

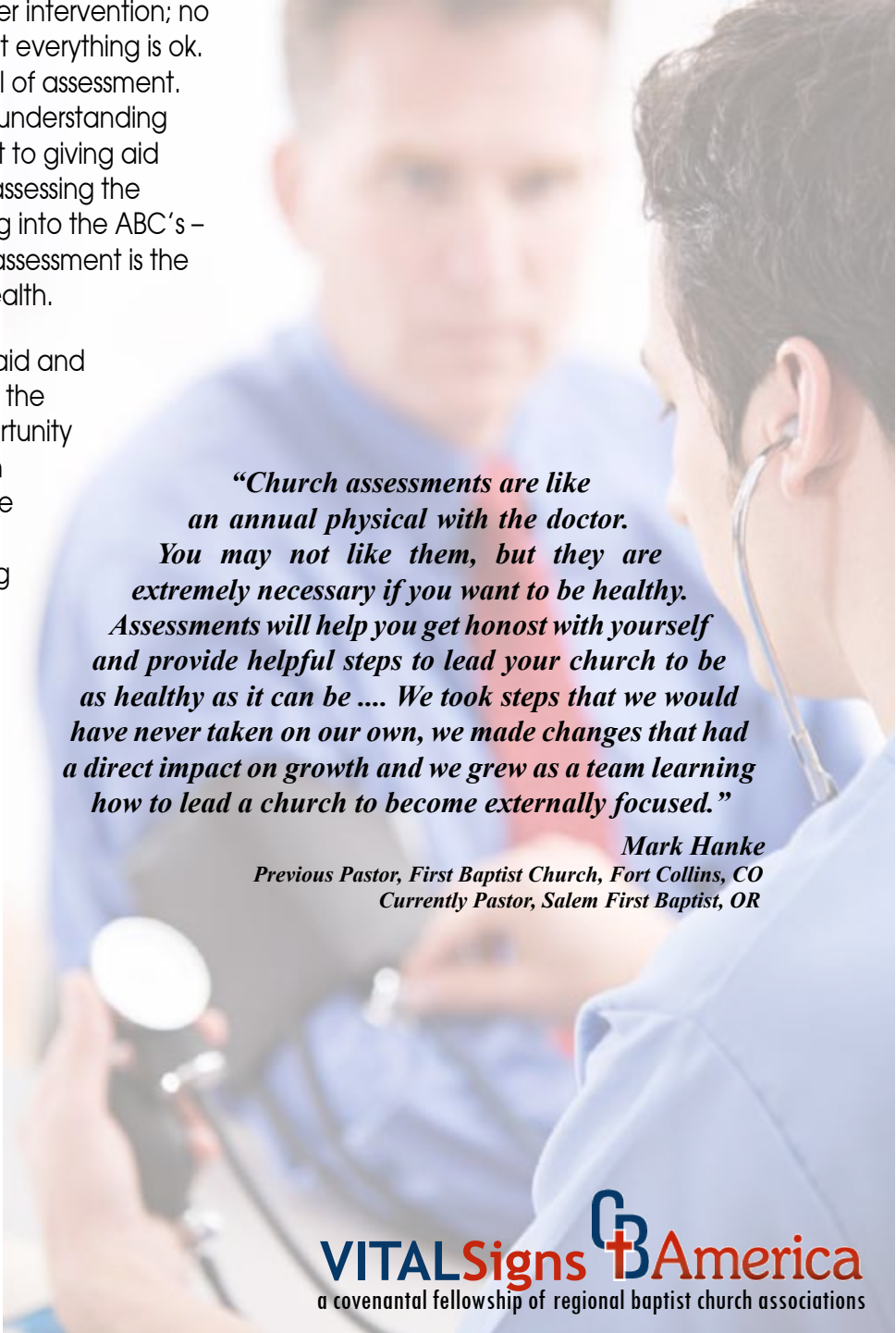
Assessing Your Church's Health

An EMT is trained to aid those who find themselves in need of assistance. While these patients often do not see their circumstances as emergencies, to a trained observer, there may be obvious indicators that there is a legitimate cause for concern. Mangled vehicles, bumps and bruises, or protruding bones are signs of possible injury and the need for further intervention; no matter how certain the patient is that everything is ok. Part of any medical training is the skill of assessment. Knowing what to look for to gain an understanding of a patient's condition is paramount to giving aid and providing care. Beginning with assessing the scene for safe conditions and moving into the ABC's – Airway, Breathing and Circulation – assessment is the foundation of care that promotes health.

Likewise, assessment is key to giving aid and providing care for the Body of Christ, the local church. As we have had opportunity to engage the assessment process in churches in our region, it has become clear that just as in the medical field, assessment is paramount to providing care and promoting health in the local church -- being something recognized throughout the Christian community. There are a plethora of assessment devices available for churches to choose. Natural Church Development (NCD), a tool used by several CBAmerica regions, has been a beneficial assessment tool. At CBAmerica's 2008 Summer Summit, representatives from the regional associations gathered to be trained in an assessment process led by Bill Hoyt, of NexStep Coaching and Consulting. With over 300 church assessments in his portfolio, Bill has a deep understanding of the assessment process.

