**Getting the Most out of Your Open Church: 3 Small Steps**

Lockdown is over, you have bitten the bullet and opened your church. So how do you make the most of your church being open to provide a warm, welcoming and safe environment? Here are 3 small steps that every church can manage.

1. **Keep it Clean**

“Cleanliness is next to Godliness”, was a much heard phrase in our home growing up. Not a direct biblical quotation of course but based on the concept of holiness and purity set out in Old Testament laws.

On a walking break early last year, we ventured into a wonderfully situated and beautiful looking church building only to discover dusty pews, grubby hassocks and piles of ‘stuff’ covered with old sacking. Fortunate not to trip on old frayed mats, we made a hasty exit. While this experience is undoubtedly the exception and not the rule, the impression it made was lasting and detracted from the peaceful stillness of the interior itself.

When Hezekiah was restoring worship to the temple, his first instructions were, *“Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place.”* (2 Chron 29:4-5)

Covid-19 has certainly made us more aware of our practices but notwithstanding the pandemic, is your church clean and tidy? Is there an article in your building that you would not give houseroom because of its dilapidated or grimy state? Then chances are, visitors won’t want to look at it or sit on it either! While we don’t want to create an environment which is so pristine people are afraid to breathe or touch anything, a little elbow grease goes a long way. After all, we don’t want them desperate for the hand sanitiser on the way OUT!

A shout out here for the cleaning team – usually unsung and elderly – whose sterling efforts through the years have been out of love and dedication. Someone once said, “If you’re too big to serve, you’re too small to lead”. Want to find out where your giftings lie? Start by picking up a broom and giving a “Thank you” to the polishers.

1. **Play to Your Strengths**

Your church doesn’t have to be all-singing, all-dancing. You are not competing with the “big church down the road”. You are you. Uniquely positioned and called to serve the community exactly where you are. You are *part of* the body of Christ, not the whole body. What is it that you offer? Where do your strengths lie? Far better to do one thing well than many things poorly.

Remember, you are not meeting together to entertain visitors (although you don’t have to leave your ‘happy faces’ at the doorway). You are meeting together to glorify God and encourage one another. Whether you are few or many, God’s presence should be seen and experienced among you.

The Bible says “Whatever you do, do it with all your heart” (Colossians 3:23). Do you love to sing? Then sing joyfully? Do you love to pray? Then pray passionately. Do you love the Word? Then declare it enthusiastically. This should not create exclusivity but should celebrate diversity if you remain focussed on the message of Christ and salvation in Him.

Many small ageing congregations mistakenly think they have to reach out to children and young families in order to be successful, sustainable and fruitful but that simply isn’t true. The gospel message is for ALL. Everyone, every age. If your peers and neighbours are in their latter years, then invite them and love them into the kingdom. If they are young then do the same. God will bless your faithfulness in reaching out to the ‘whosoever’.

1. **Learn How to Give**

I’m reminded of a sketch I once performed called, “The Interview”. The candidate has seen an advertisement, ‘WANTED – FOLLOWERS OF JESUS’, and applies for the position. After finding out there is never a day off, the question of salary arises:

Interviewer: Yes, I’m glad you mentioned that. You must give all that you have to your employer.

Applicant: (*Even more shocked*) Pardon!

Int: (*Patiently*) You must give all that you have to your employer.

App: What! ALL my money?

Int: (*Is amused*) Oh no! (*App looks profoundly relieved*) Not just your money, your possessions, your family, your gifts, and of course, your time.

There comes a point when the reality of being a follower of Jesus hits home. It’s not an easy path but the aforementioned sketch goes on to assure the applicant of the numerous benefits, including eternal life and unlimited resources, which are “immeasurably more than all you could ask or imagine”.

The main focus of our work is pointing people upwards, reminding them of the generous abundance they have received from God, through his Son Jesus Christ. With that in mind, the natural next question is, “How can you not give everything?” How can you not forgive others when God has forgiven you? How can you not open your arms to others when Jesus has stretched out his arms for you? How can you not put yourself out, when Jesus went all the way to Calvary for you?

So apart from the obvious monetary commitment, what can you give? A smile, a greeting, a ‘thank you’, a listening ear; *everyone* is capable of those. “We love God because he first loved us”, says John. It’s not just the impression you make when people come in. What impression do they have by the time they leave? Many churches worry about the service, the liturgy, the refreshments and so on but it is the LOVE that will cause people to return; the love that you give to them and to one another. Start giving today…and don’t stop!

These 3 Small Steps are not just for one or two of the congregation or for the clergy alone or the PCC members. They are for *everyone*. As it says in 1 Corinthians, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” And if you’re wondering whether the ‘applicant’ got the ‘job’, I’ll leave you to ponder the closing words of the sketch:

Interviewer: …It’s entirely up to you if you want to accept the position or not.