

**EATING THE ELEPHANT:  
Bite-Sized Steps to Achieve Long- Term Growth in Your Church  
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**Chapter 2  
Rekindling the Vision in a Traditional Church**

Process of moving from an inward organizational focus to an outward focus may itself take one or two years. Rekindling the vision, which results in real ministry and growth, may not occur for five more years.

**From Organizational Entrenchment to Outward Focus**

A pastor's natural response to such a condition is to attack the structure. Such a move may be the pastor's greatest mistake. I have known pastors who have had great concerns about constitutions and by-laws, which hinder effective ministry. A common response has been to change the structure, a document in this case. But the document is not the problem. The need is to change attitudes rather than structure. In fact, the church will need to come full circle on the vision cycle before structural changes should be made.

We have created a "First Team" outreach ministry which takes information about the church to first-time guests on the day they visit. The team does not seek to enter the home but to leave the packet and thank them for visiting.

**PEOPLE-LED VISION MODEL**

At least one possible exception to this model should be noted. In a new church it is not unusual for the vision to come directly from God to the founding pastor. Those who come to the new church will be the people whose giftedness best fit the vision of the new church.

For example, our deacon leadership saw the need to change the way they do ministry. For years they had attempted to carry out a deacon family ministry, where each deacon has pastoral ministry responsibility for a group of families. We discovered that those deacons with shepherding gifts enjoyed the ministry and were very effective in their work. But deacons who had different interests, gifts, and desires placed the family ministry low on their list of priorities. They felt guilty for doing so.

Tom Robinson, deacon chairman, took a bold step and suggested that the deacons do their servant-ministry by spiritual gifts. The response has been exciting. The different ministry teams that have been started by the deacons include: evangelism; new members; inactive members; widows and senior adults; crisis ministry; and, of course, family ministry.

The ministry is now in the organization stage. Accountability forms are

maintained. Meetings of the teams have become a regular occurrence. The structure is developing after the other stages on the vision cycle have been completed. The previous structure, the deacon family ministry plan, has been greatly modified with this new approach to ministry. However, the change in the structure followed a new outward focus, spiritual gifts emphasis, and a rekindled vision.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Getting Out of the Rut**

Success is a primary reason that churches get into a rut. A completed building program is often the culmination of years of growth. The new facility is a structure to house the people who are attracted to the vision, ministry, and growth of the church. That new building is seen as the reward for and fruition of years of prayer and labor rather than the new people and changed lives that motivated the church to build. The changed lives and new members who necessitated the new building are forgotten. The facility becomes an end rather than a means. The monument that was suppose to be a symbol of the blessings of God is now an idol that receives more attention than people in need.

Perhaps you are familiar with a church that has become legalistic with its constitution and by-laws. The original intent of documents was to bring order and organization to a positive situation. But now the document has become an end instead of a means. Ministry and needed change cannot take place without peeling back layers of bureaucracy. As one staff member told me a church I consulted: "We've stopped trying to be innovative and attentive to the Spirit's leading. It's too much trouble and pain to change anything around here."

The people of Second Faith saw their calling tied to a particular program rather than a ministry of outreach or teaching. God will change methods He will never change His mission. It is a misunderstood purpose when a calling is tied to a methodology.

### **Chapter 4**

#### **Vision Principles and Methods for your Church**

Church buildings often kill church growth. In over forty years as a church architect and consultant, I have seen it happen time and again. An exciting, growing congregation builds to make room for continued growth, only to I see their growth stop as soon as they build."

### **Chapter 5**

#### **A church Named Calvary, A Pastor Named John**

A system of accountability for ministry and outreach must exists at all levels of

the organization. Relationships and the worship service are the two entry points in the church. If we are to conserve the gains with which God has blessed us, we need a dynamic small-group organization (such as Sunday School) that cares for, disciples, and ministers to the people. Such is the challenge for Calvary and many other churches in America today.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Ten Lessons from Three Churches**

Lesson One: Prayer Is Still the Primary Church Growth Principle.

