Mission Drift
By David A. Busic

In their book, Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches, Peter Greer and Chris Horst make the case that missional drift in organizations is, in most cases, unintended. A loss of focus for any God-given mission is often unchosen, unreflective accommodation.

Harvard is a respected university, but it no longer maintains its foundational calling to be a thoroughly Christian school. Though its diplomas continue to read Christo et Ecclesiae and Veritas (or “Truth for Christ and the Church”), the school no longer resembles a Christ-centered institution. Yale University was founded in 1701 by Cotton Mather, a New England pastor, along with a Christian businessman named Elihu Yale, as a reaction to their concerns over the secularization of Harvard. They determined to establish a place of higher learning that would not relinquish its Christian values in the name of education. Their motto was Lux et Veritas (“Light and Truth”). Their passion to walk in the light of God was resolute and firm. Yet today, while Yale excels in many other areas, spiritual formation is not one of them.

What happened to these revered institutions? The same thing that happens to any college, denomination, or local church that forgets its intentional focus of why it exists. This is the beginning of mission drift.

Greer and Horst state, “Mission drift unfolds slowly. Like a current, it carries organizations away from their core purpose and identity” (18). In physics, this is known as the second law of thermodynamics. That is, in the natural order of the universe, things degenerate rather than come together. Even the hottest fires, if left untended, eventually go out.

Why does the Church of the Nazarene exist? To make Christlike disciples in the nations. That is our mission. Why does your local church exist? To make Christlike disciples in your community. We must maintain a laser-focused intentionality regarding our purpose if we are to avoid mission drift.

I am convicted by these words: “Here’s the reality: Mission drift is the natural course of organizations, and it takes focused attention to safeguard against it. Once an organization ignores its source of heat, drift is only a matter of time” (20).

Mission drift is not inevitable. Those charged with spiritual leadership face diversions from many directions. To pay careful, humble, and relentless attention to the heart of our mission is an essential part of faithful leadership. But we must stay close to the “source of our heat” or drift is only a matter of time.

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