

1001

THIS CHURCH IN THIS CITY THIS YEAR

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul often wrote very personal specific letters to certain local churches in certain cities. For example, when he wrote to the Corinthians he addressed his letters to "The church of God which is in Corinth," I Cor. 1:2 and II Cor. 1:1. In addition, we have seven particular letters addressed to seven local churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2 and 3.

Today instead of preaching a general sermon on the doctrine of the church, I want to be very specific and direct what God has laid on my heart to this church in this city this year.

I. First, think of this church, this local church, the Maximo Heights Baptist Church, at 5501 31st St. South, here in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Started as a mission in 1958;
organized as a church in 1961.

The first year of its existence as an independent church, for the year ending Sept. 30, 1962, there were 12 baptisms and 30 other additions, making a total of 120 members; the Sun. Sch. enrollment was 100, with an average attendance of 68.

\$847 were given to Southern Baptist Missions through the Cooperative Program, and, including this, a total of \$1,063 was given to all missions expenditures; In addition, \$6,001 was used for local expenditures.

This shows that for every six dollars spent for local expenses, \$1 was given to missions--quite a record for a new young church!

Baptisms continued to increase as follows:
12 in 1962; 23 in 1967; 21 in 1970; 15 in '73; and 28 in '76.

The total church membership went from 120 that first year to 445 in 1976, and then declined.

The Sun. Sch. enrollment went from 100 to 449 in 1970, and 559 in 1976, and then it started declining.

The actual S.S. average attendance on Sunday rose from 68 to 276 in 1970, and 272 in 1976, before it started sliding to where it was in 1984 and where it is today.

The total offerings for local expenses went up to \$70,729 in 1982, then declined for a few years, and now is up a little above where it was in 1982. Giving to the to missions through the Cooperative Program has increased inconsistently to more than \$6,000 last year, which is indeed a bright sign because it shows that the church is missions-minded and not completely centered in on its own needs. In fact, giving to all missions causes last year, including the special offerings for home and foreign missions, and all other missions programs, exceeded \$12,000, while local expenses, other than missions, totaled just over \$71,000, close to the same commendable ratio of 1 to 6 which the church had in its first year of existence; but I'm sorry to say that there were many years in between when this was not the case.

These statistics are available on a table in the foyer as you leave the service.

A. This says something about where this church has come from.

It's important to know your history and to learn from it.

B. What can we say about where the church is today?

It has gained ground in some respects and lost ground in others.

You should be encouraged to know that if the church has had as many as 28 baptisms and 20 other additions in one year, it can do it again this year. If it has had 559 enrolled in S.S. in one year it can do it again soon, and then aim for 600 then 700.

C. Where is this church headed?

If it doesn't redream its dream, and form new goals and objectives which the present membership can enthusiastically own as its very own, and reorder its programs and priorities, and seriously apply itself to accomplish its goals and ministries, it is headed for a slow and agonizing decline and defeat. BUT THIS DOES NOT HAVE TO HAPPEN! IT CAN TURN AROUND IF THE PEOPLE WANT IT TO!

But if it can dream a new kingdom dream,
and establish some new, challenging and realistic
goals and objectives,
and organize itself to reach those goals,
and courageously and faithfully execute its plans
and ministries,
there is absolutely no limit
to what God can do through such a church.
It could very well be headed to its best years ever
to become the leading church in this part of
St. Petersburg.

The church needs to adopt its own goals and a
realistic plan and program to achieve them, but I
can dream aloud and express the hope that the church
would make it its goal to win at least 30 souls to
Christ and baptize them into the membership of the
church this year, and that the church would reach
and win at least 30 others into the church
fellowship by statement or letter, including at
least 50 new families into the church and Sunday
School in 1988.

II. This city

A. Its past -- from a small fishing village, to a
small town, to a large city, to a crowded
sophisticated metropolitan area, not at all like the
small rural areas and pioneer and frontier
agricultural areas where most of our Baptist
churches started and have thrived in the past in
this country.