Lesson Two: The Security of God's Call -

Pastor must know beyond doubt that his vocation and calling is in the perfect will of God.

Lesson Three: A Commitment To Stay

The commitment to stay at a traditional church is a vital component of eating elephant.

Lesson Four: A Desire for Growth –

The first cost is that the pastor must assume responsibility for growth. The second cost paid by pastors of growing churches is hard work. A third price that pastors must pay is a willingness to share their ministries. Fourth, a church growth pastor has to accept that he cannot personally pastor every member. Finally, pastors must understand that a desire for church growth is biblically and theologically sound.

Lesson Five: To Survive and Learn from Battles

Lesson Six: Learning Balance in Worship Styles

Lesson Seven: Christlike Leadership Skills

Leadership by Strength

Leadership by Servanthood

Leadership by Focus

Occasional "fires" have to be handled but eventually the focus returns to the primary purposes of the church.

Leadership by Wisdom

Lesson Eight: The Sunday School Is Still Important: -

Sunday School is the place where relationships can develop, where people can meet Christ, and where they can be discipled.

Lesson Nine: Balanced Use of Time

Lesson Ten: Loving Your Church Members

## **Chapter 9**

### **"We've Never Done It That Way Before"**

#### **VISION OBSTACLES**

"The indispensable first step in guiding a church through change is earning the right to lead the people." -C. Peter Wagner

## **Change Receptivity/Resistance Factors for Churches**

### **MORE RECEPTIVE**

Church: Newer church  
 Rapid growth in membership  
 Pastor: older pastor  
 Pastor with strong leadership skills  
 Higher trust level of pastor  
 Previous pastor with short tenure  
 Longer tenure pastor  
 No dominating family or families  
 Younger membership  
 Regular decision making by staff  
 Less frequent church business meetings  
 Larger portion of membership joined in present pastor's tenure

### **MORE RESISTANT**

Older church  
 Stable or declining membership  
 Younger pastor  
 Pastor with weak leadership skills  
 Lower trust level of pastor  
 Previous pastor with long tenure  
 Shorter tenure pastor  
 Dominating family or families  
 Older membership  
 Regular decision making by committees, boards, or power groups  
 More frequent church business meetings  
 Smaller portion of membership joined in present pastor's tenure

### **Principles for Change**

1. Begin with Prayer
2. Love the People
3. Choose Your Battles
4. Realize Your Own Imperfections
5. Affirm Traditions
6. Build on Successes
7. Allow for Open Discussion
8. Demonstrate Wisdom in Timing
9. Keep the Focus
10. Allow for a Trial Period
11. Expect Opposition
12. Evaluate Changes

## **Chapter 10**

### **“I Love you Pastor, But...”**

"Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it. . . Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." -Abraham Lincoln

A Model for Dealing with Criticism:

He Ignored the Attacks. Lincoln's most common response to criticism was simply to ignore it.

He Occasionally Responded to Critics

If a vital principle was at stake, if the office of president was maligned, or if the unity of the nation was jeopardized, Lincoln responded.

He Kept His Sense of Humor

He Did What Was Right-Regardless!

When Criticisms Come,,,

The Power of Prayer

The Power of Love

Learning to Ignore

Learning to Confide

Respond on Occasion

Keeping Focused

## **Chapter 11**

### **“If Only We Had More Money...”**

#### **Two Churches, Two Responses**

##### **The View of the Past**

Newburg Baptist -Past was the promise that God works miracles if His people are open to His will.

Change was frightening to Acacia because it meant to them a departure from the “good old days” of earlier years.

##### **The View of the Future**

Newburg Baptist is excited about the future.

The future frightens the members at Acacia Baptist.

##### **The View of the Church Size**

Newburg Baptist, primarily because it has a future mindset, sees itself as a large church.

Acacia Baptist, on the other hand, saw itself as a small church with limited potential.

