

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Why Don't Churches Share?

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/church-leadership/> or <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.

This is not a Christmas article. It's been in the planning stages since September. Really.

Way back in 1986, Robert Fulghan's book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, was published. On its list of things that we really need to know is this: Share everything.

Why don't churches share? Or, for those like me who might potentially be miffed or self-righteously offended by that question, why don't churches share more? With one another?

A few months ago my wife and I had dinner with another couple. He is the solo pastor of a small church with real needs that in an economically disadvantaged community. She is the type of person who knows how to ask penetrating questions well. And she did. My paraphrase of her question of the night is, "Why don't churches share?"

I spend a lot of my time working with churches on the smaller end of the attendance continuum – you know, churches with between 80 and 200 people attending each week. I attend a larger church with four services and attendance over 1,000. I am quite familiar with churches that are much larger. Her question resonated with me because I am aware of some churches of all sizes that share a lot, and I'm aware of many churches that share nothing or next to nothing with any other church. We occasionally give away our castoffs, but certainly not anything new or still useful to us.

In general, I see two kinds of churches: those who have things they could share, and those who might be able to access those things if they would only make their needs known. My church is generally on the things-we-could-share-side; my pastor friend's church is on the needs-to-ask

side. I am sure there are churches that have both things to share and needs to be made known. Where your church is on the continuum and where you want it to be is something to talk about.

I always thought that small churches needed more money to meet their needs. And they certainly do. But I've learned in recent years that they also need people. Money can buy things, but money does not do ministry. People do ministry. It's my sense that most churches that consider themselves to be generous base their generosity claims on giving money or their cast-off used stuff rather than giving or sharing people.

Let me give you some ideas to help frame this conversation.

Churches with needs:

- If you are part of a church with needs, what are they? Make separate lists for things that are needed (stuff to be purchased) and work that needs to be done (people needs). Be specific about the costs of things to be purchased and about the scope of things you need people to do (who, how many, how often, for how long, etc.)
- What kinds of relationships do you have with churches around you and their leaders, especially those of your own denomination or group? Who might you ask for the real, tangible help you need? Are you so busy doing the urgent things that you neglect the importance of building such relationships?
- Our culture worships independence and doing things on our own. Are we willing to express our needs for assistance from others?
- How might you, a church in need, also share with others?
- How can we ensure that we don't become excessively dependent upon the generosity of others?

Churches that can share:

- If you are part of a church that could share with others, what might you be able and willing to share? Will we share generously or only out of our excess?
- Are we committed to the success of smaller, struggling churches? Do we think or behave as though we are competing against them?
- Are we willing to share our people or only money?
- What churches are around me that have needs that my church could meet? Who might ask us for real, tangible help that we could provide?
- Would you be willing to adopt a church, at least for a season, to invest in its potential to reach people for Christ?

Real, Practical Stuff:

In my conversations with church leaders, I have found a number of needs that occur fairly frequently. Consider the following.

- Website maintenance. So many small churches have obsolete information or poorly designed Websites and don't have the funds to hire a Web designer and don't have

anyone in their church family help maintain a basic Webpage. Could your Webmaster invest a couple of hours in a needy church?

- Furniture updates. I recently sat in a church's chairs for a while and my behind hurt. Bad. Thirty brand-new chairs would cost less than \$1,000 and would certainly eliminate a real pain in the ...
- Workday support. Small churches that need to maintain older properties can have significant difficulties doing so, especially if the congregation tends to be older rather than younger. Could a larger church provide workers (especially *skilled* workers) for a smaller church's workday?
- Worship leaders and musicians. Does your church have any "extra" musicians or worship leaders that you could loan to a church for a week or a month or as needed? Do you have any young-yet-pretty-good musicians that could occasionally help a smaller church while gaining much needed experience?
- Pulpit Supply. Solo pastors often preach week after week and have few if any resources within their church to give them an occasional much-needed break. Any accomplished or budding preachers you may be able to share?
- Many pastors of small churches are working to "revitalize" their older congregations so that the church will remain viable and can reach its changing community. It's hard to attract younger unchurched people when the facility and its furnishings resemble great-grandma's attic. Small churches may desperately need funds for carpet, roof repairs, painting, minor remodeling, chairs, and audio and video support. Can you help?
- Vacation Bible School. Could your church or some of your student ministry group help a small church present a first-rate vacation Bible school or similar event?
- Children's Ministry. Some of the most overworked people in Christendom are children's ministry workers in small churches. They need a break. Do you have anyone who might be able to work in a nearby church's children's ministry once a month or so just to give a brother or sister in Christ a week each month to worship with their church family?

I feel guilty writing this article. I and my church have so much to give, and I'm not sure we are doing enough to help my brothers and sisters who are leading struggling churches nearby. Please give this article a thought and let me know what you are thinking. We can do so much more for the Kingdom if we truly do it together – and together means your church and mine.

Share everything – that's something to talk about. And it's something to do.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
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