

## Blessing Point Ministries - Historical Research Check List

- First of all, pray. Ask the Lord to guide you as you examine your church's history. He will lead you to what He knows to be important. He wants you to know it far more than you desire to know it.
- Adopt a humble spirit. We are not doing this to accuse anyone or assign guilt for things in the church's history. We seek to understand what the Lord of the Church is saying about these things. We may discover some event that has resulted in Divine discipline on our church. Commit to treating whatever is found with an awareness of our own propensity to sin. We need to be honest about what we find and humility to respond to it with the right spirit.
- See if you have records of the yearly average Sunday morning attendance. Some denominations maintain records that go back decades in their district or national office. If you do not have access to exact figures, go by an estimate recollected by those who lived through the period.
- Giving is also an important measure of church health. If available plot the yearly averages of your ministry's giving.
- To make the details of your historical research manageable, divide the church's history into 3-4 eras before the retreat. You can use the tenure of your church's pastors, buildings or locations, or major events. Or you can organize it around the stages of human development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, adult eras etc. Whatever framework you choose, it should make sense for your church's history.
- You will be researching to find the specific blessings, challenges and crises that occurred in each era of your church's history, so record these.
- Identify the blessings of each era. The blessings are those things that Jesus obviously used for good in your midst. What strengths did the church have? What positive events stand out? Of what would Christ say "I know your works!" These will likely be many – because of the good work the Lord has done through your church's past. You should celebrate these.
- Identify the challenges your ministry faced in each era. What obstacles does Christ know you faced? The challenges are not necessarily bad things but things that the church had to overcome to do good ministry (like a lack of space). But it can also include changes in the culture. What difficulties did you face and survive in each era?
- Identify the crises in each era. Of what would Christ say "But I have this against you" in each era? This is obviously the most important part of the process and you need as much information on these events as possible, preferably from first-hand witnesses and documents. Crisis events are common in ministry and often manifest Divine discipline. Identify them, explain them, and explore them. Often it is not the crisis itself but the way the church responded that causes Christ's discipline. Most "hinge events" in churches occur at these time of crisis. They are the triggers to the wounds the church, pastor, staff, lay leaders and congregation have experienced through the years.

Where do you go to find this kind of information? There are several potential sources.

- ✓ Old timers who have been in the church for a while can shed light on your history. Don't be surprised if the Lord has left someone in your congregation who knows the key story that unlocks your church's healing. He wants you to know it.
- ✓ Board records shed light around key events in your churches history. They also reveal the way leaders handled a given crisis in the church. If you discover a sudden policy change in your board documents, be curious as to what motivated the change. Usually a painful story motivates such decisions.
- ✓ Call and talk to former pastors, staff and lay leaders about their perceptions of what happened at the church in the eras they were present. Gain their perspective and let them know why you're doing this. Explain that you have a concern for the health of the church and that you're trying to get a historical perspective on what Jesus has been saying to your ministry. You would value their input. Let them know you want an honest appraisal. Interview them, asking about the blessings, challenges, and crises they experienced. Help them to feel safe in sharing what they know, but don't be surprised or get defensive if you hear their pain or anger.
- ✓ Old newspaper articles about your church may shed light on your church's history. This is especially true in rural areas and small towns. Church events were often recorded in such papers.
- ✓ Written church histories celebrating a milestone anniversary can be helpful to identify the blessings, but they are usually "sanitized" and rarely record painful things. They may help people remember some of the blessings of early days though.