

So, What is a Downtown Church?

A group of pastors from downtown churches developed these five general characteristics of downtown churches. Very few will fit all the characteristics, but some might apply to your ministry.

1. **Location is important.**

Obviously, a downtown church is located in or right next to the downtown area of a city. It need not be a real large city. A downtown church is not primarily a “neighborhood” church. A downtown Church is not usually identified by a residential area. Because of location, these churches are often involved in some sort of cross-cultural ministry, or at least facing those needs and challenges. They are often committed to their location and building.

2. **Downtown Churches have a vision and sense of mission that flows out of their location and history.**

They often have a strong sense of their own history. They played an important part in their denomination’s beginning in the city and they affirm that as important. They deal with a wider socio-economic range than most churches. They will have very wealthy and very poor folks in their ministry. Again, they often face or need to face cross-cultural ministry issues. Importantly, they have often planted, or their members have formed, a core group for all the rest of the LCMS congregations in the city. They are the “Mother Church” of the city. Sometimes they have a real heart for the city and want to be a positive influence in the city.

3. **Their staff members are unique.**

Downtown Church staff members are often risk-takers. It is common to see the love for the city and its people in them. They are open to leadership development. They are hungry for support from a team and / or others in similar ministries. Those with schools see the need for a strong principal and strong team work between pastor and school.

4. **Their membership / ministry circle is unique.**

Members of Downtown Churches often come from very non-traditional backgrounds and lifestyles. These churches have considerable variety in their ministry. These non-traditional people challenge traditional approaches of these congregations. For example, boards, committees and evening activities are handled very differently. Their members come from all over the city. Often, their members have often made a conscious decision to attend that type of congregation. It would be more convenient to belong to a church in their neighborhood, but these folks want to be there and they want to make a difference.

5. **Resources are an issue.**

Downtown Churches face building maintenance challenges because of older buildings. Sometimes they are located in designated historic areas so they cannot change much. They face parking shortage. They face security issues, especially for evening events. They face financial stress, often due to the age or socio-economic level of many members.

You Know You're a "Downtown Church" if:

1. You are located downtown.
2. You are not in a residential neighborhood. Your neighbors are businesses or hospitals.
3. You are the "Mother" and "Grandmother" church of your metropolitan area.
4. Your members come from all over the city, driving by a number of other churches.
5. Your members are some of the wealthiest and some of the poorest people of the city.
6. Your members thrive on that kind of diversity.
7. You have a sense of vision and mission that flows out of your location and history.
8. You and your staff love the city, and it shows.
9. Your buildings are old, classic and a challenge to maintain.
10. You have little off-street parking, but people still find a way to get there.