

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

January 4

2009

Editor's note: The following 2 articles deal with what I believe to be a dangerous trend among brethren. Both were written several years ago and we continue to see more and more fruits of this movement toward promoting the social gospel. I commend them to you. (JH)



Abandon Youth Ministries

The May, 2001 issue of The Christian Chronicle carried an interview with LeGard Smith, now "Scholar in Residence for Christian Studies" at David Lipscomb University in Nashville. One item caught my attention. Smith was asked what he would say if he had the undivided attention of every member of churches of Christ for 10 minutes. Included in his answer: ". . . I would call on the church to abandon youth ministries, which have toppled the spiritual hierarchy. Throughout Scripture, spiritual leadership is not only male, but it's elder. It's the wisdom of the years that leads and nurtures younger generations."

Abandon youth ministries. This is not the cry of some old fogey ultra-conservative who resists change at every turn. It is the counsel of one who is seeing among his peers the ripe fruit of an ill-advised tree.

Youth ministries typically feature two things: abundant recreational activities and shallow, entertaining instruction. What happens when teens who are accustomed to such things become adults? Will they immediately consider themselves too old for church-sponsored recreation, or suddenly insist on more sober worship and meatier preaching? Of course not. As a result, today's

"adult church" has in many cases become just a slightly toned-down version of yesterday's "youth church."

The Bible, of course, knows nothing of youth ministries, youth church, or church-sponsored recreation for any age. And it emphatically warns against ear-tickling preaching (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

This warning is timely. In recent years, increasing numbers of congregations which have stood opposed to institutionalism and church-sponsored recreation (things readily accepted by Smith's associates) are beginning to dabble in youth ministries. We don't call them that, of course, and in most cases we have not yet crossed the line into unauthorized activities. But the trend is cause for concern.

Special meetings for young people call for certain speakers, those whose presentations are more entertaining. The truth is slightly repackaged - less Bible reading and exposition, more stories and humor, and lessons that are mostly application with content limited to "relevant" (daily living) themes. Parents provide ample food and entertainment.

Do not misunderstand. No one opposes occasional sermons targeted at a particular segment of the audience, nor do we underestimate the value of young Christians getting together. However, when meetings for young people consistently take on a more entertaining air, when the add-on recreation becomes expected, when we advertise it along with the worship (even though it is not paid for from the church's treasury), and when brethren begin to say that we may lose our young people without such events, we have gone farther than we think down the wrong path.

✍️ Frank Himmel



The Evolution of "Fellowship" Facilities

In the title of this article we are using the word "fellowship" in an accommodative way. All who have carefully studied the New Testament use of the word "fellowship" know that the word ALWAYS applies to spiritual sharing or partnership. All who have bothered to check the verses and the contexts where the word "fellowship" is found in the New Testament know that it is NEVER used or found in a command, approved example or necessary inference authorizing church social activities. Hence, to try to justify

church social activities by calling them "fellowship" is a flagrant and inexcusable misuse of the term. It is parallel to calling sprinkling baptism. Yet we find the rebellious and self-willed doing both!

In this article we want to briefly point out how rapidly the facilities to accommodate the food, fun and games craze have increased. Back about 1940 a few brethren began to insist that we should put a sink and refrigerator in the basement of the church building so communion utensils could be washed and supplies could be kept fresh. And we wouldn't have to carry all that paraphernalia back and forth. It was then suggested that surely no one could be so heartless as to deny the mothers use of the refrigerator to keep the babies' bottles fresh. Then came World War II with gasoline and tire rationing. In large cities and in other areas where people had to come a long distance to services, it was suggested that if there was added a stove in the basement, some could remain at the building, warm the lunch that they had brought along, and stay over for an early evening service. Next came the coffee urn and then a mouse proof kitchen cabinet, in which to store various and sundry food supplies.

Then the war ended and everyone wanted a new building. By now brethren had gotten used to seeing the stove, sink, refrigerator and cabinets. So, the next step was to suggest that in the new building, a room be left large enough to accommodate the congregation. Those big pitch in dinners that were held during gospel meetings down at the park shelter house could be held right in the church building. It was pointed out that we could have total control of the affair and we wouldn't have to compete with the sectarians for use of the shelter house. Besides, in some climates the unheated park facilities were just not satisfactory. At this point few seemed to notice or care that what had been incidental use of the building and what had been individually planned and promoted social activity had now become church action. Few asked for scripture to justify that which seemed to be such a pleasant and natural thing to do. But at that point they had gone from a second-hand refrigerator in a corner to a modern kitchen and dining hall that added thousands of dollars to the cost of the building. Money was misappropriated and misspent without Bible authority.

Then elders, sensing that they were to oversee all church property, found themselves having to decide if the kitchen and dining area

could be used for wedding receptions and teen parties. Again few asked for scripture to authorize such. How could such a pleasant and natural thing be wrong?

Through the years some questioned the churches providing such elaborate facilities for social activities, and so in a lame effort to justify them they came to be "Fellowship Halls." As the years went by, game rooms were added and the "Fellowship Hall" became quite popular and the most used part of many church buildings. Everything from class parties to baby showers, to elders meetings are now held where coffee, cokes and snacks can be served up at a moment's notice.

And now the ultimate! You watch it. We predict that with inflation being as it is, soon some churches will have "Family Life Centers" that cost more than their places of worship. Now churches all across the country from Tennessee to Texas are building facilities that resemble a cross between the country club and the Y.M.C.A. They call them "Family Life Centers" and they include basketball gyms, sauna rooms, game rooms, craft rooms, etc., etc., etc.

Yes, many have come a long way from the dingy old sink and refrigerator in the basement. And it shows just how far they have evolved into the Social Gospel and how they have totally lost sight of what the Church is and what its mission is. Woe be to the Shepherds of Israel!

Raymond Harris

<i>Belleville church of Christ</i>	
5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258	
www.bellevillechurch.net	
Schedule of Services	Elders
Sun. Bible Study..... 9:30 a.m.	Charles Carpenter.... (317) 839-3873
Sun. Morning Worship.... 10:30 a.m.	James Hahn. (317) 745-1507
Sun. Evening Worship. 5:00 p.m.	
Wed. Bible Study..... 7:00 p.m.	
Evangelist	Deacons
James Hahn. (317) 745-1507	Leon Nevins (317) 272-2966
	Don Perry. (765) 676-5825
	Alvin Stanley. (317) 831-3514