**Church Check-up**

#2 Look Outward, Not Inward

*Quotations taken from Thom Rainer’s books “Autopsy of a Deceased Church” and “Breakout Churches” for discussion.*

**Homework from Lesson #1: Recognize Our Symptoms**

Complete the following sentence with at least one suggestion for each category. I think St. John’s would be a healthier, happier church

if the pastor…

if the teachers…

if the lay leaders…

if the members…

if I…

****Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 1:6-11**

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

*6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

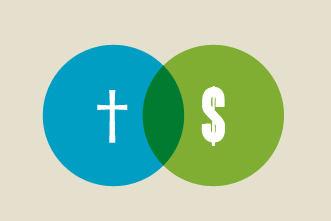
1. What are some things these verses show us?

*Jesus has given us a clear mission (witness!) / the disciples were mixed up too / Jesus has given us this task, and he’s coming back*

1. Jesus tells us to “go”, “make disciples”, “baptize”, “teach”, and “be his witnesses”. So, as we consider the current and future ministries of St. John’s, what are some practical things we should be thinking and talking about?

*Jesus uses action verbs when he gives us our mission / how can we include the Word and sacraments in what we do? (that’s where the power is!)*

**What does the money say?**

*****“In all the churches we autopsied, a financial pattern developed over time. The pattern was one where funds were used more to keep the machinery of the church moving, and to keep the members happy, then funding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The money, though, was symptomatic of a heart problem. The church cared more for its own needs than the community and the world. And no church can sustain such an inward focus indefinitely. It will eventually die of heart failure.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 36)*

*“It is for this reason the budget for personnel is often the last to go. Likewise, building and facility costs are reduced only as a last resort… Just keep in mind this truism: In dying churches the last expenditures to be reduced are those that keep the members most comfortable.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 32-33)*

*“By the way, not all the deceased churches died broke. In fact, a few of them had quite a treasure chest when they died. Some had inherited funds. Others had accumulated funds. You don’t have to be broke to be dying. It’s not a matter of how much you have. It’s what you do with your money, or what your attitude is about the money.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 35)*

1. Every one of us at St. John’s would say that the mission of our church and school is to do outreach. But what does our budget say? Consider the following information (Taken from 1998-2018 annual reports).

Total budget Funds designated for outreach\* % of budget

1998 $403, 431 $0 0%

2000 $337, 223 $0 0%

2001 $367, 851.82 $330.98 .09%

2002 $345, 656.92 $86.01 .02%

2003 $365, 585.22 $0 0%

2004 $367, 487.79 $1338 .4%

2005 $422, 859 $3500 .8%

2006 $378,530 $1034.69 .3%

2007 $351, 877.97 $2695.04 .8%

2008 $331, 537.45 $344.90 .1%

2009 $366, 727 $750 .2%

2010 $345, 056 $200 .06%

2011 $341, 761 $350 .1%

2012 $343, 063 $902.59 .3%

2013 $346, 139 $500 .15%

2014 $351, 620 $150 .04%

2016 $431, 862 $1200 (Pioneers, LCA, Radio Hr) .3%

2017 $431, 043 $1200 (Pioneers, LCA, Radio Hr) .3%

2018 $408, 200 $1050 (Pioneers, LCA, Radio Hr) .3%

2019 $433, 107 $400 .09%

\*Not including mission funds sent to synod

1. Even allowing room for pastor’s probable mathematical mistakes, these numbers are a bit shocking. What are some reasons St. John’s hasn’t designated more money for local outreach over the years?

*Money has been tight / we let other people do our outreach / outreach hasn’t worked in the past / no clear plan / school is our outreach*

1. Agree or Disagree? It doesn’t make sense for a church that is struggling financially to use a lot of money for outreach.

*We do have to be good stewards, but we also have to remember what our real mission is, to witness (trust God)*

**Do we look like our community?**

*“Our autopsy revealed this condition in several of the fourteen churches. Look at the faces of the members before the church officially died. Now look at the faces of most of the people who live in the community where the church is located. They are significantly different.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 25)*

1. Discuss with the people around you the following questions:
   1. What are some bad things that happen to a church when it stops looking like the community?

*Turns into a commuting church / disconnected from the community / people don’t feel welcome*

* 1. Does St. John’s Lutheran Church look like the Wayne/Westland community? What about the school and preschool? Explain your answer.

