

Buzz is

Word of mouth

Spontaneous

Self generating

Passion about who you are

Around the core of who you are – liturgy, formation, social exchange in the parish community

What you are seeking is a buzz that is naturally carried by members and visitors to others because there was something that strongly touched or grabbed them. [Examples – Parish #1: Beautiful, rich, liturgy; great preaching and music as part of liturgy, sense of being accepted in the community. Parish #2: Deep acceptance, artists, and decent liturgy. Parish #3: Contemplative worship, training in spiritual practices, commitment to the city, and relationship with the drama and jazz communities.

How?

1. Become a healthier, more faithful parish. Attend to the Purposes of the Parish Church (the worship of God, the formation of God's people, having a sanctifying presence in the community).
2. Do your basic marketing work – What's your image in the community and what image do you want them to have? Why would anyone drive/walk past several other churches to come to you? (positioning) How do you define yourself as a parish? AND – are those things of a nature that they will probably attract enough people, so you have an average adult Sunday attendance of at least 120.
3. Have internal Buzz - People in the parish need to be excited about the parish.

What is the story we are telling ourselves? Parish Y: we are growing; we are Anglo Catholic; we value spiritual life. Parish X: We are open to all sorts of people' we have a pastoral heart; we are of the city.

What are the actions that incarnate the story? – We often think that people get motivated and then they act differently. In fact, it's usually the reverse – people act differently and then they get committed. That's why building spiritual competence is so important, e.g., Eucharistic practices and living, saying the Office, reflection. When a critical mass of the congregation develops a capacity for silence in liturgy or to participation without prompting – they develop an investment in those things. Also, other competencies, e.g. getting most current members to put on name tags at coffee hour so it's easier for new comers – develops a commitment about hospitality and growth in those people. In my experience they become more aware of visitors and may even talk with them.

Visitors who come experience the internal buzz - Even if they just came because they live in the neighborhood and knew nothing about the parish before visiting.

Internal plus – Members tell other Episcopalians – the network spreads the word. This can change the image (from declining to growing or getting healthy)

Hook

If you can find something that “hooks” people, excites them, deeply interests them, you are likely to create “buzz.” Possibly the single best “hook” is a Sunday experience that enchants and activates wonder and awe.

What in who you are or what you do will hook people? What can you start doing that may do that? Especially -- What in the Sunday experience – liturgy & social life?

What in that can hook media? What can hook a particular reporter? When I was in Trenton the jazz reporter for the Times began to cover every jazz mass we did. That seemed to draw the attention of a human interest reporter who then covered every Compassion & Justice Award we gave to area groups.

Advertising

Web site – Needs to be high quality and have a tone and style that is congruent with the parish’s culture (which needs to be healthy and drawing). Increasingly people look over a site before visiting – to get “the feel” of a parish, read a sermon or other document. A web site is about three things 1) External marketing, 2) Internal marketing – the story we tell ourselves and 3) Parish life – information about activities and resources

Spontaneous, word of mouth buzz is what you finally need and want – it is cheap and self sustaining

In the most concrete terms

1. The Sunday morning experience

Liturgy – That is rich and beautiful; that is graceful and enchants people. In which the congregation is competent and therefore “owns” the liturgy. You want to be stunned by the experience. [Some will be blown away and never return – too scary, or too deep, or too unfamiliar. But others will be hooked and drawn into the parish’s best self more quickly]

Therefore, need

- Liturgy in which people have learned how to participate without any prompting
- Liturgy in which the ministers of the altar and all servers are competent and have a good liturgical presence.
- Great or at least good preaching
- Music that stretches the heart – hymns, sung psalms and so on that connects with the inner depth of people

Social time – That connects people to individuals and small groups as well as to the whole parish community.

- Therefore, time for all or most announcements and time for mixing.
- An attractive, workable physical space
- Coffee shop quality coffee and tea; options; snacks that are good quality (get the better cookies not the cheaper ones)

Not educational programs or forums on Sunday. These are not hooks for most people as they visit on a Sunday.

Avoid

Buzz and hooks that are` not congruent with who you are or that seem like stunts.

Copyright Robert A. Gallagher, 2007, 2009, 2022