

Prayer Triad 9 Compilation

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Scripture Question: Our scripture describes a growing vibrant church. How like or unlike that is our church?

- Our scripture reminds us of a commune. Everything dedicated to the good of the group and its success. However, communes (like the Jim Jones commune) are not a good example of Christian society – too many thoughtless followers. While Bethany does not reflect the intensity of this first church of Christians, we feel that Bethany is generous when a need is recognized. Do we look for needs? We do have an Outreach Committee that helps us look for ministries.
- The scripture is like our church that we do well with helping each other and the community, but we are unlike the scripture because we are not a growing church.
- Some gave all they owned to their church and then depended on the church – it doesn't sound like they had the different classrooms and groups and programs as we do today. They had many wonders and signs and miracle stories. We should share more of these stories.
- The scripture depicts everyone dividing wealth and distributing it evenly – we aren't literally doing that but we do give a lot of money to mission work and a lot of our time to Bethany (choir, bell choir, CWF, CMF, CYF, elderships, diaconate, various committees, various projects, dinners, etc...) The function of the church is somewhat different today than in times past. In a past point in history, destitute people turned to the church for assistance. There wasn't another place to go, but now the government has programs in place to help the needy (welfare, unemployment, disaster relief, etc...) We still help others, but there are agencies in place that do so as well. We think that to some people our church is vibrant, but we don't believe that it is to all members and we're not sure if we are to the public. Certain control factors inhibit change in the church and, therefore, growth. We are not flexible; people still want things done the way they have always been done. What are growing churches doing differently? Our service has a lot of standing and sitting and then standing and then sitting – could this be a put off to some? Perhaps if we had groups of people to visit fast growing, vibrant churches we could have them report back some new ideas. How is their worship different? What is exciting about their worship service? It is very hard to critique yourself without a baseline. If the rebuilding committee hadn't visited other churches, we wouldn't have the narthex, sacristy, parlor, video and sound equipment, stained glass windows behind the baptistery or the beautiful glass-walled fellowship hall. All of these ideas come from exploring other church buildings.
- Bethany is not growing and cannot be describe as vibrant. Bethany is a loving, caring congregation but it seems to lack the commitment to interact directly with the community to tell others about Christ – ie, while we give money to support outreach, we do not fully give of ourselves in witness or mission work.

Question 1: Why do you think our church is not growing in numbers of people?

- So many are unchurched, with no foundation and a lot are biblically illiterate making it easy to be drawn away. There is too much emphasis on entertainment instead of focusing on Christ. There is a lack of community growth and we have poor follow-up with visitors.

- Identify and focus on our inside power sources. To draw new families, teens, young parents and everyone, offer classes on various subjects. Bring in guest speakers and invite guest choirs. Goals are spiritual growth and knowledge. A revival event and Bible studies could be offered.
- Limited population and not recruiting new members with a passion.
- There aren't very many children – we deduced that this was partially caused by having the majority of members beyond their reproductive years, but this is too simplistic as there are a few families of child bearing age in the community and the county. We have to offer what is spiritually needed for anyone young or old.
- We think the biggest reason our church is not growing is because the younger generation was either not raised in the church or, those that were, do not think it is important now. There are too many other activities that interest them and church is not a high priority.
- Partly because of where we are. Families grew up here and were committed to certain churches in the area from way back. It's partly because it is a small populace as well. Some of it is partly because much of the church is older and are passing on.
- Too rigid and too reluctant to deviate from the past.
- Part of the reason is demographics, but part is our lack of drive in accomplishing God's mission for the church. We need to be concerned with accomplishing the mission by using all our resources, both people and bricks-and-mortar. We shouldn't be hung up on numbers. God doesn't care which church brings people to him and, if we tell people about Jesus, we shouldn't care what church they go to, just that they become Christians and go to church. Bethany has a lot of passionate Christians, but the church organization lacks direction.

Question 2: Do we spend more time “making disciples” or “feeding the disciples we have?”

- Feeding the ones we have.
- Probably “feeding the disciples.” Adding membership has not been a real priority in the past.
- “Feeding the disciples we have” – we tend to our active congregation mainly.
- We are frustrated about not knowing how to “make disciples.” In years past, loyalty to the church was a dynamic that caused members to remain part of the congregation. We need to spend more time feeding the disciples we have and we need to be more attuned to the spiritual and emotional needs of the individual.
- We spend more time feeding the disciples we have. We don't know that we feel comfortable making disciples.
- Feeding the disciples we have. Feeding is an important way of encouraging and we should get better at it. To be well fed is how we will be able to work towards the goals that are in place for us and it is very necessary.
- We don't do enough of either. We do need to spend more time feeding our own and feeding others. If a congregation is happy and healthy, others will be drawn to it. We should also spend more time visiting each other and being together in fellowship.
- We're doing neither well. We must first concentrate on feeding our own people so that they become a team to bring others to Christ. Then we need a team in place to accomplish the mission and we must remind ourselves every week why we are here.

Question 3: What do you think would be the best way to reach people who are un-churched or who have never been Christian?

- Workshops, advertising the church and the website, train visitation teams, having prayer vigils to ask for God's help. A community meal with a truly great speaker would be good.
- Invite anyone and everyone to share in the spiritual experience you have found at Bethany. Have members who have been trained to visit and reach out to others in the community. We need that personal contact in order to start relationships with potential new members. Have a Sunday School promotion to improve attendance.
- By visitation and personal invitation.
- Get them in the door for a multitude of reasons. Perhaps they'll see that this can be an inviting place. Ask someone to come – there are some current members that someone asked to come and they stayed. Everyone could commit to bringing one person. Offer programs or ideas for younger or more diverse folks. If children's activities are offered, the parents tend to come to observe their participation – the kids are the stars.
- Talking about our church and being visible as a church in the community (like volunteer work such as Relay for Life and other community events) would be a good way to reach people.
- Be a positive example of a loving Christian with a glad and generous heart. Often we are only around our circle of fellow Christians and are not allowing ourselves to step out of our comfort zones and have contact/mingle with others.
- Do something for them. Maybe different styles of worship because it seems that the younger generations are turned off by conservatism.
- We have to make better use of our resources. We could develop programs targeted to those people that will be held on days other than Sunday, develop summer programs for youth, develop a greeting program that would maximize the opportunity to tell others about Christ. We must realize that the whole congregation must work together to greet people and make them want to belong to our church family. This means that we must develop a way in which we can effectively greet and get to know visitors to our church beyond just having a greeter at the door.

Question 4: Do you sense that our congregation is open and receptive of new people?

- Yes.
- Yes, but that yes needs to be unconditional to really work.
- To a point, but not totally.
- Yes, specific members are more receptive than others but that comes down to personality and comfort with who we are. We've got to keep up being open, friendly and receptive when visitors come to church. However, we talked about what would happen if an "outlier" person or family came to church. How truly welcoming would we be if they had a different ethnicity, economic status or appearance? Most of us in the congregation basically have the same background, heritage and age. We need more discussion on this.
- We think our church is open and receptive to new people. We think we need to follow up on people when they visit church. Possibly a committee to visit people at home not just the minister. We should send cards to people who visit on Sunday morning.
- Sometimes we can be leery of the changes that may come with diversity but overall we would say yes.

- Yes, especially if they are introverted and conservative like us.
- Yes, but we need more emphasis on welcoming people. We must use a team effort to bring people outside the church to Bethany then make them a part of God's church family.