“A NON-DENOMINATIONAL DENOMINATION” by Al Diestelkamp

Our claim that churches of Christ are not a part of a denomination has been generally ignored and disbelieved by others. I’m willing to admit that I and other brethren may have contributed to this disbelief. Even my use of the words “our claim” at the beginning of this article may leave the impression of an organizational tie that doesn’t exist—although, even the apostle Paul makes reference to “our people” (Tit. 3:14). But, in the minds of many, “If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck…” You know the rest.

I am often amused by *The Babylon Bee,* a website that offers satirical commentary about current events—especially politics and religion. The editors occasionally take a somewhat friendly jab at “Churches of Christ”—usually about the lack of instrumental music. Some time ago *The Bee* published “A Guide to Every Christian Denomination” in which they described “Churches of Christ” as “Another non-
denominational denomination. They love the Bible and full-immersion baptism as much as they hate musical instruments.” They have obviously heard the non-denominational claim but are not convinced.

What is it that makes “churches of Christ” look like just one among many denominations? In a world familiar with businesses having branches using common logos and trademarks in their advertising, it is expected that those businesses are directed by a central organization. For example, when we see golden arches, we assume we are seeing a McDonalds restaurant that is affiliated organizationally with a parent corporation. Even independently-owned McDonalds are merely franchises of the larger corporation which exercises a certain amount of control. Exclusive use of “Church of Christ” on signs in advertising, and in conversations may lead to a misunderstanding of the undenominational nature of the church of our Lord.

I have long advocated using various ways of identifying local churches belonging to Christ. Even in advertising, I’ve often chosen other scriptural descriptions such as “the Lord’s church,” “Christ’s church,” or even simply, “the church.” Still, most people think of “Churches of Christ” as just one among many denominations.

By the very definition, a denomination is one part of a larger entity. For instance, our nation’s currency is divided into several denominations—$1, $5, $10, $20, etc. Even though each denomination is different, they are all U.S. currency. The body of Christ is not divided into denominations.

Churches that are part of a denomination are answerable to the hierarchy of that body. This was recently illustrated when a local church affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention was ousted by its governing board due to the ordination of a woman “pastor”—a violation of that body’s by-laws. It is Jesus Christ who decides whether a church’s “lampstand” remains (Rev. 2:5), and He determines whose names are in the “Book of Life” (Rev. 3:5) and are a part of His church.

Finally, although it’s frustrating when people don’t accept our claim of being undenominational, the important thing is that, as followers of Jesus, we *be* that.