

*We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very, very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and to do the rest.*

-Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador

Romeo was clear about God's prophetic call on his life, and also about what he was not called to do. If *focus* is necessary for individual believers, why is it not necessary for a community of believers?

The second congregational dialogue last Sunday went well. There was healthy participation in sharing about Shalom's 24 year journey as it relates to a natural congregational life cycle. A few said we are in the stable phase (the link between growth and decline phases); a few said we have entered decline.

Decline is natural. Many of us recognize our own physical decline. There are no interventions which can put our bodies back on a growth trajectory to avoid the inevitability of death.

Congregations have a similar lifecycle. Without intervention, congregations grow, plateau, decline and die. That cycle may take 300 years, or 30 years. But unlike the human body, interventions can return a congregation to the growth half of the lifecycle. Remember, there is no gain in underestimating decline; and there is no penalty for overestimating decline.

Acknowledging physical decline is difficult. Who likes to admit that competitive basketball days are over? That arthritis has brought an end to sewing or piano playing? That driving days are over?

To avoid congregational decline, a first level intervention is needed while in the stable phase: *redefinition*. Sunday comments suggest that Shalom made various attempts at redefinition of specific areas (worship, outreach and Christian education), but that redefinition of *congregational* purpose was not completed. If this is

correct, then Shalom has entered decline.

When in decline, a second level intervention is required: *redevelopment* (a new and different purpose, and direction). This is precisely what the second transition period objective calls for: *clarify mission (purpose), and discern new vision (direction)*. It indicates that leadership was on target with what the congregation needed. Before going farther, let's attempt to clarify terms we will be using.

A concise congregational **mission statement** is the starting point: it defines who you are and why you exist. The discipline of answering these two questions accurately and concisely, is invaluable. It forces a group to clarify foundational matters related to being and purpose. It was noted Sunday that the original purpose was primarily to start another congregation.

Most organizations (schools, businesses, hospitals, etc.) have a mission statement, *and call it a mission statement*. It is often one or two sentences. A phrase or slogan, can be very helpful for a congregation, but it cannot replace the need for a mission statement. *Called to the corner* was a powerful slogan for Living Water Community Church (Chicago), in light of their unique history and vision. But LWCC also had a mission statement. (I'll tell the story sometime.)

Shalom has a mission statement—it is printed at the top of the worship order in the bulletin each Sunday. It is the mission statement of MC USA, written jointly in 1995, by both Mennonite denominations before they merged to form MC USA.

In its early days, Shalom's mission statement was an edited form of the MC USA statement: it deleted references to the Holy Spirit and growth. This edited version is the 2006 handbook, and in bulletins through 2007. Beginning in 2008, the full MC USA statement has been in our bulletins. I don't know the story, but I suggest that since you have been seeing the full statement each Sunday for eight years, it is your mission statement!

But there's just one small problem.... MC USA, and subsequently Shalom, have always called this a *vision* statement! Without going

deep into definitions, it seems that the term *mission* points more to being and essence, while *vision* points to future direction, i.e. *seeing* where we are headed. It's not a big deal, except that it is very confusing since *mission* is the widely accepted term for a concise statement of being and purpose.

I believe Mennonites likely used *vision* in 1995, because the statement was both about being and direction: *God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.*

Therefore, I suggest that we use *mission* for the concise "being" statement, and *vision* for the longer description of what we will discern together this Fall/Winter in response to the question: "What is Jesus, the Head of Shalom, calling us to become and do in the next three years?" A vision is like a blueprint (or artist's rendering) for a building project, so we know what we need to focus on now to get there. Jesus had such a plan (Luke 10:1-14), to accomplish his unique mission on earth. (More details about this in a future sermon.)

Clarity of mission precedes discernment of vision. One needs to know who you are, before discerning where you are going. The emerging vision, must be in sync with the mission. Without a vision statement, a congregation can meander, attempting to do everything, because so many things *are* in sync with the MC USA statement. Ideally, a vision statement should be limited to one page.

In future mileposts I'll attempt to define *authority*, *leadership* and *missional*--terms which are frequently used with great variance of definition. Not to worry, I'll simply attempt to describe what they are, not how they are accomplished.

—Gary Martin

#### **Looking Ahead:**

July 17 9:30 a.m. *Spiritual Gifts: The Operating System for Jesus' Church* 2 Kings 5; 1 Corinthians 12

July 24 9:30 a.m. Sermon: Brian

Aug. 14 11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue #3: Mission Statement

Sept. 11 11:00 a.m. Congregational Dialogue #4

Gary's projected in town schedule: July 17-19; July 31-Aug3