

**Lexington Presbyterian Church**  
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*A Dynamic Church*

Rev. Dr. Thomas P. Groome III

Few, if any, aspire for their churches to be mediocre. Pursuing excellence in church work has been a staple for Christians for 2000 years now. Seminars and books abound to assist pastors and educators in helping make their churches dynamic. Many people look for a magic formula or program that will produce instant growth. Well, I have news for you. It's not going to happen!

And it's not just a question of size. Some smaller churches, which do the most they can with what they have been given, are dynamic churches. The church in Thessalonica had some problems, but there was much to appreciate. If we listen in on Paul's discussion, we can isolate several characteristics of a dynamic church.

First, dynamic churches are made up of people who work diligently. Someone once said, "I love work. I can watch people do it all day long." A management consultant makes the following observation: "Be the first in the office every morning, be the last to leave every night, never take a day off, slave through the lunch hour, and the inevitable day will come when the boss will summon you into his office and say, "I've been watching your work very carefully. Just what the devil are you up to, anyhow?"

Paul described the labor of the Thessalonians as being related to the great Christian graces of faith, hope, and love. If we possess these graces it will issue forth in practical results. The work we do as the body of Christ must possess the graces of faith, hope, and love.

Our work must be done in faith. Without faith our work is fruitless. The Book of James tells us that faith without works is dead. It is a double-edged sword. Our work must also have hope. Without hope we have nothing and our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our hope is in Him who was and is and who is to come. Our work must be done in love. Our work should exude the love for our neighbor in need. The love that God showed us by sacrificing God's only Son so that we might live with him in the heavenly kingdom, must be that same kind of love we show to others when we serve Jesus Christ.

Second, dynamic churches are made up of people who live courageously. Being a Christian is not always easy, but it is much easier for us than for those who lived in the first century. Few in the Western world know what real persecution is like. The Thessalonians had received the word in much affliction, yet with joy. It is often true that the persecuted Christians of the world have more joy than the comfortable Christians.

This is no more evident than during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries when the persecution of Christians was in the form of entertainment: Being fed to the lions in the coliseum, while spectators cheered. Others were crucified; others were covered with tar and set on fire to serve as torches to light the cities by night. Others were boiled in oil and burned at the stake. It is estimated that 5 million Christians were martyred during the period from 100-313 CE.

The point that is interesting is that even though persecution was widespread, **the church thrived**. The Church during this period reached its greatest numbers in proportion to world population. Persecution will not stamp out the Church of Jesus Christ. Our martyred forefathers and foremothers stand as witnesses that persecution cannot destroy the church. It only makes it stronger.

Dynamic churches are made of people who work diligently, and who live courageously. And thirdly, dynamic churches are made up of people who evangelize enthusiastically.

Dynamic churches are not afraid to sound the trumpet. Evangelism rarely happens without intentionality. It has been said that evangelism is more atmosphere than program. That is true, but we must intentionally develop that atmosphere.

At age 12, Robert Louis Stevenson was looking out into the dark from his upstairs window watching a man light the streetlamps. Stevenson's governess came into the room and asked what he was doing. He replied, "I am watching a man cut holes in the darkness."<sup>1</sup> I see this as a marvelous picture of what our task should be as sharers of God's light—people who are busy cutting holes in the spiritual darkness of our world.

We Presbyterians get all uneasy whenever we hear the word evangelism. We envision the street corner preacher who is shouting at the top of his lungs "Repent! Repent, and be saved for the Lord is near!" Well, that is one method of evangelism. Another form of evangelism is by our actions. Our actions in our everyday living speak volumes for who we are as Christians. What we do emerges from who we are. Being precedes doing. At the core of our Christian witness in the world lies the reality of who each of us is in relationship to God and in relationship to one another in the new society of God's people—the church.

"How can I ever repay you?" asked a person of a friend who had done him a great favor. "I shall forever be indebted to you for your kindness." "Not necessarily," answered the friend. "If you really want to repay me, keep your eye open for somebody who needs help as badly as you did, and help him. If you are willing to do this, I shall be fully repaid for I shall enjoy the warm feeling that someday—through you—I shall have helped a person I didn't even know."

