

ALL COOKIE CHANNEL

Pastor Schmidt and Pastor Anderson had a free afternoon from the pastoral conference, so they took a walk outside the City Conference Center. As they made their way out the front door, they cast their eyes upon the secular jungle of the city. The area around the conference center bore the mark of a plethora of eateries and tee shirt shops for tourists. As they waited for the light to change so they could cross the street, Pastor Schmidt noticed an attractive woman in front of a TV studio that fronted the main sidewalk. She appeared to be inviting people on the street to come into the studio.

“What do you think, Fred?” asked Pastor Schmidt. “Do you want to check it out?”

“Sure, why not,” replied his fellow clergyman.

As they approached the woman, they heard her telling someone else, “Come on in. The show will start in about thirty minutes.”

Giving Pastor Anderson and Pastor Schmidt handouts, she asked, “Are you two gentlemen interested in cookies? If you are, the All Cookie Channel will be shooting a program in about thirty minutes and you’re welcome to join the audience.”

The woman moved on to other people on the sidewalk. As far as the two clergymen were concerned, the word “cookie” triggered a positive response. As they entered the studio, an usher directed them to two vacant seats about halfway down a row towards the back of the audience area.

“It looks like they’re going to have a full house, Fred,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Have you ever seen this show on TV?”

“No, I can’t say that I have.”

“I’ve seen it a few times on late night TV,” said Pastor Schmidt. “It is kind of interesting.”

“And dangerous,” added Pastor Anderson.

“How so, Fred?”

“Well, over 84% of Americans can’t resist a cookie. If baked goods can easily sway that large a chunk of the population, can you imagine what a marketing quicksand that would be?”

“84% ... where did you ... I’m sorry, I forgot you’re the mathematician and pay attention to numbers.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Pastor Anderson. “False cookie prophets could lead many astray.”

“I don’t remember the last time I looked out from the pulpit to see a full house,” remarked Pastor Schmidt.

“There was a Christmas a few years back where we had to set up a few folding chairs in the back. The next year we set them up in advance expecting another sizeable crowd and there wasn’t any need as there was still plenty of room in the pews.”

“It’s funny that we’re here lamenting empty pews in church while sitting in a fully packed studio for the All Cookie Channel. And ‘empty pews’ is the whole theme of this year’s pastoral conference across the street, Fred. Do you suppose we could use that lack of cookie resistance to ... uh ...?”

“What are you saying, Arnie?”

“Do you think we could somehow take something away from the All Cookie Channel and use it across the street as an outreach tactic?”

“You mean like putting an attractive woman outside on Sunday morning and having her invite people in for free cookies?” asked Pastor Anderson.

“Hmm ... I hadn’t thought about that angle exactly,” said Pastor Schmidt.

“I know that wouldn’t work for St. John because you’re out in the country. St. Peter has a sidewalk on Main Street, but I don’t know, Arnie. It could be fraught with difficulties.”

“Like what, Fred?”

“Let’s suppose that it is immensely successful at first in drawing people into the church. Suppose that attendance is such that there is standing room only. Then the church council will want to establish a capital campaign to build a bigger sanctuary. Suppose we build that bigger sanctuary, take out a large mortgage, and then all those new people begin to see that it is not all about sugar-coated cookies in the church. The shallow-ground cookie lovers may fade away and then we are stuck with a

huge new building that is only half full on any given Sunday.”

“You mean like most of the churches are already?” asked Pastor Schmidt. “Isn’t that a little pessimistic, Fred?”

“Exactly.”

“Then we should stick to whatever the district suggests, Fred?”

“Well, I didn’t say that either. Traditional evangelism can work in certain areas, but overall, it hasn’t been what I would call hugely successful in filling the churches.”

“What are you thinking then, Fred?”

“Well, I think you first have to go back to our mission statements. They don’t say anything about filling the pews at our respective churches. They give the mission as telling the world about Christ. Obviously, if the pews are full, then you’ve done a good job of telling the local community about Christ. That is a more measurable response.”

“Well, we sponsor that mission in Kenya.”

“Yes, of course. And that’s good,” said Pastor Anderson. “But I was thinking more about ...

you know that cottonwood tree outside your office window. Have you ever watched the seed from that tree?”

“Sure, it’s light and feathery,” said Pastor Schmidt. “When the wind blows, it gets carried away.”

“To who knows where. Somewhere out there a new cottonwood tree may be growing from your tree’s seed.”

“Hmm ... like spreading the Gospel, but not knowing whether it is growing beyond what you can see.”

“I certainly don’t think that approach should be a major part of a local congregation’s outreach strategy, Arnie. But including it as part of the over-all plan can sometimes bring surprises.”

“Kind of like those radio programs that we jointly sponsor. While I haven’t seen an overwhelming response to them, I’ve gotten enough, particularly one lady from Picksville, that I believe them to still be worthy of our support, especially considering the low budget requirements.”

“Right, Arnie. I feel the same way.”

“What if ... what if we sponsored a show on the All Cookie Channel?”

“Well, it’s certainly something we could check out, particularly the cost,” said Pastor Anderson.

“I’m thinking something seasonal, like at Christmas. A nativity scene made of cookies with no dialogue, just a familiar hymn in the background and then at the end a screen saying brought to you by our churches.”

“I like it, Arnie,” said Pastor Anderson. “Yeah, I like it—kind of subtle, but effective.”

“Perhaps we should keep this to ourselves until we have everything checked out,” said Pastor Schmidt.

“I would never say anything at the conference, Arnie. They already have enough on us to consider us somewhat on the fringe.”

“Do you think so, Fred?”

“I’ve heard some comments.”

“Well, no matter that. We can certainly enjoy our free cookies today.”

“Absolutely, my friend.”

“And if they are good enough, we eat them all ourselves and don’t tell anybody at the conference.”

“I’m with you, brother, though I don’t think the All Cookie Channel would consider it in the spirit of cookie outreach.”