



Closed for Remodeling

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My family is in the middle of another house remodel. This time we're fixing up a place for my mother-in-law that's closer to us and more suitable for her needs. It's going well, and we're behind schedule. Some cabinets were damaged in delivery; the replacements got lost in transit. The countertops can't come in until we have the cabinets. We had second thoughts on paint colors, so redid a room. Still, the house seems to have good bones, as they say. The remodel should make it newer and better. That's the point, yes?

There's one major street I now travel regularly – a favorite, it seems, of Google Maps. The other day I noticed a tall, professional reader-board sign near a major intersection: Closed for Remodeling. I was immediately curious about what it could be. A newer and better restaurant to open? A newer and better car wash or convenience store? Because I travel this road a lot, I'm invested in its success.

Glancing beyond the sign, I saw a vacant, dirt lot. A few weeds. Otherwise nothing. "That's a serious remodel," I thought. Normally, remodeling contemplates good bones, a structure worth saving. We redo the basics into a newer and better model. Here, perhaps there wasn't enough to see the remodel to completion and razing the building proved more cost-effective. Maybe the bones weren't as good as believed. I expect something totally new will be placed on that patch of dirt. It has excellent visibility and traffic flow.

A redevelopment question that is often asked of congregations is: who would notice if your church closed? If we put a Closed for Remodeling sign on our reader boards, would anyone driving by care? If the sanctuary, classrooms, and offices were torn down and only a vacant lot remained, would we be missed? Framed more positively, who is invested in what happens on our particular corner or road?

In our season of Outward Incarnational Focus, we look not only **at our community**, but we consider how they look **at the church**. Some of it is literal inspection of our building. From the sidewalk, a passerby might notice our signs, activity, or landscaping, or we might blend in after years of shrinking visibility.

Our neighbors also look past our physical walls to see who we are. Do they see good bones built on Scripture and discipleship? Do they see weed patches where we've not tended to the soul of the congregation? We might have good traffic flow with visitors, but what do we learn if no one comes back a second time? At its worst, would those invested in the community wish something newer and better would replace us?

We do not live as Christians *for* the world, catering to its whim and fancy. As the Church we are constantly reminded not to conform ourselves to the world (Rom. 12:2) or be a friend of the world to the detriment of our covenantal relationship with God (Jam. 4:4). Yet, we know deeply that God so loved the world, God gave us Jesus Christ that we might find new, everlasting life (John 3:16). Newer and far, far better. I wonder if there is some work we might do in our connections with community to *re-model* ourselves, that is, to model ourselves again on that deep love of God through Jesus Christ. It might make our neighbors take notice.