



radical hospitality
passionate worship
intentional faith development
risk taking mission and service
extravagant generosity

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations

By Bishop Robert Schnase

Focus on the Five Practices »

The purpose of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But how do we do that? The most visible way God knits people into the community of Christ and draws people into the relationship with God is through congregations that fulfill the ministry of Christ in the world. Fruitful congregations repeat and improve on these five basic practices: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity.

The practices are basic and fundamental. But it's the adjectives that make these words come alive, because they stretch us and cause us to ask ourselves, "How are we doing in practicing these qualities of ministry in our congregation? How might we do better?"

Now these are practices—they're not qualities that some churches have and some don't. They're not phases that, once we get them done, we can move on to something else. These are practices that we have to learn and improve upon constantly. These are the activities that are so critical to the

mission of the church, that failure to perform them in an exemplary way leads to congregational decline and deterioration. Here's a look at the five practices used in fruitful congregations.

Radical Hospitality. (Romans 12:9-21)

Congregations offer the invitation and embrace of Jesus Christ, the gracious welcome that creates genuine belonging that brings people together in the Christian community. Churches characterized by radical hospitality are not just friendly and courteous. Instead, they exhibit restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. They sense a calling and responsibility to pray and work to invite others and to help them feel welcome and supported in their faith journeys. Congregations surprise newcomers with a glimpse of the unmerited gracious love of God that they see in Christ. Our Radical Hospitality goes to the extremes, and we do it joyfully, not superficially, because we know our invitation is the invitation of Christ.

Passionate Worship. (John 4:21-24)

In passionate worship, people are honest before God and one another, and they are open to God's presence and will for their lives. People so eagerly desire such worship that they will reorder their lives to attend. Passionate worship motivates pastors not only to improve their preaching, but also to learn continually how to enhance content and technique for

effective worship. Worship is something alive that requires continuing care, cultivation, and effort to keep it fresh. Pastors should willingly review and evaluate their own work and invite feedback. The motivation for enhancing the quality of worship is not only about deepening our own faith, but also about allowing God to use us and our congregations to offer hope, life and love to others. Worship is God's gift and task, a sacred trust that requires our utmost and highest.

Intentional Faith Development.(1 Corinthians 9:19-24)

Transformation comes through learning in community. Congregational leaders that practice Intentional Faith Development carefully consider the full life-cycle of members and look for ways the church forms faith at every age. They look for gaps, opportunities, and unmet needs to round out their ministries and ask how they can do better. They train lay people to lead small groups, teach Bible studies, and coordinate support groups. They realize the power of special topics and interests to attract unchurched people, and they advertise and invite beyond the walls of the church. They form affiliation groups such as grief or divorce recovery, substance abuse, parenting, and more. They explore new ways of forming learning communities—blogs, chat rooms, e-mail Bible studies, and downloadable materials. These pastors also participate in forms of community with other pastors or laypersons to help deepen their own relationship with God.

Risk-Taking Mission and Service. (Matthew 25:14-30)

This involves work that stretches people, causing them to do something for the good of others that they would never have considered doing if it were not for their relationship with Christ and their desire to serve Him. These churches not only solicit and encourage ordinary service to support the work of the congregation, but they also consciously seek to motivate people to more extraordinary service. They lift examples in preaching and teaching. Risk-taking missions and service is also part of the formation of children and youth. All youth and children ministries include teaching and experiential components that stretch compassion outward beyond the walls of the church. Faith mapped in childhood provides pathways that shape lifelong commitments. These churches collaborate with other churches, other denominations, civic organizations, social agencies, and non-profit groups. They actively invite and welcome newcomers, visitors, and the unchurched to help them in making a difference in the lives of others. As congregations move beyond their comfort zones and follow Christ into more adventurous encounters with people, God's Spirit changes them, changes others, and changes churches.

Extravagant Generosity. (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

Churches that practice Extravagant Generosity speak confidently and faithfully about money, giving, generosity, and the difference giving makes for the purposes of Christ and in the life of the giver. They emphasize the Christian's need to give for more reasons than just the church's need for money. They emphasize mission, purpose, and life-changing results rather than shortages, budgets, and institutional loyalty. Pastors express appreciation to people who give by thanking members collectively and personally, and they give God thanks for increased giving. Members are informed in positive and consistent ways about their giving. Pastors and church leadership view "giving beyond the walls" as indispensable to Christian discipleship and to congregational mission and vitality. Churches that grow in giving know that generosity increases with participation in ministry and community, and so they work to deepen the core ministries of worship, small group learning, and mission. They address the challenge of growing in giving to long-term members as to adults new to the faith. They also teach, model, and cultivate generosity among children and youth. The spiritual maturity that comes from growth in giving, and the extraordinary engagement that results from tithing, bring clarity of purpose and greater integrity to all the church's ministries.

These five practices work together in the mission of the church. Take them beyond conversations between pastor and church leaders—take them into the worship services, classes, and homes of every church member to imbed them into the fabric of your congregation. By doing so, you will develop a unifying common language that helps people understand the tasks of Christian discipleship. The exemplary and repeated practices of Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Faith Development, Risk-Taking Mission and Service, and Extravagant Generosity are the time-tested, theologically sound, and effective means congregations use to fulfill their mission with excellence and fruitfulness to the glory of God.

Taken from Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations by Bishop Robert Schnase (Abingdon Press, 2007).