

Making Decisions - Emotional or Missional

As churches face discussions of expansion, relocation, merger, or closure the process can become excruciating. Many churches form a committee to consider these decisions, others use the elder team and sometimes it is the decision of the Pastor. In my experience, it is critical that these decisions are made by a selected group of leaders, call it a team or a committee, and then approved by the body. I saw a plaque one time that said;

“For God so loved the world that he didn’t send a committee.”

While a funny statement, especially to those that work with church committees, it is important to recognize the importance of running these decisions through a group of individuals that have committed to make a decision that best positions the church to accomplish the mission and vision of the church. A committee or team must take the question at hand and look at it through a lens that asks the following questions:

1. Does this decision better allow the church to accomplish the mission and vision?
2. What is the cost of not making a decision, standing pat, and doing nothing?
3. Can we afford to take this step? Especially in expansion or relocation you must count the financial cost?
4. Is this a missional decision or an emotional decision?

Missional is a word that gets flagged by spell check all the time. My definition of “missional” is - every action and ministry function being done with a focus on the mission of Christ, decisions made with the mission, vision, and values of the church at the core of its purpose. As a team considers ministry decisions, there needs to be a clear reason why you will say yes to or no to a decision. I have been in front of church leaders who have said they want to sell their building and relocate but they have no plan related to that decision. If your church does not have clarity about how you use your facility or what you need to meet your ministry needs then pursuing buildings and property will just be another thing that will sidetrack you from the ministry you were called to. A missional decision is one that the church makes with a clear focus on meeting the mission and vision of the church. Many multisite churches and church plants have developed the missional mindset into their ministry. The decisions they make are based on a clear framework that guides their ministry.

On the other hand, it has been said that 80% of churches in America are in decline or have plateaued. I have been in many of these churches as they face the decision to close or relocate and sell their existing facilities. Many times they have failed to ask the questions and make decisions way too late. One of the main reasons they wait too long is because the decision is an emotional one. The people are tied to the building emotionally as they have married, baptized, and buried loved ones in the building. They have developed an emotional attachment to the building and to them the church is the building. I have encountered churches that have sold their building to another church and acknowledged that some of their members will stay with the building and join the new church. The place or space as become the church and asking the question should we relocate or close the church is not a missional decision it is purely emotional.

I have seen many churches run in circles trying to make a decision to move, sell, or change. These decisions can derail a church from accomplishing their mission and vision but they must approach the decisions from a missional perspective as if it is a business decision. When a church considers, expansion, relocation, merger or closure there will be members with differing opinions and emotion. Understanding your by-laws and ensuring that actions follow the by-laws will help you in the process. If you need to obtain congregational approval then you will need the congregation to embrace the missional mindset. This may take time. I have watched as Pastors have led their church through a closure and stewarded the season well. When the leader leads well and shepherds the people through these decisions the end result can be a beautiful expression as opposed to an abrupt end. This does not mean that the entire congregation is involved in every aspect of the decision process. Committees or leadership teams will best serve the church when they keep the mission and vision of the church in mind as they make these decisions.

Facility decisions and real estate decisions are not emotional decisions for a church. These decisions are stewardship decisions that affect your ministry. Prior to asking your people to consider selling a facility take the time to work through a process that will guide your decision-making process.