

Session Five : an honest look at the situation of your church

Question

Which type of evaluation mentioned in the video

- **Anonymous questionnaire**
- **An outside observer / facilitator**
- **Private interviews**

would be the best in your context?

Any of these ways of evaluating the church should give the revitalisation team a better picture of the real state of the church. That would be the starting point of implementing a strategy to lead to the “healthy church” we have been describing.

But once the revitalisation team is in place, it is never too soon to get all the church members thinking about ways to improve the way the church functions, and to contribute to the strategy which will be thought out and set in motion by the revitalisation team. And I think a learning community is an excellent way to do this.

What is a learning community?

The type of meeting called a learning community is sometimes called a results-driven conversation. As a group learns together, it should lead to some concrete outcomes. It is a structured approach which has two advantages over a non-directed meeting.

- The revitalisation team (or the pastor and leaders) have the opportunity to communicate facts and ideas about the need for revitalisation. After all, they usually have more knowledge of the wider evangelical world than most members, and often a greater realisation of the spiritual implications of today’s culture. However they need to keep in mind the goals of the learning community – to communicate the vision, to listen to each other and to conduct conversations leading to outcomes. These can often be expressed in sentences including words such as “in order to”.
- The church members are involved in discussing together how to take that presentation into account and how to move on together. As a result, the church as a whole accepts the changes more positively and may suggest good ways of getting there.

So what would that look like in practice? Here is a suggested time-table for a whole morning meeting but of course in your situation the learning community could happen at another time of day or even be a whole day event. The important thing to bear in mind is to keep things moving

quite quickly so as not to lose the “brain storming” characteristic of the learning community. That means that people will speak up more quickly and share more than in a more slowly moving meeting.

Each session needs an organiser (a facilitator) and a speaker, and should open and close with a time of prayer.

The participants will be sitting around tables of 4 to 6 people, preferably not putting people from the same family together and trying to get a good mix of age and sex around each table. There will be several big sheets of paper on each table.

9:00 The organiser opens the proceedings by explaining the vision of a healthy church, using the infographic to make a visual impact. This may be the first time the members have seen this diagram and so a 10 minute presentation (at least) would be necessary, and that could be followed by 5 minutes of Q & A (Question and Answer). I would also recommend that the diagram be printed out (maybe on A5 or A6 cards) which people can refer to during the learning community and keep as a reminder afterwards.

Then the meeting will be divided into three sessions, each one with the same format, looking at the three areas of church life identified on the revitalisation flow chart

- (Session one) Improving relationships within the church and with unbelievers
- (Session two) Improving the contextualization of the church
- (Session three) Improving the spiritual health of the church

9:15-9:30 The speaker will develop some ideas around the social aspect of revitalisation (relationships among church members and with their friends, neighbours and colleagues at work)

9:30-9:55 After this short talk, the participants around the tables discuss together two questions -

- What did I hear?
- What would that mean for our church?

One member of the group should make notes of the main ideas on one of the big sheets of paper on their table.

9:55-10:10 The participants come together at the front of the room and the papers from each table are displayed on a wall where everyone can see them. Someone from each table explains briefly what they had noted down.

10:10-10:15 The final five minutes are a crucial stage in the process. The organiser (or facilitator) asks the whole group what ideas have been mentioned the most frequently and these can be ringed in red on the displayed papers. The ideas on the sheets (and in particular those which have been ringed) will be important in helping the revitalisation team draw up an action plan (the strategy).

10:15-10:30 By this time the participants deserve a coffee break !

10:30 -11:30 The same hour-long process for the second aspect of revitalisation, with the speaker giving a 15 minute talk on the second aspect of revitalisation, the societal dimension - improving the contextualization of the church. And the same groups will again answer the questions “What did I hear?” and “What would that mean for our church?” before sharing their ideas with the other tables and looking for points they have in common.

11:30-11:45 A break (some people may need more coffee!)

11:45-12:45 The third session will have the same format as the speaker addresses the spiritual aspect of revitalisation - improving the spiritual health of the church and the groups share their thoughts.

This time table may be too intensive for your church. Or there may be too many participants to stick to just fifteen minutes to explain their ideas to the whole assembly. The important thing isn't the length of time but the format but it is nevertheless useful to keep things moving so as to encourage as much participation as possible. An afternoon or a whole day may be a better option for you.

In conclusion, the learning community offers two advantages over an unstructured meeting.

- The leaders lead! The pastoral team or the revitalisation team are responsible for the initial input. They can present the challenges facing the church and start to present some solutions (we will be looking at these in the next few weeks of this course)
- It gives the church as a whole the chance to be involved actively in the revitalisation process (without any one person dominating the meeting) and to come up with useful lines of thought which the revitalisation team can follow up. And at the same time the final synthesis of each session can reveal where there are already points of consensus among the church members.

Question

Do you think a learning community approach could be organised in your church?