

The Jesus Agenda: Community Partnerships for Ministry

BIBLE STUDY (30 MINUTES)

John 6:1-14 (KJV) - Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

1 After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias.

2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.

3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.

4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

- There is always a conflict and tension in community that offers the opportunity for the church to demonstrate the power of God.
- People, in their own frames, will only know that they don't have the capacity to address the problem, and hence will often say, "What can we do?" God's expectation of the church is that we live in this tension. That's why Jesus asked the question.

6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

- God already has a plan for community that involves the assets in community, all of which belong to God since community is God's invention and goal for humankind. The satanic influence on humankind, as we live together with each other and with God, is that our own sense of greed and selfishness results in the assets being accumulated in only a few places, and in those assets being unaligned on behalf of the people.
- Collaboration (Partnerships) helps to re-align community assets according to God's will for community.

7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

Notice here that:

- Resistance doesn't come from the community at large, but from among the disciples. There will be folks (likely trustees, finance people, or other "church power brokers") who might not understand this model of ministry, and may never get it. Intentional teaching and bold leadership is important for pastors to do to overcome this. It will add tension to the church's mix!
- Philip only understands things within the frame of the resources available to him within the community of believers. Generally speaking, no church has enough resources to do community ministry at the level at which Jesus mandates us to operate in Matthew 28 and Luke 4. This can only come through partnerships (collaboration), both with other faith communities and with other community stakeholders.

8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,

9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

- The resources are rarely where you expect them to be! A kid with a couple of fish sandwiches that his mother packed for him? Are you kidding me?
- In community, you never find all the assets in one place. None of them alone are or even seem to be enough to solve the problem, but all of them together, aligned towards a common purpose, are more than enough.
- Our imagination will rarely allow us to see how a couple of fish sandwiches can feed so many. We need to pray for discernment and vision from God as pastors, if we are going to be intentional about building the Kingdom this way.

10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

- Often the church's role in community is to act to bring order to what has often become a chaotic and potentially destructive situation in community.
- Making people sit down will mean becoming the catalyst for peaceful change though direct action of some sort. This takes an immense amount of courage faith, and organizing.

11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

- Notice here that Jesus led the disciples into action, and they followed not knowing what was actually about to happen. This will often be the same model in which we operate in local churches and communities. Again, it takes an immense amount of courage and faith. God leads us into new realities when we act in faith.
- If we lead in such a way as pastors that makes collaboration a reality, then Jesus will make the miracle happen in the communities that surround our churches.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

- Collaboration ALWAYS leads to there being more than there was before because it always means a realignment of assets.
- It is critical that collaboration not end when the initial need is met. As much as anything here, what might be lost is collaboration as a new way of being in ministry in community. What else are the new partners in ministry hearing from God that they can do together on behalf of community. In large measure, God's influence on community grows through this way of the church encountering community. There should always be sustainable efforts as a result of great collaborations.

14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

- Everyone who was there participating in the move of God understood God in a new and different way.
- Many people engage the discipleship adventure through service. Isn't this the goal?

Questions:

1. Where was the problem/conflict in this passage? As a pastor, where have you encountered problems that needed solving, but were too big for you and your church to handle? What were the inherent risks if you tried and failed? What would happen if you did nothing?
2. Was there an individual in this passage who solved the problem? How did the problem get solved?
3. Where did the assets come from? Who were the partners? How did they get together?
4. Who resisted Jesus' suggestion? What resistance can you anticipate in your church and community? How will you overcome the resistance?
5. Why did Jesus say, "Make them sit down?" In what ways does your church carry out this command in community?
6. Why does Jesus command them to gather the leftovers? What does it mean for the church and community that nothing be lost?

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (30MINUTES)

1. Do the people in your pews have a full understanding and appreciation of what life is like for various groups in your community such as: seniors, youth, disabled, immigrants and economically disadvantaged persons? How does one become more aware of needs in your community?
2. What are the challenges and benefits of congregations forming partnerships with non-faith communities?
3. What is the most exciting partnership you've heard about or initiated during your ministry? How was the partnership formed? Whom did it serve?

GROUP ACTIVITY (20 MINUTES)

Consider Tim Warner's Five Characteristics of Great Community Partnerships. Reflect on how your congregation could initiate a partnership with one or more groups in your community. Set your imagination free to ponder possibilities for partnerships. Write your responses in the space provided. After 7 – 10 minutes, share your reflections with your group.

CLOSING: (15 MINUTES)

Celebrate endings and new beginnings. Receive prayer requests and end the gathering with prayer.

- 1. Share a common vision in response to a need in the community.** What is a need you could seek to address? Who else sees this need and could work with you to meet it?
- 2. Sustain satisfaction of each party's self-interest.** What reason would they have to come to the table? What will it take to keep them there?
- 3. Each party brings a useful asset to offer to the community.** What gifts and resources can you offer? What asset can the potential partner bring?
- 4. Partnerships catalyze other sustainable collaborations.** How can you work with this group on a future ministry or project?
- 5. Successful collaborations move individuals from disempowerment to community empowerment.** How will your proposed partnership enable your target group to learn, grow and become self-sustaining?

RESOURCE LIST

Colleen Birchett, "Biblical Strategies for a Community in Crisis: What African Americans Can Do"

Robert D. Carle and Louis A. Decaro, Jr., "Signs of Hope in the City: Ministries of Community Renewal"

John P. Kretzman and John L. McKnight, "Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing Community Assets"

Robert Lewis, "The Church of Irresistible Influence: Bridge-Building Stories to Help Reach Your Community"

Robert Lupton, "Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor"

Ron Nored, "Reweaving the Fabric: How Congregations and Communities Can Come Together to Build Their Neighborhoods"

Michael Winer and Karen Ray, "The Collaboration Handbook: Creating and Sustaining While Enjoying the Journey"