

Tool #15: Explore Your Church's Foundations for Outreach

Internal church factors can affect the nature and effectiveness of your community outreach. This exercise can help your church discover strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for building up your foundation for holistic ministry. With a diverse group of people in your congregation, answer the following questions about your church. (You may choose to divide into five groups, one for each set of questions.) Then answer the reflection questions at the end of the handout.

I. Vision for outreach ministry

- Does your church have a mission statement? How is this mission statement communicated to the congregation? Does the mission have an outreach dimension (e.g., share good news, serve the community, work for justice, etc.)?
- What sources influence or serve as role models for your church's outreach: denominational heritage, spiritual sources of inspiration, other churches or ministry leaders ...?
- What goals or outcomes of mission would your church like to see: (a) For the individuals reached? (b) For the community as a whole? (c) For your church itself?

II. Theology of ministry

- What are the main biblical or theological reasons for outreach stressed by your church?
- How does your church understand the relationship between evangelism and social involvement? Are they separate areas of ministry, or connected? Is one a higher priority or more important than the other?
- Does the church believe that community service ministries should: Share the Gospel? Offer prayer or spiritual counseling? Invite people to attend the church? Invite people to become a Christian? Do these happen in practice in the ministries that your church sponsors or supports?

III. Training and mobilization

- What opportunities exist for the training of church leaders, ministry leaders and ministry volunteers? How does the church assess the effectiveness of this training?
- What qualities does your church look for in the people who lead and participate in outreach ministry (skills, character, intelligence, spiritual gifts, relational abilities, etc.)?
- How does your church motivate and recruit people for ministry? What has worked well in connecting members with ministry opportunities, and what has not?

IV. Organization and resources for ministry

- How are decisions made that involve outreach (for example, launching a new ministry, allocating funding, assigning committees)? What values or principles guide these decisions?
- What processes for evaluation, accountability, and conflict management are in place?
- What ministry assets (financial, material, human, spiritual, etc.) does your church have to work with? What is seen as being lacking?

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V. Relationships between the congregation and community

- Does the church have a clearly defined sense of a community where it has a commitment to ministry? What community events or programs has the church participated in? What opportunities do people in the congregation have to get to know people in the community?
- How do you think someone in the neighborhood might describe your church?
- What are the main changes taking place in the community? How has the congregation been affected by, or responded to, these changes?

Questions for reflection:

In light of your answers to the above, discuss:

- a) How might this information suggest a strength of your church for holistic outreach ministry?
- b) How might your answers point to areas that the church can work to improve or to more clearly define?
- c) How might this assessment relate to opportunities in the community for holistic ministry?
- d) How can your church follow up on these reflections?