



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Leading Ideas

April 9, 2008

VIGNETTE

Everyone Welcome?

By Gary A. Shockley

Many congregations truly do believe they are open to everyone until someone different comes along making them feel uncomfortable.

I recently visited a church where, and I kid you not, they had two posters on the wall near the entrance to the sanctuary with pictures of certain clothing styles that were on one poster unacceptable and on the other acceptable to wear. As I walked inside, I was met by another sign that said, "No food or drink beyond this point. This means YOU!" Just beyond that sign was another one that read, "Those who truly honor Christ kneel when they receive Communion." The real kicker was the words printed in their bulletin: "Everyone welcome!" Nobody can make this stuff up.

I meet people all the time – faithful people, smart people, good and decent people – who have walked away from the church because of petty things like this and, unfortunately, not so petty things. They have come up against our barricades – our rules, regulations, dress codes, and expectations of behavior – and have returned home muttering beneath their breath, "I don't belong there. I will never do this again." Their experience of us is anything but real. They see us as stuffy, pretentious, often out of touch with reality, and just plain inauthentic. Unchurched people (as we call them) are smarter than we think. They see through our phoniness. They can smell hypocrisy a mile away.

Gary A. Shockley (gshockley@st.lukes.org) is pastor of Hope Spring Church in Ocoee, Florida, and author of *The Meandering Way: Leading by Following the Spirit*, from which this material is reprinted. Copyright 2007 by the Alban Institute. Used by permission.