

Newark Church of the Nazarene: One church, multiple locations

I am going to suspend the series for a week and come back next week with a sermon on surrender based out of the book of Ruth. In a church like ours it is imperative that we talk about who we are often. We are constantly inundated with new people and while some of us may be familiar with the story, they are often clueless as to where we have been and where we are going.

So this week we will pause and tell our story. I will also be inviting people to consider the opportunities in at Encounter, The Firehouse, and Real Life.

He gave up his life for her²⁶ to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.²⁷ He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault. Ephesians 5:25b-27 NLT

Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness Ephesians 5: 25b-27 The Message Bible

³ *Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.* ⁴ *I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* Jude 3 NLT

It is a fact that unless we state who we are and what we believe often there is no certain sound for people to follow. Normally we try to do this centered around a message based on scripture. There are times however when we must state our vision out loud and call people to it.

Our church has been in existence for 95 years. The longer a church is in existence the more opportunities they have to lose focus and mission. The mission becomes survival and the status quo.

Our Foundation: The Call Staying, Serving and Spreading out

So who are we? We are Newark Church of the Nazarene of course. But who are we really and why do we do what we do? What makes us different from other churches? Why do I feel so different about church when I attend here?

12 years ago I came here to pastor a church of about 275 people. There had been a mass exodus of people in the months before I arrived. A few more left after I arrived. Great changes had taken place in the way we did church and it was way out of many peoples comfort zone and understanding.

In my opinion it was a refocus. It is critical that we do that from time to time. In fact every church should review their ministry effectiveness at least every two years or so. I am not talking about counting noses either. Numbers don't really tell the story of effectiveness. Churches that are healthy will grow but we should not take that as the main indicator.

Worship design is a major reason our church has been so effective. Let me talk about one of our core values.

"Why did they do that?" "What does that have to do with church?" How many times have you heard (or thought) that after you saw something during a service here at Newark Naz? Maybe it was a movie clip or a secular song. Stuff that seemed to be the last thing you would have expected in church. Well, believe it or not, there is a reason for all of this. There is a method to the madness. Culturally Relevant Communication: is one of our 11 Core Values!

Newark Naz is a place that helps connect those who are spiritually exploring God's love and truth. To do this, we're committed to doing anything to help people connect God's timeless truth from the Bible with their day-to-day life. We do not engage in anything immoral or anti-scriptural to do this, but we do embrace creative methods used in our current culture. The challenge for us is that the Bible was written a long time ago for people in another culture. The fact that we are in Newark, Ohio in the twenty-first century doesn't change the message that God gave 2000 years ago, but it does mean that we need to do some work to connect it to our lives today. That's what we mean by "Culturally Relevant Communication."

It's nothing new. It's the kind of thing the Bible referred to in Ecclesiastes 12:10 which says, "The teacher searched to find just the right words." In fact, it's exactly what Jesus did. Whether it was stories about sheep and goats, vineyard workers, or a guy who throws a party, Jesus used the current language and daily life of those around him to communicate truth.

Staying, Serving and Spreading out

As we grew we had to make some decisions:

Staying: Building verses staying

Serving: Staying in a challenged community

Spreading out: Multi-site : Never enough churches, cheaper than building, more place for others to serve.

Our Focus: The Commitments 4C's

Celebration: We believe that to have an effective community we must commit to a time of weekly celebration. At these celebrations you will experience authentic worship and challenging Biblical teaching on issues that are important to you today. We are a church that is fluid adjusting our methods along the way to more effectively be the Church to our community.

Community: We are a church that cherishes authentic community providing community groups to foster genuine and transparent relationships. Community groups or small groups play an essential role in the care and development of a believer. We are a church that is constantly growing knowing that none of us have arrived in our spiritual journey, but are here to spur one another on in our spiritual transformation.

Call: We are a church that sees the potential in people and facilitates them in discovering God's design for their life and contribution to His kingdom. We believe that God's design was for every believer to participate in serving and building the church. We are a church that is compassionate about people with needs in our community and is actively looking for ways to serve others in our community and around the world.

Christ-Centered: The call of God has been the same since the beginning of time. We are called to surrender our lives and center them around Jesus Christ. At Newark Church of the Nazarene we strongly urge people to participate in Celebration, Community, and Call. While these three activities are biblical and commendable they all should be viewed and carried out through the perspective of Christ-centeredness. The mission of our church is to lead people into a growing relationship with Christ. We strongly encourage, teach, and promote living the Christ-centered life as part of that growing relationship.

