

Evaluating the Church

January 7, 2018

Thank you so much for choosing to worship with us today. We are thrilled that you are here!

I knew the patient before she died.

It was ten years ago. She was very sick at the time, but she did not want to admit it.

There was only a glimmer of hope at best. But that hope could become a reality only with radical change. She wasn't nearly ready for that change. Indeed, she was highly resistant to any change. Even though she was very sick. Even though she was dying. I told her the bad news bluntly: You are dying. I hope I said those words with some compassion. I did feel badly sharing the news. But it was the only way I could see to get her attention.

I even told her that, at best, she had five years to live. At the time I said those words, I don't really think I was that optimistic. I would not have been surprised if she died within the year.

But she was not only in denial; she was in angry denial. "I'll show you," she said. "I'll prove

you are wrong. I am not dying." Her words were fierce. Defiant. Angry.

It was time for me to leave. I had done all I could. I left. I was not angry. I was sad. Very sad. Now to her credit, she was right up to a point. She did not die in five years. She proved resilient and survived another ten years. But her last decade, though she was technically alive, was filled with pain, sickness, and despair.

I'm not so sure her longer-term survival was a good thing. She never got better. She slowly and painfully deteriorated. And then she died.

She, of course, is a church. A real church. A church in the Midwest. A church that was probably born out of vision. A church that died because she no longer had a vision.

Thom Rainer, "Autopsy of a Dead Church"

All Things for Christ,
Michael