

CASE STUDY: CONNECTING WITH OUR (URBAN) COMMUNITY

The definition of connecting is: to bind or fasten together; to establish communication between; to associate or attach; to become connected, join or unite.

We asked ourselves: Is anything that our church is currently doing connecting with the community?

When faced with challenges or opportunities, does our local community include churches in the discussions or solution? If the answer to these questions is 'No', is it possible to have the church as a central part of the community?

IS OUR THINKING THE PROBLEM?

As a body we generally have a 'come to us' thinking. Many in our church have recognized this and to help overcome it we put on events and outreaches outside 'the four walls of the Church'. This has helped, but it is still the same thinking - just in a different location.

My church is implementing a very long term plan, where the church does not have to 'run' everything, but instead where we have realized that we can be more effective by building relationships and links in the community and being part of what they are doing.

It must be stressed that this is an ongoing journey and we don't know what the final destination will look like or when we will actually reach it.

Prayer

Prayer is the vital first step in any church or individual's desire to reach out and connect with their community. Prayer should not be a prelude and conclusion to our plans. Our prayers should be continual and sacrificial. We should love our community and pray for all areas of it, not just for our own plans.

Build Trust

People are very suspicious of churches and what their 'real agenda' is. As a church we saw the need to build trust. The local City Council was looking for people to join the committee that organizes the local spring festival so we asked if we could join. We went in with a "how can we serve you attitude" and asked them what they needed done. This came as a surprise to the organizers as most groups come with a totally different attitude.

After the first couple of years the Council saw that we were there to build up their event and serve the community. They then slowly started to include us in more things and even recommended us to other organizations and government bodies.

Show Servanthood

We can often be good at serving the church but forget about serving the community. We purposely go out and serve the community with "no strings attached". We will do 'acts of kindness' for people without witnessing. Only if someone asks will we share the gospel, instead we leave them with a small business card stating that it was an act of kindness. These acts are often repeated in the same area over a number of weeks.



More than a Servant of God

People are looking for more than an institutionalized church; they want to see people who have a close, real and living relationship with God. That is what draws people to him.

God Cares for Them

Apart from meeting practical needs (which many other organizations do) we need to show people that God cares for them. We do this by letting people know that we pray for them and the community. If someone has shared a concern or need during a conversation, we will also ask if we can pray for them. God wants to reveal himself to the non-believer. How better than through an answered prayer?

Be Involved in all Areas of your Community

Different people are drawn to different things. We encourage people to become involved in different areas of the community. We helped reform and restart the Chamber of Commerce. We have been involved in fundraising for the local hospital. We worked for two different local schools assisting with their fundraising. We've worked on different Council committees; been involved in the planning of the redevelopment of our local business area; involved in the local Progress Association; helped with the Olympics and Paralympics; Youth Week; Arts Festivals etc.

Work with other Churches

When churches work together it has a profound effect on the community. God's presence is more evident, we continually have people comment on the 'atmosphere' of an event. When we tell people that it's because we are working together, they all seem to know that this is significant and that God is there.

We have found that as we have built these relationships with individuals and bodies in the community, things have changed. They are also more willing to support, finance and promote what the body of Christ is doing.

They also feel free to come to us for support, advice and prayer. Many people have stopped seeing us as representing a particular Church or denomination. Instead they see us as representing the 'Kingdom of God'. Many see the 'Kingdom Values' and are challenged by them. Many have seen that to build a stronger community, the church is an important element, and some have seen beyond that to God who has inspired and directed it, and have entered into the community of God.

