

READING 5: ESTABLISHING CONGREGATIONS TODAY

Lyle E Schaller, renowned church consultant and authority on new church development, reflecting on major differences in church planting methods today, compared with the 1950's, comments:

These and other changes have altered the nature of the assignment given to a task force on newchurch development. The task force may still focus on three questions, but their content has changed. Today the first question that a task force asks is usually, "Who are the people we seek to reach via this new mission? (What are their religious and personal needs, their characteristics, and their worldview that have made it difficult for existing congregations to reach and serve them?)".

A significant part of the answer is that many of today's unchurched adults prefer to help pioneer the new rather than be absorbed into a long-established institution. Another part is that most younger adults were reared in a world in which words were but one of many components of effective communication. The other components include music, visual images, motion, drama, a fast pace, humor, emotion, trust, and color. The most effective preaching to people born after 1950 is designed as persuasion, not as proclamation.

The second question is, "What is the appropriate model for a new mission in today's culture that can effectively reach new generations?". What will be the ideal design for this new mission?

The most common response to that second question is a design that will bring together at least three hundred people for the first public worship service. The old design called for starting small and gradually attracting more people. Too often that original nucleus of two or three or four dozen people (a) attracted church shoppers who preferred a small church; (b) produced a new mission served by only one program person, the pastor, rather than by a staff team thus severely limiting what that congregation could offer in program, attractive schedule choices, or music; and (c) moved construction of a permanent meeting place ahead of evangelism in the congregational priority list.

A common design today calls for (a) the creation of a regional or a niche church rather than a neighborhood congregation, (b) a paid staff of three to five persons plus volunteers, and (c) a non-geographical and narrowly defined description of the constituency to be reached...

The most obvious change in the agenda for those responsible for planting new churches is the shift from "Where?" to "Who?". Instead of looking at a map that denotes the meeting places of existing congregations, the new agenda looks at demographic patterns. Who are the people not being reached by the existing churches?...

Instead of a task force purchasing the site far in advance of use, it may be wiser to focus on creating a new mission that includes several hundred people and letting them make the decision on both their temporary and their permanent meeting places.

From Lyle E Schaller, "Place or People? Changing Assumptions in New Church Development" in Net Results. August 1995: Vol. XVI, No. 8.