

Integrity

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Integrity

INTEGRITY, a journal published bimonthly by an independent nonprofit corporation, is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith, but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or the Board as a whole.

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God's Visit to This Small Planet

Is there something about "smallness" and *seeming* insignificance that is special to God? Is "smallness" special because human nature is more open to God when we sense our smallness? This issue of *Integrity* focuses on small churches.

The idea of smallness and insignificance reminds me of God's advent to this small planet, which orbits one of the billions of stars in one of the billions of galaxies. To realize that for his advent God used a small captive nation, a poor couple from Nazareth, a small town in Judea, and an animal feeding trough to bring us Emmanuel, inspires us when we are feeling our weakest.

This says to me that when I am feeling my smallest, when my weaknesses and sins weigh heaviest on me, when my hope is at its lowest ebb, when I am ready to give up and not try again, God is saying:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me one who will be ruler
over Israel,
whose origins are from old,
from ancient times" (Micah 5:20).

God is saying our smallness doesn't matter. He is saying "I have redeemed and used this small earth for my eternal purposes; I can redeem and use Israel; I used Mary and Joseph, I used Bethlehem, and I can redeem and use you for my eternal purposes."

This is the hope that Emmanuel brought and still brings today. This is the hope Christmas brings each year. And this is the hope for our small planet in 1994.

J. Bruce Kilmer
Co-editor

Some Observations on Small Churches

MARJORIE WOOD

Here are a few of my personal observations regarding small churches and their importance. My earliest memories of a small church (and I've worshipped with many) go back to the tiny west Texas town where my mother grew up. Mention "church" and before I can spout the magic phrase "the church is not the building" (which, of course, it isn't), the first vision always is a sheer pink Sunday dress with a pale blue velvet sash which was my standard Sunday wear the summer I went to singing class with my cousins. I must have been six. Every Sunday evening (in Texas, evening starts in the afternoon), we all washed the dusty patches from our bare legs and feet and quite a lot of the rest of ourselves, and slipped on our Sunday clothes which had been carefully hung up before our mid-day dinner. When we were washed, brushed, combed, bow-tied, buttoned, buckled and adjusted to the limits of our endurance, we were admonished and hugged and kissed ad nauseam and turned loose to hop, swirl, run, drag and kick our way up the dusty street and across the railroad. Another block, turn right, and there was the church building.

I don't remember the preachers or the sermons, but I remember the school superintendent who also dug water wells, preached, and led singing. All of us converged on the front steps and streamed into the high-ceilinged cavern devoid of ornament except for the baptistry painting. We were given dark blue song books and then all lined up in a long, straight row — separated when necessary to maintain peace. Dear Brother Newhouse patiently taught all of us how to read notes, interpret the squiggles, and beat time while we sang. We were older before we realized it gave all the mothers and aunts time to wash up, comb and re-pin their hair, powder their faces and rest their feet a few minutes be-

fore time to go back and worship. Summers were when we drove from Kansas to Texas to "Remember Who We Were" for a month and a half. As long as any of us cousins lives and sees each other, we recall fond memories of our early summers and the part that little church played in those recollections.

The next main small church I think of is the one in Manhattan, Kansas, where we moved when I finished high school. When we drove up in front of the small, white frame house next to the church building, I felt like I'd come home. We were met by eager people of all ages—graduate students, older people who lived in town and drove out to their farms, professors (Manhattan is a university town) and probably some military guys, too. Fort Riley is near enough to rattle windows when they play war. Our first Sunday there (the Lord's Day!) we met Miss Nellie.

Nellie Jacobs was for many years the common thread running through the small body of strong-minded, over-worked, well-educated Christians who came and went there. Miss Nellie was the cheerleader, arbiter, encourager and rebuker in the body. She had no official function but it was clearly understood that her voice always had to be heard. Every Sunday during growing season she appeared on the front steps with a homemade denim bag full of produce from her garden. These were for the young couples who were graduate students or in the military, and they truly needed the food. She rented part of an old house and lived very simply so that she could give to the needy. One winter the church bought her a warm coat which she needed but refused to buy. Nellie was one of many people there who loved us and ministered to us and lived by their consciences, but it would take a book to tell about fruit produced in that little church.

A more recent example comes to my mind of a small church that has powerfully affected those who attend when I think of a young male student I met while working at my current job at the ACU library. I saw him first when he strode into the library, eyes aflame. "Where's the card catalog? I've got to learn to use it—I've already got my first assignment!" His first class had just met and the day wasn't over. We browsed in the card catalog and he ate it up. I saw his black satin jacket with the eagle embroidered on the back as he moved around the library. He was finished with the Air Force and ready to join the Lord's army.

From time to time we'd meet on opposite sides of one of the public service desks at my work. One day he confided in me that he was preaching in a nursing home every Sunday. "Oh yes," he said, on fire. "The old people's friends and grandchildren come and worship with us there. We have about 40 people." He baptized some.

The last time I saw him, I asked if he were still preaching. "Yes," he said, "and the other day a little boy came up to me and said, 'Brother Chuck, when I grow up, I want to be just like you!'" We visited some more, and I haven't seen him lately. I imagine he's somewhere loving a small group of people to life in Christ.

All these stories remind us that every person in the church should act as yeast. Yeast is always a small part of the recipe, but without it there is no growth in the church. The size of a church does not make the difference; what matters is whether or not individuals are being responsible with the gifts God has given them.

