

.....

Year End Ministry Check Up

By Dan Reiland

.....

Every year, sometime during the Fall, I get an annual physical - a complete check-up from top to bottom (no pun intended). There are several common threads and thoughts that come to my mind each time this needle sticking, blood sucking, finger poking experience takes place. First, I don't have time. Second, it will hurt. Third, I'm fine; I don't need this. Fourth, I don't want to know what I might learn. Fifth, what if the findings and or prescriptions are wrong? But the overall result is always the same..."I'm sure glad I did this."

As a local church consultant, I find that church leaders have a similar response to an annual ministry check-up as I do to my annual physical at Emory Clinic. Pastor, please catch this...If you'll do this annual evaluation of your church, you too will say "I'm sure glad I did this." Even if you get some bad news...you now have a chance to correct the situation. Ignorance isn't bliss. In the medical field, ignorance can cost you your life. In the church, the stakes are even higher - life eternal.

The following two options are designed to help you and the key leaders in your church conduct a meaningful evaluation. Within each option there are alternative ways to accomplish the goal. Don't do the evaluation alone - include others for the most insightful and valuable results. The comprehensive evaluation is highly recommended, but if that overwhelms you, do the quick check.

Option 1 -- The Big Picture Quick Check:

Here are a couple of ways to do this evaluation:

Option A. Gather about 5-10% of your church for a one-day church evaluation based on the three simple questions listed below. Break them into groups of 5-7 people.

Option B. Gather one group of about 12 key influencers and spend a half-day processing the three simple questions listed below.

In either option, bring the key statistics of the church to the meeting.

1. What's our business?

What's our main thing? Why do we do church? What really gets time attention, resources, energy, promotion, etc? Is that what should get all of the attention?

2. How's business?

Now that the main thing, our central focus, our reason for existence is identified...how are we doing at that?

3. How can we improve business?

How can we get better at what we are called by God (see #1) to do?

Option 2 -- The Comprehensive Exam:

Here are a couple of ways to do this evaluation:

Option A. Organize nine groups of 3-5 people to meet, do research, and have each group discuss one of the following nine sets of questions. Each group selects a team leader who then meets with the other eight team leaders to share the findings of their group. From there, the nine areas are prioritized and plans are made.

Option B. Gather three groups of about five people each to meet and work through these nine areas by assigning three areas each over a half day meeting. (Numbers will need to be gathered in advance.)

1. Are you cultivating and developing new spiritual leaders in your church?

How many spiritual leaders are active in your church? How many new potential leaders have you identified this year? What do you look for in an emerging spiritual leader? How many have begun some training process? What does a spiritual leader look like in your church?

2. What is your mission/vision?

How dedicated is your church to the mission? How focused are you in achieving the mission? What are your core values? How would you describe the personality of your church? How would you describe the culture of your church? Would you describe your church as healthy? Why or why not?

3. What is your plan for evangelism? Is it working?

How many first time converts have you seen come to faith this year? How many are in some type of "new Christians" class? Does your church have an outreach mind-set or a hold the fort mind-set? What evidence can you give for an outreach mind-set? In what specific ways are you involved in the community? How many first-time visitors do you have each Sunday? When was the last time you invited an unchurched person to church?

4. What is your plan for discipleship? Is it working?

What are your overall objectives? What does a mature disciple look like? Are new people connecting with the discipleship process? Are immature believers becoming mature believers? Do you have an intentional plan to develop disciples? Do you focus more on content or life change?

5. How would you describe the quality of your spiritual vibrancy?

How would you rate the prayer life of your church? Do your people evidence a lifestyle of being sold out for Christ? Describe. Is your church committed to the Holy Scriptures...in what way? How relevant are spiritual disciplines such as fasting, confession, scripture memory, meditation, simplicity, prayer, submission, etc.? How would you describe the level of faith your church lives at?

6. What is the condition of your finances?

Is your congregation generous in their giving? Is stewardship taught? How are the people encouraged to be grateful for all the blessings they have received? Is there good accountability for the finances of the church? Are you generous when it comes to the salaries and benefits of your pastors? Do you give money to needs and causes outside your own church? How much money can be traced going directly to evangelism and discipleship?

7. How would you describe the quality of Christian community and relationships in general?

How well are the attributes and qualities of love, unity, care, forgiveness, joy, etc. lived out among your people? Is your church free from gossip, petty issues, and backbiting? Is your church genuinely open to new people...accepting them just the way they are? How many people are in some form of small group? How well are your small groups functioning?

8. How would you describe the attractiveness and spiritual tone of your worship services?

Are you excited about bringing guests to church? Do you sense the presence and power of God in your services? How would a first-time guest describe your worship service? Is the worship uplifting and does it point the people toward God? (Don't get stuck in style issues. It's not how you worship but Who you worship that counts.) Is the service relevant and meeting needs? Is it organized and does it tend to make good use of time? Is there a good blend of organization and planning and freedom for the Holy Spirit to work? Are the ushers and greeters friendly and organized? Is Scripture a priority? Is the service bathed in prayer?

9. How many people are involved in some kind of lay ministry endeavor?

Are your people encouraged to discover their God-given spiritual gifts? Is there an easy and intentional way for them to discover their gifts? Is lay ministry, in general, taught and encouraged as a Christian lifestyle? Is training provided for each ministry endeavor? What percentage of your ministry opportunities are outreach focused rather than inwardly focused? Are ministries consistently evaluated for such things as alignment with the mission, productivity and a wise investment of resources? Are you willing to cut ministries that are not productive or in alignment with your mission? What ministries have you cut this year? Are you lean and focused in your ministries or fat and random?

Your investment of time will return great dividends to you. Do not just sit and discuss. The most important thing, by far, is action and meaningful application. Gather your insights, and then prioritize the issues. Starting with the most important, make a plan that can be accomplished in 8-12 months.