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Some people say that their church needs to have stained glass everywhere.

Others say that their church would have the most ornate woodwork throughout the sanctuary.

Maybe a big steeple on top of the building and possibly even a bell tower.

Some people may feel that they need these things to worship God appropriately.

But I don't see any of that here. We don't have stained glass - bells, steeple. We don't even have a traditional sanctuary.

For those of us who routinely worship here, we have come to realize that we don't need a steeple to worship God, we don't need stained glass, we don't even need a sanctuary.

But for millions of people in our country, that is exactly what they are looking for – a building, a place to go to so they can find God – or grow closer to God. Some of these people live in our community and they will never – ever – visit us as long as we are in a school.

There could be several reasons why, but for the most part, many of them just feel that they wouldn't be able to find God outside of a traditional church building.

And, for our church, we aren't at a point yet that we can offer them a building with a beautiful sanctuary. That is just something we can't offer.

But for the 70 to 100 parishioners that regularly worship here, we have found that we can find God in a school. Maybe some of you weren't sure at first, but you have found a way to worship God with us – all without a traditional church building.

Although many people here have overcome this first obstacle, we all still have difference of opinions of what our church service should look like, sound like, or even feel like.

Obviously we can't make our church service appeal to everyone who walks through those doors. There are many people that would start coming if we offered a rock 'n roll type of service, there are many others that would come if we had weekly altar calls, there are others that would come if I bleached my hair blonde and wore an earring.

But on the opposite side, there are many here today that would stop coming if I bleached my hair blonde, eliminated all of the hymns and replaced them with a rock 'n roll band.

It is impossible for every church to appeal to every person. And we aren't even talking about our theology or our beliefs. We are just talking about things that can help some of us worship God, and may hinder the worship of God for others.

Most of you know I grew up in the Catholic Church. When I was younger I used to purposely go to their Saturday night service. Not because I liked to sleep in on Sundays, not because the Priest's sermons were more inspirational on Saturday nights, but I went on Saturday nights for one main reason: There wasn't an organist available on Saturday nights so we never sang hymns.

That's right – no hymns. And I tell you, that was my favorite service.

I don't know about you, but for me, especially as I was growing up, it seemed like those hymns would go on and on and on. I mean, what was the purpose of those hymns, surely it wasn't a way to worship God! I really thought it was more like penance. Do 3 Hail Mary's, 2 Our Fathers, and sing every verse of "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing".

That attitude wasn't just while I was young, it crossed over into my adulthood as well. Hymns were long, slow, boring, and used strange words a lot of the time.

Even in more recent years, when I became a Methodist, that hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” - I would call it, “O For a thousand Verses to Sing”. I even changed the words: “O For a thousand verses to sing, will this song ever end? It goes on and on and on and on and on and on my friends.”

This is how I truly looked at music in worship. Heck with the music, give me the word of God. Let me hear the scriptures, talk about them, see how they apply to my life today and let me go home. You can keep the music.

Then I started my studies to become a pastor and I found out the craziest thing – this may be hard for some of you to believe, but did you know that some people actually enjoy old hymns? I know, I know, it was hard for me to believe too, but some people actually use it as a way to worship God.

Okay, I guess “Amazing Grace” isn’t a bad hymn. I mean, I have known that one for most of my life. And yes, I admit, I can even be caught singing it to myself now and then. As a matter of fact, I was singing “Amazing Grace” when I truly started to believe in Christ and accepted Him into my life.

So I guess that I can kind of understand how some people may enjoy the older hymns. And I guess I can even understand how some people can worship God while singing them. So maybe they still have a place in worship.

So we have the differences of opinions about the building, and about the music, but what about our beliefs? Beliefs are an area many churches differ in as well, and this is one reason why there are so many different denominations.

Most of the mainstream Protestant religions, your Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists have similar beliefs – but some distinct differences as well. And I think that is just fine. For the most part, our core beliefs are the same, but some of the fringe beliefs or rituals are somewhat different.

Differences in theology goes back to the earliest days of the church. Earlier Al read for us a couple of stories about people having differences of opinions and what they meant for their church - and ours today.

