



## CREATE AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH CULTURE

**H**ow do you create an evangelistic church culture? Is there a recipe—a cup of hospitality, a pound of love, add prayer and stir? Or do we first need to agree upon what it means to be the church?

### PIVOTAL QUESTIONS

A Christian blogger once suggested church leaders ask their congregations two simple questions: “What is the Church?” and “What is church for?” The intent was to stimulate a healthy conversation about the purpose and function of the church as the body of Christ.

At least one pastor acted on the suggestion. Little did he know that these apparently innocent questions would unleash a scathing rebuke toward him and his role as pastor. The comments hurled at the pastor ranged from, “What’s gotten into you?” to “[You’re trying] to make us feel bad about not doing enough” to “People are busy — we have full lives. We don’t have time to be saints.” The coup de grace in this exchange was this declaration to the pastor, “[Just] do your job... [Don’t make] things harder than they ought to be.”<sup>1</sup>

The process of answering these two questions plus a third one—“What is the job of the clergy?”— may revolutionize both the clergy leadership and parishioners in your local congregation.

### *What Is the Church?*

Consider these responses as your congregation wrestles with the question: What is the Church?

1. The Church is a Christian community that reaches out to and receives people, relates them to God, guides them toward spiritual maturity, and sends them to serve in the world. The congregational life cycle includes hospitality, Christian inquiry, discipleship, and missional ministry. Here is a simple way to remember this cyclical process:



2. There are various ways that congregations grow numerically:

- Biological growth—church rolls increase as families within the congregation grow.
- Transfer growth—the congregation receives Christians from other churches who transfer their membership.
- Conversion growth—the local congregation grows through its evangelistic efforts with pre-Christians who become converts.

3. Evangelism is both an individual and communal priority for the Christian community. Local congregations are known in their larger community by their love, works of compassion, and works of justice. Wesley might add to this list works of piety.

4. The central focus of both clergy and parishioners in the local congregation is the kingdom (reign) of God as described by Jesus in the gospels.

## *What Is Church for?*

How would your congregation answer the question: “What is the Church for?” Parishioners typically answer this by saying, “Church is where I go to worship God and where my pastor takes care of me.”

Here are some follow-up questions to ask:

- If your local church suddenly closed its doors forever, would your community miss you?
- Why does this church exist?
- If someone comes within the sphere of influence of this church, what do we expect to happen?

When congregations honestly compare their notions of why (and for whom) their church exists with Christ’s expectations of the Church, a new reality often emerges.

*What are the top ten tasks that your congregation expects of your pastor and how long would it take to do them all?*

How would you begin to determine how ready and willing your congregation is to create an intentional, evangelistic church culture? Consider using the following exercise to determine whether the ministries and activities of your church are structured to reach others for Christ.

## **PAYING THE RENT**

Suppose your church is going to receive a new pastor. The bishop, district superintendent, and cabinet of your conference have asked for input from your congregation to inform their choice of a new pastor. To do so they have asked your congregation to list the top ten tasks<sup>2</sup> that the new pastor should be able to do well in order to “pay the rent” (or to be considered an effective pastor).

Responses from your congregation may look something like this:

1. Preach good sermons
2. Visit the sick and shut in
3. Teach Bible study
4. Perform marriages and funerals
5. Keep regular office hours
6. Provide pre-marital, marital, and spiritual counsel
7. Make connections with the community
8. Be a good administrator
9. Help the church improve its financial condition
10. Plan and lead good worship services

Next, quantify the tasks listed. How much *time* per week do you believe it will take the new pastor to perform each task? Work through each task considering everything involved with carrying it out. How much time do you think it takes to prepare a good sermon? Or, visit the sick? (Don’t forget to include commuting time.) Or, conduct pre-marital counseling? (Remember to include preparation time, make allowances for late arrival of counselees, and attendance at rehearsal dinners, etc.). Add up the time spent for each of the tasks.

Typically, congregations discover that the pastor spends more than *fifty hours a week* on activities that primarily serve the congregation, which brings us back to the original question: What is the local church for?

To go further: If the majority of the pastor’s time is devoted to serving the current members, how realistic is it to expect the pastor also to be the primary person doing evangelistic outreach in the community? Do congregations secretly believe that pastors are superhuman?

## **THE MYTH OF “SUPER-PASTOR”**

In *Radical Outreach*, George Hunter III describes the birth of the myth of the super-pastor in seventeenth-century England. Richard Baxter, Puritan leader and pastor in Kidderminster, England, then a town of about eight hundred homes and two thousand people, served the community with amazing industry.

