

The healthy church always has a piece that is dying, but even more, a bigger piece that is always being born.

Churches can easily become defined by what used to be rather than engaged by what will be, a positive future directed by the accepted mission and vision of the church. When conversations become about what we did, used to do, who we are, the buildings, even a family atmosphere that is appreciated, instead of the life, mission and ministry the church is presently engaging in or about to engage in, that church is usually in trouble.

Effective churches know how to celebrate what was, but they are constantly living into what's next.

What's next! Is it exciting? Is it communicated consistently? Does it make a difference, make disciples, build the kingdom of God, change lives, change the community, change the world, strengthen marriages, families or the workplace? What's next is not just the future of the church, it's the life and heart of it too.

The nature of churches is, that which was is always dying. Something that once was vibrant and effective in making disciples is naturally fading. Sometimes it's an entire season, other times it's an important program. It might even be an established culture that was effective in reaching people in another time but not in a new and changing time. It might be a worship service with a certain style, a mission statement, the look of a building, the leadership or staff structure. It's okay and natural, but the leader and leaders know when it's time to lead the church into a significant what's next.

Most everyone in the church should be able to verbalize what is next —what new mission, worship experience, ministry, outreach, initiative or even an entirely new focus the church family will be living into. Is it exciting, will it accomplish the set mission and vision, will it make disciples of Jesus Christ, will it interact and intersect into the community the church is called to influence and serve? These are some of the questions that need to be asked and answered every year if not more often.

How do you know your church is living into what's next rather than remembering fondly what used to be, and even more people wondering why it's not like that anymore?

When people are asked about their church, they won't talk about the building, the stained glass, the pipe organ, the name, the denomination or even the pastor. They will talk about what is happening, what is about to happen, who is being reached and how the church is helping. They will also talk about the growth, about children's ministries, about the mission, about the vision and about the exciting relationships that aren't just existing in the church but are growing and developing. There will be a tangible feel to what is happening, a buzz, an energy, even the Holy Spirit that moves through the church and into the new season. Effective churches are exciting and energizing to be a part of. It takes the "what's next" to keep that momentum going.

The healthy church has a people who are centered on the mission and vision of the church. This effective church is constantly moving forward, moving the people forward and engaging a changing world in new and creative ways. The healthy church has a piece that is always dying, but even more, a bigger piece that is always being born.