

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

By Bob Osborne, EFCA West
Director of Church Health
(bob.osborne@efca.org)

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Turning the Page – Again

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

It's the first of December. Twenty-four days until Christmas. Thirty days until the start of a new year. It will take me a month to consistently remember to write "2017." The start of a new year always stirs within me a sense of anticipation. I'm not sure why. There's really nothing fundamentally different between December 31 and January 1, but for some reason I still get a sense something good and new lies ahead.

In churches, leadership teams often have reason to feel a sense of newness at the start of a new year. In many churches, the start of a calendar year is also the start of a new budget – the deficit of last year is gone and, for at least one day, we are "on budget." New members of leadership teams often begin their seasons of service at the start of a new year and some previous leaders rotate out. Preaching calendars often get a fresh start when the page turns on our yearly calendar.

This time of year provides a great opportunity for church leadership teams to both look back in remembrance and to look forward in anticipation. It's a time for reflection and hope, and both are something to talk about.

We often think that we and our leadership teams will grow and get better through experience. But that's not true. As author John Maxwell has often said, "Experience is not the best teacher; *evaluated* experience is the best teacher." As we move from one year to the next, it is an excellent time for us as individual leaders and as leadership teams to pause, at least briefly, to evaluate the experiences of the previous year and look forward to the next.

Let me provide some ideas that might help you have a meaningful and productive time of reflection and evaluation as well as hope for our future together as a leadership team as you turn the calendar's page – again.

- For a time of evaluation and reflection, consider the following:
 - Talk about the founding of your church. What do we know about the founders, charter members, and their vision for the church? Have we stayed true to that vision? Why or why not?

- What were some of the obstacles faced by our church-planting pioneers? What can we learn from how they faced those obstacles?
- In the past year, what are some of the blessings that we have seen and experienced within our congregation? Where have we seen God at work? How have we grown?
- In the past year, what are some of the struggles that we faced and what have we learned from those struggles? Where have we seen God at work? How have we grown?
- For a time of anticipation and hope, consider the following:
 - What are your leadership team members' dreams for the future of your church and their individual futures? Don't debate these, just share them. It is likely that each team member will have different dreams. As long as they don't contradict the vision, let them dream.
 - How do we anticipate that our vision and mission will be implemented in the coming year? What might it look like? Where might we see God at work? How can we be a people that shares the gospel with those lost in sin? If vision and mission isn't clear, consider how working toward clarity might help.
 - Do you have any new members of your leadership team? Instead of just introducing them to the group and getting to work, have every group member introduce himself/herself and share something meaningful about themselves and their work with the team. Learn about one another's strengths, weaknesses, giftedness, skills and attributes. Create a sense of anticipation for working together in the months and years to come. When existing members are replaced by new members, interpersonal and team relationships change. Explore these changes together.
 - Talk about the yearly preaching calendar (or however far in advance your calendar goes). What are its themes and topics, and how might they produce spiritual fruit within your church family in the year to come? How might we as leaders reinforce the teaching?
 - Review devotionally the closing chapters of Revelation. Fix our hope upon the resurrection, God's Kingdom, and eternity. Despite the struggles that we will face in the coming year, we know and fix upon the hope that God wins.
 - Pray together for every staff member and leadership team member specifically and by name. In prayer ask God for clarity and unity within the leadership team and His blessings upon the church family as you seek to follow Him. Rather than asking Him to bless our plans, ask Him to reveal His plans for the church throughout the year and the courage to follow Him.

Take an hour or so in your December or January meeting to do this. It may be the best hour you spend together all year. Year-end reflections and hopes – that's something to talk about.

I wish you all and your families a most blessed and joyous Christmas season and New Year!

Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.

Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.