

Russell W. Dennis III

1754 Harrison St. • Garden City, MI 48135
(734) 353-6087 • russ@russdennis.net • www.russdennis.net

PHILOSOPHY OF CHURCH MINISTRY

The purpose of a philosophy of ministry is to give direction in achieving church health. I believe this is an important part of the candidating process because it gives a basic sense of how a pastor will lead. This is also needed because there should be basic agreement on the core values of ministry if a pastor and church are to have a lifetime of effective ministry together.

What is a Healthy Church?

When congregations are healthy, they grow as God intends. Thus, it is vital that a church understand its purpose. A simple way to describe a healthy church is found in two statements by Jesus: the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Christ established the church to build up believers to fulfill this calling (Heb. 3:13, 10:24-25; Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:7; 1 Pt. 2:5). Subsequently, a church's health is gauged by its ability to grow healthy, mature Christians. This happens when a church has healthy core values, leaders, and church members.

Core Values of a Healthy Church

- 1.) *A High View of God* – A high view of God will keep the church focused on the greatest commandment which is to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:36-37). This helps avoid the pitfalls of a “man-centered” ministry. If “Christ is lifted up,” He will draw all men to Himself better than any program or person ever could.
- 2.) *Expositional Preaching and Teaching* - Effectively communicating God's Word begins by explaining God's original message to its original audience then seeking to apply the timeless truth to everyday life. Being true to God's Word allows the Holy Spirit to work through the preaching and teaching rather than in spite of it (2 Tim. 4:2; Col. 1:28).
- 3.) *Congregational Worship* - Many times worship can be more about spectating than participating. Whether through song, giving, or prayer, God delights when His church worships together in spirit and in truth (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:16-19).
- 4.) *Christ Centered Discipleship* – A church should disciple the way Jesus did. Rather than “class” discipleship, the best way for Christians to grow is through real relationships with other Christians. While classes are useful, they will never be as effective as the teaching/mentoring relationship Jesus and the apostles modeled (Matt. 8:20; Luke 6:40; 2 Tim. 2:2).
- 5.) *Sacrificial Fellowship* – The relationships Christians have in the church often mirror those of a mere club. This stands in contrast to the deep and meaningful relationships that the early Christians had (1 Cor. 12:25; Rom. 1:12, 1 Jh. 1:3, Acts 2:41-47). The church should be a place where people have best friends, can be transparent, practice hospitality, and use their spiritual gifts to edify one another.
- 6.) *Gospel Driven Service* - The best service a church can give to its community is to share the gospel. Any service project or outreach should be gospel oriented so that the world can see Christ and glorify our Father in heaven (Mt. 5:16; Lk. 6:35-36; 2 Cor. 5:18-21).
- 7.) *Church Multiplication* – Churches should be actively involved in planting churches both at home and abroad. This can be done by supporting missionaries, training up those that are called to pastoral ministry, helping to revitalize area churches, and starting new ones (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8, 8:3-4, 13:49; 2 Tim. 2:2).

The Leadership of a Healthy Church

The leaders of a church are called to care for the flock and ultimately to guide the church in realizing its biblical core values. Within the local church, two offices are prescribed in the New Testament to help this purpose be achieved.

The Scriptures speak of an office of teaching and ruling. This office is most commonly referred to as an elder in the Bible though the term shepherd, bishop, teacher, and pastor are all used to designate the same office and its differing functions (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). The pastor is called to teach correct doctrine, model correct behavior, and be faithful in these two major areas. On a practical level, a godly pastor should be spiritually mature, love the people, and be able to lead them competently (1 Pt. 5:1-4; I Tim. 3:1-11; Acts 20:17, 28).

The legacy of any pastor is the faithful men who he has trained to become leaders (2 Tim. 2:2). While the pastor should be a servant, an important part of his calling is to train up men to become the spiritual leaders that God calls them to be. It is my firm conviction that the strength of the church is found in the men of the church. They should be trained in the Word of God to be strong shepherd-leaders both in their homes and in their ministries.

The Scriptures also speak of an office for serving (deacon). At its basic function, a deacon is to help the church fulfill its calling. It is an office of helps and not one of ruling. While the pastors' primary role is one of preaching the Word of God and leading the church. The deacons serve the congregation in whatever practical needs may arise (Acts 6:1-6).

Both of these groups should work together in harmony so that the church can be strengthened and servant-leaders developed for the glory of God. Leaders should see their role as equipping and empowering the saints and encouraging them to discover and use their spiritual gifts. When unity, teamwork, and sacrifice characterize the leadership of the church, it sets the stage for God to work powerfully.

The Members of a Healthy Church

Paul often used the human body to describe the church. This was a natural illustration because health is so important to both. Each member is gifted and a vital part regardless of the position or visibility of their ministry (1 Cor. 12:18; Eph. 4:15-16). Just as a body cannot be healthy when its individual parts are not working together, a church is not healthy when there is not unity of spirit and sacrificial service for each other. This is seen by members identifying their spiritual gifts and using them to build up the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

A healthy church member should seek to do three basic things: Love God, Love People, and Serve Today. Loving God is easily seen by their desire to regularly study God's Word, pray, and worship. Loving people shows itself by their fellowship with other Christians and their burden for the lost. A true love for God and people will naturally result in consistent service for Him. A church member who does not seek to serve in a regular way shows that they do not truly understand what God has called them to be.

Conclusion

Striving to build a healthy church is not an easy task. The world and the devil will fight desperately to keep a church from becoming a lighthouse for the glory of God. In spite of this, we have a great promise from Jesus Christ, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). When a group of believers are in God's will and striving to do God's work, no power of hell can stop it. This is what the world desperately needs, and by God's grace I look forward to entering into this work.