

Developing a Teaching Team

During my last 8 years as Senior Pastor at Kentwood Community Church (KCC) we utilized a Teaching Team for communicating in our midweek and weekend worship services. Many people have asked me about why we went to this approach and how we worked as a team. The approach has been used in churches served by multiple pastors (like KCC) and churches served by solo pastors where other members of the Teaching Team were lay leaders.

Why a Teaching Team?

Our philosophy of ministry was that “KCC would be fully functional in its mission and vision without being dependent on any one person.” This led us to the conclusion that with me communicating 45+ weekends a year the church was overly dependent upon me in that area. Earlier in our history it was appropriate for one communicator to speak this often, but as the church matured and other gifted preachers joined the team we made the transition.

There is value in people hearing God’s Word through a variety of communicators. In our case, I was an Anglo grandfather who had grown up in the Wesleyan church, another was an Anglo stepfather and father who had converted to Christ out of nominal Catholicism in his 20’s, another was an African American who had grown up in a traditional Black Baptist Church and adopted two older children, and another was an Anglo mother who had just had her first child. The congregation heard the same Word through a variety of people living out their faith in a variety of life stages and family situations, with diversity in gender and ethnicity.

We benefited from planning the messages as a team, so the variety of perspectives and insights could be incorporated into each message.

How did the Teaching Team function?

Unlike many shared pulpits where it’s simply a matter of dividing up the calendar among communicators, the Team worked together in laying out the sermon series schedule for the year, designing the messages, and giving feedback to each other so we could keep growing as preachers. The weekend team consisted of four pastors – as Senior Pastor I taught about 30 weekends a year, while each of the other team members taught 6 weekends a year (the remaining weekends were for theme weekends like missions or for guest speakers).

Once a year the team got away for a couple of days to attempt to plan the preaching calendar for the coming year. I as Senior Pastor led the team through evaluating where our congregation was at in terms of needs, identifying what areas of our mission needed to be supported through teaching, generating ideas on which parts of Scripture might speak most directly to the congregation’s current spiritual formation, and identifying tentative first and second choice for series through the coming year.

Once a week the team met, usually for an hour, giving 15 minutes of feedback to the previous weekend’s communicator (prompted by a feedback form) and give 45 minutes of input to the communicator who would be preaching a couple of weeks later (that person would provide a preparation guide and tentative outline to brief other team members prior to the meeting).

No matter who was preaching, it was often mentioned that we had worked as a team in preparing the message even though one member of the team was presenting the message.

It was an adjustment at first for the congregation as they had been used to hearing one primary communicator, and some people were “fans” of a certain preacher (not unlike Corinthians – “I follow Paul,” “I follow Apollos,” etc.). After the adjustment, there was widespread appreciation.

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