Hunter describes Baxter's work ethic: "He served as every person's evangelist, catechist, teacher, overseer, counselor, disciplinarian, liturgist, and preacher (Sunday morning and evening)." Baxter provided personal ministry to all the sick and visited them from house to house. Baxter also wrote *The Reformed Pastor*, first published in 1656, in which he wrote a job description for pastors similar to his. Baxter's job description for pastors became a universally held truth by both clergy and laity. Thus was born the myth of the super-pastor. The obvious problem with the super-pastor is that when the pastor over-functions, the rest of the congregation often under-functions.

Before beginning service as an overseas missionary I received this timely advice, "Never shine so brightly that no one can follow you." With that, my role as missionary was clear: empower people in the local setting to conduct the best possible ministry they can, in their context, with their gifts and graces and their available resources.

### ***Pastor: What Is Your Job?***

Just as wrestling with the questions, "What is the Church?" and "What is church for?" is crucial for congregations, clergy should answer an equally important question; that is, "Pastor, what is your job?" The following exercise created by Harold Percy helps clergy answer this question.

It is Tuesday. You've just taken Monday off. You have a guest preacher for Sunday, so there's no sermon preparation. No one is in crisis or in the hospital. There are no weddings, funerals, or committee meetings this week. What is your job?

Percy notes, without the prop of "things to do" many overworked clergy may have forgotten how to answer this question.

Just as congregations need seasons to refocus their mission and ministry, pastors also need time and space to ponder questions like: What does this congregation need?

What gifts and graces do I bring to this congregation's ministry? What am I trying to accomplish? Why am I doing what I am doing and not something else? When clergy no longer understand their goals in ministry, they often burn out, drop out, or act out.

### ***From the Book of Discipline***

The 2008 United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states, "Elders have a fourfold ministry of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service..." Listed prominently among the responsibilities under Order is "training" and "equipping lay leadership to fulfill the ministry to which they are called" (§§340.1 and 340.2).

*Clergy-laity partnerships are key in creating an evangelistic church culture.*

Clearly, one of the main roles of the pastor is equipper of laity for the ministry to which they are called. The pastor helps laity discern their particular calls to ministry, ensures that they receive adequate training to fulfill the ministry, and encourages them to actively exercise their ministry gifts and graces.

## **CLERGY—LAITY PARTNERSHIPS**

An evangelistic church culture is one where the congregation has a dual focus. Most congregations already do an adequate job of paying attention to the needs of the people who attend their local church. But, as the "paying the rent" exercise may reveal, after the needs of the congregation are met, little time remains for missional ministry and meeting the spiritual and physical needs of the local community.

In an evangelistic church, a clear partnership exists between pastor and congregation. Clarifying each role is key. First, the pastor must embrace and fulfill his or her role as equipper of the saints for ministry.

Second, the congregation must be devoted to being equipped for ministry. This sounds simplistic, however it is a foundational premise upon which evangelistic church cultures are built. As equipper, the pastor is responsible for ensuring the congregation receives the appropriate instruction needed to develop as disciples of Jesus Christ. Creating a learning environment is a cooperative process involving many people. The pastor does not have to lead *all* of the instruction. It is not reasonable to expect the pastor to excel in all areas of ministry.

Equipping the Church through spiritual instruction means that the pastor is responsible for exposing the congregation to the best available training. This may involve sending key leaders to events or urging teams from your church to visit other congregations and community organizations or partnering with others. This may also mean inviting in guest preachers, teachers, and evangelists.

Look for help in other churches too. There may be gifted people sitting in our sister churches who would welcome the opportunity to become “Sunday missionaries,” willing to teach or preach for a season in your congregation. Be creative. Pray, seek God’s guidance for creative solutions aimed at providing the best for your congregation.

### ***Develop Your Core (Group)***

Among fitness professionals there is clear agreement—to be physically fit exercise your core. The same holds true for the Church.

There are four groups of people with whom your local church engages in ministry. They are 1) your core group—those who attend regularly; 2) uninvited guests; 3) invited guests; and 4) people in the community surrounding the church building. The people in the core group of the church are those who demonstrate the most dedication, most consistent attendance, and most interest in the church.

Earlier we mentioned the questions: “Why do we exist?” and “If someone comes within the sphere of influence of this church, what do we expect to happen?” When the clergy and congregation answer these questions with the core group in mind, the response should be clear: guide the core group toward spiritual maturity, discipleship, and missional ministry. The following example can help your congregation develop a process to equip your core group.

