

the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

Faithful and Compelling Performances of the Gospel

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[Editor's Note: As the "Hearing the Gospel Today" team's work is drawing toward its completion, it is an opportune time to listen in to some of their reflections along the way. What follows is a statement about what the team came to see as the nature of its work, based on an earlier working paper drafted by Jim Brownson. It describes what they attempt to do in the manuscript they are preparing for publication. It is also suggestive of the way other similar efforts might be made.]

For the past three and a half years, the "Hearing the Gospel Today" Project Team of the GOCN has been working to produce a volume that would articulate how the gospel addresses us today in North America. As we struggled early on to grasp the meaning of that assignment, a central image emerged that guided our subsequent work. It was the notion of a *performance* of the gospel.

This concept needs some

unpacking and explanation, if it is to be correctly understood. When we began our work by reflecting on the question, "What is the gospel?", we found it very difficult to come to consensus on an answer, because we had diverse ways of construing or interpreting the question. In that respect, we suspect we are not unlike the broader spread of Christians. For some, this is an exegetical question, focusing on the center of the biblical story. For others, it is a soteriological question, inquiring into the nature and character of God's salvation. For still others, to ask the question is to inquire into the "paschal mystery" that undergirds and constitutes the church. For still others, it is a highly contextual question that can be restated, "What's good about the good news for North Americans?"

We found ourselves torn. We did not want to reject any of these ways of formulating the question—indeed, we found all of them complementary and mutually informing—but we also found it necessary to establish a more common framework for asking the question, "What is the gospel?" We found a way forward by reframing the "What is the gospel?" question in the following way: "What constitutes a faithful and compelling performance of

In This Issue

Two GOCN research projects that have been underway for over three years are currently preparing manuscripts for publication. One of them has been dealing with the way the gospel addresses us in North America today. To do that required the team to be as precise as possible about exactly what they were trying to do. Jim Brownson's article about "performances of the gospel" indicates the framework they adopted. It is shared here (beginning on this page) to anticipate the particular "performance" of the gospel their manuscript will offer.

For some time now, sometimes with a flurry of conversation and sometimes with a pause, the online GOCN Chatline has been a place for dialogue around issues critical to the Gospel and Our Culture agenda. Recently, a question about intergenerational worship sparked quite a bit of comment about experiences, patterns, and issues that illustrate the challenges and possibilities. A collection of responses and exchanges is offered here (page 5) to share the conversation more widely. A second installment will follow in a subsequent issue.

Finally, John Bowen shares some of his personal ruminations about his "modern" to "postmodern" migration (page 3). It's a playful piece (how postmodern of him!) that helps us know ourselves—while not taking ourselves too seriously.

—the editor

the gospel in North America today?”

This way of formulating the question attempts to avoid a number of problems. By asking the question this way, we are first trying to shift the focus away from some eternal “essence” or “core” understanding of the gospel (usually formulated in abstract concepts or propositions) and towards a narrative that is continually re-enacted in fresh ways.

Second, by asking the question in this way we are trying to avoid old *vehicle vs. cargo*, or *content vs. application* distinctions between the gospel and its cultural embodiment, instead affirming that the gospel is always contextualized. It is always “performed,” in action or utterance. We have no access to the gospel other than through its various performances.

Third, by speaking of “faithful performances” of the gospel, we are interested both in orthodox doctrine and in faithful contextualization of the gospel. Proper contextualization is no less important than conceptual orthodoxy.

Finally, by speaking of a “compelling” performance of the gospel, we are recognizing a post-apologetic context where the gospel cannot be “proven,” but only commended in winsome ways. We are also trying to underscore the importance of demonstrating how the gospel intersects with the lived experience of members of our culture.

But what exactly do we mean by a “performance” of the gospel? First, the term draws inspiration from speech-act theory, which recognizes that our language not only communicates information, but actually brings states of affairs into existence. Hence the gospel is not merely concepts to be understood; it is not ideas to be applied; nor is it only a story to be heard and believed (as if pleasing the mind or indulging one’s aesthetic appetite were the point of hearing the gospel). The gospel is rather a narrative to be performed, a narrative to be expressed by words and deeds that bring a new state of affairs into existence. This is in keeping with the

long prophetic tradition of Scripture that sees the Word of God as living and active (Hebrews 4:12).

