
GROWTH POINTS

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

Establish Direction

Recent publications have emphasized the importance of developing a vision statement for a church, and rightly so.

However, a vision statement is only part of a larger concept. Much more than a vision is need to set direction for a church. It takes patience, tenacity, gentle persuasion, good communication, and, most of all, time, to see a new direction established. Here's a few insights:

First, you can't rent a vision. At first, borrowing a vision statement from a successful church seems like a good idea. However, it's akin to renting a car. While it's nice, it's not yours. You don't own it! Effective vision statements are owned by the congregation, not just rented.

Second, the concept of vision lacks clarity. Even when vision is treated as significant, it assumes an undefined content, left to be filled in by the audience. Expressed differently, an illusion of communication is present in the word vision. When a person hears that word, they think they know what it means, but rarely do. More problematic, each hearer fills in the content differently, according to their own perceptions, assumptions, and biases.

Third, a pastor must take responsibility for leadership. In part this means creating clarity in a sea of confusion. It's best to assume the board, formal and informal leaders, don't know how to give or set direction. They might if they could, but they can't. It's extremely rare to see a board or committee determine a church's vision. Thus, it falls to the pastor to nudge them along toward the future.

Fourth, setting direction is a process not an event. It takes more than a weekend retreat, however, to establish a new direction for a local church. No one should attempt to set a new direction for a church unless they're willing to commit to a minimum of three years of hard work, sometimes longer.

Fifth, you can't plan for ever. An old proverb says, "He who deliberates fully before taking a step will spend their entire life on one leg." An average plan put into action is better than an excellent plan left undone. The point is to get moving and let God direct your steps along the way (see Proverbs 16:9).

Suggestions to get started:

First, talk to God. The idea of a master plan signals two key concepts. One, it is a MASTER plan, that is, a plan informed by what The Master, Jesus Christ, desires for his church. Two, it's a master PLAN, that is, the key plans your church will follow for the next few years.

Keep in mind that Jesus said, “I will build my church,” which must include a plan for every local church. Since he is “head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 2:22), it’s reasonable to ask him to reveal his plan for your local church. So, begin the process of setting direction by asking in prayer for Jesus Christ to reveal his plan to you and the other leaders on your team.

Second, form a team to develop a master plan. A board or committee seldom thinks about establishing a vision on its own. In churches, though, involving the key leaders on a planning team is needed to create ownership. This team is most often the board. It’s wise to include key influencers if you desire for the plan to gain traction. Godly character of the people on the team is foundational, of course, but not sufficient. Look to see what type of experience is needed to accomplish the potential plan. If you hope to build a new facility, for instance, try and include someone on the team who has experiences in that area.

Third, study the church’s history. Churches have personality, and, like individuals, the past impacts the present and future. Along with the members of your team, complete a study of your church.

Fourth, investigate the needs of the church and community. What is working or not working? How is the community around the church changing? What are the needs of the unchurched in our community? What does

the church need to change to be fruitful in the next three years?

Fifth, complete a KWIKN (pronounced “quicken”) analysis. Gather the entire master planning team together and do the KWIKN analysis: Knowing What We Know Now, what do we want to do for the coming three years? This one major question can be enlarged by asking What do we want to start doing? What should we stop doing? What changes must we make to be fruitful in the next three years?

Sixth, write a master plan. Once you’ve done the praying, the studying, and the analyzing, you can begin to write out a master plan. It should include a Statement of Purpose (What is the biblical reason your church exists?); a Statement of Vision (What do you hope to accomplish?); A Statement of Goals (What are you specifically going to do?). A pivotal question at this point in the process is Assuming the blessing of God on our church, in three years we hope to see . . . 1 and 2 and 3. These become your goals.

Lastly, and this is crucial, develop a plan where non-business people can work it, and where the average person in your church can say, “This makes sense.” The old adage of Keep It Simple is applicable.

**Adapted from Dr. McIntosh’s
forthcoming book
*The Solo Pastor***

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