

**Calling, Community, and Congregation During a Pandemic**

By

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Something is missing in how churches and congregation participants are connecting during the pandemic. Do you feel it? Are you experiencing it? If so, I would like to pitch the idea that it is about ***calling***, ***community***, and ***congregation*** and where our focus and emphasis ought to be.

Some of the key elements of connecting with a congregation are missing for even the most faithful congregational participants. In a fully involved congregation at least the following three elements must exist among more than 50 percent of active participants.

**First**, they must engage and interact with weekly worship a minimum of two or more times per month. Three is better. This is their basic connection as a ***congregation*** participant.

**Second**, they must become part of a small group that provides ***community*** for them. This is often a Sunday School class, Life Group, or other regular gathering. This gathering must provide them with spiritual formation through learning and praying together, and must provide them with true friends with whom they have an ongoing relationship.

**Third**, they must have an opportunity to carry out their ***calling*** as a Christian. This means they have an identified role in the life of their congregation that requires them to take regular action to fulfill that role. It can mean serving in a key leadership role, on a committee or team for programming or governance, as part of guest services or new member assimilation, in the music and worship ministry, through missional projects in the community or missions trips, as part of the regular Christian education program, etc.

If any one of these three areas of participation are missing or significantly diminished, then people are less connected with their church and may even drift away. One of the key places this may be seen is not a drop in on-site or virtual attendance, but a drop in financial contributions to the church.

During the pandemic, churches have worked hard to connect as a ***congregation*** with the best possible combination of on-site and virtual presence. They have utilized all reasonable means available for small groups to continue providing ***community***. Where they are having a hard time is connecting people with their ***calling***. Some of this is because of the unwillingness of people to be active and face-to-face in the leadership commitments they have previously made.

One of the key reasons for a diminishing of ***calling*** is that churches are having a hard time figuring out how to utilize people during the pandemic in proactive ways. It is also a struggle to administer, oversee, or stimulate ***calling*** when churches are so overwhelmed with keeping ***congregation*** and ***community*** functioning with excellence.

The typical hierarchy of importance for pastors, staff, and key lay leaders is to focus first on ***congregation***, second on ***community***, and third on ***calling***. Is it possible this hierarchy of importance needs to be reversed? Does our focus need to be first on ***calling***, second, on ***community***, and third on ***congregation***?

The typical secular marketing approach would start with ***congregation*** and then move to ***community***, and finally to ***calling***. In case you have forgotten, these are not typical times. Is a contrarian approach actually needed for the long-term vitality and vibrancy of churches?

Are we spending too much time on worship, and too little time on service that results in worship and praise to our Triune God? Are we too focused on getting five to ten percent more of the casual or nominal congregation participants to re-engage and too unfocused on reigniting committed people in innovative ways that may actually result in a greater connection with the casual or nominal congregation participants?

How do you see this? Your feedback to ***GeorgeBullard@ColumbiaMetro.org*** is welcome.