

Climate: Building Belongingness

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To live above with saints we love,
That will be a glory
To live below with saints we know,
Well, that's different story.

-- Anonymous

1. The need for belonging

a. God created us as members of a community

Genesis 2:18-25: Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him." And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. And the man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- i. "It is not good for man to be alone" refers not to a defect in Adam, but to an incompleteness.
- ii. People are *social* creatures; they exist in the context of relationships. We are different from the animals, and a relationship with them is not enough. This is seen when they all pass before Adam but none of them is suitable as his helper.
- iii. Our social nature is not limited to the horizontal plane--we are also socially created to be related to God (whether we acknowledge His existence or not).
- iv. We all have a need for being a part of a community (e.g, the severity of excommunication in any collective context). We were not made to be alone:
 - (1) We are to fellowship with God.
 - (2) We are to fellowship with God's people.

b. The climate of a church: people will not want to be part of a church:

- i. Which they feel is not theirs;
- ii. Where they do not feel wanted and recognized;
- iii. Where their needs are not being met;
- iv. Where they feel that they are still outsiders.

2. Building climate: what factors are important (from Jenson and Stevens, Dynamics of Church Growth, pp. 98-109):

- a. Love: "Part of the problem relating to climate in the local church is that maintaining love and unity is not as high on our priority list as it was on Jesus' priority list. We do not find these qualities on our prayer agendas nearly as often as finances, buildings, or programs." (Ibid., p. 100) Ways in which love must be shown:
- i. It must be demonstrated among the leaders of the church
 - ii. The church must act in obedience to the "one-another" commands given in the NT. There are many "one another" exhortations and statements in the epistles, which can be grouped as we have done here. How can each of these be used in the building a climate of love in our church?

Exhortations	Love one another (John 13:14, 22, 34, 35, 15:12, 17, Rom. 12:10, 13:8, 1 Thes. 3:12, 4:9, 1 Pet. 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 2 John 5); Prefer one another (Rom. 12:10); Have the same mind towards each other (Rom. 12:16); Pursue things that build up one another (Rom. 14:19); Accept one another (Rom. 15:7); Greet one another (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Pet. 5:14); Serve one another (Gal. 5:13); Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2); Be kind to one another, tender-hearted (Eph. 4:32a); Forgive one another (Eph. 4:32b, Col. 3:13b); Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:21); Regard one another as more important than yourself (Phil. 2:3); Bear with one another (Col. 3:13a); Comfort one another with words of the return of Christ (1 Thess. 4:18); Encourage one another (1 Thes. 5:11a); Build up one another (1 Thes. 5:11b); Seek that which is good for one another and for all men (1 Thes. 5:15); Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24); Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16a); Pray for one another (James 5:16b); Be hospitable to one another without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9); Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another (1 Pet. 5:5)
Prohibitions	Do not judge one another (Rom. 14:13a); Do not put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way (Rom. 14:13b); Do not lie to one another (Col. 3:9); Do not speak against one another (James 4:11); Do not complain against one another (James 5:9)
Truth Statements	We can be encouraged by each other's faith (Rom. 1:12); We are individually members of one another as part of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25); If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7); If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12)
Paul's Hope	May God grant us to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus (Rom. 15:5); There should be no division in the body, the members should have the same care for one another as do the members of our physical bodies (1 Cor. 12:22-26)

- iii. Visitors must be welcomed appropriately (N.B. this may even mean allowing them to remain anonymous initially, though eventually we must welcome them if they are to join our church).
 - iv. We should display an attitude of unconditional acceptance.
- b. Vision/Faith (in the sense of a corporate dependence on the Head of the church)
- i. Our church should have a sense of significance--we are important in God's eyes!
 - ii. We should also have a sense of expectancy--expecting what God can do in and through us.
- c. Involvement: people's feelings of being part of a church will grow as they become involved in the life of the church. Studies indicate the following (adapted from MacIntosh and Martin, Finding Them, Keeping Them, 90):

Status of Church	Non-Overlapping Tasks/Roles Available per 100 People
Declining	27
Holding still	43
Growing	60

3. Building belongingness: how is it done?
- a. The incorporation processes: accepting the new believer (or member) so that (s)he becomes a part of the local body of believers.
 - i. Informal incorporation:
 - ii. Formal incorporation:
 - b. Personal friendships: ultimately the key to enfolding the new believer into a local congregation. Some contend that 75 to 90 percent of all the people in today's churches are there because a family member or friend invited them.
 - c. Small groups: the key to building individual identity.
 - i. They provide face-to-face relationships (the 12 disciples), and anyone absent is noticed by the group.
 - ii. They provide opportunity for everyone to participate, to become accountable, to feel needed and to develop close, personal friendships.
 - iii. To assimilate effectively, churches should have roughly seven small groups for every one hundred believers (Ibid., 101).
 - d. Large celebrations: the key to building corporate identity.
 - i. They build and sustain momentum.
 - ii. They encourage by providing a vision of the true scope of the church
 - e. Social gatherings (feasts, holiday celebrations, etc.)
 - i. Provide for informal times of fellowship.
 - ii. Give opportunity to build and develop personal relationships.

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4. Making new members feel like they belong (note that all of these must fit within the ethos of the church, which includes the cultural environment of the people in the church)
 - a. They need to know that they are wanted.
 - b. They need to know that they are important to the body.
 - c. They need to feel that they have something to contribute to the groups by being there.
 - d. They need to feel comfortable.
 - e. They need to enjoy the people they fellowship with.
 - f. They need to feel that the church has something to offer them.

 5. Questions to consider
 - a. Do new members of your church feel that they belong?
 - b. How do you make new people feel comfortable in coming to your church?
 - c. How can you improve the feeling of belongingness in your church?
 - d. What are the cultural dynamics of making people feel welcome in the intercultural setting?