

Preachers' Pen Points

Overcoming Church Decline



Introductory note: In my past two articles I have focused on a significant source of loss of members for any local congregation. It is the inability to properly address and resolve conflicts and disagreements between members, and between members and those in leadership/teaching roles. As long as a congregation has people who hold personal bitterness toward other members or who seek power by promoting an "us vs. them" mentality, the church will never recover from decline. Instead it will only continue to lose ground through demoralization and conflict. However, when we learn to handle these problems, then it is possible to take positive steps to reach others with the gospel. Over the next few weeks I hope to discuss positive changes that can assist us in overcoming the past decade of numerical decline.)

Attitude changes are essential!

There are many positive changes a congregation may make to reverse declining numerical trends and establish attitudes and patterns of behavior that will result in positive growth. Let's consider some of these essential changes.

Put the past behind!

It is very important for churches to understand the contributing causes of numerical loss. Understanding them will help us correct our attitudes and actions in constructive ways. But, having learned from past mistakes we need to put them behind us and start looking ahead (Phil. 3:13).

Evaluate congregational strengths!

In the midst of decline, churches often forget the assets they have. They focus on who's not here rather than who is, on what we don't have rather than what we do have! It is essential then that we

affirm our strengths and assets, and how we may use them to rebuild (Rev. 3:2).

Determine to make things better!

If the church is to grow, we must make a personal commitment to make meaningful contributions to the work rather than sitting on the sidelines moping over losses or blaming and criticizing others. We have a choice! We can talk about how discouraged we are, or we can get back to work and become more encouraged (Rev. 2:4-5).

Make the commitment to excellence!

Depression results in half-hearted effort. It shows in poorly attended services and meetings, unenthusiastic worship, dull Bible classes, and a general congregational malaise (Rev. 3:15). All this can be changed by each person committing to do the best job he can in whatever role he finds himself.

Be a team player!

As a church declines more and more people take the sidelines or bail out. Fewer and fewer people are left to work. Some enjoy this condition because it feeds the egotistical conception that the church cannot exist without them and their perceived value increases more and more. The truth is, the cause of Christ has no superstars! Everyone is needed and everyone must be a team player who will work with all other members if the church is to succeed (Eph. 4:16).

Look to God for blessings!

If there was ever a time to pray together, to look to God for help, it is now! We can experience true growth only when we want to grow in our relationship with God and renew our commitment to His work. He has promised to supply the blessings we need, if we will pray fervently and work faithfully!

(Mt. 28:20; Phil. 2:12-13).

Don't give up hope!

With these attitude changes on the part of every member, amazing things can happen in a relatively short period of time. With God's blessing, a congregation can reverse past mistakes and plain bad luck and thrive again. God can open doors for us and make us succeed (Rev. 3:8)!

The choice is ours! The time is now!