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## **PEW POTATO SYNDROME**

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Every year the folks at Merriam-Webster pour over thousands of publications of all sorts in search of new words or new definitions of old words.

And every year they find and include many such words in the latest editions of their dictionaries.

In 1982 a new word was added to the English Dictionary. It was added because of the amount of usage it received in the press and other places in the 2 or 3 years preceding that year.

That word? Couch potato!

Merriam-Webster defines a couch-potato as “a person disinclined to activity or exertion, esp. one who spends a great deal of time watching television.”

I'll wager that as soon as I said that many of you pictured someone you know whom you consider a couch potato-

That image in your mind probably includes several common points:

- The person you're picturing probably has a remote in their hand
- They are not in the best of health
- You are picturing them sitting or reclining late at night or in the middle of a very hot humid day
- They have something to drink in one hand and a bag of chips or other heart healthy snack in the other

We live in a world that is beset with many problems that have something in common with the couch potatoes around us:

- Heart disease is at an all time high
- Cholesterol is up
- Productivity is down
- In this information age, we don't read as much as we used to
- As a result we don't write or speak as well as we used to
- Grades in school are lower

- Crime is higher

I'm not here to advocate the destruction of your flat screen televisions or ever doing away with chips and salsa while watching QVC at 2 a.m.

Rather, tonight I want to take note of a similar problem within our churches. The problem can be summed up in a new word.

## **PEW POTATO SYNDROME**

A pew potato is a Christian who makes his way into the sanctuary at every available opportunity to sit and watch what's going on while snacking on his or her religion.

Probably all of us have played the part of a pew potato at some point in our lives. And like the couch potato, we are disinclined to Christian activity or exertion.

For many, Christianity is a spectator sport. They come and watch what's going on and never involve themselves in the working of the kingdom.

Let's face it, you get out of the worship service experience what you put into it.

The Christian experience involves putting ourselves at bay to serve others:

- Working in the nursery
- Or teaching a Sunday school class
- Opening the doors of the church
- Or picking up bulletins after service
- Or pitching in at the last minute in whatever capacity is needed

And like the couch potato suffering from ill health, the body of Christ suffers and becomes ill when we allow ourselves to become pew potatoes.

And this occurs for a number of reasons:

1. They don't feel they have anything to offer
2. The work of the ministry is to be done by professional clergy/pastors
3. All the work is currently being done, and when a slot opens up, I'll hold back and give someone else a chance to serve (but unfortunately too many hold back)
4. The positions of service that are available do not fit my gifts
5. I'm too old
6. I'm too young

7. To offer my services would be prideful
  8. The available jobs are not very appealing
- Or, as Yul Brenner in *The King and I* said, – etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

To be truthful, some of these things have crossed my mind as potential excuses for not getting involved in the work of the Kingdom of God.

But the fact is none of those are very good reasons for not getting out of the pew and into a place of ministry. And yes, we are ALL called to ministry – maybe not the ministry of pastoring but the ministry of serving on a committee, ministry of teaching; ministry of hospitality; ministry of culinary science; ministry of maintenance, ministering our nurturing – whatever ministry God has called you to, your church needs you to say “yes” because you are someone that your church can not get along without.

1) THE CHURCH COULD NOT GET ALONG WITHOUT FAITHFUL PEOPLE!  
The Bible nowhere commends anyone for greatness or brilliance, but for faithfulness! Jesus says in **Rev.2:10**, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*

My prayer is, “God, give us faithful Christians!” We need people who are faithful in giving, attendance, Christian living, service, in witness!

We couldn’t get along without faithful people; we can’t have too many of them!

(2) THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT WILLING PEOPLE!  
Oh, we have willing people, all right, some willing to work & others willing to let ’em! We have members who are willing to do the work of the world, but not the work of the Lord!

Those who really love the Lord, say, "Any place that I can serve suits me! I’m willing to work anywhere that I can glorify God and serve His cause!" Are you willing to do the work or just willing to watch someone do it?

The church could not do without willing people!

(3) THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT PEOPLE OF VISION!  
We need a vision of the needs around us! All around us there are unsaved and unchurched people by the hundreds! Many of them could be brought to the

salvation of Jesus Christ if Christians went after them seriously!

We must take care of the local needs of Salem United Methodist Church, but we must not stop there! We are to look beyond! No church can grow by keeping the good news of the gospel to themselves!

The church could not do without people of vision!

**THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT OPTIMISTIC PEOPLE!**

Some people say, "We can't do that," or "We've never done that before!" The optimist says, "By God's help, we will do that!"

Moses was leading Israel toward the Promised Land. They came to the point where they could easily enter the land and settle down. God said to Moses, "Pick out 12 men and send them into the land. Have them look it over and bring you a report, then prepare to enter it."

The 12 went in, found the land to be fertile and wonderful beyond description. Ten of the men came back to make their report. These pessimists said, "It's a good land all right, but the men of the country are giants, we were like grasshoppers in their sight!"

The other two, Caleb and Joshua said, "This is true, but God is on our side, and with His help we can take the land!"

The pessimists won out! And as a result, Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 long years!

I want to be an optimist, not a pessimist! I want to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The church could not do without optimists!

**5) THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT INDUSTRIAL PEOPLE!**

Jesus was industrious! He said in **Jn.5:17** "*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" He filled every hour with good service to God!

As you read through the Bible you, find that God never used a lazy person! Moses, Noah, David, John the Baptist, Peter and Paul were all industrious; they were workers!

The church has a great program that was designed by Christ Himself! But He needs industrious Christians to carry out His work! He has no hands but ours to do His work, no feet but ours to run His errands!

If the work of the church is left to the lazy people, the church will die!

The church can't do without industrial people, those that do the work!

