

The Role and Importance of the Church in the Community

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Today, humans have acquired more knowledge than any other time in history. Science and medicine are going places never before imagined. We have bigger jets and cruise liners, faster computers, and helpful drugs for certain diseases are being discovered every day. Daniel envisioned a time when knowledge would increase (See Daniel 12:4). We have much evidence today of our successes in these and many other areas. We have improved on just about every area of life.

Every year *Forbes* magazine publishes a list of the richest people in the world. This list continues to grow longer and longer. More people can afford vacations, purchase houses, and buy brand new cars. Some car dealerships will have cars for sale that can be purchased with zero percent down. Life, overall, seems comfortable for most Americans. When life is good, most people tend to forget about church... well, until something happens that turns their lives upside down.

Personal or national tragedy (and especially since 9/11) seems to cause a major shift in people's assessment of church. It is a time when people flock to churches in droves. There is just something about churches that society finds in times of tragedy and hardship. This always fascinates me because the media and general public embrace church or (the idea of church) during a time of crisis, but in times of peace and prosperity, the church seems to become irrelevant again. Regardless of this double standard, the church keeps people grounded, flushing out the burden of life by providing a bedrock of faith and answers to

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humanity's deepest needs.

The role of the modern church in the life of the 21st-century believer is critical because it fills a void only the church can. If a car needs fixing, it is brought to the mechanic shop. If someone is sick, the health center or hospital is the best place to seek medical attention. Church is where people should go if they are in need of a "spiritual fix." The church is really a hospital for sinners and not an exclusive club for saints.

So why would someone want to attend church? Regardless of what is said about churches, people expect that their life problems can be addressed in some fashion or form. With all the weight and pressures of their world weighing down on their minds, people expect the church to provide Bible-based answers that no other institution can provide.

What is the Church?

Over the past 15 years, megachurches have been sprouting up across America and the world. (A megachurch is a large church with 2,000 or more worshippers at a weekly service.) Most of these megachurches are led by visionaries and business-minded and charismatic leaders. Just about all of these megachurches broadcast their services over major TV networks, Internet, and satellite radio. Many non-Christians and Christians view these programs and sometimes develop certain perceptions about church — whether good or bad.

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If someone would visit most of the churches in America, they will come to realize that the 100-voice choir and 10 piece Praise and Worship band does not exist. Looking even closer at your TV set, you will notice pews filled with top of the line multimedia equipment. Is this what people want from a church? What do people want from churches? Unfortunately, there are those who view church this way. Church is more than just entertainment, having large numbers of people attending services or hearing messages of empowerment from the pulpit that makes one feel good. Church is the lifeline of any society. Church is a unique place that should instill change in people's lives. So what do people need from church?

Meeting the Needs

People need to have their spiritual, emotional and physical needs met. We are living in a crazy world today. II Timothy 3:1 helps me put this in perspective, "but know this, that in the last days perilous times will come." I'll take the liberty to say that perilous times are here. More and more children are growing up in broken homes, unemployment is on the rise and Christians are sinking deeper into debt like never before. Many churchgoers are struggling to make ends meet in their everyday lives, and we feel the pinch of reality just like everyone else. Believers are not exempt from trials of the world. We are living in perilous and drastic times. Drastic times call for drastic measures. Targeted small groups should be implemented in churches to be available to meet the needs in each believer's life. Irrespective of church

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size, each church can provide effective small group ministries and outreach services, even smaller churches can have and should have specialized small groups. This momentum can then spread out beyond the walls of the church and be incorporated into the community where the church serves. To the best of its ability, the church can provide services, counseling and advice to those in need.

One-Stop Super Centers

Wal-Mart, the largest retail store in America, has built Super Centers across the rural parts of the country. At these Super Centers, one can purchase anything from cooking oil to car oil and from pet food to fresh produce. The convenience of having everything located under one roof is a multi-billion dollar secret. This is the true meaning of a convenience store. The Super Center customers are truly in love with this concept of everything under one roof.

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I think the church is a type of Super Center. Whatever the situation, there is a Bible-based solution and counsel for each and every problem. I am not advocating that each individual church would have the expertise and know-how to deal with every situation. However, every church should have access to resources

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needful to guide an individual in the proper direction along with God's Word.

At times it is hard for single mothers to control their teenage children without the help of father figures. If these single mothers are churchgoers and there are no programs, seminars and sermons to help them in this area, then the church is not meeting their needs. The church should always strive to meet the needs of men and women as it brings the good news of the salvation message of Jesus Christ. The church truly is about people.

One of the greatest lessons of meeting the people's need was demonstrated when the Messiah fed the 4,000 (Mark 8:1-9). Jesus showed by His deeds the church's purpose and function. He gave us the blueprint for successfully meeting the needs of the hearers. Before Jesus gave His sermon, He fed the "church comers." They came to hear the Messiah, and after feeding them with physical food, He then gave them spiritual food for the soul. Both their physical and spiritual needs were met. This is the classical Jesus.

Public Service

Churches are a public service to the surrounding communities. They provide just about everything. In the summer of 2005, our church covered a 15-block radius around the church by going door-to-door introducing ourselves as the "community church." It was amazing and at the same time shocking to see how many people knew about our church and how many didn't know of our

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church existence — even though we have been in the neighbor for the past 35 years! We had an older woman who visited our church recently and said that for 25 years she has lived in the community and walked pass our church and never once took notice of our edifice. One would believe that we have a small building, but our church is a huge 4-story brick building that takes up 2 lots and is by far the tallest building on our block. Can you see the egg on my face? I'm thinking to myself that maybe this lady just needs a new pair of glasses. However, the key to this issue still remains...churches must be transparent within their communities.

Upon learning the close proximity of our church and the services we offer, some people are always delighted to use our assistance, whether it is in the form our food pantry or immigration and free legal clinics, community seminars on health, finance, or emergency preparation. Making a difference in people's everyday lives will benefit the believer as well as the community. When the church is rooted deeply in its community, and its membership is operating as public servants, the church will impact the lives of the people and the believers will fulfill the Messiah's mission on earth.

Reading from the book of Isaiah in the Torah, He read our mission statement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty

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them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). The basic function of the church is to be involved in every facet of the life of the believer. Holding true to this mission, Christ looked at the needs of the people, provided it, and then began to preach out the good deeds. The church today must live up to its true billing — meeting the needs of the people. Both the alcoholic and the poor should be able to receive assistance.

Believing in the Believers

Over the past few years, I’ve been thinking seriously about the future of our church. We are living in a critical time never before experienced in the history of humankind, and the church must respond to human’s deepest needs. One question keeps coming to mind: “Who will be the next generation of leaders in our church throughout the future?” We need to bring the church to a new level. Our current leaders will be deceased or too old to lead a new century of believers. We are in desperate need of new and sound leadership to continue the Master’s work.

In my final analysis, the church must do away with all and any excuses and continue to prepare young men and women to lead the church throughout the millennium. It is never too late for the right foundation to be laid for sound leadership. Paul sets the right tone in the book of Titus 2:3-7 on this issue.

All leaders of churches, big or small, must recruit more young men and women to serve in diverse capacities in the ministry.

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The responsibility of guiding the next wave of leaders weighs heavily on those in leadership positions now believing in the believers. In return, the challenge to prepare a Christian for leadership will take proper training and a willingness to accept a role in church in order to face the many challenges ahead in the community. We must start to look deep within ourselves and arise to serve the needs of all people in the name of Christ. The time is closer until the coming of Jesus Christ and the church has much work to do. Now is the right time to become the church Christ expects it to be.