Create a **top ten list of discipleship basics** that every member and regular attendee of your church should learn. There is clear evidence from Scripture that discipleship should include things such as:

1. Reading, studying, meditating on Scripture for godly counsel (Acts 2:42).
2. Learning how to pray: intercession, praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition (Matthew 6:9-13).
3. Learning about who and what the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit is (John 14:15-31).
4. Knowing the basics of the Gospel message: The three R’s—Relationship with Jesus Christ, Reconciliation with God, Reign of God (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).
5. Understanding what the Church is—as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7-30).
6. Understanding what worship is (Romans 12:1).
7. Practicing stewardship (Acts 2:42-47).
8. Bearing witness to the Christian faith (Matthew 28:18-20).
9. Living as a disciple of Christ (Romans 12:1-8).
10. Practicing the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

### ***Beyond Survival***

Evangelistic church cultures think and plan activities beyond those that merely ensure survival. Evangelistic church cultures place different priorities on the top of their ministry scorecard.

Reggie McNeal, author of *Missional Renaissance*, urges churches to become more missional by making the following strategic shifts:

1. From an internal to an external focus
2. Change the scorecard (i.e. what you measure. Why not count—prayer, discipleship, mission, service to “the least of these,” justice for the oppressed, etc.)
3. From program development to people development
4. From church-based to Kingdom-based leadership.

The shift from an internal to an external focus means changing from the “membership-has-privileges” mentality to serving Christ as the top priority. The fundamental embrace of being a life-long learner (disciple) and a life-long servant of Christ provides the fuel to power the change from an internal to an external focus.

### ***Change the Scorecard***

The typical items listed atop mainline church scorecards are: 1) Average worship attendance; 2) Giving; 3) Well-functioning committees and programs that mainly serve church members.

Jesus and his followers created such a powerful movement because at its core was personal life-transformation. The well-publicized membership decline of mainline churches indicates that many churches also need life-transformation at their core, which requires emphasis on new goals.

*Change the scorecard by counting persons equipped to be spiritual mentors and coaches to others.*

The 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church revised the vows for professing membership to include “witness.” Our United Methodist membership vows now read, “To faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, **and their witness.**”

(¶217.6) This addition points clearly to the need to create an evangelistic church culture that prepares people to bear witness to Christ both in and out of the church building.

Consider making this fundamental change to the ministry scorecard. Instead of counting the number of people who fill the slots on church committees, count the number of people prepared to serve as spiritual mentors or life coaches to others outside the church. A spiritual mentor or life coach would be someone who has successfully grasped the concepts presented in your **top ten list of discipleship basics**. With a little more targeted instruction, people can serve in deployed ministry to people with whom they are already in relationship: at work, school, social groups, family, and others.

### ***Sacrifice...for What?***

People in evangelistic church cultures give generously to meaningful ministry. Michael Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Tipp, Ohio, suggests that instead of pleading for dollars to maintain the church facility, ask people for sacrificial gifts to help suffering people.

In 2004, Slaughter first challenged his congregation to give sacrificially to provide relief to people suffering in Sudan whom the world ignored. He issued his challenge with these words, “It’s Christmas; it’s not your birthday!”

Slaughter asked the congregation to give dollar for dollar whatever they spent on their personal family Christmas to the Sudan project. Tipp City, Ohio, is in the rust belt, just outside of Dayton, one of the fastest *declining* cities in the nation. Still, the people of Ginghamburg UMC responded with extravagant generosity. They gave \$317,000.

Now in its sixth year of The Sudan Project, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) and other partners have joined this cause. One church that gave sacrificially in 2004 created a project that put over 5000

Sudanese families back into the farming business in 2005. Those farmers produced a successful harvest that has now expanded to feed 80,000 people<sup>3</sup>

## **PREPARATION VS. PLANNING**

Many churches spend tremendous amounts of time in committees, meeting to plan for their future direction. Planning involves gathering and sifting through data, brokering opinions, and taking votes to assess consensus. Often church planning sessions demand much from our mental faculties and little from our spirits. Our human analysis is often bookended with a perfunctory opening and closing prayer. We decide our direction and afterward ask God to bless our decisions. While planning is important, without prayer and spiritual discernment it can prove to be fruitless.

Preparation—that is spiritual preparation—takes a different approach. Preparation involves discerning God’s current vision for your local church. Hearing from God means we must communicate with God regularly enough to recognize Divine direction.

In the informal survey, “The Place of Prayer in United Methodism,”<sup>4</sup> 100% of the churches surveyed indicated that prayer was either extremely important or very important. Of those same churches surveyed however, only 16% had an intentional process in place to teach people *how* to pray, though 40% have offered at least one class, workshop, or seminar on prayer. The other 44% report no special guidance in prayer. Preparation for ministry requires an active prayer life. Zeroing in on God’s vision

for your church helps you determine what you value.

In *Heartbeat!* Charles Arn suggests that the creation of new outreach ministries include listening to the concerns of the unchurched through focus groups. Invite single mothers or ex-offenders or unemployed youth to the table to find out what they believe the Church could offer them. Find out what your target audience considers important.

