

"EVERYONE HAS NEEDS, JUST LIKE ELBOWS AND OPINIONS"

Matthew 20:28; 16:24

A few years ago I remember hearing someone say something that went like this, "Everyone has an opinion just like everyone has an elbow."

O. K. From politics, to religion, to favorite flavor of ice cream, to favorite color, you name it; everyone alive has an opinion or two. Right? And I know you have opinions that revolve around this church, right? You have opinions about the worship service- the sermon, the music, the length of service or sermon; you have opinions about the building and the ministries that we are engaged in; how money is spent. The list can go on and on.

Whether you express them vocally or not, the bottom line is you have opinions. And because your opinions are important, and I have never done this before so this is new for me- as soon as I am finished with my sermon you will have 10 or so minutes, as long as you need, to fill out a congregational survey that will, hopefully, give us valuable data that will help when *The Church Doctor Ministries Consulting Firm* comes a calling for

our physical later this summer- August 24-26. The Congregational Survey

will ask questions focusing on **Involvement, Spiritual Growth and**

Worship, Community and Connectedness, Your Thoughts on Mission

and Purpose, Your Thoughts About Future Priorities, The Unique

Strengths of Our Church. So as soon as I am finished preaching, I'll have

a prayer, the surveys will be quickly distributed and after you are finished

we ask you to bring your survey up to the front and put it on the communion

table and then come downstairs for fellowship hour.

Your opinions in each category will be helpful in getting a picture of how you and others feel about First Presbyterian Church of Akron. When you think about it, defining the church's ministry by responding to people's needs is a noteworthy idea. And yet, because the lines can be skewed between wants and needs, no matter how often we talk about needs or perceived needs, it can place the church in the interesting position of being defined, not by its faith or its history, but rather by people's wants or needs.

The church's identity can become blurred and we lose our identity of being known as the people of Christ. And if people go to a church expecting the church to make meeting their needs or better yet, their wants a priority, then the church can be harmed. So if we buy into the idea that the church is to meet people's needs, then the message can become personalized where we can say, "If I go to such-and-such a church, those people will take care of me." And so to play out this notion, if we promote the church as a place where people's needs are met, we will find people for whom, at least the way they look at it, there is an implied promise that if they come to the church it will provide them with whatever it is they *think* they need. As a result, a congregation can be graded in a personal way where we give it an A for doing a great job meeting my needs, a B for a good job, a C for an OK job, and, well, you get the picture.

Now, please, don't get me wrong, the church is the place where people, rightly so, turn to for emotional and spiritual well-being.

It is the place people turn to for support in how to deal with difficult issues and in difficult times of their life. It is the place where people come to experience "community" and peace. People want contentment and to be satisfied. But there can be confusion between my needs and my wants and we can find ourselves not saying, "Is this church meeting my needs?" but rather "Is this church giving me what I want?" Do you see the difference? So it is conceivable that a person can walk in the door of a church with the attitude that this church will have as its priority, in terms of time and energy and effort, taking care of whatever it is they feel is important. The church must then respond to them on a personal level. So the church must be attuned to their ideas and support their beliefs. And to take this one step further, whatever else the church is doing or engaged can become secondary to the areas that impact them directly. To make this more personal, if a person's interest is youth ministry they might not be concerned with a ministry to younger families or singles.

If their interest is contemporary music they might see traditional music as unimportant or visa verse. The best that could be asked for is that they treat these ministries with disinterest and at worst, they want them eliminated.

So then what happens to the people whose needs are not being met or then again, what they want? The church might be seen as a failure, or the pastor as a failure, or the leadership as failures. The church has not lived up to its promise and they could get upset, make a scene, cause enough commotion that they get the ears of the powers that be, and if that doesn't happen, pick up and leave.

I am witnessing something that has taken over our society today and it is summed up in one word: **ENTITLEMENT**. I went on line and brought up this word on *Wikipedia* and this is what it said: "**Entitlement** is a guarantee of access to benefits because of rights, or by agreement through [law](#)."

It also refers, in a more casual sense to someone's belief that he/she is deserving of some particular reward or benefit. It is often used as a negative term in popular [jargon] (i.e. a 'sense of entitlement'.)" And it is this sense of entitlement that is the issue. Now there are some people because of their circumstances have no way out or no other choice. But there are those that have a mindset that they are deserving, just because.... They have no "skin" in the game but boy, they want, they are deserving and they better "get". And this sense of "entitlement" has even crept into the church.