Our Fruitfulness: The Challenge

Surrendered Lives

One of the things we embrace the most is calling people to follow Christ and put Him first in their life. This simply means we would never do anything willfully knowing that it would be displeasing to God. It also means that we allow God to place us where He wants us. We allow Him to call us and show us where He wants to use our gifts and strengths.

Sanctified Loves

We are called to surrender everything thing to God. This is everywhere in the scripture both Old and New Testament. We are to allow God to sanctify our loves. The things that we love more than anything else.

This could be any number of things. Let me ask you a question: Is there something in this world that you love more than God?

No doubt some of you will pause and think of the love they have for their spouse, for their parents, for their children. As much as we may love those special people God blesses us with during our brief journey through life, our love for God **MUST** always be first. This is a truth most people are able to understand and accept.

More to the point however, is there some THING in this world that you love more than God? We say we love God, we say God is first in our life, but is He really? Let me be a bit more specific. Is God first in your life, ahead of your career? Is God first in your life, ahead of your hobbies and special interests? Be careful now, we know what the RIGHT answers to these questions are, but are they the TRUE answers?

Even though I know you don't want to, let's go a bit deeper. Does your work or career take priority over God in your normal day to day life? Do you invest as much time each week into God as you do your hobbies and special interests? One of the profound statements Jesus made was, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Since that is a great measuring stick of where our heart is, how much of your treasure goes to God as opposed to the pleasures of this world?

I am not saying that your career is not important. After all, it was God who gave you the gifts and strengths you have to be successful in your career, it was God who opened the doors for you to be where you are, and it is God who gives you favor and blessings each day in your career. I am also not saying that your hobbies and special interests are not important. Again, it was God who gave you the desires and passions for the things you enjoy in this life. Nor am I saying you should not use some of the resources God has entrusted to you to enjoy the abundance of this life.

What I am saying is that we have to take inventory of our life from time to time and ensure that we are keeping God first at all times, in all things. We can fall into patterns at times and slowly ease God out of our day to day life. Not consciously, but often without even realizing it put other things in our life ahead of God.

Sacrificial Legacy

There are people who worry about their legacy. While I don't think most of us will have books written about us we are leaving behind a legacy.

When I think of what God has done through our church, what He is doing I am very thankful. When I think what He could do if He had the human resources I want to weep. We are positioned in the right places. We have three buildings in communities surrounded by need. We have six services designed uniquely to enable us to see lives changed.

Encounter

The Firehouse

Real Life

Williams Street

Here is what we need.

Video of our church

In my studies this week I came across these words from a book called, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, by Philip Yancey.

“As my class in Chicago read the Gospels and watched movies about Jesus’ life, we noticed a striking pattern: the more unsavory the characters, the more at ease they seemed to feel around Jesus.

PEOPLE – like these found Jesus appealing: a Samaritan social outcast, a militant officer of the tyrant Herod, a quisling tax collector, a recent hostess of 7 demons.

In contrast, Jesus got a chilly response from more respectable types. Pious Pharisees thought him uncouth and worldly, a rich young ruler walked away shaking his head, and even the open-minded Nicodemus sought a meeting under the cover of darkness.

I remarked to the class how strange this pattern seemed, since the Christian church now attracts respectable types who closely resemble the people most suspicious of Jesus on earth. What has happened to reverse the pattern of Jesus day? Why don’t sinners like being around us?

I recounted a story told to me by a friend who works with the down and outs in Chicago. A prostitute came to him in wretched straits, homeless, her health failing, unable to buy food for her 2 year old daughter. Her eyes awash with tears, she confessed that she had been renting out her daughter – 2 years old! – to men.. to support her drug habit. My friend could barely bear hearing the sordid details of her story. He sat in silence not knowing what to say.

At last he asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. “I will never forget the look of pure astonishment that crossed her face,” he later told me. “Church!” she cried. “Why would I ever gatherer? They’d just make me feel worse then I already do.”

Somehow we have created a community of respectability in the church, I told my class. The down-and –out who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome. How did Jesus, the only perfect person in history, manage to attract the notoriously imperfect? And what keeps us from following in His steps today?

YES – Christ passion for the hurting is needed TODAY... because...the world is full of hurting people and because the world and even the church doesn’t do so good... with helping them...

The idea is this: You want to be a part of this church? We are about service not serve us. We are about finding ways to care and be involved in people’s lives. It’s not just about community involvement and doing things that make us feel good about ourselves. It is all about first and foremost bringing people to Jesus Christ. What are you willing to do. Where are you willing to go?