The notion of “performance” also evokes images of the performing arts, such as music or theater. Properly understood, these images are entirely appropriate. The church exists to proclaim the gospel (1 Peter 2:9). Yet this proclamation is not in words only, but also in deeds; the gospel is proclaimed by the character of our entire lives to a watching world. That is why Paul can speak of the Corinthians as a letter from Christ” (2 Corinthians 3:3). The notion of performance underscores this missional, world-directed dimension of the gospel—the church receives the gospel not just for itself, but to offer it to the world.

The link with the performing arts also underscores both the universal and contextual character of the church’s announcement of the gospel. Each performance of a play or a musical composition is always recognizably the same piece, but each is also unique and distinctive. Perhaps the metaphor of jazz provides the closest analogy for performance of the gospel.

There is wide latitude for improvisation, but the same basic structure, sets of changes, and rhythms must be present for a piece to be recognizable. Similarly, various performances of the gospel may differ widely from each other in various ways. Yet a family resemblance remains. The same gospel is still recognizable.

But some may object that the notion of gospel performance is too activist, too works-oriented. This objection may take two forms. Some may object that by focusing upon the interaction of word and action in the lives of Christians, the focus of attention shifts away from God, and toward us. Yet one of the marks of all great performances is that they point beyond themselves. In truly great performances, it is always the music, the story, the subject matter that is at the center of attention. Similarly, the church’s witness to the gospel in its words and deeds is precisely that, a *witness*. And it is not just words that point beyond themselves; actions do, too.

The other form of this “activistic” objection is that by focusing on the performance of the gospel, we may lose

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sight of the fact that the gospel is a *gift* to the church. The gospel is, after all, not about what we do, but about what God has done for us. Yet this gospel is only fully known when it is performed, when words of forgiveness are spoken, when the bread and wine is offered, when in the common stuff of life, the extraordinary breaks through and makes itself known. When we speak of gospel performances, we are speaking of those ways in which God's inbreaking presence is lifted up and made known to the world. We participate in that performance, but only to point beyond ourselves to a God who comes to us with surprising judgment, grace, and mercy.

For us, the notion of gospel performances provided a helpful way to frame the question, "What is the gospel?" It directed our exploration of the gospel to ways of thinking that integrate belief and action, proclamation and practice. It evokes for us something of the logic of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26, where he declares, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Our workgroup has come to believe that our proclamation of the gospel must arise from its embodiment in our lives. We believe that this is the most helpful context to begin thinking afresh about the meaning of the gospel for us in North America. ■



Epistemology And Book Shelves Or, How I Knew Postmodernism Was Getting To Me

*John Bowen
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People with my Myers Briggs profile like books. We also like order and system. So, guess what? I like my books to be ordered systematically. And until we moved to Hamilton in 1996, the order was clear. First came the Bibles, source of all Christian knowledge and understanding. Then Bible background books and Bible commentaries (Old Testament, then New Testament), helping us understand the Bible. Then books of doctrine, based on what we have understood in the Bible. Makes perfect sense, right?

Here, however, came the first problem: should books on the doctrine of God come before books on the doctrine of scripture or after. After all, God is logically prior to a book, even to Scripture, and yet it is from Scripture that we know what we know of God. Hmm. (I think, if you check, that the books in that section are still a bit mixed up. In order, that is. Not in contents. At least, most of them.) OK, so God, Scripture (or Scripture, God), then Jesus Christ, then the Holy Spirit, then soteriology and eschatology. Then a few books on Satan and angels. Again, I wasn't quite sure where to put these, but I didn't exactly feel they should come *before* any of the others.

Hmm. Then what? Church was probably the next biggest section. Doctrine of the church, histories of the church, books on ministry, books on specific aspects of church life (sacraments, leadership), books on specific ministries (preaching, student ministry, healing, small groups). And after that? Well, the church engages in mission, so books on mission, books on evangelism (evangelism is a subset of

mission, after all), and books on other religions. And then . . . well, you're probably not longing for a blow by blow account. So I will just say that there was a whole section of biographies, another loosely called "Christian Life," and a diverse section called rather lamely "Christianity and . . ." (psychology, sociology, philosophy, work, arts, ethics, etc.). Dictionaries and other reference books got a (wide) shelf to themselves.

When we moved from Ottawa to Hamilton, however, and the time came to unpack my books again in the new house, I found myself with a problem. I had two Bibles in each hand, all ready to put them in the top left corner of the shelves (naturally) and, suddenly, I was frozen with indecision. "But why?" I hear you cry. "What could possibly be the problem?" Ah, but there was a problem. I knew enough about postmodernism by this time to know that postmodern people are nervous of order and system, and not without reason. Order and system smack too much of control and oppression. All too often, they reflect a white, Eurocentric, rationalistic way of looking at the world, and (in this case) at Christian faith, a way that is at best of limited usefulness and at worst actually destructive. Help! What was I to do?

