

Delight filled Church.

A fragrant waitress walked into a hotel breakfast room with "life is like a bowl of cherries" embroidered on her t-shirt. What a start to the day! What if every encounter in our church were that cheerful?

There are many ideas about church development flaunted in conventions like the 'Westpoint of evangelism' no less, little wonder some preach like drill sergeants. Such events imply desperation. To suggest that weaknesses can be cured by the *appliance of science* or boot camps is surely naïve.

Paul speaks of transformation happening through the *renewal of our minds* rather than structures and strategies. Many churches have become the rituals of predictable people with predictable results. Growth however, is related to charisma, the chemistry of personal character, spirit led creativity and passion. This is difficult to cultivate artificially, but it is easily shackled.



Some of our problem can be addressed by doing new things, but more can be done by freeing ourselves from some of the crushing authoritarianism around us.

Delight filled churches are recognised where the fruits of the spirit are clearly evident, they display dynamism, they experience more cheer than conflict. Surprises happen, change is regular. Worship becomes a festival of sanctified innovation and inspiration.

The Sabbath is a day when people are animated about their experiences, insights and God's revelation during the week. Yes, we refrain from our own pleasure, but not from pleasure in sacred communion. Creativity in music and expression flourish. Worship is a time when the tyranny of the urgent gives way to the mysteries of the eternally significant. *'I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is written on my heart.'* Ps 40:8 By insisting that the Sabbath is a delight, we create a priority for leadership.

Our calling is to create an environment where ideas are given life, where self belief is restored, relationships are reconciled and sins resolved. People come to behave as the people they believe themselves to be. *'As a man thinks in heart so is he.'* When our liturgy emphasises wretchedness without restoration, our faith and its outworking become morbid. This is not to encourage narcissism or fantasy but for people to see themselves through the lens of the Cross, *"To restore in man the image of his creator.."* This ethos requires intent.

Our church has a well developed democratic order which leads to accountability. For the most part it is a strength, but a weakness when authoritarianism becomes entrenched, when the creative majority become stifled by the vocally empowered minority, when young people are alienated by their youthfulness. Leadership requires that we take risks and the rap that goes with it. We are required to facilitate and deliver creative innovation and ensure the delight of the participative majority.

We seem to understand the principles of delight creation in Kindergarten Sabbath Schools. Indeed this is a success story. Many lapsed members return to ensure that their children experience this delight. What happens as time goes on? Why the fall out? This is not to suggest that adults and teenagers should derive delight from the infantile, but that the effort to meet the needs of our children should continue appropriately for every age group.

Individualism has helped us believe that God is experienced uniquely, that we have a 'direct, dedicated line'. However we know that where two or three gather in Christ name, Gods presence is invoked. Equally where two or three are gathered there will be fun, delight and laughter. This is the contagious outcome of social engagement.

The joy, delight and animation is evidence of Spirit when shared in communal mode, both formal and informal, in committees, discussion groups, play groups and study groups. This is not just 'feel good', in truth, we are more focussed, productive, retentive, enthusiastic and spiritually authentic when we experience delight in our endeavour.

Some suggestions toward delight filled churches:

1. They are inclusive, recognising that other people wish to express their creativity as you wish to express yours. Church is not a one man band, rather a choir and orchestra. See yourself as a creator of harmony and rhythm.
2. They have people that are real even if their tastes are surreal! Take care of them.
3. They respect individuality. Forced labour may break rocks but it rarely breaks new ground. Stand aside and allow people to do things their way.
4. They recognise that popularity arises from the open expression of engaging humanity, and not indulging populism. Delight filled churches care and engage.
5. They adopt a no blame game. Change begins with ourselves, we are responsible for the current state of affairs. We choose to make the church delight filled.
6. They are high trust environments. People are allowed to take risks, they are allowed to fail. Failure results in the humoresque not anger or gossip.
7. They are high praise and low criticism environments. People grow with genuine appreciation. Focus on the wave not the under currents.
8. They are volunteer friendly. The load is lightened because people volunteer, and volunteer because the turf barriers are low, because they have chosen to act and can depend on support.
9. They are low shame zones when it comes to asking for help. The need for help is not a sign of weakness or incompetence.
10. They have fun. Laughter happens. It is God's gift for healing incongruities.

And 5 for the committee: In delight filled churches:

- a. not everything needs to be approved. Give appointed leaders annual or quarterly frameworks and let them get on with it. If people take an initiative let the knee jerk response be applause rather than disapproval.
- b. everyone owns the mission, there is no place for overlord or 'jobs worth' attitudes. Leadership and followership are roles that are dynamic and interactive and interchangeable.
- c. people are given the tools for the job. They are trained and resourced continually and regularly at every level and for every role. Heath Robinson is not a welcome board member. Leaders are continual learners.
- d. things are kept simple. Small teams are trusted because intimate teams have a special dynamic that is destroyed when groups are stacked with title holders.
- e. people know the score, willing accountability happens regularly, success is celebrated by everyone and failures are not for the whispering few.

Delight cannot be formulated or predicted. We cannot say with certainty that delight will bring growth but we can be certain of attitudes that stunt. A delight filled church will have grace-linked outcomes and experiential objectives that are as clear and pervasive as their statements of propositional truth.

Isaiah offers this promise:

"If you turn you your foot away from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honourable, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words. Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken Isaiah 58:13,14