

The Changing Scene

In the past I have written about some of the “Big Box” churches and their proactive pastor’s. There are now over 1,200 of these “Mega churches” which are defined by sociologists as non-Catholic churches with at least 2,000 in weekly attendance. I received several emails asking what their mission was beyond putting people in the pews. “What is their secret” some of these e-mails asked, “are they is active in Outreach as in Evangelism?”

I can’t answer those questions accurately since I have met just a few of these mega church leaders, but it does raise some interesting questions that affect every congregation regardless of their denomination. The first point is that people --- all people --- have changed significantly over the past thirty to forty years.

Our society is geared to a different set of values and a different lifestyle than our people were a few years back. So it follows, that to entice them to attend a religious service is going to require some different motivation than we created then. What was looked on with some disdain as pure entertainment in the past is now required in many cases to stimulate people to attend.

This doesn’t set well with many “old line” theologians, but it’s a fact that can’t be overlooked.

Another change that is wide spread among our society is the disappearance of loyalty. Now some will argue that loyalty hasn’t disappeared but merely less intensive than it was in the past, whichever, the fact remains that our people are not as loyal as they once were. Fifty years ago a person began a career with a company and usually stayed with that company until retirement. Today people are expected to move around every so often to advance their career.

Marriage fifty years ago was “to death do you part” and the divorce rate was very low. People were loyal to both each other for the most part and also loyal to the oath they had taken. Today one out every two marriages will end in divorce --- partly because of the lack of that loyalty. The “what’s in it for me” mind set has replaced the “how can we build a happy family” attitude. The ME has replaced the WE!

And our loyalty to our congregations and our denominations has also suffered. The question that is asked by many today is not “how can I learn to serve and become a better Christian”, the question is “how can going to this service help me cope with my problems today?”



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So, what does all this say to help us to understand where the Sunday attendance goes? Well, honestly it barely scratches the surface --- but, it lays out some important things to consider. If you want to motivate people to attend your service it has to be a “people friendly” atmosphere so that even the occasional attendee can follow it. It has to be somewhat entertaining, with good music and a well organized format so there is little “down” time where people get bored. And the message and the structure of the service has to be focused on how each one in the sanctuary can walk out and enjoy a better and more productive life because of what they heard.

I know some of this “fly’s in the face” of some seminary thinking and it’s coming from a layman so take it with “a grain of salt”. It’s what I have heard from other lay people over the past twenty years and so it’s not just my personal opinion.

The message hasn’t changed --- just the way it’s being presented --- and that’s just good stewardship!



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