

I think one of the most dangerous seasons in a church is when you think everything is going fine; it's not great, it's only fine or okay or even "we are getting by." This is a season when the senior pastor or lead pastor might notice things aren't great, but the members typically do not notice. They still have their friends, they still do the same stuff, the service they receive from the leaders continues, the worship they attend continues, and life goes on.

This is what happens as the decline progresses, and no one takes notice. As the decline continues for the second and third year, there are fewer in worship, fewer people uniting with the church, the offerings are smaller or not growing as they had been, and the same situation continues into the third year or into a decade, and eventually, a crisis happens. The church can't pay the bills, the leadership is questioned or even blamed (usually the pastor is blamed), and things go from bad to worse. Often at this point, that decline can hasten into a free fall. People begin noticing and asking where is everybody, and they start complaining about money issues and being asked for money too much. What was once a deceitful, stable decline becomes a real decline and a season that is very difficult to turn around. What was once a thriving church has now become a declining church. A declining church is a declining church. There are few members that are happy and the senior leader or leaders find themselves ducking for cover.

### **What do we do?**

First, we can't watch stable decline. Leaders must do the work and watch the metrics to be aware it is happening. We must address immediately any type of decline. We can't wait for it to get better next Sunday or the next year. It won't get better without the situation being addressed. The book of Acts church continually adapted to be faithful to the call of Christ to make disciples of all the world, so must today's church.

- If the Christmas Eve Candlelight worship service is less attended this year than last, why and what am I going to do to address this and help increase the attendance next year?
- If the Confirmation class was smaller, why and how am I going to grow this in the next year?

- Did we have fewer new members this year than last year or fewer members this spring than the same season last year? What am I going to do to increase those numbers next year?
- Does the worship attendance seem down from last year at the same time? Why and what am I going to change or do to turn that around as quickly as possible?
- Was the stewardship campaign less successful or the offerings off even just a little? Why and what movement will I create to bring generosity back into line with the mission and vision of the church?
- Is our church aging, does it seem there or less young families, children, students? Why and how are we going to reverse that trend?

Barney Fife said it well years ago in the old *Andy Griffith Show*, “*Nip it in the bud!*” Stable decline is deceitful and dangerous. We must address it long before it becomes a crisis from which our church might not be able to recover. This is what leaders do!