

A Deeper Dive into Church Models

OUR OVERALL STRATEGY

Our strategy for becoming the church as Christ intended it to be has to begin with making the most of who we are today as we plan for moving to where God is calling us to be. As we contemplate the path forward, a key question has to be answered. Considering the scope of our strategic plan and the timeframe for accomplishing it, we must consider the realistic possibility that sometime during the life span of the execution of our strategic plan, a leadership transitions will become necessary. Leadership transitions can be precipitated by an emergency situation or simply the passing of time, but in either instance the transitions must be planned and orderly. As we plan for what kind of church we will become going forward, an essential part of that plan is the determination of what kind of shepherd is needed to lead us in this new future that we are seeking to attain. The following lays out a series on possible church models that we are considering as we execute our strategic plan.

WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS AS WE MOVE FORWARD?

As Amity grows as a church and as more people are added, the more personal preferences we can expect about what the church should eventually be like. Because our preferences are so broad, it would be impossible for one church to accommodate all preferences. The following are six popular church “styles”. The one set of assumption for each model is that all of them preach the gospel, are theologically precise and are led by humble shepherds.

Does Amity Want to Become a Seeker Church?

The “seeker church” is a group that desires a relevant connection to the culture. They want to relate and even cater to the culture. This may require a survey to determine what accommodations may need to be made within the church environment.

The “seeker church” approach might provide Amity with the wherewithal to draw a younger audience. The upside is that “seeker churches” are excellent in drawing people to the church

The downside is that to in order to retain the seeker audience, Amity would have to continue to prioritize relationship to the culture, with less emphasis on biblical education

and discipleship. The congregation may grow numerically but would potentially be deficient in daily living out progressive sanctification.

If Amity were to become a seeker church, it can expect to plateau quickly. The back door would be as busy as the front door. Stagnation is a problem because there is very little “deepness of earth” in this entry-level Christian environment.

Is Amity Becoming a “Second Chance” Church?

Today, Amity is largely made of people who had a less than satisfying experience at a previous church. This demographic is looking for something different so they gravitate to a church culture that has the “feel” of something positive that they remember about church.

People who have had “bad church experiences” or come from cultures where leadership lacked integrity are perfect for this kind of church. A church like this will make much of grace, which is music to the ears of a person who feels “unfulfilled” in church. If you ask them why they attend Amity, you will hear repeated themes:

- I have never heard the Bible preached like this before.
- I do not feel judged when I walk through the doors of this church.
- This church is not about rule-keeping.
- I never understood grace until I came here.
- The worship experience is alive and authentic.

Nearly all of the good things they say are framed in comparative language—comparing their current church experience with their past experience. They love the “do-over” opportunity.

If Amity continues to be this kind of church, it can move people toward sound theology and cultural relevance. The challenge is that the “do-over” crowd is more of a “settled” crowd. This group will have more Bible knowledge, but fewer young people will gravitate to this environment and “do-over” churches are typically weak in making disciples. ***If Amity can determine how to attract young people to this model and can work to get people actively involved in small-group discipleship, this could be a good model for Amity.***

Is Amity Becoming an Evangelistic/Outreach-Oriented Church?

Some churches do a fantastic job reaching the lost, whether locally or globally. They have a “go into all the world with the gospel” mentality. Over the door of the auditorium as you are walking out, you might read this sign: “You are now entering the mission field.”

If Amity were to adopt this approach to ministry, it would require a balanced focus on the outward and inward mission fields.

A “Seeker church” relates to the culture but tends to be weak in maturing their flock. The “second chance church” relates well to the burned out religious crowd, but is also weak in discipleship. The evangelistic/outreach folks know how to win people to Christ but are not so good with sanctification issues.

If Amity chooses to become an “Evangelistic/Outreach” kind of church, significant emphasis will need to be given to strengthening the discipleship process, including a greater emphasis on evangelism.

Is Amity Becoming an In-reach/Ministry-Oriented Church?

Amity is committed to being a ministry-minded church but this model may not be the best fit for the church long term. Many Amity stewards are super-busy doing all kinds of things for the church and the community, but others are hardly engaged at all. We currently try to follow a simple church philosophy. We are unable to respond to every burden or every need. In a true ministry-oriented church, you have mission-minded Christians who are on a genuine mission for Jesus. All they need is a burden to start a ministry. If there is no ministry to match the burden, then ministry minded people will figure out how to create it because they want the world to know about Jesus. They see ministries like portals to reach the world.

The downside to this approach is that people are so busy being busy that there is little time to grow spiritually. This is similar to the previously mentioned sanctification problems with the other models. Ministry-minded groups can get so busy that they cannot slow down to do “soul care”...theirs and others. They are ministry minded even to the detriment of their marriages and families.

Amity has to be careful to value a steward’s character as much as we value a steward’s gifts. People can be an unkind spouse or ill-equipped parent and still lead a ministry. We

cannot afford to allow a steward's passion for ministry to carry more weight than Christ-like character.

Is Amity Becoming a Teaching-Focused Church?

Teaching-focused churches love to study their Bibles. They have an endless supply of Bible studies. Knowledge is king. They enjoy getting into God's Word to discover the countless nuggets of truth.

They are correct in their belief that being theologically sound is essential if you want to grow in your sanctification. The downside is that growing in sanctification requires more than Bible knowledge. Teaching-focused churches often don't match their understanding of the Bible with an equal, appropriate, and practical application to becoming mature in Christ. They study for the sake of study.

One of the challenges with people who know the Bible is that they often fail to know the God of the Bible. They know how to walk a person through a difficult passage of Scripture but they are helpless when it comes to walking that same person through a difficult set of circumstances in their lives.

The gulf between what they know and how to make it practical in a struggling person's life can be broad. If Amity fails to provide the tools needed to study the Bible and the practical instructions on how to walk it out, people will leave seeking that support from some other church.

Is Amity Becoming a Disciple-Making Church?

A Disciple-making church is a rare because it is the hardest aspect of our faith to accomplish. If a church is going to fall short in only one area that area will probably be discipleship. To create a context where people can be honest, transparent, intrusive, humble, courageous, and able to assimilate the gospel into situational challenges is a bridge too far for many churches.

The Lord's intent for sanctification is that it happens in a community of competent and compassionate Christ-like disciple-makers.

The downside of this group is that a continued focus on the church within the walls can lead to ingrown stagnation. If the disciple-making church is reaching the community while

taking care of its people, ***this model may be the best representation of a New Testament church and the best approach for Amity going forward.***

OUR OVERALL STRATEGY

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