

RETHINKING THE ISSUES – CHURCH SIGNS

Signs are what we look for when we want information. Have you looked at your church sign lately? Are you able to read it from further than 10 m away? Can the sign be read by a driver passing your building at 60 km/hour?

Following are some common shortcomings of church signs identified in a study^[1] by Thomas Donnachie, United Methodist Pastor in New Castle, Delaware.

- Signs with fancy or small lettering made reading them very difficult
- Well intentioned shrubbery made viewing signs challenging
- Too much information for motorists to take in
- Signs not illuminated were of no value at night
- Some signs were set too far back on the property
- Signs in poor repair

We are a visual society and expect to be able to get the information we need by seeing it. For signs this usually means the first time past. Take a drive around your community and notice the different signs. You will notice that good signs will get your attention and identify the organization.

Along with the exterior of the building your sign is a strategic component of your evangelism. Some people will determine if they will enter your building based on your sign. That means your sign must communicate information about your church that may be of interest to the reader.

Basic Identification

If they are looking for you then they need to know when they have found you. An identification sign will include at least the name of the church but it is also valuable to include your logo if you have one. Your phone number gives them the opportunity to contact the church at their convenience to get answers to a number of questions they may want answered before attending their first time. If your church has a website the website address will give them the opportunity to get to know you better.

Now Add Value

The question to consider now is what can be added that will attract people who are not specifically looking to find your church. Are you starting a new program which will meet the needs of a particular segment of your community? New programs also communicate that the congregation is active.

Sermon topics can add value if they communicate that the pastor will be addressing a specific need or interest. Remember that Jesus generally taught by responding to expressed needs or by exposing needs and then speaking to them.



Changeable signs allow you to give the community a laugh, pique their curiosity, draw their attention to an important thought, introduce new ministries, publicize events and generally give your church a personality through the messages that appear.

A note of caution is to remember that what may be an acceptable message to those inside the church may not be viewed positively by others.

What You Probably Don't Need on a Sign

When designing a sign remember to keep it simple. You must communicate the essential information while making it easy for motorists to read.

Your address is of low importance because they are already there. You probably want it on your building but it is not really necessary on your sign.

Construction

An attractive design for a church sign can be made with the help of a graphic artist or by using online design software provided by sign manufacturers. Decide if this is to be a static identification sign or if you will want changeable text. What about illumination? In Canada a significant number of people drive to and from work in the dark for several months of the year. These are also the months when most churches are at their busiest with programs. Many of your target audience may be missed if your sign is not illuminated.

Location

Set it as close to the road as bylaws permit. Consider your audience. How will they best view it? If it is parallel to the road they will have little, if any, opportunity to get the information. Perpendicular to the road or head-on is the best placement. Get in your car and approach your property from all directions. Is there one spot that can be seen from all approaches? Is it highly visible from the direction of the heaviest traffic? If you are on a corner will you require two signs, either in two locations or perhaps in the same location but at different angles. Consider the length of time that people will be close enough to be able to read your sign while driving towards it. Is it blocked by shrubs or trees? If so can they be trimmed or relocated?

It is important to remember that the function of the sign is to attract and inform and it should attract and inform people who are not already attending your fellowship. For the purpose of the sign is to encourage people to come in so they may be made aware of the ultimate sign, that Jesus is the Way.^[2]

[1] Thomas Donnachie in The Clergy Journal

[2] Acknowledgment to Church Extension "Planning Guide" publications

