
“How Sharing Your Church Property Could Start a New Church”

An inspiring movement across the USA and Canada continues to grow in impact and influence. In a wide variety of expressions, congregations are mothering new churches by sharing their church properties and reaching previously unchurched clusters of people in their community.

Pastor Ian Fitzpatrick pastors the Immanuel Church of the Nazarene in Toronto, Canada. This congregation hosts six different congregations in its church property that would normally house one congregation of approximately three hundred. By being willing to share their building, the church ministers to an extended fellowship of people from nearly forty different cultures. But this ministry is not an isolated example.

Pastor Jossie Owens ministers in Boston. She leads the Dorchester Second Church of the Nazarene where four different congregations share one property. They are now considering starting another new church to reach the unreacheds Vietnamese in their community. One congregation has expanded their ministry influence to a much larger and influential responsibility enrollment.

And the list of these multi-congregational churches is growing. In Chicago, district Superintendent Brian Wilson reports forty of their eighty churches are already sharing their buildings with other congregations. Our Metro New York District under the leadership of Dallas Mucci has been practicing this multiple use of church property for many years. Even cross-cultural congregations are experiencing this innovative trend, as Dr. Kim Lundell reports several Korean congregations now hosting new Hispanic churches. Hundreds of existing Nazarene Churches could immediately start a new church by adopting this pattern of sharing their church building with another congregation.

Like any Kingdom oriented movement, such faith driven ministries experience multiple obstacles and challenges. But the spiritual rewards are well worth any temporary tests. Where local church leaders can patiently guide the process, the results are both significant and life changing. And with each new church, dozens of new believers are brought to faith in Christ.

Scores of churches have discovered that by being willing to adjust a few personal conveniences, whole new communities of faith have been born. Like any birth experience, new life brings some accompanying travail. But with the thrill of new life, joyful parents quickly minimize any times of travail.

What the church experiences today parallels in some ways what many immigrants adopt as a way of life across the Border States and metropolitan areas of our nation. Many immigrant families commonly share living quarters originally designed for single family dwellings. For most, their hope is to eventually get established and obtain their own property. Many are able to endure the inconveniences since their living conditions mirror the “in-

between” spiritual situation of Kingdom minded believers.

However, some cultures and families are far more communal in nature. The concept of extended families sharing living spaces are both the acceptable and preferred environment. Grandparents, aunts and uncles are all a part of the many demands of child rearing. Mentoring becomes intergenerational, both for individuals and for couples. The same could be said for many multi-congregational churches. Driven by the ever present needs and limited resources common conveniences give way to the more pressing necessities of life.

Some churches seeing themselves as “incubators” for other new congregations. Within the safe environment of their ministry and church property, daughter congregations are born and nurtured. As each group reaches a level of maturity, they “leave the nest” to extend the Kingdom from their own base of ministry. As the new daughter congregation becomes self-governing, self-propagating and self-funding, they formally organize and charter as an indigenous Church of the Nazarene.

Yet, other systems are equally effective. For a number of justifiable reasons, some daughter churches wish to remain affiliated with and connected to their mother church. They may even continue to minister and worship in the same property, even though language and cultural distinctives separate most of their activities.

Both the incubator example and the multi-congregational expressions require mutual consideration and flexibility. Until a new church moves out of the host location, and especially if they intend to remain indefinitely, some guiding principles and property protocols are needed to enhance collaboration and promote unity among the ministries.

The same economic limitations that motivate churches to share property also guide some business ventures. Businesses like the Scott Rice Company have developed strategic plans for the development of multiple uses of a single property. Flexible work and meeting areas allow for multiple training activities at the same time. Shared office resources service multiple staff needs without duplicating expensive equipment purchases and office space. Conference rooms and hospitality areas provide for common group needs that can be utilized and shared in common. But they emphasize such cooperation can only occur where property protocols are clear and consistent.

Property protocols are simply the forms of courtesy and consideration observed by all the various individuals in the representative groups. To be able to accomplish the overall mission of each church requires this kind of collaboration and partnership.

As each leader and group understands and carefully practices the property protocols, the total ministry will experience an enhanced interaction between the groups and move adequate utilization of the available resources they share in common. Each church and its various leadership groups will no doubt want to discuss and walk through their own personalized list of “The Property Protocols”. The following list might serve as a basis for beginning discussion for each ministry to consider.

Property Protocols

1. Reserve all ministry and meeting space through the church office.
2. Respect closed doors and scheduled ministry sessions unless it is an emergency.
3. Return all worship and ministry spaces to their original condition.
4. Refrain from disruptive activities in your shared spaces.
5. Reinforce all property protocols for special ministry spaces in your group meetings.

No doubt the process of discussions and discovery of your ministry's own property protocols will prove invaluable. Because every property is unique, a clear understanding of your church's guidelines will enrich future unity and fellowship. Every group and leader will profit from this discussion.

When developing your own guidelines, keep in mind:

1. Less is more. Try to reduce your list to the most basic list possible. As important as the initial protocol list is the consistent practice of regularly reporting and communicating weekly affirmations and corrections. (see attachments at end of chapter)
2. Privacy and Flexibility. Maintaining a balance for all groups concerned between these twin values can be challenging. Some type of signals ought to be in place so group meetings are not disrupted by other groups. Yet permanent ownership of areas of the property, however desirable, will severely restrict extended and flexible use of all other groups. Balancing privacy and flexibility will remain an ongoing exercise for everyone involved.

In conclusion, at the heart of this growing practice of sharing property beats some core stewardship principles. When congregations and church leadership begin to view their church properties as stewards and managers rather than owners and land lords, major paradigm shifts in outreach can begin to occur. Church properties are not assets to be protected or maintained, they are resources. To be leveraged to extend the Kingdom of Christ. Our core values as a denomination reinforce this practice. The unreached masses of unchurched in our communities call for this kind of bold and decisive action. Sharing your church property with a new church may prove to be the most effective Kingdom building decision your church makes in this decade.