

Maybe churches should ‘brag’ about helping communities

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=4912>

There is one thing that I can think of that churches are really lousy at doing and that’s bragging. Remember that old saying, “it ain’t braggin’ if it’s the truth?”

In last week’s article, I wrote about the growing trend to demonize churches as being a burden on society. It doesn’t take much of a Google search to turn up complaints against churches and more than a strong suggestion that churches aren’t paying their fair share of their burden on society because they don’t pay property or income taxes. And that is leading to some real discrimination against churches.

For example, The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty is helping the Elijah Group, a small evangelical church in Leon Valley, Texas (a suburb of San Antonio) regain its right to hold worship services in their church building on Sunday mornings. The city, through zoning codes it has adopted, has prohibited the church from doing so, claiming that “it can treat churches differently because they don’t produce tax revenue.”

Because so many cities are going broke, some city governments are looking for any means available to them to enhance revenues, and that has led to the practice of driving out any organization that doesn’t generate property taxes. In cases like the aforementioned one, adopting a zoning code that is hostile to churches, or perhaps even one particular church, amounts to harassment under the guise of law.

What is sad is that these cities are literally driving out the best of their citizens, without recognizing the high value that these citizens bring to their communities. And that leads me to my opening comment about churches being lousy at bragging. Perhaps they’re bad at it because they are admonished by Scripture to keep their gifts between themselves and God, and not be like the rich of that day who made a show of their giving to gain the favor of other people. But that’s not the kind of bragging I’m talking about.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16, “You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world - like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (NLT)

The truth is that few people know just how much good churches and other faith-based organizations do for their community. Unchurched people think the extent of good churches do are a few missionaries to Africa, and don’t have a clue about how many ministries churches provide to those who live near to them.

My own church has adopted a nearby low-income neighborhood to assist them with food, clothing, assistance in maintaining their homes and providing activities for their children. And it is done without any expectation that those neighbors attend our church.

It also participates in the Angel Food program, as many other Tulsa area churches do, that provides a source for low-cost groceries. It is open to anyone inside or outside of our church. Another service that it sponsors is Financial Peace University, a program developed by Dave Ramsey (whose column runs in the Tulsa Beacon and whose show is on KCFO AM970 each weekday afternoon) that helps people manage their finances and get out of debt by using Godly principles.

There are other churches that provide car clinics for single moms, counseling for unwed mothers, couples that are considering divorce, and many other social problems that have become rampant in America.

They provide after-school programs for latchkey kids, mother's day out for single moms that just need a break, and literally thousands of wholesome activities for kids of all ages.

They have become places where people can seek help without receiving either admonishment or entitlements, where they are accepted, with love, just as they are, and a place where close friendships and relationships create the best citizens that America has to offer. And that's naming just a few.

It might be impossible for anyone to quantify the actual dollar value that churches bring to their communities, but the fact is that it is immeasurable. Unfortunately, it is somewhat invisible, and that's where churches need to engage in a kind of Godly bragging, the kind that Jesus was talking about.

Churches need to let their communities know what they do for them, and communities need to take notice of how self-destructive it would be to say that, just because churches don't pay taxes, they've got to go.

©2011 Randy W. Bright

Randy W. Bright, AIA, NCARB, is an architect who specializes in church and church-related projects. You may contact him at 918-582-3972, rwbrightchurcharch@sbcglobal.net or www.churcharchitect.net.

This entry was posted on Thursday, January 20th, 2011 and is filed under [Columns](#).