

Reaching People under 30 while Keeping People over 60

Creating Community Across Generations

EDWARD H. HAMMETT

WITH Paul L. Anderson AND Cornell Thomas



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Editor's Foreword

Inspiration and Wisdom for 21st-Century Christian Leaders

You have chosen wisely in deciding to read and learn from a book published by TCP Books from The Columbia Partnership.

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We welcome your comments on these books, and we welcome your suggestions for new subject areas and authors we ought to consider.

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Foreword

I've known Eddie Hammett for more than two decades. During that time I've watched him hone his coaching skills and develop into one of the best church coaches I know. What I really like about Eddie is that he keeps current with our ever-changing world. His adaptability is most recently evident in this revised version of the older book *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People Over 60*.

I was privileged to write the Foreword for that book because I thought the principles in it were spot on. Well, the world has radically changed again since publication of the first book. We have been introduced to the most secular generation and culture I've ever seen. In wholesale fashion these under thirties are avoiding the established church in favor of the likes of Starbucks. While spiritual, they don't have a religious bone in their body. We thought the Gen-X crowd was anti-establishment. But to our surprise they are tame compared to the under thirty crowd. People under thirty require totally new approaches to outreach, worship, and discipleship, and all of them will upset the average person over sixty. I know because I attend one of those churches reaching this under thirty crowd in record numbers. So Eddie's book is profoundly relevant to the current crises.

Now add to the new mix the multicultural, multiracial changes over the past decade and you have a recipe for disaster for most established churches. Eddie not only addresses both issues in this revised version of his book but also has coauthored the book with two African American friends who offer perspectives from differing generations.

I was born in 1939 into an Ozzie and Harriet world. Most people were baptized, married, and buried by a church. In most areas of the country the church played such a significant role in the culture that America was considered to be a "churched" culture. Even though you might not have attended church, you felt as if you should. In many ways twentieth-century America was a "one size fits all" culture. And to top that off, most of my world was white. I had never seen a Muslim or an Asian person in my life. My high school was integrated my senior year, but with only one black student name Elmo. Elmo was elected president of the student body. Compare that to what we've seen in Ferguson, Baltimore, and the like.

All that has changed today. No longer is America considered a white, Ozzie and Harriet "churched" culture. No longer does life revolve around the church. No longer do people expect to be baptized, married, and buried by a church. For the first time in our history, civil marriages outnumber church weddings in some parts of the country. New parents are far less likely to bring their babies to church to be baptized just to please their parents. No one feels guilty if they

aren't in church on Sunday, not even most Christians. As a result, the public's knowledge of Christianity has significantly waned. Many people are cynical toward organized religion or they are cultural Christians.

The cultural revolution has been so effective that in order to survive, much less thrive, established churches must learn how to reach and disciple people from this unchurched diverse culture without losing the over sixty generation. Few established churches are winning this challenge. Some simply aren't willing to entertain any level of change. Others are so frightened by the cultural changes that all they can do is retreat behind their walls. Still others are so comfortable with what they have that they consider congregational death more desirable than disruption of their comfort.

In all fairness to established churches, the changes they need to make to reach the new world are so daunting that the best of us wilt a bit under the prospect. But here is where the authors' work offers hope to established churches. They describe a win-win strategy for reaching this new culture while maintaining the established church.

What I like about this book is every section is augmented by some of the best coaching, grounded in concrete, practical church examples that every church leader in an established church will quickly recognize as part of their dilemma. The authors recognize that many churches have no clue how to start, and so they probe the everyday issues facing churches that are fixated on the past, yet desire to reach into the future.

Those who read this book and follow its coaching will find a win-win approach to reaching this new culture.

Bill Easum
The Effective Church Group
www.effectivechurch.com

Preface

Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60 (2007 edition) has touched churches of many denominations across the country and in a few foreign countries. Leaders, both lay and clergy, have found value in the practical principles and tools about *Being Church for All Generations*. I'm grateful for all the readers, churches, and leaders who have embraced this challenge and watched God bear much fruit. Amid a host of seminars and workshops across the country, I've heard leaders struggling not only with "being church for all generations" but also "being church in an increasingly diverse world." I recall a middle-aged, seasoned pastor in the Midwest who came up to me after the seminar and asked for some of my time. I was delighted to listen to her story. She served as pastor for a midsize church that once was homogenous and now "the community is changing rapidly, and the church does not know how to deal with the growing diversity of ethnic groups, value systems, economic realities, different family systems, and a host of different beliefs and views of spirituality." After I heard her struggles with "learning to lead amid diversity without destroying their church," she asked with tenderness in her voice and a tear in her eye, "Can you help us know how to create community across generations and diversity?"

That conversation, and many other similar conversations, over the last seven years provide the distinctives in this updated edition. Even as I work on this revision, the world is filled with protests from people of all cultures and ethnicities due to what some see as injustices around racial, political, and law enforcement issues. Ferguson, Missouri, and Berkeley, California, are only two examples where African-American young men have been shot and killed, often by an older white police officer. As this goes to press our country has experienced the tragedy on the Emmanuel 9 in Charleston, SC. A brutal and senseless murder during a local church Bible Study. Where is the reconciliation, redemptive voice, and ministry of the church? Emmanuel AME church is showing to the world a glimpse of living from and into grace and redemption as they live out of deep faith and trust in God and create community across the diversities of culture and generations. I am excited to have two friends, former students and professional colleagues, Paul Anderson and Cornell Thomas, as contributors to this edition. They bring an urgently-needed African-American perspective from differing generations.

What Differences Will Readers See?

While this volume attempts to stay loyal to the principles and practices introduced in the 2007 edition, we are also committed to bringing the challenge of leading and being church amid diversity into the manuscript. You will find

about fifty pages of new material, and in many places throughout the book, you will see guidance for being church amid increasing elements of diversity. Since we are addressing people under 30 and the increasing diversities in our culture we are retitling this revision. *Reaching People Under 30 while Keeping People Over 60: Creating Community Across the Generations* sustains proven principles from the previous book but builds upon these from new challenges and lessons learned.

We will address several topics that surface repeated in our experiences and travels: (1) What are the distinctives of doing church in a multicultural, multiethnic, multigenerational community? What are the challenges? What are the benefits? (2) What are the challenges of creating a parallel structure for the younger generation in a multicultural and multigenerational faith community? (3) How does a multisite, multiworship service church retain focus, community, and unity without forced uniformity?

You will also find supplemental information on my personal website that allows you to stay current with teaching supplements from the authors and other readers. My hope is that this information will bring freshness, teaching materials, and connections with other leaders and churches facing the challenges reviewed in the book from our own personal and professional ministries inside and outside the walls of the church. We want to speak to this topic in the framework *in*, *through*, and *as* the church. (I speak more to the biblical framework of these issues in *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age*.)

