

Faith Pulpit

Shall We Go For Entertainment?

Among pastors lately I hear a deep concern for the future of Fundamentalism and of the local church as we have known it. The old patterns do not seem to be working. The growth in numbers of churches in the General Association of Regular Baptists appears to have ended about five years ago, and we seem now to be in a period of negative growth. Of the churches, it is hard to know just what is happening among them, when a third of them do not send in annual reports, but nationwide the average local church seems to be numerically small.

Certain patterns are emerging as answers are sought to the question: how can we build strong churches which will bring in people and retain them?

I. The Entertainment Pattern

One kind of local church program that promises certain and increasing numbers is the one that bases itself on entertainment. People have some impulses to which we can appeal, and the appeal to novelty is one that does work. In practice the service comes in three basic parts, music, drama, and pulpit communication, plus such incidentals as announcements, congregational singing and offering. These leading features, however, have been shown to work.

The first element is music, and music with an appeal to people who might be repelled by the Victorian songs of Bradbury, Bliss, and Fanny Crosby. To appeal, the music is frankly contemporary, a live combo. The elderly may object to that, but their objections carry little weight before the compelling logic of numbers. Rock music excites and appeals to people who are turned off by traditional music. The music becomes a performance, often imitating the world's style and pattern.

The second element in this formula is drama. Historically the church has used the theater only when at her lowest spiritual ebb, as in the Medieval period and the high Italian Renaissance. But moral lessons

can be made exciting when so portrayed, and who can stand against the pragmatic argument, that it succeeds?

The third element in this formula is warm pulpit communication. This is not the thunder of other days, when people spoke of certain churches as “brimstone corner”, and throngs came to hear of a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. The formula requires a person who makes his hearers feel good. He does not talk about hell, and if he talks about sin, he is careful not to get offensive about it. Nobody goes away angry; nobody walks out during the discourse. The message may touch Scripture, but not as exposition; the content is mainly pop psychology, and put across convincingly. The pattern works, numerically, but it rewrites Gal. 5:24 to read that they that are Christ’s frankly appeal to the flesh with its affections and desires.

II. The Loyalty Pattern

The loyalty pattern marks itself first by tradition, the feeling that we do this because somehow we’re supposed to do it. We listen to the parts of the service because we’re supposed to, not for any appreciable spiritual gain we might make. However sincere the preacher, he conveys the impression that he put no great amount of work into his message, attaches no compelling spiritual urgency to what he has to say, and expects no outward or definite response. The whole service conveys something apologetic and assumes that all the regulars will forgive the lack of freshness in the proceedings. The regulars tend to feel guilt for the lack of visiting they do, not caring to admit to themselves that they are not proud to invite either friends or strangers to the services. Such a church conveys something pathetic, and visitors tend not to return.

If church had to be a choice between either of the above patterns, should we be surprised if many professing Christians move from the loyalty pattern to the entertainment pattern? And should we not feel a certain sympathy for those who could move but choose on some principle not to? They endure loyally, in part because they cannot fit worship with entertainment, even though their traditional services give them little occasion for real worship.

It is our conviction, however, that there is a viable third choice.

III. The Expository Pattern

This pattern of church differs from the second mainly at two points. First is the vital personal contact between the leadership and the Lord. Worship seems easy in their services because the leaders have worshipped privately, and the church service (including its music) does not intrude the flesh into the proceedings. All is designated to bring people face to face with the living God. Vital prayer has already gone into the service, and you never get the impression that anything about the service is a performance.

The second point of difference is in the preaching. The preacher, if not a spellbinder, is at least a passable communicator. His style may be more conversational than oratorical. Yet he knows how to organize a message, and he puts quality time into its preparation. He gives solid Biblical and doctrinal content, and it comes across as important, not as somehow trivial or ordinary.

Such churches do exist, and if they do not often show dramatic growth, they do not tend to stay small, either. This country has no great number of Christians who seem hungry for Bible exposition, but then we do not seem to have much true Bible exposition being preached. Since the tone of an organization is set at the top, we believe that vital churches can result from the proper training of their pastors. As instructors committed to training qualified pastoral leadership, we at FBBC and FBTS believe that we can make a deep impact on local churches through the leaders we help produce—men of God, men of the Book.

Dr. Robert Delnay

Former Professor at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | [Other Articles](#)

Dr. Robert Delnay (Th.D., Grace Theological Seminary) was a distinguished theologian, educator, and author whose ministry spanned over seven decades. A graduate of Wheaton College, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Grace Theological Seminary, Dr. Delnay served in numerous leadership and teaching roles, including at Faith Baptist Bible College, where he was a beloved professor known for his commitment to expository preaching and biblical scholarship.

A prolific author, he wrote several books and articles, leaving a lasting legacy of theological insight and pastoral wisdom. Dr. Delnay's deep love for God's Word and his dedication to training the next generation of Christian leaders impacted countless students and ministries worldwide. He went home to be with Christ in 2023.