

Commentary: Being a church home for senior adults looking for one

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The drummer had on headphones and was beating out a tune like he was at a rock concert. We had been standing up for at least 20 minutes singing the same verses over and over. The man across the aisle had on clothes entirely too casual for a worship service. Yes, this was another church to mark off our list as we searched for a church home.

When we moved from Phoenix to East Texas—the Bible belt—the last problem my wife and I thought we would have was finding a church home. But it took us a year and 18 visits to churches of various denominations to find one. Some we attended for as long as three months hoping we would adapt.

From our experience, we thought it would be helpful for people like us to share what we are looking for in a church. By “people like us,” I mean retired and preferring traditional church services.

What we look for in a church

Our primary criteria is for a church and its leaders to be Bible-believing. We expect the church and its leaders to believe the Bible is the true word of God.

Strangely, we heard a number of sermons focused more on life skills than God’s word. Several feel-good preachers seemed to believe simply being nice will get you to heaven. Many ministers never mentioned the word sin

or the devil.

We realize culture has changed, but the Bible, sin and the devil are important to the gospel message.

Speaking of the Bible, we also expect to see people bring a Bible to church with them—a real, honest to goodness printed Bible. We expect pastors to engage people in opening their Bibles, turning the pages and finding Scriptures during the service.

We realize people are using their phones more and more to access and read the Bible, but we also realize you can't get distracted by texts, social media and other things that don't appear on the pages of a Bible.

We want traditional music, plain and simple. Traditional hymns are buried deep in our hearts. We don't have the same relationship to contemporary praise songs, partly because they haven't been around long enough and partly because many of them aren't as theologically deep as older hymns.

Also, a choir accompanied by traditional instruments—a piano and an organ—aren't boring, and they're easier on our ears than drums, amped guitars and microphoned singers.

What we look for in a pastor

We expect pastors to preach God's word. See above.

It's also important to us for pastors to acknowledge us, to be personable and to interact with visitors and church members.

And while we understand business attire has given way to casual Fridays, we still expect pastors to dress well. By "well," we mean not in T-shirts and skinny jeans ... especially if they're close to our age.

A pastor's sermon content and delivery are important. We expect pastors to preach as though the Bible is the living and active thing Scripture says it is. Monotone, reading from notes, these don't communicate God's word is alive.

Also, pastors need to do their own work on the sermon. Again, Scripture is alive enough that pastors don't need to use someone else's sermon they found on the Internet.

Jokes are great, but we really don't expect the church to be a comedy club. Remember, we expect the Bible to take center stage in a worship service and sermon, not punchlines.

And brevity. Brevity always will be appreciated.

What we look for in Sunday school

We grew up in a time when Sunday school teachers were trained and prepared their lessons for each week. We still expect teachers to take teaching seriously and either to have or gain skill in teaching.

We also expect Sunday school teachers to base their teaching on the Bible. Outside material should never crowd out the Bible.

We want to be engaged in discussion. Since we have spent decades in Sunday school, we don't want the teacher to be the sole source of information or the center of attention. We want to be drawn into participating in the lesson. Confident teachers allow class members to contribute to the teaching.

We are grateful for classes in which people feel comfortable sharing prayer requests with one another. At the same time, we don't want all of our medical issues to take up half of the Sunday school hour. Printed prayer lists enable us to spend more time studying the Bible together and to be

able to pray for one another after we've gone home.

What we look for in church members

Friendly people who welcome visitors say much good about a church. They make us feel like we would fit in with the church family.

A close second to friendliness is helpfulness. When we visit a church for the first time, we don't know where everything is. Having a friendly person look us in the eye, greet us warmly and then take us all the way to where we want to go tells us we are valued.

As with the pastor, we really do think everyone who attends worship should dress for the occasion. When we were younger, we couldn't conceive of wearing jeans and T-shirts to church. For us, the clothes we wear to church reflect our respect for God.

Returning to a point mentioned above, we do expect church members to bring their Bibles. We take the Bible seriously and want to know those we worship with take the Bible seriously, too. More than simply bringing a Bible, we want to see church members engaged in reading and studying the Bible together.

What we found

The good news is we did find a church home that meets our expectations. I am glad we didn't give up.

The pastor preaches from the Bible and is personable. We sing traditional hymns from the hymnal, led by a choir and accompanied by a piano and organ. We have an excellent Sunday school teacher who knows the Bible and does a great job keeping the class involved. The people are friendly and make us feel comfortable.

If you are looking for a church and are having trouble, keep looking. God will lead you to a church home.

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