Acknowledgments

Reaching People under 30 while Keeping People over 60 is a personal book for me in that I've lived through the struggles and successes shared in this manuscript. The insights shared here come from my professional and personal journey experienced over the last thirty-five-plus years of involvement in the local churches in various volunteer and paid leadership positions. These lessons began in my home church and in my own family of origin and extended family.

The title of this book came from an elderly lady in eastern North Carolina who desires to remain anonymous. I knew when she asked me during an interview, “How can my church reach people under forty while keeping people over sixty?” that she had described the challenge of many churches in North America. I wrote an article by that title for *NetResults Magazine*, and the e-mails and phone calls poured in. The book was then born through seminars, online forums, and countless coaching conversations with churches across denominational lines throughout North America.

I have invited two of my former students—both colleagues and friends—to contribute to this manuscript to bring a younger and multicultural perspective. Both are engaged in multiethnic and multicultural and multigenerational ministries. They are seasoned and yet fellow learners on the journey of knowing how best to lead in and minister to a diverse, fast-paced world. Cornell Thomas, a Millennial, is involved in inner-city ministries in Charlotte, North Carolina.. Cornell is married and has three beautiful, energetic daughters. Paul Anderson, a Boomer, is founding pastor of The Fountain, a multicultural, fast-growing congregation in Raleigh, North Carolina. He and his wife are parents of two creative millennial men.

Because this book is a part of a series of my books seeking to speak to “a church in need of conversion,” I will reference my other books here. I simply am trying to acknowledge that many of the ideas presented here are complex and have received additional treatment in my other writings. We hope this book offers everyone greater understanding for the differences in our generations and cultures. We all need one another for healing and movement toward health and wholeness. We can teach one another so much if we can only remain open and seek to understand and be understood.

A final note of appreciation for Judi Hayes, Trent Butler, Judith Pierson, and Gail Stobaugh, who helped with editing, the support of The Columbia Partnership, Chalice Press, and the continuing support I receive from Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina where I serve as church and clergy coach. I am founder and president of Transforming Solutions, LLC. We are committed to offering coaching and consulting services to for-profit and nonprofit

organizations, denominations, and churches across the country. We work with our clients to discover and implement solutions that bring transformation of heart and organizational structures to ensure a deeper impact on the culture in which we are called to work.

Edward Hammett
Hendersonville, North Carolina
August 2015
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Introduction

A woman came up to me after a conference at a church in eastern North Carolina. She had listened attentively and was clearly concerned about her church. She said, “I just need to know one thing: How do we reach the people under forty without losing those over sixty?”

Many established churches are facing a number of challenges in today’s increasingly secular and diverse culture. No longer are North American churches living and serving in a churched culture. Recent research has suggested that the number of unchurched persons in America increased 92 percent between 2005 and 2014. Not only do we have a category of “nones” (those who claim no affiliation to a church), but we also now have the “dones” too! (those who have been active in church leadership in the past but now are “done with the church” for a variety of reasons. We now find ourselves in a pluralistic, often pagan culture that is more often than not insensitive to traditional church culture values. Traditional church times, programs, buildings, music, staffing, dress, and manners are frequently diminished rather than elevated. Such a shift in many communities creates a challenge to church growth and church health. It seems that satisfying the needs of one group creates barriers to reaching another group. So, many are asking, “How do you keep people over sixty years of age—who often hold traditional church culture values—while at the same time reaching people under thirty—who often hold postmodern values on a vast array of subjects?” If a church is interested in growing, this situation and generation (the Millennials, who generally became adults in the first decade of this century) become a major challenge—one that confronts most established churches today.

This book contains some of the understanding I’ve gained from more than thirty years of church ministry and denominational service. We’ll look at the church as it seeks to function in a new world—what has changed, what has not, and why reaching people today is so much more difficult than it once was. We’ll look at the differences in the generations we serve, and we’ll look at postmodernism—not just generational differences but a global change involving a shifting demographic, value system, and understandings and expressions of faith and spirituality. Then we’ll look at what a church can do in this new age to help the church survive—even thrive. Finally, we’ll celebrate what God is doing in the church today.

Some grieve the demise of the church. I’m not one of those persons. My 2014 *Recovering Hope for Your Church* gives all the signs of hope I see. In fact, I have more hope for the church than I have ever had. I’m certain the journey of recovery and reconnecting with this modern-day culture will be tough for most, but it is essential to carry on the message of hope, healing, and reconciliation

into the next generation. Since the journey of revitalizing and retooling churches for a 21st-century world is not a quick fix and is complex I wrote this book that lays out eight basic principles and concepts. *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age* provides information about the rapidly changing culture in which we minister; *Making Shifts Without Making Ways* provides leadership a toolkit to implement the principles and concepts; and *Recovering Hope for Your Church* frames a congregational process of education and coaching that focuses and mobilizes a congregation around God's call, their discernment, gifting and passions to be and do church in unique ministry contexts.

Edward H. Hammett

Lessons Learned from Churches Using *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60*

1. The principles work when you work the principles.
2. Introducing the book to staff and leaders and dialoguing with them about it before the congregation hears about it adds support and needed legitimizers.
3. Using the book as a teaching/dialogue tool during small-group studies brings insight, encouragement, hope, and opportunities for intergenerational dialogue.
4. Engaging in an ongoing coaching relationship ensures sustained momentum and helps those involved gain clarity, establish focus, and set priorities.
5. Providing a congregational seminar generates excitement, deepens ownership of the principles, and illustrates the impact.
6. The work is hard but can ensure the future of a congregation for the next generation.
7. The degree of effectiveness depends on the level of intentionality, follow-through, and focus of the remnant leadership.
8. Engaging in individual and group prayer provides an essential element of spiritual discernment and unity to keep moving forward

PART I: UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH'S MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHALLENGES

1

Pastors Burn Out, and Churches Die

If you grew up in the church, as I did, you can probably remember a different day in the church. Doing church was pretty easy. Programs ruled. Everyone participated in just about everything, and most congregations and communities were homogenous. Everybody used the same curriculum, studied the same Scripture. Whatever the church leaders asked the congregation to do, they did. Well, almost. It probably wasn't as wonderful and easy as we sometimes recall it, but it was a different day.

The Dying Church

We lived in a church culture. We counted our progress by the four *Bs*: bodies, budgets, baptisms, and buildings. We were usually more concerned about where we would put all the new babies than with whether we had the budget to keep the lights on and the staff paid.