Typically assessments are based first upon an understanding of

the MISSION of the church. Historically, CBAmerica churches have focused upon the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as core values in defining the church's mission. More recently, that mission has received further clarification and emphasis through the *missional church movement*.



“Church assessments are like an annual physical with the doctor. You may not like them, but they are extremely necessary if you want to be healthy. Assessments will help you get honest with yourself and provide helpful steps to lead your church to be as healthy as it can be We took steps that we would have never taken on our own, we made changes that had a direct impact on growth and we grew as a team learning how to lead a church to become externally focused.”

Mark Hanke
Previous Pastor, First Baptist Church, Fort Collins, CO
Currently Pastor, Salem First Baptist, OR

VITALSigns  **America**
a covenantal fellowship of regional baptist church associations

An oversimplification of the missional church movement would be understanding the difference between the church saying, "Come and see," to its declaring "We will go and be."

Second, most assessments define and determine the health of the SYSTEMS needed to support effective ministry. These vary in number from 7 to 10 systems which include leadership, ministry, spirituality, structures, worship, small groups, evangelism and relationships (these happen to be the NCD systems.)

The Power of Assessment

We have witnessed the power of the assessment process to bring intentionality and effectiveness to the churches

that are courageous enough to enter into a state of vulnerability and openness. Contrary to popular thought, the best time to engage an assessment process is when a church is healthy, even though most will wait until a time of crisis. Why is it that my doctor wants me to come in for regular check-ups?

Here are a few of the reasons that both I, and the local church, might want to consider regular times of health assessment.

Assessment accesses expertise that I do not have.

You may be known as a know-it-all, but the reality is that given virtually any subject, there are those who actually do know more. When it comes to my health, I can assess my ongoing health by how I feel, but I am painfully aware that many people die from diseases and ailments that did not produce dramatic changes in how they felt. Like the proverbial frog in a pot of boiling water, I can lose sensitivity to my current condition. Likewise it amazes me how many churches are oblivious to the obvious crisis caused by their unhealthiness. Our autonomy (in this case synonymous with pride) has preconditioned us to be apprehensive in enlisting the aid of those who have the expertise to

use the tools necessary to assess health and prescribe action toward health. The epistles stand as testimony to the power of assessment and the need to heed advice. Paul understood the character and nature of the church and continually helped churches make mid-course adjustments to health and effectiveness.

Assessment establishes the benchmarks for change.

When I go in for my yearly health screening (ok, maybe it is really every other year), I am confident that the doctor is going to order a blood test to look at my cholesterol, blood sugar levels and a bunch of other things that are somewhat meaningless to me. Two things are going to happen. He will compare them to the norms for men my age and he will look in my records to see if there has been change. Bill Hoyt has written a great book entitled, "Effectiveness by the Numbers" that helps us understand the things that we need to count – these would be the norms. We are then encouraged to look for changes to determine if there is cause for concern. Things like baptisms, attendance, giving, assimilation and retention, and leadership development are great indicators or gauges of health. Let me emphasize that it is not about numbers, it is all about health and effectiveness.

Assessment is the doorway to intentional and effective ministry.

Through assessment, the medical personnel affirm me in the areas of health and assist me in prioritizing my health needs. When I work up the nerve to go to the doctor, I really want to know what I need to do to feel better or deal with my issues. I would be disappointed if the doctor diagnosed a problem and did not offer some prescriptive action to deal with it. Depending on the severity of the problem and the discomfort I am experiencing, I am probably as open as I will ever be to do whatever it will take to fix the problem.

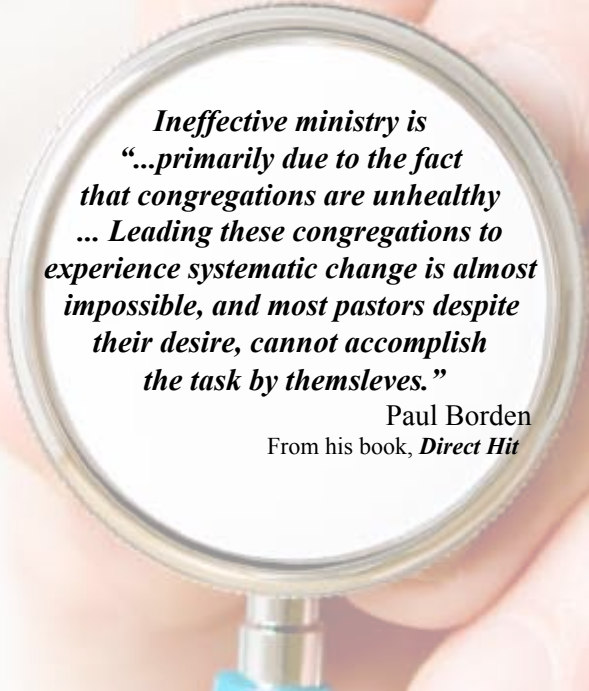
Likewise in the church, assessment often becomes the impetus to intentional and effective ministry. Imagine the power of a ministry focused on its mission of making disciples. Assessment aids a church in examining

"The (assessment) material identifies the important and necessary categories that informed me as to the church's history, their present state and where they needed to develop. I would recommend the (assessment) evaluation to any church, healthy or not, to be better equipped for the work the Lord has given them ..."

