



central conference of the evangelical covenant church

How Do You Measure Health?

10 Missional Markers

Something all of us have learned from the great recession in the last several years is that anxiety causes constriction. Most of us have experienced this situation in our personal lives or with family and friends. Have you noticed that creativity doesn't thrive in a constricting climate? Anxiety is not our best motivation.

I have noticed over the past several years working with congregations as they seek to become more vital (alive) that much of their evaluative conversation is centered on attendance and money. Let me say first off that no one should dismiss these factors as irrelevant in our evaluation. Both are important in helping a congregation move forward. But the focus on these two areas is misplaced. Attendance and dollars are lagging indicators in a congregation's vitality.

Over the next year, I will be addressing the need to look deeper at our evaluation. This is a challenge, in a sense, to look at the ten healthy missional markers and how they are at work in the life of our congregations. I am actually appealing for us to look at these key factors as a method to evaluate, celebrate and improve our congregational vitality

"What are these markers," you may ask? They are ten dynamics, core values which are at work at some level in all congregations.

1. Centrality of the Word of God
2. Life transforming walk with Jesus
3. Intentional evangelism
4. Transforming communities through active compassion, mercy and justice ministries
5. Global perspective and engagement
6. Compelling Christian community
7. Heartfelt worship
8. Sacrificial and generous living and giving
9. Culture of godly leadership
10. Fruitful organizational structures

All our congregations find these markers at play in any given moment. But, please notice that, for most of these, the emphasis is not just on the noun but the adjective. Is the Word of God **central**? Is our walk with Jesus **life transforming**? Is our community **compelling**? You get the idea.

A few years ago, a young woman, rather new to the church, shared a significant story of God intervening in her life in a powerful affirming manor. She shared her excitement at seeing God at work in a relationship with her neighbor. It was a moment to be celebrated for sure.

I was watching the responses to what was being shared. Several people were encouraged and celebrated with her. But the overall feel was indifference if not outright condescension. It felt to me as though the air was sucked out of the room. More "mature" members of the congregation seemed to communicate a, "that's nice honey" kind of attitude. It didn't feel malicious. It was a spirit communicated by a mid-life group of experienced Christians who over their lives have been deeply disappointed by God. It felt sad. That young woman no longer attends that church.

So, what I am getting at is that, though people may indicate a walk with Jesus, the expectations are less than "life transforming", and in these days obligation does not motivate people to commit.

I am asking all of us not to simply evaluate our health and vitality around attendance and money. I would like to see us use these 10 missional markers as a basis for ongoing evaluation. This will create a more interesting conversation that may help us move from constrictive thinking to hopeful opportunities.

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