

# Attendance Matters

Statistics show church attendance in America to be in decline. Summer attendance here at HUMC illustrates it. Last July average attendance was 184. This July average attendance was 167. It is curious since HUMC added 23 new members so far this year.

The number one cause of decline in church attendance is that members attend less frequently than they did in the past. If frequency drops, then average attendance follows. For example if a church of 200 members attend every week, the average is obviously 200. But if one-half of those members miss only one out of four weeks the average drops to 175. No members have left. Everyone is still relatively active but attendance declined 12 percent because half the members made a slight change in their attendance behavior. We don't notice it when someone who comes four times a month drops to three or even when a bi-monthly attender goes to once a month.

The issue here is not the loss of members but waning commitment. But here is some good news: yearly worship attendance in America is about 300 million—far above the combined total for every kind of sports event (including the Detroit Lions!). There are hundreds of reasons why members don't come to worship. It's fair at this point to put the pastor and worship leaders in the evaluation spotlight.

I believe it's also productive to work the positive side and ask why members come to worship. Here's a list of some reasons why. Put a checkmark on the ones that are most personally significant to you:

1. Dispels loneliness
2. Brings hope
3. Counters self-centeredness
4. Reminds you of important values you tend to forget

5. Strengthens courage
6. Gives you the opportunity to express thanksgiving
7. Brings you a sense of forgiveness
8. Renews your faith
9. Empowers creativity
10. Helps you to see reality more clearly
11. Increases feelings of self-worth
12. Helps you to make positive changes in your life

John Wesley counselled a despondent farmer who could not handle the worries of his life. Wesley pointed to a cow in the field and asked the farmer why he thought the cow was looking over the stone fence. The man shrugged his shoulders and Wesley said, "She is looking over the wall because she can't see through it." Smart cow! People come to worship to gain Holy Spirit perspective on life, to look over the barriers they can't see through.

God believes worship is crucial to human life—he spent all of Exodus 25-40 designing the worship life of Israel in precise detail. Jesus set the example never missing a Sabbath—even when the Pharisees led the service. He said the Father is seeking people to worship him in spirit and in truth. If God planned it and God exemplified it for us, then it's got to be good!

Commit to increase the worship frequency of our members--starting with ourselves.

I love Sunday. I get up with anticipation each week to meet with my church family and glorify God together. I pray each of us would say with enthusiasm, *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"* (Psalm 122:1)

Connect, Grow, Serve!

**Pastor Tom Anderson**

