

Christ Church Communiqué



The Monthly Newsletter of Christ Church

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Establishing the Godly Habits of a “Great” Church

In the last issue of the Communiqué, we took up the question, “What makes for a great church?” We said that 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 committed to developing, communicating, teaching, and serving God’s theology and priorities in ways that are both clear and faithful.

And we further explored the fact that, though there are churches that understand what makes for a truly “great” church, few have become the church that God has intended, for they fail to strategically align their resources in the service of their God-given priorities in order to accomplish His vision and purposes for His church. In other words, there are too many churches that are simply trying to launch ministries, implement programs, host events, and organize activities without proper consideration given to the purposes for which they exist. As such, every church ought to establish a set of principles through which every proposed ministry and activity is sifted and evaluated in order to ensure that the time, money, and resources of a church are effectively directed in the service of God’s vision for His church.

To this end, the first principle that we explored in our last issue was that of “Visualizing the ‘Realized’ Vision.” By this we mean that churches ought to evaluate potential ministries and activities according to whether or not they will move the church markedly closer toward its overarching God-designed vision. Of course, this means that those involved in the decision-making process *must* understand the biblical nature of the church, for whom it exists, and God’s design and purposes for His church.

With all of this in view, I have previously proposed the following overarching “realized vision” for Christ Church:

“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 the short, “great” churches nurture transformed lives—lives that are significantly, consistently, constantly, and credibly being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and such ought to manifest itself in how people think, feel, and live. Indeed, this is what God intended for the church to be...and to be about. Visualizing this “realized vision” in action will help guide a church toward “greatness” in God’s eyes.

Now with this as our backdrop, I wish to develop a second principle:

Principle Two: Establish Godly Habits

Contrary to popular belief and practice, “great” churches are not necessarily innovative or creative. Rather, “great” churches understand God’s design for His church and faithfully adopt His priorities as their own. In fact, in “great” churches, God’s priorities for His church are so thoroughly understood, embraced, and adopted that they become habitual in both the life of the corporate church and in the individual lives of its members.

Before we outline those habits that capture and reflect God’s priorities for His church, we might be aided if we clear away some of the “man-made” habits that are commonly pursued and practiced in the contemporary church:

1. Designing Sunday morning services for the purposes of evangelism and outreach. In more recent decades, an increasing number of churches have erroneously adopted the “Great Commission” as their purpose statement (never mind the fact that the “Commission” was given, not to the church, but to individuals; Matt. 28:18-20). And in keeping with this misplaced emphasis, many churches have designed their Sunday morning services with the unbeliever in primary view. From the music, to the attire, to the length and content of the sermon, to the décor, it is difficult to attend a Sunday morning service today that is not intentionally, or otherwise, catering to the desires, proclivities, and sensibilities of those outside the faith. Of course, the pursuit of numerical growth lies at the root of this man-made habit. Sadly, among its consequences is the fact that the evangelical church is rapidly losing its ability (along with its desire) to take up the biblical responsibility of personal evangelism and to gather as the community of the redeemed on Sunday mornings for the express purpose of worshipping God. Over time, this shift has proven disastrous to the evangelical mind and faith—resulting in a dumbed-down Gospel, the rise of “professional” clergy, an entertainment-styled service, a dizzying plethora of programs and events, and shallow Christians who are, in large measure, biblically illiterate and theologically naïve.
2. Conducting an annual Easter and/or Christmas program. These pageant-programs were originally designed to attract and retain the semi-annual visitors who feel strangely compelled to attend a “house of worship” during the two primary holiday seasons of the year. Of course, these special events divert the

church from its primary God-given Sunday purpose (i.e., the community of the redeemed gathered to corporately worship God) to entertaining unchurched people with the hopes of either getting people to make “a decision” or increasing church attendance. Naturally, if the event is “successful,” it only provides further impetus to move the church more fully and permanently away from its God-given purpose. However, rarely do these events draw their intended audience but, rather, merely serve to entertain the community’s sheep. And those few who do return to the church the following week often feel that they have fallen victim to the old “bait-and-switch,” as only a vanishingly small number of churches can sustain the “professionalism,” “polish,” and “pageantry” of their previous week’s semi-annual production. Moreover, unless the music/drama folks are constantly expanding upon the previous year’s program, these events tend to fizzle over time, leaving everyone with a sense of failure because whereas once the “house was packed,” now only half the number show up.

