

## Club or Mission

In our family, we've always had tapioca pudding with strawberries for dessert on Christmas Eve. It's a cherished tradition that goes back... Actually, I have no idea how far. I also have no idea why tapioca pudding, just that it's delicious and somehow became our custom – one nobody would dare suggest changing. However, I remember one Christmas when we had something else instead, and surprisingly enough, we survived. The apple pie was different but just as delicious.

Why am I telling you this? Because, believe it or not, I see a parallel to some of the customs and traditions we have in our churches. We grow attached to whichever seat we've claimed as ours. We're equally committed to the order of service and the style of music. We find the routine comfortable and satisfying. All is well... until somebody suggests changing things up a little, perhaps to be more youth or visitor friendly. Then the cry erupts, "But we've always done it this way." That's when we have to decide whether we're operating a club or a mission.

A club's focus is inward. It caters to its members' preferences and expectations, so they will remain loyal. A club entertains their patrons and preserves cherished traditions. There's nothing wrong with this *modus operandi*, except when a church attempts to operate this way. Jesus didn't tell his followers to form a cozy club for themselves; He gave them a mission, saying, *Go and make disciples of all nations*. And so the early church (Acts 2) kept it simple.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. [Also consider what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9.] But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel...*

We expect our churches to accomplish two, often mutually exclusive goals: to keep all of us members happy while also honoring Jesus' Great Commission. A tough balancing act... except it shouldn't be. There can be no compromising God's Word and Jesus' command, so the flexibility must come from the other side – from us. As church members, we must be willing to set aside some of our preferences for the sake of furthering the gospel. And if we truly believe that mission is most important, we won't grumble. We might even discover that we like apple pie just as much as tapioca pudding.

S. Johnson