

What's Missing?

A recent New York Times (April 2001) article by Laurie Goodstein titled, "Search for the Right Church Ends at Home," states that there are as many as 1,600 home churches listed on house church Web sites throughout the country.

There's always room for more churches, but why this increase in home churches? The reasons vary, but many of them point to the things people complained about regarding the established church. Instead of reacting negatively to these reasons, perhaps we can identify areas in our churches where we're doing well and areas that need improvement.

Pastors are often control freaks or are power hungry. What personality are you portraying? Do you delegate responsibilities and ministry to other people? A good leader allows others to discover their gifts and to shine in their accomplishments. Are there areas of ministry you can give away—but you're still holding on to? Spend your time wisely, intentionally developing people who can do ministry, and do what you've been called to do—pastor.

Families are separated. From restaurants to entertainment venues, our culture is spending a lot of time and money on providing experiences for the whole family. What's your church doing? Life stage and developmental groupings are important, but so is keeping the family together. Create services, Sunday school classes, small groups, outreaches, and activities that encourage family participation.

Members aren't interacting during the worship service. Christianity should be a dialogue, not a monologue. The talking head is becoming a thing of the past. Dialogue, story-telling, discussion—all these elements of communication are important. Give people a chance to talk about what you're preaching on. Even during your sermon—gasp!—stop what you're saying, ask questions, and encourage people to turn to their neighbor and talk about it.

Churches are more concerned about getting larger than they are about the lives of individuals. With the idea that "bigger is better," some people are turned off by the lack of personal touch often sensed in a larger church. They want relationships, and that can happen through small groups no matter the size of the church. As your church grows bigger, continue the goal to be smaller. Intentionally create settings for people to get together in homogenous or felt-need groupings. Provide avenues for people to build relationships within your church and community.

Lay people aren't involved in the ministry. Some people don't feel comfortable doing the usual ministries—teaching, singing, ushering, providing hospital care—but they have other things to offer. A benefit of the home church is that everyone is involved in the service. Think of creative ways for people to be involved in ministry by providing outlets through the arts, using people's mechanical skills and hobbies, and encouraging lifestyle ministry.

Money isn't being used wisely. Whether or not it's true, it's still the case of the ol' p-word—"perception." Make sure people are aware of where their money goes. Likewise, evaluate whether money's being spent wisely. Consider how the contributions should best be spent to continue ministry—both inside and outside the church. And remember that people in our culture are inclined to give to projects.