

Signs of Community Transformation:

Moving Christians and congregations in their thinking from individual betterment (which is good) to community transformation (which is more impactful) is very challenging. I have been thinking through this week, How can one tell if a church is engaging in Community Transformation? What are some indicators of progress?

Many churches have language, liturgy, leadership, programs and practices for Ministry of the Word and sacraments. What would the language, liturgy, leadership, programs and practices be for a church that was equally focused on community transformation?

Here are some initial thoughts: What do you think?

A. Congregational Readiness:

1. Does the congregation have a target neighborhood? Yes or No.
What is the specific neighborhood that the congregation has committed to? How can a church leave a redemptive (and sustainable) imprint in a community, if it does not have a declared neighborhood as its focus for transformation?
2. Does the congregation have a community transformation leader (or team)? Yes or No? Who is teaching and guiding the congregation in its community transformation engagements? The work will not be sustainable without a leader or team who leads/guides the transformation story over time.

B. Community Transformation Process:

1. Is there a systematic (and ongoing) listening process with the community that results in:
 - a. Discovering and cataloging neighbors (and members) gifts; Is the gift information transparent, accessible and shared with the community for the common good?
 - b. Discovering what residents care about, enough to work on it with support from the congregation
2. Is there an agenda for change that is shared with the community that arises from the listening process? Is the agenda co-owned by church and community?
3. Are there community action groups (with congregants and neighbors) forming around the agenda items and working on the things they care about?
4. Is there a shared venue(s) for reporting back to congregation and neighbors the progress being made on their agenda?
5. Is there evidence of cooperation with other congregations, associations and institutions in the community in accomplishing the agenda?
6. Is there evidence of Church(es) raising the voice of the poor to change the systems that perpetuate poverty?

C. Sign Posts of Progress:

- There is movement from “ministry to/for” those people to “ministry with” our neighbors
- There is movement from “inward” to “outward” focus in ministry
- There is movement from “simple responsiveness” to “more complex” (w)holistic engagements that address root causes.
- There is movement from “mono cultural” to “multi-cultural” engagement
- There is movement from economic homogeneity to economic heterogeneity
- There is movement from “commuter-based” ministry to “geographic-based” ministry.
- There is movement from “church-centric” to Kingdom-centric language and frameworks.
- There is movement from focusing on “problems” to “future/vision” oriented focus
- There is movement from understanding stewardship of “our gifts” to stewarding of the “community gifts”.
- There is a “relocation” strategy for changing the residential mix in poor communities (a healthy mix of low, middle and upper-income residents
- There is movement toward development of new leaders from the community and church.
- There is evidence of gospel response (new disciples being made)

Jay Van Groningen

Communities First Association

www.communitiesfirstassociation.org

vangronj@gmail.com