

A BIT OF ADVICE FOR SEEKERS...

who want fellowship with Christians that take the teachings of Jesus seriously.

by Ernest Eby | Updated January 2019 | ernest.eby@gmail.com

David Bercot in his message, *Finding Fellowship in the 21st Century*, gives advice along this line:

"Become a person who loves well and is living a holy life. If you aren't that kind of person, you will only make life difficult for your family and the church you attempt to join." He then suggests these three basic options for seekers... 1) Attend a conservative Evangelical church and try to be an influence for good even if the rest in the church do not uphold Kingdom teachings. 2) If you are a mature Christian, consider helping to organize a small fellowship of folks who are interested in Kingdom teachings. 3) Join an Anabaptist or similar fellowship.

I would like to expand on this last suggestion and describe three options under it.

1. If you want a stable church fellowship and want to stay with a church long term, join a church that is part of a Conference or Fellowship on the more-conservative end of the spectrum - one that has demonstrated little transition over the decades. You might have to give up a lot of freedoms, and put up with some unhandy and really difficult cultural expectations, and you may be limited in the ways you can serve the Kingdom of God. But at least you are part of something that will likely be at a similar place 50 years from now. Your children may or may not decide to stick with this church. Much of this will depend on your attitude toward the church.
2. If you want a church that has a high moral and spiritual standard, yet one that allows lots of room for people to fulfill their calling in the Kingdom of God, you will likely end up in a church that is not as stable. You will need to be prepared to keep changing churches if the church you are part of eventually heads in a direction that isn't good. Along the way you can teach your children to stand for what is right and how to grow in their love for God and others. If you do this well, they will thank you for teaching them how to live by principle.

However, if you change churches too often, your children may prefer to stay at one church when they grow up (which is very understandable). This could end up being a spiritual detriment for them or their posterity.

3. If you want all your freedoms and you don't want to change churches periodically, you can plug into a less-conservative church and be the person you want others to be. When the church drifts in an unhealthy direction, you just stay there and keep being a good example. If you do it well, there is a chance your children will choose a church that more accurately reflects your values when they become adults. However, more than likely, some of your children may find it easier to fit in with the crowd than to go against the flow, and they may wash out spiritually. Because of this, I can't recommend this option for a family, but sometimes joining a more disciplined church is not an option for one reason or another and God gives people grace to be role models for Christ in less than ideal situations.
4. Keep in mind that doing anything with the wrong spirit can have a disastrous affect no matter what church you are in, so attitude is very important for yourself, your children, and your friends. May God bless you with wisdom and light on your spiritual journey!

Please contact Ernest Eby to submit additional information or corrections.

Here is some advice from Dan Ziegler who along with his wife Wendy found their way into the Plain Anabaptist world:

- 1) Look for churches that have a track record of welcoming those from non-plain backgrounds. Not all plain churches are the same. We have found this to be especially the case among a number of non-conformed groups including the River Brethren, some German Baptists, some Beachy congregations, some Charity/Remnant congregations (which were started as a joint revival effort when plain and non-plain background folks joined forces), some Neo-Hutterite groups, and groups such as the Biblical Mennonite Alliance. In my experience, the fundamentalist/separatist groups and the groups with a strong German dialect still in use are the hardest to assimilate into - for different reasons. If all else fails, the house church option is out there, where you can gather for fellowship and accountability with like-minded folks who share your lifestyle convictions - our family is currently in this situation. Remember, Anabaptism started as a house church movement. 😊
- 2) Give yourself and the group plenty of time to get to know each other - by choosing to be a part of a plain group, you are stepping into not just a set of beliefs, but a faith-based high-expectation culture that is likely very different than what you have grown up with. This is probably what drew you in the first place, but understand one does not just flip a switch and know everything right away. Most of the folks you will fellowship with have grown up in this context - and they don't think twice about much of what they do. Things that you have to deliberately and sometimes self-consciously decide to do are second nature to them. If you have chosen the right group (see #1 above) they will be patient with you, understand your dilemma, and extend grace as you learn to assimilate. And try not to read too much into things or take things too personally - in any cross cultural situation, grace should rule the day.
- 3) Embrace your role as "Ausländer" - Come to terms with the fact that you are not, nor will you ever become a Yoder or Miller, Friesen or Stoltzfus -

and that's OK. Jesus doesn't care about surnames. Believe it or not, many conservative Mennonite churches (see #1 above) long to find a way to welcome seekers into their midst - they just want to do so without losing what is important to them. They recognize that seekers bring in new conviction, passion for things that have become common-place for them, fresh perspective, and ultimately, that Jesus calls us to make disciples of all nations. You may have a unique voice within the group as one who has deliberately chosen what they were born into - many plain folks will find it affirming that you have chosen to align with their convictions. And you may even be used to help the group see and understand perspectives that they may have been otherwise cut off from.

- 4) Understand plain folks care deeply about the stability of the church and the influences on their youth - It's not about you personally. They are concerned about the world and its influences, and experience has taught them that sometimes seekers may stir the pot and raise questions in ways that may be unhealthy for the church - especially for their young people. Respect that - you may share the same concern someday.

- 5) Don't try to Reform the church to your expectations - Sometimes seekers join a plain church that is close to their ideals...but not quite there. So they try to agitate and push to "fix" it. Plain folks place a high value on *Gelasseheit* (surrendered-ness to Christ and his Church), and before you can speak to what the group is not, you need to show a strong willingness to give yourself to what it is. Seekers are often independent-minded folks who have spent a lifetime following their own instincts. This is perhaps the toughest transition to make - but if you want to truly be a part of a plain group, you will need to set aside your individualistic bent in deference to the body. Recognize that you are now linked to something larger than yourself - and that discernment is a collective process (which often means it is a rather slow process). I'm not talking about disregarding sin here - but understanding that you may need to set aside some of your preferences in deference to the group's understanding, and for the sake of fellowship.

- 6) Serve the Church in Mission - For a seeker coming into a plain community, especially after they have become established a bit in the group, spending time, or even a few years serving the church through mission is a great choice. This may be through short-term mission trips or disaster relief, or service in foreign missions. Service is a core Anabaptist principle and the mission context is a great leveler, where the most important things matter and much of the cultural baggage that keeps us apart falls away. In a mission setting (for us it was 5 years in Haiti) you can build deep relationships with a wide cross-section of plain folks, share a common bond of mission and purpose, and build credibility with those back at home as you show your commitment to the work of the church. You will also build life-long friendships that will help you feel more connected and make connections with others who know people who know you.
- 7) Remember - it should ultimately be about Jesus and his Kingdom - This is the most important thing...our motivation should be about obedience to Christ and service for his Kingdom. This is the holy calling for all who choose to follow him - it is in Christ that we find our motivation, our courage, our affirmation, our purpose. Anything else - lifestyle, pet doctrines, personal acceptance, culture, clothing styles, canning beans, whatever - may be important, but it's not the main thing.