



Building the Church Community **One Cup** at a Time

By Mike Bacile

WITH THE BEGINNING of the new century, more and more churches are finding new ways to build fellowship within their congregations and communities. The coffee house age has entered our churches at a rapid rate, but is a coffee house in *your* church a good idea? The short answer is: probably yes, if done correctly.

DEFINITION OF A CHURCH COFFEE HOUSE AND COFFEE SERVICE

Traditionally, for years, church coffee service provided only coffee for the congregation for free or for donations. Generally speaking, the coffee provided was nothing more than the least expensive coffee brewed up in a small glass carafe or airpot

and served with cream and sugar. As times have changed, so have the expectations of the congregations. Where a cup of Folgers was good enough to capture 25% of the congregation leaving services in the past, the coffee revolution (also known as the Starbucks' revolution) brought a change in our society virtually overnight. America became a specialty coffee country; drinkers of lattes, mochas, cappuccinos, and for the daring, shots of espresso. We became accustomed to paying \$3.00 plus for a cup of gourmet coffee. Not only that, we had to have that cup of coffee every day, including Sundays; thus, the birth of the coffee house in a church was created.

In order to be successful, "church coffee houses" and mini cafes now being built

inside churches must include an espresso machine along with coffee, tea, and most likely, smoothies, frappes, chai, etc. Basically, the design is what you see when you walk into your neighborhood coffee house. An espresso machine is a machine that brews a shot of real espresso and steams real milk—a push button freeze dried "cappuccino" machine that you would find at a convenience store is not a real espresso machine in the industry's eyes or in the eyes of your congregation. It is important to consider this point because the type of equipment you choose for your coffee house will directly affect your results. If you build a coffee house, use the real thing or you will be doomed for failure.

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Baron architects in North Texas says that all the churches they are building either are including a coffee house or wished they had included one into the plans when building. There are two main reasons to add a coffee house on your church campus:

1. A coffee house builds fellowship.
2. A coffee house is a financial asset for the church, not a liability.

BUILD FELLOWSHIP WITH COFFEE

Building fellowship is the main reason most churches choose to add a coffee house on their campus. Building fellowship provides multiple benefits for the church. Gone are the days where the congregation scattered after the service in a race to the cars for their Starbucks or IHOP fix. Church coffee houses now provide a reason for the people to stay, drink, eat, and build fellowship. Why spend fifteen minutes getting to the locations of the closest caffeine fix when you can enjoy a latte with friends right away? The building of fellowship outside the sanctuary walls strengthens the congregation's attachment and support to the church. It is yet another way for churches to create that sense of family and belonging.

It is this bond of belonging that supports the churches in fundraising and building membership. People support the organizations and groups with which they feel the closest connection. The building of fellowship, even over a cup of coffee, provides a church that deeper connection with its congregation. New members who come for a visit now have an area to meet other members and build relationships, thus making their return more likely in the future. The coffee house creates that "Third Place" that Ray Oldenburg writes about in *The Great Good Place* and has been the focus of so many churches and articles. It is the home-away-from-home where we can all enjoy, relax, and be with friends discussing the topics that matter the most to us. The coffee house experience allows visitors not only to gather with their friends after the service, but it also provides a relaxed atmosphere to meet

other members and build a bond. Quickly, they can become friends with five, ten, fifteen people. The church is no longer their friend's church, but is now their own church.

COFFEE HOUSE AS A FINANCIAL ASSET

Obviously, church administrative leaders can see the spiritual and possible giving benefits of a more connected and growing congregation, but a properly designed, equipped, and trained coffee house is also a profit maker. Almost eighty percent of churches have paid off their equipment investment within the first eight months of opening. Unlike other building costs which generally have no direct revenue benefit, the coffee house is an investment that can be a great financial asset to a church's bottom-line or ministries.

Churches have discovered that members are willing to spend the money for their daily "fix" if the quality and look of the product are the same or better and they know the money is going to support a good cause in their church community. Most churches surveyed are getting about 25–35% of the service attendance stopping by the coffee house before heading home. The biggest factor limiting even a larger percentage stopping by the coffee house is the limit on time. You can only make so many lattes, mochas or frozen hot chocolates in a minute. Also, over eighty percent of churches charge about 10¢ less than the local Starbucks charges. The most ordered items in a coffee house are espresso based drinks such as lattes, cappuccinos, mochas, etc. Most espresso based drinks will sell at an average about \$3.25–\$3.50. The cost of the product with cup is about \$.50 to \$.65. The average profit will be about \$2.75 per espresso based drink. For the frozen drinks of frappes and smoothies, the average sales price is \$3.15–\$3.35. The product cost with cup is around \$1.00–\$1.30, depending on product. The average profit is about \$2.00 on your frozen drinks. A cup of coffee will sell at an average of about \$1.25–\$1.50. The cost of the product and cup is about \$.25–\$.35. The average profit on a cup of coffee is about

Summary

- The coffee house age has entered our churches at a rapid rate.
- In order to be successful, "church coffee houses" and mini cafes now being built inside churches must include an espresso machine along with coffee, tea, and most likely, smoothies, frappes, chai, etc.
- A coffee house builds fellowship.
- A coffee house is a financial asset for the church, not a liability.
- There are three basic requirements for a successful church coffee house:
 - a congregation of size capable of supporting the coffee house
 - a prominent location on the campus
 - the appearance of a coffee house
- Picking the right equipment for your coffee house can make or break the success of the program.
- In addition to selling quality coffee, it is important to offer quality teas, smoothies, frappes, and syrups.
- Since personnel create the atmosphere of your coffee house, proper training and practice for staff is vital for success of a coffee house.

