

Sources of a Malnourished Identity

What nourishes the identity of your church members? Why do they call your church home? What is the glue that holds them? What if you could sit attenders down, one by one, and x-ray their soul to find the real answer to these questions.

There are four categories of answers for most people. We call these “Four P’s” the sources of a malnourished identity. In the absence of a compelling, tangible vision, people rely on these to form the deepest emotional connection to the church. Notice that these are important and some even essential for church life. But they should not be central to your members’ sense of identity. After reviewing the details, assess whether your church suffers from a malnourished identity, or whether your people have a healthy identity that is nourished by your “Purpose.”

Place

Personality

Programs

People



Purpose expressed through a unique vision

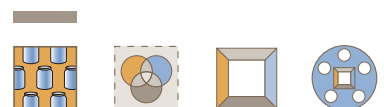
PLACE

Most members have a nostalgic connection to the brick and mortar (the more beautiful the sanctuary, the deeper the connection) – to the physical reality of the church as place. Is this not how we use the term “church” predominantly? Maybe members have been giving to building programs over the years. Maybe they have a room dedicated to them. How connected are members to place? Just find out by dropping one word- “relocation.”

PERSONALITY

Like place, personality is a good gift that every church needs. Most pastors would never suggest that they want themselves or any staff person to be the defining point of a members’ identity. Yet, the most fragile time in a church’s life is when the pastor changes. And it doesn’t matter how well a staff person’s exit is, there is always someone disillusioned when their “staff connection” departs.

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The Sources of a Malnourished Identity (cont'd)

PROGRAMS

A member who has experienced success in a certain way of doing ministry gets quickly attached to that program. It is the reason for the pats on the back and a source of freedom to use his or her spiritual gifts. The program may provide belonging or it may provide significance. Resistance to change of programs is really a resistance to taking away a source of significance.

PEOPLE

By people, we refer to the 100 or so people who know a person by name at church. These are usually the people who attend worship at the same time and same vicinity in the sanctuary. Or they may be the people in a large Sunday School or Adult Bible Fellowship. In any case, relationships are obviously good to have at church, but should they be the defining identity of the member? How do you know when this is someone's identity? Just ask them to switch Bible Fellowships or announce the change of worship service times. When you "shuffle the deck" of people in the church, you mess with the identity marker.

So what is the best answer? It is the Vision Pathway or "Purpose" – how your church best expresses its particular purposefulness in the kingdom. Imagine people who get their fundamental identity in the mission, values, strategy, mission measure and vision. Imagine how the 4 P's become changeable tools and building blocks in order to achieve a more transcendent vision.

