

**Acting Out the Gospel Message -  
Locked Out of Church and Loving It**  
Kerry S. Doyal

Have I got a wild idea for you, for your church? It is one that may seem crazy, threatening and counterproductive to "doing church." But, it is an idea whose time has come. Will you take the risk of reading on and leading on?

First, some context: my notion was inspired by seeing people blocking the doors to the courthouse in Alabama to keep the Ten Commandments in the lobby. As I mulled that over, something seemed backwards to me.

Then, when I heard a national Christian leader calling people to head to Alabama to join the ranks, it all became clear to me. I knew what needed to be done instead.

What if, instead of protesting to keep the Law in the public arena, we stage an exact opposite protest - as reverse from that as a film negative. Let's mobilize an army of people to block church doors before some Wednesday night gathering, or gospel singing or Board meeting. Not to barricade them in, mind you, but to keep them out.

Our militant crusaders would surround the building and keep them (us) from hiding inside the safety of our building, insisting - in a gracious, Christian way - that they take the gospel out to the public square, a needy world.

Are we nearly as vexed by the lack of penetration of the gospel in our world as we are the potential removal of a marble reproduction of the Ten Commandments?

May I make that a bit more personal? While you were disturbed in the past weeks by the news out of Alabama, did you in that same time frame allow yourself to be nearly as upset by the minimal movement to get the gospel message out by God's people?

The presence or absence of the Law from the lobby of a courthouse is far less significant than the absence of believers in the world sharing Jesus. Hands down, no competition.

In fact, at one level, to insist on The Law leaves people in a condemned state, in more desperate need of the gospel (see Romans 7; Galatians 3 & 4). To fight for The Law in such public arenas at neglect of the gospel is cruel. Granted, they are not contrary to one another, but certainly the

gospel completes the Law.

Back to our budding protests. A militant group called ACT UP has garnered headlines in the past few years with outlandish, often rude protests and disruptions. How about forming an alternative group for Jesus' people?

Let us start "Act It Out", a squad of disciples of Jesus who refuse to simply "be in their place" every time the church doors are open.

We "Act It Out" radicals would refuse to come to each church event, too busy taking Jesus' love and message of forgiveness to those who do not come to us.

News would spread of us showing up in nursing homes with listening ears and hugging arms, converging on widow's homes to cut their grass, rake their leaves and disappear as suddenly as we came.

Rumors would spread of "Act It Outers" blitzing food banks with bags of needed groceries, showing up with quarters in laundry mats, paying for people's wash cycle (Jesus did ours).

Word would get out of people being fishers of men with hammers, pulling wires, painting, landscaping, building habitats on earth, while telling about ones available in heaven.

Pews would grow occasionally cold, as we A.I.O.'ers are MIA (Missing In Action) in the best sense of the word: picking up trash, sharing a tract, telling the gospel, offering food for both body and soul.

To be fair, the first "lock out" should be at my church, during the week, when I am heading to the office. Start with me. While I need office and study time, I can hide behind my desk, with my books to a sinful fault. Go ahead, make my day, flush me out - better yet, fence me out some time.

So, if I arrive at church some day to face a loving, smiling, singing group of protestors blocking my way, I will count myself blessed. I will head to the bank, get a roll of quarters and hit some laundry mats, taking a few of you with me.

But be warned, I will also try my best to organize a retaliatory lock out at your place some time soon. And payback - in this case - can be heaven.

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.' " (Mark 16:15)

"Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' " (John 20:21 - NIV)