

Understanding the Seasons - Church Life Cycles

Title Slide Understanding the Seasons

There is a time for everything, to be born and to die is part of that cycle

- Ecc 3:1-2 NLT For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. 2 A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest.

David had with him men who understand the times - to know what Israel ought to do

- 1Ch 12:32 ESV Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...

I want to talk about a Church Life-Cycle (Churches have times and seasons as well)

There were great churches in the Bible...yet none of them exist today

Jerusalem, Antioch, Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, Colosse, Ephesus & 6 other churches of Revelation

Every day, in the United States, churches are being born and dying

- In the US 2014, There were 4,000 new churches, and 3,700 closed - **a net gain of 300**
- In the US 2019, There were 3,000 new churches, and 4,500 closed - **a net loss of 1,500**

Some causes of this...? (Economy people move, Cultural drift, Denominational changes, Leadership)

- But there is a natural one that I want to talk about is called ***the Life Cycle of Churches***
- All organisms [*think people*] and organizations have a life cycle - **born, grow, mature, decline**
 - Think of malls like the Carnation Mall - opened in 1983 - 40 years later it is being torn down
 - Blockbuster video 1985 - first store2004 - **grew to 9094 stores** 2014 - **began closing stores** 2019 - **1 store left in Bend Oregon** → failed to reinvent itself like Netflix did

In church world - consulting ministries help churches navigate the life cycle (where we are/next steps)

7 Stages of a typical life cycle of a church?

7 Stages of church life (birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, empty nest, old age, death)

Each stage has an emphasis (Vision, Relationship, Programs, Management/Maintenance) - What is the first thing missing as the church goes into the decline side of the cycle??? VISION

1. Birth - Vrpm - There's a **focus on reaching new people** - vision
2. Childhood - VRpm - outward focus and building **relationship that will help accomplish the vision**
3. Adolescence - VRPm - Provide discipleship **path for growth and mission**
4. Maturity - VRPM - You can't stay here either decline begins...or a rebirth of sorts - a fresh vision
5. Empty Nest - vRPM - **insider focused** - decline in attendance (HOW more important than WHY)
6. Old Age - vRpM - **Methods more important than mission** - desire to go back to the way it was
7. Death - vrpM - no fruit, financial crisis, one family or one donor is the main driver

Some Examples I Can Think of

- **A church can have multiple life cycles**...but to do so it must be able to intercept the life cycle at the peak (maturity) in order to gain **new life and new momentum**.
- **First Baptist Church in East Liverpool** - followed the cycle to death 500 people in heyday - **died with 7 people maintaining all the committees**, but no life, sold the building for \$1 to a new church
- The church we helped start in Colorado Springs went through the cycle, **it died and no longer exists**
- Mennonite church in western Ohio - on the down side of the cycle - rebirth through caring for Latino community that moved into the area - the church eventually became ½ American, and ½ Central American - new young families, kids etc - **the church found new vision and new life**
- Abbott Loop, the church we were sent from, went through this cycle, **and it did not die, but is currently in the process of remaking itself and renewing the vision**

Where is Alliance Christian Center?

- We have not had this consulting, but have read many of the materials and findings
- We have a basic understanding of where Alliance Christian Center is in the cycle & what we need to do
- **We think we are in the mature area** - (healthy, mature believers, financial stability, and programs and some management of the church)
- **We have been here for a while so we are probably starting to trend toward empty nest**
- The Maturity Stage is a strange place because while it is healthy overall→**it is also the most vulnerable** spot, because on the surface everything looks stable, but decline is approaching

What is needed now? → Vision

- **VISION that's the first thing to go** missing on the down-side of the cycle
- **Define vision**...a desired future for **how the community** (not the church) will be different and through a church that **focuses on persons "not there yet."** -- *every church starts with a vision to reach people*
- The knee jerk reaction in the maturity stage is to put more programs into place or to keep doing what you are doing...when in reality the eventual decline which is the natural progression of any church will not turn around without a **fresh sense of God's vision and embracing outward-oriented mission**
- To say it another way, when vision and outward relationships become **secondary to internal programs and structure**, a church's life cycle will begin a downward slope

Churches that start a new life cycle do the following things:

- **Vision is the foundation of a successful life cycle:** A vision is the "what does it look like" piece that paints a vivid picture of a preferred future for those **outside the church** and **helps us accomplish our mission.**
- **Relationships:** Gathering people to rally around the vision...
- **Ministries / programs:** **Out of the vision and the relationships, come new ministries, new expressions of existing ministries shaped to accomplish the mission and vision.**
- **Structure sustains the growth:** but then it must revive vision again so that systems don't replace mission

What is needed now at ACC - is a refreshed vision for those outside the church

A new cycle of (1) **vision** for those outside, (2) **relationships rallying** around that vision, (***A Night Like No Other was a TEST***) (3) new and re-engineered **ministries that help accomplish the vision**, and (4) **structures** to build and maintain the process...and at some future date...when structure begins once again to move into the driver's seat, it's time to start a new life cycle

What is the vision? The Mission Remains the same - it is 2000 years old

- **The Mission has remained the same for 2000 years** - to make disciples of all nations
- Core Values that drive us constant the Great Commandment - Love God and Love Others
- The vision - to live out the Great Commandment in such a way that the Great Commission becomes our highest priority
 - Vision - to see multiple streams of multiplying disciples of Jesus throughout our city and region
 - A focus on the young, a focus on schools, a focus on neighborhoods, a focus on church unity
- The key challenge - outward focused gospel- inward focused making disciples
- **Are we willing to modify & add to what we are doing in order to make disciples a priority**
- **- pyramid Living out the Great Commandment in such a way that the Great Commission is our highest priority**

NEXT WEEK PART 2