Marjorie Wood lives in Abilene, Texas with her husband Lewis and their family. She likes to read and cook and entertain friends and welcomes *Integrity* readers to "come and visit" if they are ever in the Abilene area.

Munday Congregation Good News

LARRY FITZGERALD

When I first came to the Munday congregation in 1989 the average attendance had dropped to 65. The town of 1600 had lost population but it was a far less attrition rate than that of the congregation. Now in 1993 our average attendance is about 130. Most of this increase is due to baptisms and restorations—many of our restorations are among members who left the church ten or more years ago.

Our small but active youth group attends Bible Bowls, camps and does mission work. We have six elders who are dedicated to God's Word, but who are also willing to try new methodology. Indeed, we have done many things in our worship that

the so-called progressive churches can't do without causing problems and splits.

One thing we've found useful is to use the holiday season to our advantage. This past year we decorated our auditorium with wreaths, pine trees and lights. We had over 45 non-Christian visitors from the community attend during December. Several of our conversions and restorations have come from those who attended for the first time during December.

Dr. Larry Fitzgerald, a former adjunct professor at Texas Christian University, now ministers to the Munday Church of Christ in Munday, Texas.

Our Plans, His Plans, One Year Later

KATHY BLAKELY and BRETT KAYS

One year ago Saturday night had come and we had no idea who would be there to worship in the morning. There were six of us: Brett and Penny Kays, Ron and Mikie Scott, Sarah Johnson, and Kathy Blakely. Backed by some big guns of prayer, financed by metro-area churches, and having laid the groundwork with the help of many different people, we prayed for 200 people to fill the Woodhaven High School auditorium (a definite faith-stretching goal). But the Lord showed us nothing is too difficult for Him as 257 people came to celebrate Jesus the next morning.

One exhilarating, exhausting, demanding and delightful year later, the Lord has transformed a crowd of strangers into a family of faith—averaging 111 in attendance, with 30 baptisms and 19 transfers. Along the way, we have experienced many wonderful surprises and learned some lessons that may encourage and benefit *Integrity* readers.

#1 You Cannot Predict Or Control How God Will Build His Church (So Don't Even Try).

Much has been written about "targeting" people—focusing on attracting certain homogenous segments of the population. We set out to appeal to people in their 20's and 30's who wouldn't normally consider going to a traditional-style church. And while we have been moderately successful in reaching the "twenty-somethings," we have seen the greatest growth numerically with people in their 30's and 40's.

God has sent us a great mix of people, rather diverse in fact, including some three-generational families, more men than typical church, and a few African-Americans. This may be due to our stress on being an open, accepting family. You may be interested in this paragraph that is printed on

our weekly program:

Relax. You can be yourself and be accepted here. It doesn't matter if you wear a suit or jeans; if you have a religious background or not; or if you are single, married or divorced. From our beginning in April, 1992, we set out to be "seeker sensitive." So whether you're seeking to investigate spiritual stirrings for the first time, or you're seeking to strengthen your faith, you can feel at home. At the same time, we're finding common ground as "Christians only," going beyond the exclusivism that needlessly divides God's family.

To try to control the type of church God is growing would be presumptuous, if not disastrous. If a person wants to know God, and to follow him, we will help that person find his or her way down the right path, and welcome them into our fellowship. . .which leads directly to the next point.

#2 Be Relevant—For God's Word Has To Be Heard Before It Can Be Believed

God calls to people all the time through his Holy Spirit. But when they look for him, they run up against religious and cultural barriers. Our main job at Southpoint has been to knock down those barriers that Satan uses to keep people away. So many people view church (and ministers) as totally out-of-touch with real life. For them, church seems other-worldly—a place where you dress differently, behave differently, sit on antiquated pews in a stained glass room filled with quaint relics from the time Grandma was a girl, and listen to stale funeral-home music and boring sermons on "so what?" subjects.

The message of reconciliation with God through Christ is certainly the best of all possible good news. It deserves to be

communicated; it is imperative that it is communicated in the best of all possible ways. What is that best of all ways? Whatever is relevant to the listener. Brett has visited a number of growing churches with various styles and philosophies of ministry, yet each was perceived by their particular audience as relevant—that is, speaking of things that really matter in ways in which people could relate.

The gospel message remains the same, but the forms of communication change. This is why we use contemporary music (though we still lack a worship band—so if you play an instrument and want to move downriver, give us a call). We dress for church like we do the other six days of the week, and give people permission to worship freely (raising hands or not, clapping or sharing or participating in a number of ways). We use lighthearted skits and cartoons to supplement down-to-earth, enthusiastic preaching.

We're not talking about being trendy, but communicating eternal truths in ways that bring down the walls of resistance. Life is too short to waste playing church, rationing Jesus out only to people who adapt to our traditional forms. We need to be flexible enough to sacrifice hobby horses and sacred cows. If you can't imagine worship without pews, or hymnals, or everyone in their "Sunday best," then ask yourself what we had to ask ourselves: "Are those things actually more important to me than helping people know God?" For our part, we'll continue trying new ways of sharing God's timeless Word so long as we believe it pleases Him and advances His Kingdom.

#3 Delegate—Don't Monopolize Ministry

Even before our first service, we asked some people over the phone if they would like to bring cookies or usher. Ever since, we have given people jobs as soon as they're interested. They filled the vacuum left when temporary workers, such as the Scotts (directors of NCCE), completed their time of service. People actually do **want**

to be involved in something meaningful for God. If they accurately perceive a job as real ministry (service in the name of Christ to fulfill His purpose), then they rise to the calling.

