

Discovering our purpose What Drives this Congregation?

Intro: Just before giving a lavish party at his estate, a tycoon had his swimming pool filled with poisonous snakes. He called the guests together and announced, "To anyone brave enough to swim across this pool, I will give the choice of a thousand acres of my oil fields, 10,000 head of cattle, or my daughter's hand in marriage." No sooner were his words spoken than a young man plunged in, swam across the pool and climbed out--unscathed but breathless. "Congratulations!" the tycoon greeted him. "Do you want my oil fields?" "No!" gasped the guest. "The 10,000 head of cattle?" "No!" the young man shouted. "Well, how about my daughter's--" "No!" "You must want something," said the puzzled host. "I just want to know the name of the guy who pushed me in!"

That young man was acting with a different motivation, not quite the one that his host thought.

Motivation is important to a church. And, every church has its own motivation. Every church is driven by something. There is a guiding force, a controlling assumption, a directing conviction behind everything that happens. It may be unspoken. It may be unknown to many. Most likely it's never been officially ratified by the congregation. But it is there, influencing every aspect of the church's life.

What is the driving force behind Perry Heights?

Congregations are often driven by inappropriate influences

Some churches are driven by tradition

The seven last words of the church are "We've never done it that way before". And the most fearful word in the human vocabulary is "change".

There are "traditions" that are thoroughly Biblical (1 Cor. 11:1). These can never be discarded. There are other traditions that are expedient ways our forefathers implemented God's traditions. We need not discard what has worked well for the sake of change. But we must have the integrity to admit it when what we've done is no longer working. We must learn to break out of old paradigms. Being fresh and vital does not mean being compromising and unscriptural. But it does call upon us to ask hard questions that may make us uncomfortable:

What are we doing that works? And what is not working?

What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses?

Where could the church improve its characteristics?

We cannot be driven purely by tradition!

Some churches are driven by strong personalities

The key phrase in personality driven churches is: “What does the leader or some prominent member want?” The church then moves in the direction of this prominent and strong person. God wants the church to have leaders (Ac. 14:23). They can give us a vision of what we need to be.

But leaders can be a liability if:

The leader’s concepts are misinformed.

Leaders do not agree on the direction of the church.

The leader leaves or dies?

We cannot be driven purely by personalities or leaders.

Some churches are driven by money

The key question is, “How much will it cost?” Every decision stands or falls on its cost implications.

Counting the cost is important (Lk. 14:28). But it is not the most important question. What should be important is not, “How much did we save?” but “How many did we save?”

Some churches are driven by programs

The key question is, “Who will fill the slots?” We are constantly looking for new people to take over the burnouts and the dropouts. Church programs may enable us to implement our purposes or they may keep us so busy that we don’t have time for effective ministry. But, sometimes its good to ask ourselves whether or not the programs are needed, or whether they simply make us all busy doing what doesn’t really make a difference.

Some churches are driven by facilities

The key question is, “What do we need to do to the building? What will our building allow us to do?”

All too often the building becomes the focus of business meetings. We spend way too much time talking about “brick and mortar” and not enough talking about the real business of the church. Sometimes providing an impressive structure to meet in causes us to sacrifice needed funds for fruitful work. Sometimes refusing to increase the size of a facility may discourage newcomers and leave us satisfied with where are. In these cases, the facility is driving the church’s actions.

Some churches are driven by events?

The key question is, “What’s on the calendar for this week?” Some churches imagine that the more events they plan the better the church, that exhaustion is next to godliness. And so we fill the calendar with one event after another and we all become tired, irritable and ineffective at doing what God wants us to do. It is good to plan events, but again we must ask, “Do they help us meet our objectives?” They cannot become ends within themselves.

Some churches are driven by numbers?

The key question is, “What do outsiders want?”

It is important to be sensitive to the needs and interests of outsiders. Reaching outsiders is not the whole of the church's work. There must be balance. We must be seeker sensitive but not seeker driven.

A growing and healthy church is not driven by any of these.

The Biblical model: Purpose-driven church

A healthy and growing church is one that is driven by a commitment to the purposes of God!

The church is the result of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10) To be the true church of Christ we must fulfill that eternal purpose. The first half of Ephesians stress the "wealth" God purposed for us. But the second half stress the "walk" God purposed for us. We can't enjoy the wealth without walking the walk!

That means that our purpose must be clearly defined by Jesus' own statements about what He wants us to be!

Mt. 16:18

Col. 1:18

This is "the church of Christ". For many people that is a people who are committed to some traditional hermeneutic that has resulted in a people different from the rest of the religious world. But, that's not enough to justify our existence. We have a right to exist only if we answer the call of discipleship!

Mt. 28:19

It means that our teaching and our actions are measured, not by our own agenda, societies' preferences, but Jesus' commandments!

Col. 3:17

1 Pet. 4:11

A rich man was determined to give his mother a birthday present that would outshine all others. He read of a bird that had a vocabulary of 4000 words, could speak in numerous languages and sing 3 operatic arias. He immediately bought the bird for \$50,000 and had it delivered to his mother. The next day he phoned to see if she had received the bird. "What did you think of the bird?" he asked. She replied, "It was delicious." Some churches don't seem to have a clue about what God had in mind when he gave us.

Discovering our purpose has many benefits.

Discovering our purpose unites God's people.

The power of unity is taught all over the Scripture (1 Cor. 1:10).

It motivates us to get involved and cooperate (Phil. 1:27).

No group can move forward one step until it unites on direction! Amos 3:3 Cf. the Israelites. A million or so strong they proceeded from camp to camp all over the Sinai peninsula, because they all had agreed to follow the leading of God!

Discovering our purpose ignites God's people.

When we are discouraged or in decline, redefining our purpose will spark renewed interest in the congregation. It will build congregational morale.

Discovering our purpose enable us to succeed (Prov. 19:21).

It enables us to concentrate our efforts where they really count.

It reduces frustration of unrealistic expectations. It keeps us from the frustration of trying to please everyone!

It assists evaluation. When we have clear purposes we can evaluate whether we are "on track" or not.

Conclusion: Sign on door: "Gone out of business. Didn't know what our business was." 1963 -- University Christian Church in NY

Let's make sure that that we are not incorrectly driven by the wrong motivations. Instead we need to be purpose-driven. And let's make sure that the purpose that drives us is God's purpose expressed through Jesus Christ and not our own agenda.

(Source "The purpose-driven church by Rick Warren)