



Relocation

Moving to a More Promising Location

One of the Ten “R” s for Plotting a New Congregational Course

Relocation is one of at least ten choices available to congregations who need to engage in transitions and changes that could lead to transformation as they plot a new course for their congregation. This is when a congregation moves to a more promising location. Communities change. At times congregations can be more vital and vibrant in a different location.

Selling and moving away from a current location is a hard decision to make. Yet it is one that holds promise for congregations when it improves their location, the quality of their facilities, and the access of their members plus others with whom they are gifted, skilled and have a preference to minister.

Congregational relocation happens for both positive and negative reasons. Some of the reasons are internal to the congregation. Some are external to the community context. Some are voluntary on the part of the congregation. Some are involuntary due to redevelopment of an area mandated by government action.

Churches may relocate their facilities because they are no longer demographically similar to their community context, and the gap for reaching new residents is too great. Their relocation is often preceded by many of their members moving further away from the facilities than they once lived. Also, zoning changes that bring commercial and industrial use may come as well as the roads to support them

Two churches were forced to move when the new \$1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium was built in Atlanta. They both received a favorable financial settlement and were able to envision new futures in new locations. Few churches have such a beneficial economic transfer of assets.

One evidence that a relocation has taken place can be the name of the church. For example, in Louisville, KY there is a Green Street Baptist Church located on Gray Street. Plus, there is a Walnut Street Baptist Church located on Oak Street. In each case the congregations relocated, built new facilities, but did not change their name.

Why Move to a More Promising Location?

Here are seven reasons for moving to a more promising location. Perhaps you can think of more.

1. Because the congregation outgrows its facilities and it needs move to a larger location that is likely nearer to many of its members.
2. Because the facilities outgrow the congregation plus the congregation has not been able to keep up important maintenance of the facilities.
3. Because the residents of the community served by the congregation disappear due to a change in land use such as a move from residential use to commercial and manufacturing use.
4. Because new road and highway construction cuts the church location off from the primary community of people served by the congregation.
5. Because the congregation ignored and perhaps were hostile toward community demographic changes and got to the point they no longer had credibility to minister in their community context. They needed to move to another location if they were to continue viable ministry.
6. Because the focus of their ministry changed and the location and/or the facilities no longer fit their focus.
7. Because the congregation chooses to become part of one or more other congregations and their location was no longer needed.

How Does a Church Move to a More Promising Location?

As difficult as it may be to consider relocating a congregation, the process is often more difficult and takes multiple years. Here are seven things to consider.

1. It goes almost without saying that the decision to relocate must be both a spiritual and strategic decision. Without both it may not succeed. It must be because of a new sense of God's empowering vision for the congregation.
2. Congregations must build the case for why relocating is better than staying where they are. The perceived benefits of relocation must be two times or greater than the perceived losses that will be experienced by relocating.
3. At times a church is fortunate that their location is desirable to commercial or manufacturing development and a buyer comes to them. In this case the buyer often assists with the relocation.
4. Your congregation must be able to identify the households or the affinity groups God is calling your congregation to reach. What are their characteristics? What are their religious preferences? Where are they located that you need to consider in your relocation.
5. Your congregation must be able to provide leadership for the relocation. It is possible that it would be a staged move where a new campus would be started in the location to which the congregation is moving, and temporarily the congregation would need some leadership at both locations.
6. It is important to have a tentative strategy for ministry in the new location for up to the first seven years. A congregation who relocates without a multi-year strategy is highly unlikely to be more vital and vibrant in the new location.
7. If a congregation knows its strategy in its new location, then it knows what type of facilities it needs. If it does not know its strategy, it may make early mistakes that are hard to overcome.

What is the Impact on the Church That Moves to a More Promising Location?

Much of the impact is uncertain, but here are seven possibilities.

1. Without a clear vision and strategy for a new location, the arithmetic of relocation is that one congregation plus a relocation equals a congregation three-fourths their size before the relocation. Not everyone goes with the congregation to the new location.
2. With a clear vision and strategy, and a deep commitment to relocate to move into the future rather than to restore the past, it is possible for a congregation to become more vital and vibrant.
3. With a positive relocation comes a new sense of excitement about a new beginning. This can open congregants up to allowing God to show them and do in them new spiritual things.
4. The satisfaction of your congregation about their church may increase as numbers and finances increase. Any lack of hope that had existed in your congregation may begin to diminish.
5. It may cause your congregation to be more inviting and hospitable in its new location. This can result in new households connecting with the congregation. This could lead to numerical growth in the congregation.
6. Your congregation may discover it has resources of money, leaders, and talents you did not realize you had as there may be opportunities for people to step up and help at the new location.
7. The spiritual depth of your congregation may increase as you pray more fervently for the new things happening in your midst and rejoice in the Lord concerning them.

Afterword

In moving to a new location, it will be important for a congregation to negotiate with the new owners the right to take certain things with you that have historic, cultural, and spiritual significance. When a congregation leave a former location, it is not leaving the heritage of people God brought together to form that congregation. It is extending its heritage and going to a new place that God has shown you. Therefore, take some symbols of your heritage with you and make them a part of the new place.