If new members accurately perceive that they can make a difference with their gifts from God, and do not always have to be "under the thumb" of church leaders, then God can use all the gifts he has given his church. For example, one of our members took the initiative to scout out our current worship location, and did a lot of the leg work to make the move happen. If it had been up to Brett, we would still be meeting in a high school auditorium, instead of enjoying our new elementary school facilities that we use all week long for the same price. God has called us to lead this church, but he has not called us to monopolize it, and he has not given us leaders every idea and gift he needs to build it.

By the way, we put women to work in every area except where we believe they are expressly limited by Scripture. They pray, read scripture, lead singing, greet newcomers, pass the communion and balance the checkbook, as well as staff the nursery, vacuum the floors, and set up refreshments. We have been thrilled with the willingness and quality of our people. We have an "Advance Team" of a dozen men and women who meet bi-weekly to pray and plan for church growth; and it's exciting to see God giving them the same leading and vision he gave to the first six of us that short year ago.

Both of us have worked in traditional, established churches, and a new church is not that much different after the first few weeks. We face many of the same struggles and obstacles. It's easy to get bogged down in deskwork and non-productive busyness instead of personal visitation or discipleship. There's never enough time, volunteers, or money. But anything that we might have given to God for this work—time, money, career paths, whatever—has been worth it to see and experience how God can move in people's lives.

God has used us to help set in motion a church we believe will be great in the kingdom—great in service, great in love for the Lord and his people, great in influence in the community and great in numbers. We are reminded every day, when things work out differently (and better) than we counted on, that "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, NIV).

Small Can Be Beautiful!

CURTIS D. LLOYD

Growing up in a vital church is something that never leaves you as the decades blur by. This being my experience, it never dawned on me to think critically about my home congregation. Church was the major interest of my family's life and of my growing up years. In time, the simple concepts that Jesus spoke about to describe his followers — salt, light, and leaven, began to impact my life. The memories now flood back and they stand out as formative in my life: Sunday School classes taught by teachers who really cared about me, fidgeting through long sermons with my friends, eating large bowls full of homemade chicken noodles and lemon meringue pie at potluck dinners, going to Christian Service Camp the first year I was old enough to attend, two-week Vacation Bible School's crammed into one week, annual church picnics with a thirty-gallon crock of fresh-squeezed lemonade cooled by a twenty-five pound block of ice. . .

In relating these memories to friends and acquaintances over the years, I am often asked, "How large was the church you grew up in?" I would always think, "Funny you should ask—I never thought about it." It always seemed just the right size. (The truth is that it was one of the most consis-

Kathy Blakely, a graduate of Great Lakes Christian College, lives in Taylor, Michigan, and works for the Sisters of Mercy Health Care Corp. as a claims processor. Brett Kays is a graduate of Cincinnati Bible College & Seminary with M.A. and M.Div. degrees. He, his wife Penny and son Stephen live in Brownstone, Michigan. Both Kathy and Brett have ministered to the Southpoint Community Christian Church, which began April 19, 1992 in Woodhaven, Michigan through New Churches of Christ Evangelism-Detroit Metro.

tently attended churches I have ever known—80 people on a good day and 79 on a bad day. Very consistent!) "Oh, you went to a small church." "That depends — it was very big in my life!" My teachers, church leaders, ministers, typical members were my friends and my heroes. They took a young boy seriously, treated him as important and faithfully demonstrated that Christianity worked well in all of life's situations.

Today much is written about the mega church, which by definition has 2,000 or more in worship each week. There were very few mega churches prior to the 1980's, but today it is estimated that there are over 2,000 congregations this large or much larger. It is a phenomenon that intrigues me. How did they get to be so big? Surely not by being unfriendly and impersonal, as many who grew up in small churches think. My heroes of the faith in my home church can't conceive of being in a congregation so large, but when I reflect on that aspect it dawns on me that if my home church was small, so was the community, the school, and my high school graduating class. Perhaps it is a matter of scale.

As I work as a consultant with churches of various sizes, it is clear to me that small

churches do have limitations as do churches of other sizes. David R. Ray points this out in *Small Churches Are The Right Size* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1982):

The Christian church has five primary and essential tasks: worship, education, mission, caring for one another, and organizational maintenance (so that it can do the first four tasks). Small churches are by nature the right size effectively and faithfully to do the essential tasks. (The things it doesn't do well—support large budgets, buildings, and programs—are incidental to the essential tasks.) p.

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Small churches are often called “family churches,” which suggests their strengths and their weaknesses. If a small church has strained physical family relationships then the spiritual family also has upheaval and vice versa.

Still, “family” is the glue that holds both the physical family and the spiritual family together when times get really tough in a small church. The facts indicate that the average church at worship is small, so if you attend a small church, you are in the majority of church attenders. Of an estimated 400,000 churches, fifty percent have under 100 in worship attendance, according to Dr. Gary L. McIntosh in his publication *Church Growth Network*. Most Church Growth writers treat up to two hundred in worship attendance as small churches. If this is reasonable, then Dr. McIntosh reports eighty percent of all American churches are small by classification.

Whether a church is small because of the culture and the population it mirrors, or it is small because of an unwillingness to welcome and integrate new folk, makes a great deal of difference. If the case is the latter and they fail to recognize and alter exclusionary behavior, theirs is a terminal case. On the other hand, a small church may simply reflect their ministry area or be quite willing to change their attitudes and

turn outward. If this is true, then they should utilize their considerable strengths as a small church.

