

10 Ways Mission Statements Backfire

The idea of mission is simple: **Do you and those who you lead know what you are ultimately supposed to be doing?** While most pastors think they are clear on mission, most church attenders are not. And in some ways, how we use the default language of “making disciples” is to blame, even though these words represent a very important biblical passage.

To say it a different way, **how church leaders cut and paste Matthew 28:19-20 as a crown-jewel text of the Great Commission is actually working against their accomplishment of it.** Our church mission statements backfire on us!

Here are **ten quirky realities about church mission statements that illuminate how they backfire.** Which one is most applicable to your current situation?

Quirky Reality #1: No Process

Even though the Bible records many examples of leaders articulating the mission of God’s people, we fixate on Matthew’s version of it. Rather than going through a process to articulate the Jesus-given mission for our specific time and place, we parrot the words of one particular gospel over the others.

Quirky Reality #2: No Definition

By photocopying Matthew’s version of the church’s mission, we traffic in words like “make disciples” with little to no definition or context and in some cases very little actual experience. Because we get it from the Bible and preach with biblical intent, we don’t think we need to.

Quirky Reality #3: Anything Goes

It is easy for church attenders to reinterpret their experience of church—whatever it may be—as a “making disciples” experience because there is little to no definition or context for these words. This creates a vicious cycle within the church of assuming we know what we mean as the church continues to make decisions, spend money and add ministries. A church can be anything it wants to anybody. It can do anything it wants to do with perfect justification underneath its undefined mission statement.

Quirky Reality #4: Missing Scorecard

Pastors validate the mission of “make disciples” with a scorecard that has nothing to do with whether or not a disciple has been made; that is with the scorecard of attendance and giving only. Concerts and circuses have great attendance and giving too.

Quirky Reality #5: Incomplete Competence

Because we can name “make disciples” as the “right answer” for the mission of the church, we

think we know how to lead with mission. When in fact, we are substituting “a knowledge about” mission with the lifelong competency development of “leading from” mission.

Quirky Reality #6: False Assurance

Because of the notion of “mission as statement,” the written statement in our membership class or website creates a false sense of completion. Stating the mission one time becomes a “been there, done that” step.” Since it is stated somewhere, we think the work of leading with mission is done, when it has hardly begun.

Quirky Reality #7: Reinforced Consumerism

In the process of articulating a “make disciples” mission, 95% of churches reinforce consumerism without knowing it. This happens because most statements imply to the church attendee that they, as the disciple, are the beneficiaries of services and groups provided by the fulltime pastors. The pastors and staff, they assume, do “the making.” Why does this occur? Simply put, the language of “making a disciple” is not accessible enough to the mindset of our culture. People don’t get out of bed and think to themselves, “I get to make disciples today.” They leave that to “the professionals” and to the “place they go” to attend church.

Quirky Reality #8: Misdirected Energy

The primary growth challenge of any church is having culture of mission. By focusing on a thousand things to grow our church, we miss the first and most important step to healthy multiplication and dynamic growth. All growth and renewal in a church comes from the process of re-founding the mission with the leadership core, which is hopefully a growing leadership core.

Quirky Reality #9: Little Transference

When a church is in its most entrepreneurial form, a culture of mission is “in the atmosphere” and little intention is necessary for people to “feel it.” The start and the big bang of the church itself substantiates the mission whether it is thoughtfully articulated or not. But once the church grows past 75 people, how you articulate the mission is critical to its transference.

Quirky Reality #10: Shadow Mission

In addition to your stated mission, every organization has a functional mission or “shadow mission.” Think of the functional mission as the unstated driver or notion of “success” that most naturally tempts us to drift off the Jesus-given mission of the church. For example a functional mission of many churches would be something like to “have more people attend worship services” or “to sustain enough giving to keep our current staff” or “to not make anyone unhappy.”

One Application: Your Own Words

Perhaps the best way to summarize this post is to recall one of the fundamental exercises of learning: “putting it in your own words.” Your second grade English teacher asked you to read something. And when she wanted to know if you understood what you were reading, she asked you to restate it in your own words.

Likewise, our people won’t understand the mission of Jesus until they can put in in their own words.

Would you like to learn more about developing mission statement that reflect your church's unique mission? [Connect with an Auxano Navigator and start a conversation with our team.](#)
