

Spaces For Church Planting. #3 School or Community Space

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How do you establish that "outpost of hope ... infiltrating the local culture for the purposes of the kingdom?", as Rick Painter from Gateway Church, Seaford, Vic put it. Sharing a school or community building when not otherwise in use may achieve more than simply a space to gather.

Peter Caroline leader of Merri Creek Anglican found that a local primary school provided an excellent space. They had taken some time looking around for a venue including theatres, bowls clubs and redundant churches. They called the school during the school holidays and were able to speak with the principal.

It was a good venue because it was already established with chairs, AV system, kitchenette, upstairs library and an outside play space for kids. It was also affordable and insurance was covered by the school. Aesthetically, it was a tired space. Peter finds that there is a power in architecture to theologically lift people. Acoustically, it is too absorbent for corporate singing. as it is designed to manage school children.



Another downside was that it was invisible to the passing public during the week. Social media and personal invitation became important. Temporary signage before and during the service on Sunday morning may be all that can be provided on site. Otherwise, it is invisible. Other venues are needed for mid-week gatherings.

When construction work started at St. Alfred's, Blackburn North, the church moved in procession down the street to start meeting in the local school hall. During the 15-month construction period the membership grew by over a hundred.

Danny Ang from the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV) Mission Catalyst Team has noticed recent difficulties as many community halls and school facilities are already booked out. School sports halls can be very poor acoustically. However, when spaces are available mid-week, they have succeeded in "cultural insurgency" through art and craft events that have attracted seniors, and online gaming parties to which young people bring their laptops and Wi-Fi is provided. The BUV has provided placemakers to assist with these events which help to familiarise people with the church's venue.

So, what can an architect advise? If a client is willing, make any new community or school building flexible enough to be used by a church when otherwise vacant, including:

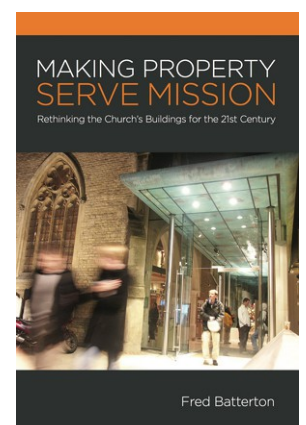
- Providing easy access, facilities and storage for others to use independently.
- Considering acoustics, providing AV and Wifi
- Enabling hospitality - easy access to a kitchen.

The cultural benefit to the community can be significant. It is also environmentally sustainable to double-use buildings rather than build many that are often left empty.

Many issues to consider - more covered in the book. Feedback welcome.

Next time - Social Enterprise.

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