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## Turning Your Church Inside Out: What Are You Missing?

It was an unusually warm, sunny, winter day in northern Indiana. For some time we wanted to visit Springdale Church in a neighboring city. When we learned they offered a Saturday service at 5 p.m., it was an easy decision.

We discovered worship at Springdale is “white hot,” as our Church Doctor Consultants call it. We’ve learned this terminology from our annual excursions to England, introducing North Americans to the strategic elements of that move of God. White hot worship is engaging, relevant to the audience, biblically grounded, friendly, joyful, and challenging toward spiritual growth. “Here’s a church that can reach this community,” I thought.

The pastor’s message was strong on Scripture and application. He did a good job of answering the two questions every worshipper is asking: “So what? Now what?” However, in the context of worship, it became clear: This church is focused on an “attraction” strategy. The emphasis was entirely on “invite someone to church.”

Admittedly, Springdale’s emphasis on inviting is a step up from many churches caught in inward-focus, a friendly country club—with little emphasis on outreach. The limited

Kent Hunter is the author of numerous books on church health, vitality, and outreach. In this issue of the *Church Doctor Report*, Kent reflects on the strategy of “turning your church inside out.” This subject is a reflection of one of the chapters of his upcoming book, written with Tracee Swank, leader of Church Doctor Ministries.



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strategy for Springdale omitted the element that moves God's work from growth to exponential explosion: turning the church inside out.

## Inside-Out Model

Inside out is a several step reorientation to mission strategy:

- *Inviting* others to church is great, if they are clearly ready and are seeking a church.
- *Bringing* people to church recognizes the power of the Christian movement: relationships. It is one important element of an effective strategy to reach those who have drifted from faith.
- *Taking church to people* is the way God blesses the exponential growth of the Kingdom. It requires a worldview shift: church is not a destination. It is a training center and launch pad.
- Those far from God are not viewed as an extreme challenge, but a *unique opportunity*.

The primary mission objective is to equip new Christians to *disciple* others, equipping them to reach out to their own social networks. Those who have been far from God usually live in a network of non-Christian friends. This provides the opportunity for explosive Kingdom growth.

## Lepers, Adulterers, Tax Collectors

In the Gospels, Jesus is notorious for hanging out with those who would make most church people uncomfortable. The religious leaders were shocked by Jesus' behavior. For some, Jesus' willingness to hang out with the riffraff disqualified Him as a religious leader.

Jesus didn't confirm their lifestyles, He affirmed their needs. In their needs, Jesus discerned their receptivity. Through their receptivity, Jesus recognized hunger for repent-

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ance, response, and faith. In new faith, Jesus witnessed their enthusiasm to share. As they shared, they multiplied and God ignited a mass movement.

Many Christians today have frequent touches with unbelievers. Congregations operate pre-schools, basketball leagues, food distribution, and addiction recovery programs. Most of these churches do *good work*. Yet, most fall short of *movement work*. I know, I've consulted hundreds of churches with outstanding *programs* for the community, but fall short as *ministries* of the Kingdom.

Most of these churches declare the Great Commission, to "make disciples," as their purpose. Many Christians point to this mission: "Yeah, that's why we're here. Look, there it is, Matthew 28:19-20, right up there, on the wall." Sadly, many Christians don't get it off the wall and into their lives.

Recently, I spoke with Mark, a pastor with a growing heart for revival in his community. His church operates a large elementary school. This pastor shared his growing frustration in a recent conversation:

"We have all these children in our building, five days a week, during the school year. They represent many young families who do not have a church home. However, rarely do we see these families come into the church. This is an enormous effort and expense. The kids get a great Christian education, but we don't reach the families. How can we make disciples?"

Mark probably didn't want to hear what I had to say. I shared how it worked at the inner-city church I pastored years ago. Admittedly, I had mission training as an advantage.

"Mark, before we started the school, we went into our community and asked what a church could do to help people. It was a cross-cultural outreach in Detroit. Our church was elderly and Anglo. Our community was young and African-American. The response from our neighbors was clear: They wanted better education for their children than what the overcrowded local public elementary school could provide."

Mark was intrigued about where the conversation would lead next. He wasn't prepared for what he heard.

"You see, Mark, before we began to think about *how* to reach the many unchurched families in our community, we spent two years building a *mission culture* among the majority of those in our church. If you don't start with that environment, it leads to division in the congregation."

As Mark listened, his body language spoke for him: he was increasingly interested and uncomfortable—at the same time!

I continued: "As we recruited teachers, we trained them to be missionaries. Not everyone made it. Some of the teachers had the worldview that they would teach Christian kids, from Christian homes. We graciously and kindly helped them look for another church to use their gifts." Most of the people in our community were unchurched.

"So what happened?" asked Mark.

"Through our school we began to break into the culturally 'different' people in our communi-

ty—who weren't that different after all," I replied. "But we didn't stop there. Every child in that school had parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. We disciplined them to reach their social networks. Our church grew at movement speed."

"And...how did the white members react to this huge change in the makeup of your church?" Mark asked.

"Remember, Mark, they were first equipped in mission culture. Most of those life-long elderly Christians said this was the most exciting and fulfilling time of their Christian lives."

## The Samaritan Woman at the Well

To say the Jews didn't like the Samaritans is an understatement. In John 4, the disciples went to town for food, while Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the well. They talked, and her spiritual world was turned upside down. But her life, was turned inside out. She left her precious water jar at the well, went into her village, and God used her to start a movement. Many came to see Jesus.

This was a great potential lesson for the disciples: Reach those who are considered the least, the last, and the lost. Show them love. Show them Jesus. Disciple them to reach out through their social net-

To schedule a phone appointment to discuss this topic further with Kent, call Jason Atkinson at 1-800-626-8515.



## TEN WAYS TO TURN YOUR CHURCH INSIDE OUT

1. Develop a culture beyond "inviting" and "bringing" to church as primary strategies. Add more focus on taking Christianity to others.
2. Build this worldview among Christians. Church is not a destination but a launch pad.
3. Resurrect this culture: Every Christian is a missionary, a "sent one," every day. A trip to Walmart is a short-term mission trip.
4. Develop the concept that the mission field for your church is not "a circle on a map, reaching a three-mile radius," but those far from God in your social network: friends, relatives, neighbors, and those at work or school. The platform for mission is not geographic. It is relational.
5. The most effective strategy? Church leaders disciple Christians to be missionaries. This occurs more in one-on-one development (in a relationship) than in a class or through preaching.
6. All people matter to God. However, strategic breakthrough for movement comes when you reach across cultural or social barriers.
7. Stretch the mission horizons in your church. There is a unique and special opportunity for Kingdom growth when you reach the least, the last, and the lost.
8. The strategy for reaching the least, the last, and the lost is to meet needs. However, avoid defining "mission" as *only* meeting needs.
9. As needs are met, continue to sensitively develop relationships, and when appropriate, share the gospel. This has even more Kingdom value when you move to step number ten.
10. Disciple new Christians to become missionaries to their own social networks. These networks are usually filled with nonbelievers. When one of them experiences a spiritual life change, the movement of the gospel explodes in growth exponentially.

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