

Christ Church Communique



The Monthly Newsletter of Christ Church

July 2006

From Good to Great

Introduction

What makes for a great church? In part, the answer to this question depends upon how one defines, “great.” For some, “great” means “large.” For others, “great” equals “growing.” Yet others would include references to the music, socials, friendliness, excellent preaching, programs, facilities, and a host of other things in their definition of “great.” However, none of these things—alone or in combination—characterize a “great” church. Oh, there is nothing wrong, per se, with any of these things, but they do not (individually or collectively) constitute a “great” church.

As I have developed elsewhere, a “great” church is that which reflects the biblical theology and priorities that God Himself established to cultivate spiritual health and holiness in the lives of both individual believers and the local church, and to accomplish His purposes. Such makes for a “great” church, and here at Christ Church we are keen to develop, communicate, teach, and serve God’s theology and priorities in ways that are clear and fruitful.

It begins with our mission statement—that which reflects God’s vision for His Church and defines our existence. And we have consistently and prominently displayed in nearly every imaginable format that Christ Church exists to:

*“Declare the preeminence of Christ in all things,
to the glory of God in everything,
and for the joy of all peoples everywhere.”*

Such is our vision...our purpose...our endless pursuit that will continue as long as the Lord tarries.

It continues with identifying the theology and priorities of God for His Church—the essentials of our life and ministry together. And, as we have laid out in detail, Christ Church is committed to:

Preaching the Word;
Praising God with meaningful worship;
Pursuing and affirming truth;
Preparing believers to think and live Christianly;
Presenting our very best to the glory of God; and,
Permeating a needy world with the Gospel

These are God’s priorities for His Church, and they provide the contours and impetus for the vision that we pursue.

We have also identified the spheres of ministry through which God’s vision for His Church will be pursued, and God’s theology and priorities will be realized. And these areas include:

Worship
Equipping
Fellowship
Expression

Every ministry, function, and activity of the church ought to fit under one or more of these categories in order to ensure that God’s theology and priorities are being pursued in the service of God’s vision for His Church.

Sadly, few churches today have come this far. Rather, they pursue *their* own agenda, for *their* own church, in *their* own ways, and believe that the church exists for *their* own benefit and needs. But even among those churches that have faithfully recaptured God’s vision, theology, priorities and ministries for His own Church, exceedingly few will ever make the leap from “good” to “great.”

What makes the difference? How can a good church become a “great” church in God’s eyes? Over the next year, I wish to write a series of essays on these questions in an effort to help move us along, under God’s guidance, from “good” to “great.”

The Neglected Element

Even where a church has crafted and communicated a coherent vision statement and knows what it “should” be doing, there is a tendency to move too quickly from vision to ministry implementation. For example, someone will float a wonderful idea for a new educational class and before you know it, the discussion almost immediately turns to identifying a teacher, a curriculum, and a room. If the idea is a good one, and the

teacher, curriculum and setting are fine, the class will frequently take off and fly for some time.

Usually, ministries that are perceived as going “well” do not receive much further attention. No one wants to “tinker with success,” and so the leadership will leave well enough alone. However, it is not too long before the class begins to fade. Attendance flags, enthusiasm wanes, and some don’t like the new teacher or classroom. This is when the leadership usually gets involved in an effort to resuscitate a dying ministry. More often than not, things do not turn around, which leads to accelerated efforts to “fix” things and restore back to how they used to be in the “good ‘ole days.” Once this cycle begins, the demise of the particular ministry in question is usually inevitable.

What happened? Well, as odd as it may sound, the seeds of failure were actually planted when the leadership moved from idea to implementation—frequently years before the ministry shows any signs of problems. Unfortunately, a critical step was overlooked, and it is a step that *most* churches (indeed, most corporations!) fail to address. The intermediary step between idea and implementation is **strategy**. To be sure, churches spend far too much time on implementation and far too little time on strategy. Yet, all things being equal, it is strategy that marks the difference between a “good” church and a “great” church.

