



Practice Case 21 (The English Church)

Question and Background Information:

Assume you are the new pastor of a rural English church in the late nineteenth century. Over the last three years, attendance has been declining. Your boss has just come to town to tell you that she is considering shutting down the church. You have two weeks to diagnose the problem and come up with possible solutions.

How would you think through what these problems might be and the possible solutions?

Suggested Sample Response:

There are many potential reasons why the churchgoers of the parish have stopped going to church. First, I will talk about the possibility of competitive churches; secondly, I will talk about the possibility that people in the area have simply stopped going to church.

There is the possibility of competing churches. There are two reasons why competing churches could be taking our parishioners away: better location, better religion, or better services. I remember from my history classes in college that some churches were located far away from pockets of the population, and churchgoers often would establish churches closer to home. Also, sometimes people change what they believe or new ways of thinking emerge. This could also be driving people to other churches.

I would also want to figure out if the nearby churches are preaching different religions. There is at least a chance that these churches are offering parishioners a different kind of religious viewpoint that is more attractive than the religion we have been preaching. Their rules regarding behavior, for instance, may be different from ours.

Lastly, I would want to understand the different services being offered at "competing" churches. There may be different value that these other churches offer that we do not. For instance, these churches might provide childcare, adult education and job training, or singles dances. These churches may offer more personal attention and guidance from the pastors.

I will also talk about the possibility that people who live in the area around the church simply may have stopped going to church. Off the top of my head, I can think of two reasons why people may stop going to church: progress and inconvenience. As science and communication advance, people may rely less on the church to explain the world and more on scientific findings and written forms of communication such as books and newspapers. This could be happening in our parish. On the other hand, going to church may be becoming inconvenient or economically nonviable. Maybe our parishioners feel that they need to stay at home to work in the fields in order to maintain subsistence. I would want to talk to these parishioners to find out why they have stopped going to church.



There are many ways I could test my hypotheses. I think the most important thing is to talk to the former parishioners to ask them why they have left the church and what we would need to do to entice them back. After that, I would want to send someone (or myself) to the other churches in the area during services to understand what is being preached at these churches. To help prove if the issue is location, I would draw a map of our current and former parishioners and analyze how distance from the church affects attendance. To understand if there are other churches in the area taking away our parishioners, I would also map these new churches on my newly created map.

Once I understand why people are leaving, I would devise a plan to bring the parishioners back. I would want to be focused on the needs of my parish, by offering enhanced services, such as day care as well as flexibility, such as offering services at different times of the day. If distance is a factor, I may want to consider having services at different locations at different times, making our church more accessible.

Summary Comments

This would be a very good answer. The candidate came up with a number of hypotheses, identified ways to test those hypotheses, and formulated an action plan to address the issues. This answer shows thoughtfulness, creativity, and structured thinking. While there may be some issues that this candidate did not identify, he/she does a good job structuring a comprehensive answer. For a 3Cs answer to be good, a candidate does not have to address every single issue.