

Southside Church of Christ

Bulletin

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Thoughts For A Busy Church

By Gary Henry

These are the days of many, many "Christian activities": gospel meetings, Bible studies, singings, lectureships, workshops, retreats, ladies' days, men's days, Bible forums, summer camps, young men's camps, young women's camps, Sunday-night "devos", youth lectureships, singles' weekends, couples' weekends, preachers' conferences, etc. The list gets longer every day, and our bulletin boards are beginning to sag. Within scriptural limitations, of course, these things are wonderful, aren't they? I enjoy them as much as anyone. Activities like these have the potential to increase a person's spiritual growth and development. But to be quite frank, in recent years I have become concerned, and my concern is well expressed by a quotation that I came across in my reading just the other day:

"We are producing Christian activities faster than we are producing Christian experience and faith" (John Raleigh Mott)

And here are three more entries that I found in my notebook pertinent to the same point:

- "Busyness, including busyness with religion and church activities, has been called the 'archenemy of spiritual maturity'...it can stifle spiritual growth and keep us from becoming effective difference makers" (Gary R. Collins)
- "Today, through an overplus of Christian activities, Jesus Christ is being dethroned and Christian wits and wisdom are taking His place" (Oswald Chambers)
- "In an effort to get the work of the Lord done we often lose contact with the Lord of the work and quite literally wear our people out as well" (A.W. Tozer)

Am I just getting cranky in my old age, or is there a legitimate cause for concern here?

My main concern is not the "Christian activities" themselves (I have profited greatly from many of them), nor is it just the busyness that results from the proliferation of these activities (although that needs to be managed carefully). My worry is that, in too many cases, we are

not producing what we want to be producing with these activities: **Christians who are stronger in their devotion to the Lord Himself.** Go back and look at the quotation I began with.

“We are producing Christian activities faster than we are producing Christian experience and faith” (John Raleigh Mott)

I fear that we are not producing Christians who are more strongly devoted to the Lord, at all costs and under any circumstances; instead we are producing a generation of spoiled Christians whose interest is merely in these enjoyable activities. The acid test would be dropping the Christians raised on these activities down into an environment where they could only worship with a small, struggling congregation in an area where there were few of these activities to be enjoyed. If they showed any less interest in the Lord’s work under these “deprived” conditions, that might be an indication that their interest was not being held by the Lord himself but only by a **certain group of activities within a particular kind of environment.**

I would say the same thing about a strong, vibrant congregation, one that is very enjoyable to be a part of. There is nothing wrong with that scenario; we all enjoy such an environment in many ways. But if all that congregation is doing is creating dependency on a particular kind of environment, then it is not doing its job. What every congregation wants to know is that it is nurturing Christians who love the Lord, period—Christians who would, if need be, serve the Lord just as faithfully under very different circumstances.

So I hope you’ll ask yourself the same

question that I ask when I look in the mirror: ***IS MY DEVOTION TO THE LORD SUCH THAT I FIND THE “CAKE” DELICIOUS . . . WITH OR WITHOUT ANY PARTICULAR “ICING” IN THE HERE AND NOW?***

Let me share two final concerns about the proliferation of “Christian activities” in our day. Keep in mind the original quotation that we started with: “WE ARE PRODUCING CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES FASTER THAN WE ARE PRODUCING CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH” (John Raleigh Mott).

(1) **Most of our Christian activities are a means to an end:** they are to equip us for service in the Lord’s work. But if we spend so much time on the means, we have little time left for the end: living the life and doing the work for which these activities prepare us. I worry about some individuals and some congregations in the same way that I would worry about a football team that spent all of its time in the huddle. And to change the metaphor, we’re the salt of the world, and some of us need to get out of the salt shaker!

(2) **I also worry about the demographic segmentation that characterizes so many of our activities.** As intensely interesting as these activities are to those within the “target group,” the danger is that we lose the cohesiveness of a BODY of believers who are interested in the work of the body as a WHOLE.

In particular, I worry about our young people, many of whom are really “into” youth-oriented congregational programs but show little interest in anything not designed to “rock” in a youthful kind of way. I talked to a young man last year who crossed his arms across his chest, looked me in the eye, and

said, "I'm not into old stuff. If the congregation expects me to be interested, they'd better bring in speakers who are cool." (That's like me staying in someone's home during a gospel meeting and saying to the hostess, "If you expect me to eat, you'd better put my favorite foods on the table. If you don't, I'm outta here.") But my concern is that with our niche-marketing approach to church activities, we are CATERING to that kind of self-centered thinking rather than helping people to grow out of it.

There is certainly nothing wrong with doing special things to meet specific needs — now and then. But the body of the Lord as a whole is in trouble if we've sliced and diced it into so many age-groups and interest-segments that people feel no need to be interested in anything that's not tailored specifically to their demographic group.

The question is not how the body orients itself to me and my preferences; it's how I orient myself to the body and, more importantly, to Christ *"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (Ephesians 4:16).

—**CyFair church of Christ Bulletin**

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James Miller

James Miller will be preaching this morning. He is visiting from Arlington, TX along with his wife, Erin, and two children. I am confident you will be encouraged and challenged by his study.

Gospel Meetings

- Tim Jennings will be holding a meeting at the Southside church of Christ in Sulphur Springs through Wednesday.
- Jared Rogers will be holding a meeting at the South Main church of Christ in Lindale through Wednesday.

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Monthly Ladies Class

The monthly Ladies' Class will meet this Thursday, October 2, at 6:00 PM. All ladies are encouraged to attend.

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Weekly Ladies Class

The Ladies' Class will meet this Wednesday, October 1, at **10:00 AM**. **Mary Burns** will be the teacher and all ladies are invited and encouraged to attend.

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Weekly Ladies Class

A second adult class will begin Sunday, October 5 in the large classroom. It will be taught by Jared Rogers and will cover the book of Ephesians.

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NEWS (continued from back page)

- **Bob Arnold** underwent another chemotherapy treatment this past week.
- Continue to remember **Relda Marshall, Michele Williams, Maurine Lee, Pat Brown, Dorothy Kyle, Judy Hinson, Deborah Brown, Tammy Wilford, Shirley Ferguson, Ronald Stringer, and Bob Arnold.**
- Remember our **Shut-ins:** *Clayton Bellamy, Loyd Clark, Maurine Lee, Irma May, and Lelda Thompson.*

