

Church Signs Across America

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The cover pretty much summarizes the whole idea. It is the sign in front of an Ascension Lutheran Church somewhere. It gives the schedule of services, the pastor's name, and the cute thought of the week. In this case:

“Free Trip to Heaven
Details Inside”

Mom gave me this book for Christmas 2008. It consists of 162 pages, two pictures per page, one of a church and one of its sign. Aside from what is on the sign, the only other words on each page are the identification by city and state. The churches are arranged alphabetically from Ozark, Alabama to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Aside from the title, authors, ISBN number, and identifiers, there are no other words in the book, so it really is a picture book.

It looks like the Paulsons may be a retired couple touring the U.S. (no pictures in this book from outside the U.S.) taking pictures of churches and their signs everywhere they happen to go. Church signs talk about what they are: Ascension Lutheran Church (LCMS) and when they meet: Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 8 & 10:45 a.m., but they don't waste letters on anything else, like telling you where they are (thus the need for city, state identifiers) or what year or month it is. The times are, of course, always for Sunday (Saturday or Sabbath for Adventists). Anyway, “no one knows the day or the hour of his coming...” so maybe this doesn't matter.

Most of the churches are beautiful facilities in lovely locations. Some of them are clearly doing the best they can in their circumstances. Some have to be identified as churches or you wouldn't know. You would think the signs would range from funny to profound, and they kind of do, but some people's idea of cleverness -- well, at least that week -- could be questioned.

A lot of them are along the lines of, “Long before e-mail God answered knee-mail. Send him a message today.” Or, “Keep using my name in vain. I'll make rush hour longer. -God” Or, “If God had a refrigerator your picture would be on it.” A little better is, “Stop drop and roll won't work in hell.” Many times it will be a scripture quote. Sometimes they are an advertisement for a care line or equivalent. Sometimes the little sayings are not particularly religious, “When all is said and done, there is more said than done.” Anyone who has ever done anything knows that.

A different twist, “Be yourself, everyone else is taken.” Sometimes there is a little insight into the local culture: “ATM Inside, Atonement - Truth - Mercy. Sunday 10:30 AM & 6 PM Wed 7 Italian Worship Thurs 7:30.” Sometimes they make you think a little. “Every Saint has a past .. Every sinner has a future.” Sometimes it makes you wonder what has happened to theology, “It wasn’t the apple it was the pair.” Or to English, “The Ten Commandments are not multiple choice.” Huh? Or, “Our Sundays are better than Dairy Queen.” I guess there is no particular requirement for logic, grammar or even spelling on these.

“Be as good a person as your pet believes you are.”

“Now even Darwin believes.”

“Sign Broken. Message inside this Sunday.”

“Don’t give up; Moses was once a basket case.”

“Ability to lie is a liability.” <groan>

“Tithe if you love Jesus! Anyone can honk!”

“A good angle to approach a problem is the ‘Try’-angle.” <more groan>

Ok, enough of the quotes. You can go through the book.

My favorite was not one of the “cute” sayings, it was the standard information. Late one night I turned the page and saw the church’s schedule:

“Traditional 8 AM - Contemp. & Deaf 10:30 AM.”

I laughed and laughed about that. “Contemp. and Deaf.”