

PRESBYTERY OF TROPICAL FLORIDA
VIBRANT TOGETHER BREAKOUT GROUPS

2/5/2022

Evidence that your church builds relationships

- ongoing COVID restrictions still affecting congregational life, isolation and loneliness, limits of facility access, tech problems, public health concerns
- we are building relationships again
- need for intentionality in creating new ways of ministry
- increasing food ministries to the community
- seeing how people lead other people, read each other and reflect Christ
- circumstances can reveal our strength of character
- seeing diversity in our communities means we have a good connection to them
- value of Deacons ministries
- Interfaith connections - some successful, some difficult to create
- Community feeding programs, food pantries
- Connecting with other local PC(USA) congregations
- Outreach through our church's school to local families
- Welcome and engage the community to use our facility - Partner with community groups
- Electronic outreach to members (via various platforms)
- Elders have stepped up to provide leadership and maintain mission after pastor left
- Some shared, "Our church still has a ways to go on this."
- Current relationship-building activities that were mentioned:
 - Zoom/hybrid Bible Studies,
 - 12 step group interactions,
 - Regular contact with homeless populations,
 - Ecumenical events,
 - Residential and retirement community activities offered by churches
 - Regular newsletters,
 - Luncheons with speakers focusing on broad interests (Health, pets, mental health, wills/trust/finances,)
 - Session retreats,
 - Intergenerational Confirmation classes (and Confirmation refresher groups for adults!)
 - Focus on small groups
 - Going to festivals to pass out bookmarks etc.
 - Reading fruitful congregation
 - House ministry – meetings
 - Presbyterian Women
 - "The Wired Word" on zoom
 - Focus on Evidence – connections with school on campus; international mission
 - It's vital that there is a solid mission identified and lived out.

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Evidence that your church builds relationships cont.

- At the core the membership is there because they have built relationship. Membership grows or declines with regards to how well do or don't do that.
- It's about the numbers of butts in the pew.
- Ministry with people in the local context and meet them where they are. It's not just people at worship, it's also budget, mission penetration etc. Relationships with other churches and community services that have missional impact in the community.
- An intentional effort to reach out to the youth in the particular area. Via music, events, etc.
- Evidence: Increased relationship with Presbytery to help see how others do things.
- Emails regularly to congregations on issues
- Zoom has also offered a way to build relationships. People share with others outside the area and builds local communities
- Pandemic has made in-person relationships difficult. Zoom has helped since some are not comfortable for in person meetings.
- Tuesdays Together helps us learn what others are doing
- In person worship continues with social distancing – that has helped to keep people close.
- **Elders & Deacons send notes to people several times per month. Prayer concerns and “how are you doing”. Lots of written communication.**
- Regular zoom bible studies keep people in family
- Family meal once a month – usually doubles attendance on those days
- Expanding efforts to be more social in the community. Invite community to church functions.
- Use more social media – Facebook to announce events and extend invites
- Use music for outreach – teach dancing, instruments or bring bands into worship that have a following
- Cast a wider net
- Anything associated with food (Fellowship Meals) brings people in.
- Black History “soul food” dinner – St Patrick's Day event – Hat parade for Easter - celebrate everything!
- Souperbowl outreach to local churches & synagogue. Vote for best soup (pay per vote) and have mutual recipient in the community for donations
- Hospice mission for families.
- Relationships are harder w/covid; zoom helps, enjoyed together with Tuesdays
- “actually got some new members,” send out weekly “blast” with news and prayer requests
- Increased relationship with Presbytery to help see how others do things.
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- **Elders & Deacons send notes to people several times per month. Prayer concerns and “how are you doing”. Lots of written communication.**
- Regular zoom bible studies keep people in family
- Family meal once a month – usually doubles attendance on those days
- Expanding efforts to be more social in the community. Invite community to church functions.
- Used to have ecumenical Thanksgiving service; serve kids in after-school program
- Annual sock drive for nursing homes, backpack school supplies, expand the evangelist committee to provide meals for housebound individuals

