

Pastor Sailer's Page

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BEING THE CHURCH IN A CULTURE THAT DOESN'T CARE

The Church can still play a huge role in the lives of those outside the church, but how do we proceed in reaching them?

Reach them, we must! That is Christ's call to us in His Great Command/Commission in Matthew 28. We've talked a lot about this lately. People are lost for eternity unless they get to know Jesus as their Savior. And the local congregation, fortunately, has the tools (means) to reach them, via God's Word and His Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And each of us, as members of the Body of Christ, is to let our lights shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven" (cf. Matthew 5:14-16).

But what if the people around us, especially in the neighborhoods in which most of live, just don't care? What if they are so prosperous, having all they need, that they don't see the need for God? What if they don't regard the truth of God's Word as truth they need?

More and more, that is the culture we live in. It is a skeptical culture, ambivalent about the very concept of truth.

Now, I realize that we in Sioux Falls have the great benefit of living in a fairly "churched" environment, a place where God's Word is still esteemed highly, where many new residents to Sioux Falls are "salt of the earth" people who love and honor the Lord, and where we are a congregation some of these people connect with. And yet, it's also true that many people around us are skeptical, ambivalent about truth, leery of the Christian Church. How do we reach them? (And reach them we must!)

It's interesting what a church in Norway did to begin to connect with people like this. Norway is a country where only 3% of the people attend church regularly. Norwegians, by and large, regard the Bible as an important book of their heritage, but not as God's life-giving Word. They are, by and large, a prosperous people, who don't feel the need to involve themselves in churchly things. Life is just fine the way it is.

The Mjondalen Seventh Day Adventist Church, located about 50 kilometers from Oslo, wants to reach these people anyway.¹ It's what Jesus wants them to do. This church knows that people won't just be drawn to them as those who have the Word of God, because, again, God's Word is not regarded as important to most of their neighbors.

This church knows that these folks still need Jesus and His forgiveness. They know that the Scriptures have immeasurable value. But they understand that what we offer must have *perceived* value in the eye of the receiver before it will be appreciated.

So, what have these Christians done? They have gotten to know their neighbors. They have hosted seminars in their church on topics like nutrition and personal finances. They do offer studies on biblical topics, too. People outside the congregation have been coming to these seminars, and the people of the Mjondalen church have gotten to know these "outsiders," treating them like friends.

The Mjondalen Christians know that, as good as life is in Norway for most people, there is still an occasional crack in the utopian façade. There are cracks that inevitably appear in one's personal life—family discord or sickness comes at some point to each of us. There can also be a sense of isolation—a longing for authentic community in a world where technology and affluence are transforming the way people interact with one another. They can offer community and people who care and a Savior who cares.

Many in Sioux Falls are like the folks in Norway. There are cracks in their utopian facades, too. How will we serve them?

We know what Jesus did. He engaged in conversations with people. He went into "unclean" places to seek and to save the lost. He even prayed to His Father about how His followers should do the same: "*My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ... As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world*" (John 17:15-18).

God cares for the skeptics and for those ambivalent about Him and His truth. How will we get to know them and fill in the cracks of their utopian facades with the Gospel? How will you?

¹ The story of the Mjondalen congregation is from the September 2014 issue of *Ministry* magazine, pp. 6-10.