Most of our competition was friendly rivalry with the church down the street to see who had the best youth ministry. Almost everyone went to church somewhere, at least on Sunday morning. If not, they at least knew they should. When you visited newcomers or hardcore nonattenders about coming to church, they knew the church language, knew what you were talking about, and appreciated your visit. An annual revival was certain to draw a crowd and reach some people—perhaps some the church had been praying for and trying to reach for years.

This wasn't just a simpler time of your childhood memories. It was really like that. Churches really were thriving in a friendly environment. A denomination could program for A Million More in '54 (a Southern Baptist emphasis).

That day is gone. What once worked, no longer does. Hardly anyone has a revival anymore because it's almost impossible to get busy members there, much less the unchurched. Many churches no longer have a night of planned

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visitation for the same reasons. Church members often won't come, and church guests sometimes fail to appreciate surprise visits. The age of knowing what to do, how to do it, getting great support, and seeing results is a thing of the past.

Perhaps even worse is that many people today have a negative image of Christians, of denominations, and of the church in general. In the past, even people not involved in church had great respect for it. Today many secular adults see the church as neutral or negative. Before someone can be reached for Christ, that negative image must be overcome. Often this takes a long time and is accomplished only by gradually building relationships.

Cultural Challenges

Culture is now specific to a group. That's what culture is—shared values, characteristics, beliefs, goals, and practices. Church attenders tend to find people much like themselves in the church. They feel comfortable there. A few decades ago, most people who attended church had that experience. Today, at the same time the world seems smaller—meaning we have access to products, information, events, and even travel with relative ease almost anywhere in the world—our world is also much more diverse. The world has come to our doorstep with a myriad of beliefs, customs, habits, ideas, and ways of understanding. People know where they feel comfortable and where they don't, where they fit in and where they feel like a stranger.

Each community, church, people group, family, or Sunday school class has a culture created by its participants over a period of time. People who helped fashion it usually embrace it and value it, while those who were not part of creating it often feel alienated or even repelled by that culture. This is often one reason a newcomer to a group doesn't fit in and often doesn't join the group. (I discuss the impact of culture on the church in more detail in my books *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age* and *Making the Church Work*.¹)

In the last several decades, cities, states, organizations, and institutions have found themselves challenged by a growing multiculturalism and a pluralistic society. Language, rituals, traditions, and values are not as clear and readily accepted as when we were in a church culture with people from the same or similar backgrounds and belief systems. Now the world has shifted—families have changed, and schools have children who may speak many different languages (but not ours), and who may come from a number of different countries. Businesses have become culturally sensitive, while churches for the most part haven't changed at all. In fact, many churches believe that remaining the same as they were when their culture was formed in the 1950s or earlier is their godly responsibility. For many, they are not looking for a church but rather for a life mission.

Cultures Coming Together

John Bingham makes a fascinating observation. He wrote that places of worship and sporting events lead the way as places modern Britons are most likely to mix with people of other races, classes, and generations:

Groundbreaking new analyses of the friendship networks of almost 4,300 people aged from 13 to 80 has identified churches and sporting events as the last bastions of neighborliness and integration in Britain. Overall, it found that churches and other places of worship are more successful than any other social setting at bringing people of different backgrounds together, well ahead of gatherings as parties, meetings, weddings, or venues such as pubs or clubs.²

Church is a vital institution and experience in our increasingly diverse world. I suspect what is true in Britain is equally true in the United States.

Don't misunderstand. I'm not suggesting that churches change their biblical message. I am suggesting the church is intricately valuable in our culture when it connects faith in the midst of the diversity. I am also suggesting that we might need to consider altering our methodology so that those in our new world might be able to hear the Good News in ways they can understand and embrace it. That's really what this book is all about. Ultimately, it's about reaching people, evangelism, making disciples, carrying out Jesus' command to reach people. Here's the pinch: when you begin trying to make the needed adjustments, church members—usually sixty and over from the church culture, and certainly of that value system regardless of age—become angry, resistant, intolerant of change. They withhold their money and leadership. They vote collectively to keep things the way they are, for, “If the way things are is good enough for me, it should be good enough for others.” Now what does a church or leader do?

In most communities, if the congregation decides to keep the over-sixty crowd satisfied (to keep their money?), the church will not grow numerically. In time, the congregation will die (unless the community demographic can support a church focused on senior adult ministry). In all probability, keeping the sixty-plus crowd happy almost always assures that the church will reach few new people under the age of thirty. (By the way, those who are fifty or so are transitional persons—some join those with under-thirty characteristics, and others join the over-sixty group and their characteristics.)

The reality here is that most denominations have not been reaching many people under thirty for decades. Most people thirty and under are from a world with different values, traditions, rituals, and personal preferences—a different culture. Tension escalates, leaders resign or become disgruntled, money begins to dry up, and the church community becomes more and more introverted—focused on caring for people within the church rather than being concerned about reaching out to those outside the church to people they don't understand and really aren't sure they want in the church anyway. So begins a cycle of maintenance and survival for most churches. What's a leader to do?

Leadership Challenges and Solutions

While principles remain intact for an effective New Testament church, the design of programming and the approach to leadership face many seismic shifts. Quite often these shifts prove threatening; most always they bear fruit for those

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who persevere in leadership development. Both volunteers and paid staff find themselves overwhelmed by challenges in this situation. They love the church and most sincerely want the church to grow.

At the same time, they experience conflict: church is a place where they are comfortable, where they come for fellowship with lifelong friends, where they worship in a setting and style that easily helps them connect with God. In my travels across the country I increasingly hear a refrain from clergy and lay leaders alike: “I’m tired of working harder and not making any progress.” “I am tired of fighting with those who want to stay the same while my call is to fulfill the Great Commission.” “I just cannot do any more. My plate is full and running over. I’ve got to have a break!”

To reach out to younger people may mean that this place of familiarity will change so radically that they no longer know how to function, and so they are torn. Do they change to reach a new generation, or do they keep doing what once worked but no longer does. Do they welcome under thirties into their fellowship, or do they watch the church continue to decline and perhaps even die? Others feel they are not honoring their past and present leaders or family members if they allow things to be changed. Still others control the pace of change as much as possible in the church because they cannot control the rapid rate of change in their workplace or community. The challenges church leaders face are immense.

The solution is often complicated and messy. Heart-held beliefs and identity-giving rituals and practices may have to change. Tension may erupt, challenging relationships. Church leaders may be torn between loyalty to friends and taking a risk to find a new way of doing church. Generations of family members within a church may strongly disagree. Personal preferences may have to be discarded to try to reach younger people. Even with the best planning and research, change is a risk. Your change may attract younger people, and it may not. Trading the secure for the unknown may mean losing the older generation, while it may or may not reach the younger crowd.

