Pathological conditions affecting local churches

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Biblical analogy: “body of Christ”

When a body stops growing and starts declining, we look to find out what’s wrong.
1. Ethnic-itis: an island of one kind of people in a sea of another kind

- Word comes from “ethnic”
- Symptoms
  - Surrounding community changes its racial makeup
  - Congregation does not shift to reflect the neighborhood
  - Church members move away although some commute back to attend
Ethnikitis

- Remedy
  - Transition to reflect neighborhood
  - Give property to congregation that does reflect the neighborhood
  - Become a multi-congregational church
  - Sell property and move to where core of members live
2. Ghost town: rural or small-town church that is running out of people

- Symptoms
  - Lost members are not being replaced with new ones
  - Large percentage of members over 50
  - Funerals outnumber weddings
  - Net out-flow from community of young people to find jobs and go to school
Ghost town

Remedy

- Use circuit-riding pastor
- Use bi-vocational or lay pastor to maintain what is left of congregation. Allow the church to move toward a natural death with dignity
- Note: Mergers, though not to be ruled out, are often counter-productive
3. **People blindness: church is oblivious to differences that exist in community** 😊

- **Symptoms**
  - Unwillingness to recognize cultural differences
  - Ethnocentrism
  - Expectations that everyone came from the same mold and should live by same set of cultural rules
People blindness

- Remedy
  - Celebrate cultural differences
  - Provide ministry and programming options
  - Minister in ways that are meaningful to each group
  - Attempt to remove cultural barriers to evangelism
4. Koinonia-itis: the “holy huddle”

- Symptoms
  - congregation fellowships among itself well, but outsiders are rarely included
  - Church programming is focused on members, not on people in community
  - Church is for saved, not for sinners
  - People’s main interest is growing spiritually, not winning people to Christ
Koinonitis

- Remedy
  - Introduce outgoing evangelism program to counter-balance the extreme inward focus
  - Develop small groups to assimilate newcomers
  - Move people from maintenance positions to outreach-oriented ministry
  - Cultivate positive, welcoming atmosphere for visitors
5. Old First Church syndrome: nominal, second-generation Christianity

- Symptoms
  - Possesses form but not the power
  - Cooling off of first love for Christ (Rev. 2:4)
  - Very little evangelism taking place
  - Immorality crops up and is not dealt with
Old First Church syndrome

- Remedy
  - Renewal and revival
  - Obedience to the Holy Spirit
  - Purposely expose key leaders to dynamic, spirit-filled churches
6. Sociological strangulation: physical facilities cannot handle more people

- Symptoms
  - 80% of available parking spaces are used
  - Seating in sanctuary is 80% or more filled
  - Classroom space is 80% utilized
Sociological strangulation

- Remedy
  - Provide visitor parking
  - Go to double sessions
  - Find space off-site
  - Start new church in another part of town
  - Build new facilities
7. Hyper-cooperativism

- **Symptoms**
  - Church thinks growth problem will be solved by joining in an evangelistic effort with other churches.
  - Denominational / ecumenical energy drain
  - No natural connection between making decision for Christ and commitment to a local church.
Hyper-cooperativism

- Remedy
  - Make local church evangelism central
  - Focus on making disciples rather than on getting decisions.
  - Peter Wagner: "Unless the local church remains central, evangelism that produces fruit that remains and results in church growth will be minimal"
8. Pew paralysis – arrested spiritual development

- Symptoms
  - Flavor #1: After sacrificing, members want to enjoy fruits of sacrifice
  - Flavor #2: Pastors do almost all the ministry work
    - Lay workers become "helpers" for pastors to attain their goals and fulfill their visions.
Pew paralysis – arrested spiritual development

- Remedy
  - Invert the pyramid of authority
  - Assist Christians attain their spiritual potential
Church diseases

- Ethnic-itis
- Ghost town
- People blindness
- Koinonia-itis
- Old First Church

- Sociological strangulation
- Hyper-cooperativism
- Pew paralysis
This PowerPoint presentation is available along with related materials and other PowerPoint presentations at http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/ppt.htm