

2nd Opinion: Blind spots and church migraines

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Have you ever experienced a migraine headache? Across my life, I have struggled with occasional migraines. Thankfully, they have diminished in both frequency and intensity over the years. Mine always are preceded by significant distortion in my field of vision. As a child, I came to understand that when my vision was distorted, an excruciating headache was about to engulf me.



Bill Wilson Later, I learned the term for that visual distortion was “scotoma.” The dictionary defines it as “loss of vision in a part of the visual field; blind spot.” Those who have experienced this phenomena of blind spots know it is extremely disorienting and distracting. Those afflicted with scotomas can attest these dreaded blind spots and distortions bring normal life to a halt.

Individual & organizational blind spots

I’m increasingly convinced individuals and organizations can have blind spots in their life’s field of vision.

An individual can have a scotoma when it comes to his or her character. In the Old Testament, Nathan pointed out David’s gaping moral blind spot.

Jesus talked about people who took great joy in pointing out splinters in the eyes of others while ignoring logs in their own eyes. We all are capable of having a scotoma with regard to our shortcomings while seeing clearly the shortcomings of others. Some of us specialize in this.

Church scotomas

Is it possible that churches have scotomas? I'm afraid so. We can think we are doing one thing and never understand that, in reality, we are doing something quite different.

Many churches have awakened to the fact their mission efforts, though well-intentioned, often exacerbate someone's situation rather than help it. Whether it be second-hand clothing sent to victims of disasters that ends up unused in warehouses, or once-a-year food boxes that do little to curb hunger, we often have blind spots when it comes to helping others. We slowly are focusing on the fact too often our helping hurts as much as it helps.

Some churches have turned a blind eye toward their gradual withdrawal from healthy evangelism. With the demise of tactics like revivals, door-to-door evangelism, confrontational evangelism using tracts, and a host of other methods that have fallen out of favor, churches have frequently ended up with no evangelism strategy at all. I often talk with churches about this, and they are forced to admit it has been far too long since their baptismal waters were stirred by anyone over the age of 18.

Acute sense of self

Another blind spot for many of us is when our focus upon internal congregational concerns overwhelms our concern for our neighborhoods and communities.

Anyone guilty of the blind spot of thinking that worship should cater to our

tastes and preferences? How about the idea that children and youth ministry primarily is meant to be convenient entertainment?

Has your church gradually lost its missional future vision and balance? One pastor shared with me the shock their church experienced when they admitted their missional vision had been reduced to simply paying the bills, the ministers' salaries and the various expenses of gathering with one another each week.

Long list

The list of blind spots in my life and yours is longer than we want to admit.

One thing a healthy church continually can ask itself is, "Where are the blind spots of our congregation?" Recognizing them as symptoms of deeper issues is a first step toward treating the underlying ailments that keep us from becoming all Christ intended us to be.

As an adolescent, I came to understand my visual blind spots always were followed by the intense pain and discomfort of a migraine. I learned to plan and medicate accordingly. So it is with our churches. We ignore our blind spots at our own peril, for they are our early warning system for more complicated issues ahead.

In my 40th year of ministry, I have discovered simply asking the question begins to improve our vision and diminish the headaches. Someone needs to ask regularly: "Where are our blind spots?" Just being open to the possibility that we may have work yet to do is to bring fresh eyes and the ability to see possibilities. Often, I enjoy a ringside seat as congregations come back to life by refocusing their future vision on the things that define a healthy church.

Let me encourage you to begin to look for those scotomas—those blind spots—in your life and in the life of your church. We all have them, and

when we recognize them, we can treat them. In doing so, we can become proactive about being transformed into the people God intends us to be.

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