

Church Renaming: A New Coat of Paint or a Re-Envisioning?

What's in a name?

It's an old adage.

It flows from Shakespeare's famed play, "Romeo and Juliet." The actual line is,

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet."

Most are familiar with Shakespeare's tale of "star-cross'd" lovers. Though members of two warring families, Juliet tells Romeo that names are meaningless, and shouldn't stand in the way of their love. After all, she loves the man who *is* Romeo Montague – not the Montague name. Such titles are irrelevant. It is the substance of the person that matters.

Apparently some church leaders aren't so sure.

I've noticed a growing trend, at least in my own city, of **churches renaming themselves in an apparent effort to invigorate a plateaued or even declining situation**. Usually it is a church start that has been going at it for a few years, hasn't caught fire, so the thinking is that it's best to reboot.

Two churches in our area are on their third name.

I wish them well. I really do. There's not a snarky bone in my body toward their situation.

But I hope they are doing more than rebranding. I hope they are doing more than a new logo, new website, or new location. **I hope they are not simply renaming the church, but rethinking it.** Because a new name – actually, any name – is not substantive.

Why?

That's easy.

No one goes to a church for its name!

A bad name might work against you, but that's not usually the case in the church renaming phenomenon I'm observing. Nor is a bout of bad publicity that makes you want to distance yourself from a public relations disaster usually at hand.

No, the trend I see is oriented to jumpstarting a dead battery. The goal is a quick fix, an "easy"

button, to reverse an adverse situation.

But that's not what is going to happen.

It's like putting a new coat of paint on a house that just won't sell. The paint may freshen up a drive-by, but that's about all. The house is still...well, the house it was. It has the same square footage, the same floor plan, and the same number of bedrooms and bathrooms.

Even if you switch neighborhoods (translation: change the location of your church), it's still the same house. Either it has appeal, or it does not.

The truth is that **many of these renamed churches need more than a new name**. They need a new...well, lots of things. Let's assume they are praying diligently and presenting the gospel faithfully. That still might leave room for:

- A new leadership style or level of leadership ability
- A new communicator or level of teaching/communication in terms of gifting
- A new emphasis on outreach and/or bridge-building to the unchurched, or a new strategy
- A new approach to musical style or worship
- A new emphasis on excellence in children's ministry and service to marriage and family
- A new commitment toward learning how to effectively explain the gospel to a "nones" world
- A new...

Well, you get my point.

"What's in a name?"

The answer will always remain the same:

"Not much."

But **what's in the substance of a person...or a church?**

Everything.

Just ask Juliet.

Or better yet, ask the person who tried your church and never came back.

Read more from James [here](#).