

Metrics matter

Declining churches, even with stable decline, slowly become defined by the decline. Not enough money, not enough volunteers, not enough energy, not enough of anything but an awareness of a church-wide despondence about the future. Money becomes the main topic of conversation and the conversations about mission and vision become about what the church used to do or can't do. People start pointing fingers at their neighborhood, other churches in town, the culture, each other, the Conference, and too often the pastor and leaders. Often the church becomes invisible to the community.

Metrics matter

Growing churches are very different. They are defined by growing layers of life focused on the mission and vision of the church, what they can do, the impact they can make, and the energy of making disciples of new people who become part of the church. Growing churches have the community talking about the church, the growth, the dynamics of it, and the impact it is typically making in that community. New people want to be a part of the momentum in a growing church.

Metrics matter

Few things change a church more than when it grows, even a little. Few things change a church more than when it declines, even a little.

The biblical narrative tells us the church is supposed to grow, make disciples, and reach people we are not already reaching. When it doesn't, the church enters a basically unbiblical realm. The book of Acts doesn't have much to say about decline. The story of the Apostles, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the first-century church is about growth and transformation, from 12 to 120 to 500 to 3000 and then the world. "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea,

Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The early church grew in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. The WIG or market share for the Acts church was the world.

Metrics are a big part of the narrative in Scripture and they are in the church.

The Wildly Important Goal (WIG) that was presented and approved at Annual Conference is a goal to grow worship attendance and professions of faith in every local church focused on the idea of increasing market share in our communities. Lovett Weems called it “mission reach.” I believe the biblical narrative easily supports the WIG, a metric and narrative focused goal.

In my years as a senior pastor of various sizes of churches, from less than 100 in an average worship service to more than a 2,600 average worship service, I was constantly aware of metrics. I compared them to the previous Sunday’s, previous years, current worship services, Easters, Christmas Eves, Confirmation class numbers, Vacation Bible School numbers, number of guests each week, professions of faith, small groups, classes, choir numbers, bell choir numbers, children’s worship, youth worship, youth activities, mission trip numbers for youth and adults, new members, and special and regular offerings. I learned that each number interreacted with other numbers, confirmation was connected to children’s worship and Sunday school, youth participation impacted worship, worship numbers reflected in professions of faith, Easter and Christmas Eve reflected numbers before and after, and numbers always influenced the effectiveness of the church in its overall life and mission. If a number went down, I wanted to know why and then address that why. I even cared about the metrics of Easter egg hunts, fall festivals, dinners, Halloween events, and how many pumpkins we sold each year at our pumpkin patch. We set goals and then we figured out what we needed to change or do to make this happen. I was a narrative guy who loved the small interactive moments with people and mission, but I paid careful attention to the metrics. It’s what effective senior leaders do.