Various possibilities presented themselves. (At this point, you may be glad to know, I put the Bibles down, and made some more coffee.) Previously Scripture had come first. But Scripture has not simply dropped into our laps from above. It is the book of the church. So maybe I should begin with books on the doctrine of the church and then scripture. Or, perhaps it would be more realistic to begin with books on the history of the church, since doctrine can be dangerously rationalistic and the life of the church

really ought to come first. Or maybe I should begin with books about Bible study, to acknowledge the reality that Scripture lives in the midst of a reading, studying, responsive community.

Then it occurred to me that there was a whole other way of coming at this. The church is the product of mission. The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the disciples. Without mission, there would be no church . . . and no books on Christianity to categorize. So how about beginning with mission, then evangelism, then church, then Scripture? Maybe that would work. This was getting more complicated by the minute.

There again, maybe I should begin with books on Jesus Christ. After all, he is the subject of Scripture, the heart of all our doctrinal understanding of God and life and truth, head of the church, instigator of mission, model for the Christian life and for all those biographies, the *logos* in psychology and socio-logy. But then . . . Well, you can work out why there might be “buts” even now.

I know you will think this is stupid, but half way through the third cup of coffee, I had this revelation. Part of my problem actually had to do with the nature of bookshelves. Yes, really. You know what the problem is? You may never have thought about this, but bookshelves are in straight lines! We blame the west for its linear thinking, but how can you *not* think linearly when books ever since the invention of printing have always been arranged in straight lines?

Postmoderns, however, are attracted by other views of truth—for example, that of W. V. O. Quine. Nancey Murphy of Fuller Seminary explains this view and its attraction like this:

Postmodern epistemology is dominated by a picture: W. V. O.

Quine’s picture of knowledge as a web or net. There are no sharp distinctions among kinds of belief in the web, and so there is no distinction between basic (foundational) beliefs and nonbasic beliefs. Beliefs differ only in their “distance” from experience.

(*Anglo-American Postmodernity*, Boulder CO: Westview Press 1997, p. 27.)

That is why I was having so much difficulty with what had always been a simple and satisfying task. I was trying to arrange a spider’s web into a straight line. (Try it some time.) Every Christian doctrine is connected to every other Christian doctrine. That’s why I could connect the dots so many different ways. Why *should* they form a neat straight line, after all? Is there something inherently Christian about straight lines? (The “straight and narrow” of Matthew 7:14 doesn’t help, because it is actually “strait and narrow.” But thanks for the thought.)

What I needed, I now saw clearly, was web-shaped bookshelves, maybe arranged maze-like on the floor of the spare bedroom. My family, however, was beginning to lose sympathy by this point, and complaining about other things needing to be done. (I have to say I am sometimes a little disappointed in their lack of passion around the really important issues of life.)

So what did I do in the end? OK, I confess: I compromised. The books finally ended up much as they were before. But the first section is now the section on Bible study. Just to remind me that Christian truth is not a line, and neither is theology a mind-game. God is bigger than my system, bigger than any system. God is certainly bigger than Myers Briggs. And, in case the thought had occurred to you, I am working at getting a life. ■



GOCN 2001 Consultation

October 18-20
Techny, Illinois

Last October’s GOCN Consultation on *Missional Systems* will be followed by the 2001 Consultation on the theme

“The Continuing Conversion of the Church.”

The theme draws its inspiration from the title of Darrell Guder’s new book in the GOC Series.

Guder will give the keynote address, and a vision will be forged for “converting patterns” in the church’s life.

Informational registration brochures will be mailed out during the summer. Those who are not subscribers to this newsletter may request that information by contacting Judy Bos at judy@westernsem.org or 616-392-8555.

INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

A Cyber-Conversation

An online GOCN discussion group, hosted by Yahoo! Groups, recently got into a vigorous conversation about intergenerational worship. This thread of conversation is re-published here to share the insights with a wider audience than the 200 or so who are members of the eGroup. A second installment will follow in a subsequent issue. (For information about signing on to the discussion group, go to the GOCN webpage about it at <http://www.gocn.org/chatline.htm>.)

