

Growth Points

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OUTWARD FOCUS

You may have heard the phrase, “If it were a snake, it would have bit me.” This is typically said when an individual misses seeing something that is very close to him or her. It is common to look endlessly for an item only to discover it was there the entire time right in front of you!

We all are guilty of this at one time or another. We go searching for an item, scour through drawers, shelves,

A similar thing happens in our churches regarding outreach. It is very easy for church leaders to believe their church is outwardly focused, when it actually is not. The perception of many church people is that they are kingdom minded, concerned for reaching the lost, and connected to people in the community.

I clearly remember consulting with a church in the Midwest. The results of a

Some churches have little interest in the community or in the world around it. The focus of such churches is in the rearview mirror, not out the front window. Their concern is for survival, keeping the budget in the black, and maintaining peace in the membership. Outreach is an aspirational objective of the church, but it is not an actionable objective.

closets, and then confidently declare, “I can’t find it.” Then to our chagrin, someone else will look and quickly discover it. What’s the difference? Often the difference is simply focus. We think we are focused on finding the item, but our mind—our focus—is elsewhere.

church-wide survey revealed several areas of strength and a few dominant weaknesses. One area of strength was community outreach. Careful listening to conversations in five focus groups found that people believed their church was effective in reaching the

Improving Outreach

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Consider some of the following ideas to improve outreach in your church.

- Pray specifically that God would open doors for outreach in your community.
- List five actions your church can take to move toward an outward focus.
- Share stories of how church members are making a difference through serving in community activities.
- Encourage all of your people to have two ministries: One inside the church and one outside the church.

What steps can you take this month to focus more on outreach?

Which of the ideas noted above can you begin to use?

community for Christ. Closer examination found otherwise. Five hundred dollars was budgeted for outreach, but it had not been spent in the past year. A full 99% of the church's identifiable programming was internally directed to the existing congregation. The only identifiable program listed for outreach was VBS. Facts demonstrated that the church was not outwardly focused at all. How could a church be so wrong in its assessment of its strengths?

Sometimes it is the corporate ego that generates such a false view. A church can become like the person who was overheard saying, "Well enough about me, now tell me what you think about me?" Of course, many churches truly aspire to reach out, but the internal fellowship is so wonderful that those outside the church are forgotten. This problem is so common among churches it is called *koinonitis*. It is present when the fellowship within a church becomes a selfish lack of desire to reach the unchurched. For other churches, perhaps most of the time, it is just lack of focus.

Any outsider would find it painfully obvious that the church is not outwardly

focused, but no one inside the church can see it. Their vision is foggy and blurred.

So, what does a church look like that is focused on outreach?

You might be an outreach focused church if . . .

- You designate 20% of your church budget for local outreach.

- You hold events in locations other than on your church property.

- You know the names of the business owners around your church location.

- You attend community functions. You discuss how to reach your community in all board meetings.

- You talk about fulfilling the Great Commission more than about the church property and facility issues.

- You see new people from the immediate community in your worship service.

- Your church leaders are personally engaging in ministry outside of the church's walls.

- At least 10% of your people are involved in community activities.

- Your church's pastors are active in at least one community group.

- People on the platform of your church reflect the community in which the

church resides.

- Your church expects and acts as though new people are present in every meeting.

- Your ministry training always addresses the need for believers' to be present in community activities.

- An outward focus is a core value, not merely an interest, and is evident through the budget, ministries, and activity of the people.

- Your pastor(s) are involved in community activities over 10 hours per week.

- Your church offers training to people on how to serve in the community.

Churches that are focused on outreach work diligently at getting, keeping, and expanding an outward focus. This outward focus becomes the epicenter of missional engagement. The result of an outward focus is effective evangelism and community engagement.

A church's willingness to engage the world *in* the world is a singular clarion call to the reality of God! People best see God and engage God when his church is going out.

Adapted from the forthcoming book *Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church* by Gary L. McIntosh and Phil Stevenson.

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