

How to find a church: Don't skimp on the coffee

by [Gordon Atkinson](#) in the [November 16, 2004](#) issue

I keep getting e-mails from people who say, "Your church sounds nice. I wish I could find one like that."

Let me guess. You're looking for a cool church, filled with authentic Christians who aren't judgmental but also have convictions, and are hip and classic in just the right mixture. A church where people forgive each other, love children and worship in meaningful ways. A church with a swingin' preacher who makes the Bible come alive, tells great stories, is a wonderful inspiration—and plays too. A church that isn't liberal or conservative, but seems to transcend weak-ass categories like those. A church where the hunger for truth is honored, and people can disagree but still love each other and share a plate of tacos. A church where people are committed to "The Christ Life"—and it shows in the fabulous and creative ways they love the world.

That what you're looking for?

I got ya. I understand.

Here are some tips to help you in your search:

- You won't find that church.
- Open the yellow pages. Tear out the entire church section and burn it. Offer prayers for your journey while warming yourself at the fire. Dance if that's your thing.
- Surely I don't need to say anything about churches that have billboards and commercials featuring preachers with \$200 haircuts.
- Dedicate yourself to this quest.
- Call denominational offices in your town and ask if they know of any spectacularly unsuccessful churches. Explain that you do *not* want a church that is huge and

famous and full of all the right kind of people. Tell them you are looking for a ragged bunch of pilgrims who might be meeting in a laundromat or someplace like that.

- Try the Quakers. You'll have a hell of a time finding them, but that's the point.
- Find out if there are any "house churches" in your area. Not every house church is what you're looking for, but your odds are better. These are Christians who have decided not to have buildings. They put a high premium on authenticity and relationships. Think guitars, Ritz crackers and singing Jesus songs with a baby in your lap.
- Let's talk about my first tip again. As I said, you won't find the church you're looking for. Go ahead and grieve. You'll have to make do with a silly bunch of dreamers and children, prone to mistakes, blunders and misjudgments.
- Find some people you can hang with—people you can trust. Be patient. You'll change them and they'll change you. You'll meet somewhere in the middle.
- Relax. It's all good. God might use this journey to teach you something. If you don't find what you're looking for, you might pick up some friends along the way and start your own church. All you need is coffee, a Bible and a couple of kindred spirits.
- Don't skimp on the coffee. Get the good stuff.