

## **CASE STUDY**

### Church Revitalization Evaluation

You have been invited to do an evaluation of a church to help them to understand how to be better at attracting new people to the church. So read the case study of the church and then develop a strategy that you could use to help them identify areas they can improve on. The material used for the case study was taken from Dr. Rainer's book "Surprising insights from the Unchurched"

A few weeks ago I was asked to attend a church that is located in a southern state and has a reputation of being a pretty good church in its region. A slight but steady decline in the church's attendance prompted a call to me. The leaders wondered, "what could be wrong with our church?"

The consultation included an observation of the morning worship service. I intentionally arrived about five minutes before the service was scheduled to begin. The most conspicuous parking lot was full, and there were no clear markers or signs for additional parking. I finally found a spot in a more distant lot. As I got out of my car, I noticed the parking lot had numerous cracks with grass growing in them. Two large pot holes were within ten feet of my parking space. And the striping in the lot was faded almost to the point of invisibility.

I made my way toward the sanctuary, though no one was available to offer directions or greetings. Upon entering the foyer of the sanctuary, I was half-heartedly greeted by five men whose average age I estimated to be in their seventies. One of them pushed a church bulletin toward me without saying a word.

Upon entering the sanctuary, I immediately discovered that all the back rows and middle rows were filled. The first available seating appeared to be on the fourth row from the front. I made my way uncomfortably toward the unoccupied seat, sensing that fourteen hundred eyes were watching my every move.

The church did have a greeting time for guests. The pastor informed us alien beings to remain seated while the rest of the real people stood and greeted us. To be fair, several people did at least acknowledge my presence. But the view I had while seated and others were standing was not the most scenic! When the time of greeting was over, the real people returned to be with their own kind while no one dared sit within six feet of me.

I finally took the time to observe the facility in which I worshipped. Décor—1974, I suspect.

I have a tolerance for a wide range of music styles. I love many of the old hymns but enjoy most contemporary music as well. The music in the church, however, was too traditional to reach the younger families that the demographics indicated. But the problem was not just that the music was too traditional; it was slow, dirge-like, bad quality, traditional music.

The sermon was pretty good, consisting of solid exposition of the text with a contemporary application. No complaints there.

At the end of the service I approached others to attempt conversations, but most of the individuals were already engaged in conversations with people they know. Oh well, I thought, it's time to leave. So I made the trek to the distant parking lot without a word spoken to me.

Upon returning to the hotel, I reviewed my notes from the interview I conducted the day before with some fifteen church members. The most common remark given to me by those fifteen members was “We are the friendliest church in town.”

As a prospective pastor or as a consultant visiting this church for the first time, what are some things that are a concern to you and that you can identify as possibly the reason for the steady decline?

As you reflect on these, how is the church you are serving in at this time doing in these areas?

How would you go about assisting the leadership and membership and begin to address these issues in a non-threatening way?