An example that occurred during Summer's Best Two Weeks, and let me just say we had a tremendous camp but always have a few glitches- anyway, a mother came with her 8 year old child on Thursday, July 3 to drop the child off for their first day of camp. One of the staff reported back to the mother that we were filled up and couldn't take the child. The mother, without any forms being filled out, drove away leaving the child.

My wife, who is the Director of the camp, after a few phone calls, got the message out that the child would not be able to stay and eventually the mother came back and picked the child up. My wife is a better Christian than I am because I would have, well, let's just say I would have informed the mother she had no right to do what she did and we could have easily called CSB if we were not able to make contact- Entitlement.

Look with me again at our passage from Matthew 20:28. Jesus said, "Just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." And then Matthew 16:24 where Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." **What are the key words in these two passages?** In Matthew 20:28- **Serve and Give**. In Matthew 16:24- **Deny, TAKE-UP and FOLLOW**. Is there anything in these passages about getting or receiving? NO. It is all about giving, is it not?

I'm not saying this is the case in all churches but I have heard it said that those who expect the church to respond to their needs, whatever the needs might be, frequently have little interest in doing for others. I have also heard it said by pastors that lower worship attendance, pledging, and other forms of participation are definite signs of this notion of receiving. And this notion of entitlement in the church has this kind of mindset- the church is supposed to take care of my needs, and therefore I can ask whatever I want from the church. The issues are not do the people of this church even know me or even how difficult the request might be or even how flexible or cooperative I might need to be. I want, so give.... I remember coming across a person who thought the pastor should be in their home every month. The person was soon gently told that the expectation was unrealistic and an understanding soon followed about what was reasonable. **What we need is a change of heart and a change of language.**

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Philippi encouraged those he was writing to show forth humility and follow the example of Christ. Paul, desiring a Christ-like spirit in the hearts of those he was writing to said in Philippians 2:1-5a, "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete; be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in [and here it is] but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

That, my friends, is the heart stuff, but then there is the change of language. The problem with ministry being perceived as responding to people's needs is the perception people come away with when they think about the church. The church is reduced to a service provider whose clientele/recipients are free to complain when they become dissatisfied.

And what gets put on the back burner is the thought of people becoming and being the Church of Jesus Christ. There is no understanding of the church as the community of faith where people gather together to struggle in the journey called life and faith, where people draw nearer to God, where people gather for worship and exit to engage and serve.

I guess it all comes back to the purpose of the church. Is the purpose of the church to respond to the needs of the people and community or is the purpose to be a community of faith? And if we are a community of faith then we will feed the hungry, walk with those who are broken, minister, as best we can, to the things, the issues that people are dealing with. The difference is we do these things and more as an expression of our life together as a community of faith that seeks to serve the risen Christ.

The great preacher, teacher Fredrick Buechner once said regarding *purpose*, it is, "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Maybe this needs to be something we consider as the *Church Doctor*

Ministries consulting team comes to be with us- it might impact our

understanding of mission and our call. Sometimes I know I need to get out

of the way and let God be God and look to, not to my own needs, but to the

needs of others because, Everyone has Needs, Just Like Elbows and

Opinions. Right? Right. Amen.

"EVERYONE HAS NEEDS, JUST LIKE ELBOWS AND OPINIONS"

Matthew 20:28; 16:24

Introduction: Someone once said, "Everyone has an opinion just like everyone has an elbow."

Responding to people's needs is a noteworthy idea...
NEEDS AND WANTS

"Is this church meeting my needs?" "Is this church giving me what I want?"

The concept of **ENTITLEMENT**- "a guarantee of access to benefits because of rights, or by agreement through law.... Refers, in a more casual sense to someone's belief that he/she is deserving of some particular reward or benefit"

Matthew 20:28- two key words: _____ and _____
Matthew 16:24- three key words: _____, _____ - _____ and _____

What we need is a **change of _____ and a change of _____**
Philippians 2:1-5a: the heart stuff

Is the purpose of the church to respond to the needs of people and community or is the purpose **to be the community of faith?**

Conclusion: Fredrick Buechner- "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."