

A Kingdom Growth Mindset in the Midlands of South Carolina

Serving as a Family of Baptist Congregations – Words of Challenge for CMBA
Third Dispatch

By

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Factors surrounding church growth and church sustainability were addressed in the first two dispatches. (See the dispatches at www.BullardJournal.org.)

For congregations to serve with a Kingdom mindset more than a church growth or church sustainability mindset, they must understand from their founding the need to renew the core while extending the ministry. This means continually raising up the next generation of leaders, passing on to them the mantle of missional leadership, and realizing the strategies and tactics of missional ministry may change with each generation.

Many congregations engage in great missional ministry in addition to church growth emphases for the first generation of their lives – approximately 18-21 years – and never reach the same depths of missional ministry again. The leaders and followers who formed the core of the congregation during that first generation guide the ministry of the congregation going forward based on how they did it during the first generation.

They are willing for other people to connect with them in their missional ministry, but they guard the core values and key strategies of that ministry. As such, they never develop the next generation of leaders for the missional ministry they believe God gave to them.

In one congregation, the woman who was leader of the major missions projects of the church declared during a revisioning process that the way they did missions projects was non-negotiable. Fortunately, a 100-day season of prayer in which she took part brought a new revelation to her, and the missions projects transitioned to a new generation with innovative methods. They renewed the core while extending the ministry.

It is always possible that at some hinge point in the life of a congregation a new generation of people come into leadership roles and a period of moving forward and a new era of missional ministry takes place. If that is desirable – and I think it is – how is that happening in your congregation?

Many congregations – following the first generation of their life – are never captivated by the Kingdom growth mindset again. Their missional involvements become more indirect than direct, and the people who are the focus of their ministry are people with whom they never develop a primary spiritual relationship. They prefer to give money or commodities rather than have an interpersonal, spiritual intimate relationship with the people who are the focus of their ministry.

An example was a congregation known as the “Potato Church.” They grew and gave away tens of thousands of pounds of potatoes each year. They did not know the names of many of the households who were recipients because it was a task in which they engaged and not a relationship they cultivated. They never developed a new generation of leaders and did not

renew the core of the congregation in terms of missional leadership while they were extending the ministry.

They reached a point where they no longer had the leadership to engage in the ministry they felt was God's vision for them. They retrenched. They backed up. They downsized their ministry. They did not renew the core while extending the ministry. They began a death march of some yet undetermined length.

My formal seminary education began in a period just following the 1960s when many urban congregations were engaged in prophetic ministry but were not reaching a new generation of leaders. Or, as I am suggesting, they were not renewing the core while extending their ministry. The rightness of this prophetic ministry was something we young theologues liked to debate late into the night.

One evening a friend stuck his head in my room and said, "I get it. If the congregations engaged in prophetic ministry die while doing this ministry, they die as unto the Lord." I responded, "That is ridiculous. If they die they are dead. And, if the ministry in which they were engaged was a holy cause then they should have done something to renew the core of the congregation so the ministry could live another day."

How about your congregation? Are you holding on to the past? Or are you embracing a new Kingdom mindset and inviting a new generation of leaders to join you as you renew the core and extend the ministry? What are you doing to assertively connect with and empower the next generation of leaders in your congregation that God's call upon your congregation might thrive in the years ahead?