

February 2018

In a world where the Church is no longer the center of community life and where people are less likely to just “show up” to connect with others, in what ways and places do we communicate our faith? It used to be that going to church was the expectation...THE central place where folks gathered to socialize and catch up with community events, and, yes, where faith was taught and made relevant to daily living.

Well . . . times have definitely changed. There are a multitude of other activities and interests, as well as avenues to glean information/news regarding community/world events that vie for our allegiance and attention today. People do not just show up at church seeking this kind of information while getting a “little religion” on the side as in years past.

So how does the church fulfill her mandate to “make disciples of Jesus Christ” if folks aren’t naturally coming to us? There are many strategies utilized by the Church to connect with people and draw them into a relationship with God in Christ. Some strategies are more direct and involve intense training to equip disciples to go into the community and evangelize . . . to ask questions and invite others into conversations about faith. It takes a certain maturity in one’s faith life, a working knowledge of God’s Word, humility and confidence to engage in this strategy. To nurture disciples in this way is a worthwhile endeavor. I’m convinced that God blesses and uses this approach in vital ways.

However, there are other strategies for making disciples that aren’t as direct and are less intimidating. I have urged you to be intentional and consistent in extending invitations to friends and neighbors to join us for worship, fellowship and vital activities of ministry/mission. As the song says, “There’s a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place and I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord.” God shows up when we gather, and I want others to be embraced by and transformed by God’s Spirit here. So, I ask you, how are you doing in this “invitational evangelism?” Who is the last person you have invited to participate in the life of our church? How long ago? Have you asked again? Please do.

Yet another strategy that is less-direct but very impactful involves our efforts to be generous in our hospitality with families who are grieving the death of loved ones. These are situations where folks seek us, ask us to help them, and trust us to do

so during deeply tender and vulnerable times. Often times these are families with whom we already have a connection, and with whom we are able to renew a relationship. Our careful attention and loving embrace serves to remind them of God's love, hope, joy and strength, and we invite them to come back and find their place within our church family.

In recent days we have been given the privilege and incredible opportunity to make the love of God known to a number of families who are grieving the death of loved ones and who have no church connection/home. Together we have embraced them in Christ's name and demonstrated genuine concern and acceptance. You have worked diligently to welcome them. You have sacrificed your time both to attend the services of remembrance and to provide food and fellowship for the family reception. You have helped to prepare our building for their arrival when weather has been challenging. You have smiled, introduced yourselves and expressed your care for their aching hearts. You have invited them to come back . . . Thank you! For this, too, is a beautiful and effective way of relating people "who are seeking" to the God who is "seeking" them.

~PASTOR TODD