

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

Another advantage that house churches have is this: they excel at discipling children and teens. One of the great falsehoods perpetrated by institutional churches today (especially large ones in the United States) is that they provide wonderful ministries to children and youth. Yet they hide the fact that the large majority of the children who experience years of fun attending their exciting children and youth ministries never return to church again upon "leaving the nest." (Ask any youth pastor for the statistics—he should know them.)

Additionally, churches that have youth pastors and children's pastors continually promote the falsehood to parents that they are either incapable or not responsible for their children's spiritual training. Again, "We'll take care of your children's spiritual training. We're the trained professionals."

The system as it stands breeds failure, because it creates a cycle of ever-increasing compromise. It begins with parents who are looking for churches that their kids enjoy. If teenager Johnny says on the ride home that he had fun in church, the parents are thrilled, because they equate Johnny's enjoying church with Johnny's being interesting in spiritual things. They are often dead wrong.

Success-driven senior pastors want their churches to grow, and so youth and children's pastors often leave staff meetings feeling pressure to create "relevant" programs that kids think are fun. ("Relevant" is always secondary to "fun," and "relevant" doesn't necessarily mean, "Lead kids to repent, believe, and obey Jesus' commandments.") If the kids can be sold the program, naïve parents will return (with their money), and the church will grow.

The success of youth groups in particular is measured by attendance numbers. Youth pastors find themselves doing whatever it takes to pack them in, and that too often means compromising genuine spirituality. Pity the poor youth pastor who hears reports that parents are murmuring to the senior pastor that their kids are complaining about his boring or condemning messages.

But what a blessing youth pastors could be in the body of Christ if they became house church leaders. They normally already have great relational skills and possess young zeal and no lack of energy. Many of them are only youth pastors because that is the required first step for them to gradually acquire the super-human skills required to survive being senior pastors. Most are more than capable of pastoring a house church. What they've been doing in their youth group could well be closer to the biblical model of a church than what has been going on in the main sanctuary of the church! The same could be said of children's pastors, who might be miles ahead of most senior pastors in being able to serve in house churches where everyone, including children, sits in one small circle, all participating and even enjoying some food together.

Children and teens are naturally better disciplined in house churches, as they experience true Christian community and have opportunities to participate, ask questions, and relate to people of other ages, all as part of a Christian family. In institutional churches they are continually exposed to a big show and "fun" learning, experience very little if any true community, are often made very aware of pervasive hypocrisy, and just as in school, only learn to relate to their peers.

But in a gathering of all ages, what about babies who cry or little children who become restless?

They should always be enjoyed, and practical steps can be taken to handle them when they pose problems. They can, for example, be taken to another room to be entertained, or given crayons and paper to color on the floor. In the community of a house church, the babies and children are not problems who are dropped off at the nursery staffed by a stranger. They are loved by everyone in their extended family. A baby who starts to cry in an institutional church is often a disturbance to the formality of the service and an embarrassment to the parents who may feel the disapproving stares of strangers. A baby who starts to cry in a house church is surrounded by his family, and no one minds the reminder that a little gift from God is in their midst, a person they've all held in their arms.

Parents whose children are uncontrolled can be gently taught by other parents what they need to know. Again, believers have genuine, caring relationships. They aren't gossiping about one another as is so often the case in an institutional church. They know and love each other.