



# 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>