B. At present it is one of the fastest growing
urban population areas of our country, with highly
advanced computerized and scientific technology,
highly respected educational and commercial institu-
tions, and a well-educated, cross-cultural
population, many of whom are spiritually illiterate.

C. The future of this city is difficult to
predict; but it will no doubt include many of the
unsolved problems of poverty, race, housing,
education, crowding, crime, conflict between the
"haves" and "have-nots," politics, water resources,
growth management, etc.

The church can not avoid some involvement in some of
these problems which have definite moral aspects.

III. This year -- 1988

- A. Making the most of the present opportunities
- B. Planning goals, objectives, & programs
(by Easter)
- C. Organizing to execute the plan (Mother's Day)
- D. Diligent execution & implementation
(by Father's Day)
- E. Continuous review and analysis of progress.
(Monthly between last Sun. & first Sun. of month)
- F. Making "Mid-course corrections and adjustments"
at critical check points along the way, (between
1st & 2nd Sun of each of following months: Aug,
Oct., Dec., and every other month thereafter).

NOTE; Special Church Task Force composed of the following will be responsible to supervise the above activities:

- Deacons
- Church Council
- Stewardship Committee
- Sun. Sch. teachers

IV. New Testament Prototypes

A. Corinth

- 1. Diversity of gifts, I Cor. 12:14-26.
- 2. A church turned in on solving its own problems.
- 3. The true mission of the church is not just survival, or keeping the doors open, the lights and water on, and the organizational machinery going.

A church that focuses on reacting to crises and settling problems, cannot concentrate on carrying out its divine mission in the city.

Let's be sure that this year the hidden agenda of this church is not just to survive, but to plan and carry out great spiritual goals in the name of our Savior.

- 4. This church at Corinth had a large variety of spiritual gifts, and some of these must have included gifted leaders with unusual administrative and leadership ability.

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sdom" and "knowledge"s
and 12:28, "governments" or "administration."
("kubernesis" = administration, leadership;
ability to lead, or to steer.

B. Ephesus, Rev. 2:1-7

A fallen church that had left its first love & needed to repent and renew its former ministries, as under Paul and John.

Here is a church that must have had a good beginning but went downhill after a period of growth. The church lost its dream and had to find it again or redream its dream.

An ancient proverb says, "Where there is no vision the people perish," Prov. 29:18.

A clear vision changes life and insures growth.

Lack of a clearly-focused vision and plan means a church is headed for spiritual death.

But once a church has developed and has been challenged by its own kingdom mission it will tend toward the fulfillment of its dreams and goals.

Every church makes one of the following decisions:

1. Decision to concentrate on survival and maintaining itself, or

2. Decision to carry out the Great Commission and minister to the maximum number of souls in the name of Christ.

We may speculate on which of these two decisions the church of Ephesus made after the Apostle John completed his ministry there. Probably it was the first decision I mentioned, to concentrate on survival and rest on its laurels. This was fatal.

C. The church in the city of Laodicea,

Rev. 3:14-22.

Here was a church rich with resources, but probably without a plan, or goals or objectives. What a pity some other churches with the dedication,

uld not have had some of the material resources that Laodicea had!

The Laodiceans probably didn't even realize they didn't have any plans, goals, or objectives.

You must understand that church goals may be formal or informal.

Formal goals are those considered & developed & openly committed to by the congregation.

Informal goals are whatever most of the members want to see happen, or are satisfied to see happen, whether or not they are adopted by the congregation as a whole.

Church goals are influenced by several things. Two of these are:

1. The climate or atmosphere of the congregation; optimistic or pessimistic; passive or aggressive; positive or negative; defensive or constructive.

2. The expectations of the members which grow out of their personal ownership of the church's goals & objectives, and the degree of their own commitment to the mission or ministries of the church.

Someone (Lyle Shaller) wrote that a good goal is "one that I had a part in forming. A bad goal is one that someone else developed and wants me to implement."

Every church member should hold a personal stake in the work of the church, and should feel a personal involvement in, and responsibility for, and loyalty to his or her church.

CONCLUSION

D #53 "THUSCHUR"
Mar. Hts. B.C. 1-3-87 (pp. 1-4)