Plenty of Advantage

Lyle E. Schaller in *The Small Church Is Different!* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986) lists many strengths of the small church and here are several: The small church is tough! The long-established Anglo church is usually built around a ministry of the laity. The small church is a volunteer organization. The small church cares more for people than for performance. The small church rewards generalists. The grapevine is an asset in the small church. The small church is intergenerational. The small church is relational.

All churches are participants in and contributors to something much larger than the local congregation; it is called the Kingdom. Small to large, rural, suburban or urban, each makes its contribution to the Kingdom of our Lord. It is obvious that all churches are small compared to our Lord whose Kingdom it is.

In practical terms, all churches are small. Regardless of worship numbers, there is a limit to how large a group one individual can effectively relate with. This does not mean what many conclude, that large churches are unfriendly. How do they think those churches got to be large?

Groups Within a Church

As churches in America grow today, great emphasis is being placed on the development of small groups in churches of every size. Experts in the field of Church Growth speak of “Single Cell,” “Stretched Cell,” or “Multiple Cell” churches. They are suggesting that the small church is a single unit, cell or family and that larger churches have been able to build on this strength, stretching and multiplying cells within the framework of one congregation. They further promote the paired concepts of “Cell”

and “Celebration.” “Cell” is what takes place relationally in the neighborhoods where they reside and when they meet during the week. “Celebration” is that which occurs when those cells come together for larger, corporate worship.

Even in the complex social structures of America today the small church is impacting lives in the small church setting and attracting many to the gospel because of its unique dynamics and offerings. C. Wayne Zunkel in *Growing the Small Church* (Elgin, IL: Cook, 1984) shares thoughts that first appeared in the newsletter of a tiny Church of the Brethren located in a racially turbulent city:

In a big world,
the small church has remained intimate.
In a fast world,
the small church has been steady.
In an expensive world,
the small church has remained plain.
In a complex world,
the small church has remained simple.
In a rational world,
the small church has kept feeling.
In a mobile world,
the small church has been an anchor.
In an anonymous world,
the small church calls us by name.

What is Small?

Small? Is salt a small thing? Salt can be harmful to one's health and it does sting when applied to a fresh wound, but most would agree life without salt would be too bland. Salt can preserve meats and food-stuffs, fix bright colors in dyed materials, flavor our daily foods—perhaps salt is not a small thing.

Small? Is light a small thing? Light is difficult to measure and control, but few would argue about light being useful, necessary and life-giving. Without light there are no visual experiences, no plant life, no colors, no rainbows—perhaps light is not a small thing.

Small? Is leaven a small thing? Leaven is subtle, it can spoil a recipe if left unchecked, but the whole world agrees we can't easily do without this surprisingly potent, unseen element. Without leaven, there would be few breads for us to enjoy, bakeries would go out of business, there would be no sourdough pancakes—perhaps leaven is not a small thing. Salt. Light. Leaven. Little things? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Is there such a thing as a small church? It depends on those who make up the congregation. Only if they see themselves that way, will they think small, feel small, act small and remain small—small by every definition. I am enamored with the idea that the largest, the most successful churches, are really small churches. Small churches intentionally, and so successful at doing what the small church does best that they have become medium, large or even mega churches.

Is this surprising when we have a big God? Is this surprising when we have a great big God who values each of us so much that he sent Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten, to redeem every one of us? Is this surprising when this same good God sent his Son to establish his Body on earth that we might have a real loving family on earth, regardless of our fractured human relationships? The Church is his and he will empower its people to achieve what he desires, whether in fellowships that are mega, large, medium, small or “Where two or three are gathered together in My name.” With our Lord's promise that “I will be in their midst,” small can indeed be beautiful, too! I'm so glad that I had the joy of growing up in a loving, vital, small church.

SUGGESTED READING:

Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath, *Developing Your Small Church's Potential*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988.

The author's first two sections are on how change is challenging small

churches and discovering connections. The first is of crucial concern to all small churches and the second addresses causes and responses to cultural change. Their last two sections discuss integrating community change into the small church and how small congregations can change communities.

Carl S. Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*. Nashville, TN: Abington, 1984.

Dudley outlines his thoughts under the main headings of Caring, Conserving, and Coping. Excellent exercises are at the beginning of each chapter. Well documented.

Lyle E. Schaller, *Looking in the Mirror*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986.

If you are unfamiliar with the dynamics of various church sizes, this is a must read. The author opens with some interesting metaphors to point out differences between small, medium and large churches. As the title suggests, this book deals with self-appraisal.

Lyle E. Schaller, *The Small Church Is Different!* Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986.

Schaller accurately describes the distinctives of the small church, especially dealing with self esteem, youth ministries, the financial base and church growth. Chapter Five is typical Schaller, as he asks the reader to challenge com-

monly held assumptions.

C. Wayne Zunkel, *Growing the Small Church: A guide for Church Leaders*. Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1984.

A manual produced in 8 1/2" x 11" format. Permission is granted for use in the local church only, to freely copy the helpful charts and posters for handouts with practical suggestions on every page.

