give one illustration: using flannelgraphs in a wide-screen TV era is a “non-sequitur!”

Why does a church not grow? There are some historically solid churches that are not growing. Churches run into problems when they don't question the assumption that "A good church will quickly become a big church." Not true. Just doing the "same" as we've always done it will not grow a church body in a culture that is constantly changing. Static churches in changing cultures are doomed to dwindle.

There are some people who like "same" and when we're doing "different," then some people will not like it. You need to understand that at the beginning. Otherwise, you'll go through a process and develop some ideas, and someone will opt out because they don't want to offend people who like "same" and then you will be back to square one. So be determined to get your head out of the sand and think outside the sand-box in which you have always been shoveling. In fact, you may need to build a new sand-box!

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