

Take a Fresh Look at Local Church Outreach

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The scriptures are so full of action! No matter where you read in the Bible, God is asking for His people to get involved in the lives of others. It seems we are always encouraged to “do “something.” Consider these passages:

1 Corinthians 10:31: “*whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*”

Matthew 5:16: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*”

Here are some thoughts:

- **The “normal” has changed forever.** We hear this all the time: “*We just can't wait until we get back to normal.*” More than likely, this is not going to happen. The fact is, there is no “normal” to go back to, said Carol Childress, a Texas-based church and organizational consultant. “*We have left Egypt, and we are never coming back.*” We must look for and recognize a “new normal.”
- **Nobody knows completely what the “new normal” will look like.** You can easily find 50 articles on what the church’s new normal will look like, *but nobody really knows*. There are some tough certainties that we have to face such as:
 - The “online church service” will compete with “in house attendance.” Many people are getting used to worshipping at home on Sunday morning.
 - Tony Morgan, popular church consultant, says “*growing churches must focus less on gathering and much more on connecting.*”
 - Church leaders will have to focus more on “digital ministry.”
 - Pastors cannot ever look at their church buildings the same way. The church will have to become an “equipping center.”
- **More than likely the church will have to become a permanent “hybrid” church.** Churches that make it will have to have both “in-person” and “online” (virtual) ministries.
- **“In person” doesn’t just mean “in building” anymore.** *Zoom* and other video conference apps have forever redefined the concept of “in person.” It doesn’t always mean “physical” and “in a church building” anymore.
- **Many of the people the church will reach in the future age will be “online only” people.** Remember: people are people—no matter where they are!
- **The church will realize an “expanded vision”** that allows for virtual ministry. Carey Nieuwhof, successful Canadian church pastor and author says, “*If the size of your vision shrinks to the size of a room you can fill, you’ve missed the church’s mission.*”
- **Every growing church has an empowered and active laity.** The laity is not used to *reach* the goal...they *ARE* the goal. When church laity are trained and released, the church will grow! The

church cannot continue to focus on counting “noses and nickels” anymore—laity have to be trained to connect with the community through outreach.

- **To equip the laity you must form and utilize small ministry groups and teams.** Here are some that are essential:
 - Visitation Team
 - Feed the Hungry and Homeless Team
 - Outreach Team
 - Congregational Care Team
 - Outreach Prayer Team
 - Helping Hands Ministry Team
 - Cooking Team
 - Social Media Contact Team (we can turn “social media” into “social ministry!”)
 - Church Website Team (your new “electronic front door.”)

Churches have always been a lifeline for people during difficult times. This past worldwide pandemic has proven to be one of those times, and the church has been forced to adapt in many ways in order to continue its ministry. An elderly woman was seeking to further her education in college. She was asked, “Why do you want more education at your age?” Her reply? *“All I have left is my future!”* That’s the way it is with the church. The mission of the church is not fulfilled, and the future is ours. We can look forward to the future with hope and optimism.

First, some basic principles on reaching others for Christ and the local church. We recommend the “I. C.A.R.E.” method (this might be a great theme for a local church):

Identify the unchurched

Connect with them

Act with kindness

Relate through friendship

Encourage them to attend church with you!

Here are some effective ministry ideas for church leaders and laity. They are practical ways that local church laity can get involved in ministry in these changing times.

- **Show up at church again yourself!** Just be there. Lead your family! The return to in house church attendance begins with YOU!
- **Bring someone with you!** Better yet, don’t just invite them—bring them!
 - Thom Rainer says that 82% of the people that you meet this week would be likely or more than likely to attend church with you if you would just ask them!
- **Join one of the newly formed ministry teams** (as described above—we hope the pastor will lead the way and form them). Plan to get involved.

- **Pick the best calendar time and plan for a “Season of Care for the Community.”** Schedule community picnics and food gatherings, feed hungry people with food boxes, provide community meals, sponsor a neighborhood block party, give holiday gifts to the needy, put up a prayer tent and offer prayer for hurting people, and visit every church member who is “shut in” and cannot get to church.
- **“Queen for a Day”** – Offer free cutting and styling of hair for ladies in the community. We know of one church that went to the lowest of low income homes, got permission to use their public building, recruited two or three of the top hairdressers in the church and, on a Saturday, gave free styling to any and all as time allowed. (Helping Hands Ministry Team).
- **Use the “Message in the mailbox” plan.** Send volunteers to deliver an inspirational note or postcard from the church to mailboxes in selected neighborhoods. Let the residents know that the church is praying specifically for them. Offer an opportunity for prayer for their specific needs, an invitation to the church and an offer to visit them personally if desired.
- **Free church “rummage” sale.** Church solicits items for a one-day “give-it-away” charity event. (Outreach team).
- **Redo the church website** and keep it updated regularly. (Social Media Team)
- **Offer an opportunity to pray—online!** Prayer ministry works over the internet. If your church normally offers prayer ministry after the service, you might do this digitally at the same time you normally would but ask people to sign up via email or text.
- **Create a “Visitors Center”** at the church to welcome visitors with gifts and treats!
- **Some other team ministries:**
 - Get groceries for a widow or shut in.
 - Easter egg hunt at church (church can get hundreds of new people on church property each year.)
 - Sponsor a rodeo for the kids in the community.
 - Car Care Clinic (in a neighborhood). Repair vehicles and give free oil changes on a Saturday.
 - Tutor children for free. Use retired teachers!
 - Offer digital connection points. People have different preferred platforms they use. One church we heard about hosts a daily morning prayer time on Zoom. A local church can host a midweek bible study on Zoom.
- **Personal Ministry.** Here are some things anyone can do individually in the church and in the community:
 - Cut flowers from your garden and give them to someone
 - Send a card of appreciation to someone
 - Cook a meal for someone coming home from the hospital
 - Give a gift to the trash men

- Clip coupons and give them away
- Give food gift cards to homeless people
- Cook supper for a neighbor
- Help a friend move
- Sweep your neighbor's walk/driveway
- Learn to say "God Loves You" in Spanish
- Help someone carry their groceries
- Mow your neighbor's lawn
- Visit someone in the nursing home
- Pick up trash in the park or public area
- Rake your neighbor's lawn
- Pay for the person behind you in the McDonald's drive-thru
- Buy someone a coffee at Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts
- Buy an extra bag of groceries for the food pantry
- Listen to someone
- Write a letter or make a phone call to someone you like (or don't like!)

The future is before us. We could be on the threshold of a new revitalization of inventiveness and connection as we accept the challenge to reach out "beyond our building" and reach hurting and lonely people that live, work and play all around us.

May God continue to bless our pastors, church leaders and laity with creativity and grace as we reach out and share God's love in a practical way everywhere.