Date: Sat, 20 Jan 2001:11:54-0800

From: Stephen Dilworth <yfc-crossroads@intergrity.com>

We are looking for interactive ways for our children to be a part of the services. Many in our core are tired of our families being dissected when we are supposed to be coming together as the body in traditional settings. I know that age variances are tough for teaching and leading discussions. But I believe that the modern solution of shove them in a closet and entertain them is seriously lacking. We desire an opportunity for holistic ministry and cross generational learning, and we can't do this if we constantly segregate within our churches based on age.

I'm hoping someone out there has a creative solution.
Pilgrim-at-Large.

Date: Tue, 30 Jan 2001 11:10:40 -0500

From: Thomas Eggebeen <tegg19@qix.net>

Dear Pilgrim:

Some years ago, after many a wretched struggle, our church became a family-church, with every age present in worship.

1. We don't use a "children's message" ... parents have found it to be disruptive for the children ... they come forward, folks laugh at their cuteness, they get excited, and then have to settle down after they've returned to the pew.

2. During the message, I frequently use a concrete image for some point and specifically address the children, "Boys and girls...."

3. We have doodle pads in the pews for children and they produce an enormous number of little hand-drawn pictures that typically represent images from the church, the Lord's Table, me preaching, one of the images used in the message, or simply a little message to God ... they're all quite wonderful.

4. From time to time we use a dramatic reading of Scripture ... we have liturgical dance, and some very good (I think) special music, all of which keeps the service well-

paced, but not frantic or pew-driven.

5. I have cultivated earnestly my relationship with the children of the church ... being with them on many occasions, not to teach, but simply to be there, hanging around ... but especially at the door on Sunday mornings, to greet each child very personally, often with a hug from them, as they pass on their little notes and drawings to me.

6. Children here receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper ... which we mostly do with everyone coming forward.

7. Three times a year, we have baptism, and during the morning offertory, after the sacrament, the children come forward, and each one is signed with water and given a little business-sized card with these words, "Today, Pastor Tom and I remembered my baptism."

8. On other Sundays, during the offertory, children come forward for an anointing with oil, and a benediction ... their eyes wide with wonder.

9. Our mid-week children's program introduces the hymns for the next Sunday ... helping children use a hymnbook.

All-in-all, it depends a great deal on the family ... I've written and mailed out to every family of the church a booklet on Keeping the Sabbath Day Wholly ... things to do as a family, beginning Saturday night, to set the tone for worship.

Is it working? Talk to me in 20 years ...

Date: Wed, 31 Jan 2001 13:28:07 +1100

From: Greg Crowe <gcrowe@netspace.net.au>

Stephen - Fellow Pilgrim,

This is my first offering to the GOCN egroup, but I have benefitted from the discussions in the past. Stephen's letter picked up on an issue similar to what my congregation is facing.

This integrative, family stuff is a tough one and a journey in itself. I have no answers but can share with you some thoughts and a way we are attempting to move. In September (2000)'s issue of the GOCN newsletter (12:3) an article appeared by Chris Erdman on re-visioning the Pastoral Vocation. While it was focussed on Pastoral Leadership and his interest was in the monastic model as perhaps a way forward, it started me thinking about the nature of the religious community, how we are together as an assembly, and the monastic village as a model for a congregation's life.

I, perhaps like you, am a Minister of an average size, middle class congregation in the inner suburbs of

Melbourne, Victoria. We count ourselves still fortunate to have families attending with their primary aged children, making up a significant third of our attendance.

As I reflect on my own childhood in the church and what was provided for me, it was extremely focused on proclamation and teaching. At 35 I am probably the last of the Sunday Schooled generation. The model seemed to be: baptize anything that moves, get them into Sunday School and teach them the Bible stories so that they will become the church of the future. Great Christendom stuff. But even though I love it and despise it, this church life has little to do with my experience of God and my encounter with the Christ of the gospel. It happens for me in the gathering of the community, as I am embraced by it, challenged by it, nurtured by it and confronted by it. I don't see this happening when, as you say, we disconnect a part of the body from itself for teaching time.

In response to the monastic village model, I wonder if we have lost the calling to a common life, where as a community we share all things in common, feasts, prayer, worship, study and mission.

