

As I write this, it is the last day of the Central Texas Conference where we continued the focus on the WIG, the Wildly Important Goal, that was introduced last year —increasing market share with goals that help us measure professions of faith and worship attendance. This goal was developed by the Core Team as we grappled with the increasing decline of our Conference and the Methodist Church. Together we decided to do something, a goal that was welcomed by an overwhelming vote. The leading edge of an effective church must be evangelism at last year's Annual Conference.

The leading edge of an effective church must be evangelism.. They must have a non-negotiable center that is evangelistic in fervor, scope and focus.

Too often, long-term churches still have a heart for mission, outreach and justice but are living off the evangelistic efforts of previous generations. I think this is especially true for the Methodist Church. The evangelist passion of the church that drove phenomenal growth well into the middle of the 20th century was exchanged for maintaining what a previous generation had sacrificed to build.

It's still bringing people into a first-time relationship with Jesus Christ and guiding them into a discipleship journey that funds the mission, outreach and justice that we focus on as a denomination. Churches without new faces and new disciples will eventually fail, and the very mission that is so central to Methodism will fail with that. I see too many churches whose conversation is around the faces that used to be in the church rather than the new faces that recently connected.

Churches that don't have a leading edge of evangelism and elevate a culture of professions of faith and church growth will eventually lose the ability to accomplish the very mission, outreach and social justice that Jesus exemplified for us. This is even more true as the nones and dones continue to grow.

Without effective evangelism funding, a growing church will enter a survival mode the church was never intended to experience, one that becomes focused on buildings, stained glass and having church the way we have grown comfortable with having church.

Questions to ask ourselves as clergy:

- Is our leading indicator of effectiveness the number of professions of faith in our church?
- Does our church family know what a profession of faith is and are these celebrated? Is there a discipleship process that focuses on professions of faith that includes next steps?
- When was the last time we aimed a message series at the unchurched, the skeptic, the non-Christian, the lost and the none or the done? Or is our emphasis mostly on members?
- Do we build hospitality, worship, budgets, our buildings, systems, staff and volunteers with a focus of evangelism at the core?

I have served several churches that had been in decline. I know what that feels like. We find ourselves talking too much about money and the problems the church is experiencing, often entering a season of blame. We lose the best people who want more than that. When growth begins to happen, margins are created. Margins in money, momentum, new people and excitement that allows the church to continue to grow, move forward and to have an even greater impact in mission, outreach and social justice. Creating margin is where the Church is going to make the biggest difference, so important to all pastors. This margin comes when our leading edge is evangelism.