In the very early days of the church, right after Jesus died, all of the followers were, for the most part, converted Jews. And their belief was that Jesus died only for them; that God did not show mercy or forgiveness to the non-Jews. That was until Peter had a vision that told him that all God's creatures – including the non-Jews, were to be considered clean and worthy.

At first they didn't want to accept this. To the Jews, the non-Jews were disgusting, non-God fearing people – why would God want anything to do with them?

But then Peter told them that when he had shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the non-Jews, that the Holy Spirit had come upon them as well, so God must love them just as much.

So the church board, if you will, decided that it must be okay for the non-Jews to receive the message of Christ as well. BUT – they must still obey by the Old Law of the Jews and all adult men who decide that they want to follow Christ must become circumcised.

This caused a lot of debate as well. Imagine telling adult men that if they want to become Christians they must undergo this procedure - pretty much without any medical equipment – and certainly no anesthesia as we know it today.

If it was still that way, I don't think there would be too many people converting any more.

But the ones that wanted the new believers to be circumcised were more worried about the letter of the old laws and the old rules than they were the gift that God has given all of us.

Then Peter shared with them – “On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they (meaning the non-Jews) will.”

If Peter decided not to stand up that day and speak, where do you think the church would be today?

Disagreement over how things should be done is common. It happened 2000 years ago and it happens in churches today.

We can't be a church that pleases everyone. I am sure the Old Timers in Peter's church didn't want the gentiles – the non-Jews - to be included with their salvation. I am sure that they thought that they alone were special. We can all get like that sometimes – thinking that we alone are special. But luckily for us, God's Grace is much more than that.

Once we realize that through God's Grace we are all special, other areas of our spiritual lives wake up.

For me, it meant that I would take the time to try and understand why so many people like the old hymns. I started listening to them, I started singing them, I started hearing them – then – I started feeling them.

Believe it or not, I actually started to worship God through our old hymns.

I admit, I am nowhere close to worshipping God through the hymns as well as many of you are – but I am getting there.

Now over the years we will probably change portions of our worship service, maybe add some things, maybe take some things away. We will probably add second and third worship services eventually. One of them may even be one of those Rock ‘n Roll services.

I know that some people don't believe that having electric guitars in church is respectful to God, but let's all remember that – not too terribly long ago - churches were in an uproar saying that the devil had taken them over because some churches started adding pipe organs to their services.

No, we can't be everything to everyone – nor should we even try. What we need to do is to be good servants of God, and do our best to make our church as open and welcoming, so we feel truly accepting to as many people as we can without compromising God's Word.

So if there is something in the service we have today that you may not enjoy too much, or that may even get in your way of worshipping God, I challenge you to pray through it and really try hard to work through it so you can enrich your own worship experience – like I am still trying to do with the hymns.

Over the next year we will see a lot of visitors come into our community, but many of them will never come back. Maybe they were looking for more contemporary music, maybe they are looking for a younger pastor, maybe they are looking for stained glass.

Whatever it is that they are looking for, some of them will not find it with us. We need to realize this and be okay with it. We should pray that they can find a church that they feel that they can worship in.

Out of all those visitors, some of them will stay with us. Maybe it isn't everything they are looking for in a church, but something here will touch them in a special way. Maybe it will be the music, maybe it will be the way they were greeted when they walked in, maybe it will be something in the children's message. Whatever it is, something here will touch their hearts and they will decide to return.

It is possible that we may double in size over the next year. As we continue to grow we need to realize that with additional people comes additional ideas of the way church is supposed to be. But let's remember that we will need to agree that we will disagree a lot about our church and its services.

Some of it may be theology, some of it may be the service itself, and others may have to do with the type of stained glass that will be in our future sanctuary.

These aren't the things for us to get worked up about or to focus on. We should all continue to truly focus on the greater picture – and instead of us thinking of it as “My Church” what we should really start thinking of it as – is God's Church and what do we think God would want it to look like?

Let's all be open to God's will for our church and for our lives.

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