

Which will come first in the 21st Century . . . BELONGING OR BELIEVING?

Part 3 of an article by Gil Cann (Parts 1 & 2 can be read in April and May editions of the ECHO)

At the conclusion of a recent weekend church family camp in which I was involved a young single-parent, with his four-year-old daughter by his side, stood and said to the hundred-plus church members, 'as you know, I am not a Christian, but I want you people to know that this is the best weekend my little girl and I have ever had in our lives'.

A strange 'testimony'. Not the kind to which we are accustomed at such times. But quite a few tears rolled down several evangelical cheeks! Because it was just beginning to dawn on these people what enormous potential there is in a local church to be an 'extended-family' for people of all kinds.

There is a desperate need for churches to which it is easy to 'belong'. This does not require any compromise of membership standards but it does require a church community to be welcoming, easily related to, accessible, 'open', in various forms seven days a week, 'user friendly', readily contacted, with open boundaries'. It requires we set aside ways, habits and customs which are intimidating, exclusive and threatening.

Our approach to programs and activities needs to change, we need to be more flexible, less hurried and fun to be with. We must abandon the idea that we should always have a solid, advertisable, evangelically 'legitimate' reason for every occasion of meeting together. There is great validity in meeting at times primarily for the sake of being together. Those who 'don't belong' are far more aware of this than we are.

I will not be surprised to hear that the little girl and her father who does not believe, but who feel they belong in that local church, have become believers. Would they feel they 'belong' in your church? We must act quickly, because there are hundreds of thousands more people like them.

- Gil Cann <gilcann@start.com.au> (Used with permission of Gil Cann)