

an assignment from some organized program to act.

Maybe if we gave less attention and criticism to what "we" are doing or not doing beyond those things that must necessarily be done collectively and gave more attention to diligently studying the Bible and quietly practicing it, on an individual level from day to day, the church would really grow and prosper. I know this much. When members do this they do not make up a dead church by any stretch of the imagination.

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The Tanner St Church of Christ meets each Lord's Day beginning with Bible classes at **9:30 AM**. We continue with our worship at **10:20 AM** and again at **5:00 PM**. We also meet each Wednesday evening at **7:00 PM** for Bible study and worship. Our meeting place is located about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from I30 at 1512 Tanner St in Malvern, AR.

If you have questions about what we believe and teach, please visit our website, [tannerst.com](http://tannerst.com) to listen to sermons or read past articles from our bulletin. Or you can contact us and we will be glad to find a convenient time to study with you.

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## Consider: Romans 6:3 Needed News

**Joyce Venable** and **Dolline Fain** are both dealing with considerable pain at this time.

**Conrad Harris** is tired and continues to take cancer treatments. Their son, **Joel**, has gone back home. **Judy Robinson** (Venable's daughter-in-law) will be taking cancer treatments each week for the next year.

**Phyllis Jackson** is in Conway, AR this weekend.

As always, talk to these families to see if any help is needed. Pray for God's will in all things.

The men have a meeting planned after services this Sunday evening. Let us each make certain that we are striving to grow and help spread the Word in this community as we help one another remain faithful to our Lord.

# Seeking His Righteousness

"...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.." **Matthew 6:33**

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## Exaggerated Reports of Dead Churches

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Mark Twain once sent a telegram stating that "the reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated." Occasionally I hear that a certain church is dead. Knowing that churches do die, this concerns me because I love God's people.

Sardis was a dead church with a general reputation of being alive (Rev. 3:1). This biblical example and my own experience teaches me that people's assessment of a situation may not be accurate. A church pronounced alive by certain people may in fact be dead. Conversely, a church pronounced dead by certain people may be alive and well - thank you.

When I hear these reports of dead churches, I try not to get too alarmed and immediately go into mourning over their passing. Nor do I hastily jump in with some kind of drastic resuscitative measures to restore their breath of life. It just might be that these reports have been greatly exaggerated. I have learned to consider my sources before notifying the next of kin throughout the brotherhood or even expressing my concern to the membership of these "dead churches." A church that may be dead from a certain person's perspective may not really be dead after all because his concept of deadness may be influenced by certain experiences in his background.

A person with "pentecostal" leanings will sometimes observe the quiet and orderly manner of a congregation's worship and pronounce it dead. A decent and orderly service, according to the principle taught in I Corinthians 14:40, needs some life pumped into it from his perspective. To him, a little foot stomping, hand clapping, bodily gyrations, gospel music to a rock, country, or western beat, and spontaneous outbursts would infuse some life into this "dead church." But, the churches in the New Testament seemed to get along and thrive without such things.

A very liberal-minded brother analyzes a congregation's collective work and pronounces the church dead. He sees no social welfare activities. He notices no organized recreational, social, political or other "fellowship" activities for its various age groups. He looks over the church staff and facilities and sees nothing that indicates the church's involvement in such things. The congregation just meets for worship and edification, conducts periods of Bible study for all who will attend, maybe has a special series of meetings from time to time, supports an evangelist who works locally with them and other evangelists who work in various places in the world, and gives financial aid to

needy members as the need arises. What a dead church! Poor thing! To a person of this mind-set, this church needs a transfusion of a whirlwind of activities more relevant to today's world along with the trained personnel to direct these great "ministries" to raise it from the dead. Again, never mind that the Scriptures nowhere authorized these social and recreational programs.

