

Discover the Power of Changing a Church Name

For three years, Bishop George L. Davis, pastor of Faith Christian Center in Jacksonville, Florida, has been frustrated. It was three years ago that name-change stories in the Bible started to stand out to him: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, and Simon to Peter.

Each change reflected that God was giving them a different direction and calling them to accomplish something new.

As Bishop Davis shared with his congregation, "Throughout the Bible, when God has a new purpose and plan, He would often change someone's name."

The name *Faith Christian Center* had been effective. But in his spirit, he felt it was time to accomplish something new. Plus, in today's digital age, names matter more than ever. Some experts say that online, people take a second or less to read about you—based on how much the name attracts them. Type the name *Faith Christian Center* into Google, and page after page of churches show up—not exactly a unique identity.

Even more important, Bishop Davis felt like God was doing a new work in this growing church. So after working intensely over the last year with his creative team and pastoral staff, the decision was made: Faith Christian Center would become Impact Church.

The official change happened this Easter Sunday, and the congregation was thrilled. Davis said after the service, "Certainly it takes time to grieve the loss of the old name—a name that we have loved for many years. But I can't describe the excitement of our congregation over this new identity."

As one longtime church member put it, "The name *Faith*

Christian Center has said, 'Come to us and we will teach you faith.' The name *Impact Church* says, 'We are coming to you to change your life wherever you are.'"

Bishop Davis wants people in Jacksonville and beyond to know that Impact Church is a place where their lives will be impacted in an eternal way. It's a place that will make a lasting and profound difference for the kingdom. At the same time, they wanted to "impact" their 10 locations around the world. With a network of churches throughout Florida, Georgia, Maryland and even Peru, changing the name would allow all those churches to be readily identified as a global family, so they become the Impact Church in their respective areas.

How about your church? Could you take a lesson from these great name-change stories in the Bible and consider the strategy of Bishop Davis? If your church name is tired, doesn't reflect the identity, mission or purpose of your congregation, or doesn't connect with your community, here's some principles to consider:

1. Never be flippant. Bishop Davis realized that names have meaning and that there's an emotional relationship between a congregation and the name of the church.

2. Buy the URL. In a world with hundreds of thousands of churches, it can be difficult. But if possible, get the closest web address possible to your church name. Remember that virtually 100 percent of potential visitors will check your church out on the web before they attend, so a powerful and easy-to-find website is more important than ever.

3. A strong name can make a big difference in the community's perception. Perception matters in a cluttered, distracted and hypercompetitive world. A strong name cuts through the clutter and gets noticed.

4. Get your leadership team's buy-in. They will help influence

the congregation, and a name change should be a positive event—not a reason for criticism.

5. Get professionals in the room. The digital revolution has transformed how people find churches and has shifted their expectations. Get advice from professional communicators or media consultants before you make a potential mistake.

6. Make sure the name change is birthed out of a new vision, not a novelty. Remember that Bishop Davis wasn't looking for a new name. God was leading him over and over to stories of name changes in the Scripture. In that process, God was revealing to him a vision and purpose for a new season in the life of the church. Don't do it backward and look for a purpose that matches the new name. Make sure your new name comes out of a God-given identity and mission.

There are thousands of churches today that may offer great worship experiences, but a poorly chosen name keeps potential visitors from coming in the door. If that describes your church, then consider a change. Anything that keeps people away from hearing the gospel is a hindrance, so clear a path. If God is leading your church into a new purpose and season, don't let a bad name hold you back.

Phil Cooke, Ph.D., *is a filmmaker, media consultant and co-founder of Cooke Pictures in Los Angeles. Find out more at .*