

## JCCC Admin

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**From:** "Johns Creek Christian Church Admin" <jccadmin@johnscreekchristian.org>  
**To:** "Johns Creek Christian Admin" <jccadmin@johnscreekchristian.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 19, 2009 5:43 PM  
**Subject:** from Rev. Randy Barnhart, JCCC, March 19, 2009



March 19, 2009

A survey recently came across my desk which asked would-be church guests (aka “visitors,” a word we should probably strike from our church vocabulary) how the names of individual churches influenced their decision to visit a church or not to visit. It seems that some church names give the impression that they exist for certain “types” of people, while other church names sound like they would welcome anyone. For example, I once saw a church named “Zion Charismatic International Church.” I am sure it is filled with loving believers who probably never considered the possibility that having the word “Charismatic” in the name of their church might exclude anyone who does not consider himself or herself “charismatic.” Then again, maybe they did. But consider [this](#) name: St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. An unchurched person, a person who had zero church background might get the wrong impression and think “this church obviously exists for Episcopalians (whatever that is), and I am pretty sure I am not an Episcopalian.” They might, according to the survey, walk away from a loving and welcoming fellowship – just because of the name of the church. For this reason a lot of churches (of various denominations) have decided to drop the words “Baptist” or “Methodist” or whatever and call themselves names like “Fellowship” or “Community” – something that sounds like open doors, open arms, a welcoming people.

No, I am not suggesting a name change! Rather, I share this to raise the question: for whom does the church exist? Is it a members-only sort of club that has programs and activities for insiders (understanding that outsiders are welcome, of course, if they happen to show up) or is it something altogether different? Of course, the church exists for Jesus, so anyone who beat me to the Sunday school answer -- you are correct. But exactly how does the church live out this existence for Jesus? The answer is found in Jesus’ own life and in the example of the

earliest Christian communities. Of course they cared for the needy among their number. Of course they took care of the elderly. Of course they led immature believers to new heights of spiritual growth – and so shall we. But their focus, their reason for being was always outside their own walls, beyond their own needs and wants. Our focus, our reason for being is the same – to meet outsiders where they are, ministering to their real needs, learning to speak God’s story in *their* language, and adapting what we do to reach as many as God allows with his wonderful news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Where there is a language gap, or a cultural gap, or a generational gap, so long as the message of the good news isn’t sacrificed, it is our responsibility to bridge the gap – not theirs. How many churches refuse change, how many retain what is comfortable rather than embrace new ways -- and thereby fail to fulfill their mission? Meeting people where they are, rather than where we want them to be, is the first step we take in serving “the lost sheep” God has put within our spheres of influence.

From the earliest days the church has seen itself as a mission to spread the good news that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” We see in the Bible that the focus of Christians was then, as the focus of healthy churches is now, to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. That’s not just what we do; it is who we are.

Pax Christi,

Randy

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***REMINDERS:***

**...Today, Thursday, March 19th: *CrossCurrents* newsletter and April calendar deadline**

**...JCCC Youth will sponsor a lunch Sunday, March 22, following worship, offering lasagna, salad, bread and desserts provided by the youth and their sponsors and families. Please plan to join us for lunch and make a donation to our summer mission trips. There will be a presentation during lunch to give info about our mission plans for the summer. You don’t have to be a youth to go on these trips, so if you think you might be interested in doing some mission work this summer, stay for the lunch to find out more.**

**...JCCC Prayer Concerns attached**