

NURTURING HOLISTIC VISION AMONG THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

A pastor with a passion for reaching the community with good news and good works may be eager to take the ball and run with it. But bypassing others who are “gatekeepers” for the larger congregation’s support (whether the pastoral team, staff, or influential lay leaders) multiplies the chances of conflict, ineffectiveness and burn-out down the road. David Heney points out that when God gave Moses the charge of delivering the Israelites from slavery, his “first act of communication was to talk to the elders (Exod. 4:29). By getting the already accepted elders onboard, Moses greatly shortened the time needed to spread his message with good credibility.”

How do you encourage the leadership team to embrace and implement a holistic ministry vision? The most effective way is to expose them to what others are doing in holistic ministry. Seeing and experiencing transformative ministries in action helps people develop a taste for holistic mission that cannot be generated through words alone—not even this book! The following suggestions can not only rally the existing leadership but help in training an expanding base of new ministry leaders.

Eat out!

Check out the menu of what God is doing outside your corner of the kingdom. An idea borrowed from the corporate world is to send out venture teams or scout squads to check out the playing field. In other words, eat out!

Send out leaders to sample taste tests of effective holistic church-based models. Palate probes can last for a few hours, such as by sending a work crew of your church’s leadership to another church’s housing rehab project. Jesus Day/March for Jesus (www.jesusday.org) offers a one-day adventure in holistic ministry. For a more intense taste test, take a weekend plunge at an innovative rural or inner-city congregation; this affords the opportunity for experiencing worship that is the heart and soul of holistic ministry.

Then try digging in to a hearty ministry meal to feed leaders’ vision for mission. Get involved in short-term mission trips sponsored by groups such as Network 9:35 and its partners (see Appendix B). Appreciating a good meal takes time, and so does experiencing quality holistic ministry. Help leaders process a ministry experience by gathering afterward for reflection and prayer. Give staff sabbaticals so they can really dig in. When Phil was missions pastor at First Presbyterian Church, he and his family used their sabbatical to visit effective ministries across North America and to take a course on urban church planting with holistic practitioner Michael Green. His sabbatical brought a breath of fresh ideas, inspiration, enthusiasm, and vision.

Eat in!

There are many ways to nurture a contagious vision among leaders and ministry staff at your church home:

- C Sponsor “witness weekends.” Invite a group (of lay people, not just clergy or staff) from another congregation more experienced in holistic ministry to come. This group can join you in a mission tour of your community, share their stories and experiences with your leadership and congregants, and answer your questions. The weekend might include a service project that allows you to work side by side. (As a useful resource for this exercise, see *C2C—A Visionary Journey: Congregations Helping Congregations Launch Holistic Ministry*, by Phil Olson and Jim Hancock, available from www.network935.org).
- C Provide leaders with more substantial fare by hosting a holistic ministry expert-in-residence—that is, offer housing for an experienced practitioner in exchange for sharing their expertise (teaching leadership development classes, leading small groups, helping launch a targeted ministry, etc.)
- C Bring seminary, college, or church training institute professors to your church “campus.” Enrolling all your leaders in a course may be financially prohibitive, but more likely the church could afford to pay a professor to teach a course on site, either as an intensive weekend or as several weekly classes. Imagine training all your leaders at one time in topics like the theology of mission, economic justice in the Bible, dealing with other religions and cults in evangelism, or a Christian perspective on social work.
- C Similarly, invite seasoned veterans from the field of community ministry to teach classes on practical topics like grant writing, starting a micro-enterprise, youth outreach, or political advocacy.
- C Staff exchanges—from a month to a year—with churches more experienced in holistic ministry provide a dual benefit. During the exchange, your congregation gains the abilities and insights of an experienced ministry leader, along with an “outsider’s” critique of your church’s foundations for ministry. And when it is over, your staff member brings home a wealth of new ideas and skills to pass on to others. An exchange might strengthen a growing relationship between churches that could lead to additional exchanges of ideas, people, and programs for years to come.

Adapted from Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson and Heidi Rolland Unruh, Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works, chapter 13. Used by permission of Baker Books, a division of Baker Book House Company, copyright (c) 2002.