We think *Integrity* readers will be interested in knowing that Curtis D. Lloyd, one of our Board members, was married 29 years ago to Carole, who grew up in the a cappella churches and attended Harding College (now University) while he grew up in the instrumental churches. Curt is in his 30th year of ministry since his ordination and is currently involved (along with Carole) in ministry with many churches particularly in the upper mid-west. Their work can best be described as "Consulting" in areas of congregational assessment, strategic planning, mother-daughter church relationships, conflict resolution, church growth, leadership seminars, etc. Curt also founded and directs the national SAFETY NET program for ministers, their wives and families. SAFETY NET is designed to encourage those in ministry, to help those who drop out, and to reclaim some so that they may return to active ministry. Through SAFETY NET, Curt has been able to serve ministers from the instrumental and a cappella churches and others from outside the Restoration Movement. Curt and Carole's "home base" is in Grand Ledge, Michigan.

New Growth in the Ukrainian Church

JOSEPH F. JONES

My long-time friend Stephan Bilak invited my wife Geneva and me to come to Ukraine to help with a Christian family encampment. After months of prayer and planning, Geneva and I stepped off the plane in

Geneva, Switzerland on June 22nd, to be met by Stephan and Bob and Jan Towell from Maryland, Christians whom we had never met but with whom we would be closely associated in the days to come.

Three days later our three couples arrived in Ternopil, Ukraine to share in an indescribable week, telling the story of Jesus and his love.

Not that these people in Ukraine have never heard of Jesus Christ, for countless persons have heard the voice of Stephan Bilak in past years. But now, after years of vision, patience, preaching and prayer, the harvest is beginning to come in. During the past year about twenty-five precious souls were brought to salvation in Christ, putting him on in Christian baptism.

Brother Bilak asked me to focus the lessons on Colossians since it affirms so fully the all-sufficiency of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Some campers had already been baptized. Others had already indicated a growing interest in baptism, its nature and meaning. So our lessons concentrated on the need to "put off the old sinful nature," and to put on Christ in the new life. Much attention was given to the reality that in baptism it is not the water that saves, even if "blessed by a priest," but it is God's power at work in the baptismal response of the believers; so our focus daily came to be on faith in the crucified, loving Lord Jesus,

Extended Family

ANGEL and IRIS MARTINEZ

This letter is in answer to your request for "Good News From Small Churches." Although I am not certain that what I am about to share would be considered good news by you, I believe some may benefit from the information.

The group here does not come from a Church of Christ background. I was briefly in contact with brother Ketcherside for two years before his death, and have read a few of his books. I had been reading *Restoration Review* for two years or so, and now I am reading *Integrity*. Our small

his burial and resurrection by the power of God.

On a beautiful sunny afternoon near the end of the week, ten precious persons confessed Jesus as Lord, and were immersed into Christ. Then those baptized were encircled by the others, warmly hugged, and given the "kiss of peace," as Stephan so biblically expressed it. My heart and eyes overflowed from joy and thankfulness!

Following the baptisms there was an agape (love-feast) shared in a lovely pine-wooded grove. Later in the evening most of the group joined again in a fellowship meal in one of their homes, an occasion that lasted on toward midnight. As with that jailor mentioned in Acts 16, who after his baptism "set a meal before them" because he was "filled with joy," so did these new believers in Ternopil, Ukraine. All glory be to the Father!

Dr. Joseph F. Jones has ministered to the Church of Christ in Troy, Michigan, for 26 years. He holds doctorates in the fields of higher education and pastoral counseling. Joseph has worked and written for *Integrity* since its earliest days, and has served as president of the Board for more than 12 years.

church (6 families) is a Hispanic church. Most of the members come from a Baptist background, but at the moment there is but a tenuous association with the Baptists (Southern)—a very kind sister that happens to be the director of the Baptist Student Center for Mary Washington College has allowed us to meet at the center twice a week.

The good news is that we are Christians trying to serve the Hispanic community in the area. Also good news is the fact that past experiences of some of the oldest in

the group have enabled them to understand the evils of sectarianism. This has created an atmosphere of understanding and freedom, without falling into the trap of being superficial in our regard for doctrines. The church is growing spiritually with this basic concept at its core. Our concern is to grow spiritually and prepare the church to receive and nurture new ones (who are already beginning to trickle in). We, as a group, have a name: Iglesia Cristiana Hispana de Fredericksburg (Christian Hispanic Church of Fredericksburg). The naming is a necessity which we have reluctantly accepted.

The bad news is that because two of the members (my wife and I) had been Jehovah's Witnesses ten years ago, no congregation has been willing to help our church. When we came to this city we tried to find a place and people with whom we could have Christian fellowship. The usual questions were asked about our past. Then the obvious questions followed: Do you still deny the divinity of Christ? When we try to explain that we were not Trinitarians nor Arians, they simply opted for thinking of us as non-Trinitarian. This was sufficient for them to close their doors and hearts to us. (Of course, they always said, "We still love you, though!") We are considered non-Christians by many of our brothers and sisters, Hispanic and Americans, outside the Hispanic Church.

Slowly we have been able to come into contact with Hispanic Christians who did not ask the usual questions, although they had already heard about our background. Instead of looking at our "minds" they looked at our lives. This acceptance has allowed us to share with each other what we believe and to come to a clear understanding of what makes us Christians. As I said before, this attitude of respect and openness should not be confused with an ecumenical approach nor a superficial attitude toward the Scriptures. There are things we have to believe if we are to be called followers of Christ. Our list is short, though, compared to most people's lists.

All other things we can discuss in love, always using as a test the questions: Will this subject edify the congregation? Is my attitude divisive?

