

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Money Follows Vision

It is an old, but still accurate, truism, "Money follows great ideas."

If a lack of financial resources seems to be a regular condition in your church, the chances are good that you don't have a financial problem...you have a vision problem.

Victor Frankl, noted Jewish psychologist and survivor of a German concentration camp, wrote the insightful book *Man's*

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Search for Meaning. In the book Frankl recalls those in the camp who did, and did not make it out. While most had no choice of their destiny once they arrived at Auschwitz, some were kept alive to service the needs of the camp. Among those who lived through the terrible ordeal rather than commit suicide in those hellish conditions, Frankl found a common thread, a trait essential to their survival. All those who made it through had something significant yet to do in their future. "It is a peculiarity of mankind," Frankl later wrote, "that we can only live by looking to the future. This is our salvation, even in the most difficult moments of our existence." A dream, or vision, is what keeps people focused on the future. Especially in the hard times, it is essential. And, whether it is an individual, a family, a country, or a church...without a dream the people perish (Prov. 29:18).

Leading a focused, effective, growing church is not easy. In fact, it is easier to lead a stagnant, ingrown, plateaued

church. But the anticipation and challenge of pursuing a vision not only makes the effort meaningful, but the changed lives and new disciples that occur make that journey well worth the effort. A vision is defined as: "a cherished ambition, aspiration, or ideal." "It is that vision," observes Donald McGavran, one of history's most noted missiologists, "that compels the pilgrimage."

The pursuit of a vision first requires the existence of a vision. Thus, the first concern is to identify a vision for your church. In reality, you are not looking for just any vision, you are seeking God's unique vision for your church. Make it a part of your constant prayer life to ask God that he grant his vision

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Vision compels the pilgrimage

Ask God to make his vision clearly known.

to be made clearly known. Your attitude and prayer should reflect the prophet Balam's words, who wished to be "...one who hears the words of God, who sees a vision from the Almighty, who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are opened..." (Num. 24:4 NIV).

Many authors in the field of spiritual gifts suggest there is a spiritual gift of vision. Others identify it as the gift of "faith." In either case, the gift is defined as: "The special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to discern with extraordinary confidence the will and purposes of God for the future of His work."

If you believe that the Holy Spirit gives Christians spiritual gifts, that means there are some people in your church with that gift of faith/vision. Do you know who they are? Are you tapping into their special giftedness to see God's purposes identified and then pursued in the future of your church? A "dream team" comprised of people with the gift of vision who are seeking God's vision can be a very invigorating experience. Here are a few questions to spark the conversation in such a group:

How does God want to express Himself through this church in this community?

If our church building burned down, would we rebuild it to be the same? If not, what would we change?

If we were starting our church from scratch, what would we do differently?

If our church lived up to God's expectation, in five years we would ... [fill in the blank].

Or, try this activity with different groups throughout the church.:

Begin by reviewing God's priorities as found in Scripture. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is a great place to start. Then, do some dreaming about your church. Take a few moments to have group members clear their mind. Ask each person to work independently and imagine their church *five years from today*. Have them think about some or all of the following areas, and then write down a sentence or two about each: *Worship, Education, Evangelism, Membership Size, Facility, Member Involvement, and Other areas*.

Once everyone is done, go around the room and have members share their dream for the first category ("worship"). If a person doesn't have a statement for that (or any) particular category, it's fine to pass. After everyone has finished, discuss common elements heard from participants, and write down some of those vision ideas. Then go on to the next category and repeat the process.

A timeline cannot be put on how long it will take to confidently grasp God's vision for your church. But major steps forward should not be taken without such confidence. Once you have determined your vision, begin communicating it to the congregation. Resist the urge to preach a sermon on the vision as your first step. Instead develop a complete diffusion plan. Start by sharing the vision with the main church board, and then gradually fan out over the entire church.



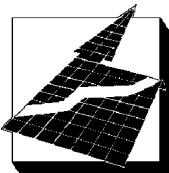
For additional ideas on sharing your vision, see *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Baker Books 2013).

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Beyond the First Visit

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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Beyond the First Visit

Does your church put out the "welcome" mat or the "do not disturb" sign?

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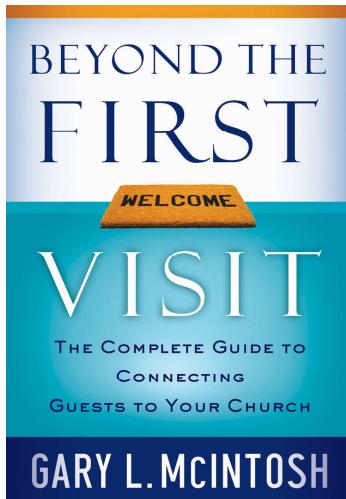
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—George G. Hunter, III

Dr. McIntosh has served numerous churches in over 87 denominations throughout the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

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