

Mission and outreach is always a good thing, one of those Jesus said “do it things.” But I see many churches who do outreach in their community and mission in the world, but they are not growing but declining. Why?

First, not all mission is going to bring people into the church, nor does it have to. Second, sometimes so much of the energy and focus of the church is on mission and outreach that there is little energy left for a focus on evangelism and church growth. Third, mission and outreach are easier. It takes less investment for the congregant, and sometimes just giving money is an absolute feel good. Many times churches and or pastors believe in mission more than evangelism. So often it seems there are fewer and fewer “disciples” to change the world through feeding the hurting and hungry of the world or to become involved in social justice change that should always be a responsibility of the church.

What I call interactive mission or outreach that makes disciples of Jesus Christ most effective is invitational and involved mission. Recipients of mission and outreach are blessed for sure, but when there is an opportunity for them to reciprocate and partner, they are more likely to want a further connection with the church. When they only receive, often they can feel like second-class citizens and may not see a place in the church that is serving them. It’s often why Methodist churches that are so good at mission still decline in worship attendance and active participation. Effective mission and outreach should result in people becoming disciples, members learning how to be disciples, professions of faith and worship attendance increasing in a variety of settings.

What are some of the characteristics of mission and outreach that makes disciples and grows a church?

- If it doesn’t allow for the building of relationships between the church family and members of the community, it’s probably not going to make disciples and help the church grow.
- If the missions and outreach work does not include the unchurched and non-members becoming involved as participants and not just recipients, it’s probably not going to make disciples or grow your church.
- Outreach and mission that creates opportunities for the church to build relationships with the unchurched on a consistent basis is paramount today and Church Growth 101.

- Creating partnerships between the church and the city, suburb, neighborhoods, communities, schools, school districts and other nonprofits will help create a culture of relationship building with the unchurched and church growth. Inviting the neighborhood, parents, children and youth, community leaders and residents to be participants in the mission and ministry with clear “*what’s next steps*” on how they can connect is critical.
- Build church around a commitment to form and shape the community the church is in and not just benefit from the community. The community should know this church and know the church is invested in them.

Ideas that worked:

An emphasis that included stewardship called *In the City for the City* was a year-long focus designed to include small groups, worship, sermons, new outreach and mission and revitalized outreach and mission that connected with the community and invited the community to participate.

A mission in Africa where we invited our community to participate by creating a fundraiser at Bass Hall. This event invited other churches and community leaders to participate, not just attend. The community helped lead.

We created a community-wide prayer breakfast for all leaders that connected with Common Ground Network, a community-wide support for schools that our church began, but we gave ownership to the city and school as we involved community leaders and other pastors to lead in the breakfast and Common Ground.

Our mission center spun off into a separate nonprofit that expanded rapidly and became more user-friendly for community people, leaders and churches to partner with our church and members in this transformative way.

We partnered with the hospital to implement a half marathon that helped fund cardiac care.

We led a park clean-up that involved the community in an amazing way. The key for this success was inviting families to participate as a family and bring the kids. This really worked.

When other churches, the city or school or other organizations had projects, we often supported them, advertised and encouraged our members to partner by wearing their *In the City for the City* shirts.

We have a Youth Mission Week. During this week, the church floods its own community with service projects, inviting non-members to participate, as well as the church family.

Most of these ideas can be adapted to fit any size church or be a starting place for a church to develop its own work. Remember some churches are resistant to this, but once the church gets going in this new way, the culture can change very quickly to a more transformative outreach and mission that grows the church.