

## 1950s America

One of the comments I heard on TV after this last election is significantly relevant to our CARBC churches. A political pundit noted that 1950s America is gone and it is never coming back. His statement was disheartening to me because I am from that 1950s culture and I really liked it.

I liked it that most women with children didn't work outside their homes and I still feel that's the best way to raise children. TV programs were harmless even if they weren't edifying. Almost all of my friends had one Mom and one Dad with the same last name. No one worried about identity theft or monitoring their kids because of internet pornography.

Sunday School attendance was important to Christians and Sunday evening was my favorite service of the week. The whole church family was there; the choir sang. The difference between Sunday morning and Sunday evening was about 25 people. Prayer Meeting was smaller but it was still a great service – no one even considered leaving before the actual prayer time when we would get down on our knees and pray together. I'm glad the area churches where I grew up in Michigan held two full weeks of evangelistic meetings because I was saved in the second week.

The pundit is right. The 1950s are gone and they are never coming back. A fearful thought since reality is what it is: our CARBC churches are not keeping the interest of those who are born again. (Reaching the unsaved is another subject.) And without a dramatic shift from 1950s thinking, we will continue to decline in numbers and influence.

To minister to Christians in this culture, we need to "think" their lifestyle into our planning. For instance, have you noticed how many buckets of Kentucky Fried chicken are coming to potlucks these days? It's because working women are hard pressed to find time to cook, not because they are lazy or uninterested in the church. Successful children's programs are being held between 3 and 5 PM for two reasons: kids need safe after school care and their baseball games happen after 5:30 so that Mom and Dad can attend.

Is Sunday School a 1950s concept? No. And for that reason we should consider changing the name. Most people don't say "man, that's cool" anymore, and there's nothing sacred in the term "Sunday School." A creative, descriptive name would do a lot to change the 1950s image of this all important program. We could even rethink the timing. Evening classes might be more conducive to families than early morning. We also need to look at what's being offered in light of what Christians are facing. Classes on marriage and parenting are pretty much absent in most Baptist churches while our culture has a soaring divorce rate and young people are leaving the faith en masse. Personal finances, issues singles face, and living righteously in the work place would also be good topics. Current political issues taught from a Biblical perspective (i.e. abortion, gay marriage) may spark interest as well.

I would like to put the term "culturally relevant" on the Top Ten List of Most Irritating Evangelical Phrases but unfortunately, there is a lot of evidence that relevance is important to the health of the church. We should never water down our theology or lower our moral standards. Some of the most successful churches in America today have pastors who faithfully preach theologically sound expository messages (many lasting over an hour), speaking against sin with complete freedom knowing that God's Word will justify itself and the Holy Spirit will work in hardened hearts. The idea that we have to

compromise our convictions to explore and utilize Biblical and “culturally relevant” methods to meet the needs of our congregations is a prime example of 1950s thinking.

Bottom line is this: The church is people and once people stop coming, the fat lady sings. Jesus said in Matthew 16, “I will build My church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” We are not going to stop the work of Christ – it will be accomplished with or without us. We can keep our comfortable feelings and our 1950s mindset but we risk being excluded from the greatest work on earth.