Steps to encourage building of relationships

- resuming Session retreats to build relationships
- using the example of the Early Church and coping with a dangerous world
- being better disciples
- using new methods but not forgetting the old ways
- Encourage leaders to reach out beyond those you already know
- Get out of the confines of the sanctuary, show the congregation is out and engaged - *“Be the church, vs. come to church”*
- Elder/deacon retreat to share with each other & develop relationships
- Create a “watch care list” - leaders make monthly calls to members to share news and gather news, especially for those not on Zoom
- Grateful for technology to provide instant access and transform relationships, especially with needs
- One church is making cold call visits house to house...with success in welcoming new congregants
- Sanctuary Church is offering a multi session training on building relationships and welcoming people
- Several churches have begun to offer a hand-on project track during after-worship fellowship to accomplish a common goal (making food baskets for those in need/crafting things for a church sale), some churches use this time to learn a skill or build an individual art project—but what happens is that people connect over DOING.
- ***one cool idea was making bowls one Sunday after church that would be glazed and fired and then used the next week for the chili cookoff for SOUPERbowl of Caring Sunday!!*
- Intentional
- Not to lead by facilitating
- Making room for the Holy Spirit

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Steps to encourage building of relationships cont.

- Being vulnerable and approachable
- Encouraging
- Reformatting session meetings to be less business, more spirit led
- Leaders getting to know people outside of the church
- Creating small groups
- Identify gifts and graces and link those in the church with others in the community with gifts and graces and leverage that relationship.
- It's constant reminders from leadership to the masses of a ministry's value and importance.
- Weekday Devotionals, communication mission activity, Bible study, feedback from members, much thought went into this question, good leadership culture, building relationships among members is challenging, how to reach the section of the church that attends for one hour per week.
- (First impact mission) Local mission agencies speak at a weekly ZOOM meetings,
- Work through members living in gated communities
- Work in assisted living residences with Bible Studies and transportation to church on Sundays
- Building relationships in community don't usually transfer to them coming to church
- Leaders need to be more aware of relationships that are functional
- Use more social media – Facebook to announce events and extend invites
- Use music for outreach – teach dancing, instruments or bring bands into worship that have a following
- Cast a wider net
- Anything associated with food (Fellowship Meals) brings people in.
- Black History “soul food” dinner – St Patrick's Day event – Hat parade for Easter - celebrate everything!
- Souperbowl outreach to local churches & synagogue. Vote for best soup (pay per vote) and have mutual recipient in the community for donations
- Annual sock drive for nursing homes, backpack school supplies, expand the evangelist committee to provide meals for housebound individuals
- Assess people's passions/personality/spiritual gifts and when there is intersection of all three, that's a person's sweet spot. Then, leaders connect those individuals with like gifted and graced people in the congregation. This develops synergy that moves mission and relationships outward

Role of Prayer in building relationships

- Prayer is paying attention to the signs of the times, then taking action
- prayer is relational not transactional
- prayer is opening our minds to the beauty of the Creator
- regular devotional practices
- prayer is conversation with God, finding out what God wants

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- Psalm 46:10 be still and know that I am God
- importance of prayer for difficult people, enemies
- prayer is facing uncomfortable things and being transformed
- We invite the Holy Spirit into our human relationships when we pray together
- Especially important in conflicted situations and relationships
- The most pertinent observation was that Prayer is the "glue that holds us together" as Christians, Christian groups, and the Kin(g)dom of God
- We also noted that prayer provides the focus and mindset needed to see where relationships need to be built.
- While human relationships are built face to face, individual to individual, the Holy Spirit, though unseen, is present in that.
- Prayer moves and furthers relationships through a largely unseen, sub-liminal dimension of God's creation and connexion Prayer is important is the decision making process. Prayer partners, and prayer lists. Praying to know what missions that God wants us to do.
- Prayer is very effective; we need to cultivate a habit of praying for each other
- Remember the Holy Spirit's presence
- Prayer gives freedom to share to the Lord together even difficult matters
- Pray at all times
- Encouraging leaders who are gifted with prayer ministry to lead prayer groups
- Text prayer group
- Prayer in the context of what is happening in the world (eg. Black history month)
- Weekly prayer groups engages people more – grateful for the outreach
- Prayer important for everything – finance, health... etc.
- **Create prayer chains – invite people outside the church to pray with your church to create community**
- Brings in additional people – don't pray alone
- Include people of different religious backgrounds
- **People become closer to people they can relate to and prayer provides that opportunity when similar situations arise between people**
- Written notes of prayer creates relations between sender & receiver in addition to increasing relationship with Christ
- Understanding the struggles of others helps to better know the congregation and what they may be going through
- **Prayer breaks the barrier of pride and let's people who are hurting get the help they need**
- Prayer allows people to speak from the heart and express their fears and gratitude
- This should be the starting place.
- Partners in Prayer Leaders (Deacons and Elders) Notes sent to new members that the church is thankful for their service and that they are being prayed for, helps improve communication and relationships.
- Weekly prayer groups engages people more – grateful for the outreach