

# A good man is hard to find at church

August 14, 2008

DALLAS (ABP)—Men are disappearing from the church.

According to the Barna Research Group, there are 11 million to 13 million more American women who are born again than there are born-again men. While nine out of 10 senior pastors are men, a majority of regular church attenders are women.

Not only are women the majority of born-again American Christians, the Barna Group reports, “Women are the backbone of the Christian congregations in America.”

Perhaps indicative of women’s sense of spirituality, 41 percent of women said they have set specific spiritual goals they hope to accomplish in the coming year or two. Only 29 percent of men have identified such spiritual goals.

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“Women, more often than not, take the lead role in the spiritual life of the family,” said George Barna, president of the research group. “Women typically emerge as the primary—or only—spiritual mentor and role model for family members. And that puts a tremendous burden on wives and mothers.”

Pam Durso, associate executive director of the Baptist History & Heritage Society, agrees women play a major role in families as spiritual mentors. “One aspect of that is that mothers generally are the ones who do the scheduling of events and the planning of activities, including church attendance and church-related programs.”

But that's nothing new, Durso argues. Historically, women have dominated the membership of Baptist churches.

"Here is something to think about: Is 61 percent for female participation really a change for Baptists? Over the years, many Baptist churches have had a majority of female members," Durso said.

At First Baptist Church of America, in Providence, R.I.—the premier Baptist congregation in the New World—59 percent of the members from 1730-1777 were women, Durso noted. From 1779-1799, that percentage dropped by only 1 percent to 58 percent.

"So, perhaps the question is not where have all the men gone, but is instead where have men been all these years?" Durso said.

David Murrow, author of *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, believes the way churches market themselves affects the demographics of their memberships. According to Murrow's Church for Men website, a typical congregation draws an adult crowd that's 61 percent female and 39 percent male.

"It's widely believed, and rarely spoken of, that men feel church is something for women, children and grandparents," Murrow said. "If a man becomes involved (in a church), then he is less manly."

Murrow believes this trend began during the Industrial Revolution in the 1840s. Harsh economic conditions drove men to seek jobs in mines, mills and factories. While men worked, families were left behind for longer periods of time. The only people to be found in congregations were women, children and older men. Women began to add socials like teas, quilting circles and potluck dinners.

"The able-bodied man all but disappeared from the church," Murrow said.

Murrow mentions on his website, [www.churchformen.com](http://www.churchformen.com), that many who have grown up in the church don't recognize the "feminine spirituality." But to the masculine mind, it's obvious as the steps in front of the door.

"He may feel like Tom Sawyer in Aunt Polly's parlor. He must watch his language, mind his manners and be extra polite. It's hard for a man to be real in church because he must squeeze himself into this feminine religious mold," Murrow writes on the site.

The tendency of targeting women has grown with the increased popularity of contemporary worship, Murrow added.

Hymns used to be tuned into the masculine heart by alluding to God as a mighty fortress, Murrow noted. Songs such as "Onward Christian Soldiers" spurred men in their faith.

"But now worship sounds like a Top-40 love song," Murrow said. "They are wonderful and biblical, but it's not the sentiment that will rally a bunch of men."

Romantic music is a response to the market of single women, Murrow added. "They provide a Jesus image who wants to steal away with them ... which doesn't appeal to men."

"Are we going to allow the market to drive the church, or the Bible to drive the church?"

Murrow suggests there's nothing wrong with the gospel—just the way Christians present it. "We just need to change the culture container that we are delivering it in and should be willing to follow the example of churches who succeed in reaching men," he said.

A leading example is Christ Church of the Valley in Phoenix, Ariz. The church markets to men through the events promoted, down to the colors

and design of the building. The church even changes the range of the worship songs so men can feel comfortable singing.

“Everything we do when it comes to marketing is geared toward men in the 25-45 range ... an underserved demographic in the church market today,” said Michael Gray, communications coordinator of Christ Church of the Valley.

The church offers activities like motorcycle and sport groups. One of the groups is called The Edge. There men can rappel down cliffs, jump out of airplanes and bungee jump off bridges. The purpose is to cause men to take a step of faith and stretch their comfort zones. The ministry is a spiritually challenging group, not just physically challenging. While the group focuses on adventurous activities, their ultimate goal is to lead people into an adventure with Jesus Christ.

“The Edge helps get men plugged into the church and hanging out with other men, outside a church setting,” Gray said. “It shows that we are men’s men, and we don’t just sit in shirt and tie on Sundays with our leather-bound Bible”

There is more than one way to present the gospel in a way that contemporary men will respond to, Murrow said. But it begins with the congregation understanding it must make an intentional effort to reach out to men.

“People have to realize it’s a problem. They need to wake up and look (at) how magnetic Jesus was to men. We have a 70-to-80 percent failure to boys. I don’t think that’s (God’s) will.”