

Growth Points

Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

4/1/17

Volume 29, Issue 4

OUTWARD FOCUS VIRUS

The focus of a church can occasionally become foggy, resulting in blurred vision.

Here are ten infections that are regularly found in churches that cause blurred vision. Check the box beside each virus if you sense your church has its symptoms.

Missional Drift

Churches can easily drift from the biblical purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission to the institutional purpose of survival. The church may begin to measure fruitfulness by the contentment of those in the pews. In reality, it ought to constantly monitor its mission to bring the message of Jesus Christ to new generations and new cultures.

Change Resistance

Church researchers can agree with one pastor who wrote, "A significant proportion of church leaders are content with the status quo." Change must take place for a church to move from an inward to an outward focus, but few leaders want to negotiate the process needed to initiate and implement that change.

Leadership Deprived

A church needs a leader who is willing to show the way to the next level of effectiveness. How can leaders expect their congregations to change if they themselves are unwilling to lead the way? Often the leader infects the church with a virus.

Overly Tolerant

Churches may tolerate sin, infighting, complacency, and disruptive activity out of a misguided sense of acceptance. Clinical Psychologist Henry Cloud states, "It's important for leaders to remember that they get what they tolerate." The longer sin is tolerated, the deeper the rift; the deeper the rift, the stronger the hold on the church.

Functional Dysfunction

When churches learn to function with their dysfunction, it becomes the norm. It is their security. They know they are not what they can, or ought, to be, but they are comfortable. Many churches never experience a comeback because they want

The Church's Sent Nature

•••

Jesus' physical ministry on the earth was limited to a three-year span. He was going to depart, leaving behind his disciples (John 17:11). They would now need to take up the *sent* mantle. They were not going to be taken out of the world (John 17:15) but sent into the world as Jesus modeled for them. "As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world" (John 17:18). Being sent, going out is central to the ministry of those who follow Christ. It is an extension of his being sent by the Father into the world.

Jesus extends the same ministry to us today. "I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony" (John 17:20).

the community to change while they remain the same.

□ **Systems Suffocation**

Every church has systems in place. These systems guide the implementation of the mission and vision. Systems are needed, yet when the system becomes the mission, the church suffocates. The system is a mere delivery method for mission. Unfortunately, in many churches, the systems become the reason for existing. Systems suffocation spills over into the questions asked. Churches that operate by asking, “What do you think we should do?” end up in a different place than churches that ask, “What does God think we should do?” When a church asks what ought to be done, systems are protected.

□ **Cloudy Clarity**

Clarity in mission and vision is critical for the continued effectiveness of a church. Overtime, clarity of direction may become cloudy, confusing, and downright chaotic. Church leaders cannot expect folks to charge into the chaos of system change if they continue to sound such an ambiguous call. Ambiguity (cloudiness) halts a church’s effectiveness.

Lack of clarity either freezes a congregation, so it does nothing, or it wanders off in the wrong direction.

□ **Vision Indifference**

A community of faith that does not have a clear focus on its future is on dangerous ground. An exciting vision brings emotional fuel for change. Indifference about the need to change is typically inward looking.

□ **Inward Inertia**

Inward inertia is seen when the focus of the church is on itself, not on what it takes to succeed. A church with this virus is often suffering from past hurt. A church split, internal conflicts, or major disappointment may lead a church to turn inward in an effort to avoid further pain. An inward virus is difficult to combat. It will take strong doses of spirit-filled antibiotics to bring this virus under control, as well as time for healing to occur.

□ **Success Syndrome**

Churches that have had a season of ministry effectiveness tend to continue to do the same thing repeatedly. The most difficult

thing to change is often what used to work well in the past. The past success puts blinders on the people so they cannot see the current state of their church. The culture has changed, yet past success makes a church refuse to adapt.

So if your church has a virus, what can you do? God made the human body to work in wonderful ways. Whenever a person comes down with an infection, the body’s immune system goes into action. Antibodies find the germs causing the infection and wipe it out. The immune system is strengthened, and if the same infection tries to enter the body in the future, the immune system remembers it and attacks it with vigor. The major antibiotic used to defeat the infections that are found in churches is the *sent* nature of the church. A church that does not grasp and grapple with its *sentness* will wither in the call God has placed on every congregation. The church will resist looking beyond itself. So, give serious study and thought to the fact that your church is sent into the world.

Adapted from the forthcoming book *Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church* by Gary L. McIntosh and Phil Stevenson.

Growth Points is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$20 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.

Copyrighted 2016 ISSN 1520-5096

Church Growth Network, P.O. Box 892589, Temecula, CA 92592

www.churchgrowthnetwork.com Phone 951-506-3086