

# **Fuzzy Church**

*A Travel Free Learning Article*

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## **Fuzzy Vision**

I can't see. I didn't know that until I entered the first grade. When I complained of being unable to see the writing on the board I was whisked off to the eye doctor and fitted for my first pair of glasses. The eye doctor mumbled some odd numbers like 20/200 and kept shaking his head. Soon I was fitted with a great pair of very unattractive glasses. This was back in ancient times before several great innovations in lens technology so I had glasses with rather thick lenses. Kids being kids they immediately dubbed my glasses and me "Coke bottle bottoms."

Frankly, I didn't care what they called me. I could see. There I was, six years old, and for the first time in my life I could see the things that other kids had been seeing all along. I discovered that one could see individual blades of grass without having to lie down on the grass. Trees have individual leaves. A baseball thrown to me could be seen before it was just inches away. A whole new world and a whole new way of seeing the world had opened up to me. Call me names, I didn't care. Life was suddenly bright and clear. I especially loved the clear part. It took a bit of adjusting, but adjust I did and love it I did.

## **Fuzzy Church**

We live in a time when we like to label things and people and ideas and politics and just about everything. We, in the life of the church, like labels too. There are all kinds of church-going on out there. There is traditional church, contemporary church, emergent church, progressive church, mega church, house church, open and affirming church, life church, simple church, cyber church, and the list could go on and on. I would like to propose one more type of church – Fuzzy Church.

Fuzzy Church is what most of our aging, mainline denominational churches seem to be practicing. By Fuzzy Church I mean we are doing church without our glasses on. We can't see where we are or where we are going. We lack what I lacked before entering school and visiting the eye doctor—clear vision. We insist on doing church, or are at least willing to do church, without a clear, powerful, and empowering vision from God. And without a vision our blurred, fuzzy perceptions are causing us to stumble around, running into problems, arguing with each other about minutia, running after whatever appears in our paths as something cool and trendy to do, attempting to build our churches on what we might consider to be good ideas.

I am not a proponent of Fuzzy Church. Not only do I not want to practice Fuzzy Church, I believe if we keep doing Fuzzy Church, we are going to kill the church. Well over 100 years ago, in what I believe was an amazingly egocentric move, Frederick Nietzsche pronounce God dead. He, of course, didn't mean that God had really died, but that God had never existed. It is a cheap shot but I will take it by announcing that more than 100 years later God is much more alive than Nietzsche.

Since the days of the announcement of the death of God, many people have been writing about, arguing about, and worrying about the life and health of the church in North America. For the past several decades those within the church, and those who observe the church from a safe distance, have opined that the church is on its way out. Many people have joyfully pronounced the church dead. I don't think the church is dead. Well, I don't think it is all dead, but it is just mostly dead.

## **The Results of Fuzzy Church**

The church in the northern hemisphere, as we have known it for several centuries, is just about dead. That is not an opinion. It is not an accusation. It is not a complaint. It is not a call to arms. It is just an observation. If the statistics being reported to us are accurate, it is an astute observation of the obvious. The church in North America is dying and it is dying rapidly.

I feel badly about that; kinda. First let me address the “I feel bad” part of that statement. I feel bad because I love the church. In general, the church has been good to me and for me. Some of the best (and some of the worst) experiences I have had have been in the church. I believe in the church. I think Jesus founded the church as His vehicle to impact this sadly sick world with His message of love, health and forgiveness. The church, at its best, is an awesome, beautiful thing. But all too often, the church is not at its best. And at its less-than-best the church must be seen as unacceptable.

I feel badly that the church is dying because it is me and people like me who have just about finished it off. It has been under my generation’s leadership that the church has taken a nose dive in attendance, mission, ministry and cultural influence. The church has survived some amazingly toxic assaults, both ecclesiastical and secular, over the centuries. But nothing can measure up to the toxicity of our present North American culture. I am not attempting to fix blame for the state of the church; just making an observation. Without going into a cultural diatribe let me just say that our present culture is a challenging place and time to do church. Personally, I like the challenge. I believe it is in just such a challenging arena that the church can flourish and grow to its fullest potential. That is where my “kinda” came from. Though we, the church, seem to be dying rapidly, I believe we are perfectly positioned to profoundly impact our world.

## **Get a Clear Vision**

This article is not a plea or an apologetic for everyone to do church like I think we should do church. It is a call for us to quit doing church driven by our personal preferences, our political agendas, our perceived needs, or our human frailties. Instead we must start doing church driven by the vision God has given us, you and me, for the church. It is not about trying to meet the needs of the people in our communities (Though that is not a bad idea.), or speaking to the preferences of a specific generational group (But that is not to be ignored.), or pushing a political agenda in the name of justice or righteousness (Though justice and righteousness are great things to pursue.), or putting all of our time, energy and effort in developing programs and events that might grow the church (Again not a bad idea.). Instead we must get a Godly vision.

Quite honestly, I have attempted to do church using almost all of the previously mentioned platforms, policies, programs and processes. And in doing those things I have been moderately successful for a while; sometimes. But the church always seemed to be wandering, feeling its way around, not going anywhere in particular or doing anything with strength and vigor. I have come to believe we were doing fuzzy church.

It is probably pretty common to find it easier to try to do church by searching out new and innovative programs, plugging them into my local church situation and trying to get them to work. Most of us find it to be much more difficult to get a vision and using that vision to drive the church. By vision I do not mean coming up with a good idea. Coming up with a good idea or two is easy. I can come up with a couple of good ideas a week. I am talking about finding a God-given, divinely inspired vision for what God would have your local church be and do. Taking the time and energy to seek God and to listen to what God has to say is difficult. Some, if not many, churches seek God’s vision by having a meeting and inviting everyone to come and have their say. And I am all for people having their say. But the voice I want to hear is God, and that voice is usually heard in the quiet of prayer and meditation and in conversations with other visionaries. To find God’s calling, mission and vision for your church is going to take a deep

investment in prayer, study of the scripture and deeply spiritual conversations among the spiritual leaders of the church.

With a clear vision to guide the church, Fuzzy Church goes away. Discussions are held in the context of the vision. Instead of making decisions based on personal preference or past experiences, decisions begin to be made according to where the vision is directing the church.

- Should our worship service be traditional, blended or contemporary? What is our vision?
- Should we invest in a children's sports ministry? What is our vision?
- Should we consider remodeling the present structure or should we relocate? What is our vision?
- Should the church develop a small group ministry? What is our vision?
- What kind of staffing should the church add? What is our vision?

Being guided by a God-given vision changes how we do church. It changes everything about what we decide and how we decide to move into the church's future. Vision brings clarity. No more fuzzy church.

### **Important Things to Know**

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The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. **Travel Free Learning** is a leadership development emphasis of The Columbia Partnership. For more information about products and services check out the web site at [www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org](http://www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org), send an e-mail to [Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org](mailto:Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org), or call 803.622.0923.