

What Churches Must Do Now to Help Save the Community

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“People perish for the lack of knowledge.” What exactly is the meaning of this statement?” It is a complex way of saying, “What you don’t know can kill you!” It means that churches needs to set up community forums and educate the community about available resources.

Do you need insight on developing community forums? Whether you are a mega pastor or a pastor that just opened your doors, the goal is to become a “visionary pastor” and wake up the people because without food, clothing and shelter – people can’t survive.

This article is written to give churches and other establishments that have physical addresses vital information on how to set up community forums to empower the people.

First of all we need to understand that churches will never get back to where they were in the 60’s when they totally took care of the community. But with all the misinformation, old wives tales and urban legends that have caused people to sink deeper into despair and hopelessness - it is time for every church, organization, or group to at least provide regular forums to educate the community.

One would hope that they could get all the information they need on TV, in newspapers and on the Internet – but that is definitely not the case, so therefore, the church can serve as a major information dissemination point for their community.

If you are a pastor thinking about setting up forums then this makes you a visionary and proactive pastor. We have many pastors out there who feel they don’t have the resources or contacts to pull off educating the community but that is not true --as you will find out by reading this article.

FIRST STEP - DO YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES TO PULL OFF HAVING FORUMS IN THE COMMUNITY?

First of all in order to set up forums in the community you will need three things: 1) A church or a building, 2) Electricity, and 3) Parking (People will not come out to forums if they do not have sufficient and SAFE parking, especially women).

SECOND STEP- WILL YOU APPOINT SOMEONE OR A GROUP TO HELP SET UP FORUMS?

Next you will need to decide if you will take on this responsibility yourself or assign a program director or someone else from your church to relay back to you all the relevant information on the forums.

THIRD STEP - WHAT TYPE OF FORUMS SHOULD YOU HOLD?

Then you want to decide which type of forums to set up. There are two types of forums that work well in church settings:

- 1) You can set up a forum and invite an expert from the community who will be speaking on relevant topics to empower people in your church and community. They could speak for any time limit (30 minutes to an hour) but remember the goal is to provide sufficient time for questions from the audience. And remember many people who have questions will be intimidated to ask questions so make it easier for them by providing as much information as possible.
- 2) You can also set up panel discussions and invite more than one expert but a panel of experts (4 - 6 people or more) to give the latest updates on relevant issues and answer questions from the audience. With panel discussions you will need a moderator who could be one of the experts sitting on the panel or someone you appoint to move the questions and answers back and forth to the audience. A moderator is simply a person who presides over a panel discussion.

FOURTH STEP - WHAT TIME AND HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU SET UP FORUMS?

After you decide what type of forums you are going to set up - decide what time and dates you will be setting up these forums. Will they be every week, twice a month or once a month?

FIFTH STEP - WHAT TOPICS SHOULD YOU DISCUSS?

Decide on the topics of your forums. Some of the main issues in the community at this time are:

- Economic Empowerment
- Political Empowerment
- Housing Industry
- Education
- Healthcare
- The Criminal Justice System

An effective leader such as a pastor should be knowledgeable about history, must not be afraid to touch it and respects all segments of the community -- grassroots, youth, elderly, business proprietors, professionals, laborers, and other clergy.

SIXTH STEP - WHO DO YOU INVITE?

First of all you need to realize that you do not know everything and it will be important to bring in the right people to your church to help educate your congregation and the

community.

In deciding what experts to invite - most of them should have their own websites which will make it easier for you to see exactly what they are doing and what services and products they are offering the community so google.com them and conduct research before inviting them.

Community Experts:

An expert is a person who has a special skill or knowledge in some particular field. You will see these experts in community newspapers, on t.v. and on the Internet. Many will be speakers with services or products such as books, booklets, pamphlets, CD's, DVD's, Special Reports, etc.

A speaker is a person who speaks formally before an audience; lecturer; orator. There are two types of speakers - professional or public speakers. A professional speaker spends most of their time speaking for a living. A public speaker is a person who delivers a speech or oration. Politicians are public speakers. Most speakers make good moderators and panelists.