## **CONCLUSION**

Creating an evangelistic church culture requires clear understanding about which vital roles should be played by clergy and laity. Pastors bear the chief responsibility of equipping laity for the ministry to which they have been called. Laity should be disciplined learners ready to be equipped. The clergy-lay partnership will require an honest assessment of existing ministries and will likely point out the need to examine closely your current ministry scorecard.

The Peace Corps’ slogan is, “It’s the hardest job you’ll ever love.” The Church should offer people no less challenge. Create an evangelistic church culture and you may be surprised to find out how fulfilling it is to see lives transformed—including yours.

<sup>1</sup> [Make-No-Wave United Methodist Church](#)

<sup>2</sup> *Putting in All Together in the Parish*, by James Glasse

<sup>3</sup> [The Sudan Project.org](#) and [Sudan Project Overview 2010](#).

<sup>4</sup> Research focus in [United Method Deviations](#)





# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PRACTICAL HELPS

## *Investigate the Function of the Pastor*

1. Provide each member of your congregation or each member of your church leadership a 3 x 5 index card. Ask them to write one sentence or phrase that states what they believe is the most important function of the pastor. Collect the cards. Church leaders and the clergy may arrange a time to discuss the responses.
  - ✚ Is there a general consensus?
  - ✚ Is there a broad range of responses?
  - ✚ What are the implications? What, if anything, would you like to change?
2. Invite lay leadership and clergy to review the segments in the *Book of Discipline* that describe the responsibilities of clergy. (See particularly ¶340.) Given that no pastor is gifted in, nor has the energy and time for every ministerial task, engage in conversation about the fulfillment of pastoral duties.
  - ✚ How can clergy and lay leaders work in partnership to ensure fulfillment of essential clergy responsibilities—those that only the pastor can do?
  - ✚ How would you energize and empower both laity and clergy to work from their strengths to accomplish the church's goals and needs?

## *Equipping the Saints*

3. Clergy are to equip laity for the ministry to which they are called. Ask the congregation to respond to this question:
  - ✚ For what types of ministry does our congregation need to be equipped?
  - ✚ Who could and would provide the hands-on instruction needed?

## *Explore “What Is Church”?*

4. Start a conversation with Sunday school classes and groups of all ages about the purpose of the Church with your congregation. This could set the stage for a future Bible study on the Church, a sermon series on the Church: past and present, or serve as a precursor to examining your current ministry scorecard.
  - ✚ What is church?
  - ✚ What is church for?

## *Brainstorm New Outreach Ministries*

5. Invite people to brainstorm about new outreach ministries the church could create. Choose one or two of the ideas. Invite non-church members from the community who represent the projected target audience of the new ministry to share what help they believe the church could offer them through the new ministry. Afterward discuss the response from your guests. Note any differences in priorities between what the church members and guests from the community believed were top priorities. Consider forming a partnership with people from the community to ensure that your new ministry speaks to their needs.
  - ✚ What would a partnership between the congregation and community look like?
  - ✚ What support system or structure needs to be in place for a partnership to succeed?
  - ✚ What might church leaders and stakeholders need to relinquish or change to make room for a community partnership?

# RESOURCES

## REFERENCE

- [www.gbod.org/evangelism](http://www.gbod.org/evangelism) The GBOD Evangelism website
- [Make-No-Wave United Methodist Church](#)
- [The Sudan Project.org](#)
- [Sudan Project Overview 2010](#) – Ginghamburg Church (YouTube video)

Glasse, James, *Putting in All Together in the Parish* (Abingdon, 1972; ISBN 978-0-687-34932-6). This book is out of print, though there may be copies available through an online book seller.

## READING

\_\_\_\_\_, **Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation 2009-2012.** *Evangelism: Sharing the Good News* (Abingdon, 2008; ISBN 978-0-687-46525-5). The 2013-2016 edition will be available in the fall, 2012. Both editions are in print and digital format.

Arn, Charles, *Heartbeat!* (Xulon Press, 2010; ISBN 978-1-612-15053-6). This is a laity-focused resource designed to help them identify their passion and turn that passion into ministry—particularly to non-Christians.

Hunter, George III, *Radical Outreach* (Abingdon, 2003; ISBN 0-687-07441-X). Hunter offers readers a wealth of practical strategies and examples of how congregations can be intentional about outreach.

McNeal, Reggie, *Missional Renaissance* (Jossey-Bass, 2009; ISBN 978-0-470-24344-2). McNeal delves into the “what” and “how” for churches to make the transition from an internal to an external focus.

Percy, Harold, *Your Church Can Thrive* (Abingdon, 2003; ISBN 0-687-2256-8). This is a very user-friendly resource that provides a common-sense approach to developing an evangelistic/disciple-forming church culture.



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