

## The Importance of Raving Fans

There are churches that have grown 2000% with no advertising except a yellow pages entry, no invite-a-friend Sundays, no special programs and no publicity. They grow the way early Christianity grew, with raving fans (people who are so satisfied they want to recruit others). Raving fans have an emotional attachment and contagious enthusiasm for the community that goes beyond just referring others; they feel a strong need to bring them.

Examples of raving fans are found in Mark 1:40-45 ("he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word") and John 4:5-42.

What are some barriers to raving fans?

1. Not having a clear vision and understanding of how we will serve others, including trying to be everything to everyone or not being clear about our expectations. It's important to remember that "expect" comes from "expectare," which means to look forward to, so expectations are our hopes and visions. Rather than an ethical pronouncement of what a person "should" do, expectations are a statement of the reality of how we may strengthen our spiritual development and need to affirm each person wherever they are in their spiritual journey. Examples of expectations include participation in worship, a small group, a ministry or mission, and stewardship. Questions to answer are: What are the benefits of being a member? What are the responsibilities of membership? How can I get involved in ministry? What do I do now that I am a member?
2. Not meeting the real needs of people, including not meeting people where they are or helping them to take the next step.
3. Not being consistent, because even satisfied people will not be raving fans if they wonder whether others will have the same experience they did.
4. Not building trust, a real sense that church leaders are there to be true stewards for the people who are served (and aren't just in it for something else such as financial growth).

What do we need to have raving fans?

1. Worship and programs that people are confident inviting people to because they are satisfactory and consistent and meet real needs (worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, mission).
2. People who are trained enough to have confidence in sharing their experiences with others. (Most people are out of their comfort zone with this, so this needs to be an area of formation.)
3. Expectations for people who come to the church community and for people who will bring them ("what we are looking forward to"). This is the beginning of a clear understanding of who we are.
4. A genuine primary focus on serving God and other people (stewardship).

Are you a raving fan of your Christian community? What would it take for you to become one? How can we further support raving fan experiences in our church community?