

Positive Change in the Ministries of the Church

In December each year, our family gathers at our home or one of our children's homes where we celebrate Christmas and enjoy each others company. With fifteen of us, it is a high energy time and we all enjoy it immensely. This year, as our time together was drawing to a close, we were discussing the coming New Year and what God had in store for each of our families. Somehow, the discussion turned to New Year's resolutions. I listened with interest as each member of the family stated their resolution and I wondered what it would be like if all of those resolutions were achieved. I also recalled the statistics that say virtually every New Year's resolution is broken in the first seven to ten days. And yet, as each one stated their resolution, I silently prayed that God would help them achieve their heart's desire. There is something about a fresh start and a new goal to achieve that is empowering and worthy.

Just as a fresh start and new goals are empowering and worthy for individuals and families, they are equally potent for the local church. Do you have a desire to see positive change in the ministries of your church? What is your vision for that change? Is it a complex process or is it easily stated and simple to enact? Every church has the same mission; The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)! The mandate for every church is to go, make disciples, and teach them. Wherever the believer is (home, neighborhood, work, school, etc.) becomes fertile ground for the Gospel message to be proclaimed. To "make disciples" one must share the Gospel with the lost and let the Holy Spirit do His work in their hearts and lives. The teaching part is the intentional discipleship process that best occurs in the local church.

In God's plan, the uniqueness of local church leadership, the location of the church, the Spiritual Gifts of the congregation, and the needs of the community provide

each church with a unique application of the mission within their specific context. As you ponder the opportunities for a fresh start in 2007 you must evaluate your current structures and ministries. Is your church organized to accomplish the mission? Are all of your ministries fruitful and contributing to the accomplishment of the mission? Are all of your leaders committed to the mission of the church? Have you and your leadership, with appropriate input from the congregation, established goals for the new year? Do you have a strategy and specific action plans to achieve these goals? There is a lot to consider as you look to a fresh start for your church in 2007.

I would like to outline four general steps or phases you must accomplish. These are not inclusive but will give you a good idea of the process. Your first step in this process is to get alone with God and seek His leadership for the future. What is God's desire for the church He has given you leadership responsibility for? This is a "must do" first step in the process of having a fresh start. As God leads you, He may give you a vision for the future that seems impossible. Just remember, it is God's vision, not yours. If you are obedient to His leadership, He will empower you, your leaders, and your congregation to fulfill the vision.

The second step in this process is to assemble a small core group of members that are committed to the vision God has provided. This core group will be the catalyst to implement the vision. Change comes hard in the local church so be sure the process is bathed in prayer and the congregation has a good grasp on the vision for the future. Cast the vision with passion and total commitment. Use word pictures that give insight into the vision. Without ownership by the congregation, the vision will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

The third step is to evaluate where you have been (learn from history), where you are (the current reality), and then discover what it will take to accomplish the vision. The only way you can begin the journey to accomplish the vision is to know where you are starting from.

The fourth step would be to develop strategies and action plans and then implement them. Build in milestones so you can evaluate progress. Help the congregation celebrate the progress. Nothing breeds success like success. You may encounter detours along the way; things you didn't anticipate that will have to be dealt with before you can get back on track. This is a normal occurrence and should not deter you from continuing on with the journey to accomplish the vision.

A fresh start may be a very easy task for some churches, but most churches will struggle with this process because it involves change. Be patient, work hard, and watch God work in ways you may have never seen before. God wants your church to be fulfilling The Great Commission in an effective and productive manner. New Year's resolutions are stated because there is a discontent with "what is" and the desire is to change to something better is strong. I pray that you will consider a fresh start in 2007.

Bruce Morrison
Director of Sunday School/Discipleship
Missouri Baptist Convention

Published
The Pathway News Journal
January 23, 2007