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\$1.00. Surprisingly, coffee is the smallest seller for most coffee houses.

With the high demand and profit potential, it is important that the coffee house be set up and trained to run like a well-oiled machine. Most of the churches will

A quality coffee house set-up company will be able to provide you with the training and service you need to make sure your coffee house is successful for the years to come.



have at least one paid staff and many have multiple paid staff, instead of relying on volunteers. What does a “quality” coffee house require in terms of looks, equipment, and cost? The answer: it depends.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH COFFEE HOUSE

There are some basic guidelines that can help determine if a church is ready and able to sustain a coffee house. These guidelines help paint a clearer picture of what the church should expect from the coffee house.

First, it is important that you have a congregation size significant enough to create a large enough client base for the coffee house to be financially successful. It is perhaps more accurate to say it depends on the average number of people that attend your weekend services. If you have 500 or more people attending your services each Sunday, a coffee house should provide you the fellowship and financial support you want.

Second, the location and space will greatly affect the demand on your coffee house. The three most important things in real estate are location, location, location and this is no exception. The coffee house must be visible to the members as they enter and leave the sanctuary. Most churches will place it in the main hall or just off the main hall next to one of the main entrances. If it is located out of sight, it will be out of mind as well. Space is also a key issue in creating room for fellowship. When setting up a coffee house, be sure to have room for members to gather with their coffee and chat. Tables and chairs are important, but most people will take this

time to mingle with friends, moving from one group to another.

Third, your coffee house needs to look like an actual coffee house. This is not the time to cut corners on build-out. It does not need to be a gold plated coffee house, but it is important to create the feel of the local coffee house. Perception is important to the success of your coffee house and having a “look” can create success in the bottom-line.

LAYOUT AND FLOW OF THE COFFEE HOUSE

Once you have determined that a coffee house is a fit for your congregation and church, the planning begins. The layout and flow of the coffee house is the second most important thing next to the equipment. Proper layout and flow saves staff hours, time, and money while providing quicker, better service. Many architects and designers do an amazing job on the look of a coffee house, but they do not understand the flow and equipment layout. That is why it is important to have a coffee house layout/flow expert work with your architect and general contractor. Not laying out the equipment correctly will often lead to poor service, longer waits, and the eventual demise of the coffee house.

CORRECT EQUIPMENT FOR THE COFFEE HOUSE

As the saying goes, an espresso machine is not an espresso machine. Espresso machines are like cars; there is a big difference between a Mercedes and a Yugo. Picking the right equipment for your coffee house can make or break the success of the program. It is best to find a quality piece of equipment that is built for long-term professional

use. This does not mean get the biggest or most expensive piece of equipment. The size of your service attendance, the age of the congregation, the space available and the number of paid staff will determine what equipment you should buy. Having an espresso machine that can produce high volume quickly is important to keeping the line moving and the waits short. A coffee house expert will work with you in placing the right equipment for the job.

PRODUCT SELECTIONS FOR THE COFFEE HOUSE

Buy what works and sells versus name brand? There was a time a couple of years ago that everyone wanted to carry Starbucks coffee for the mere fact that it was Starbucks. People soon started realizing what I call the 80/20 rule. Eighty percent of people do not like Starbucks coffee, but choose to go there because of the atmosphere and because it is a safe place to socialize. Churches who started with a name brand have all virtually switched to coffee that eighty percent of the congregation enjoys. Of course you can serve a dark and medium roast to cover most needs, but the real bonus is that brand name coffee like Starbucks can cost up to twice the amount per cup as a quality gourmet roast.



There is more to a coffee house than just coffee, though. It is important to carry quality teas (the fastest growing segment in the specialty drinks industry), smoothies, frappes, syrups, and more. These added drinks will support you by bringing in young and old customers alike. But just like equipment, it is important to carry quality products. Do taste testing and see what a small group of “testers” think. It is worth spending two cents more on a drink that tastes great than saving some pennies on a product that will not have your customers come back the next Sunday.

TRAINING AND SERVICE FOR YOUR COFFEE HOUSE

Beware the drop-and-go equipment companies! Yes, you can always find some-

thing cheaper online, but the savings on the equipment is lost in the lack of training and service. Personnel create the atmosphere of your coffee house. With proper training, anyone can be turned into a competent and quality barista within a couple of hours. You can start with a group where no one knows the difference between a latte and a cappuccino, but by the end of the trainings they can make every drink on the menu to perfection. The truth is that it is not that difficult to work behind the bar in a coffee house with proper training and practice. A properly trained staff provides consistency and effective customer service and will limit the machine breakdown and service calls. The quality of the equipment will also limit breakdowns. A quality coffee house set-up

company will be able to provide you with the training and service you need to make sure your coffee house is successful for the years to come.

If you have not considered a coffee house for your church, now may be the time to act. Coffee houses as a “Third Place” are gaining in popularity. Even though one national brand has been on the decline for the last two years, coffee sales in general have gone up. Last year, more people drank coffee than the year before and the people who drank coffee drank more cups than the year before. So now may be the time to sit down and think how a cup of java can help build your church community. [f](#)

