

Nbr. 44 – September, 2022

Evangelism as Boasting

“More than that, we also *rejoice* in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11, ESV, italics added). The italicized word can mean “rejoice,” but its more basic meaning is “boast.”

Maybe we should stick to basics here.

It might help us to think about evangelism if we regard it as boasting. Maybe better to say, we wouldn’t spend so much time thinking about it and would devote ourselves more actually to doing it.

After all, no one has to contemplate boasting. We just do it. We brag about our kids, our sports teams, our favorite movies. And ourselves.

Ah, there can be the rub when we see evangelism in the category of boasting. Boasting of the Lord takes ME off center stage. Giving the credit to Him means less of it comes to ME.

And isn’t this the problem when we fail to tell the Good News about Jesus? It’s not so much that we cannot figure out some complex intellectual problem. It’s more like we don’t want ourselves and our interests to take a back seat to Him.

Yet HE took the back seat. He died for us while we were still sinners . . . selfish and self-seeking sinners. He died in our place when we were downright ungodly, enemies of God. Despite all that, He acted as our Friend. “Since, therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9). If you have a Friend like that, what could possibly stop you from boasting?

“More than that, our boast is only in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now given us this changed relationship” (Rom. 5:11, GWN).

See? WOW! “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor. 1:31).

C-WOW Circle Widens

This fall, we will be pleased to welcome Pastor Jeff Gross of Bethlehem, Petersburg as C-WOW for the Springfield East and West Circuits. I am awaiting word of his official appointment, but I’m sending the present newsletter issue to him.

The District convention affirmed Evangelism Commission’s revision of the C-WOW position description that includes laypeople as possible C-WOWs. A layperson might find serving in this liaison position to be a bit of a challenge. Still, it is possible. In some circuits, a layperson might be the only one willing to undertake C-WOW duties.

Please let me know if new C-WOWs are being appointed in your circuits. Otherwise, I will keep sending this newsletter to all of you and figuring that you present C-WOWs will be continuing in this position into the new triennium.

Talking Church Planting

See www.cidlcms.org/outreach-church-planting.html There you can find a brochure and a series of four short videos to resource pastors and others to begin talking in our present churches about planting new churches. Church planting is a great way to reach new people with the Gospel.

My predecessor Joel Cluver has agreed to visit several Circuit Winkels this fall to help jump-start the church planting conversation with the pastors. He will be at Bloomington North/South in September, Mattoon in November, and Lincoln in December. A few more Circuits remain to be scheduled for Joel or me to visit. We both look forward to these opportunities.



Worth considering: Back to Church?

People are coming back to church since the pandemic. The “who” and the “how” behind this headline may prove a bit surprising.

The Barna research group recently released findings of a survey it took in January, 2022 (in an article “A New Chapter in Millennial Church Attendance”). Among Millennials (now aged 26-41), weekly church attendance has *increased* since 2019 from an anemic 21% to 39%. The latter figure is still depressingly low, but note that it amounts to a near-doubling during a time of pandemic! For Gen X (those now aged 42-57), attendance has also risen somewhat. By contrast, the church attendance of Boomers (those 58-76) has most recently fallen off after it went up briefly in 2020.

Online services play a big role, for they are included in these figures. Online services “debuted” in 2020 and boosted the numbers. Then in 2021 “the novelty seemed to have worn off,” Barna Associate Vice President Daniel Copeland said, and attendance (including online) declined. But in early 2022 church attendance, especially on the part of younger generations, was bouncing back.

Again, note *who* and *how*. The significant increase in church attendance by Millennials is attributable largely to people in this age range who are not white. In the 2022 study, 45% of non-white Millennials were attending church each week as compared to 35% of white Millennials.

And how were they attending? One third of Millennials, more than Gen Xers or Boomers, reported that they are attending church *both* online and in person rather than strictly one way or the other. Millennials also turned out to be the most likely generation of the three to attend several churches. For their part, Boomers were the most likely to have dropped out of church altogether. In

the survey, almost one-quarter of them said that they have stopped attending church entirely.

Here are some inferences that I draw for evangelism and outreach to inactive members:

- 1) Online church attendance is certainly a reality that must be faced. 20% of those in the survey, across all generations, indicated that they attend church primarily online. But more people, 26%, are attending partly in-person as well as partly online. Especially with the latter group there are opportunities to highlight the value of in-person churchgoing and lead them further and further in this direction.
- 2) The fact that non-white Millennials are especially interested in church is good news for congregations whose members are mostly white. Non-white Millennials may be more interested in checking out such a church online than they would be in coming to its services at first. So proclaim the Law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness online, and trust the Holy Spirit to reach hearts. And do not fail to invite online viewers to come to your church.
- 3) Online tools must be used to invite and exhort also church members to attend services in person. CID started dabbling at this with our weekly “Pass This On” messages during the pandemic. Should we revive them, or produce something else along similar lines? Let me know your thoughts.
- 4) Don’t forget ministry to older adults. Boomers are the least likely of the three generations to sit home and just take in church virtually, but they are also the most likely to drop out altogether. Perhaps some of them have valid health concerns, while others may be needlessly fearful. Yet they all need attention.

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