

REPRINT

There's just one thing your church must do

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He's a skilled pastor with plenty of experience. His church grew slowly but steadily for years, but it stalled four or five years ago. It's been in slow, steady decline since then. He's got a handle on all of the issues, but he can't seem to figure out what to do next. Frankly, I don't know what to tell him. What would you say if you were in my shoes?

My friend was trying to explain why he was baffled about how to help one of the pastors in his district. This friend and colleague is a bright spot within his denomination. His churches comprise one of the few districts enjoying church growth within that denomination. I was mystified that this skilled, experienced and well-educated leader couldn't figure out what to tell that pastor.

"Evangelism is priority number one—first, last, and always. No matter what else that pastor has to deal with, he must make evangelism the church's highest prime directive. If evangelism isn't a plateaued church's first concern, it will never be foremost in that church's mindset, mission or programming."

The "Aha!" moment was written all over my friend's face. He already knew this, and I knew he knew this. But, like that pastor, he was overwhelmed by the issues. In trying to keep his nose above water, he lost sight of the "main thing." I wasn't surprised because that's pretty typical for busy pastors.

Too much to do?

Over the past couple of years, we (my colleagues and I at Turnaround Pastors) have noticed a troubling problem: many pastors we've trained forget to make evangelism priority upon returning to their troubled churches. They are soon overwhelmed with the same patterns of behavior and the same processes that put the church in jeopardy in the first place.

Administrative demands, managing staff (paid and volunteer), planning and attending meetings, sermon preparation, pastoral counseling, visitation duties—you know the drill—all work against new priorities and a return to more effective gospel ministry.

The one thing

The film *City Slickers* features a brilliant exchange between Curly, the resident cowboy, and Mitch, the vacationing urban outdoorsman.

"Do you know what the secret to life is?" Curly asks Mitch. He holds up an index finger and says, "This." "Your finger?" Mitch asks.

Curly replies, "One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and the rest don't mean (anything)."

"That's great, but what is the 'one thing'?" Mitch wants to know.

A big grin creeps across Curly's tanned, leathery face. "That's what you have to find out," he says.

Unlike the greenhorn, Mitch, we don't have to find out what that one thing is. I recall hearing Gary McIntosh say, "There are many things a church could do. There are a few good things a church should do. But there is only one thing a church must do." We already know because Jesus told us. That one thing is to "Go, and make disciples."

Isn't it time we stopped making excuses, my fellow pastors? It's time to get down to the Lord's business. Make evangelism your first priority.