

Six Healthy Habits of an Effective Church

At the height of congregational life in North America, the Church was an institution that society would look to for answers to moral dilemmas and as a safe haven for which one could trust for guidance and spiritual direction. When the church doors were open, people came.

That assumption is no longer the true for most parts of the U.S. and Europe. People look elsewhere for a moral foundation and spiritual enrichment. In many ways we are more like the ‘*exiles of the dispersion*’ mentioned in First Peter 1.1 and 2.11. The church is foreign to a majority of people in our cities, including Spokane. Yet many congregations are operating with habits that were commonly found in the institutional age of the Church. These habits need to come under close biblical scrutiny and in many cases discarded for healthier habits that help us carry out His mission more faithfully. Here are six institutional habits and their more healthy counterparts:

Traditional Habits

Sunday Centered

The church is not a building and the worship service is not the fulfillment of our only Christian obligation. As Christians, we are to be engaged in our ministry and our life of devotion throughout the week. We take up our cross ‘daily’ to follow Him (Luke 9.23) ‘day by day’ we worship, fellowship, serve and learn (see Acts 2.46-47 as an example we should to emulate).

Clergy Centered

Read Ephesians 4.11-16 and First Corinthians 12.12-26. It is not the clergy’s role to ‘do’ the work of the ministry. Everyone has received a gift and needs to employ it for the building up of the body of Christ. One of the primary responsibilities of the clergy is to train, equip and deploy the laity for the work of the church.

Do the ‘Right’ Things

You’ve heard it said “every church needs _____ program or ministry.” There are many programs we could recite to fill in the blank. Most of those church activities are fine and good but they are often not done the right way. Instead of dictating which ministries we ‘must have’ we will do things the right way which means that ministries will develop out of the passion, vision, commitment and giftedness of its members. If those characteristics are not present, regardless of the program or ministry, it will fail to be fruitful (read Romans 12.1-8).

Healthier Habits

7-Day a Week Ministry

Shared Ministry

Do Things the Right Way

Traditional Habits

Healthier Habits

Dominated by the Spiritual Unhealthy

Built on Spiritual Health

We choose our leaders using the criteria found in Titus 1.5-9, 1st Timothy 3.1-13, Acts 6.1-6 (and others). Leaders of our ministries and the voices of influence will be those who are committed to, and involved in, the ministry of Christ the King Church. They will have demonstrated spiritual maturity and servanthood. We won't twist arms or guilt individuals to get volunteers, even if it means putting a ministry or dream on hold.

Generational Segregation

We Are A Family

This is probably the most counterculture of all the habits I present. Please read carefully Deuteronomy 6.4-9, 1st Timothy 5.1-2, Matthew 12.46-50 and 19.29. Mike Yaconelli said what could, and should, be the habit of churches in the 21st century: "I still remember, as a junior high student, refusing to go out with my friends on Friday nights because I would much rather stay home for my parent's neighborhood Bible study. I loved listening to them laugh and argue and study the Bible together. Surrounding your children with good people is one of the greatest gifts parents can give to their children." Older and younger, singles and married, spiritually mature and the spiritual beginners, we learn from each other and support each other. We will avoid segregating into 'affinity groups'.

Aimless

Mission Driven

A pastor friend of mine once reminded me that their church's "vision dictates our ministries; our ministries dictate our facilities." We need to hold up our vision and values so that not one member of our congregation can claim ignorance of who we are and where we are going. Everyone is on the same page, accomplishing the same purpose and mission. They were acting 'together' in Acts 2.42.