

Church Case study: Gramado, RS, Brazil

Yesterday, to celebrate my wife's birthday, we went to Gramado to eat at a very nice fondue restaurant. Gramado is considered by many critics as the most elite resort location of all Brazil.

While enjoying a leisurely birthday dinner, I engaged in conversation with the owner of the eatery about the future of Gramado.

He surprised me about how the "face" (profile) of Gramado was changing rapidly.

For many years, according to his informed opinion, Gramado was known as the only place in Brazil to eat quality fondue type food. So much so that there are over 150 restaurants in that quaint town that specialize in fondue, some even listed as among the best in the world of that line of food.

He said, however, across the last few years, Gramado has been changing very rapidly from an elite resort town by lowering its food quality standards as the city attempts to reach for a broader segment of tourists. Now, Mr. Paraná said "Gramado is promoting its pizza restaurants as the "face" (attraction)—the identifying eatery type of Gramado."

Pizza, much differently than Fondue, requires considerably lower cooking skills, and the production overhead cost is 80% cheaper than fondue. Plus, since pizza is such an "average" type of meal, the tourists now frequenting Gramado are much more "sloppy" (including dress and manners) than those that originally made Gramado the elite town of the country.

Pizza, he said, is banalizing the city. The quiet pride of a special town is now becoming the gathering of unruly and loud-mouthed pizza/beer clients!

Finally, with a very sad voice, he said, "The fondue restaurants are closing their doors in record numbers while the pizza places are multiplying." As a chef, he said, "I can make a family-sized pizza for less than \$2.00 (U.S.) and sell the same item for over \$20.00 (U.S.). Fondue requires much more effort and money to produce with quality, and the profit margin is much lower (40% or less)." Furthermore, he mentioned that fondue is a "slow" meal (expected table time is over 90 minutes), pizza eaters clearing out within 50 minutes.

Now the question: Are our Apostolic Pentecostal churches on the fondue level or the pizza level? Are we interested in producing "fast" big number results, offering "cheap" pizza, or do we try for the time-tested development of quality disciples, prepared for the long haul, until Jesus returns?

Is the "face" of Pentecost changing with the mass production of thematic gospel music shows (pizza), or do we travail in prayer for an hour or two or more until the Holy Ghost moves into our souls and congregations?

How many churches do you know that are changing their church style (and even their church name) from fondue to pizza in order to supposedly survive when really they are seeking big numbers and easy profits.

In the long run, almost everyone loses. The pizza crowd does not remain faithful for long before moving on to cheaper pizzas. Meanwhile, many apostolic pastors die slowly twisting in the shifting winds of Pentecost as they try to remain faithful to the Biblical apostolic roots they embraced so long ago.

Do we invite Jesus in for the night and wait for him to manifest Himself through the breaking of bread like he did for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Believe me, that was not a fast pizza meal!

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