*Sort of, the school looks more like the community than the church (especially the preschool) / Not many African Americans in the church*

* 1. What are some challenges our congregation faces with reaching out to our surrounding community?

*Fear / poor community / cultural differences*

**The heart of the issue**

*“But the deceased church, somewhere in its history, forgot to act upon the Great Commission. So they stopped going. And making disciples. And baptizing them. And teaching them. Perhaps I’m being too gentle to say the deceased church ‘forgot’ to act upon the Great Commission. Perhaps it is more accurate to say the church ‘decided’ not to act upon Christ’s command.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 41)*

*“Members of the dying church weren’t willing to go into the community to reach and minister to people. They weren’t willing to invite their unchurched friends and relatives. They weren’t willing to expend the funds necessary for a vibrant outreach. They just wanted it to happen. Without prayer. Without sacrifice. Without hard work. But here’s the bigger issue. Even if the church began to grow on its own, the members of the dying church would only accept the growth if the new members were like them and if the church would continue to “do church” the way they wanted it. That reality, when it is all said and done, is likely at the heart of the issue. Members of the dying churches really didn’t want growth unless that growth met their preferences and allowed them to remain comfortable.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p. 44)*

*“If you talk to members in a dying church, most will deny that their church is a fortress. But in our autopsy, we found that is exactly what was taking place. People in the community did not feel welcome in the church. Those in the church were more concerned about protecting the way they did church than reaching residents of the community.” (Autopsy of a Deceased Church p.27)*

*“When congregants focus inwardly, they become self-serving and begin to ask what the church is doing for them. And when these inwardly-focused members do not get their way in worship styles, pastoral attention, music choices, and carpet colors, they pitch holy temper tantrums. A divided church is inevitably an inwardly-focused church.” (Breakout Churches p. 74)*

1. What are some reasons a church “forgets” or “decides” not to carry out the Great Commission?

*Witnessing is uncomfortable / “They aren’t like us!” / “I want things my way!” / Plenty of busyness, so people feel like we’re doing what we’re supposed to do or are too tired or busy to actually witness*

1. I think we would all say we want our church and school to grow, but what if it means…

* I don’t get to sit in my favorite seat at church anymore.
* I have to park on the street for services/events because the parking lot is always full.
* The worship style I like is modified or eliminated.
* My applications to the endowment fund are denied in favor of outreach distributions.
* Our Communion format has to be shortened to accommodate larger attendances.
* Pastor doesn’t have as much time to minister to me.
* My favorite church program or worship service is discontinued.
* I have to support a new pastor, teacher or staff minister I don’t really like.
* My opinion/vote doesn’t carry as much weight at church meetings anymore.
* I’m asked to take a more active role in the church’s outreach.
* I’m asked to increase my weekly offerings.
* I’m asked to sit and talk with strangers at church meals instead of my family and friends.
* I’m asked to attend school functions to mingle, even though I don’t have any kids there.
* I have to sit behind someone in church who smells like cigarettes and is covered in tattoos.

Rank each of these listings on a scale of 1-10 (1 = I would gladly make this sacrifice, 10 = I really would struggle to make this sacrifice). Then discuss your rankings with the people around you.

1. What are some ways we can help ourselves and our fellow members of St. John’s to adjust our focus outward instead of inward?

*Get into the Word / Plan and intentionalize outreach / come up with a mission / don’t get caught up in the small things*

**1 Corinthians 9:19-22**

*19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.*

1. What are some insights regarding outreach that these verses provide?

*Be willing to sacrifice everything except doctrine for souls / we should be willing to change before we expect everyone else to change*

**A Caution**

*“Frankly, some of the leaders of the comparison churches viewed the community as a means to their ends—increase attendance, add to the budget, lead the area churches in baptisms. The breakout churches, however, had a passion to reach and minister to the community. They did not first ask how the community might benefit the church. As best as the research team could tell, the motives of the breakout church leaders were selfless.” (Breakout Churches p. 125)*

1. What are some ways we can keep our church’s outreach efforts selfless?

*Focus on the spiritual (souls, not number of members) / Search for a need in the community*

**Homework**

Complete this statement with at least three suggestions. I think St. John’s can do a better job of following Jesus’ Great Commission if we…

*Come up with a clear, exciting mission / Clean up the clutter / Remember why we’re here (for God and others, not ourselves)*