For many, a traditional worship service including a sermon without distraction is the only way, and to force them to integrate may not be a Spirit response to the issue. So we have a late morning traditional service for those who would find another way of doing things to be of no benefit, and in fact would find change a faith killer. [But] we now are having an early service for any who would like to explore the common life. There is discussion, activities, prayer, singing, quiet, and fellowship around the eucharist. But the focus is not teaching the bible as such, nor proclaiming the gospel as such. The emphasis is on learning to gather together, infants to 90-year-olds, to encounter the living presence of God in our midst. And we do this through sharing all things in common, in our worship at least. We are not teaching children that they need to know certain Bible stories; we are hopefully enabling young and old alike to allow our communal life to be the witness.

This is not a program, or even a solution, but for me and my little religious community at Ewing, it may be a faithful and creative way forward as pilgrims together. I, too, am interested in hearing from others, particularly in relation to Chris Erdman's article on the monastic village.

Date: Mon, 5 Feb 2001 13:18:04 -0700

From: Darren Cummings

<cummings@ecc6.ateng.az.honeywell.com>

It seems to me that this discussion is really larger than kids vs. adults, that what you are touching on here are fundamental tensions between the types of nurture required by people at diverse developmental levels. It's most apparent in a family, where various developmental levels have a commitment to be together regardless of their differences, but it also exists between adults at various levels.

It's interesting in this discussion to hear how often

"integrate" gets used. That word communicates a very particular developmental perspective, that of the adult who is moving beyond conventional adult development and seeking an integration of the various compartments of life. Adults at other places on their journey would perhaps focus upon the "identity" issues implicit in this topic, or perhaps upon the facing of inherent limits implicit in this topic.

How do you all feel about this? Do you feel that differing developmental levels are a major or minor source of tension in your congregations? Does anyone have any general insights or lessons learned about this?

Date: Tue, 6 Feb 2001 08:52:48 -0000

From: Adam Sparks <asparks@eauk.org>

I have been following this discussion with interest. It is a subject that I have been giving some thought to recently, as my church has been exploring possible ways forward regarding models of church, etc.

In order to think through some of the issues I have drafted a paper entitled "Church Family? - Intergenerational Tension in the Church" The paper addresses issues such as Trends in Society and the Church, The HUP, The Generation Gap, Church Unity, etc. It does not really address the issue of young children in services, but the principles may be of interest. It can be read at www.facingthechallenge.org/family.htm. I would appreciate any feedback.

Date: Mon, 05 Feb 2001 15:35:16 -0800

From: Mark Lau Branson <mbranson@fuller.edu>

There are benefits in the larger, longer traditions for intergenerational life. We adopted Jerome Berryman's "Godly Play" as a curriculum for children (and I used it on occasion with adults in education and in worship times). This is very difficult to describe, but it is a Montessori approach in which OT, NT, and Church history stories are created in visual, tactile forms, placed on shelves around the room, and a weekly story is told by the leader. (Because all the stories are always visible, kids are often making connections.) Then following the teaching (like Montessori) the kids use most of the time in response—art, retelling, telling another story they've heard, etc. My two boys (now 7 and 9) are more biblically literate than most adults arriving at church. They know these are their stories, that their interaction is respected. When coordinated with preaching series' or, in some churches, with the liturgical calendar, the adult-child relationship is nourished.

From around the age of 5 (parental discretion) children are welcomed as full-time in regular worship. This passage is marked by the child making a special candle (lit that morning, then taken home) and by a liturgy of welcome. We continued to use some activities as optional during some sermons—usually art or pictorial Bibles. I learned that with a half dozen or more easels and a few suggestions, I could fill the aisles with illustrators working on the sermon topic. (Most memorable were the plagues!) The quiet conversation of the

art teams did not distract significantly from the sermon—and the family conversations later probably let the word go deeper than segregated worship could have.

We also had a weeknight common meal before separate studies, and a number of the families with kids are now in a cohousing project, so intergenerational life is practiced as normal.

When we began looking for a church in Pasadena, top on my boys' list of what to look for were Godly Play and a church where adults and kids do most things together.

Date: Tue, 6 Feb 2001 21:28:43 -0500

From: Randy Buist <Georgetown2@email.msn.com>

I have really enjoyed reading this discussion, and integration will continue to be a significant issue in churches. As our world continues to fragment, the church will also experience some of the same thing. Still, while many of us will continue to bring integration to the church, I have two questions?

First, why is integration so important to us? Sure, I understand the value of different ages “being” and “doing” together. I also believe there is much merit to such arguments, but what is our primary reason for bringing the generations together? Has this goal become one of our primary reasons to exist as the church?

