

Neighboring Ideas for Churches

Who is Our Neighbor?

The Bible calls us to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. A neighbor refers to those near to us. Our neighbors are found in the numerous settings where our life intersect with others in some way. Caring for our neighbors is a way to inspire mutual trust which creates strong community. Strong relationships are valuable in times of need, crisis, and celebration.

It is one thing to know that we are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, but it's another thing to do it. Our neighbor is anyone we can help. The best thing we can do for our neighbor is to love them and the love of God compels us to share Christ's love (John 13.34, 1 John 4.20-21). We can offer our neighbor three things...time, talent, resources (James 2.16, 1 John 3.17).

Neighboring Ideas for Churches

1. Walk, Talk, Pray, Mobilize

a. Map Your Neighborhood

Map a radius around your church facility based on the concentration of the population in your area. For example, an urban congregation may map a few blocks away from the church facility. A suburban and rural church may map two or more miles away from the building, depending on the layout of the community.

Walk as groups of two to meet, and talk with people at coffee shops, local businesses, restaurants, the gym, etc. Start without assumptions and get to know people by listening to their stories and perceptions of the community. Ask open-ended questions when talking with people.

b. Identify Congregational & Community Assets

John McKnight once noted, "Every person has capacities, abilities, and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed, and gifts given." Many congregations focus on the needs or deficits of the community. Yet, every community has conditions requiring attention. Identifying and mobilizing congregational and community assets boost parishioners' and neighbors' outlook on their circumstances and empower them to build and improve their quality of life.

Transformation efforts are more effective and last longer when people come together, mobilizing their assets that will strengthen the community.

c. Prioritize and Mobilize

Bring the "walk and talk" groups together to share their observations and thoughts on community patterns and needs. Do some creative thinking as a group. Next, begin to match and prioritize the assets your congregation wants to offer with what the community needs most.

Start at first with initiatives that are easier to get off the ground. Outreach projects are best started one at a time. Stagger the launch dates if the church identifies more than

one project, so the community and congregation are not overwhelmed and confused by the onslaught of initiatives.

Constantly assess how new projects are received and the church's reputation in the community. Then, be open to adjusting projects and test runs before cutting whole initiatives and programs when things don't go as expected.

2. Stay in Touch With Your Community:

Keep the community connected with your church. Keep the community informed about activities, special services, and events as much as possible. Utilize a service that enables the church to send pre-recorded voice and text messages and direct emails to keep people informed of whatever is happening at your church. In addition, provide ways through social media and promotional material so people can opt-in to stay informed about upcoming events sponsored by the church.

3. Clean up the Community

A simple way to engage the community is to clean it. There's probably plenty of litter and other trash that the church can help clean up if you look around. Furthermore, you can interact directly with neighbors and community people by going door-to-door to rake leaves or shoveling snow. A simple act of kindness brightens the lives of people in your community.

4. Open Your Facility

Keeping your doors open to events outside your church is a great way to build relationships with people in your community. Offering fair prices and interacting with guests to the service the church provides are opportunities to change people's perceptions about the church, serve them well, and learn more about them.

5. Support Local Businesses

Relationships are not built when we click it and buy it. So often overlook opportunities to strike up a conversation and build a relationship by not walking into a local business. Walking into a local store, library, or post office presents the possibility of striking up a conversation with someone that could lead to a friendship.

8. Partner, Don't Compete

Work with your city, local businesses, or non-profits to do an event or support a cause. Think about what stirs the passions of your congregation. Working with other groups on a current event or new idea is a way to involve your church in the community.

Partnering communicates the following:

- a. Your church cares about community issues and wants to do something about them.
- b. You care about people and not just worship attendance numbers.
- c. When you leave the church, neighbors notice when you partner with them about something you care about.
- d. New or deeper relationships are formed with people who share something in common.
- e. Established relationships have opportunities to share the love of God.

Find out more (tab link to email address)