Still another, though not as liberal-minded as, the other brother, but geared to the fast-paced, results-oriented, organizationally-minded, elaborately-programmed modern world, looks at a congregation that is not as highly organized as he has become accustomed to in his secular world, as being dead. Such a one has a hard time conceiving of a church being very productive without the same kind of techniques and pressure points that he is used to in his day-to-day world. His kind often convinces the church to pattern itself after the concepts that they consider to have worked so well for society, business and government. Then they look around at churches that do not have similar "programs" and pompously pronounce them dead on the vine. Unless a church has the same kind of dynamic, hyper-active programs characteristic of their highly organized world, it is simply not doing anything - it is dead.

These people do not seem to understand that the bulk of the Lord's work commanded and done in the New Testament was done by Christians on a personal level. Yes, there was church organization in the New Testament (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). Saints were organized into local congregations with elders to lead and oversee and with special servants called deacons. They had work to do that required organization; and, of course, this is still true today. However, not every thing that a Christians does for the Lord and his church has to be planned, organized, orchestrated or supervised by the church. The church does not have to have a "program" to cover all the needs, problems and responsibilities of the Christian. In fact, it is this writer's judgment that many churches - even those we would label "conservative" - are "programming" themselves to death. Much like secular governments, they are becoming top heavy with bureaucracy, thus stifling individual initiative and productivity.

To certain people, unless the work is done as a part of a church initiated and highly structured "program," "we are not doing anything." When, in fact, "we" may be doing much more than many of the highly programmed churches are doing. How can this be? By dedicated members, prepared "for works of service" (cf. Eph. 4:12, NIV) by the edification work of the church, going about their daily lives fulfilling their individual responsibilities according to their abilities and opportunities.

A worker talks informally with a fellow-employee about Christ. A housewife talks to her neighbor about the gospel over a friendly cup of coffee. A student gives tracts to his classmates at school. A couple invites some folks over for dinner and in the course of it tells them about Christ and the church - maybe even getting together with them again and again. A sister carries meals to a sick or bereaved neighbor and her family. A member notices a fellow-member is missing a lot lately and phones him to find out what the problem is. A mother

raises a house full of children, all of whom turn out to be faithful Christians. A family has some kids over to sing, study the Bible, or just to be together. The list could go on and on with things Christians of conviction and dedication do without any public recognition or fanfare. This kind of thing is seldom taken into account by those who are quick to pronounce a church as a dead or "do-nothing" church. Unless these things are done within the framework of some church initiated and supervised "program" they just do not count with some brethren.

A Methodist preacher once told me that they were so organized that if two Methodist preachers accidentally fell out of an airplane that they would not be able to hit the ground without first forming a landing committee to supervise the operation. I fear that some of my brethren are about as bad.

To brethren with this mentality, we are not visiting unless we have a church-planned and supervised visitation program. We are not evangelizing the community unless we have a specific personal evangelism program, planned and supervised by the church. Unless we are super-organized with highly visible programs for such things then we are bound to be accused by certain elements in the church of being dead or at least "we are not doing anything" - no matter how much individual members may be quietly doing without a sound of a trumpet (cf. Matt. 6:2).

Am I opposed to all organized programs for doing the Lord's work? No. I am simply saying that it has gotten to the point that too much emphasis is being placed on "church programs" and not enough on individual initiative and activity, prompted by personal conviction and commitment to the Lord. Also, that simply because a church may not have a portfolio of organized programs or a church orchestrated effort for everything that Christians need to be doing for the Lord and his church, does not mean that it is dead or that it is doing nothing.

Maybe, we can learn from the failures of communist systems around the world. Many countries are beginning to see how unproductive such tightly organized societies really are. They have placed too much emphasis upon state initiated and supervised programs. Such programs discourage individual initiative and productivity, hindering society as a whole. I believe a similar thing happens in those churches that over-emphasize collective programs for almost every phase of a Christian's life.

One wonders how the church ever grew and prospered before all these ingenious programs, that some brethren think we must have today, became so fashionable. From the very beginning, churches that met for worship and mutual encouragement, edifying themselves through teaching or preaching, supporting gospel preachers and helping needy saints from their treasuries under the oversight of elders and served by deacons grew and prospered around the world. Why? Because the members were converted to the Lord. They were diligent students of the Bible "always abounding in the work of the Lord" from day unto day and from week unto week. They did not have to have