Michael F. Sabo, Ph.D.
President, Christian Leadership Institute
and Transition Pastor, Grace Church, Greeley, CO

all of its systems on the basis of that mission, discarding hindrances and distractions, and implementing strategies that reinforce and empower missional ministry.

Preventive medicine is less costly, invasive and painful than emergency management. As an EMT, I would often transport patients who would share what became a common story. It would go something like, "Well, I haven't felt well for the last several days. It started with indigestion and moved to chest pain with my arms hurting. I just feel terrible. But I don't like to go to the doctor." At this point, more likely than not, the



***Ineffective ministry is
"...primarily due to the fact
that congregations are unhealthy
... Leading these congregations to
experience systematic change is almost
impossible, and most pastors despite
their desire, cannot accomplish
the task by themselves."***

Paul Borden
From his book, *Direct Hit*

heart attack has already irreparably damaged the heart muscle. It may mean open heart surgery, but probably a life-changing event has taken place. Often times had the patient been familiar with the early symptoms, or had they availed themselves of regular check-ups, this life altering event could have been avoided or at least the damage mitigated.

"At the very end of 2007 ... I accepted the call as Lead Pastor. During the interviewing process I was able to look at the Assessment Report which painted for me a clear picture of the church's past, it's preferred future, and what kind of leadership was going to be needed. It was a beautiful match to my history, abilities, and passions. As I stepped in as pastor, I was able to hit the ground running, because I knew exactly what needed to be done, and we finished up all of the prescriptions laid out during the Assessment. Currently the church is healthy and growing ..."

Matthew Fite
Pastor, Good News Community Church
Broomfield, CO

I wish there were not comparable scenarios played out in the church. The crisis reveals itself in a phone call from a pastor who has been asked to resign or was fired. Perhaps it is a board member calling to ask how to deal with tension in the church that is about to split a congregation. It may be the notice that a church is closing because what was once a beacon for the light of the Gospel can no longer keep the doors open. It is always easier to deal with these problems before they become a crisis.

Is an Assessment in Your Future?

What does the future hold for your church? How will you do ministry in the ever changing culture of our current society? Are these days of fear and uncertainty, or days of opportunity?

As an EMT I often found myself standing in the midst of mayhem -- people injured through traumatic circumstances, some in the stillness of shock, others hysterical because of fear - all at a loss for direction and action. What was needed at that moment was someone who could assess the circumstances and determine a course of action to best deal with the given situation. Assessment provided the foundation for action.

I believe every church could benefit from a regular check-up (assessment). I am more convinced than ever that there is power in having an outside source facilitate that process and that few churches can do this on their own. Your regional office can help facilitate the assessment process. It is a powerful tool for church health and ministry effectiveness.

Stan Rieb
Director of Operations and Communication - CBAmerica
Associate Director - Rocky Mountain CBA

Humility and Submission...A Tale of Two Churches

Dr. Stephen LeBar, Executive Director

It was a time of great celebration in the church. The short-term mission team had returned from their overseas ministry, and the report caused all to rejoice. Not only had the team evangelized in unreached areas, they had actually planted three churches, disciplined men into leadership roles, and appointed elders in the burgeoning congregations. All this was accomplished in a two-year commitment involving over 1,000 miles of travel. The sending church was ecstatic over the report, and praised God for the day they had commissioned this team and sent them out. Missionary endeavor was a priority to this local church, situated in the third largest city of its area.

But the elation was short-lived. Visitors came to the church and questioned the theological position of the missionaries, criticizing the glowing report and even casting doubt on the motivation of the returned team.

Intense discussion erupted, and eventually the leaders of the church determined to seek counsel from their mother church in the capital city some 300 miles to the south.

Sound familiar? The story is found in Acts chapters thirteen through fifteen. Jerusalem was the mother church, Antioch

the missionary church. Paul and Barnabas were leaders at Antioch, where believers were first called Christians. The church had sent them out, along with John Mark, in what is now called Paul's first missionary journey into Asia Minor, currently known as Turkey.

When the dissention erupted over the conversion of Gentiles, the church at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to go to the church at Jerusalem and seek counsel. Think about this. Why would this vibrant congregation, with its missionary zeal, seek advice from its mother church to the south? After all, they had Paul, certainly the most educated Christian leader of the day. He was a brilliant and articulate polemicist who could argue theological circles around anyone! Why should they seek counsel? They had it all together, and were a successful, competent church. Yet in humility and submission, they sought outside help in dealing with their troubling issue.

Allowing an assessment team to come into your church and becoming vulnerable to outside evaluation, regardless of your church health, strength and missionary zeal, requires humility and submission. But it is a source of God's abounding grace and the Spirit's empowering vision.

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