

SOME CHURCHES I HAVE KNOWN

What a joy to fellowship with and preach to hundreds of precious people in the churches of India. The singing was enthusiastic, the preaching received with welcomed hearts, and as always, the hospitality wonderful. American churches stand to learn some much needed lessons from the churches in India, Venezuela, Mexico, and many countries we often call the "mission field." Maybe we are the student and they are the teacher.

The multitude of smiling faces and enthusiastic handshakes were refreshing. Talk about a singing church! Wow! These folk lifted heart and voice in praise to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The children as well as young people radiated with such a beautiful spirit.

The Lord has richly blessed Terry and I with churches and preacher friends that have been such an encouragement to our ministry. From Maine to Florida, North Carolina to California, Texas to Alaska, Canada to South American and around the globe to India, it has been my privilege to become acquainted with some wonderful local churches. Whether preaching or just a visitor, I have always been attentive to the uniqueness each ministry offered.

It is not my purpose here to extrapolate the negatives, but to accentuate the positive. Pastor – lay person, you just might glean a bit of good to take along to church with you next Lord's Day.

Sophie Muller wrote in her book *Jungle Methods*: "Some people say that it cramps the Holy Spirit to have everything written down in order for the services, but I know that it really cramps the devil."

I'm thinking of a church where I've preached several meetings. Hard work, prayers, and organization have been hallmarks of these meetings, as has the apparent sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Souls were saved, and God's people

expressed in a spirited and reverent fashion the Lord's work in their midst. I agree with Sister Sophie. Often, the lack of order is an excuse for laziness and an opportunity for the devil.

One precious congregation forever touched my life. Halfway around the world in Calcutta when Howrah folk baptize, they truly praise the Lord. As each candidate rises from beneath the waters, the Pastor pronounces a powerful "Hallelujah." Then the entire congregation echoes, "Hallelujah." A second time and finally a third, the Pastor resoundingly declares a "Hallelujah" as the congregation each time echoes quite enthusiastically.

I found this procedure very appropriate for the occasion. By the way, dozens of small children sat for about three hours with barely a peep from a one. That was indeed incredible.

What is a small church and what is a big church? Personally, I think a big church is one doing the will of God.

At the Camp Meeting, Pastor "A" thought Pastor "B" had a big church with a congregation of 300, while Pastor "B" thought Pastor "C" had the big church who averaged almost a thousand in Sunday School. I even heard it said, "Well, I don't like those big churches – don't know anybody and they don't know me."

Let me share my experiences in two churches that run about 2,000. The three of us (my wife, daughter, and myself) walked into this huge auditorium thinking, "No one will even shake our hands."

Were we surprised! We had barely taken our seat when a brother approached our pew, introduced himself, shook our hands, and warmly welcomed my family. I later found out that every pew was divided into sections and a member knew when a visitor sat in his/her section. That individual diligently greeted newcomers, providing information about Sunday School, church,

restrooms, etc. Incredible!

I've also been in a church where I could count the adults on my fingers and toes...yet not a handshake or howdy-do. To my amazement, the Pastor of one "BIG" church personally greets and shakes the hand of every visitor following the service. Every visitor is asked to stop in the Welcome Center, a room conveniently located at the auditorium exit, to meet the Pastor and his wife. Now, how about that!

Do you ever get the impression that some churches just don't want to grow? Well, it wasn't true of these folk. If you ever darkened their door, that following week you will receive a letter in the mail, a follow-up visit, and a phone call. Absentee members get the same treatment. Too pushy you say. I kind of thought it was because they CARED.

There was no shortage of full-length mirrors at this church. They were the nicest looking bunch, for sure. Just imagine - the ushers all wore coats and ties. Now that was a novel idea. Try this on for size: Each Sunday morning they go through the entire congregation and ask how many chapters in the Bible you read that week. Oh, but Brother Ronnie, that's embarrassing. Why? – Because you did not read any?

I'll have you know there are strong, Bible-preaching, soul winning, separated local churches all around this globe. Can you believe it? I was even in a service where they played the organ and the piano and sang the old faithful hymns. Not a tape or watered-down ditty in the house! They sang with spirit. No dead, dry funeral dirge. "Victory in Jesus" had victory. "Power in the Blood" had power, and "When We All Get to Heaven" made you want to go there. Then, my – the preaching! He had something to say, and I believe God said it to him first. Isn't it great to have been in the House of the Lord! Amen. - -RLW