
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Two Risks in Ministry

After nearly nine years in pastoral ministry, I found myself struggling with having enough energy to do the job.

Each day I went into my office, shut the door, and promptly fell asleep on the couch. No doubt people in the outer offices detected the silence and assumed I was praying. They were right to one extent. I was praying . . . for a new place of ministry that would refresh my energy level. The years of sermon prep, pastoral care, handling conflict, and leading change had taken a toll. When I first came to this church, I wore a clean white tunic (so to speak). However, after nine years of making changes, dealing with upset parishioners, and facing numerous issues—large and small—, my tunic was quite stained. Stained, in fact, to the point that I could no longer lead. I eventually moved on to a new place of ministry that provided fresh challenge and opportunity for my personal growth and development.

Looking back on those days, I now recognize I was battling with the two main reasons pastors change ministry: Vision Conflict and Compassion Fatigue.

Vision Conflict

Vision conflict is a relative new concept, although the essential aspects have been around ever since pastoral ministry has existed. Simply put, *vision conflict* refers to the difference between what pastors expect to happen when they enter ministry and what actually happens.

When pastors experience a call to ministry, it is natural to develop expectations about what that ministry will be like. For example, it's common for younger pastors to see themselves spending nearly all week studying the text of Scripture in preparation to preach on Sunday. Disparity arises as they discover ministry is constructed around high demands and numerous meetings, which may actually keep them away from the study of Scripture. Such vision conflict between what they expect and what they actually find in ministry, often results in depressed feeling of self-doubt and fear.

Looking for a coach? Our team is available. Email Dr. Gary L. McIntosh at cgnet@earthlink.net or call 951-506-3086 for full details.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is more commonly understood than vision conflict. Other words that are used to describe the same phenomena are spiritual fatigue, compassion stress, and emotional labor. *Compassion fatigue* is the depletion of emotional, spiritual, and physical energy that a pastor experiences when taking on too much of other people's burdens. It can demonstrate itself in a number of maladies, but depression and feelings of always being tired are common.

The presence of compassion fatigue among pastors is to be expected, indeed it is inevitable. Pastors serve in a role that has a high-low liability. For example, a high emotional experience on Sunday morning at worship may be followed by a low emotional experience within a few minutes or hours when a church member registers a complaint because his or her needs were not met as expected.

Fatigue also comes as pastors shepherd others through times of high trauma, like the death of a loved one, which may leave pastors depleted of their own spiritual and emotional reserves. And, given the reality that pastors serve the very people they also rely on for their own spiritual and emotional support, it is easy to see how this dual relationship results in fatigue.

Facing the Facts

Are you experiencing vision conflict or compassion fatigue? While the following questionnaire is not perfect, it will give you a basic insight into your current situation. Answer each of the questions YES or NO.

1. I feel overworked.
2. My sense of confidence is diminished.
3. My trust in church leaders is weak.
4. I wonder about my calling as a pastor.
5. My life is far too stressful.
6. I feel my work is futile.
7. I feel isolated and alone.
8. My board and I disagree on the vision of the church.
9. I feel emotionally empty.
10. I am confused about my major role.
11. My spouse and family are unhappy.
12. I am not working in my area of giftedness.
13. My work is too demanding.
14. I am insecure in my present position.
15. I must prove myself a hard worker.
16. My ministry is not satisfying.
17. It is difficult for me to say "no."
18. My dream of success has not happened.
19. I can't meet the needs of my people.
20. I would like to leave my church.

If you answer YES to ten or more questions, you are likely facing either vision conflict or compassion fatigue. Are most of your YES answers to the odd numbered questions? Then you are facing compassion fatigue. If most of the YES answers are to the even numbered questions, you are struggling with vision conflict. Why not talk with someone you trust about your answers?

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Church Consulting

Picture your church in the not-too-distant future. Imagine a gradually changing attitude reflecting a new sense of expectancy. Imagine new people with a contagious enthusiasm for Christ and your church. Imagine ministries pulsating with new life. Imagine a new heart for mission in your church.

Is it possible? The answer . . . a resounding YES! It is possible. Indeed, God very much wants to see it happen. Just think about it. God wants your church to grow! And, the McIntosh Church Growth Network stands ready to assist you through personal coaching and/or your church through consulting to see growth take place.

Gary L. McIntosh is considered one of the premier church consultants in the United States today. Here is what others are saying about his church consultations and guidance.

“I cannot tell you how much I appreciated your consultation with our elders. You are a wealth of help and guidance. And you do it with such grace! As I sat there listening to you describe the challenges of growing from 400-800, I noticed the elders faces. They were lighting up with understanding about things that I would have found difficult to say. You did a masterful job.” —**Jerry Reub, Cornerstone Church**

“It was wonderful to return from my time in England and Indonesia and to receive the McIntosh Report. Thank you for its clarity, brevity, wisdom and insight. Everybody so far has received it with enthusiasm, which is no mean feat in the Midwest! May God richly bless you in your ministry of strengthening and supporting the Church.” —**C. John Steer, Autumn Ridge Church**

“I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with Gary individually on several occasions, and he has been a tremendous blessing to my life and ministry. Gary is a very wise, stable, insightful and capable Christian man. The counsel, guidance and direction Gary has offered to me over the past two years have been extremely helpful.” —**John W. Tastad, East Hills Christian Church**

“The impact has been incredible. Through his insight and recommendations I have grown as a pastor in ways I never thought possible. We appreciated not only Gary’s expertise but also the spirit by which he worked with us. He was compassionate, sensitive and personable as he interviewed our people, brought recommendations and continues to lead us through the growing process. Each conversation has been an encouragement to me as a pastor to continue in the work to which God has called me.” —**Robert L. Bletcher, Faith Evangelical Church**

If you could replenish the spiritual dynamic of your church, would you be interested?

If you could enhance the guest welcome of your church, would you be interested?

If you could improve the growth environment of your church, would you be interested?

If you could increase the outreach potential of your church, would you be interested?

If you could align your staff in a more productive way, would you be interested?

Dr. Gary L. McIntosh can help you with these and other aspects of fruitful ministry. For full information email Gary at cgnet@earthlink.net or call 951-506-3086 for details.