

Massification, Anonymity, Closeness

Last month's workshop triggered a memory of mine from theology school in Spain, where the Spanish word *masificación* struck a chord for me

That word gave me that awful sense of individuals being treated as units in an anonymous crowd, rather than unique individual persons made in the image and likeness of God

I recently googled the word in English and Spanish and was disappointed by the English article, which focussed on strategies used by firms to broaden their market

The Spanish article got nearer to the heart as it used the example of people, especially young women, who are often under pressure to conform to fashion. I remember in my own youth wondering whether or not my choice of clothing was OK or would be regarded as "weird." Today, I'm far less fashion-conscious and more more nonconformist

This is only an example, but the word *masificación* evokes in me a sense of individuals losing themselves in a crowd instead of forming friendships and communities. I shudder when the word "communit'y is used merely to refer to the local population of a district

In scripture the word *koinonia*, from which "community" and "communion" are derived, expresses a sense of closeness and fellowship. When members gather, they're not just a crowd assembled in one place. A good example is the church in Corinth addressed by Paul who encourages them to transform from a set of small cliques to a single fellowship of love

By contrast the scriptural word *ochlos* for "crowd" often denotes individuals in one place attracted towards a person or event. They don't know each other. A classic example is the diverse group of people from several opposing parties who all shout "crucify him!"

Community building is a major of any church that aspires to balance prayer, worship, service and fellowship

If I attend 2 churches I have never visited before,

- church A may try too hard to respect my privacy and leave me to find my own way;
- church B may try too hard to make me welcome - if I were shy by nature, I'd feel as if someone were forcing hymn-book, newsletter and bank details into my hand when I just wanted to pray quietly

I suggest there's a happy mean between those extremes and a wide spectrum of preferences, so it's hard for a church to get the balance right for every new visitor

I also suspect that I, being extrovert by nature, probably have a stronger leaning towards church B than most fellow Christians who are on the spectrum. So I have 2 questions we could explore

- What preferences do we have and is autism a factor?
- How can we help churches get that balance right for people on the spectrum?