

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Ways

***YOUR PARKING LOT MIGHT BE HOLDING BACK
THE REDEMPTIVE POTENTIAL OF YOUR CHURCH***

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Believe it or not, your parking lot could be the thing that is holding back the potential of your church. In fact, your church might not be living up to its total calling because of what is happening at the parking lot. We call this site unSeminary. Today, we're diving into an issue we can guarantee that no seminary has talked about anywhere before:

Your Parking Lot Might be Limiting the Redemptive Potential of Your Church!

Cars have a profound impact on the manner in which we "do" church across the country. As the adoption of the car took off in the first half of last century, our approach to churches changed and morphed accordingly. The local parish gave way to the regional church which ended up paving the way for the entire mega-church movement, which became a fertile ground for the multisite movement. We would do well to understand the impact of cars and connecting our parking lots to our ministry because they are so connected to what we do. Here are a few ways that parking lots might be negatively impacting your ministry.

A Full Parking Lot is Limiting Your Church

Obviously, most church leaders are inside their buildings when their services start. Your people might know that you have a problem and you're never around to see it.

Full parking lots are a great sign because that implies lots of people are attending your church. However, if they are "too full" like a packed auditorium, it can actually turn people off.

Most municipalities' bylaws are inadequate to tackle the required parking spots per seat in the main auditorium. Lots of cities typically only require 1 spot for every 4 seats in your auditorium. (I know one city by us that only requires 1 for every 40!) **My experience suggests that your church needs 1 spot for every 2 seats in your auditorium.** Most legacy church buildings were not built with this much space and might get cramped every week.

If your parking lot is more than 70% full as your services are starting, it's time to start looking for better parking solutions. You want your guests to be able to find a spot easily.

Four Tactics for Dealing with a Full Parking Lot:

- **Street Parking** // Diving into your municipalities parking bylaws might reveal that your area allows street parking on Sunday. In many regions, the rules pertaining to weekend street parking are different during the week. It's worthwhile investing the time to figure out if this type of opportunity exists on the streets around your building.

- **Cross Use Agreements** // Look around your immediate neighbors and find someone who you could borrow spots from. Oftentimes, other businesses and organizations will be open to you using their empty parking spots. However it's much better to approach them and talk about it rather than just starting to use it.
- **Park Your Leaders Off Site** // Those who volunteer and lead at your church should be encouraged (or even required) to park off your location. Cast vision with them around the idea of creating more space for visitors and ask them to do the extra walk.
- **Shuttle Buses** // Churches facing a more acute parking problem might need to resort to off-site parking that isn't adjacent to their property and might need to offer remote parking supported by shuttle buses. This approach should ideally be the "last stop" before you look at building more parking spaces. It can be a great solution and provide good service for families connecting with your church.

Church Parking Lots without Volunteers Are Missed Opportunities

If your church doesn't have people serving on a parking team, you must know that people within your church are missing out on a perfect service opportunity. Over the years, I've found that churches that have parking teams are actively engaging a group of volunteers that lots of other churches seem to be unable to connect with. I love the churches that have parking teams which espouse an almost superhero-like ethics as they serve outdoors all year long. "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays this team from the swift completion of their appointed service"... even the postal service can't claim that anymore!

Your church grows when more people get plugged in and they spread the word among their friends. As you get this group of volunteers plugged into your church, they will start telling other people. Also, churches develop faster when they see more people getting plugged into the community. As you move a group of people from anonymity to community through serving on a team, the church is inevitably strengthened.



5 Tips for Launching a Parking Team

- **Start with the Who** // The team leader is critically important for this team. (Any team, really!) Find an outgoing team builder who doesn't mind asking people to join the team. Typically these are high energy folks because it takes a lot to push and stay outdoors all year long!
- **Launch in a Mild Season** // Please don't launch this team in July if your church is in Florida, or in January if you're in the upper peninsula of Michigan. Launch the team in a "shoulder season" where your team can effectively do its task before the heat or cold sets in.
- **Consider the Uniform** // Give your people something to wear that will help them stand out while serving. Think about the different kinds of weather when considering various parts of the uniform.
- **Training! Training! Training!** // Make sure to think through exactly what kind of experience you want your guests to have upon their arrival. Talk it over with the team before they start. Draw it out on a diagram or two for the visual learners. Oftentimes, theme parks do a fantastic job of parking people. Maybe you could take your people to visit a theme park to watch and understand what they do.
- **Celebrate Lots!** // This team needs lots of public celebration and admiration. These people are considered to be heroes of the church because of what they do for you. Talk lots about them from the stage and celebrate their service. You can't overemphasize how amazing this group of people really is!

