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People Spot Missile: Upward or Outward

I was talking with a younger servant of our Lord during a video session. He used the phrase “is it upward or outward.” It was the first time I had heard those two words put together.

Upward implies growing the local church larger. Outward implies spreading the church by the beginning of new congregations.

Paul and Barnabas were a team. As they prepared for their second missionary journey, there was a problem. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark and Paul was opposed to the idea. As a result of that, they went their separate ways now making two teams instead of one. Many of the early Christians were located in Jerusalem. As the persecution of Christians intensified, those Christians dispersed across the Roman Empire taking their Christian faith with them and beginning new churches wherever they went.

It is okay to encourage upward. As a pastor of local churches for 18 years, I always worked to see the churches I served grow. I have spent much of my life helping local churches understand what growth of a local church requires.

Unfortunately, many of the churches that have grown significantly have done so by attracting people from other churches. That is simply rearranging the Kingdom. It is not true growth of the Church. In fact, many churches that at first began to expand with conversion growth, transitioned into transfer growth. Why?

Sadly, so many churches have no vim, vigor, or vitality. These churches literally drift from week to week. Many times they are shrinking almost unnoticed until they are mere shells of what they once were. When a church comes alive, is vibrant and exhibiting some excitement, those churches become very attractive to people who see no hope in their present situations.

Outward implies the conscious effort to begin new churches and reach new people for Christ. I have helped a number of new churches start since 1979. The track record for those churches was that $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the people came from the unchurched community. That is outward and expansion growth.

Only India and China have more unchurched people than the United States. It will take a minimum of 500,000 new churches to effectively evangelize the United States. Though it may

seem like there have been a lot of new churches started, we have barely started enough to compensate for the churches that have closed. Drive around the countryside and see the vacated church buildings or church buildings that have been changed into other uses. It is true that some relocated, but the majority of them died. In fact, churches are dying at an alarming rate.

The increase in energy costs, benefits for clergy such as health care, and various other inflationary issues have put many smaller churches at risk. However, regardless of what is going on we need to be aggressive in reaching outward whether we are in a pre-existing church or a new one. The walk-ins will never cover the normal attrition. Normal attrition consumes 10-15% of your worshipping congregation. A church averaging 100 will lose between 10 and 15 people this year, next year and the year after that. Losses generated by conflict are on top of that. Growth does not occur until these losses are covered.

Jesus tells us to lift our eyes and see the fields that are white with harvests. Churches and individual Christians are myopic. We have trouble seeing beyond our noses. Pray that Jesus will open our eyes to see those fields white and ready for harvest. Why? If we do not see the fields that are white with harvest, we will never pray for laborers to go into those fields.

Upward or outward. I don't think it is to be either or. It has to be both.

A Thought: "...How white are those harvest fields? Look at 4 homes and 3 of them will be occupied by people who either have never been to church or haven't been to church in a year or more...." Jim Moss, Sr.

I am now available to present "The Role of the Church in the Civil War", "Starting a New Service", "Churches Have Personalities", "People Spots", "Does Your Church Really Care About People?" and "A Christian Perspective on Leadership Skills." "Stewardship and Managing Debt" jm Volumes 1, 2, 3, and 4—"A History of the Civil War as Presented by the Church Advocate!" are now available. It is a history without the varnish of revision.

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