

Your Church Can Grow: Rethinking Mission, Strategy, and Involvement

By Bob Young

Many churches are not growing. They want to know why. Let me tell you what I see. The reason churches don't grow, the reason churches don't evangelize, the reason church mission programs don't produce multitudes of new souls and dozens of new churches -- the church is not focused on what it is called to be about!

Three things are essential:

- Churches must identify their mission, purpose, and goal. This church exists to _____.
- Churches must focus every strategy (ministry) on the mission. Everything must be focused on the task.
- Churches must help members become involved in those ministries that support the mission.

In most churches, this rethinking process will greatly simplify the ministry system. It will also help the members become engaged in the primary ministry of the church.

Some church leaders think this is backward. The common thinking is that we need as many activities and options as possible. If we do not have a lot of activities and options, people will not come. If we do not have a lot of activities, people will not be involved in the activities of the church.

The truth is just the opposite. If a church has too many activities, involvement in the ministries that matter drops off. If there are too many options, involvement lessens. People burn out; people have trouble choosing options; some choose so many activities that they can do none of them well.

It is true that a church with lots of programs and ministries can get people involved in a lot of stuff—but member involvement that supports and advances the church's mission occurs only when the members are involved in the core activities. The only way to accomplish that is to make sure that the core activities that genuinely support the church's mission are the only options.

Identity the mission and simplify the strategy. Churches with a lot of programs or ministries that are "off mission" have a hard time getting those who are involved in the peripheral programs to become involved in those things that keep the church "on mission." Church leaders must know what it is that people really ought to do and then help them do it. Too many Christians are passionate about some peripheral program but spend little time thinking about God's ultimate, eternal purpose. They seek their mission instead of the mission.

The only kind of church involvement that really matters is involvement in the activities that advance the church's mission.

Here are some suggestions to begin the process.

- Help the church determine what its mission is—based on God's purpose, its own context, opportunities, circumstances, resources, etc.
- Evaluate the church's strategic plan for ministry in terms of its mission.
- Use the mission and strategy to define member involvement, ministries, and programs, to make certain that every member is "on mission."
- Make sure the ministries and involvement opportunities advance the vision and mission.
- Get rid of the ministries and program involvements that distract members and take them "off mission."