

Closing the Back Door of Your Church: Moving from Entitlement to Servanthood

Numbers of gifted persons and organizations have studied the phenomenon of the church "back door," the metaphorical way we describe people leaving the church. And there will always be the anticipated themes of relocation or personal crises. We should recognize those issues, though we can respond to the latter more than the former.

But all the research studies of which I am aware, including my own, return to one major theme to explain the exodus of church members: a sense of some need not being filled. In other words, these members have ideas of what a local congregation should provide for them, and they leave because those provisions have not been met.

Certainly we recognize there are many legitimate claims by church members of unfulfilled expectations. It can undoubtedly be the fault of the local congregation and its leaders.

But many times, probably more than we would like to believe, a church member leaves a local body because he or she has a sense of entitlement. I would therefore suggest that *the main reason people leave a church is because they have an entitlement mentality rather than a servant mentality.*

Look at some of the direct quotes from exit interviews of people who left local congregations:

- "The worship leader refused to listen to me about the songs and music I wanted."
- "The pastor did not feed me."
- "No one from my church visited me."
- "I was not about to support the building program they wanted."
- "I was out two weeks and no one called me."
- "They moved the times of the worship services and it messed up my schedule."
- "I told my pastor to go visit my cousin and he never did."

Please hear me clearly. Church members should expect some level of ministry and concern. But, for a myriad of reasons beyond the scope of this one blogpost, we have turned church membership into country club membership. You pay your dues and you are entitled to certain benefits.

The biblical basis of church membership is clear in Scripture. The Apostle Paul even uses the "member" metaphor to describe what every believer should be like in a local congregation. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Paul describes church members not by what they should *receive* in a local church, but by the ministry they should *give*.

The solution to closing the back door, at least a major part of the solution, is therefore to move members from an entitlement mentality to a servant mentality. Of course, it is easy for me to write about it, but it is a greater challenge to effect it.

May I then offer a few steps of a more practical nature to help close the back door by changing the membership mentality? Here are five:

1. **Inform church members.** Though I do not have precise numbers, I would conjecture that more than one-half of church members do not have a biblical understanding about church membership. Providing that information in a new members' class can move an entire congregation toward a servant mentality.
2. **Raise the bar of expectations.** We have dumbed down church membership in many congregations to where it has little meaning. Clarify expectations of members. Again, doing so in the context of a new members' class is a great way to begin.
3. **Mentor members.** Take two or three members and begin to mentor them to become biblical church members. After a season, ask them to mentor two or three as well. Let the process grow exponentially.
4. **Train members.** Almost 100 percent of pastors agree that their role is to train and equip members. But almost three-fourths of these pastors have no plans on how they will train them (see Ephesians 4:11-13). I will address this issue more fully on my blog next Wednesday.
5. **Encourage people to be in small groups.** Those in Sunday school classes and small groups are more likely to be informed and functioning church members. In others words, there is a much greater likelihood of a member with a servant mentality to be in a small group than not.

What are you doing in your church to close the back door? What are you doing to move members from an entitlement mentality to a servant mentality?

Read more from Thom [here](#).