Secondly, have we underestimated the difference between the modern and post-modern mind? I believe the differences are so vast that little will make them be of one mind and spirit. In my experience, the modern mind simply does not comprehend the significance of these different realities. Remember though, post-modern and modern do not define generations. So, integration of different generations of post-modern (or modern) minds is not necessarily difficult.

Date: Wed, 07 Feb 2001 07:37:45 -0800

From: Mark Lau Branson <mbranson@fuller.edu>

Randy Buist raises important questions. Research here at Fuller (headed by Chap Clark) shows, if anything, an increase in the importance of child-adult and adolescent-adult relationships. More than ever he finds among youth the desire for authentic, mutual, partnering relationships.

Prior to my conversations here, we had moved toward intergenerational life for several reasons: (1) Jesus' welcome of children; (2) if families are to use home to pass on narratives and values, they needed something to imitate and the church could provide a model; (3) per Robbie Castleman (*Parenting in the Pews*), it is rather absurd to expect young adults to fully join, participate and help form congregations if they have been excluded during their teen years; (4) the respect of youth and twenty-somethings for older adults only comes by more contact, in more complex settings, and in seeing them worship and hearing their witness; (5) adults need to gain respect and appreciation for what children and youth bring, so we need new venues for

attentiveness and even instruction in seeing these members differently.

Youth know if they are seen as a program; they know if they are a job for a hungry intern. We wanted them to know themselves as fully members. Clark notes the inadequacy of earlier attempts—such as seating youth on church committees and boards. This was an artificial inclusion—place without mentoring, without serious relationships. The passing on of narratives (biblical, traditional and personal) requires more time together. The forming of a people means the whole people.

I have been surprised in this “Ministry of the Laity” position, that others are surprised when I assume children are part of my purview. There are reasons we have had difficulties bringing new generations into full membership—why they seek parachurch or new era churches—but there are ways we can change that would make this less likely.

Date: Fri, 9 Feb 2001 01:43:51 -0500

From: Randy Buist <Georgetown2@email.msn.com>

So we want to integrate the ages, the different generations in the local church? Tonight I am reading through the “available church positions” in a denominational magazine, and this thought strikes me. The way we have organized our churches suggests that we compartmentalize the way we do church, ministry, and relationships. We have senior pastors, youth pastors, children's pastors (and directors if they are female), and we look for gifted people to fit our specific needs for our specific churches. If our churches continue to be organized this way, perhaps we will have little choice but to perpetuate the segregation within our churches that we ourselves have likely caused.

Perhaps a bigger paradigm shift is necessary for our leadership than we have seriously considered. What would our churches look like if our ordained senior pastors thought of themselves as the “senior theologian” on staff rather than the primary “preacher of the word.” What would our churches look like if the youth pastors were not primarily “program directors” but “relational bridge builders”? How would a theologian and a highly relational person relate to one another on staff if they understood these to be their primary gifts rather than a senior pastor and a youth pastor?

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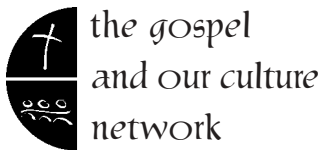
Date: Fri, 09 Feb 2001 09:57:35 -0500

From: Scott Crane <revcrane@bellatlantic.net>

I have been skimming through previous discussions and have a couple of comments that I would like to offer. First, church has taken on the cultural baggage of corporate structure in the hopes of being efficient and productive. Unfortunately, it has lost the family perspective. I told my church that they have become an “empty-nest” church. Many are retired from their occupations and are glad that children visit but are used to sending them home. That is great in the home life. But, churches that become “empty-

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nesters” begin to set a pattern toward death unless they exist in a retirement community.

Secondly, we tend to want young families and children to keep church programs going, i.e., warm bodies to fill committees and to work on events. Not much spiritual depth, if any. We need to reach out to the community with the idea of adoption into the family, not hiring in new young recruits that need to be trained.

Last, but not least: How does the faith story get shared in our individual and church family units today if there is limited interaction between generations? Where are the aunts, uncles and grandparents that share the stories of yesteryear with the younger ones? As has been noted by

others, the passing of knowledge via papers, television or internet is not the same as the passing of stories one on one. The family model is the ideal (as compared to corporate) for sharing the story recognizing fully that adoption and extended family are quite necessary to make this work in our highly mobile and dispersed world of today.

We need intergenerational relationships to have healthy growth. And relationships (good ones) take time to develop. Efficiency (quick results) that is pushed on us sometimes works against us.

For further reference, Will Willimon speaks to this in his discipling confirmation materials distributed by Logos. ■