

Creating Opportunities for Discipleship

Church leaders have been complaining lately that their church is declining, or that Church in general is shrinking. However, at Church Community Builder we work with some churches who are thriving and asking for our help in growing well. So, what's the difference? Are some churches just lucky?

“Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” - Seneca

I believe the key difference between churches who are struggling and those who are thriving is community. When you think about the people who walk in your door, how connected are they to your vision and to each other? People attend church for many reasons, and they stick around because they find community and connections with the people and the work that they are doing. We all long for community, but how do we create it? In all the coaching I have done, I think there are two big ideas for building community in church - clarity and opportunities.

Be Clear

Church is daunting and can be scary for the beginner. So, as a church leaders, you need to be extra clear in your language and your process. Here are three important things to look out for:

- *Internal Language.* “We are meeting in the old high school room.” I heard this while attending a church recently and I wondered where that was. I walked down the hallway and never noticed a room with that name. There was however, a room labeled “High School” and the occupants quickly told me I was in the wrong place. How often do your staff members use words or labels that only make sense to those on the inside?
- *Churchy Language.* “We will now participate in a faith offering” or “Let me describe our Assimilation process.” Well, I don’t think I need to offer my faith up just yet, and those Borg people from Star Trek is all the Assimilation I can imagine. I would invite you to filter all your outgoing communication through a non-church goer’s perspective. Would it make sense outside your church? If not, try to find better words.

If you continue to say, “In other words...” then use other words. - Unknown

- *Confusing Processes.* Knowing what to do next is extremely comforting in a new environment. If I am a visitor (for the first, second, or third time) what should I do next? Does the building direct me to the next step? Does the connection card

outline what I could do? What about the announcements before the sermon? I recently attended a church who renamed their “Connection Corner” to “Start Here” and the number of people who stopped by doubled overnight. As the new guy, I don’t know whether I want to stop at the “Connection Corner”, but I do know how to “Start Here.”

People already engaged in community can often lose sight of the idioms and catch phrases that confuse the newcomers. However, rarely does communicating clearly to the outsider confuse the inside crowd.

Create Opportunities

Church Community Builder (both the company and the software) was created largely because of a volunteering problem. Church leaders were having a hard time recruiting volunteers for various reasons, and staff members were struggling to cover it all (You have never experienced that, right?). The initial thought was to improve the recruiting process, until they interviewed folks who were not serving. Many of those people indicated that they could not find a way to volunteer. They wanted to help but didn’t know how. Enter the “Needs” function of the software. In short, it is a tool to define and post services you need, and then allow people to take that need. Maybe it’s potato salad for the barbecue, or taking care of greeting at the next service. Since that time, we have also included volunteer positions and scheduling tools, and the need still exists to create very clear next steps and on-ramps for people to get on the highway of community.

Consider whether or not your church makes it easy to take the next step in discipleship through the following:

- *Attending.* If I want to see these people again, how do I do that? Is there a calendar of events on the website for me to view? Is there a list of groups I might explore such as a bible study, or the weekend volleyball group? Are all the locations and service times posted on the website and in the bulletin? Make it exceedingly easy to know what’s happening and how to attend events.
- *Serving.* I am a pretty useful guy, and I would like to be useful here. How can I help? Is there a list of volunteering positions or needs the church recognizes, beyond guiltting people into the children’s ministry? Are those roles described with the skills or temperament required to be successful? What about the time and expectations? People love to serve when they feel useful and they know how to meet the expectations required for the role; so make it clear and easy!
- *Giving.* Everyone knows churches take donations. However, many visitors have no idea how you prefer to receive their gift, or even why this is a thing. Money can be a very approachable subject. People in modern society use money all the time, there is no need for mystery. Is giving a discussable subject in your church? Be clear and frank about where the money goes, from paying the light bill to helping starving children across the globe. Once the purpose of giving is

communicated, then make it easy to give. Today, that means quick and easy online giving solutions. Church Community Builder just announced a partnership with Pushpay, and they offer one of the fastest and easiest giving experiences on the web - check it out.

Your Next Move

Take some time and review all your communication - in your program, on your website, and from your stage. Confirm whether or not you are using words that are accurate, meaningful, and accessible for people who are new to your church, or new to Church altogether. As part of that communication review, ensure that you have great "Next Step" opportunities for people who want to attend, serve, or give more. People are more often immobilized by the confusion of the process than by their own unwillingness to take up an opportunity. Your job is to create the opportunity.

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