

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

...strengthening local churches

The following descriptions are from Robert Schnase's website: <http://www.fivepractices.org/default.asp>. All page numbers refer to his book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Abingdon Press, 2007)

Radical Hospitality

Christian hospitality refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.

It describes a genuine love for others who are not yet a part of the faith community; an outward focus, a reaching out to those not yet known, a love that motivates church members to openness and adaptability, willingness to change behaviors in order to accommodate the needs and receive the talents of newcomers. Beyond intention, hospitality practices the gracious love of Christ, respects the dignity of others, and expresses God's invitation to others, not our own. (p.11-12)

Radical means "drastically different from the ordinary practice, outside the normal," and so it provokes practices that exceed expectations, that go the second mile, that take welcoming the stranger to the max. It means people offering the absolute utmost of themselves, their creativity, their abilities, and their energy to offer the gracious invitation and reception of Christ to others. (p.21)

Passionate Worship

Worship describes those times we gather deliberately seeking an encounter with God in Christ. We cultivate our relationship with God and with one another as the people of God. God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion, and bind people to one another. Through worship, God actively seeks a relationship with us, pardons sins, restores relationships, and changes lives. (p.33-34)

Passionate describes an intense desire, an ardent spirit, strong feelings, and the sense of heightened importance. Passionate speaks of a connection that goes beyond intellectual consent. It connotes eagerness, anticipation, expectancy, deep commitment, and belief. (p.37)

Passionate Worship means worship that connects people to God, worship that people enter into with expectancy, and with the anticipation that God desires to speak to them and connect to them. Whether traditional, blended, or contemporary, Passionate Worship is authentic, connecting, and sustaining.

Intentional Faith Development

Intentional Faith Development refers to the purposeful learning in community that helps the followers of Jesus mature in faith, such as Bible studies, Sunday school classes, short-term topical studies, and support groups that apply the faith to particular life challenges.

Learning in community replicates the way Jesus deliberately taught his disciples. People cannot learn grace, forgiveness, patience, kindness, gentleness, or joy, simply by reading about it in a book. These are aspects of spiritual formation that one learns in community, through intentional engagement. The sanctifying presence of God's spirit works through these practices to help us grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. (p.62)

Risk-Taking Mission and Service

Risk-Taking Mission and Service includes the projects, the efforts, and the work people do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not they will ever be part of the community of faith. Some churches have after-school programs for at-risk children, some send work teams across the state or across the world, some offer regular ministries to the incarcerated.

Risk-Taking refers to the service we offer that stretches us out of our comfort zone and has us engaging people and offering ourselves to ministries that we would never have done if not for our desire to follow Christ. Risk-taking steps into great uncertainty, a higher possibility of discomfort, resistance, or sacrifice. It pushes us beyond the circle of relationships that routinely define our church commitments. It changes the lives of the people who are served as well as the lives of those who serve. (p.83 & 78)

Extravagant Generosity

Extravagant Generosity describes practices of sharing and giving that exceed all expectations and extend to unexpected measures. It describes lavish sharing, sacrifice, and giving in service to God and neighbor. Every scriptural example of giving is extravagant, and churches that practice Extravagant Generosity teach, preach, and practice the tithe. The focus on the Christian's need to give because of giving nature of God whom we worship.