This is the snowball effect as we pay it forward. The same can be said for evangelism. God's light can spread to a raging inferno from just one ember.

Finally, dynamic churches are made up of people who wait expectantly.

Dynamic churches are expectant churches. We know that some in the Thessalonian church had taken this attitude of waiting to ridiculous extremes. They quit working and just looked to the skies. While Paul condemns their attitude, he didn't discourage them from living as if the Lord could come at any time.

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<sup>1</sup> Illustrations Unlimited, James S. Hewett; Editor. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, IL, 1988.

So God's plan and program revolves around people. We have long been reminded that churches are not buildings, but people. Dynamic churches are dynamic because they are filled with dynamic people.

Are we a dynamic church? Are we dynamic people?

To be a dynamic church or dynamic people we must do three things.

First, *each of us must see ourselves as ministers of the gospel*. Our whole understanding of ourselves as members of the Body of Christ is directed toward being equipped to serve effectively in our vocation and our community—wherever God places us. Jesus gives us our marching papers as he speaks to the disciples for what our calling is: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Our calling is to make disciples; to baptize and to teach. It is as simple as that. Everything else is secondary. We are a denomination in decline, because we have forgotten our commission to make disciples.

Many Christians have a divided view of life: Faith is over here in this compartment, and the rest of life—work, family, leisure time, and everything else—is over there. Each of us should be in the business of Christian service full time. Don't misunderstand me; I didn't say FT Christian service. I said Christian service full time. The two are very different. All of us are called to be ministers of the gospel in everything we do. Some of us are called into the ministry as a FT vocation.

Second, to be a dynamic church *we must be willing to not be captive to the culture*. Francis Schaeffer was once quoted, “Here is the greatest evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—accommodation.” Living in the world today means that our Christian faith will be ridiculed and we will be regarded as strange. That can be costly, but obedience often is costly. The church needs to be sensitive to cultural attitudes. However, the church must never confuse technique with truth. Times change: truth does not. The church stands or falls on its adherence to Scripture and its historic confessions. In today's culture the truth lies in the believer. But we know that Jesus Christ himself said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father, except through me” (John 14:6).

Third, to be a dynamic church *we must learn how to support and encourage one another*. “How would you like a job where, if you make a mistake, a big red light goes on and 18,000 people boo?” (Former hockey goalie Jacques Plante).

There's a story of a man who during his HS years spent most of his day in the principal's office being disciplined for creating problems in class. His family life was a mess and he worked out his frustrations in the classroom. He got a reputation as a troublemaker.

As punishment for some of his anti-social behavior, he was given work detail after school. The school janitor, Ernie, worked quickly and demanded that he do the same. At the end of his forced

week's work, Ernie asked the boy if he was interested in a PT job. The boy couldn't believe anyone was willing to hire him and quickly said yes.

Under Ernie's direction, he worked after school every day for 2 hours. Ernie talked to the boy as a friend and complimented each task he did. Gradually the boy began to like himself and trips to the principal's office grew less frequent.

The boy graduated at 18 and enlisted in the service. Ernie came down to the bus station to give him his final pay and a bear hug for good luck. It wasn't until years later that the boy learned just how special Ernie was. The PT job had been Ernie's invention, and the pay had come out of Ernie's meager earnings. No school board had budgeted extra money. Ernie had.

We must support and encourage one another by beginning with what we have in common, not with what separates us in our theology or where we stand with the "hot topic" issues in the church. We have to start with what we have in common, and that is with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We must go back to the roots of what we believe. "I believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth."

A dynamic church? Is LPC a dynamic church?  
Are you willing to be a minister of the gospel?  
Are you willing to not be captive to the culture?  
Are you willing to encourage and support one another?

I believe that there are many here who can truthfully answer "yes" to those questions. And that is great and we are on our way. But I also know there are others who will answer those same questions with "maybe" or "no." If the answer is maybe or no, then we have much to overcome.

Sources:

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.