

Subject: Church Growth & Management

Submitted by: Carolyn Holland

Closing the Back Door

Like so many of our churches/centers, we seem to have an open back door - or to have Teflon pews, not sure which! In an effort to gain some ideas on closing the back door of our church, I've been reading a couple of books: 1) "High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church," by Thom S. Rainer, which is Christian oriented, and 2) "Cracking Your Congregation's Code" by our old friends, Richard Southern and Robert Norton (remember them from the Crossroads experiment a few years ago?) and these questions have come up for me.

1. What is so important about the perpetuation of 'church' in the SOM philosophy? We don't have a 'heaven' to offer people as a reward, nor a 'hell' to threaten them with. We do not have a biblical mandate to 'go and preach the gospel' nor to 'win souls for Jesus.' Our New Thought God doesn't get angry and pout when we don't attend and participate in church.

2. So why would people want to get up, get dressed and spend an hour or two (if the church has a morning Adult Class) out of every Sunday at a SOM Gathering?

3. Would those of you who don't have a revolving door ministry share with us how you assimilate and retain members?

According to Mr. Rainer's research, the key to closing the back door is the successful assimilation of new members. He surveyed more than two thousand churches over a six-year period, and his findings were that those churches that had most successfully closed the back door had high expectations of their members: they were required to take a membership class before they became a member, they were expected to attend and participate in the Sunday School program, to be a regular participant in worship, and to be involved in ministry. But the one key ingredient was their participation in the Sunday School program. In these churches it had become the primary means of pastoral care in the church, and where people felt the most connected and had developed long-term, meaningful relationships.

1. For those of you who have an on-going Adult Education class on Sunday mornings, which might be called 'Sunday School,' what has been your experience as to the effectiveness of this class in regard to the overall satisfaction with the church of those involved?

b. Have you noticed a difference in the assimilation/retention rate of those who don't and who do attend the Adult Ed class?

"The Boys" (Richard Southern and Robert Norton) say that "A denomination passes on its own inherited spiritual DNA -- those characteristics, beliefs, and cultural features that create a public identity as well as a connecting link to its congregations."

1. How true do you think this is for United Church of Religious Science and the member churches, and,

2. how important is it for us as member churches to reflect UCRS' DNA in our church so as to present a 'united front,' so to speak, to the public?