



Good Morning, Church!

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Want to Be the Body of Christ? Avoid Playing Keep Away!

Rev. Dr. Carl K. Ellis

When I was growing up, older and bigger kids occasionally would break into our football game, take the ball, and start playing "keep away." Because they were bigger and stronger, they could take the ball, and no matter how hard we tried, we could never get the ball back. Eventually, we gave up on being part of the game and walked away.

When I was growing up, there were times when my friends and I weren't selected to play on a team. Sometimes, it was because we were too small; other times, we weren't good enough; other times, we weren't part of the inner group.

Today, I wonder if some of our churches are playing "keep away" from those who are not church members. They don't realize that people feel left out because conversations revolve around the church of yesteryear, and people continue to sit with their friends rather than the newcomers. The church may appear to be a closed community unless you fit their standards.

On the other hand, some churches have gone all-in for the younger generation. They believe the older generations' time has come and gone. Everything revolves around the lifestyles of the children and youth. They act as if senior adults don't understand and exclude them from conversations; they should go home and sit in the rocking chair.

Today, I wonder if the church plays "keep-away" with music and hymns. We want the hymns we have always sung. I have worshipped and even been part of the conversation around what is now known as "choruses." Many complain that they keep singing the exact words over and over and over again. Some say it is alright to sing our favorite hymns, but we don't want the new hymns because it's not who we are.

At the same time, some churches have thrown out all the old hymns and have gotten modern. They believe it is their turn and don't care about what the older members want. They have the power now and play "keep away" from the older generation.

We play "keep away" with liturgy because that is how we have always worshipped. Yes, we may change the order of worship, but we play "keep away" when making changes that attract younger people. We have to worship in the sanctuary in the pews we have sat in for the past thirty years rather than worshipping in the fellowship hall in an informal setting.

At the same time, there are places where we have done away with sanctuaries, pianos, and pews. They are no longer "In" style. We now worship in auditoriums, with electronic pianos, and folding chairs. We play "stay away" from sacred spaces.

We become distraught when the pastor spends too much time with the youth. Yes, we even want to keep the pastor all for ourselves. Many pastors have been moved because they spent too much time with the children and youth and not enough time with the older members.

Finally, we play "keep away" with our money. If the church changes in ways we don't like, we stop and play "keep away" with our gifts and financial support.

Friends, if we want our small membership churches to grow and be around for tomorrow, we must stop playing "keep away" where others are excluded from our community. We must become the Body of Christ where people feel welcome and valued.

Our small membership churches in rural communities cannot have a worship service for every worship style. We will need to develop worship that blends different genres of music and liturgy. We will need to understand that we are all different and respect our differences. We can create worship and fellowship that celebrates each generation's gifts, which will help us all come closer to God, grow as disciples, and be the Body of Christ.



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