#### 6) THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT ITS BOOSTERS!

We need boosters. We need people who are out everyday, in every walk of life, telling others of the good times to be had in our church!

If you want your church to grow and prosper, boost it!

#### 7) THE CHURCH COULD NOT DO WITHOUT LIBERAL PEOPLE!

Who are the liberal people? The one who gives a hundred dollars a week or the one who gives a thousand dollars a week?

Recall the story of a little woman, a widow, who slipped in some small coins in the church treasury! She was probably very sorry that she could not give more! Nothing was said about her gift because it was so minimal compared to the tremendous offerings made by others.

But Jesus, who saw the woman and her gift, made her forever famous! He said, "She hath given all that she had!"

If you love the Lord you need not be afraid of giving too much! He will always out give you!

Churches seem to get along without rich people, but they can't get along without liberal people! We need to love our church so much, that we're willing to give in support of it! Let's give it our best! If we do, we'll have a church that pleases God!

These are some people our church cannot do without!

- Are you faithful?
- Are you willing?
- Do you have a vision for your church?
- Are you optimistic?
- Are you industrious?
- Are you a booster?

- Are you liberal in your giving of financial support to your church?

If you are all these things, the church cannot do without you!

Salem United Methodist Church cannot do without Y-O-U!!! Turn to your pew family on the right and tell them **“Our Church cannot get along without you.”**

And we do not want our pew family on the left to be ignored; turned to them and say –**“let’s fight the pew potato syndrome together.”**

WHY we should we fight the pew potato syndrome and get into a place of service?

#### 1. BECAUSE WE WERE CREATED FOR SERVICE

As I serve others, my own needs are met, and as I give my life away, I find it. We were created for service.

#### 2. IT PROVES THAT I BELONG TO CHRIST

A non-serving Christian is a contradiction. There’s no such thing.

#### 3. SERVING OTHERS IS THE WAY TO SERVE GOD

No matter what you’re doing, who are you doing it for? You’re doing it for the Lord. **Matthew 25:40** Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”* When you feed, clothe, and nurture others, then you feed, clothe and nurture Me. Humble, willing service to others is the same thing as service to God

#### 4. BECAUSE I OWE GOD EVERYTHING

The reason why I serve the Lord is because of what God has done for me – because of God’s grace and mercy. When I think of what Jesus Christ has done for me, the sacrifice that He’s made for me, there is no sacrifice that I can make for Him that will ever compare. So I give Jesus my life. Because I owe Him everything.

#### 5. BECAUSE IT’S THE BEST USE OF MY LIFE

If you’re in Children’s ministry and you change a diaper, it’s not without value. If you pick up a piece of trash on Sunday morning because you say, “Someone

walking in who needs to know Jesus might be turned off by this,” that’s not worthless. It’s of value. If you walk into a restroom and you see paper spread out all over and you pick it up thinking, “Some visitor coming in here might be offended by this,” nothing you do is without value if you do it for the Lord.

The Bible says, whatever you do, since you do it as to the Lord, it all counts. When I go home and be Mom to our young adults its as important a service as preparing a sermon.

When Martin takes out the garbage or supports my call to the ministry, that’s just as significant service as my being the pastor of this great church - because it all counts in God’s eyes.

It’s not so much what you do, it’s your heart and how you do it. There’s no insignificant service in God’s eyes.

Being one of our angelic singers on Sunday morning is important; our faithful Jane preparing the bulletins is important. Teaching Sunday School is important; Ms. Dorothy preparing the coffee pots is important. The Bible says that nothing you do in the Lord’s service is ever without value.

When you minister (and remember we are all called to a ministry), even in the smallest way you’re making an impact for eternity. It is the best use of our lives to serve other people.

The fact is, what counts is giving your life away. That’s why Jesus said, “Whoever wants to find his life will first lose it for my sake.”

## 6. BECAUSE IT MAKES LIFE MEANINGFUL

Jesus said in **Mark 8:35 (Living Bible)** *“Only those who throw away their lives for My sake and the sake of the good news will ever know what it means to really live.”*

I don’t pity people who are up to their neck in service. I happen to know that those are the people who are most alive. If you’re not serving, you’re not living; you’re just existing. That’s why we want to see people break free of **Pew Potato Syndrome** and become involved in the service of God. Only then will they really know what it means to really live. It makes life meaningful.

## 7. IT WILL BE REWARDED FOR ETERNITY

In **Matthew 25:21** He says, *“Well done, good and faithful servants. You’ve been faithful in a few things. I’ll put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness.”*

This life is a test. This is just probation down here. You’re just being tested, and God is seeing what kind of faithfulness you have. You’re going to spend far more time on that side of eternity than you do the 60, 70, 80, 90 years you’re here. How you spend your time here is going to determine what’s going to be done with you in the next life for eternity.

Someday I want to stand before Jesus Christ and I want to hear Him say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. You were not perfect, but you did your best. You gave it your best shot. You tried to make your life count for Christ. You gave it away. You had mistakes and bloopers and did all kinds of things that were worthless, but you gave it your best shot.” At that point, when Jesus says, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” it will be worth it all. Because that’s where I’m going to spend eternity.

## CONCLUSION

“I will not be a **Pew Potato!**” I will serve God by serving others and be happy about it. No matter what God asks me to do.

The sign-up posters for the Smorgasbord still has too many empty lines. There are still tickets to be sold. Your voice for reading the Scripture is needed. Do you have a vision for a helping the community? Hospitality for members and guests? Can you write notes of encouragement to homebound or sick and shut-in? Members that have not been seen in weeks, months or years, have you written them to say, “We miss you?” Have we been encouraging to our youth in their call to service?

Don’t be a **Pew Potato** because the church cannot get along without Y-O-U!