The real bad news: Except for the loving sister of the Baptist Student Center, all churches we have approached to ask to share their places with us (or some rooms) for which we would pay rent, have closed their doors, because of my wife and me. As far as I know, most members in the group do not share our point of view on the Trinity. We simply have not made a big deal of it. (By the way, my wife and I believe that Jesus Christ is God.) So we have been sorry to see our church affected by our reputation. We told the other members that we would leave if they wanted, so that they could have the support of the churches in the area. Their unanimous comment was: "We know that our attitude toward you is the Christian attitude. We would be compromising God's truth if we accept their conditions for support."

Maybe the last paragraph should not be prefaced. "The real bad news" but "the real good news." How may Christians today have the understanding shown by these people, of what makes us one? How many have the courage to stand by their brothers who differ with them in matters of secondary doctrinal issues?

As an aside, I should not leave you wondering what exactly these brothers were accepting as a legitimate Christian difference with regard to the deity of our Lord. This is shared only with the intent to inform, not to convince. The first point is that the Bible nowhere states that we have to believe that Jesus is God (in the absolute sense) in order to be of God's family. We are told that we are to believe that Jesus is the "Son of God." Any interpretation of what that may or may not entail is just that, an interpretation of a clear biblical statement. The second point: Even a reading of John 1:1, so often used to support the Trinitarian view, does not say as much as the Trinitarians assume it says. Translations like Barclay's, Moffat, An American

Translation from Goodspeed, The New English Bible, and a few others in German, do not support the Trinitarian view a la Nicea/Constantinople. Should I rationalize Paul's words to the Corinthians, "yet for us there is one god, the Father. . ." (1 Cor. 8:6)?, or Jesus' own, "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3), ". . . I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God. . . I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God . . ." (Rev. 3:12), so that I can make sense, somehow, of a creed that had its origins in political haggling and intemperate religious conflict?

Jesus is God, because according to John 1:1 he is of the essence of God. But he is not Jehovah, the One he himself called the "only true God." The only One that is God in the absolute sense is the Father. Am I a polytheist? In the absolute sense, no. In a relative sense, of course. Please note that

this is different from the Arian position (and the Witnesses' position also). My position is what John 1:1 and 1:18 state, i.e., he is of God's essence and he is the "only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*" (NASB, emphasis theirs). I am simply trying to state it like it is without "going beyond what is written."

I suspect that perhaps our position on the doctrine of the Trinity stretches, maybe to the point of tearing, the bond you have so kindly extended to others. I pray, though, that this time I am wrong.

I will say "adiós" now. I hope this letter has added something of value to your ideals on Christian unity. I hope that my wife and I can find in you another group of brothers and sisters for whom John 17 is more than just a chapter in the Bible.

Angel and Iris Martinez reside in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

A Movement to Home Churches

WANDA C. HATCHER

This is a brief report on an exciting experience my husband, Gene, and I had recently that may be of interest to some *Integrity* readers. We attended a three day conference exploring the house church as an essential model for carrying on Jesus' mission of healing and reconciliation in today's world. About 200 Christians came to the conference from many denominations along with many who have been in house churches for years. We were hosted by a small Christian college in upper Virginia.

Even though we were strangers from different religious backgrounds and from all over the U.S. and Canada, it was such a joy to early on sense the bond of love between us because of Jesus. We attended

lectures and workshops throughout the day on Friday and Saturday, but on both evenings from 6 to 9 p.m. the large body was broken into groups of about 15 people. We shared a meal each evening, had fellowship, study and prayer which served to give us a "feel" for the home church. It was great! There is no denominational name attached to a house church in order to keep the focus on the Lord.

On Sunday morning the entire group gathered for breakfast, communion and worship. Home churches today as in the first century have communion as a part of a meal, so we shared in this ancient holy memorial following breakfast. The worship came next and it was a joyous time of singing to the Lord, praising him, reading his

word and praying. Those assembled were participants, not just spectators. For both Gene and me, the three hour meeting seemed to end too quickly.

If anyone is interested, we'll be glad to pass on more information on this growing movement to home churches which nur-

tures face-to-face bodies of love, accountability and shared life.

Wanda and Gene were early members of the *Integrity* Board. They are now retired and living in Tennessee where you may write them at: 105 Meredith Place, Franklin, TN, 37064.

Intercepted Correspondence

The following "Intercepted Correspondence" is a continuing feature begun in the January/February 1988 issue of *Integrity*. These letters are *Integrity's* version of C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* and Os Guinness' *Gravedigger Files* and are written by two different *Integrity* board members.

To refresh your memory and inform new readers, our imaginary setting has Bruce attending WordPerfect computer classes, where he accidentally begins intercepting subversive communication between two devils on his computer screen. The *Integrity* board decides that we must inform Christians everywhere of the destructively evil plots of the nefarious teacher Apollyon and his young student Ichabod by publishing the letters for as long as they can be intercepted.

My dear Demon in Derogation,

Your most recent communique brought me demoniacal glee, revealing your own discovery of the delight of derogation. This ensues, quite naturally, from successfully subverting the commitment of the Enemy's slaves by frustrating or despoiling their efforts in His behalf.

When you launch and succeed through perpetrating an attack against one of the Enemy's servants, and especially a neophyte, you know the greatest gratification we can experience. You have nipped a potentially full-fledged enemy in boot camp, as it were, sparing us later conflict in our ongoing spiritual warfare. Continuing success will indubitably result in your being honored by elevation among all our members of the North American Association of Spiritual Subversives! Said membership endows its recipient with numerous privileges, such as periodic use of an asbestos suit, which may be worn while in attendance at our more-than-warm council fires! I need not point out the relief, however temporary it may be, when you gain this honor.

