

YOUR CHURCH CAN GROW

BREAKING THE CHURCH STAFF “INSIDER” MENTALITY

By Marcia Gillis

Church “insiders” are people “in the know.” They are people who have inside knowledge of what is going on and where it takes place. Insiders understand “insider discussions” of past events and use terminology or laugh at “insider jokes” that only “insiders” understand. “Insiders” have solid church relationships, feel comfortable, accepted and supported. It’s hard for insiders to understand that the newer people in the church are struggling to be accepted and to find a place, in the church, where they are also accepted, can experience spiritual growth and can serve. “Insiders” have a tendency to think that everyone is having the same positive experience they are, personally, having.

“Insiders” who make decisions based on “insider mentality” can easily unintentionally make decisions that keep the “outsiders” out.

“Insiders” include the pastor and pastoral staff members who went from serving at their parent’s church to being on staff somewhere else. They include adult children, raised in the church, who stay in the same church and serve in leadership capacities. They are longtime members or adult children and relatives and friends of longtime members.

“Insiders” are youth who are the children of staff or long-time church members. They are youth who attend the churches’ private school. They don’t mean to shut out the new kids or the public school kids, but do so without thinking.

An “insider” mentality will keep a church from growing and from making disciples. An “insider” mentality communicates rejection, keeps new people out, and will result in a declining church.

So, where do you start in changing that growth destructive mentality? You start with the pastor and staff.

Sadly, many pastor’s and staff strongly assume that they know the type of experience new people are having and don’t think to ask questions, of new people, to be sure their assumptions are correct. Perhaps it is time for this to change.

Pastors, why don’t you bring in some outspoken new people to meet with you and the staff and ask them to share what their experience has been and how you can improve the experience of future new people? You will want to bring in people who have been there for at least six months.

Here are important ways to help new people move from being “outsiders” to being “insiders” who feel accepted.

1. Clear, regularly updated, communication of small groups and ministries available to help people develop relationships, grow in their faith, and work through their areas of struggle (divorce, addiction, grief, finances, etc.).

“Clear” means that the communication should be “user friendly” and easy to find, not something they have to work hard to search for. “Clear” means that there should be no

questions that small groups and ministries are the most important things happening at the church. In regard to the website, it means that the media department should have a number of “new” people look for things on the website before they consider the website format/structure finalized. Media “Insiders” should not be the ones who decide whether the website is user friendly.

In regard to printed communication, it should be constantly updated, well-laid out, with complete descriptions and passed out to the whole congregation, at least once a month. Remember, that most people need to see a TV commercial several times before they act. The same thing is true at church. The small groups and ministries are more important than special events in helping people move from being “outsiders” to “insiders.” Be sure you draw adequate attention to these important ministries.

In regard to social media, use it regularly to pull people in and keep them updated.

2. Be sure the worship service experience is “welcoming.” Utilized friendly trained ushers and greeters to welcome everyone. Encourage members of the congregation to meet those around them. Have “visitor information” stations and follow-up every new visitor, making sure they are aware of small groups and ministries that are available for them to participate in, with their family.
3. Train your adults and youth to be “welcoming,” to include newcomers in their groups, to help “outsiders” become “insiders,” and to make sure new people are kept in the loop of what is happening.

Our family has had experience as “insiders” and as “outsiders.” You quickly become an insider when you are hired to be a staff member, but it takes a lot of work to become an insider when you join the church as a new person and try to get involved. In older churches, it may take many years to be accepted as an insider. Sometimes it’s just not worth the effort, if you are a lay person and is better for your family to go to another church where the process is faster and where you can use your gifts more quickly, instead of just sitting on them.

What are you doing to make new people feel like outsiders?

What do you need to change? Maybe it’s time to ask.