Support church members and your local legislators by allowing them to participate by:

Church Members:

Some of these experts can be members of your congregation so support them by allowing them to participate in these forums. But just make sure they are not involved in any type of negative or false advertising such as Multi-Level or Network Marketing (MLM) ventures such as Noni juice, Melaleuca, Prepaid legal, YTB travel, ACN, Ignite Energy, Quixtar, Body magic/shaper, etc.

The last thing you want to do is to continue to march people off cliffs and bringing the wrong person to your church could mean others will stop coming. Remember the goal is to empower -- not weaken the community.

Legislators:

Also look for legislators to come in and speak at your forums. Start with the legislators in your area and have others who are doing great work in the community. Legislators are responsible for many things that happen in the community.

They are responsible for dispersing funds and making laws, therefore, it is important to work with these individuals. It is always good to build relationships with legislators in the community, but do not get so friendly with them that you lose touch when they do not do the right thing.

Too often, church families think they cannot make a difference in our voting system. It is

true that according to IRS regulations, a church should not endorse any political candidate or political party nor should a church distribute campaign literature, raise money for candidates, or do anything to persuade churchgoers to vote a particular way. However, this does not mean churches cannot make a difference. A church can sponsor debates or forums, register voters by supporting the "Get Out the Vote" campaigns.

Other groups you can invite include: 1) Attorneys, 2) Educators, 3) Community Leaders, and 4) Community banks so the community can support them.

SEVENTH STEP - HOW DO I GET THE WORD OUT?

You would not believe how many people set up forums in the community but do not have a way to tell the community about them. If you have the same people coming out to your forums, you need to conduct more advertising. Remember your forums should be an invitation for everyone to come out and get educated so the goal is to expand your audience attendance.

To tell everyone you are educating the community, you need to form business alliances and strategic partnerships with media entities. Sometimes these entities can be members of your church or they can be local publishers, editors, reporters of community newspapers, producers and hosts of radio shows including internet radio shows, TV shows including community public television.

Inviting media entities out will help you get more exposure for your forums because if they are the guest speaker, part of a panel discussion, moderators or if they cover the forums, then chances are you will get more exposure for your community forum.

If you are having FREE forums then there is a good chance media entities will place your announcement about your forum in their outlets for free but again everything depends on what type business alliances and relationships you have formed with media outlets.

If you are charging a fee for a community forum, then it is only business that you might have to pay to advertise your forums. Most of these media entities prefer that you send them a press release – either by email or hand it to them in person so you can get to know them.

You also want to post your forums in your weekly church bulletins and have your members spread the word by telling others and passing out flyers. Flyers are always the cheapest way to advertise but building relationships with media outlets will save you a lot of money in the long run because they can cover a much wider area.

Remember radio has the greatest potential to reach more people so utilize community and Internet radio for your announcements. When the community find out that you are

providing this great information, then chances are --they will want to be a part of your congregation.

You can also ask for donations at these forums that can help pay for any resources you give out to the community and help to pay any bills associated with the church.

Steps the Church Can Take to Empower the Community

- Churches can become a Community Resource Center (Might have to be a non-profit). They can put together a list or directory of resources in the community
- Join local Chambers of Commerce so you can see what businesses are coming into the community and form alliances with other businesses
- Create a Business Directory/Create Chamber of Commerce in Church and have Saturday's Entrepreneurship Day where members and the community support church entrepreneurs
- Create an Apprenticeship/Mentorship Program
- Create a Business Training School or Institute
- Give regular Youth and Adult Business/Job Fairs
- Bring Legislators, Speakers and Trainers in to train and empower your congregation and community
- Set up Computer Labs and Internet Satellite Centers
- Create a Church Band
- Create a Speaker's Bureau – Orators Competition like the ACT-SO program in NAACP
- Create Sewing and Knitting Groups
- Open a Church Fitness Gym & Basketball Court
- Give Regular Aerobic and Yoga Classes
- Create Walking Clubs
- Start your own Grocery and Health Food Stores
- Create Thrift Store/Clothes Drive (Drop-offs & Pick Up)
- Set up a Food Pantry (Donations & Pick Up)
- Create your own Credit Union for your members and the community

There are a ton of community resources out there and sometimes having community forums will be the best way to educate the community on how to find them.

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