

evangelism

Building Missionary Congregations

Yes, but how?

Number 1

Simplifying the Life of the Local Church

Practical Ideas for Action

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A growing number of churches that have grasped, and are seeking to work with, the concept of missionary congregations, are left asking a number of questions. The question addressed in this article is, in many ways, the most basic of all the questions. It is 'how can we simplify the life of the church, so that we can have the time and energy, to give attention to the issues that are raised for us by missionary congregation thinking?' Most churches feel overwhelmed simply with the job of keeping going. Suggest they do something new, and all they hear is the demand to do something extra. So we will achieve little in the way of new developments unless we can cut out the dead wood and create some space for new initiatives. So the goal is 'cut, and cut and cut again until we have spare resources (of people, time and money) to invest in new developments'. And that raises the question 'Yes, but how?.....' Here are some of the answers churches are finding.

1 Replace committees with teams

Committees tend to involve lots of people sitting around saying what others ought to do. Teams are smaller work groups, given responsibility and authority, to get a job done. Teams have a way of releasing energy. So, for example, in most churches three to five people can handle all the fabric needs of the church. However, they need to be set free from all other responsibilities in the life of the church, be given the full authority of an allocated budget and the authority to sign cheques. They will need to be accountable to the PCC, but should be given authority - each year - to get on with the work. In January of each year such a team can report to the PCC on what they did last year with the money, and on what they plan to do with the money this year. Unless there is a major (figure to be specified) need/issue, the PCC need not talk about fabric for the rest of the year. A small team of two to five people can also handle all the financial management of the church. They probably need to report once a quarter (month?), but it need take no more than half an hour at a time, especially if a clearly planned budget has been agreed.

By taking these two steps fabric and finances can be dealt with in about five hours a year on a PCC, thus releasing a considerable

amount of time for other issues, or for less frequent meetings. This can only happen if the PCC is willing to trust others, whilst retaining proper accountability. If they are not willing to do that, then the emotional agenda behind their resistance needs to be addressed - not the 'management' issue.

2 Work on the principle of 'do one job and do it well'

One way of exhausting people is to overload willing horses. This can be prevented by spelling out the value of everyone sharing in the work. It has a number of advantages. It gives everyone a chance to contribute: sometimes the most unlikely are the best. It reduces the power of the power-hungry. It tends to mean that the one job which is done is actually done well (there is time and the focus of commitment to do so). Both the above two points can also be reinforced by having all committee/team meetings on the same night - then you can't do two jobs.

3 Work on the principle of 'minimum ownership'

By this is meant that the church, as an organisation, accepts responsibility for the running of as few things as is possible. This is known as reducing the 'base costs'. Yes, some fabric, finance, choir/worship-group and children's work may be considered the 'core business'. For the rest, the church can limit itself simply to what people are motivated to do. This means letting old structures die. When they do new ones often emerge, but often only after the old has gone. There is no Easter other than by way of Calvary.

4 Work on the principle 'don't row, steer'.

Clergy in particular need to turn their efforts from 'doing everything' to ensuring everything is done' (whilst defining 'everything' in terms of 3 above). This means that delegation is vital. It is also hard work, time consuming, and a skill clergy are often not trained in. It may well mean that clergy need to find training (demand it from CME, or look for it in secular adult education groups, or ask members of the congregation skilled in this from their work situation). Where necessary the reluctance to ask for help needs to be addressed as evidence of a false view of ministerial competence.

5 Work on the principle 'purpose not structure'.

For example, what is the purpose of a home group? Give it to them, or better still, get them to define it. Then give them the task and

responsibility and freedom to decide how best to achieve that aim. It may not involve meeting every week, do not require groups to do so. What they should be 'required' to do, is fulfil the agreed purpose - in as creative and original a way as possible. It almost certainly won't be like the next group. It will look untidy. But only corporation gardens are tidy. Shed everything that does not relate to the purpose of the church, simplify all that does.

6 Work on the principle of 'community before organisation'.

Don't squeeze people into the structures (if no one has flower arranging gifts, buy in the services of the local florist to do a dried flower arrangement twice a year and scrap the list). Work rather with what gifts, interests, convictions people have. Build the structures for, and around, the gifts and calling of the church. It may look an odd balance for a church, but it will energise the participants and appeal to the spectators. Encourage new ventures, encourage lay initiatives. Be 'the church that likes to say yes'. Yes, there are sometimes scarce resources so decisions have to be made about priorities, but there is much more energy available when people are allowed to follow their convictions than there is when they are required to fit into the structures.

A good number of the above points are not so much about reducing activity as relating it more closely to how people are motivated. Yet we all know the difference in feel, 'the buzz' we get out of doing what we are keen to do, and 'the drudgery' of doing what we 'should be doing'. Yes Christianity involves sacrifice, cost and pain; but too easily we have assumed that 'if its drudgery it must be right'. What people are motivated to do is what they are often willing to make great sacrifices for - yet feel less pressured by. Try it!

For advice or assistance in the area of Evangelism please contact:

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