

Creating a Culture That Outgrows An Ingrown Church

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“We are the friendliest church in town!”

“Everyone is welcome!”

“A place to belong!”

“Join our family!”

“Come join us!”

These tag lines are from many church mission statements, promotions or church signs. Churches desire and declare to be a warm, inviting, and family environment as part of their ‘value add’ for the membership. In today’s world there is a real need for and value of authentic community. Family, in our 21st century culture, however is being redefined by many. Sometimes circumstances, like recent economic trends, are forcing even more non-family household units living together as family. Sometimes non-family households are by choice of cohabitating, multi-generational households. When these church tag lines are presented but not lived up to churches often sabotage their possibility of reaching others. When declared but not authentically present in the church value system and culture more harm is done than good in terms of reaching others. *A small church or a church that does ‘small well’ and creates genuine community has a great future in today’s community-craving culture. A church that professes ‘community’ but does not genuinely offer and create community it professes is certain to sabotage its present and future with the younger generation!*

For instance...declaring a ‘place to belong’ is tested when people show up that are of a different class, ethnicity, socio-economic etc. and do not feel like they ‘belong’...what message is sent and received about your church? A litmus test for some might be invite strangers from different types of people groups and ask them ‘how are we living up to our church tag line (i.e. a place to belong...’).?

Creating a culture that turns an ingrown church outward so that activities, membership practices and policies are more missional the coach approach might be of help. For each meeting, worship experience, choir, women or men’s group ask some key questions as these and other experiences are planned and conducted.

- a. What are we hoping to accomplish by this gathering?
- b. Who are we wanting and planning to attract?
- c. Who are we attracting?
- d. What are the celebrations and challenges of this reality?
- e. What would open this experience to others?

f. How can we evaluate/measure the effectiveness of this experience?

Part of this is to listen to how each of these questions is practically answered by being honest about....

1. Who are we really targeting by our menu? Program design? Promotion? Invitations? Location? Time frame?
2. How inward/outward focused are we really being?
3. What would make it more missional/outward focused?

A few ways most activities and learning experiences can be made more missional and more outward focused calls forth intentionality of prayer, planning and evaluation. Consider...

1. Multi-site, multi-offerings for a percentage of programming so as to address work and family schedules of a 24/7 world
2. Work to engage a defined percentage of attendees from beyond your normal attenders/members. Increase percentage each week/month
3. Engage in intentional prayer walks (in community) and windshield surveys (driving through your community) during traditional church gathering times to see 'who is out of meetings'; what they are doing; engaged in other than church. Ask, what does this say to the church? What can we learn from these 'scouting/exploration' exercises? Listen to podcasts on 'Finding and Using the Remnant in Your Church' www.soulful-leadership.com
4. Be intentional about raising awareness of attendees to all events by asking 'who do you know that would benefit from a similar experience?'; 'what would make our experience more valued by them?'
5. Always ask – 'who beyond our membership received value from our community gathering?'; 'what value add did they experience or receive?'

A church becomes ingrown (always focusing on keeping and reaching 'us'), more often than not, because that is what they value most and believe most about the nature of church. Turning a church from inward to outward focus demands intentionality of leadership driven by missional, rather than maintenance values and a commitment to persevere in living into missional values. *Churches will never go beyond their spiritual leadership. Where are you leading your church by the beliefs, values and behaviors you exhibit regularly?*

Additional guidance and practical ideas can be found in my [Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age : Building Bridges Instead of Barriers](#) book. Available at www.transformingsolutions.org Available in paperback or e-books format.