Your Church's Parking Lot is a First Impression... all week long!

The first thing that most people typically see about your church is your parking lot. This

is not only the case on weekends when your guests arrive, but also all week long as most people just drive by your parking lot.

I've seen some churches with a small forest growing between the cracks in the parking lot by communicating that it's a very long time since anyone parked there. We've all seen a worn out parking lot that hasn't been painted since the Spice Girls were on Top 10 radio and it all looks far too depressing.

Stand back and look at your parking lot. If it were the only thing that people knew about your church, what would it communicate? For most of us, it is the only thing people know about and identify with our churches because they simply drive by and don't come in. Ensure your parking lot communicates that your church is welcoming and open for one and all!

On a related note... have you ever stopped to consider what your parking lot communicates if it's empty throughout the week? All of our buildings have their heaviest usage during the weekends, but does that mean they're completely empty during the week? Does an empty parking lot throughout weekdays implicitly communicate that your church isn't relevant to the lives of rest of the people? Just wondering.

Is Your Parking Lot Holding Back Single Parents?

Today, 1 in 4 kids are raised by a single parent. [ref] If your church isn't seeing at least that number of single-parent-headed families in your church, the onus may lie on the parking lot. Traveling with young kids can be particularly challenging as a single parent. By the time a single parent has arrived at your church, they have already braved a lot to make that happen. The last daunting task is getting out of the car and across your parking lot into your facility.



5 Ways Your Church Can Be More Single-Parent-Friendly in Your Parking Lots

- **Designate “Parent Parking” Spots** // You don't need to make these “single parent parking spots” because people do appreciate some level of anonymity. Having spots that are closest to the front and have easy access to your children's ministry is a gift to all parents!
- **Train Leaders to Look for Single Parents** // The simple act of helping a parent with a stroller in your facility can be a sign of selfless love and care. Having team members walk with single parents and help their kids get into your ministry can make all the difference.
- **Have “Fun Transport” Options** // Wagons are a simple yet effective tool that some kids love to jump into and get driven into church in style. A next level option would be to have golf carts or even a tram! (I love the tram at Disney World!)
- **Umbrellas Are A Must** // Train your people to look out for parents on rainy days to meet them with an umbrella at the car. There is nothing more thoughtful than when someone steps up beside your car with an open umbrella on a rainy day to help you get your kids out!
- **Great (Obvious) Signage** // If you have two or three kids in tow, you are focused on keeping them safe coming across your parking lot. It can be difficult to discern where to go. You can't make your signage too obvious to people. Make it better, simpler and brighter so that a frazzled parent doesn't need to exhaust their brainpower to figure it out!

Parking Lots Are a “Hidden In Plain Sight” Stewardship Issue.

Finally, parking lots are expensive. It's not uncommon for parking lots to cost at least \$5,500 per spot on a fairly low complexity build. [ref] As a point of reference, let's say your church has 500 seats in the auditorium with only 100 parking spots. You'd ideally like to add another 150 spots to match the 1 spot for every two seats we quoted above. **After factoring in all the design, drainage, curbing, painting, etc., it would be an investment of \$825,000 for your**

church – assuming that you don’t run into any significant problems along the way!

Once parking lots are built, they become a recurring maintenance issue that often gets differed longer than it should; ultimately costing the church more than it needs to. If your church doesn’t keep up with resurfacing and patching on a periodic basis, you can be forced into a situation where major renovations need to be done at a massive cost. **No one wants to invest massively in maintaining a parking lot when there are so many other pressing ministry needs, but ignoring its significance may have severe consequences down the road.** You should be looking at regular maintenance of your parking lots on a bi-annual or at least annual basis!

We often take this resource for granted and hence, it’s easy to not invest in. Typically, the cost of a parking lot gets hidden as part of a major capital expansion. This is why we don’t consider what an important resource it is to the church. Challenge that mindset because it really is an amazing tool for our ministry!

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