Despite our best efforts, we have not been able to gain full-time wearing privileges; but something is a bit better than nothing at all.

You have put your finger precisely on two types of people with whom we must work hard: the idealistic ones and those who are self-righteous. Both must be properly identified, and your course of action will fall automatically into place when you have made their proper classification.

The idealists may be recognized in several respects. They are the first to volunteer for difficult tasks in the Enemy's service. They listen to every word of their instructors, taking copious mental notes so as to win the world to their convictions. They read their Textbook at every opportunity, wherever they are, committing certain portions to memory for use when the occasion arises. They spend an inordinate amount of time in prayer—*meaningful* prayer. You must *never* underestimate the seriousness of their intent, the persuasiveness of their sales pitch, or their hon-

est satisfaction brought by any success. What's more, they are genuinely humble, which complicates our task immensely.

And how do we respond to this type of idealism? Our best and most subtle work is to confuse them at the onset, if possible. Almost immediately after their Leader left this earth and placed His work in the hands of His emissaries, we launched our attack against His primary message by sowing seeds of division and confusion among those who had become his disciples. Their own surviving records tell something of our success.

We especially enjoy subverting the faith, works, and lives of the young 'soldiers of the cross', fresh out of their seminaries. We can honestly boast of great success here, as witness the high drop-out rate. The first thing we do is take a long, hard and deep look at the person, asking vital questions: Has this young preacher made a hard and fast, genuine commitment to serving the Enemy, or is he riding a tidal wave of emotional euphoria? Is he ready to absorb criticism, either constructive or abusive? Can he learn to organize and utilize his time well, or does he grind out the hours in 'busy work'? The potential chinks in his armor are legion; you have only to observe him carefully, and his spiritual vitals will be exposed.

With the self-righteous, subversion is simpler. One trick which works wondrously often is to take the subject through the "It's right, therefore I'll do it" to the "It's right *because I did it*" syndrome. Essentially, this is an exercise in egoism, pride, and self-justification. Master this approach, and you can slay throngs. One of our enemies put it rather neatly on one occasion when he wrote, "Let that one who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he should fall."

Offensively yours,

Uncle Apollyon

PS — Noting our works and some few successes, one of the Enemy's senior advisors has established what he calls the 'Safety Net' — a program designed specifically to reclaim ministerial drop-outs for their Master's service. Confound it, he's been all too successful; we must find an effectual counter-measure, or we may suffer severe damage. Your suggestions on the matter are welcome.

My Dear Mentor in Malice,

Many thanks for your encouragement of my efforts and your optimism about my winning recognition in NAASSTY (I think you left out the last words in the title—"and Tempters of Youth"). I hope before long to advance to the Council of the Ungodly. No doubt you were admitted long ago to the Way of Sinners and the Seat of Scoffers fraternities. Is it true, as I have heard, that to be admitted to the Seat of Scoffers Society you have to give a thirty-minute impromptu refutation of some point of the Apostles' Creed? And that furthermore it has to be scathing enough to reduce all but the strongest believers to abject intellectual shame? That must be something to hear! I would love to listen to your initiation piece sometime. I may need the asbestos suit just for that.

I have no new initiatives or developments to tell about at Broad Way Church. Actually, things seem to have been rocking along pretty well without any special effort on my part. I heard a heartening statistic recently, to the effect that the average American gives only about 3% to charitable causes, and that even the average churchgoer doesn't rise above that level. I'll bet most of the church people pay more of their income in interest on their credit card and automobile debts than they give to support the Enemy's work. Hasn't the easy availability of credit been wonderful for our cause? It works right in with our strategy of making discipline and deferred satisfaction look ridiculous.

As to your worry about reclaimed ministerial drop-outs, I think we have first of all to cultivate people's natural tendency to gloat over those who have "fallen" (never allowing the gloaters to realize that the only reason they've not fallen is that they've never been anywhere to fall from). Even the sincere restorers of the fallen will probably not heed the warning of their Book to look to themselves, lest they too be tempted, and we can get at them in the vulnerability of their over-confidence. One pitfall for these Believers that we don't have to deal with is getting careless and slacking off; our persistence has won many a

victory that would have gone to the Enemy, if only His children had realized (as we do) that there is no truce in the battle we wage. So even if the do-gooders in the "Safety Net" program achieve some turn-arounds, they probably won't get enough prayer support and financial help from the rest of the Body to carry on long-term; then they'll get discouraged themselves and wind up in the same boat as those they're trying to rescue. May it be so!

Yours in demonic consistency,

Ichabod

Book Review

Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How To Fix It

By Thom and Joani Schultz (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1993. 240 pages.)

Reviewed by RAYMOND S. STEWART

Christian education for most congregations is in a state of crisis: teens are leaving our Bible school classes in droves and young adults often don't return after one or two visits. Furthermore, our older members often drop out and opt to attend every activity by the Bible classes of a congregation for which they otherwise feel great loyalty.

I believe that we have a two-fold problem:

*How can we pass on our faith to others (our children, friends, etc.)?

*How can we retain those who are already baptized believers and nurture their growth?

Some church leaders are hoping these problems will just go away (they haven't and they won't). Others refuse to believe

or acknowledge the existence of a problem (they'll die and their legacy will be one of a disbelieving, cynical, unconcerned generation of Christian believers). Still others (I believe a very small minority at least within churches of Christ) are reviewing all church-related efforts to "become all things to all men so that [we] might save some." Into this tempest Thom and Joani Schultz have provided a penetrating analysis of our dilemma in *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How To Fix It*.

