

Have We Gone Too Far by Reinventing the Church in This Generation?

What counts as church? Is it singing and listening to a sermon? Is it gathering with other Christians? Does it require a pastor? Reimagining church has become a popular aspiration in the past decade or so. But is there a line? And if so, have we crossed it? Let's look at some popular examples of "church reimagined" and consider the implications.

Kanye West's Sunday Services

Each week, Kanye West's Sunday Services are hosted in a different city across America. And rumor has it he's planning to go global this year. Several components make this event a unique interpretation of a traditional church service, not the least of which is the fact that there is no formal pastor or church leadership. When asked to describe the Sunday Services, Kanye's wife, Kim Kardashian described it as primarily a "musical ministry."

However, she did seem to indicate that he may be pursuing a 501(c)(3) legal status and referred to the event as a "Christian church." Whether or not Kanye is revolutionizing how church will be done in the future is yet to be seen, but it certainly is a unique reinterpretation that should lead us to ask more fundamental questions, such as what exactly does and does not qualify as a church?

Dale Partridge's House Church

In direct contrast to Kanye's embrace of "lights, camera, action," church planter and speaker Dale Partridge has gained a substantial following made up of worshippers who believe the "house church" model is the biblical model for church laid out

in the book of Acts. While we can't ignore Partridge's recent plagiarism allegations, his house church model is increasing in popularity and is having a substantial impact on Christian culture.

Online Church

In an effort to make the Sunday worship experience as convenient and accessible as possible, livestreaming has become a fast-growing trend. Online church, as it is often called, is especially popular among megachurches, including Life Church, North Point Community Church, Elevation Church, Saddleback Church and many others.

Promoters of this unique church experience applaud its unparalleled ability to reach a much wider audience, including people who do not attend church or have limited access to a good church in their area. However, critics argue that online church removes an attendee from community, godly authority and the corporate worship experience.

So, what counts as "having church?"

Are these new and trending models redefining church as we know it? And is that a bad thing? On the one hand, there is a lot of value in the traditions Christians have kept for centuries. On the other hand, shouldn't we implement 21st-century methods if we want to reach 21st-century people with the gospel?

There is no easy answer to this question. After all, "What is church?" has actually been a much-debated question for the past 2000 years. But maybe we can compile a list of essential elements that are needed in order to qualify as "having church." A list like this would make room for flexibility while creating a helpful guideline to follow.

Acts 2:42, 44 gives us an almost bullet-pointed list of what a holistic church experience looked like for the first Christians:

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers. ... All who believed were together and had all things in common.”

Let’s stop arguing over whether or not something counts as church just because it’s new or different. Instead, let’s use these criteria to determine the health of a congregation:

- Is the Bible being taught? (“the apostles’ teaching”)
- Is the Lord’s Supper being offered? (“breaking the bread”)
- Are the people praying together? (“and in the prayers”)
- Is there a genuine sense of community? (“all who believed were together”)

As long as your church service includes these components, it doesn’t really matter whether it’s happening in a stadium, house or park. If not, while it may be a life-giving experience, it’s probably not a church. {eoas}

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