

## Staying in Focus

### Part One: A Rifle or A Shotgun?

The church has been declining gradually for a few years. There has been a change of senior pastors, followed by a few months of "come-back growth" as some who had left or become sporadic in attendance return to more consistency. There appears to be a proliferation of church programs, events, and ministries attended by the most interested or most highly committed. While there is a pleasant atmosphere among the people, the church staff and core leaders are tired and over extended. Lots of things are happening, but nothing is really captivating or defining the church and activity as unique or purposeful.

What is the issue here? This first article in a two-part series briefly analyzes what may be going on in this case of a lack of FOCUS. What does it mean to be in focus in our life or church ministry? Four statements may help us focus on what it means to be focused or unfocused.

1. Being focused is seeing clearly and channeling all of our energy and resources toward achieving what we are trying to accomplish. It is the rifle approach rather than shotgun.
2. When a church is not sharply focused and is not seeing the goal clearly, it is easy to pursue several "goals" and respond to spontaneous "opportunities" or pressures. When a church is responding to many opportunities it often is not achieving what should be its priorities. This leads to a shotgun approach rather than a rifle.
3. When a rifle is fired, all of the power and energy of the explosive gun powder, grooves in the gun barrel, and the single, carefully shaped bullet all work together to hit the precisely scoped target with maximum effectiveness.
4. When a shotgun is pointed and fired, the hope is that several of the one hundred or more lead pellets will spread and hit a desirable target. While the target may be hit, normally many other things ("targets") are hit as well. Sometimes the unplanned targets are damaged in the process. The shotguns target needs to be much closer to the shooter than for a rifle, as the pellets much more quickly lose their velocity and fall to the ground. To be healthy and grow, a church must have a clear focus on its mission/purpose and fire with precision at its target/goals.

#### **Symptoms of an Unfocused Church**

While the parable of the rifle and shotgun helps us understand the focus options, how can we tell if our church is sharply focused or generally active but unfocused? Here are three easily observed places to look for hints:

1. **The Church Bulletin**  
There are three identifiable characteristics of the bulletin of an unfocused (shotgun) church. First, there are often a large variety and quantity of scheduled programs, events, and service opportunities listed each week. The unfocused church usually offers many inviting opportunities for people to spend their time. Second, the many activities do not seem to be coordinated and interrelated so as to produce a certain outcome or lead the people in achieving established goals. Third, the actual church mission statement or specific church goals are often omitted from the bulletin. This is usually an indication that they are not reinforced and used during the service.
2. **Announcements/Celebration**  
The announcements and PowerPoint scrolling notices are numerous and often suggested by individuals or groups that want to promote an opportunity that is of special interest to them personally or their friends. Again, there does not seem to be a cohesive vision or mission that ties together these public statements in a way that helps the church achieve pre-planned goals or a strategy.
3. **Core Group Participation**  
An unfocused church will often have a very dedicated core of lay leaders (as well as staff) who are very busy preparing for, setting up, and taking down these numerous programs, events, and ministries. Consequently, they are often tired and have little time for making strategic decisions, evaluation, and focusing on achieving specific goals or outcomes.

Often, the unfocused church is actually focused on a ministry philosophy without realizing it. The general mission becomes to hold and run church events and participate in a variety of program ministries. The definition of "success" for the church becomes the fact that "We do these events and a sufficient number of people participate in them."

The next issue of the ChristWay Ministries Newsletter will include part two of this Ministry Methods article and will deal with ways to become a focused church or individual. In the meantime, there are three resources that may assist your church or yourself toward "Staying in Focus". Detailed descriptions of each may be found by clicking on the appropriate links.

**[Developing Leadership Skills Through Goals](#)**

A CD training set for increasing focus.

**[Simple Church](#)**

A book by Thom S. Rainer & Eric Geiger that helps us understand being focused.

**[The Excelling Church Consultation](#)**

A professional service of ChristWay Ministries to assist churches in strategic planning and becoming a highly focused and growing church.

Dr. Howard Bixby