

Six Planning Steps Being the Best Church FOR the Community

I. Start with Scripture

- Study Scripture about “God’s Heart for the Poor”. (See Resource section)
- Offer Bible studies around appropriate scripture.
- Have “table discussions” around topics concerning where you have seen God working to help others, etc.
- Dedicate a day of worship around serving the needs of others, incorporating appropriate sermon topics, etc.
- **Pray** for God to guide your church and help discern what call your church has for the community.

II. Your Church Identity

- Be clear about your mission/vision of your church. How does serving others in the world fit into the mission of your church?
- Who is your church in relationship with the world and the community?
- What part does our Eucharistic commitment play in how your church shares good news and practice good deeds?
- What is your church’s philosophy about serving outside the walls of the church? Do you have a mission statement for community outreach?
- Commission an “outreach team” dedicated to this effort.

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

III. Understanding Your Community (Community Profile)

a. Define Your “Community”

- Start by defining a small geographical area such as a census tract, block area or zip code.
- Collect population and demographic data about the area that has been defined. Note: City, county and zip code level data can be easily found online. (See Resources below).

b. Determine Needs

- Determine what services (i.e. social services) are serving your defined area or community.
- Identify unmet needs in your community. Ask social services, businesses, public schools, clinics, etc. what they perceive the needs to be in the community.

c. Summary Report

- Compile information from above (a. and b.) into a concise report.
- Provide forums to share the community profile with the rest of the congregation.

IV. Identify Community Partners

- Based on information gathered in Step II, begin to identify potential community partners that share similar goals and aspirations for the community (and would be enthusiastic about a partnership with your church.)
- Consider partnering with organizations that 1.) can identify a need in the community and 2.) are already providing services that the church can support or improve upon.

Example: Public schools make good partners because they do what they do best--- teach and nurture children to learn. A church may offer to further their efforts through reading programs, mentoring, teacher appreciation, etc. based on the school's needs. The school can offer guidance and work with the church on the best methods to accomplish the goal within the school's guidelines.

IV. continued

- Set appointments with potential partners. Learn about the organization (see Resource section). Share information about the mission of your church and for community outreach. Ask what the organization's needs are and how you can assist their efforts? (*As opposed to stating what you can do for them!*).
- Discuss potential partnerships with your designated outreach team and develop a proposal for the services you believe you can provide to help the cause. It is important that both parties are in agreement to all the terms of the proposal. No strings attached!

V. *Gifts and Opportunities*

- Discern the types of gifts among your congregation. Begin to understand how those gifts might be used to serve needs in the community.
- Offer "first step opportunities" for parishioners to become involved and serve. These are simple, often one-time group activities that are non-threatening with little or no orientation needed.

Example: reading to school aged children in the classroom, church youth choir singing to nursing home residents, house restoration.

- Seek opportunities that are relational...that is, opportunities to interact with others in need. It's all about relationships!
- Share and reflect on stories about your success.

"The goal of the externally focused church is to serve, but the ultimate goal is to build the kingdom."

VI. Strategy and Action Planning (see template attached)

- Identify key goals (5-6) to accomplish during the first 1-3 years.
- Goals could be related to 1.) process that you are trying to put in place (such as outreach mission statement, getting a team in place, Bible studies/classes **or** 2.) actual implementation of partnerships, programs, getting volunteers, etc. All goals should be measurable.
- Identify major actions that will need to be accomplished in order for the goals to be reached.
- Determine who will be responsible for completion of action steps and what the expected timeframe for completion is.
- Identify how the goals (and actions) will be measured? How will you determine the success and completion of the goals?
- Revisit the action plan frequently to monitor progress, revise and update.

*Jesus called the disciples not to just become fishermen, but to a greater purpose—
to become “Fishers of Men” (Matthew 4:19)*

Resources:

General resource: The Externally Focused Church (Rusaw and Swanson, 2004),
The Church of Irresistible Influence (Lewis, 2001).

The following may be found on the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas Website:

www.episcopal-dallas.org

Go to tab: *Providing Resources, Episcopal Community Services Network, Resources and Tools*

God's Heart for the Poor (Episcopal Church of the Ascension- Dallas, Bible Study, 2004).

Population and Demographic Resources (for online population and demographic resources)

Ascension Outbound Blueprint, Episcopal Church of the Ascension, 2004.

100 Verses on Gods Heart for the Poor. Also see appendix from The Externally Focused Church for Bible verses.

Agency/Organization Discovery Tool, Episcopal Church of the Ascension, 2004.