

Fish Bowl Mentality?

Few people will deny the theory that **a local church stops growing as the size of the church building reaches 80% capacity**. The reason for this is purely human and not so spiritual. Most people simply will not tolerate feeling crowded in the pews. Using chairs instead of pews helps this problem somewhat, but eventually the congregants feel like their space is being invaded and soon become uncomfortable.

However, **this is not the biggest reason for a churches lack of growth** or the reaching of certain size and then growth stopping.

We use the analogy that a fish will only grow to a certain size in a small fish bowl but in a larger pond for instance, the fish can grow much larger. I'm not so sure however that God's church should so easily be compared to a fish. I suggest that the building is not necessarily the problem in most cases. In fact, we have all seen churches who were literally bursting out at the seams. **In many parts of the world today, revival is happening at an unprecedented rate.** Pews are packed and chairs are in the aisles. Some churches are utilizing 2-3 services per day to accommodate the crowds.

While it is true that most people don't like to be in a crowded atmosphere, it is also true that **people will come when they are being fed**. Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me Peter?" Peter responded in the affirmative and when he did, our Lord told him to "Feed my sheep." He did not tell Peter to house them or get them plenty of exercise. He told him to "Feed Them".

People who are starving in the natural will walk for days to get even the smallest amount of food or water. **Something within them drives them on** as they struggle to find something to fill their belly. It is very sad that much of our world's population goes to bed hungry and starving every day. We are also living in a day when people are starving spiritually. **People are eating almost anything that comes along spiritually speaking.** Truth is often ignored in the famished rush to simply fill the starving spiritual belly.

People don't care what you are preaching, just so it answers some of the gnawing that is in their heart and soul. An alcoholic will receive the five (or is it six) step program and ignore the friend who is telling him about the delivering power of the Holy Ghost. Why is that? He's hungry. He wants what ever is going to fill his spiritual belly right now. Mentally he makes the decision to do what is simplest and easiest to fix his spiritual problem. That couple in the divorce court often doesn't care if you say God is 3 or God is 1. They are looking for the thing that is going to keep their family together.

What's the greatest church growth program you could have this year? Feed His sheep. People won't mind sitting closer to one another when your ministry is holding their family together. When the **Holy Spirit** is the element that is behind every song and every sermon, people will crowd in to see and hear what is going on.

Professionalism and perfection is not what feeds people. Choirs singing on key will impress some people but if you want to feed the hungry soul, get anointed. Now don't get so anointed that you have a **Holy Ghost** break down every time you get up to speak or sing, but **allow the Holy Spirit to operate** through your person and your emotions.

Professionalism has no place in the church. Neither in the choir loft, nor behind the pulpit. **Professionalism is only a vain attempt to do carnally what only the Spirit of God can do.** You cannot touch someone's heart with professionalism. You might touch their intellect. However, you cannot touch the core of their being until you allow the **Holy Spirit of God** to operate in every aspect of your personal and congregation's ministry.

Preach not to impress. Preach to feed. Sing not to delight the audience. Sing to heal the wounded soul. When church leaders get together early this year to put the church calendar together, the question should be asked of every event planned, **"Is this really feeding people?"** or are we doing this out of tradition?

One of the reasons Small Group and Care Group ministries thrive in many churches is because **they are all about feeding the individual.** In the larger setting of the church the individual's needs often go unmet. Yet in the smaller setting, their needs are often paramount to the concern of the small group. In this setting the individual is often fed much more than in the congregational setting. This causes the congregation to grow as the congregation is made up of individuals.

Which churches will grow and prosper in this new year? Is it the churches with the largest or most beautiful buildings? Is it the churches with the most talent and charisma? Not in this generation. **This generation is longing for the thing that will fill their hungry soul.** They are willing to buy into whatever will keep their kids from overdosing or committing suicide. They're looking for the church that can show them the God who truly loves them in spite of their shortcomings and mistakes. **They're hungry. Feed them!**

I hope this was a blessing and encouragement to your ministry!

By Rev. James Smith