

Hospitality Office Bearer Led Assimilation

There's a lot of discussion in church and ministry circles as what do office bearers, elders, and deacons actually do? There's a lot they can do but typically and traditionally in most churches, the office bearers make the decisions that govern in the direction of the church, and if you're an office bearer you have a monthly or bimonthly meeting and you talk about budget. You talk about building issues if you have a building and so forth. And that's all going to probably stick around with the church. But I will tell you that what's really effective is if the office bearers join the hospitality office bearer led assimilation effort. If as a leader, you can sort of get that corporate culture in the office bearers, your church can be impacted in a very positive way for Christ.

I mentioned Clement of Rome and I just want to mention that again. Has anyone indeed shared with you without attesting the excellence and firmness of your faith without broadcasting your spirit of unbounded hospitality? Now how did that hospitality occur in the Corinth church that Clement is writing to? I submit to you that if you were to really study that church if we could, you'll probably find that there is a culture of elder and deacon office bearer led hospitality.

Now, in some ways, what an elder deacon can do is form what I would call term small groups. What that is if an office bearer has someone over to their house call it a little small group. It meets once, one time. So you organize your office bearers in hospitality. If you can get an elder and a deacon to band together, to go around and invite people all over it's like a little team, that would be huge. 1 Peter 4:9, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." If you can have that positive people matter attitude in local church, that is huge, and the office bearers can be critical and a key part to that.

It's fascinating that actual qualification of an office bearer. It even says rather that he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, self-controlled, and very holy in discipline. What you could do as office bearers is point out the critical nature of being an office bearer and actually make a schedule of what team is going to get together and invite new attendees or invite people who are sort of involved but not going that much over to their houses.

Let's talk about what does the office bearer actually do? And let's get very practical. The first thing is the pastor and the office bearers pick a date. Get a schedule. Do it. Then the pastor or office bearers—and a lot of times I find it's like the pastor—invite the new attendees with—and this is important—some

existing attendees. So you actually bring some existing people in church with new people in church to a lunch or dinner after church to someone's house. If necessary, at the church or whatever it takes to bring that proximity. During the week. At a restaurant. Whatever.

Here's something crucial. The meeting is to last two to three hours. No more. If you make it like seven hours, that's not reproducible and that's not sustainable and quickly your office bearers or the people that come will burn out. What we want is the office bearer to conduct a simple meeting, so the host office bearer conducts a meeting. Let's talk about the meeting. What does the meeting look like? Well, introductions with name tags if that's appropriate in your culture. Maybe let the people tell a little bit about themselves as they're coming. You go around. How they found out about the church is always an interesting story.

Then eat. I can say no more about that. But while you're eating, as the leader or an office bearer leading, it's usually a good idea to allow the persons invited to bring something. Now you say, "They're supposed to be our guests." But bring something especially if that person or family asks. That's really crucial because a lot of times you'll invite someone and they'll say, "Can I bring a salad?" Say yes! Because if they own the process of that meeting and that getting together and bring something, they're on board with you. If they don't want to, fine. If they say, "I'll just show up," that's fine too. But if they ever ask to bring something, by all means let them do so.

While eating, conduct the conversation so that everyone gets an opportunity to talk. That's really important that the office bearer if a pastor's there or whatever, that one person doesn't do all the talking, that everybody is asked a question. Everybody talks about themselves a little bit so that there is this feeling like we got to know everybody. Maybe you want to have a question. A question would be like "What's your hometown? What did you like about your hometown?" and so forth. There's all sorts of serendipitous type questions that you can share when people are at the meeting.

In the eating time we're doing a Bible reading passage. This is really important. I like to share a passage. Now if your church is on a Bible reading plan, do the Bible reading plan for the day so that people see the piety that characterizes your local church.

Number five, have an elder or leader share why they grow at the church. This is really important. An elder or a leader gets involved and shares "Why do I love this local church?" And then if comfortable, ask each person their spiritual journey. A lot of times people will love to tell it. Do they want to have anything to share about their walk with God and how they became a Christian?

Number seven, keep an eye out. So you're having this meeting. You have your elders and leaders to keep an eye out for gifts and interest and report the findings to the pastors at the monthly leaders meeting so that when we find this information, write it down and bring it to the elder deacon, the consistory meeting, the Presbyterian meeting, whatever you call that meeting.

Finally, dismiss the group. Keep the meetings under three hours. This is important again if hospitality is sustainable. Here's some reproducible things.

Number one, stay away from the perfect house syndrome. I'll tell you this has sunk many hospitality initiative in many churches where people do not invite people over because the house is too perfect. Maybe it's good that you have a meeting with the office bearers and their wives. Talk about hospitality and talk about the things in this presentation and then talk about the perfect house syndrome. Here's why it's so important. If you house, if the leader's house is not perfect, then the person that is reached does not feel like their house has to be perfect in order to have somebody else over. Very reproducible issue.

Next, train your office bearers not to dominate discussion or to be the answer people. Sometimes you'll have an elder who is really smart and they can answer almost any question. Or the pastor is that way. Somehow that understanding, don't dominate every discussion. Make it so that other people get to talk.

Lastly, under-delivering is better than over-delivering. When you have the meeting, don't over-sell the church. Don't get in the mind that we meet every need, and then what happens they find a need that isn't met and then they get very upset. These are just reproducible things to always keep in mind when the office bearers lead in hospitality.

The fact of the matter is hospitality is the portal to more fully being in the body of Christ. I just think about Romans 12:4. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function. So in Christ. We who are many form one body and each member belongs to each other. Notice that's powerful. Each member belongs to each other. So in some ways, how is that going to be understood if in fact people are not connecting with one another.

From the first time they come to the church and throughout the process of being there to create that relational body of Christ is absolutely crucial. Your office bearers are a critical piece, an important role in creating the hospitality culture in your local church.