

## Reflections on the Greatest Challenges in Ministry

By Bob Young

The online publication, *Pastor's Weekly Briefing*, recently asked its readers, mostly ministers, about the greatest challenges of ministry. While many different answers were received, four areas of concern received the most responses.

First, many ministers responded that **apathy within the congregation** is a primary concern. Related concerns that ministers reported were lack of commitment, lack of help in ministry, and lukewarmness. The report suggests that such may come from members being too busy with wrong priorities and family distractions.

Clearly, the non-involvement of members has increased in recent years. Many other activities demand our attention, so that the task of recruiting teachers and workers is increasingly difficult. Bible class attendance is down; church workdays are less well attended; special activities often attract only a handful of members. Recent activities in which I have noted decreased interest include meetings for prayer, women's and men's fellowships, and leadership and evangelism seminars.

A second area of major concern is that **church is seen as an event rather than an opportunity to be the body of Christ**. This concern was also reflected in observations that the church is more like a club, with a consumer approach that says 'serve me.'

The definition of church as event or place limits our understandings of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and a part of his Body, the Church. With such faulty definitions, too many Christians conclude that "being a good Christian" only means being at the "right place at the right time" or participating in a limited number of "right events". Both concepts are customarily limited to Sunday morning worship at the church house. If the location of worship is moved from the church house, or the time of worship is changed, worship becomes non-binding and attendance is not mandatory.

A third concern was reflected in the high percentage of comments indicating that the church has **lost its sense of urgency to spread the gospel**. Too many churches are more concerned with tradition, programs and activities than with personal evangelism and discipleship.

The decrease in evangelistic fervor has been noted several times over the last two decades or more. The church has turned inward, and often fails to lift up its eyes to the harvest. The church must return to its primary commission, and seek to avoid the internal turf issues that accompany traditions and self-benefiting programs.

A final concern voiced by the ministers who responded to the survey was **the influence of cultural tolerance for sinful practices**. Within the church this is seen in a lack of disciplined lives that reflect biblical values and in a lack of church discipline to address moral issues. The adoption of postmodern values coupled with a more liberal approach to life leaves the church without a prophetic voice in the world.

The failure of the church to be counter-cultural, committed to being a holy, separated people in an unholy world, compromises both the influence and the message of the church, as well tarnishing the image of Christianity in the eyes of the world.