

# OPEN FORUM

Picking up the latest *Circuit Rider* as I passed through Indianapolis's Christian Theological Seminary, I had no idea that reading it would absorb half my time at lunch. I was taken aback by Willard "Buzz" Stevens's "Being Honest with Our Doubts." His thoughts reminded me of my days at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in the mid-1960s, where I came to many conclusions about Jesus, the Church, and my own "ministry" that have become stepping-stones in my soul ever since. From our student body's reaction to President Kennedy's assassination, to our own Professor William Hamilton being "defrocked" because his "death of God" viewpoint wasn't "Christian theology," to hearing Malcolm X preach only days before his assassination, to riding with others to Washington to support civil rights legislation, it was a very formative time. Instead of the pulpit I chose human services as my career.

Since then—and likely prodded by those three years of intensive exploration of what others found true—my spiritual life has been one of constant questioning, searching, and lighting on conclusions that continually undergo challenging even until today. Often I find myself as "Buzz," filtering my deepest unsettled convictions when in conversation with a person or group who may like me less for them or whose expectations I think I may disturb. Sometimes I don't.

Often I wonder just what I would preach about and say, if given a chance to fill the pulpit some "lay persons'" Sunday morning. I'm much more comfortable lining out my erstwhile beliefs during Sun-

day school discussions, amidst folks whose own views usually are far different than mine. I may never reach the kind of absolute certainty about the "big" questions of life with which many in my religious community seem to have become comfortable. I would welcome a "table talk" group with Buzz, where we could be honest with ourselves, each other, and God. Thank you for including Stevens's article in your journal.

**Tom Rugh**  
Indianapolis, Ind.

I was impressed with your August/September/October issue concerning Rethink Church, as it covers a variety of issues relating to our "broken" system. I'm a retired elder, a member of the Northern Illinois Conference. My late spouse, son of Norwegian immigrants, was born Lutheran, graduated from an American Baptist seminary in California, and was a professor at a Presbyterian university in Iowa. So I've seen and been involved in a variety of denominations, and in my opinion the problems we face are universal. The basic issue is our refusal to change.

Ours is a radically shifting culture, which older folks are still resisting. Working women, involvement in other groups and clubs, kids also involved in a variety of after-school activities, no time anymore for church stuff! It's not as it was in Granny's time, when her entire life centered around the church, especially in small communities. I've heard older women

say, "Why can't these younger women do what we used to do?" The answer is plain; too much else is going on in today's culture, whether we like it or not! So I've often thought to myself, "What will happen to the Church, when the grannies and the grandpas pass away? Will our churches pass away too?"

Maybe the answer is to rethink the church, as your last issue indicated. Trim the programming; cut the fat; and even more importantly, preach sermons that fit NOW, not yesterday.

**Anonymous**  
Waukon, Iowa

The recent articles on creative strategies to "Rethink Church" were helpful and challenging. As one whose theology is neither fundamentalist nor orthodox, I especially appreciated Willard Stevens's article on "Being Honest with Our Doubts."

In the future, I would respectfully suggest that *Circuit Rider* include some articles which explore what it might mean to "Rethink Church" vis-a-vis the stewardship of God's creation. Perhaps there are local churches that are scheduling fewer meetings as one way to break our addiction to fossil fuels. Perhaps there are local churches that provide smaller and more energy-efficient parsonages.

Because the Body of Christ lives and breathes within the natural world, our rethinking must also include the stewardship of God's creation. After all, most of Jesus' ministry was not in the synagogues or the Temple, it was in the hills and valleys of rural Galilee.

**Bob Blackburn**  
Neshkoro, Wis.



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