Transitioning puts heavy demands on church leaders, both paid and volunteer. The church must continue as it always has, which is demanding in itself, while researching, dreaming, praying, seeking God’s guidance, and giving birth to a new direction—all at the same time. Workloads and stress may increase exponentially.

While stress levels and workloads are rising, leaders must continually communicate love for all. Leaders are to demonstrate a desire to hear each member and an effort to communicate openly with the entire church. They must find a way to be inclusive with existing members while knowing that many will dislike any changes that are made. Such an inclusive spirit is both Christlike and practical. Jesus’ example is to love everyone, even enemies. Church leaders need to remember that opposition in the church isn’t usually the enemy. People within the church who disagree may have the same goal in mind but different

ideas about how to get there. Alienating senior adult leaders may mean that they withdraw their substantial influence and finances.

Cultural Sensitivity Creates Community

Church leaders who are sensitive to what is happening both inside and outside the walls of the church have a growing awareness that the world outside the walls of the established church is changing and that new methods and strategies are needed to remain relevant. Such sensitive leaders have probably also noticed, over time, that the pews are not as full as they once were, fewer children come to the front for children's sermons, not as many high school students are recognized in graduation events each year, the pastor is performing and members are attending more funerals than weddings, across the congregation on any given Sunday a lot more gray heads appear than blacks, browns, and blondes.

The Builder Generation's aging out. Church and denominational loyalists, we love local church ministry. Proudly we narrate how we built our church as institution and as facilities. We explain the way it was done in the fifties and the sixties, almost unaware we Builders are dying out. These are the leaders who were around for the "million more in '54" (a Baptist campaign) when the church was thriving, growing, building new church buildings. Institutions and publishing agencies were soaring. During that time churches basically looked alike, studied about the same thing, had basically the same type worship service. Like it or not, that's just not true anymore. The Builder Generation, people over sixty, are beginning to age out of leadership pretty rapidly. With them goes the tithing base and the leadership base. With their retirement, funds are diminishing in the local church. Today a growing number of churches are merging because they do not have enough members to keep the doors open. Other churches are "building poor." That is, they have a small congregation in a large, aging facility. Maintenance and building upkeep surpass their budget. Many churches and denominations are downsizing staff and merging congregations due to economic struggles. Money always talks. I don't care what business you're in, what church you're in, too often we don't pay attention until the money drops. Membership can drop, but as long as we've got a lot of rich people or a big endowment, we're OK. When the money starts to drop, we pay attention. And the money is dropping. The tight economy might just be of God. It is forcing churches and denominations to streamline and "cut away the fat" of our organizations.

I was at a meeting of 121 church leaders from twenty-one denominations. One of the leaders asked, "How many of you in this room have already experienced an economic drop or a downsizing of your staff in the denominations in which you serve?" Everybody except one person raised a hand. During the dialogue and debriefing session, the person who did not raise his hand, said,

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“It hasn’t happened yet, but it’s coming.” The dialogue that ensued that day confirmed what most of us already knew: we’re losing our Builder Generation. They’re taking their money and leadership with them, and we haven’t replaced them with people under thirty. Mutual understanding of culture helps in creating community.

Ignoring Cultural Changes at Your Own Risk

The longer churches delay adapting their structures and programming, not their message, to the changing world around them, the more difficult church life becomes. When a church moves from plateaued to declining, it will first try to maintain the same level of ministries; but this becomes increasingly difficult. Leaders are harder to find. The faithful few are stretched. Limited time, energy, and resources, which could have been directed toward finding a future, are now focused on survival. At this point the church has moved from mission to maintenance. Carey Nieuwhof, a pastor in Canada who speaks and writes about culture and change, explains “12 Cultural Trends Church Leaders Can’t Ignore (But Might)”:

- Online as a New Default
- Wifi and Smartphones
- Dialogue
- Loyalty
- Lack of guilt
- Declining trust in authority
- Declining trust in institutions
- Personalized, eclectic spirituality
- A desire for greater purpose
- Personal mission
- Trust in user reviews
- The death of cash and cheques³

Churches through the years have faced change in a variety of ways. At one time in recent church history, the biggest challenge was a changing or transitioning neighborhood. Churches decided to move, to embrace the newcomers, or perhaps to have two campuses. Change wasn’t easy, but it wasn’t too hard to understand. The challenge today is more complicated. Understanding how postmoderns, Millennials, and Gen X want to worship is complicated. It may mean a lot more than doing away with the hymnals in favor of a big screen. Just figuring out how to change is a challenge. Even change with the best intentions may not guarantee the desired results. Change is likely going to be ongoing as churches learn to connect with people in a secular, unchurched culture. Still, for a strong percentage of churches, change is essential for survival.⁴

Such challenges of change are real and ever-present in the hearts and minds of church leaders. The leaders fear moving forward, for they may destabilize a group or church that is already suffering. They are not sure how to take calculated

risks, which risks to take, or whether they have the skill set needed to introduce and manage this cultural change.

Choosing to Survive

Often they opt just to survive and keep people as happy as they can. In making this decision, they continue to do much good. Individuals and families inside the church receive much-needed ministry. The church may continue to be involved in worldwide evangelism. Some inside the church may be growing in their personal journey. But, ultimately, while I can understand this logic and feeling, *the flaw in being satisfied with the status quo is that it does little to follow the biblical mandate* given to all Christ followers—and thereby to all churches—to “go...and make disciples” (Mt. 28:19).

Now if you just want a holy huddle and a hotel for saints instead of a hospital for sinners, then tie all your staff up, turn all your lights on, and turn on all your air conditioning and heating at the same time. Burn all your money up to make those ten people who come comfortable. Eventually you’ll kill your church. My granddaddy would say that what I am saying is heresy. I believe it’s just good Bible preaching out of the book of Acts.

Can the Staff Survive?

Part of what we’re often dealing with is an overwhelmed staff. I’ve recently completed a study of leadership models throughout the Bible. The Scripture’s clear: church leaders have a biblical mandate to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, as Ephesians puts it. *Equipping* means teaching people to go out to where the people are to do whatever it takes to connect people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Jesus spent more time at parties than he did in the synagogue. His culture was similar to ours. The people in 30 C.E. weren’t knocking down the doors to come to the synagogue. If we don’t do something, we’re going to continue to overwhelm our staff. They will sense that the church expects them to deal with this diverse and growing problem. The staff will see an emerging population. All the while, our staff will look at themselves as ill-equipped and hamstrung by the same structures and in the same value system that worked in the fifties.

