

Three New Trends in an Outward-Focused Church

In a previous post, I recalled the decline of traditional outreach ministries in many churches. I further noted that most churches no longer try to connect with people through “cold call” visits in their homes. These churches, more often than not, begin to see declines in their attendance if they did not replace the traditional approach with something else.

In simple terms, churches without any ongoing outreach approach were likely to decline. **The ethos of the church changed from other-focused to self-centered.**

Churches That Made Positive Changes

A relatively small number of churches, however, did not leave the void of outwardly focused ministries unfilled. They, like the declining churches, stopped doing traditional outreach ministries. But, unlike the declining churches, they replaced the traditional approach with something new.

Though my research is more anecdotal at this point, I did review several dozens churches that have transitioned well. Thus far I have noted three major new approaches toward an outward focus.

Three Successful and Relevant Outreach Approaches

My research to this point is by no means exhaustive, so I will likely have more approaches in the future. For now, here are three outwardly focused ministries that have filled the void left by the abandonment of more traditional approaches.

1. **Additional worship venue.** In the 1960s and 1970s many congregations moved to multiple worship services on Sunday mornings. Such transitions were not without their critics and detractors. Today a number of churches are adding a worship service on a different day; or adding a new campus in close proximity to the church; or adding a different venue in the same facility; or moving to video venues. These new starts tend to grow faster and reach unchurched persons more effectively than existing services. While churches above 500 in attendance were more likely to add a venue, many smaller churches are moving in this direction as well.
2. **Ongoing community ministries.** Some churches regularly send their members into the community to minister to those who live and work there. Typically they find the greatest needs and seek to fill two or three of those needs. This approach is not to be confused with the community ministries that require people to come to the church facilities. While those ministries are vitally needed, the members must be going into the community on a regular basis for the church as a whole to become outwardly focused.
3. **Inviting with accountability.** Still other churches have developed ministries that encourage and equip members to invite persons to church on an ongoing basis. Those that have proved successful have some type of accountability built into the process. It is not a simple exhortation from the pastor to invite someone to church. It is rather an

organized system that can account for the number of people invited to church each week.

The Research Continues

It appears that many churches began to decline when they abandoned traditional outreach programs but did not replace them with anything else. And it appears that the churches that continued to grow made certain that such a void was filled. For that reason, I will continue to research the different approaches of congregations toward keeping an outward focus.

I could use your help in this process. If your church is growing, I would love to hear what outreach methodologies you are using. I have already heard from several church members and their contributions are invaluable. I have even heard from some church leaders where they have continued with the more traditional approaches with great success.

This one thing is clear: **If your church does not have some ongoing approach to reach those outside the walls of the congregation, it is likely to be in decline.**

I look forward to interacting with many of you on this vital issue. And thanks for the way you love the bride of Christ.

Read more from Thom [here](#).