

## WHAT IS REQUIRED OF A DOWNTOWN CONGREGATION?

### 1) Who comes:

- people passing by other neighborhood churches to come to First because of unique opportunities there or their parents went there
- new people in condos downtown
- students at UT
- business people who work downtown during the day - what might be offered to them at lunch, etc.
- the homeless
- maybe a ministry to the jail downtown
- the people who will transition through the new city bus transit station being built out behind the church

### 2) Basic **FOUR** major legs needed for a thriving congregation almost anywhere

A) Dynamic worship/preaching/ music -- This church has a fine program I think; that is the reason I come downtown when I could go elsewhere

B) strong fellowship aspects like Wednesday suppers and program, First Fellowship Groups, various opportunities to go to games, music events, etc. PLUS visitation and care by pastors and congregants.

C) Strong Educational opportunities -- different types of classes led by competent lay people and possibly as time goes on bring in UT School of Religious study faculty and Maryville College professors. First Church could consider running special 6-8 week special learning opportunities.

D) Several major mission opportunities like Jesus' Friends, Volunteer Ministry Center participation, Community School of the Arts, housing the homeless for a week in conjunction with other downtown churches, FISH participation, Dogwood School work, etc.

### 3) Needed functional aspects:

-- Open accessibility -- locked doors for safety are always a challenge -- people need to be able to find us in the church.

-- high visibility -- ministers and others leaders in the community at large. Maybe enroll one of the pastors in Leadership Knoxville program so they will be visible in the community because Knoxville is still a need-to-be-connected community. Westminster did that for me and it put me in connection with lots of other leaders in the community.

-- What is First Knoxville known for in this city??

-- Adequate parking -- doing pretty well with that

-- adequate space in the facility -- other than confusing because of numerous changes it's good.

### 3) The hospitality Imperative

**Don't confuse hospitality with Friendliness** -- people who come are "Guests" and need to be treated as guests not just "visitors" Visitors see themselves as seen by the church as people who come and then go. The "presumptuous behavior about how long-term membership might privilege one over someone of briefer ties has no place in the church".

When the gap between guest and host becomes indistinguishable true hospitality has arrived

Recall Acts 2 when all the strangers heard the Gospel in each one's own language.

Often times, friendliness by congregational members get seen as "Clubiness". The hosts get seen sometimes as "those who possess the goods". If church members get seen too much as "Family" one recalls how hard it is to get inside someone's family.

Pew captains (as someone else this week called them) are a good idea. They see themselves as responsible for who sits around them and become the host to those people.

Remember guests come bearing gifts within themselves. See Abraham and Sarah welcoming strangers at the Oaks of Mamre -- Genesis 18. The gift they finally revealed was the promise that Sarah would birth a son "Isaac"!!!

### 4) The Practicing Congregation

A somewhat new trend in congregations is brought about by a new sense of identity through Christian Practices, Social Justices, and Shared Leadership. Groups within a rising number of churches are imagining a way of being church and committing themselves to it and making it happen. In one church I know this movement got started and continues in a group called Companions Class. They are concerned about relating to the Sacred. Such a group engages intentionally in definite activities that deepen their relationship to the sacred. These are shared activities that address fundamental needs and that woven together form a way of life.

Christian Practices are the constituent parts of a larger Christian way of life as revealed, modeled, and taught by Jesus Christ. Christians do practices because they are good, worthy, beautiful, not because they are instruments to some other end like membership or marketing the congregation!!.

Practicing falls into 3 definitional categories:

- 1) moral -- hospitality, healing, dying well, stewardship, justice, caring
- 2) ascetical -- contemplation, silence, union with God (Spiritual exercises)
- 3) anthropological - things that people do - eating, meeting, greeting - negotiating faith in relation to the larger culture.

### **5) The educational imperative**

-- Biblical study for "Practice" as I talked about above. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ gives us a "Clue" for interpreting, understanding and making sense of what is happening in our lives and in the world.

### **6) Some discussion on the rising practice of "Testimonies" in the midst of worship -- why do you come to this worship??** All testimonies are to be in relation to God -- no other boundaries.

Books cited: Diana Butler Bass -- **The Practicing Congregation  
Christianity for the Rest of Us**

Lillian Daniel -- **Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony**