

Plenary 1 Responses

Arno said: We need to incorporate Prodigal Friendly thinking in ‘our vision, mission, values & theology’. How do we do that?

‘Our vision, mission, values & theology’

- Need to have the Prodigal Friendly Thinking concept as a *clear and deliberate* policy.
- Need to *talk* about, frequently *revisit* and ‘own’ the Prodigal Friendly vision.
- Mission – Need to *communicate* that what ‘we are **about**’ is different to ‘what we do’. What we **do** may change but what we are **about** remains constant.
- We need to *value* people where ever they are; ‘in’ the church or outside it/because in them we *can see God*. (Created in His Image)
- Need to be about *building relationships* that go beyond prejudices.
- Should reflect the importance of prayer for the prodigals.....*What we value we pray about and what we pray about we value*.
- Should reflect the importance of the ‘one another’ verses. (Love one another, bear with one another, share with one another, etc.).
- Develop a theology of ‘*church as family*’ not ‘church as meetings’ (Jesus’ model with disciples).

Acceptance, love and forgiveness

- People from any situation need to be accepted and loved - gently shown what God wants.
- Find the reasons why people have left.
- Hospital for sinners, give people space to tell their story.
- Be careful how we talk about sin - attitude such as arrogance can be more damaging to others than sinful behaviour e.g. sexual sin.
- Do we tolerate or celebrate ourselves and others.
- Servant church, integrity is key. DNA has to be built into mind of congregation “We will accept you as you are”.
- Relational church: the right order of belong, believe, behave. Asking always ‘do we have a relational environment?’

Understand and mix with the secular world

- Make people who have left the church feel that their new situation is still important and valued by church members.
- Get involved where prodigals have gone to; football, skateboard, café. One church bought a nightclub.
- Experiment with different ways of being church – make church accessible.

Is Outreach and Evangelism the same as being Prodigal Friendly?

Vision and mission must underline influence every decision

Can you think of 'one thing' that would make it harder for prodigals to leave?

Forgiveness

- Use 'followers of Jesus' rather than Christians as a phrase

A listening church

- To allow people to say when they've been hurt
- Avoid public disagreement
- Being real
- Give them space to share
- Empowering with responsibility

Give people a role

- Develop gifts at an early age
- Encourage them to use their gifts to make them wanted and loved
- Allow people to be themselves

Allow them to leave

- 'With permission they have less to rebel against'
- Let them go but let them know they are always welcome back

'Leadership needs to be vulnerable and not appear perfect'

Relationships are more important than power...

... but we can't compromise on doctrinal fundamentals

- One person said, "When my mother died no one visited me, no one talked to me at church."
- "One thing" is LOVE. It is love that binds a family together, so it should also be with church, together through good times and bad.
- It's not about looking at issues and roles but about looking at **people**.
- People withdraw from relationships before they disappear.....
- Genuine, real, *sacrificial love* and care within fellowships.
- If relationships were stronger it would be harder to leave.
- Real relationships mean sacrificing time.....
- Real, genuine, accepting love – Christ-like love.
- Honesty.
- 'Belonging' is key. Programmes need to recognise that.
- Make sure Sunday flows through the rest of the week (with on going contact).
- People who belong find it harder to leave.
- Involving people by being vulnerable to them, "Can you do something for us" says 'we need you'.

Create nurture groups

- Beta groups following on from Alpha
- Creating opportunities to build on contacts/friendships
- Opportunities to eat together

What can we do to build relationships with those we don't understand whilst 'the sun shines' (i.e. before things go wrong)?

Church is about getting people into the Kingdom not church

Do you have to understand someone to love them?

Listen to them

- Listening intentionally
- Listening skills
- “Customer service training in churches”
- Understand someone else's life
- “Needs to talk to those we don't need to talk to”
- One church has a commitment by the leaders that they will give a pastoral visit once a year to look together at “how am I in God” “Is the church meeting my needs” “Do I want to be more or less involved.
- Ok to have differences of opinions

Hospitality

- **Need to check our priorities**
- Something on eating together
- Sharing a meal, hospitality, preferably on mutual territory
- Identify their gifts

Ideas

- Social outreach committee (No preaching)
- Help people reach their potential and minimise their problems
- “Put fathers and mothers on the door, rather than brothers and sisters”
- Men's activities outside church
- Social action projects or other projects – people building relationships as they work alongside one another – it's more natural.
- Mix up groupings i.e. crèche workers and older peoples groups, etc. from time to time.
- Cultural evenings for those churches with cross cultural mix – willingness to learn from those from another culture.

People skills

- Use the phrase “Tell me your story”.
- Have an attitude that the ‘other person may be right or have a perspective I have missed’.
- Genuine appreciation for the other person's walk with the Lord and their differences.
- Make disciples not coverts.
- Teach love and relationships from the pulpit (AND MODEL IT).
- Make an active decision to relate to those who don't naturally gravitate towards.
- Make friends with your enemies.
- Attitudes – see differences as positive, see people as holding potential not having problems.
- Customer service training in churches.
- Teach the church that they are **all** pastors.