

How Your Church Can Better Reach Your Local Community

Perhaps the most common question I get in church revitalization goes something like this inquiry: "What do I do to get people in the community to come to our church when our members don't live in or near the community?"

My response is usually not well received. Simply stated, you can't expect the community to come to your church if your members don't live in the community. The most common reason someone attends and eventually connects with a church is relationships. Those relationships are unlikely to develop when church members and community members live in two different places.

Further, community members will often feel like you don't care about them if members live elsewhere. It's really an untenable situation.

Is it an impossible situation? To call any situation impossible is to deny the power of God. But it is a very difficult situation, one that rarely ends well. A few radical decisions have to be made:

- **Someone must become a missional presence in the community.** You can't be on the mission field in absentia. You must live there. If the church does not have one or more families living in the community, it does not qualify to be a gospel presence there. In fact, the church should have several families willing to live in the community.
- **The church must begin to look like the community.** If the community is 90% non-white, and all the church members are white, the church obviously does not reflect the community. Until the demographics of the community and

the church are more similar than not, the church in the example will look more like a white country club than a gospel-centered congregation.

- **The church must yield its leadership to members of the community.** A church cannot merely say members of the community are “welcome to join us.” The church must say, “We desire to follow you.” The congregation must seek to move community members to places of leadership as soon as possible.
- **The church should be willing to contextualize its ministry for the community.** Among other contextual issues, this change may very well mean changes in the worship style.
- **The members of the church should be intentional about praying for the community.** If a church is to make a difference in the community, it must love the members of the community. If the church is serious about loving the community, it must be praying for the residents of the community regularly.

Churches that do not reflect the community are called ex-neighborhood churches. The nomenclature is telling. The church is really not in the neighborhood; only the building is.

There are no silver-bullet solutions. The church is confronted with the decision to change or die. And the change the church must be willing to make is both sacrificial and radical. {eo}

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