

Suburban Parking Lot Church...giving everything away

The Parking Lot church is not dependant on any external props, facilities, or permissions. It simply gathers to love God and love persons, without breaking any public rules or relying on any required set of circumstances. As people arrive in their vehicles, or by foot, the first ones there just settle in an open spot on the parking lot. Usually, they get near a shade tree in summer, or in a sunny spot in the winter. When it rains, the park pavilion nearby is always empty (who else would go to a park when it's raining) so they cluster there. Most bring lawn chairs. A few sit on their vehicle or the curb. The church arrives in their hearts, and leaves in their hearts.

Someone usually brings a box and another brings a boot. As persons arrive they put small bags of groceries in the box, and offerings in the boot while others chat. One lady comes with her battery operated keyboard and guides the group through a few worship songs and scriptures. Or, sometimes she uses just a CD, or a testimony, or "nature" to inspire worship.

The volunteer leader almost always has a "Thank You" note to read from some recipient of the church's ministry, and he always makes a big deal out of the box of food: who has a report on last week's food recipient, who wants to take it today, do any kids have something to put into the box, what are some of the contents (he holds up tuna, rice, beans, mac & cheese, cereal, and toothpaste). It's kind of their weekly way of living-out a deeply held value.

A prayer time is facilitated by another volunteer (sometimes they share and pray for special needs longer than any other activity during the gathering).

New needs or ministry projects come up often from whoever runs across it. The church values the idea of responding to whoever or whatever God brings across their path during the week. Always by the end of the month the offerings for that month are given away to a person in need, and a mission of some sort (often to multiple items that arise.) Some past examples include: shoes for orphans, Christmas gifts for prisoner families, supplies for hurricane victims, food and arrival kits for refugees entering the U.S., medicine for a transplant patient, clothes for homeless shelters, specific missionaries, cereal for a children's home,

cash for families whose homes have burned, or for expectant parents without insurance...you get the idea!

There is a Bible time during which the leader guides the group in discussing a few verses of scripture. He kind of keeps the discussion on track, but frequently a personal comment by someone about how the scripture fits their own current life circumstances becomes the real heart of the discipleship time. People respond well to this “shared dialogue” approach. They internalize the truth of scripture and grow in how they live with Christ during the week.

Then it’s over with a short prayer. No big fanfare. Someone gets the food box. Others pack up shoes, or toiletries, or coats, or kitchen utensils, or clothes that have been collected for a ministry project...which they will hand deliver during the week. One or two leave with checks to put in the hands of a needy family.

If someone becomes a new Christ-follower the church caravans to the nearest backyard pool to celebrate their baptism. Most hang around and talk in groups of two or three. And within 30 to 40 minutes it’s just an asphalt parking lot again. The church has filtered back into the community. They live-out their core values for another week:

Core Values

1. Share God’s love through kindness and prayer everyday.
2. Do everything a church should do, but keep it basic: worship God, learn & live the Bible, help hurting people, stand by each other, and graciously share Christ.
3. Give all offerings away...to missions and to persons God brings our way.
4. “Where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” Matthew 18:20

The “green” church exemplifies the most elemental & Biblical definition of church I’ve ever heard:

“A group of Christ-followers who fully function, believe, and understand themselves to be the Body of Christ in their circles of influence”

The Bible doesn't give us just one verse or passage that concisely defines "church".....we have to read scripture and look for the recurring patterns or the Christ-like "rhythms of life" that Christians practiced and taught as they came together. How does God's Spirit & Word guide you to define church?