A visionary pastor will often become frustrated at churches like Acacia.

### **The We Can't Obstacle**

#### **Not Enough Money**

The difference between "Can-do" and "can't-do" churches is how they respond to their present financial situation. "Can't-do" churches will literally stop doing many ministries because they do not have the money.

The "can-do" churches, on the other hand, will often go into new ministries without a clear indication of the financial resources available for the venture. "Can-do" churches simply trust God for their finances. And God honors their faith.

#### **The Problem with the Building**

Acacia could not see the possibility of raising funds; nor would they make the changes if the money was given to them.

#### **Limitation of Programs and Ministries**

'We just can't compete with Eagle Run Community Church.

One-half of the people in America prefer a smaller church, less than two hundred in attendance.

#### **Staff Limitations**

The church must maintain the balance of being financially prudent while taking the steps of faith to which God has called them.

#### **Overcoming the "We Can't" Obstacle**

##### **Prayer . . . Again**

Do you believe attitudes can be changed with prayer? Do you believe that your prayers for your church can be powerful and effective?

##### **Develop Allies**

You develop allies; you will have a solid core group that will gain confidence to speak positively in both public and private settings.

##### **Focus on the Church's Strengths**

**Celebrate the blessings God has given you.**

##### **Challenge the People**

Need to hear from you about God's power.

People need to know that the normal Christian life is one of victories and even miracles.

But you-pastor or staff member-you need to believe in the power of God yourself.

### **Chapter 12**

#### **"Why Didn't You Visit Me?"**

## **Time Management and Growth Potential**

A pastor of a traditional church who does little or no personal ministry is setting himself up for mayor problems in the future.

### **Keep Track of Your Time**

#### **Become a Better Steward of Time**

The most common time wasters

television, reading the newspaper, running errands others could do, self-imposed interruptions (studying and finding something else interesting on your desk), no to-do list, opening useless mail, over preparation, handling mail or paper four to five times, driving, unstructured visitation, not having clear directions, spending too long visiting, work overload diminishing output, ineffective reading habits, telephone, not getting up early enough and procrastination.

#### **Establish Priorities**

#### **Become Organized**

#### **It's OK to Say No**

#### **The Power of Delegation**

#### **When Spiritual Gifts are Discovered . . .**

It frees the pastor to do his ministry according to his giftedness and passions. It empowers the people of the church to be in ministry which might otherwise fall in the overloaded hands of "hired help."

### **Spiritual Gifts Discovery by the Pastor**

#### **The Importance of a Leadership Team**

1. Focus Your Time and Energy to Equip Current Leaders and Develop Future Leaders
2. Select and Recruit People with Leadership Potential
3. Agree on Areas for Training and Development
4. Recognize the Dynamics of an Effective Training Program

Schedule Regular Appointments for Ongoing Reporting, Encouragement, and Accountability

## **Chapter 13**

### **Putting It All Together: The Growing Traditional Church**

1. Outward focus
2. Unleashing the laity
3. Rekindling the vision
4. Growth and ministry
5. Organization and structure

### **Tensions of the Traditional Church Pastor**

Spiritual and Pragmatic

You must ask "What works?"; but you must realize that tools are only for a

season.

**Tenacity and Flexibility-**

Long-term tenure is of great importance.

**Action Oriented and Patient**

Traditional churches need pastors who take initiative and lead the people to new challenges.

Churches need pastors who have patience, who can wait on “God's timing when it seems that nothing is happening. Traditional churches need pastors who have the wisdom to know when to move and when to wait.

**Sensitive and Tough-skinned**

**Ambitious and Content**

Must believe that the God you serve is a God of miracles and that He will work miracles in your church.

Yet you must be content with what may seem like the pace of a snail.

**Traditional and Contemporary**

You must lead your church to reach a contemporary world. Some of the methods must change if that possibility is to ever become a reality. But you must also be willing and even eager to hold on to the traditions that really matter.

**Encouragement, Hope and Promise**