3. Substituting cordiality for community. This is the practice of a church in which everyone is warmly greeted, handshakes are exchanged, and all are made to feel welcome—at least for a week or two. The unconscious (or otherwise) thought here is that people tend to like those who like them and, as such, if a church can be perceived as friendly and warm, people will want to stay. However, this façade quickly wears off, and when it does, those who were once “warmly welcomed” often feel lost and alone in a crowd. Cordiality should never be an end in itself, but rather, merely a genuine prelude to an invitation to cultivate community through committed interdependence, interpersonal intimacy, authenticity, and mutual accountability.
4. Confusing niceness for love. This is the learned habit of those in a church who tend to be more concerned with perceptions and attendance than substance and spiritual health. This habit is fostered by the implicit belief that people will only attend a church if they are getting what they want and being treated in the ways that they prefer. As such, the rigors of biblical love are exchanged for Pollyannaish niceness; broken repentance is exchanged for passing regret; and restorative discipline is exchanged for permissive accommodation. Of course, these kinds of settings rapidly become prime breeding grounds for gossip, rumor, secrets, and sin, as loving biblical confrontation is forfeit in order not to “tip the boat” or scare anyone away.
5. Maintaining ministries, events, and programs because of internal politics and/or history. This is the seemingly ubiquitous habit of perpetuating a ministry or activity because: “we have always done it,” or because “that’s what we are known for in the community,” or because some of the old-timers and/or “power-brokers” enjoy them (i.e., it’s their “baby”) and are willing to work on putting them together. Often, these counterproductive man-made events are signaled by their reference to the number of years that the program has been conducted (“Join us for the Eighth Annual....”). At some point (and, usually, much sooner than anyone on the event committee realizes or is willing to admit), these programs no longer serve any useful function and are almost mechanically maintained by mindlessly placing the following year’s installment on the calendar as soon as the

current event is over. Of course, few are brave enough to ask the painfully obvious question in the planning meeting: “Precisely *why* are we doing this event and precisely *how* does this help us accomplish God’s purposes for His church?” In short order, these events simply become the production of production, and any proffered rationale for the ministry or event is retrospectively contrived.

Well, enough. I could go on and add numerous other examples of bad habits to this list, but you get the picture. So, let’s advance some healthy habits grounded on a radically biblical understanding of what the church is and is to be about:

Habit #1: Preach the Word. The focus of each worship service, educational class, and small group meeting ought to be the sound and effective teaching of God’s Word, for only this brings about true and lasting transformation.

Habit #2: Praise God with meaningful worship. The healthy and holy church stresses the importance of joyously responding to God through corporate worship; the blending of theology and doxology, reflection and praise. Biblical worship leads people to an authentic, personal, and wholesome encounter with the living God, which is truly transforming.

Habit #3: Pursue and affirm truth. Thoroughly transformed lives are characterized by a growing relationship with Jesus Christ that naturally results in a passion for truth as both taught and lived. Spiritually healthy people cultivate lives marked by integrity, humility, maturity, honesty, compassion, stability, and security; graciously commending and defending truth.

Habit #4: Prepare believers to think and live Christianly. A healthy church desires to see every person grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through instruction, modeling, discipleship, and mentoring, lives become intimately connected with the Lord through prayer and praise, and members craft a coherent and integrated Christian worldview that values the unseen and eternal more than the seen and temporal. At heart, a “great” church is one that helps believers apply sound doctrine to daily living, within the context of a warm and loving community actively practicing genuine thoughtfulness, kindness, tenderness, generosity, courtesy, forgiveness, graciousness, encouragement, and appreciation.

Habit # 5: Present our very best to the glory of God. “Great churches” teach their people to live by faith and to entrust God with their plans, time, talents, and treasures. In “great” churches, every member acknowledges that everything is a gift from God and they habitually practice returning the same to Him with thankfulness, cheerfulness, and generosity. Reflecting the infinite excellence of the God, “great” churches pursue excellence in everything that they do.

Habit #6: Permeate a needy world with the Gospel. “Great” churches are Kingdom-minded, concerned for the spiritual and social needs of their community and the world,

and are resolved to make Christ known to all persons everywhere. As such, the church will have at its heart world evangelism and live out the transformational power of the Gospel and proclaim the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to everyone, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching all peoples. Of course, a "great" church affords priority to the task of reaching the lost with the Gospel and gives evidence of this through its prayers, planning, training, outreach, missions, and funding.

Conclusion

Such are the habits of a "great" church, for these habits reflect the 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. As such, these habits form the core essentials of our identity and activity at Christ Church, and we will strive to filter every ministry, action, and program through this grid to ensure that God's purposes are being faithfully pursued and that His vision for His own church reigns supreme in our individual and corporate lives.

Indeed, these are exciting days as we continue to see God move in and through Christ Church—that which He has so clearly established for His own good pleasure and glory. As we continue to refocus and recapture God intended purposes for His church, remain in prayer and humbly ask that God might fashion in us—both individually and corporately—these habits of health and holiness.

Soli Deo Gloria!

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Healthy Church Leadership



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