

THE BEGINNING OF CHURCH CONSULTING: DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

Several weeks ago, I participated in training new church consultants through Church Central's certification program. It was great to see the excitement that these men and women exhibited as they talked about their desire to help God's church.

The churches they consult, though, may not be so excited, as a church consultation is sometimes like a medical physical—we know we need it, but we don't like being poked and prodded. Nevertheless, a good consultation prods with some important questions. Even if you are not a church consultant, perhaps these questions will help you to analyze your own church.

1. *Is the church's teaching based on the Bible?* Ultimately, a local church is a group of believers who proclaim, teach, and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where that gospel is not taught, something less than the New Testament church exists. An inherent danger in church consulting is that the consultant will give ideas and suggestions that will, in fact, lead to "church growth"—but the final product will focus more on growing than on being church. We must guard against that possibility by reminding churches of the importance of a biblical foundation, while also challenging them to do evangelism.
2. *Is the church a praying church?* Legitimate church growth is a gift of God, who empowers His followers and draws others unto Himself. Another danger in church consulting is that we will offer solutions that are based on our ingenuity rather than God's power. For that reason, I want to make certain that the church is focusing on prayer before, during, and after the consultation. In fact, I expect the church to enlist a prayer team that prays together during the length on the consult. Is your church a praying church?
3. *Is the church driven by a Great Commission focus?* Five times in the New Testament, Jesus expressed some form of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21, Acts 1:8). Apparently, preaching the gospel and making disciples mattered to Jesus—and so these tasks must concern churches today. Many churches have become so inwardly focused that church is more about protecting the status quo than about reaching out beyond themselves.
4. *Is the church reaching non-believers?* Here, the possibility of overemphasizing numbers becomes apparent, but the question must be asked: are non-believers coming to know the Lord through the church's ministry? If the church is growing, is the growth conversion growth (nonbelievers meeting Christ) or transfer growth ("swapping sheep")? Transfer growth is sometimes necessary, but it seldom results in Great Commission growth.
5. *Is the church keeping the new believers who join?* Suppose a church reached twenty non-believers for Christ in the last year. Did the church see a corresponding increase in attendance? If not, why not? Is the congregation an aging one, and several died within the year? Are longer term members leaving the church as the church changes? Does the church have a poor strategy for discipling and keeping the new members? Or, more positively, did the church send out a

- team to begin a church plant? Whatever the cause for the discrepancy between additions and attendance, the church must respond appropriately.
6. *Is the church both locally and globally minded?* At the risk of understatement, the world is *always* bigger than any local church. As many as 1.6 billion people in the world have little access to the gospel. The people groups of the world are now coming to the United States. The Hispanic population in the U.S. continues to grow. Burgeoning populations in the cities cry out for the gospel. Who will reach the unreached if the local church is focused only on itself?
 7. *Does the church have a strategic plan for future growth?* One reason the Enemy so readily succeeds in attacking churches is because he is often a better planner (Eph. 6:11) than most church leaders are. He methodically and strategically attacks the church while most churches operate from Sunday to Sunday. We are not prepared for his attacks. In the same way, most churches would not be prepared for significant growth if God were to grant it. What would the church do if God sent a genuine awakening? Does the church have a vision around which their plans—including facility, staffing, and programming—are developed?
 8. *Are the leaders committed to the ministry of the church?* By far, the most common problem we see in unhealthy churches is poor or unfocused leadership. Leaders who are not committed to a long tenure at a church seldom lead a church to lasting growth.

These questions are just a beginning, but every diagnosis must start somewhere. If these questions show areas of weakness in your church, though, don't lose heart. Honest diagnosis is the first step toward prescription and better health. In future articles, I will offer suggestions for addressing each of the areas covered in these questions.