

Come and See: Knowing What We Are Doing and Why
by Bob Young
November, 2008

Church XYZ is hosting another “Come and See” event. They are advertising the “Feeding of the 5000”—a Thanksgiving Dinner for all who will come on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Church ABC is not about to be left out. Their most recent “Come and See” event was a weekend Marriage Seminar which included several speakers and lots of entertainment. You can expand this sample with a glance at the weekend religion section in most any urban newspaper.

In many places, the church has become “event” oriented in its efforts to reach out and touch the lives of the communities and people around it. Events are not all bad—in today’s society, they may be essential to community outreach. Special events provide multiple opportunities for the church. The challenge is to understand the purpose of an event. The church where I minister also hosts “Come and See” events. The challenge I constantly wrestle with is that we are asking people to “come and see”, but usually they do not see us doing what we customarily do as church. More often, they see us in a special situation or circumstance doing things we do not normally do.

Let me suggest three purposes of special events. I do not have snappy names for these events—I will merely describe them. Perhaps someone else will come up with more memorable descriptions.

First, some special events give the church an opportunity to **become acquainted** with many people from the surrounding community or area. These events are essential; these provide the first step to building the bridges across which the gospel can be shared. A church with lots of friendships and acquaintances, or with lots of new people present regularly, may not need many of these events, but most churches need more ways to make initial connections with more people. Bill Hybels calls these AMEs—acquaintance making events. These events provide a loose connection through which people may be brought into the circle of influence of the church. These events must be personal. Little gain will come in having lots of people present with no personal contacts. Additionally, these events are not going to immediately move visitors into the center or core of the church, but they do provide an initial contact. If the purpose of a specific “Come and See” event is to become acquainted, the event should be organized and planned with that goal in mind. Participants should be purposefully “mixed”, opportunities provided for information exchange, and like interests groups encouraged. One approach to AMEs is to provide thematic events that attract those with specific interests. Many events designed to make acquaintance with others are hosted at church buildings, although it is possible to have these kinds of events in other locations. The advantage of being “at home” in the church building is that people become acquainted with our buildings. (Most of us think our buildings are easy to navigate because we are familiar with them, but studies have shown that many people find church buildings extremely difficult to understand, partly because the buildings are often poorly marked or lack appropriate signage.) One important distinction: there is a difference in become acquainted with persons and persons becoming acquainted with the teaching and work of the church. The gospel travels across personal relationships—events designed to help with this first

level should not be too “heavy.” On the other side, they should not be so bland as to misrepresent the church.

A second kind of event is designed to build or **strengthen relationships**. Events of this kind often recur over a defined period of time. A good example is the effective use of small group home Bible studies. Sometimes these activities fail to reach out because the Christians involved are starved for fellowship and use the activities to meet a felt need for more meaningful fellowship. These events provide the church an opportunity to build trust in the context of relationships. They also serve to move those involved nearer the center of the church and its life.

When people know us and find friendship or relationship among us, they will often “come and see” us at a regularly scheduled activity—Bible classes, worship, or Bible studies or groups away from the building. These are some of the best “come and see” opportunities. For those who need extra encouragement, it is time to roll out a **special connecting event**. These events say, “Come and see us in the life we share weekly.” Effective connecting events show the church at its best, perhaps even doing something beyond the weekly routine. Such events work best when acquaintances and relationships have already been established and built, so that people are drawn ever closer to the center of the life of the church.

One can certainly identify other kinds of events, but these three categories provide a first step toward thinking about what the church wishes to do in touching the lives of those around us in our communities and neighborhoods, and how we might more thoughtfully plan our outreach activities and events.