

Congregation in an Elementary School Paper No. OCCG-010

Angela Conaway, North Fort Bend church of Christ, Katy, TX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: As Christians at some point in our spiritual growth we must decide how “The Great Commission” applies to us. Reaching out to those who live in our town and neighborhood is our mission. If our area needs to be serviced by a local congregation, the next step you are immediately confronted with is where to meet. This may require us to think outside the box and look for an inexpensive way to do this and get started. This paper discusses using space in a local school or assisted living facility to do this.

KEY WORDS:

Church start up
Evangelism
Building
Assisted living facility

REPORT:

Depending on your background of growing up in the church we tend to think of the church and the building as one in the same. However, once you take a step back, the building is just the place we use to meet. As a church start up, especially one that is going out without the support from an established congregation, funds are limited, and credit history is non-existent. After you have a core group and you have meet together long enough to determine that your motives are pure, the area you are looking at evangelizing can support another congregation, and that you are ready to start reaching out; the next step is finding a place to meet. We quickly realized that going straight into an owned

building wasn't feasible. The next step was finding suitable temporary space. We contacted the local school district and received a listing of available school auditoriums we could rent on Sundays.



Benefits of renting from a school:

- Low start-up costs,
- Reasonable rental rates,
- No long term rental agreements, with the option of it being a long term situation,
- Immediate critical mass facility,
- Can likely have signage out Friday night and all day Saturday, sometimes not,
- Chairs and tables are provided and can be set up and taken down to suit,
- No utility costs,
- Flexible rental times on Sunday,
- Avoids problems of having cash for multiple year's lease payments on hand to start, and
- Allows more of your member energy to go into the Great Commission rather than facility maintenance activities from light bills to painting to yard work.

Drawbacks:

- No permanent feeling like having your own building, and which most prospects expect today.
- Sunday evening services cost as much as Sunday morning services.
- No mid-week services are allowed at many schools.
- Little flexibility for other Side Door events at other times to try to engage prospects.
- No onsite storage. You must bring in all your teaching materials and sound equipment—We purchased storage boxes and everyone has their part. In a start-up everyone has to pitch in. It provides the feeling of a family working together. (Note: everyone is pitching in and having a part achieves the desired goal of high member involvement)
- No signage during the week. A trailer sign needs to be stored during the week and moved in and out each week. Signage reminders of your existence during the week would be beneficial
- Subject to the personality of the school personnel.
- To tell everyone you meet in an elementary school would tend to have a short credibility period as people expect a “real” address.

With the exception of having to bring items each week and setting up because of no on-site storage, all the other activities to be done would happen irrespective of where the congregation meets.

In our smaller start-up situation, we primarily used our homes to overcome the location flexibility of the school we rented.

- We chose to host our Sunday evening service in the homes of our members on a rotational basis. We are hoping that the home setting might be more inviting

to prospects who are “unchurched”.

- We chose to host our midweek service in member’s homes also. We have a meal together so we can fellowship and then study. Again, we are hoping this home setting will appeal to those who are “unchurched”.

Since beginning, we have found another opportunity. A member from a different congregation moved into a local assisted living facility in our area. Not only was she not served by her former congregation, none of the residents were served by any church services unless someone came and picked them up. Assisted living facilities always have a chapel or other area suitable for church services and are happy for someone to assist their clients.

We have moved our Sunday evening service into this assisted living facility, providing advantages such as:

- The immediate ability to be of service to the church member.
- A free first-class facility for our services.
- A ready list of prospects to preach the Gospel to. Many of the prospect have spent a lifetime in some other group, and so progress will be slow in this area.

Beyond what is generally called a “Satellite Service” at an assisted living facility on Sunday night, a start-up group might consider this as their initial Sunday morning service location. It can provide a start-up facility with prospects supplied at no-cost while the new members literally become acquainted with one another and learn how to plan together.

Our particular group prefers to ultimately have our own location. We decided that due to the high cost of land in the area, we do not want to wait 10 years to be able to build a building. We are currently looking to rent a portion of a retail strip center. We have contacted a real estate agent who is

working with us. We are in the process of saving enough funds to cover the 5-year lease term before we sign the lease since the rental companies require the “officers” of the church to personally guarantee the entire lease. In the meantime, we are focusing on becoming a family and getting our name in the community through targeted events.

CONCLUSION:

Having a congregation in a school or an assisted living facility have a variety of plusses and minuses. This makes one of them a good or bad idea for you in the short run or even in the long run. They are certainly options we have in trying to determine how we do our part of the Great Commission. Options we do not have as we see new neighborhoods continue to grow is to do nothing or to continue putting off doing something year after year.

Reviewed by: Benton Baugh