

Working for Excellence  
by Ken Behnken

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In Colossians 3:23, the apostle Paul wrote “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”

It is so easy to get caught up in trying to please people rather than God. The demands, commands, directions, and suggestions drip on our heads like water from a leaky roof. Everyone has a different idea of what can make this church better.

As pastors and congregational leaders, we must constantly be in prayer, seeking God’s direction and His will for our ministry. At the same time, it is good to look around and ask, “What are the needs of the people I am called to serve?” What do the Scriptures say about “serving” rather than “running” a congregation? It is also helpful to see what other congregations, ones who are effectively reaching God’s people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are doing.

**The U.S. Congregational Life Survey**, the largest and most representative profile of worshipers and their congregations ever developed in the United States, includes the LCMS and 50 other denominations. Their findings are published in a book entitled *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregations*. They found these 10 strengths in congregations that excel and go beyond the ordinary.

1. **Growing Spirituality**--They help their worshipers grow in their faith.
2. **Meaningful Worship**--They provide worship services that meet the needs of their worshipers.
3. **Participation**--These congregations are places where worshipers are involved in many of the activities of the congregation.
4. **Having a Sense of Belonging**--They provide people with a sense of fellowship with others.
5. **Caring for Young People**--They ensure that the children and youth in the congregation are nurtured in the faith.
6. **Focusing on the Community**--They reach out to and serve those outside their doors
7. **Sharing their Faith**--They help their worshipers feel comfortable sharing their faith with others.
8. **Welcoming New People**--They ensure that new people become a part of their faith community.
9. **Empowering Leadership**--They help worshipers to share in the leadership of the congregation.
10. **Looking to the Future**--They focus on a positive future.

These are good measuring sticks for congregation ministry. In all we do, we should seek to be “beyond the ordinary.” Our God has given us a solid doctrinal foundation on which to stand. He also gives us creative minds, visionary desires, exceptional spiritual gifts, and quality lay people who have the gifts we lack. To be in ministry is to always do our best and to always seek better and more effective ways to reach the unchurched with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember, we are working for the Lord, not for ourselves or for men. Our Lord has given us the tools to go “beyond the ordinary” to be the church He wants us to be. To God be the glory--great things he has done and is doing!