

Subject: Church Growth & Management

Submitted by: Rev. Nikki Colman Ackerman

Closing the Back Door

Carolyn,

Thank you for a very well articulated query regarding what is probably a common problem amongst our churches in SOM.

I founded this Tampa Bay Church 10 & 1/2 years ago (after being a staff minister at Founders for two years) and I have certainly seen this phenomena in action but there is another interesting factor, that I have observed in SOM Churches in California and this church in Tampa. That is the fact that individuals "travel" from one SOM Church to another. They get upset with the minister or some member at one church and then move

on to another church in the vicinity. After months or sometimes years, they return to the original church and the cycle starts all over.

I wonder if this happens in other denominations? Why does it happen? It could be positive, in so far as they feel like we are all one big family, or it could be negative, in so far as they have not learned to stay put and face whatever their "emotional experience" is and work through it to their higher good and the higher good of the overall church family.

In your question number 2, it has been my personal experience that people come to church to socialize with like-minded people, to get an emotional quick-fix, or because they have a crisis in their lives and they have learned to turn to the church for support, guidance and direction. Theoretically, if we are teaching the principles as they were laid out by Holmes, people should be able to use this tool to help themselves, and I suppose many do. Maybe we are just "tribal" enough to need that interconnection with others of the same ilk?

That creates another question in my mind. What is the deciding factor of which church to attend? I could not believe that I heard a minister at the SOM Gathering in Chicago this year say that the number one thing that people came to church for was the music. Do you believe this is true? Then why have ministers at all? I can only speak for myself and answer that the music was always a part of the overall experience which was uplifting to me but I used to drive over 50 miles to attend the church of my choice because of the message primarily. Maybe I'm weird though? Surely it must be a combination of many things?

I personally feel that it is not important to worry about those leaving by the back door if you have a good solid group of core individuals. If your attention is on those leaving -- then you perpetuate that motion, yes?

We do not currently have a Sunday Morning adult class, although we have had in the past. I recognize no difference in the number of committed individuals, however, I do provide morning and evening accredited classes for those interested in learning more, and that might make a difference. My background is marketing and the many years ago that I attended UCI, we were taught that individuals generally only appreciate what they must pay for, (even if it is nominal) i.e.: the classes.

In your final paragraph you speak about passing on the spiritual DNA and I do believe this is true and important. I researched many new thought organizations before committing to the UCRS School of Ministry and the reason I choose UCRS was because of the strong Spiritual DNA. The solid education, the adherence to the basic teaching without all the water-down woo-woo that many of them freely allow to associate as SOM. They did "seem" to have a solid united front based on Textbook Principles and that is what attracted me. Now, I'm not so sure. I recognize the need for change, but the baby should not go out with the bathwater. We can adhere to our spiritual DNA, while moving forward in change. If we lose that -- we are just another new thought group riding the modern wave of spiritual activity.

I keep the Global Heart information on the wall above my desk and I read it every day (just about) but I am still not sure if UCRS knows "who they are now, or where they are going?" I am actively involved in the middle of it and I still am looking for the answer. As an Ecclesiastical Representative for UCRS, I am currently in personal connection with 88 churches, study groups & special portfolio ministries in the eastern USA and I am doing the best I can to assist these organizations but I am still looking for some solid answers myself. I keep asking questions and I encourage others to do the same.

One of the things that I know needs to be changed and I am sure is in process, is, the simple fact, that you cannot have a set of guidelines which you constantly work outside of, for special individuals and circumstances. The guidelines must apply to all (without favorites) or you have anarchy which, to my knowledge, has never been successful in establishing strong groups. I do see progress so I am still watching and waiting to see what happens with our wonderful teaching.

Bless you Carolyn for posing these questions to the Listserv!