

The 10 Warning Signs of an Inwardly Obsessed Church

by [Thom Rainer](#) on Wednesday, June 20, 2012

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Any healthy church must have some level of inward focus. Those in the church should be disciplined. Hurting members need genuine concern and ministry. Healthy fellowship among the members is a good sign for a congregation.

But churches can lose their outward focus and become preoccupied with the perceived needs and desires of the members. The dollars spent and the time expended can quickly become focused on the demands of those inside the congregation. When that takes place the church has become inwardly obsessed. It is no longer a Great Commission congregation.

In my research of churches and consultation with churches, I have kept a checklist of potential signs that a church might be moving toward inward obsession. No church is perfect; indeed most churches will demonstrate one or two of these signs for a season. But the real danger takes place when a church begins to manifest three or more of these warning signs for an extended period of months and even years.

1. Worship wars. One or more factions in the church want the music just the way they like it. Any deviation is met with anger and demands for change. The order of service must remain constant. Certain instrumentation is required while others are prohibited.

2. Prolonged minutia meetings. The church spends an inordinate amount of time in different meetings. Most of the meetings deal with the most inconsequential items, while the Great Commission and Great Commandment are rarely the topics of discussion.

3. Facility focus. The church facilities develop iconic status. One of the highest priorities in the church is the protection and preservation of rooms, furniture, and other visible parts of the church's buildings and grounds.

4. Program-driven. Every church has programs even if they don't admit it. When we start doing a ministry a certain way, it takes on programmatic status. The problem is not

with programs. The problem develops when the program becomes an end instead of a means to greater ministry.

5. Inwardly focused budget. A disproportionate share of the budget is used to meet the needs and comforts of the members instead of reaching beyond the walls of the church.

6. Inordinate demands for pastoral care. All church members deserve care and concern, especially in times of need and crisis. Problems develop, however, when church members have unreasonable expectations for even minor matters. Some members expect the pastoral staff to visit them regularly merely because they have membership status.

7. Attitudes of entitlement. This issue could be a catch-all for many of the points named here. The overarching attitude is one of demanding and having a sense of deserving special treatment.

8. Greater concern about change than the gospel. Almost any noticeable changes in the church evoke the ire of many; but those same passions are not evident about participating in the work of the gospel to change lives.

9. Anger and hostility. Members are consistently angry. They regularly express hostility toward the church staff and other members.

10. Evangelistic apathy. Very few members share their faith on a regular basis. More are concerned about their own needs rather than the greatest eternal needs of the world and community in which they live.

My list is not exhaustive. You may have some items you could add. Have you ever been a part of an inwardly obsessed church? What signs were evident that led you to know the church was inwardly obsessed? Do you affirm some of the items on my list?