

There's a word for it: A collection of neologisms

by [Rodney Clapp](#) in the [April 7, 2009](#) issue

New inventions often result in new words, or neologisms. *Radar*, for instance, emerged as an acronym for a “radio detection and ranging” device. Cultural developments also evoke new words and phrases, such as *cyberspace* (originating from science fiction), *soccer mom* (from the world of politics) or *prequel* (from movies and pop culture).

A neologism takes hold in our vocabulary when it crisply encapsulates an activity, event or category that people intuitively understand but which has not yet been labeled. Several regular church happenings have yet to be labeled. What follows are some suggestions for naming if not claiming these familiar phenomena:

Egocessory prayer: A public prayer centered more on the pray-er and his or her eloquence and cleverness than on God.

Pewburn: Posterial malady of those who hustle from church immediately after the service ends. “The Gleasons were out of here so fast this morning they got *pewburn* .”

Glibertarian: Theologically, this refers to those who are indifferent to issues of doctrine and thoughtlessly dismiss them. More generally, it refers to those with a weak sense of the common good who actually believe that the phrase “God helps those who help themselves” is in the Bible.

Lexlexia: When the pastor mistakenly preaches on a lectionary text not assigned for the day.

Bulletinnitus: The dazed, ear-ringing sensation you get when the announcements for the day drone on and on.

Homhal, short for *homiletical hallucination*: When people confuse their daydreaming or free associations with something the preacher said. “Ben Franks had a *homhal*

—he thanked me for quoting Roy D. Mercer on catfish noodling. I’ve never even heard of Roy D. Mercer or of catfish noodling.”

Fliturgy: A hyperactive worship service designed for short attention spans—with a sermon under ten minutes, no more than two verses of any song sung, and prayer time limited to two minutes.

Osteentatious: Unrelentingly upbeat. “Pastor Greg was a little too *osteentatious* for that occasion, don’t you think?”

Falter call: A conclusion of a sermon or exhortation that falls flat, ending anticlimactically or ineffectively. “It was a strong sermon, but it limped to the end with that *falter call*.”

Rubric’s cube: Oral or printed instructions for liturgy that are puzzling and frustrating. “Pastor Hillary’s footwashing directions were a *rubric’s cube*.”

Flightgeist: A reflexive inclination to flee to the customs of the past while complaining about how the church is capitulating to the zeitgeist.

Handstake: When a worshiper greeting the pastor in the postworship line pursues a leisurely conversation or demands a virtual counseling session. “I would have made it to lunch earlier, but John Bull wanted a *handstake*.”

Blithers: Church members who don’t tithe and would not even consider it.

Megalurch: A very large but very static and complacent congregation.

Cruelogy: A tepid or spiteful eulogy.

Hysterlector: One who engages in overly dramatic readings of scripture.

Baptism by ire: The rookie pastor’s initiatory encounter with a parishioner’s wrath.

Ecclesiometrics: Various measures, usually dubious, by which churches quantitatively gauge faithfulness and success in their mission.

Catch 23: An unwanted occurrence that turns out to be serendipitous because it makes those involved turn to the Lord as their Shep herd.