

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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“It Goes Without Saying”

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at www.efcawest.org. Click on the Church Leadership tab to get to the archive.

I like idioms. They ring nicely in my ears. I keep an eye out for them. They are not rocket science, yet they seem to give me a shot in the arm when I'm feeling blue or can't keep my head above water.

An idiom can be defined as a phrase that has both literal and figurative meaning, with its figurative meaning often quite different from its literal meaning. The title of this month's article, "it goes without saying" is an idiom. Why? Because when we use that phrase, we follow it by saying what goes without saying. For example, one might say, "It goes without saying, but that's a beautiful baby." How does it go without saying when I feel compelled to say it anyway? Though it is something I felt needed to be said, I said it didn't need to be said. But I didn't really mean that. Literally. Aw, the wonder of the idiom.

Several times in recent months I have had conversations with church leaders about mission, vision, goals, and strategies. In many of these conversations, I noted that reaching lost people was not brought up during conversations about why churches exist and what churches are trying to do. When I ask why this was not included, the response always seems to be something along the lines of, "Well, that goes without saying." This got me to wondering about things that go without saying in local churches and among local church leaders. Might this be true?

If it goes without saying, it doesn't get said;
If it doesn't get said, it doesn't get done.
If it's not getting done, it went without saying.

One of the key roles of church leaders is to cast, clarify and communicate vision – to let those being led know where we are going, why we are going there, and what we are to do along the way. A problem occurs when we leaders stop reminding ourselves and those who follow about where we are going, why we are going there, and what we are supposed to be doing. Although these things "go without saying," over time, as we stop saying them, we and those who follow may also stop doing them. These unspoken assumptions are, indeed, something to talk about.

Here are some questions that may spark beneficial conversations within your leadership team.

- What are some of the underlying assumptions about our church, its direction and its ministries that we seldom if ever talk about? How might we effectively remind ourselves periodically about them?
- What 5 to 10 assumptions that have gone without saying should we actually be saying from time to time?
- What important assumptions about spiritual growth, evangelism, discipleship, and church-family relationships have we not verbalized in our congregation for a long time? How healthy are these areas today as compared to what they should be? If we last talked about them a long time ago, how would new attenders know and understand them?
- What underlying relational, systemic, and organizational assumptions among leadership team members have we not talked about for a long time? What may be becoming fuzzy and in need of clarification? What doesn't seem to be working well anymore? What did we do together before that, although proven to be beneficial, we no longer do?
- What unspoken assumptions about how we leaders work together to come to decisions or discuss and process important issues need to be brought up as a periodic reminder?
- Is reaching lost people something that "goes without saying" in the church's mission and ministry? If so, do our results match our intentions? Do ministry workers and volunteers envision what they do as having the end result of reaching lost people and making healthy disciples, or has the ministry taken on a life purpose of its own?

Airline pilots and ship captains know that there is much more to getting to the proper destination than just pointing their aircraft and vessels to the desired destination and enjoying the journey. Although the destination could go without saying, the crew constantly talks about where they are going as they make adjustments along the way. There is no room for assumptions. They verbalize where they are headed and what they are doing to get there to ensure clarity among the crew and to ensure their passengers arrive safely at the proper destination. Those of us who provide leadership for the church should do no less.

Important stuff cannot go long without saying. It must be said. And it must be said repeatedly throughout the journey. Reaching lost people is important. That goes without saying. And that's something to talk about.

Let us know how your conversation goes. Contact Bob Osborne by e-mail at bob.osborne@efca.org.