This book hasn't merely unsettled me. Rather, it has forced me to do a basic rethinking of every teaching method that I have used during my thirty-five years of church classroom teaching in weekly Bible classes, summer vacation Bible school classes and an eight-year bus ministry. I

have concluded that the classical teaching methods that I and many of my brothers and sisters in Christ have used over the years are suspect because they have largely not produced meaningful results. However, this book's authors not only critically examine what's wrong with Christian education in our churches; they also attempt to spur and inspire us to take action whether one worships in an urban or rural congregation, large or small.

The Schultz's basic theme is that the church has adopted its educational methods from an already bankrupt public educational system which is in dire need of an overhaul. From the introductory chapter entitled "The Lost Art of Learning in the Church" to the final chapter, "Welcome Change," the reader is urged to question the effectiveness of our teaching methods that often stress rote memorization, unscrambling of words, and a rewards system that does little to nurture faith. The authors' avowed purpose is to alert the reader to new emerging effective models for education that can be used in our churches' educational programs to "help you unlock learning in the church."

Although there is much to be done, the authors strongly affirm that Christian education matters a great deal to them and that effective Christian education can promote strong ties to a person's growth in faith. This fact has been substantiated by recent surveys of adults and youth in churches of several denominations. The authors cite the finding of such surveys to make the point that the bible school environment is a tremendous opportunity for real learning to occur!

Shattering the Cliches

The book consists of an introductory chapter and ten chapters which begin with "Know the Goal" and concludes with "Welcome Change." Chapter One — "Know the Goal" — proceeds to shatter about every cliché that I've heard or used during my

years as a teacher and educational director for four congregations of churches of Christ. I am a product of the Bible school programs of churches of Christ. Yet I must question very seriously educational programs that have frequently stressed attendance, discipline/silence, adoration of teachers, theological correctness, busy work of students, and rote memorization. Seldom have I asked the question posed by the Schultzes: Are our students learning anything? What about the harvest? Are we truly preparing our students to think for themselves as responsible believers?

I agree with the thesis of the authors because for many in my fellowship, I believe we've lost our way; we've forgotten why we're doing what we're doing. Surely it's time for change in teaching the changeless Word! It's, therefore, quite encouraging that the authors deal with the challenges that we face as Christian teachers as well as many of the problems that we have created for ourselves. However, Chapter One isn't meant to be only a hand-wringing experience. The authors share their goal for learning in the church: "to know, love and follow Jesus." This results-oriented, harvest-oriented goal covers every age group because Christianity is emphasized as a lifestyle.

The end of each chapter is a "DO IT" section with ideas galore for the reader to consider in applying each chapter's principles. For example, the authors recognize the need for getting church leadership and teachers on board before implementing any changes of significance in an educational program. Thus, one exercise at the end of Chapter One deals with raising concerns (building awareness and goal-setting for teaching staff).

In Chapter Two—"Focus On Learning Rather Than Teaching"—special attention is given to examining Jesus' learning techniques. The authors include a truism that many of our textbook writers forget: "allowing learners to practice what they've learned puts emphasis on learning, not teaching" (p. 35). In this regard, this book

is filled with helps which include reading lists and other outside resources for the interested reader to pursue. Interactive learning techniques are continually stressed: one's fellow students are viewed as learners and resources in the learning process rather than as competitors. Examples of such techniques are provided from Jesus' ministry.

Many readers of this book may share my feelings of frustration and an overwhelming desire to call our curriculum writers to account for the fact that "all these puzzles, fill-in-the-blanks, mazes jumbles, cross-words, encoded Scriptures, and closed-ended questions produce virtually nothing. No one learns anything of substance—except that church and God and the Bible are aimless, tedious, confusing, boring, and a monumental waste of time. That's the hidden curriculum our students actually retain."

Authentic Learning Techniques

I'm encouraged by Chapter Eight — "Use a Curriculum that Produces Authentic Learning." It contains suggestions to use with a curriculum that will promote "authentic" learning. There is also an advertisement at the end of the book for "Hands-On Bible Curriculum" from Group Publishing which promises to help teachers implement

many of the ideas in the Schultz's book. I personally plan to obtain these materials for inspection by our teaching staff for future implementation.

Although the primary emphasis in this book is on promoting a revolution in our approach to classroom teaching, the often sacrosanct sermon is also mentioned as a time for learning rather than for merely enduring. In a highly thought-provoking passage, the authors take us on a tour of "If Madison Avenue Preached" and relate these ideas to why many so-called "children's sermons" work and the majority of sermons from the public pulpit don't.

A delightful concluding chapter entitled "Welcome Change" is both realistic in anticipating hurdles and proactive in trying to produce realistic changes in the total educational program of the local congregation. Indeed, I agree with the authors that "now is the time for common sense, for courage, for change. We're faced with a world that desperately needs to learn, to learn about and become transformed by the saving grace of Jesus Christ."

Raymond S. Stewart holds a Ph.D. in chemistry, has worked as a chemist in the paint industry for more than twenty years, and is currently a research manager for Akzo Coatings, Inc. Ray has taught Bible classes in Churches of Christ for more than thirty years, and is now serving as deacon and education director in the Lake Orion Church of Christ, Lake Orion, Michigan.

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