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SF 603 Field Education
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Case study - Basketball in Church?"

Bob is a young mid-twenty year old seminarian eager to get involved at his new internship church field placement. After taking several classes in bible, youth ministry, cultural engagement, and church development, Bob is ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work serving in ministry and the surrounding community of the XYZ church.

Being a 2000 member multi-generational congregation, with auxiliaries for children, youth, young adults, adults with families, and seniors, the XYZ Church prides itself for having its doors open and some form of programming operating every day of the week. They open the doors to allow people to drop in for prayer at 6am, and they shut the lights off and lock the doors at 10pm. There is great pride amongst the leadership and the membership who proudly state 'the doors of the church are truly open'. They are certain as a congregation, that by keeping the building open, they are doing the Lord's work. Bob was even more excited about the church facilities. The church had tons of classrooms, a dance room, a music room, a mini chapel, a gymnasium, and a banquet hall. Surely space for programming would never be an issue.

But, it wasn't long before Bob started to realize that although the large facility and the open hours would suggest there were tons of programs happening, various leaders throughout the church had some surprising feelings towards different populations who entered the building.

Thursday nights were reserved for basketball. The young men from the surrounding community came into the building to use the gymnasium although it was clear that many were not 'churched'. They were at times loud and boisterous, you could hear foul language and some walked in with the stench of alcohol and weed on them. The security guard at the front desk tirelessly repeated himself, 'take off the hat young man, watch your language, this is a church.'

Bob loved that the church allowed the community to enjoy this opportunity, and hoped that it would be used as a grounds to develop relationships with the attendees and introduce them to Jesus.

One day while in the hallway Bob ran into a Minister who served in senior leadership. The leader looked at Bob and said, "Bob, I don't understand why they come here to

play basketball. They play basketball in the park, they play basketball in the church, they play basketball at home on the video games. They play it everywhere. Why do they need to come here to play their basketball. This is a church, we are not a YMCA.”

Bob was taken aback. It's not the perspective he thought senior leadership would carry. In a neighborhood filled with gun violence, gang activity, high truancy rates, and few safe spaces to be during the evening that are free, would an urban church want to welcome these young men into the doors of the church? Shouldn't there be strategic initiatives to engage the young men both with the gospel and life skills?

Bob thought to himself, “What are we really here for if not for these opportunities to engage these very souls?”

Questions to discuss:

1. In what ways would you agree with the sentiments of this senior leader?
2. How could the church's leadership be intentional about creating space for effective ministry with this same population that comes in for basketball?
3. Should the church scrap the community basketball program?
4. How should Bob constructively address his concern about the statement made by this senior leader?