

Why Isn't the church in America growing? Are we using the Covid Pandemic as an excuse on why our church has leveled off or declining? Or are we using the excuse that the culture in America has changed? It has, but those are merely excuses. According to Statistics, over 15,000 churches will close this year and another 15,000 won't be able to pay their pastor a living wage.

The real truth does not lie in excuses. The real fact lies within the church itself. America needs what the church has, but in truth, many of our churches are more inwardly focused than they are outwardly focused. In other words, many of our churches have lost its evangelistic thrust and love for the lost; otherwise, the church will be growing and making a difference in lives of everyone in their community.

So, how do churches and pastors move forward and do what God has called them to do? People in our church and community awaits our decision. It is imperative that our churches remain focused on the Great Commission and make a difference in the hearts and lives of individuals all around. Without the church, what hope does America have? We can help others to "fear not" and to place their faith in the One who can bring "everlasting peace". The church can be a tremendous help for those in need or are hurting.

There are some challenging times for the church. The leadership must be strong and focused on a vision on reaching the lost. Without that vision and heart to do what God has called the church to do, what hope does America have? Again, America needs what the church has but people will not come running into the church. According to the Gallop Poll, only 46% of people in our country state they have a religious affiliation, down from 70% for over 60 years! For the first time, there are more people in America who claim the church and religion is not important to them. Has the church dropped the ball in promoting the gospel? Or is the gospel for only those inside the church?

Our nation is hurting, and people are crying out for help. Without sounding too harsh, is the church hearing those cries? Most of us see the violence, chaos, protests, and a moral decay. While Christians may not like what they see, people are communicating they need help, they just do not know the church has the answer to their cries. We need to move the church forward to reach those who are hurting. The real question is whether the church can set new goals that will include the lost and hurting.

Can the church set new goals that will include those who are lost and hurting?

10 Ideas on Moving Your Church Forward

- **Begins with prayer.** Even if our church is blessed to have great leaders and staff members, our goals and objectives are inferior to God's. None of us predicted this pandemic, but He knew it was coming, and He will know how your church can move forward more effectively with His Plan.
- **Begins with Planning/Vision.** There are many questions that a church may ask itself to help the church move forward:

1. Address unanswered questions such as, "How can we get new people to visit our church?", "How can our church be attractive enough for others to notice her importance?" and "How can the church reach out to others in a receptive way?"
2. Create a new Vision/Mission Statement.
3. Create a strategic plan for your church that includes your goals, objectives, mission, outreach, and general direction of your church. Ask, "What do you hope to accomplish?" "Is your goal or vision measurable and one that you can accomplish?" What do you need in place to successfully kick these off?
4. The vision of the church must be something your whole church and leadership will embrace, participate, and believe in that vision.
5. Using your strengths, objectively brainstorm with others on how this plan will successfully move your church forward with everyone working together and one accord.
6. Develop a formal budgeting plan to insure adequate funding for your mission strategy. It should also include a plan for equipment and salaries. Do not forget to include capital improvements if needed.
7. Planning and expectations should be in writing and achievable. What good are goals if they are not achievable or not communicated well with others? A lack of communication is a lack of planning and a lack of having a defined plan leads to operating "less-than" in what we could be operating.
8. Communicate this vision throughout the year. You may use a slogan or theme when describing it. Frequently give updates and progress on what the church has achieved. This can build excitement that will carry further momentum.
9. Assign leaders to oversee specific tasks or outreach. Have regular meetings with team members to discuss what is working and what is not. Quickly correct those areas that are not productive.
10. The church leadership must be unified from top to bottom. Pastors need to share how instrumental each leader is on moving the church forward.

- **Begins with Monitoring.** Monitor your goals and objectives on a regular basis to make sure you are on track. Modify or adjust as needed to ensure the success you are hoping for.
- **Begins with the Right People.** A church does not have to have a large payroll or staff to ensure success, but no church can operate without people. Every church must rely on volunteers to fill the gaps needed to make every church run effectively! The key is finding the right personnel to help your church to move forward in a way that produces positive results.
- **Begins with Communicating to Your Church Family and Community.** Take time to communicate your goals and objectives to the church and advertise this regularly to the community. Your church family and workers need to invest in your vision! Getting people involved and "on the same page" can result in positive results. Remember...Many people can accomplish much more than just a few. Look for ways to keep your people engaged.

- **Begins with Fruit.** This could have easily been listed first but nothing comes before prayer. We need His (the Lord's) guidance, we also need to plan and monitor our progress from time to time. We are hopeful we have the right people with the right spirit to communicate what we are hoping to accomplish. But...without love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, why would anyone want to be a part of your church family? This is a must. A good leader will remind and maintain the "Fruits" in every meeting and event.
- **Begins with Realness.** People in your community are hurting. Many are looking for answers even if they may be unaware of what they need. The church has a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of thousands of people but again, the church must be real. People are looking for a *real church* with *real people* who *really care*. The church should be a light and hope for all to see. It may mean that our church may look a little different but ask yourself, "What does God want the church to do, sit still or move forward?" Are you willing to do this for the Kingdom of God?

These are only a few planning ideas for you and your church. Each day brings wonderful opportunities to reach out to even more people. Jesus is still the answer to so many needs and people in our Nation. But the Lord uses us, the church, to accomplish His mission and outreach to others.

We are simply encouraging pastors and churches to refocus on what God has called us to be...His vessel, hand, and instrument in bringing others into the Kingdom of God. Learning from our past and moving forward with His guidance, we will surely accomplish much more. May God bless you for what you do for the Kingdom of God.