

Why People Trust Strangers Over Your Church - Part 2

People are increasingly more trusting of strangers than they are of institutions.

This is evidenced by the popularity of ridesharing (Uber), crowdfunding (GoFundMe) and renting extra bedrooms or houses (Airbnb).

What then does this mean for the local church and how should churches respond?

1. Focus on the desire for community and introduce people to people.

Within your church and within your town or city, build in opportunities for people to get to know one another and start building trust. Encourage people to share rides, eat in peoples' homes, share stuff (lawn mowers, snow blowers and so on), attend community events and meet others.

The need for community - to be known, respected and cared for - never goes away as a human need.

Figure out how as a church you can be a good, welcoming, trustworthy community to those in your town and city, especially those that desperately need more genuine community.

It's relationships and it's people that God uses again and again to change lives and change neighborhoods. Get to know people. Help people get to know other people. Help people help each other out.

2. Be a movement, not just a tagline or a church name.

Invite people into a purpose, a movement, not to a building or institution.

People use these apps and social economy platforms because it helps them and helps others.

People need to see how your time, money and talents (and theirs, too, if they join your movement) will make a tangible difference here and now, not just to an institution or to vague "others" but to real people and to your neighborhoods.

Stop expecting people to trust you or come because of your denomination, titles, building. Rebuild your trust quotient as a people who have joined God's mission of reconciliation and healing wrongs in our world.

People won't trust your church because of your denomination, name, building, titles or because you've existed in the town for a long time.

Reduce the trust leap for your church. Give others ways to safely interact, explore, see you out in the community and see what you're up to as a people of faith in making a difference.

Others will start to trust you if they can see how you care for the community and how you care for others. That's like getting the best reviews over and over again on Airbnb. Everyone will want to experience time with you.

3. Be a safe place to explore.

One of the features most sharing economies have in common is that you can search different options and users until you find one you are comfortable with. They give you names and ratings of other users, which makes it easier for us to trust others.

The lesson here for the church is to look at what you do inside the church, outside the church and online through the eyes of an explorer. Is your community understandable, helpful and safe for an explorer of faith?

One thing many local churches could immediately do is make their next step clearer.

When someone comes for the first time (or has been visiting for a little while), is it easy to see what their next step is when they are ready to take the next trust leap and lean into your community more or learn more?

I've discovered next steps are often very unclear in our churches. Saying "Please talk to (insert name) after the service if you're interested" is not helpful to the new person.

Reduce the unknowns so it's easier for people to take the next trust leap in your church.

4. Recognize that your online presence matters.

Technology is changing how much information we can gather quickly about your local church and leaders. Technology is giving people the opportunity to check you out long before they decide to interact with your community.

People are checking you out, picking up cues about you, gathering information about your presence or lack thereof in the community, all from looking online at your website and social media.

Your online presence allows people an option to safely explore you at a distance. They are deciding how much they trust you, even before they meet you.

So make sure your online presence captures who you are, who you are becoming and the movement you are a part of in your community and world.

Give opportunities for people to interact with your church and its members online. Give lots of options for people to see what you are up to, listen to messages, know what to expect if they join you at an event in the community or come check out a program at your church.

Online is a great place to reduce the unknowns.

5. Become involved in these networks.

Christians need to be out there in the world and engaging in these different platforms that invite people to trust strangers.

Do you know what we have tended to do instead? Huddle together and create our own Christian version of these platforms. That is not the solution. If we are separate from the world, we can't be salt and light.

Instead, what if we engaged the existing economy-sharing systems and used our gifts of hospitality, generosity, sharing, listening, time? Be authentic, honest and generous - showing God's character - in all your interactions.

I do think it is good news that how trust flows through society is shifting toward distributed trust. We never should have relied on our buildings, titles or institutions to earn trust.

This will force us to take a more humble position and remember what it means to

build trust, transparency, connections and accountability both within our churches and in our wider communities.

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Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part series. Part one is available [here](#).