

URBAN CURRENT

Your church in an urbanized world

Your church exists in an urbanized world. How is it going?

What cities do, what cities say, what cities think, what cities promote, now dominates the entire world. Regardless of where you are located or how you think of yourself — rural, suburban, small town, small city — you are living and functioning in an urbanized culture, an urbanized atmosphere. Urban good, bad, and ugly is now everyone's reality. This truth has theological, philosophical, sociological, psychological, personal, and spiritual ramifications. Understanding the environment in which you serve, exegeting the environment in which you minister, is essential to effectiveness. How is it going?

Many are describing the contemporary scene in primarily post-modern terminology. I have no fight with that view. What is important to note, however, is the connection between post-modernism and urbanism.

The following points are from a piece titled "What To Remember When Building Bridges To Post-moderns." (*On Mission* special issue 2006)

- Discipleship is a lifelong process, not just a one-time event.
- A greater emphasis needs to be placed on authentic connected relationships. Evangelism is a lifestyle, not just inviting someone to church.
- One of the most effective evangelism strategies is to cultivate genuine friendships with people who are nonbelievers, engaging them in thoughtful, respectful conversation about what's important to them.
- Those with foresight and strength to speak the truth in love will have the most impact.
- Genuine humility and love will win over anyone anytime.
- Centralize everything with Jesus. Post-moderns like Jesus but they don't like the church.
- People tend to think narratively rather than propositionally. Your personal story of salvation will carry a lot of weight.

- Post-moderns have extreme openness to spiritual things. Create opportunities for spiritual conversations.
- Don't try to sell them. Rather, lead them into discovery.

All these tips were extremely pertinent a generation ago in my urban setting. I learned years back that these were essentials in connecting with urbanites. Not only is there a link between urbanism and post-modernism, the city led our entire culture to its present reality. This is no surprise. Thirty-five years ago I was trying to tell people, "What I deal with today, you'll be dealing with tomorrow."

Consider these game-changing, culture-altering issues. They were our reality in the city three decades ago.

1. The homosexual agenda: Launched in cities, it is now altering our culture through new marriage laws. A second impact is the wide-open propagandizing through public education and pop culture, causing many young people (don't think there aren't some in your youth group) to approach their sexuality without absolute truth in the mix. Call it gender confusion.
2. The multi-cultural thing was an urban reality that is now pressing in everywhere from small city to rural areas. This generation is growing up without some of the boundaries and biases of the past.
3. Maybe to a lesser degree in the mind of many, but not in reality, the crime issue. The dangerous inner city zones have now leaked to places like Pearl, MS, Littleton, CO, Newtown, CT, and Everytown, U.S.A. People are locking their doors and looking over their shoulders, horrified at things happening close to them. Events like church shootings and child abuse have congregations everywhere giving attention to things that were unheard of a few years ago.

Being an effective, New Testament church in an urbanized world will mean giving attention to the following ...

Pursuing **INCARNATIONAL** ministry mod-

eled after Jesus, who left glory to "dwell among us." Today's local church cannot be insulated or isolationist. We must invite engagement with the community and the culture. We must wrestle with "in the world, but not of it" for the sake of the gospel.

PERSONAL ministry must permeate everything the church does. High touch is Jesus' way in a high tech world. People are craving authentic relationships. How do we prioritize this, pursue it, and practice it?

INTENTIONAL ministry must mark the way we do business. Randomness, floating, allowing the hottest church trend, current theological fad, or contemporary culture to drive us is not acceptable. We must be rooted in scripture, married to the mission Jesus gave us, committed to practicing and teaching Biblical truth.

CROSS-CULTURAL ministry is not the call to a few; it's the call to Jesus' church. "Reaching people who are not like the majority of us," needs to be at the very heart of what we do. This is not always ethnic. It may be sociological. It may be political, generational, or cultural.

Above all, **SUPERNATURAL** ministry is the crying need of the day. Our churches will not survive, much less be effective on a New Testament scale, if we are not soaked and saturated in the practice of prayer and routine experiencing of the power of God.

How are we doing?

Your church is in an urbanized world. Let's relentlessly pursue New Testament effectiveness. Let's follow Paul as he follows Jesus. Moral, religious, Jewish, Paul could not have been more foreign to Corinthian culture. He told the Corinthians "Death works in us but life in you."

by Charles Lyons, Pastor
Armitage Baptist Church,
Chicago, Illinois
charles.lyons@armitagechurch.org

