

CYBER COLUMN by Brett Younger: Jesus' Church

January 29, 2007

Posted: 1/29/06

CYBER COLUMN: Jesus' Church

By Brett Younger

In Fort Worth, [Grace Country Cowboy Church](#) began four years ago. Or as they put it, "a posse was formed." They're trying to reach out to cowboys and cowgirls who wouldn't attend the average church. The church welcomes anyone who enjoys old-time country music. They promise to "boot scoot for Jesus and two-step on the devil."

In Mayfield, Ky., boaters gather at Kentucky Lake every Sunday morning. They worship on the floating pavilion next to the marina restaurant. The pastor must be tempted to preach on fishers of men every service.

Brett Younger

In upscale Manhattan in the arts community of Chelsea, [The Gallery Church](#) is made up almost completely of single adults. Picture the cast from Friends discussing Song of Solomon.

In Union Point, Ga., a church of ATV and motocross riders meets early each Sunday. You have to assume the benediction is, "Gentlemen, start your engines."

In Denver, Colo., a church that meets on Sunday nights is named—and I’m not making this up—[The Scum of the Earth](#). The church is filled with punks, skaters and people with tattoos, body piercings and purple hair. I bet their choir wears black robes.

All of these churches reach people most churches don’t reach, and that’s wonderful. But you wish it wasn’t necessary, because it isn’t what Jesus had in mind.

Jesus’ Church doesn’t have separate congregations for cowboys, boaters, singles, bikers and those with hair colors that aren’t found in nature. Jesus was serious when he said God is our Father and we all belong to one family. It’s sad that God’s family seldom meets in the same church. We have churches for the rich, churches for the poor, churches for liberals, churches for conservatives, churches for white people, churches for black people, churches for straight people, churches for gay people, churches with Starbucks in the lobby, churches where the coffee only comes in one flavor and it’s called “black,” churches that function like neighborhood associations, churches that act like historical societies, and churches that say everyone is welcome and yet everyone looks the same.

Twenty years ago, I was a pastor in Paoli, Ind. Our church was a block off the kind of town square that makes you wish every town had a town square. If you’ve heard of Paoli, it’s probably because of the furniture. Since 1926, Paoli Furniture, Inc. has made gorgeous furniture that the people who make it can’t afford. My salary as pastor was \$14,000 a year, but the parsonage was filled with beautiful furniture. About 1987, the Middle Adult Sunday school class—and isn’t that an attractive name for a class?—decided they didn’t want to sit on folding chairs any more. They worked out a deal with one of the managers in the factory’s chair department. The fourteen members of the class would spend \$40 each to buy material for chairs that would normally cost about \$500. They would make the chairs on a Saturday when the factory was closed.

What a great idea! Jesus was a carpenter. How could he not love this? The craftsmanship on the chairs would be amazing—fine wood, deep finishes, exquisite details like brass trim. Any one of these chairs would class up the Palace of Versailles.

Then I found out they were making exactly 14 chairs and asked, “Couldn’t we make a few extra?”

The answer was: “The class only has 14 members. We’re the ones who are paying for the chairs and doing the work.”

I naively asked, “Well, what about when visitors come?”

I was told, “We still have the folding chairs, and if a member isn’t there, they can use one of our chairs.”

I foolishly asked, “But won’t you feel funny sitting in these beautiful chairs while visitors sit in folding chairs?”

I was informed, “That’s not going to happen.”

They were right.

Before the new chairs arrived, the teacher put a lock on the door. We’d never had a lock on any door. He explained that they wanted the chairs to stay in the room and didn’t want the kids to get in there on Wednesday nights.

Several years later, Carol and I went back for the church’s anniversary. They still had 14 chairs in the room, and they looked great, but most went unfilled most Sundays. The majority of the class was gone. The teacher had gotten mad and gone to another church. The young adult class was getting bigger. The older adult class was doing well, but the middle adults didn’t have anybody new.

What could be less surprising? That's what happens when we decide that the church will always be who we are now. That's what happens when we keep the best chairs for ourselves. That's what happens when we want some people to stay out of our church.

If my church is going to look like Jesus' Church, we need more poor people to show us Christ in the least of these. We need more rich people with portfolios in need of a good cause. We need people who drive SUVs and people who don't drive anything. We need PhDs and graduates of the school of hard knocks. We need people who kneel when they pray and people who put their hands in the air. We need African-Americans and Hispanics to teach us what their lives are like. We need conservative Christians who hold tenaciously to the central truths of our faith. We need liberal Christians who force us to think in new ways. We need young people to give us a sense of liveliness. We need old people who'll give us a sense of liveliness. We need non-Baptists to expand our understanding of faith. We need Baptists who appreciate the good gifts of our heritage. We need people who've sinned mightily and people who seem to have only gold stars by their name. We need cowboys, boaters, singles, bikers and hip hop artists.

If we let the Holy Spirit have its way, churches could be churches for all kinds of people. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if the church looked like the Kingdom of God?

Brett Younger is pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth and the author of Who Moved My Pulpit? A Hilarious Look at Ministerial Life, available from Smyth & Helwys (800) 747-3016. You can e-mail him at byounger@broadwaybc.org.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.