Principle One: Visualize the “Realized” Vision

In order to “strategize” the ministries of the church in the service of God’s theology and priorities toward the accomplishment of His vision and purposes, one must begin by visualizing what the realized vision would look like. Now, strictly speaking, a vision is never “realized.” In other words, a proper vision is an unattainable objective that perpetuates the existence and strivings of a church. However, for purposes of strategy, one begins by considering what it would be like *if* one were able to “realize,” or accomplish, the vision.

For the purposes of Christ Church, we might ask: “What would a church that is pursuing God’s vision, embracing His theology and priorities, and accomplishing His purposes look like?” Only when one can thoroughly answer this question can the effective implementation of ministries occur. Where one has failed to answer this question, one has planted the seeds for a troubled ministry that will eventually sprout and choke out its effectiveness.

So what does our realized vision look like? I offer the following:

“Christ Church is committed to the individual and corporate spiritual health and holiness of its members as exemplified by lives thoroughly transformed by the Gospel and in constant, consistent, and credible progression toward Christ-likeness.”

In other words, I am saying that a “great” church fosters, equips, and nurtures transformed lives—lives that are significantly, consistently, constantly, and credibly being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and that such ought to manifest itself in how people think, feel, and live.

Do you see how radical this view is? Notice how there is no thought of attendance, buildings, cash, events, media outreach, opportunities, activities, name recognition, or any of the other trappings that so easily ensnare many contemporary churches. Again, there may be nothing wrong, per se, with any of these things, but what I am saying is that, contrary to popular opinion, these things do not correlate with (much less, cause) a “great” church. Rather, it is the converted lives and transformed hearts of the people in response to the Gospel that measures “greatness.” “Great” churches plumb the depth and reality of the Christian faith and make it real and pure, one person at a time.

Notice, too, how this vision can be pursued regardless of the size of one’s church. Indeed, it is no coincidence that most of the truly “great” churches are small in size. The larger one grows, the more challenging it is to be faithful to God’s vision for His church, for it becomes increasingly difficult to personally invest into the spiritual growth and depth of each individual.

You will further notice that this standard of measurement radically changes the way in which leaders, ministries, and activities are evaluated. In the short, unless a leader, ministry, or activity is having a “transforming impact” upon the lives of the people, it ought to be eliminated. This is where strategy becomes important, because it is through the strategic evaluation and implementation of proposed ministries and people that “transformational impact” takes place.

What this means, of course, is that there are *many* activities that churches engage in that, if strategically assessed, would be immediately eliminated. Rather, all of the resources and ministries of the church would be strategically assessed and those showing evidence, or holding reasonable promise, for transformational impact would be strategically aligned with the vision of the church. In other words, strategy bridges the vision for ministry with the implementation of ministry. And this process begins by visualizing the “realized,” or accomplished, vision of the church.

Conclusion

As we reflect upon the first 8 months of Christ Church, we are filled with awe and thanksgiving at all that God has done. Indeed, He has established this church—it is His. He is providing for this church—it is His. He is leading this church—it is His. And He is adding to this church—it is His. And I believe that God is doing all of this because of faithfulness—His and ours.

We have been prayerful and careful to discern God's leading in the establishment of Christ Church, and we have been prayerful and careful in discerning God's vision, purposes, theology, and priorities for His church and its local expression, Christ Church. We have strived to move prayerfully, deliberately, carefully, and obediently at each step along the way, and God has smiled and entrusted to us far beyond anything that anyone could have imagined or asked.

Yes, the vision is biblically sound and clear, and the essentials of a healthy and holy church are firmly in place, but now the real work begins—bridging the development and implementation of ministry with God's vision. Join me in asking for God's wisdom and direction as we seek His face, hear His voice, and follow in His footsteps as He continues to build Christ Church and moves us from "good" to "great" for the cause of His own glory, good pleasure, and purposes.

Grace, peace, and joy,

Robert W. Evans

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Establishing the Godly Habits of a "Great" Church



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