

Most Rev. Brian J. Dunn

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Dear Bishop Dunn,

I understand that Roman Catholic Parishioners have been approached to give some ideas regarding the decline in attendance and church membership. Someone suggested I offer some suggestions and ideas, even as an outsider, and send them to you.

I am not a Christian, but I do have some thoughts why the pews are not filled to capacity. I believe that an initial reaction is the fact people are generally more in tune to their own feelings and do not appreciate to be told what they must believe and how they must live according to church teachings. Times are rapidly changing and churches must get in tune with the times. There are a number of thoughts regarding low church attendance.

1. The lack of prospective clergy is understandable as celibacy is an abnormal behavior for a human being. We are all sexual beings, thus the existence of a non sexual life is not normal. Perhaps if priests were allowed to live in a relationship more men may enter the priesthood.
2. Discrimination under the umbrella of the law. Freedom of religion is great, but not if one is allowed to arbitrarily verbally attack, or otherwise minimize the existence of a minority such as members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and transgender community (LGBT). It is hardly "Christian" to deny those members equal treatment in the Roman Catholic Church. I am speaking of equality in all its forms, including same-gender marriage. Pope Benedict, on many occasions has been a harsh critic of the gay community, even so far as to say that "Society needs protection from homosexuality, like the rainforests need protection from destruction". If the church hierarchy would transfer thoughts to include a modern society, then it will assist in bringing more people into the fold.
3. The Catholic Church does not stand alone in discriminating practices. Other denominations are also part of this apparent problem facing churches. An all encompassing organization will be successful as everyone is treated with respect and love. The poor tend to be snubbed by some churches and one problem is the fact they are not socially accepted by a number of church goers. The other point is their inability

for financial support to the parish. I believe the evidence is clear that the churches must change with the times in order to survive. As I understand it, churches are closing doors all over the world.

4. People are better educated in our modern society and therefore will think for themselves. They tend to question many biblical writings and form their own opinions. Hence, they may try an alternate route to satisfy their spirituality.
5. I strongly think all world religions are out of tune with our society. As an atheist, I am looking in from the outside and whatever I say will not change the facts. However, these are just a few thoughts that you may wish to consider, but you will notice that the decline will not diminish in your churches unless major reforms are part of the plan. Personally, it matters not, but I do consider my brothers and sisters caught in this web of discriminatory and unjust practices that keeps them from sitting in the church pews.
6. Let people think for themselves and allow them to be who they are. As a gay man I truly am happy, but as a long time gay rights activist I see many practices that remain in many groups in our society. I am thinking of the LGBT community, Aborigines, any person or group in our society that needs a friendly shoulder and not be judged. People tend to be judged unfairly in our society and mainly by organized religion. That is my main concern, and to also make an attempt to educate, raise awareness and get all members of society the opportunity to live life to the fullest. This is my goal and hopefully with an eventual positive outcome, but it takes years of hard work. A daunting task indeed, but we must remember, we are all the same somehow.

Yours truly,

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