For many church leaders the stress has already become overwhelming. Some of the brightest and best of our ministers are e-mailing me to say that they are leaving their churches for other occupations. It’s not just that they don’t see their families because they work seventy hours a week. It’s because as hard as they work, they feel what they do has no positive results in growing the kingdom. They have told me they are burning out. They are overwhelmed. They have said the churches’ expectations on their time and on results are unrealistic. And they have said, “I’m tired of beating my head up against the wall with these church people I’m trying to serve. They really don’t want to go on mission into the world. They want me to be a caregiver for them. God called me to go into the world and to reach the world for Jesus, and my church people really aren’t

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interested in doing that. They want to keep things the way they are, and I feel that God is calling me to go out into the secular world.”

Many ministers are doing that successfully. I believe God is birthing a whole new church out there that I call the scattered church, and he’s taking some of our best and brightest clergy and building that church.⁵

The Plight of the Pastor

Pastor-bashing

“Pastor-bashing is my church’s focus” were the words from a sincere but deeply wounded coaching client. He was so hurt, angry, and tired that he needed a retreat, a compassionate listening ear, and encouragement in his coaching session. God did bless our coaching time, but his words and story continue to work in me.

His words have haunted me for days. I have had many faces and experiences rush to my mind that would likely fit into this “pastor-bashing” category. In a decade when most numbers associated with church—finances, membership, baptisms, new members, visitors, etc., are declining, pastor-bashing seems to be on the rise. While some pastors and staff and churches are having a fulfilling and fruitful relationship, many others are in the fierce tensions of pastor-bashing.

Pastoring a church or serving on staff in a church of any size, in any setting, with any demographic is challenging at best these days. Most pastors and staff find themselves living in the pinch. They feel the pinch of finances, demographic challenges, philosophical and theological challenges, control issues in the church, community, and often the denomination or judicatory of which they are a part. Permit me to share personal observations based on my experience consulting with churches for more than twenty years, serving congregations in denominational work for fifteen-plus years, coaching pastors and staff for six years, and serving in various church roles as a volunteer. I’ve found the burning issues to include:

1. What is pastor-bashing?
2. How does pastor-bashing manifest itself?
3. What does it mean?
4. What methods might bring some resolution to pastor-bashing?

From my client’s perspective and from my observations through the years, pastor-bashing can be characterized by at least these experiences:

- Accusations, and sometimes threats, that “the church is not growing because of you!”
- Spreading of rumors that question the pastor’s integrity, work habits, loyalty to church traditions or disregard of ancient church values, etc.
- Withholding of tithes, offerings, leadership, and participation because of personal disagreements between church members and pastor/staff.
- Accusations, uncalled-for personal references or ridicule of pastor/staff’s

family members and their participation or lack of participation in church activities.

- Isolation of the pastor/staff from friendships, loyalty, and the support of leadership.
- Tearing down of pastor/staff's self-esteem, confidence, and sense of call or pastoral skills.
- Forcing pastors' families to live in a fishbowl before church and community families.

How does pastor-bashing manifest itself?

Sometimes physical threats even enter the picture. Believe it or not, I know directly of a church where three deacons visited the pastor and threatened him in the presence of his teenage son. They were "going to take him behind the barn and teach him a lesson." What do you think that teenage son learned about deacons and church that day?

I had been working with this pastor and church to assess what would make them more effective in a rapidly growing community. The pastor was growing the church and bringing in people, but these deacons did not like the people he was bringing in. The pastor was bringing in new members who were unlike the natives of the community. That fueled the congregation's anger. The church leaders feared that the influx of new members would jeopardize their control, so they sabotaged the growth and bashed the pastor! Who would have ever thought it! Such brash actions illustrate living in the pinch of times. The pastor/staff is caught between at least two value systems, two worlds, two cultures, and two philosophies of church.

What does pastor-bashing mean?

How could church leaders and congregations bash their pastor? What does this mean? Christians are supposed to be kind, courteous, forgiving, loving, self-controlled, patient, long-suffering, and the list of virtues from Galatians 5 continues. So how do we get into this tragic situation where no one really wins?

Seems to me that pastor-bashing displays some patterns that frequently occur and may reveal meaning and motive to this traumatic situation:

- Personal preferences create tensions. The pastor's vision and preferences conflict with those in leadership or in the pew.
- Spiritual warfare and immaturity emerge in people, families, and often the congregation at large.
- Past and future collide in ways that create tension. Often the congregation (sometimes the pastor) wants things to stay the way they are rather than face the demands and opportunities of the present and future.
- Control and leadership are challenged. So often the bashing is over control issues. Who will lead the church? Whose vision will drive the congregation's decisions or programming?

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- In earlier phases bashing—and awareness of the bashing—is limited to a small number of leaders.
- Incompetence and impatience collide. This can be seen on one or all sides involved. So often fear emerges before patience is cultivated, and stones begin to be thrown in efforts to protect “our way.”
- Families take sides, and boundaries are set. Again, this can be on one or all sides of the issue. When such polarization occurs, the intensity increases, and the bashing becomes visible to a larger group.
- Emotions escalate, and facts become blurred. So often emotions drive the dialogue and bashing and not the real facts. The emotions are often driven by perceptions, not necessarily the facts. People think such and such is true, or they “heard it from many people,” but they never name the people.

What methods might bring some resolution to pastor-bashing?

Most pastors are living out a calling to “go into all the world” and a belief that Christ wants the world to know him and his love. The pastor believes that the church is on mission and is to grow in Spirit and in number. However, increasingly pastors and staff are finding that they are called by congregations who do not share this same value system. The members may mouth the words and loyalty to the Great Commission during the interview and negotiations. The reality becomes clear in time that their words mean: “only if the mission doesn’t inconvenience me, doesn’t change our church’s traditions, or challenge the leadership base’s personal preferences.” That is living in the pinch!

I recently heard Eugene Peterson, a pastor to pastors, has explained the situation:

Pastoring is not a very glamorous job. It’s a very taking-out-the-laundry and changing-the-diapers kind of job. And I think I would try to disabuse them of any romantic ideas of what it is. As a pastor, you’ve got to be willing to take people as they are. And live with them where they are. And not impose your will on them. Because God has different ways of being with people, and you don’t always know what they are. The one thing I think is at the root of a lot of pastors’ restlessness and dissatisfaction is impatience. They think if they get the right system, the right programs, the right place, the right location, the right demographics, it’ll be a snap. And for some people it is: if you’re a good actor, if you have a big smile, if you are an extrovert. In some ways, a religious crowd is the easiest crowd to gather in the world. Our country’s full of examples of that. But for most, pastoring is a very ordinary way to live. And it is difficult in many ways because your time is not your own, for the most part, and the whole culture is against you. This consumer culture, people grow up determining what they want to do by what they can consume. And the Christian gospel is just quite the opposite of that. And people don’t know that. And pastors don’t know

that when they start out. We've got a whole culture that is programmed to please people, telling them what they want. And if you do that, you might end up with a big church, but you won't be a pastor.⁶

David Olsen echoes these thoughts:

Recent studies indicate clergy have more stress-related health problems than the general population and work longer hours, an average of 51 hours a week according to one study. In response, some religious denominations are either adding or expanding health and counseling programs, while urging clergy to take more time off. Denominational leaders say stress and the damage it can cause personal relationships often end up harming not only clergy but the congregations they sacrifice so much to serve.⁷

What Can a Pastor-bashing Church Change?

