

Fundamentals of Renewing The Church

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2016 - Reflections on 7 plans for Strategic Renewal

Congregations are either in a constant state of renewal, or on a downward Trajectory. The most common factor in a declining congregation is being inward Focused. Here are helpful ways to work on renewal.

The ELCA in cooperation with other mainline denominations has compiled research showing the 7 most effective plans for renewal in a church. Here are the 7 categories and my reflection on them. This is just the beginning of the conversation. This is not an exhaustive list. It is only a start. Ideas will emerge as individual congregation engage their context and list to see what people want and what is needed in your setting.

- I. A congregational plan leading to numerical growth in worship and participation in the life of the church - evangelism
 - A. Learning to talk about Jesus and faith

Lutherans are good at outreach and social ministry, but these days we have to be able to engage people in meaningful conversation about life and faith issues. We need to be able to tell why we do outreach.
 - B. The cultural of inviting

We can't just be welcoming. The congregation can be the most welcoming group on earth, but if no one invites, very few if any will come. We have to take the initiative to invite. Enter into conversations.
 - C. Marketing - internet

In partnership with inviting is marketing. Congregations have to tell who they are and a brief description of what "kind" on church it is, or the assumption will be made that your church is closed minded and legalistic, like those in the media. Webpages, social media, and other types of electronic communications are a must. Logos and branding are helpful.
 - D. More than social service - we are great at food. It is our heritage.

As we help others, it becomes even more meaningful if we tell them the story of why we do social service. If we actually say, "we do this because when I was down, God and God's people helped me" or "I have been blessed by God and because God blessed me, I must share it".
- II. A congregational plan to develop, equip, and empower self-reliant leaders.
 - A. Role/Model of the pastor

The pastor has to be one that both models good leadership and

empowers others to lead. A church where only the pastor leads will be limited in growth by the pastor's time and energy. As the pastor grows in relationship with the people, the renewal of the congregation works best when the pastor give leadership away and supports the leadership of others. Be a church that is constantly raising up new leaders.

B. Structure to foster shared leadership and innovation

Much of our church structure stifles growth rather than fosters it. In the changing world the church has to be able to make quick decisions, empower people to try new things, and give lay leaders to lead.

C. Involve and inspire youth and young adult leaders

Growing and renewing congregations share leadership with all ages, and raise up new leaders for the future. Mentoring, encouraging, and sharing leadership will grow young leaders. A congregation must be open to new ideas and new way of doing thing. Youth and young adults will not be inspired to keep things just the way they are.

D. There is a shortage of pastors across the Christian Church. In what ways does the congregation talk to gifted people about being a pastor/rostered minister

III. A plan for the congregation to reflect the diversity of the mission field and community.

A. Anti-Racism + cultural sensitivity

Many congregations were started by ethnic communities. Now those communities have changed. There may be new ethnic communities, or the economic make-up of the community may be different. A congregation will likely not grow and flourish if it is only made up of people from outside the community. Congregations in renewal invite the neighborhood in and welcome changes that reflect the neighborhood.

B. Openness to cultural differences - celebrate

A congregation that welcomes the neighborhood may need to initiate new activities and celebrations that reflect the values and heritage of the current neighborhood.

C. Use history of serving the community to support future mission

The congregation's history my reflect the cultural heritage of the community that established it. That history could be good evidence that one of the congregation's guiding principals is to always be open to the community, its language and culture.

IV. A congregational plan to develop the discipleship/faith practices of the ministry participants. Its no longer just Sunday School. There are a wide variety of

options in sharing faith and teaching discipleship.

A. Bible study

Congregations that are growing and in renewal offer a variety of opportunities to engage people in the Word. These opportunities may vary in type and location. Often they can be an entry place

B. Children, youth, young adults

Opportunities are offered for children to hear, role play, and live out bible stories in fun, exciting, and engaging ways. Youth and young adults, in addition to having opportunities to discuss faith and life, also are given leadership roles in teaching younger children

C. Families at home

Parents are eager to find opportunities to teach the faith at home. Resources are provided to assist parents in home activities of faith and life.

D. Spirituality

People are eager to cultivate spirituality in their lives. Renewing Congregations foster spiritual renewal as a vital part of growth. Including spiritual gifts inventories, healing services, and opportunities to engage is spiritual mentoring

V. A plan for holistic, year-round stewardship.

A. Yearly response method

The first step is a plan for a yearly time for commitment. A challenge to giving in response to what God has done, and giving as a response to belonging

B. Year round education and story telling

Congregations renewing and growing in stewardship and mission support never overlook opportunities to share the stories of people whose lives they have touched. People need to know why to give, and how their gifts are working to help others

C. Preaching stewardship when it is text appropriate

Pastors should not shy away from talking about money and possessions when it appears in the lectionary. Jesus talks about money more than he talks about heaven and hell

D. Thanking

Congregations must use sound fund raising practices to compete in the non-profit world. Pastors and church leaders must have a consistent way of acknowledging and thanking gifts.

E. Modeling behavior

Pastors and church leaders model stewardship behavior, sharing faithful

stories about why they give, and how.

F. Stewardship of gifts, talents, environment

Renewing congregations have regular methods of discerning spiritual gifts, and use that information to recruit leaders, matching gifts to positions

G. Working toward a goal of at least 10% giving to support mission beyond the local church; synod, synod ministries, churchwide efforts

H. Good financial practices that inspires confidence. Established endowment funds and policies for receiving memorials, bequests, and major gifts

VI. Developing a worship and music ministry that is relevant to the community

A. Cultural awareness

Many congregations are stuck in worship and music styles that reflect the past and not the desires of those in the pews. The liturgy and order of Service does not have to be compromised in order to make music and worship relevant to the community

B. Support history

Variety is the spice of life. There is no one right worship style that will magically attract new people. Worship styles and music vary by region and heritage

C. Differing worship services

Congregations may have to offer more than one service with differing styles to reach out to the diversity of the neighborhood.

D. Music/Worship done well

No matter what the style, music and worship must be done well. Renewing congregations pay attention to the quality of music and planning for Worship

E. What is the culture of your community? Ethnic, age range. Lutherans just think that if we can get people to like funeral dirges on the organ, then everything will be OK. There has to be a variety of music.

VII. Plans for partnering with the community

A. Listening - Renewal involves

1) Listening to God - bible study and reflection

2) Listening to the congregation - dedicated time to talk with one another about the mission and ministry of the church

3) Listening to the community - The pastor and church leadership look for every opportunity to engage in conversation with the community and its leaders. These conversations develop relationships, spark ideas of community engagement, and generate ideas for the congregation to meet community needs

B. Frequent places where people gather

The pastor, church leaders, and church activities frequent places outside the church building where people community members can be engaged

C. Volunteer for public visibility

When serving the community, church members advertise their connection to the church. This can happen with shirts, signs, logos, etc

D. Always be about inviting

With the congregation involved in the neighborhood, they are always inviting people. Inviting not just to church or worship, but inviting into a relationship with Jesus, and into a community of faith

E. Visit with those who use the building

The church building serves as a community center and a gathering place and church members and the pastor engage those who use the building to build relationships and further invite

F. Cultivate mission to meet community needs.

Further resources

Go to the synod webpage - www.mittensynod.org

Drop down menu "mission"

Click on Director for Evangelical Mission's blog

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