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From:

To:

Sent: Wednesday, October 20, 2010 11:14 AM

Subject: Now you know why we don't sell coffee at GBC - it would be better than the preaching!

Church transforms into coffee chain

<http://larknews.com/current-issue/>

DENVER — Connection Metro Church, which used its foyer coffee bars to attract visitors to its eight satellite churches in the Denver area, has decided to abandon ministry altogether to focus on coffee.

"People liked the coffee a lot better than the ministry, according to congregational surveys, so we're practicing what we preached and focusing on our strengths," says former teaching pastor and now chief marketing officer, Peter Brown.

Many in the congregation seem downright relieved.

"The sermons were okay, but the vanilla frappes were dynamite," says one woman who regularly attended the church for two years so she could enjoy the special brews. "I even brought my Jewish neighbors and they loved them."

The staff of Connection Metro Church began noticing last year that more money was coming in through the coffee bar than in the offering.

"People complimented us about the pastries and mochas but didn't really mention the teaching," says Brown. "After feeling disappointed, we got pragmatic about it and realized God was telling us where to put our efforts."

The church renovated each of its locations into Connection Coffee Houses and removed most traces of its spiritual past. Now crowds are up and many former members are flourishing.

"Who knew I was so gifted at making foam?" says the former head usher, now the head barista, as he makes a heart-shaped design on a cappuccino.

The church's small groups have been turned into neighborhood reading clubs, with some reading Christian titles and others following Oprah's recommendations. The only visible remnants of the coffee house's past are the offering bucket which serves as a tip jar, and the greeters stationed at the door to give a more welcoming feel than the nearby Starbucks.

Some former members were stunned to arrive at church Sunday morning to find the sanctuary transformed into a seating area with newspaper racks and coffee-themed gift items.

"I guess we'll go back to the Methodist place," said one father who had brought his family. "But only after we try those delicious looking chocolate cream-filled croissants."

People in the surrounding neighborhoods say they are far more likely to stop by now. One man who came occasionally says he feels less guilty standing around the coffee counter now that there is no service taking place.

"Before, we had to sit through the service and pay our dues," he says. "Now we go right to the good stuff — the double espressos."

The staff also feels liberated now that the pressure of ministry is off.

"The best way to be relevant is to give people what they want," says Brown. "In our case, that's coffee drinks." •