So what's a church and pastor to do? How can we move from pastor-bashing to pastor blessing? How can a congregation and pastor become partners in ministry and learn to work through personal and philosophical pinches and fears? Let me make some suggestions:

As a pastor

- Acknowledge that implementing and managing change in a congregation calls forth a unique set of skills that most pastors need help in refining.
- Enlist a certified coach to walk with you through the trials of change and the learning curves you are faced with to move forward your congregation and leadership style.
- Read, reflect, and pray before you embark on introducing change in a congregation.
- Join a peer learning community of pastors in similar situations for support, encouragement, and guidance.
- Clarify what you need during times of negotiating with the church before you come.
- Be honest about your strengths and weaknesses as a pastor, leader, preacher, administrator, counselor, and other roles that might be expected of you
- Commit to ongoing self-care and continuing education.
- Be faithful in taking your time off and vacation. You and your family deserve it.
- Negotiate and make plans that ensure an uninterrupted time away.
- Build a partnership with area pastors who can help in times of crisis.

As a congregation

- Acknowledge, as church and pastor, that these are rapidly changing times and that introducing and managing change is inevitable if churches are to

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remain relevant, faithful, and fruitful in the twenty-first century.

- Be honest with candidates about the state of your church, community, staffing, finances, and expectations. Hiding them only sets all up for disappointment and struggle.
- Require and resource continuing education and coaching for all pastoral staff and key church leaders. Budget for it, schedule it, and build it into the culture of your leadership circle. Such will help the leader and congregation to face and walk through the learning curves that come with change and challenge.
- Plan regular pastor/staff appreciation days/months. Resources online and in print are available to help with this special time when the church blesses, encourages, and supports pastor/staff and their families. Surprise them, and be authentic. Enlist persons to tell stories of how God has used the staff personnel in personal ministry efforts.
- Encourage pastor and staff to take their days off and all their vacation time. *Then make plans so you do not have to interrupt their time away.* So often pastors can't relax because they live in the reality that they might be expected to return for funerals, etc. A local pastor can help with this. Give your pastor uninterrupted rest time.
- Be faithful in scheduling, planning, and resourcing sabbatical times for your pastor/staff.
- Provide the needed support staff that will allow the professional staff to maximize their time and focus their ministry.
- Stand up for your pastor/staff when they are accused, ridiculed, or judged by others. They need friends, support, and people who are willing to stand up to the few who are against them.
- Be a trustworthy friend for your pastor/staff. Many pastors and staff persons and their families are lonely and stressed people. They are often afraid of ridicule and judgment if they make friends of a few in the congregation, so they live lonely lives. Be their friends, allow them to have other friends, and take the initiative and reach out to them regularly.

Certainly the church should not have to fall into the trap of pastor-bashing, and the pastor and the pastor's family should not have to be victims of pastor-bashing; but more than that, the world, the nonbelievers, should not have to hear of pastor-bashing. Such ridicule and bashing are not the image we want to present of Christ's church. They tarnish the church's witness to the world. Will you join me in focusing on blessing rather than bashing our pastors?

Economic Challenges

Many churches today struggle not only with keeping existing members (those over sixty) and reaching new members (those under thirty); they also struggle with their expenses and their financial base. These provide economic challenges for both the church and the pastor:

Some of the Issues:

For the pastor

- Pastoral salaries and annuities create dependency on ministry as a lifelong source of income, resulting in some pastors working out of a need for money rather than out of empowerment or fulfillment.
- Clergy face a major gap between retirement age and income and housing. Retired ministers need extra income and meaningful service. Denominations need to find ways to use/employ retirees as chaplains or in other positions.
- Pastors face stricter requirements to maintain denominational ties. Various boards and agencies attach economic strings to ensure pastors (and churches) pass a litmus test for orthodoxy. Thus they generate a self-serving agenda rather than God's agenda.
- New standards of measuring success are greatly needed for pastor search/appointment staff committees, churches, denominations, judicatories, districts, conventions to move beyond bigger buildings, attendance, budgets, staff as defining effectiveness.

For the church

- Preserving family heritage and hope becomes more central than faithfulness to biblical teachings.
- For most members, maintaining buildings is the essence of church, not biblical mandates or mission.
- Creative funding of ministry moves beyond traditional church-based giving plans (which many have made a sacrament) to multiple-funding streams and collaborative ministries and fruitful partnerships.
- Many churches are businesses with massive overhead to sustain services valid in another age but that often are a financial and leadership drain today (for example, travel when the cost of gas is high; large staff in an age of downsizing, etc.).
- How can partnerships/alliances be established to offer services without current denominational and associational agencies, boards, etc.?

Statistics on Church Involvement

Is the picture as dire as I've painted it so far? Let's look at some research statistics:

- The nation's largest Protestant denomination saw stats for 2014 suggesting "decline evidence in recent years will not only continue but likely accelerate. Follow the current trend line and soon the Southern Baptist Convention will be declining at 2 percent a year, then 3, then..."⁸
- Southern Baptist membership declined for the eighth straight year in 2014, according to an annual report released June 14, 2014. An article

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reporting on the 2013 decline said, “The report by the Southern Baptist Convention’s publishing arm, Lifeway Christian Resources, puts total membership in the Nashville-based SBC at 15.7 million. That’s down from 15.9 million in 2012, a decrease of a little less than 1 percent. Weekly church attendance decreased more than 2 percent last year, falling to 5.8 million as a weekly average for the year. The report also notes a 1.5 percent decrease in the number of baptisms, falling to 310,368. Baptisms are an important measure for the denomination because of its strong commitment to evangelism.”⁹

- “‘Unchurched adults are very much like church members . . . except they don’t attend church,’ says David Kinnaman, who served as a general editor alongside George Barna in the recent book *Churchless*. . . . ‘While a few of the demographic differences between church members and unchurched are statistically significant, there is no such thing as a can’t-miss strategy for appealing to them. In fact, the data uncover so many similarities between church members and unchurched people that we have to conclude that a number of the stereotypes about both groups are not valid.

