

I often ask senior pastors, "How many parking places do you have at your church?" Many times they don't know. It is very difficult to grow a church past the number of parking spaces available. This reality must be faced. As I travel around the Conference, I have noted that we have many churches with inadequate parking. It's a big problem for churches who want to reach those we are not already reaching.

Trying to grow a church beyond a parking lot even 80% filled is very frustrating. Even if the parking lot is filled, it's like running forward with a huge bungee cord attached, the church will eventually fall back to its parking plateau. Maybe not in a few weeks, maybe not in a few months, but we just can't step up to the next level without sufficient parking.

### **What can we do?**

- Build more parking or buy more property if necessary, expensive but an option. I know some churches are either landlocked or financially unable to bear the costs. There are other options; there are always other options.
- Shuttling is always a great option, even for a small church. Even though guests and most members won't use it, encouraging church leaders, councils, committees, choir and band members, nursery volunteers and all staff to use it can make a big difference. Consider that many of them attend church all day on Sunday. This can release many parking places, sometimes hundreds of parking spaces during a Sunday in a large church and dozens in a small one, with little cost and one that will pay for itself quickly. Then guests can find parking easily.
- Multiple services and activities scattered over Saturday, Sunday and through the week allow optimum use of parking spaces. When everything in a church is over a two-hour period, we will limit growth in space, parking and overall ministry.
- If there are services back to back, allow enough time for the parking lot to clear so members and guests can get in and find a place. Often guests come early and find a full parking lot or get caught in traffic coming and going in the parking lot.

- Be proactive on parking. If we wait until the parking lot is too full in a growing church, it can be too late as we will lose momentum. The best time to maximize parking by shuttle, scattering our worship services or building more parking space is before we need it and before guests choose another church down the road. Few things kill momentum in a church quicker than a lack of parking or crowded parking, and few things keep us at a plateau or declining more than parking issues.
- Often parking lots are behind the church and not visible to the guest. This can be a problem as people don't know where to park or enter. Or it may look like the church is closed, no one is there or they are there at the wrong time. Putting a welcome team outside can correct this and is probably a non-negotiable choice for churches looking to be guest-friendly. Recruit them, train them and keep recruiting and training as they forget. New people are often the best in this role.
- On special days — Easter, Christmas Eve, etc. — prepare ahead for parking issues. Whatever you do, make sure there will be parking easily found for the guest. If they come on Easter and have a bad experience in the parking lot, they will probably not have a good experience in worship and might not be back. At the very least you want them back next Easter.
- Clean up the parking lot, stripe the parking lot, fill in the holes, keep up the landscaping, put out mulch in open spaces. This is the first experience a guest has; make sure it is a welcoming one. People will think that if a parking lot is in disrepair, the church probably is too.