

Growth Points

with Dr. Gary L. McIntosh

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Look Back — Leap Forward

When Australia was a new nation, its leaders established a crest to represent their country. Two animals stood one on each side of the crest—the kangaroo and the emu. These two particular animals were chosen because of a unique common characteristic—while kangaroos and emus turn their heads to glance backward in order to get their bearing, they always move forward. Though each animal is very swift afoot (reaching speeds of 30 mph), neither is able to walk backwards. The founders of Australia wanted their country represented by what moved forward, never backward. In other words kangaroos and emus look back and leap forward!

As we move swiftly into the

21st Century, it is important that we look back to find the core values that give meaning to our ministries and leap forward to take hold of new opportunities.

Unfortunately, the strong pull toward the future may cause us to overlook the past. When looking back promotes a *Band-Aid Mentality*—doing whatever it takes to survive and hold the church together by looking to the good old days of the past for ministry results and affirmation—then looking back is not good. We cannot expect anything original from an echo. If looking to the past only leads to an attempt to redo ministry in by gone ways, we are doomed to failure in the 21st Century. In short the past is for remembering, not living.

However, looking back is often necessary to fund a powerful future. Martin E. Marty, church historian at the University of Chicago, calls this "finding a usable future in our past." Joshua might have said, "A good past is the best future." The exact story is recorded in Joshua 4:1-24. After all the people of Israel had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord spoke to Joshua and commanded that twelve stones be removed from the river and set up as a memorial. After the stones were set up in Gilgal, Joshua explained the reason as follows.

When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What are these stones?' then you shall inform your children saying, 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord God had done

to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; that all the people of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

Joshua knew that understanding the core values of the past are crucial for designing a new future. Thus, he commanded that whenever the nation of Israel struggled with determining direction the people should always look to the past to rediscover their core values.

There is a great deal of talk today about defining a church's core values. It is a mistake, however, to think that we create our values in a vacuum. The truth is we discover them by looking to the past, just as the people of Israel looked to the past to rekindle the fire of their own values. How is this accomplished?

The following are a few steps to assist leaders to

Look Back and Leap Forward.

Church Growth Network Changes Its Name

If you are a regular subscriber to the McIntosh Church Growth Network newsletter, you have already discovered that we have changed our title and format.

After being published for sixteen years, we decided it was time for a new look and a new name. Rest assured, however, the new Growth Points newsletter will still contain the insightful ministry ideas you have come to enjoy and appreciate.

—Editor

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Living Traditions Point to the Future

Life is understood backwards; but lived forwards

1. Honor the past.

A wise person once commented, "The past teaches us, the present tests us, and the future rewards us." So look to the past asking what lessons can be learned from former leaders and ministries? Ask, "What values does our church actually hold?" "What has inspired great passion in our people in the past?" The answers to these questions will point clearly to the values your church naturally embraces.

2. Affirm previous ministries.

Values are something our people must buy into and they must have a predisposition to hold them. By affirming the underlying values of former ministries, we retain the people who are attracted to those values. Learn what ministries are legendary in the history of your church and begin to affirm them and the people who served in them. Let your people know that you understand the place the ministry holds in your church and their hearts.

3. Highlight the biblical values and principles.

Methods are not long-term but the values that created and supported them are. As you affirm the past leaders and ministries, highlight the foundational values that undergirded them. Think through each ministry that will need to be changed and identify the biblical values that make it valid. Teach and preach the scripture, the values and basic principles that are timeless and remain valid today.

4. Present new ministries as extensions of the past.

Building on the first three steps just noted, present new approaches to ministry as an "extension" of former ones. For example, if your desire is to begin a new worship service, focus on the fact that you are just building on your core values so that you can reach more people.

5. Show how new approaches carry on the values of past.

Highlight the core values of your church and then show how the new ministry you wish to start is simply a new way to fulfill old values. For example, a youth soccer camp may be presented as carrying on the core value of evangelism in the same way that Vacation Bible School did for generations in the past.

6. Assure people that you are committed to core biblical values.

Take time to educate people so that they understand it is the "form" of the ministry that is changing but not the "core values." Stress the principles of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, and show how your new ministry is becoming "all things to all men so that you might win some."

7. Listen and love.

If the change is major, take a minimum of one year to work through the above steps. Effective leaders give people time to share their feelings, vent their frustrations, and become accustomed to the new ways of ministry.

8. Communicate that traditions are honored best as they are seen in new ministries.

There are dead traditions and living traditions. The dead ones continue to be remembered but with little impact on life and people today. But the living traditions continue on by underscoring the historical values for ministries that are being accomplished today. The best traditions are the ones that point to the future through effective ministries that reach people today.

9. Be patient.

Understand that in urban and suburban areas of the United States, it normally takes 5-7 years to turn an existing church in a new direction. In more rural settings it often takes 10-12 years and sometimes longer. Church leaders who are leading churches in the 21st Century should be careful to take the long view. While we may not be able to accomplish as much this year as we might hope, we will accomplish more over the next five years than we think.

10. Trust God to make a way for it all to happen.

The old hymn says it well, "O God, our help in ages past our hope for years to come." What better words to bear in mind while leading a 21st Century church. As we love God and His people, He will help us lead them to effective ministry in the new millennium.



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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