“‘The fact remains, though, that more Americans than ever are not attending church,’ Kinnaman continues. ‘Most of them did at some point and, for one reason or another, decided not to continue. This fact should motivate church leaders and attendees to examine how to make appropriate changes—not for the sake of enhancing attendance numbers but to address the lack of life transformation that would attract more people to remain an active part.’”¹⁰ A recent study’s results document this.¹¹

- “‘Five Trends among the Unchurched’” from the Barna Group says that the percentage of unchurched adults in America has increased from 30 percent to 43 percent of the population since 1990. Barna points to five trends that are contributing to this increase:

The research reveals the big picture: Today’s unchurched are much less likely to come from a church background than ever before. Furthermore, unchurched people today have different expectations of church involvement from those of previous decades. These changes are the result of shifting personal attitudes as well as significant changes in the broader cultural landscape.

1. Secularization Is on the Rise

- Nearly two-fifths of the nation’s adult population (38%) now qualifies as post-Christian (measured by 15 different variables related to people’s identity, beliefs and behaviors . . .). That includes 10% of Americans who qualify as highly post-Christian. Another one-quarter is moderately post-Christian (28%). Examined over time, our research shows that the proportion of highly secularized individuals is growing slowly but steadily.
- In other words, in spite of our ‘Christian’ self-descriptions, more than one-third of America’s adults are essentially secular in belief

and practice. If nothing else, this helps explain why America has experienced a surge in unchurched people—and presages a continuing rise in this population.

- Among the churchless, the proportions skew even more heavily: Overall, more than three-quarters of unchurched adults fall in the heavy-to-moderate range on the secularization scale. That compares to about one out of eight among the churched.
- As you might expect, the data show some striking generational differences when it comes to secularization. The pattern is indisputable: The younger the generation, the more post-Christian it is. Nearly half of Millennials (48%) qualify as post-Christian compared to two-fifths of Gen Xers (40%), one-third of Boomers (35%) and one-quarter of Elders (28%).

2. People Are Less Open to the Idea of Church

- Barna research shows that the unchurched are becoming less responsive to churches' efforts to connect with them. For example, conventional wisdom says the best way to get people to visit a church is to have friends invite them—and the conventional wisdom is right. The churchless we interviewed were most open to 'a friend of yours inviting you to attend a local church,' with one-fifth expressing strong interest and nearly half willing to consider a church based on this factor. An invitation from a friend is the top-rated way churches can establish connections with the unchurched.
- However, while the conventional wisdom remains true today, the road ahead shows challenging signs. Barna Group's trend data raise questions about the long-term durability of this approach. *Twenty years ago, two-thirds of churchless Americans (65%) were open to being invited to church by a friend. In 2013, that percentage has slipped to less than half (47%).*
- ~ It's not only the efficacy of personal invitations that is changing. Barna's tracking data stretching back to the 1990s reveal a slow-growing calcification of unchurched people toward churches. For every outreach method surveyed, the unchurched are less open to it today than they were two decades ago. While churchless people continue to show moderate openness to high-touch, relational connections—pastoral home visits (27%, down from 34%), a phone call from a church (24%, down from 34%)—they are resistant to other forms of outreach. This is especially true for advertising, including TV, radio or newspaper (18%, down from 20%), direct mailings (16%, down from 24%) and billboard ads (14%, down from 21%).

3. Churchgoing Is No Longer Mainstream

- Churchgoing is slowly but incontrovertibly losing its role as a normative part of American life. In the 1990s, roughly one out of every seven unchurched adults had never experienced regular church attendance. Today, that percentage has increased to nearly one-quarter. Buried

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within these numbers are at least two important conclusions: 1) Church is becoming increasingly unfamiliar to millions of Americans, and yet 2) the churchless are still largely comprised of de-churched adults. . . .

4. There Are Different Expectations of Church Involvement

- Another intriguing shift among the churchless has to do with their expectations of church involvement. In the early 1990s, our research showed that nearly seven out of 10 adults, if they were to visit a church, would be most interested in attending the Sunday service. In 2014, weekend worship services remain the most common entry experience, but only slightly; now, only 57% of churchless adults say they would be interested in Sunday worship as their starting point. In 2013 unchurched are more likely to say they are simply not sure, reflecting their disinterest in churches generally, or are more likely to say they would prefer attending some activity other than the Sunday service.
- A similar shift is afoot in terms of the number of churches they would attend. The churchless were asked in both 1993 and in 2011 if they would prefer to be involved in one church or multiple churches in their area. Two decades ago, even the unchurched expressed some sense of church loyalty (albeit hypothetical): 85% said they would expect to attend just one congregation. The recent study reflects a slight loosening of this potential loyalty, but the more notable shifts are among those who don't have a preference and who aren't sure. *Together, these percentages doubled from 8% to 16%, reflecting growing cultural indifference to church involvement.*

5. There Is Skepticism about Churches' Contributions to Society

- Although many of the churchless hold positive views of churches, a substantial number also have no idea what Christians have accomplished in the nation, either for the better or for the worse. When the unchurched were asked to describe what they believe are the positive and negative contributions of Christianity in America, almost half (49%) could not identify a single favorable impact of the Christian community, while nearly two-fifths (37%) were unable to identify a negative impact. Of those who could identify one way Christians contribute to the common good, the unchurched appreciate their influence when it comes to serving the poor and disadvantaged (22%), bolstering morals and values (10%) and helping people believe in God (8%). Among those who had a complaint about Christians in society, the unchurched were least favorably disposed toward violence in the name of Christ (18%), the church's stand against gay marriage (15%), sexual abuse scandals (13%) and involvement in politics (10%).¹² Reflecting on the skepticism about churches it is critically important to see that this is not just a current issue. These statistics are for the last two decades. The trend is now a clear and continuing pattern.

- “According to the latest research, more than 1 out of every 3 adults (33%) in America is unchurched. This means they haven’t attended a religious service of any type during the past 6 months. This represents approximately 73 million adults, plus roughly 27 million teens and children for a total of 100 million Americans.”¹³
- “For most of the past 300 years, 35%–40% of the population has participated in church with some degree of regularity.”¹⁴
- “Despite what people SAY about weekly attendance, the true weekly rate is closer to 25%. If we use lesser frequencies, more than 60% of American adults have attended a service at a religious congregation in the last year.”¹⁵
- “While it’s debatable whether the attendance is going down or remaining level, the data is unambiguous that overall church attendance is not increasing. More specifically, religious service attendance declined in the several decades leading up to 1990 and seems to have been essentially stable thereafter.”¹⁶
- “However, the percent who say they ‘never’ attend church has risen steadily over the last 30 years as people shift from infrequent attendance to nonattendance.”¹⁷
- “Finally, the Protestant portion of the U.S. population is in decline, due to the rise in ‘nones’ (no religious preference), decline of mainline denominations, and rise in the percent of recent immigrants claiming a religion other than Christian. The Protestant makeup was 62% in the early 1970s to just over 50% [in 2014]. If that trend continues, we will soon be a Protestant-minority country.”¹⁸

This latter conclusion may be hard for many churchgoing Christians to believe. But it’s true: Even though the cultural trend is toward less church-friendliness overall, the vast majority of unchurched adults still have at least some level of personal experience in a church.

