

## Calendar

Singing tonight, from supplemental song book, in lieu of sermon.

### A Small Church Mentality

Recently, a family of seven attended a tiny church in another part of the county and tried to place membership. I say tried because they asked four times and got no response. The preacher said, "Brother Phillips (not his real name) handles that; he'll give you a call." He never called.

This family would have added 50% to this church's membership number and also added some children to their number (they had none attending with them at the time). Most churches welcome families with children. But when this family assembled for worship with the church, more than one of the 15 or so people there turned and looked at them with a "keep-your-children-quiet" scowl.

The preacher in this tiny church preached on matters that he felt were important, as most of us do. But what he thought was important were topics like "why women should not work outside the home"; "why it is wrong for Christians to have a Christmas tree"; "why Christian men should not serve in the military." He even preached a lesson the qualifications of elders even though there was not a man in the church who was remotely qualified to be one.

While we all have our opinions and may feel strongly about them, it seems odd that a preacher would spend time on these matters when the church is struggling to survive. Wouldn't topics that touch on how to grow or reach the world with the gospel have made more sense?

But it's not just about what happens in the assembly. Why do so many churches seem to not want to be found? They literally hide their buildings and make no effort to publicize their existence.

Recently, the family made another attempt to attend an assembly. But when they arrived at the building at the "appointed time" on Sunday morning no one was there. The door was locked. Apparently, some people were out of town so they decided to meet at one of the members' homes; but they put no sign on the door to direct possible visitors to the meeting place. The only explanation is that they are not conscious of possible visitors; they have a small church mentality.

These are things that happen in churches that have a "small church mentality." I didn't say they happen in small churches, but in churches that have a small church mind-set. I am familiar with larger churches that seem to exemplify a small church mentality, too. They ignore visitors, provide few resources for finding the meeting place,

### The church of Christ

meeting at 900 E. Natoma  
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David Posey: 530/676-9514  
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Brent Agee: 916/786-0436  
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#### Service Times

Sunday Morning Assembly  
9:30 AM

Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM

Wednesday Bible Study  
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.

Private classes arranged at your convenience.

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such as a website or other means of advertising, and/or consistently preach sermons that many visitors would find highly offensive. Lest I be misunderstood, we must preach sermons that clearly spell out the sin of certain lifestyle choices, such as homosexuality, and call denominationalism and division what it is. However, even these ought to be presented in a way calculated to get a hearing from those who may be in attendance for the first time. We are to “restore” but with a “spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1).

I’m familiar with and encouraged by several small but strong churches — churches that have few resources but are constantly reaching out, trying to win souls and spread the gospel. I could give many examples, but one that I know very well is the church in Middlebury, Vermont where Dale Pennock preaches and Pat Minor (Nick Sadowy’s sister) attends.

This church is small and getting smaller. Yet they have a strong church mentality. Vermont is one of the most picturesque places on planet earth, but it is a difficult place for Christians to live. All the towns are small, rural and spread out (the largest city, Burlington, has a population that is less than Folsom). The state is politically and socially liberal, and the liberalism is even more pronounced in Middlebury, a college town.

The church has only three or four men who can fulfill the public roles in their assemblies. Teachers teach year round — no one gets a break. Recently, a key member of the church and his wife retired and moved to warmer climes. That was a major loss, but the church is used to losing key people. Not very long ago, Cal Minor, Pat’s husband, a supremely talented man, was killed in an accident. The loss to Pat, of course, was devastating; but it also devastated the church.

Yet, with all of these obstacles, the church presses on. This church, tiny in number, has a spirit the size of Vermont. They pray fervently that a family like the one mentioned above would move in and ask to place membership. They would be thrilled beyond words and would embrace them and welcome with tears and joy. Whenever the children made a peep, they would receive smiles in return, not scowls.

The church in Vermont is small, but they don’t have a “small church mentality.” They regularly sponsor gospel meetings that target the community. The members enthusiastically support the

meetings and prepare for it by putting fliers in every business establishment in which they are allowed to do so. When Dale makes the announcements, he does it as if he is speaking to 200 people — even if there are only 20. Dale doesn’t have a small church mentality.

But other churches, small and large, do. It’s hard to believe, but it must be true: some churches do not want to grow. Like people who grow up in a small town and get upset when the first traffic light is installed, people in these churches want to keep the church small.

But why? I’m sure most people in these church would deny it, not even realizing that their attitude is sabotaging growth. Perhaps they have grown comfortable and, at least in the back of their minds, are worried that new people bring new problems and, “well, we’re doing alright as we are...” (as I heard one lady say one time). Others may be concerned that false doctrine may creep in. The best way to prevent it, the thinking goes, is to prevent false teachers from coming in. This kind of thinking makes everyone but the present members and the preachers they recommend suspect.

There’s another small-minded attitude that I’ve heard now and then. Someone once said that they were concerned about a certain family placing membership because “they are \_\_\_\_\_ [liberal, etc.]” My thinking on that is very simple: tell them to come on and we’ll teach them the truth if they’re missing it. We can’t do that if they stay where they are. What did Jesus say? “Those who are not sick do not need a physician”? Bring on those who are not perfectly straight on every issue; we’ll teach them and may learn a thing or two in the process.

We can develop and display a “strong” church attitude regardless of how big or small our number. A strong church is one that is constantly aware of the needs of visitors and does everything it can to welcome them and make them feel comfortable, short of sugarcoating the truth. A strong church loves kids and caters to their spiritual needs. A strong church exhibits strong leadership, even in the absence of elders.

And as a larger church, let’s make sure we never fall into the trap of cultivating a “small-church mentality.” It can happen very easily when we become comfortable with the status quo.

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