

When Church Gets Weird

We shouldn't let misguided people ruin the meeting for everyone else.

I love it when the Holy Spirit moves in a church service. But I also know there's a fine line between charismatic and charismaniac. Too often, those of us who love spiritual gifts get carried away—and things can get weird. The supernatural turns peculiar, and what is prophetic becomes pathetic.

This is not a new problem. Two chapters of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians are devoted to this dilemma. Even in the first century, people misused charismatic gifts to get attention. The abuse of speaking in tongues created pandemonium, and the lack of order invited an apostolic rebuke.

I've never been a fan of the "seeker-friendly" philosophy. I don't want to limit God or tell Him what He can't do in church. But there's nothing wrong with creating healthy barriers so certain "characters" in your congregation don't ruin the meeting. In my years of ministry I've identified these All-Time Worst Meeting Spoilers.

1. Bertha the Banner Queen. Colorful pageantry can enhance a worship experience if it's done tastefully. It can also be horribly distracting if the banners look like cheap props from a high school version of Camelot. They also can trigger lawsuits, especially if someone from the arts ministry whacks a visitor in the head with a wooden pole or jabs them in the eye. If you are using flags or banners, insist that carriers stay far enough away from people to avoid accidents.

2. Norm the Ninja Warrior. This is the guy who insists on waving a sword (and not a plastic one!) near the stage during worship. Someone needs to remind this man that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (see Eph. 6:12). When my kids

were small I took them to a charismatic church where people waved swords and shields during worship. One of my daughters was horrified and begged me never to take her again to what she called “the sword church.”

3. Darla the Dancing Diva. Dancing is a legitimate form of worship, and it’s entirely biblical (see 2 Sam. 6:14) when done in holiness. But we are inviting disaster if we allow someone with unresolved sexual issues to get on the stage and writhe like a stripper while the congregation cringes. Church is no place for the daughter of Herodias to perform in gym shorts.

4. Herschel the Shofar Blower. I wish I had a dollar for every time I’ve heard someone ruin a worship service by snorting into a ram’s horn. This ancient biblical instrument can rouse God’s people to action if blown correctly. But if it is blown by an amateur, it sounds more like a tortured animal. If you open your worship with a pitiful “MMMMWWWAAAUUNNNCCCKKK!” sound, your visitors will remember the pain you caused their ears—and they will never return.

5. Manny the Manifester. If you want visitors to head for the door before the sermon begins, make sure this guy gets overly excited during worship. He might fall on the floor, vibrate or act like he is having convulsions. (And he will tell you he can’t control himself when the “anointing” hits.) Meanwhile, visitors seated behind him will assume he needs medical attention. When they realize this is acceptable behavior for your congregation, they will run out!

6. Agnes the King James Prophetess. Nothing dampens the mood of a church more than a raspy-voiced church member who feels it is his or her duty to scold everyone with a pointed finger. After the angry rebuke, they always tack on the obligatory “THUS SAITH GAWD!”

Don’t let angry people practice their prophetic gift on an

audience. And remember: Mature prophets will speak in a normal voice rather than channeling the Elizabethan version of James Earl Jones.

The apostle Paul was “seeker-friendly” in the best way. He urged the Corinthians to leave room for spiritual gifts, but he also warned them to avoid charismatic excesses. If you are sensitive to seekers, they will be more likely to listen to your message and come back next week to hear the gospel again. Please don’t scare them away.

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