

THE SERMON OF THE MOUSE

The day had finally arrived. Everyone in the congregation was waiting expectantly. The negotiations had taken months, but finally everything had been worked out. It wasn't every congregation in the country that could have an opportunity like this. It was a rare visit from a very well-known celebrity.

The pastor and his guest mounted the platform. The first hymn was sung. Then the pastor rose. "I'm sure everyone is aware who our guest speaker is this morning," he said.

Aware? How could anyone help being aware? There were posters all over town. There was a big yellow and black banner stretched across the entry to the parking lot. Seating in the sanctuary had been assigned on a reservation basis with preferential treatment given to members in good standing. An overflow crowd was watching the service on closed-circuit television. Everybody knew about it.

"It isn't often," said the pastor, "that we have an opportunity to meet someone who has become a legend in his own time. Starting back in the bleak years of the depression, with a shoestring budget and a very simple plan, our guest, with hard work and contagious enthusiasm, built an empire for himself that rivals that of Howard Hughes. His name is a household word; he is admired by young and old alike; and he has even survived his mentor. He reigns over a multi-million dollar business venture that was so successful in southern California that he established an even more spectacular venture in Florida. By now, I'm sure you know who I am talking about. We are so honored to have Mickey Mouse with us today to share with us the secrets of Disneyland's success. We hope that our church will be stimulated and helped by his story."

A hush came over the congregation as this famous mouse rose to his feet, cleared his throat, and began his sermon.

"Thank you for inviting me to come to your church. I must admit that at first I was surprised that a church would ask me to give a sermon. Oh, I have been invited to religion-

class contests where they give each new person a Mickey Mouse hat and expect me to shake hands with everyone and act funny, but a sermon is something new.

"But after I thought about it, I realized that maybe Disneyland and the church did have a lot in common. As I began to organize my thoughts, I saw how ingenious it was to invite me to share. I really believe that if your church were to apply our principles you could become as successful as Disneyland.

"First, make sure your enterprise seems exciting, even dangerous; but be quick to let your people know that there really is no danger involved. *Give the illusion of great risk, but make sure everything is perfectly safe.*

"Second, admit that you are in the entertainment business. People won't care what you say as long as they're entertained. Keep your people happy. Don't tell them anything negative. And don't make demands on them. Just keep them diverted from the ugly reality of today's world, and they will keep coming back for more.

"Third, make everything look religious. Make the religious experience so elaborate, so intricate, so complex that only the professionals can pull it off; and all the laypeople can do is stand around with their mouths open and watch. People would rather watch an imitation mechanical bird sing than a real bird, anyway. They would rather watch worship than do it.

"Fourth and finally, pretend that there are no problems. At Disneyland we dress up our security guards as smiling rabbits or friendly bears because we don't want anyone's experience at Disneyland to be ruined by the sight of law enforcement personnel. Disguise your problems and failures behind a warm smile and a firm handshake. Leave them at home, and let the church be a happy place where there aren't any ugly problems.

"People today want good, clean entertainment. They want an environment that is safe for children, and they want a place that is safe for their families and friends. I am so glad to see that the church is moving in this direction. Thank you, and God bless you."