

# Survival guide: Memo from a church consultant

by [Dwight Moody](#) in the [November 6, 2002](#) issue

Dear Congregation of the St. Pachomius Byzantine Orthodox Church: Pursuant to our contractual agreement dated August 1 of this year, I have completed my evaluation of your church. I have, as you requested, assessed your worship as to its compatibility with contemporary sensibilities. I have researched the tradition of your own congregation and also studied the Leading Indicators of Spiritual Trends (LIST). The report is organized in six categories.

*Food:* I begin here since this is where the people are. They want food but not necessarily foreign food. Also, distributing it from the altar at the close of the service is not good.

I recommend that you secure a Starbucks franchise; locate it in what is now the prayer room just off the foyer. If a communion service is absolutely necessary, develop techniques to make it move a little quicker; research indicates that videos shown during the lag time are well received.

*Building:* All the trends are against you, except your trees. I have attached drawings to demonstrate how to rework existing facilities to include an outdoor fountain and a walking/running track, plus an atrium entrance with escalator to the sanctuary. Fully half of the altar space can be redesigned as a store. With a name like “Spirit Shoppe,” you can offer your people apparel, pictures, ornaments and assorted trinkets.

*Furnishings:* I took pictures of your interior: hardwood floors, unpadded pews, plain windows and walls, and—how shall I describe them?—painted panels of old people. It needs a complete makeover. Down with the panels and up with video screens; two will do fine. Theater chairs are a must.

Replace the choir loft in the back with a projection booth. The incense will have to go, but I have some very nice potpourri planters in a selection of scents: Miracle

Moonlight, Oceans of Peace and Farm Fresh Faith.

*Music:* Choirs, especially a cappella types, were fine for the last century, but no more. I liked the male quartet, but surely you have people slimmer and more sophisticated, and at least one female.

Modern, younger people—those you must seek to appease, I mean, attract—are drawn toward drum sets and speakers; make them very visible, even if you actually use sound tracks (sample enclosed).

*Literature:* Good idea; bad execution. Pull the mimeographed tracts on tithing and Sabbath observance; denominational stuff is death. Everything must be brief, illustrated and in color; comic style has proven extremely popular.

Stock the following: *The Jabust Principle*, *Behind the Leaving* and *Everything I Needed in Heaven I Picked Up in Sunday School*. Accessorize with study guides, interactive CD-ROMs and color-coordinated theme merchandise.

*Name:* May I be frank? Nobody—and I mean NOBODY —understands any part of your name. (I actually commissioned a survey.) Most assumed you were Jewish, others thought of a travel agency, and one was sure “Byzantine” was a link to al-Qaeda.

My recommendation: Be bold! Embrace the third millennium! Take a new name, one derived from the old, but in a clever sort of way. Our people suggest you utilize the word “box.” How about “p-BOX”? Edgy, isn’t it? But evocative and mysterious as well.

Remember how United States Steel Corporation became USX? Brilliant: strong but subtle, distinctive and vague, all at the same time.

Additional note: What are the prospects of replacing “patriarch” with “senior executive pastor”?

**WARNING:** Do not assume that because you have thrived for years and your tradition claims millions of members, your church can survive the fickle and ferocious religious market of modern America. Act soon, before it is too late!