

Your Ministry Facilities

By Aubrey Malphurs

(Number 13, August 1, 2004) How important is your ministry facility (setting)? In this edition on setting, first I will define the term and then establish its importance to your ministry.

What is a Setting?

I have chosen to use the term setting. Why this particular term? Based on the introduction, it would appear that setting refers primarily to a church's facilities. And for most of us it does. However, if we are to think and act strategically, we must understand that it is broader than that. I would define a church's setting as anywhere its ministry takes place. It is the places where you deliver ministry in some way. It is where your church has a ministry presence. However, in this chapter we are looking at where its primary ministry events occur, and that is at its facilities.

Regardless, there are at least two kinds of ministry presence: physical and electronic.

Physical Presence

Physical presence is geographical. It focuses on the church's location and its immediate community-the people who live within driving distance. It is also the church's facilities that include not only where it gathers each Sunday but other locations such as someone's house, a coffee shop, an office, a restaurant, and even a street corner. And a growing trend is to have multi-site campuses that can reach beyond one's immediate community. The primary focus of this chapter, however, will be on the church's physical presence in general, and its location and facilities in particular.

Electronic Presence

Electronic presence takes you beyond the limitations of physical presence. It focuses more on reaching the church's intermediate and international communities wherever that

may be but could include its immediate community. It primarily includes the telephone, the Internet, a web site, and e-mail but could also include radio and television.

This is the up and coming ministry thrust. Pastors such as Rick Warren and Paul Cho believe that electronic presence will have a huge impact on the future church and where it is able to minister. It is no secret that younger generations are more computer literate than the older generations, and thus they spend more time on the Internet, web sites, and chat rooms. Why would the church not use this as a viable ministry to reach beyond its four walls? This is all that I want to say about electronic presence in this chapter. If you see its value and would like to explore it further, see the book that my son and I wrote entitled *Church Next* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003).

Why is Setting Important?

There are no less than five reasons why setting, in this case location and facilities, is important to the church.

One reason is that a church's physical setting affects people's first impression of the church. The question is not, Does the physical setting make an impression on people? That is a given. The question is, What kind of impression does it make on people? Better the question is, What kind of first impression does your church have on people? Do you know? And first impressions can be lasting impressions.

There was a time in my ministry when I served frequently as an interim pastor for churches who were looking for pastors. I recall my first visit to one such church. I could not locate it because weeds were blocking my initial view of the sign. When I did spot it, it was hard to read, because the paint was cracked and peeling. When I pulled into the parking lot, I noted that the paint was peeling off the building and weeds were springing up through the tarmac. As I entered the facility, I observed that the carpets were well-worn and there were water stains on the tiles that made up the ceiling. Later in my time at the church, when I felt that it was appropriate, I called their attention to my first exposure. They were shocked. They had become so used to these conditions that they were oblivious to them.

So how can you know what kind of first impression your church makes on visitors? That is not hard to answer. Ask an unchurched friend to visit the church and give you his or her honest opinion. Buy the person lunch after the service when they debrief the experience.

A second reason is travel time. Time matters whether you are saved and churched or unsaved and unchurched. If you recall from chapter 7, Win Arn conducted a study of travel time and discovered that 20 percent of people drive from few to five minutes to get to church. 40 percent will drive from five to fifteen minutes. 23 percent will drive from fifteen to twenty-five minutes, and 17 percent will drive twenty-five minutes or more. Thus, most (83 percent) will drive up to but not beyond twenty-five minutes to get to your church. To establish your immediate ministry community, drive out the various main arteries (interstates, main highways, and so forth) from around your church and see how far you can drive in under twenty to twenty-five minutes.

A third reason is culture. The physical structure of the church reflects the culture of the majority of the people of the church. Traditional people tend to meet in more traditional facilities and want their church to “look like a church.” Since the early church did not meet in structures like today’s traditional churches, that means something similar to the churches in Western Europe from the 1400s or 1500s to the present. More contemporary and younger people either do not care or favor a different, often more open style that may include a converted warehouse, a rented school auditorium and classrooms, leased space in a shopping mall, storefront, grocery store, or a public meeting room in a bank, hotel, or movie theater.

A fourth reason is that form follows function. This is at the heart of the problem I was alluding to in the introduction to this chapter. Function is a strategy issue, whereas, form is a facilities issue. Far too many churches make form decisions in total disregard of function issues. Once a church knows its DNA, has a mission and vision, and a strategy, it is ready to make function decisions. These function issues will be decided by these

other concepts plus the maturity matrix and your primary ordered activities in particular. For example, if you opt for a primary activity that involves small groups ministry, this is a function decision that will affect the church facility's form. If you decide that your small groups function will meet on your campus at approximately the same time, this will dictate your decisions about the forms that the facility will take. You will likely need to construct or free up a large number of smaller rooms for these groups to meet in.

A fifth reason is that setting is important to strategic ministry and outreach. Location was most important to the first century churches. Acts 1:8 has geographical implications. Another example is found in Acts 19:1-10 where Paul located in Ephesus (verse 1). If you know the geography of the area, then you would realize that Ephesus was the gateway to Asia Minor. Everyone that traveled to Asia Minor went through Ephesus. Consequently we are not surprised when Paul plants a church there that exposes most in the province of Asia to God's word (verse 10). One of my seminary classmates wrote his masters thesis on why Paul chose the various churches to visit on his missionary journeys. His conclusion based on an investigation of the cities was that they were all located in strategic places that would promote the hearing of the Gospel. Thus we must think strategically about the locations of our churches.

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