- Interest in spirituality in the United States is growing, but this has not translated into greater church involvement.¹⁹
- At the present rates of change, Islam will become the dominant religion in the world before 2050.²⁰
- At the present rate of change, most Americans will be non-Christians by the year 2035.²¹
- Interest in new religious movements (e.g. New Age, neopaganism) is growing rapidly. In particular, Wiccans are doubling in numbers about every thirty months.²²
- The influence of the central, program-based congregation is diminishing as more cell churches are being created.²³
- Many Christians have left congregations and formed house churches: small groups meeting in one another’s homes.²⁴
- Only three out of ten adults in the U.S. in their twenties (31 percent) attend church in a typical week, compared to four out of ten of those in their

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thirties (42 percent) and nearly half of all adults age forty and older (49 percent).²⁵

- Eight million adults who were active churchgoers as teenagers will no longer be active in a church by the time they reach thirty.²⁶
- Only three out of ten adults in their twenties donated to a church in the past year, whereas 61 percent of older adults reported having donated to a church.²⁷
- Only 30 percent of those in their twenties have read the Bible in the past week, compared to 37 percent of those in their thirties; 44 percent of those in their forties; 47 percent of adults in their fifties; and 55 percent of those age sixty and above.²⁸
- Just one-third of adults in their twenties (34 percent) claim to be absolutely committed to Christianity. That compares to more than half (54 percent) of all older adults who claim such absolute devotion, including more than six out of ten adults who are age fifty and older.²⁹
- More than eight out of ten adults in their twenties (80 percent) said that their religious faith is important in their life, and nearly six out of ten (57 percent) claimed to have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their lives.³⁰
- Three-quarters of young adults in their twenties (75 percent) said they had prayed to God in the past week.³¹
- Since 1991, the adult population in the United States has grown by 15 percent. During that same period the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled, rising from thirty-nine million to seventy-five million—a 92 percent increase.³²
- In the American context, 2009 was a turning point in regards to the perception of Christianity's health in the U.S. That year, the results of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) was released. It showed, the percentage of self-identified Christians had fallen 10 percentage points, from 86 to 76, since 1990. It also showed that the “nones”—those who claim no religious affiliation—rose from 8 to 15 percent in the same period.³³
- Men constitute 55 percent of the unchurched.³⁴
- The unchurched are also younger than the norm. The median age of U.S. adults is forty-three, but it is just thirty-eight among the unchurched. Born-again adults are substantially older than either group (median: forty-six).³⁵

Reflecting on Statistics

At first glance, the impact of these statistics is depressing, staggering. The stats certainly shine the light on the world's diversity and the need for community building. But take a closer look. Younger adults aren't coming to church; but they do claim to be Christians, have faith that is important to them, and to pray. That's encouraging. The challenge is to get those who claim Christianity involved in a church they find relevant and meaningful and, through them, to reach other young adults. A seventy-eight-year-old, former member of a Presbyterian church,

and later in life an Episcopalian, is now an active part of Jubilee Community Church in Asheville, North Carolina. When interviewed about her church and church attendance, she explained,

“I think people either grow up in a church and stay there, or they search for what they need. And I think most people have found Jubilee because they were searching.”

When asked why the younger generations are leaving traditional mainline church pews, she says: “You all are diverse. You are accepting of all kinds of people, all kinds of lifestyles. You know when something happens on the other side of the world immediately and you react to it, and that’s different from what we knew. We knew our little town and that was about it.”³⁶

Dr. Molly Marshall reflects on and frames the future church with sharp and challenging insights after reading the Spring issue of *Abby Banner*, in which

Abbot John Klassen describes what the emerging church will look like: “It will be browner and poorer, more sensuous and feminine, less clerical and more collegial and inclusive, less concerned about the works of charity and more aware of the need for change in structures, more multilingual and polycentric.” I find his words extremely hopeful, especially if the marginalizing impulses that arise from hierarchical structures are quelled. He is describing a major shift in all quarters of his ecclesial tradition, and his words are perceptive for the larger church.³⁷

Dr. Marshall continues her reflection by declaring, “I believe that the coming church will be a better blend of youthful and senior, more liturgical, more theological, less bounded and more permeable, and less self-interested.”³⁸

The Potential

Years ago in many communities of this country, especially throughout the South—the Bible Belt—everyone went to church. Church growth came from children growing up in the church, occasional newcomers, and the transfer membership of a few disgruntled church members. On Sunday everyone got up and went to one church or another. That’s no longer true today. Today we live in a secular culture in which the church’s competition doesn’t come from another denomination down the street but from work, golf, NASCAR, football, community soccer, Little League sports, caring for aging parents, gardening, or just a treasured day with family without the weekly rapid pace of life.

Ed Stetzer’s work suggests we may have three different categories of Christians today:

Cultural Christians—people who believe themselves to be Christians simply because their culture tells them they are. Christians by heritage. Makes up about one-third of the 75 percent who call themselves Christian.

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Congregational Christians—similar to the first group, except these individuals at least have some connection to congregational life. They make up another one-third of the 75 percent in the research sample.

Convictional Christians—people who are actually living according to their faith. Another one-third of the 75 percent.³⁹

The potential is great. Every community is filled with people who do not know Jesus Christ, and those who are from the other categories mentioned above. The church has work to do, people to reach. To do that, the church will need to build relationships and community, getting to know the needs of younger generations, and make changes in the church to appeal to people under thirty.

Is changing worship the answer? Perhaps. Some have changed to blended or contemporary worship. For some this has worked, and for others it has not. Many who have tried blended worship in an attempt to please everyone have found that there was a greater likelihood of making everyone angry.

Jubilee, a diverse community of faith, incorporates a variety of arts, styles, traditions, and ethnic and cultural rituals and traditions.

Throughout the service, there are multiple opportunities to hold your neighbor's hand, greet them, embrace them. A poem spiced with personal, social and political flavors is offered by one of the members whose birthday it is; a local singer-songwriter performs; sage is burned as the 300–400 attendees turn in unison to face the four directions in the traditional Native American manner as [their leader] leads in prayer. Those present range from Millennials to elders in their 70s and 80s, plus parents of many ages in between accompanied by their children."⁴⁰

If a congregation discerns change is needed, the key to change is to change values and beliefs before changing behavior. We'll deal in depth with these concepts later in this book.

COACHING QUESTIONS

- What issues in this chapter do you most identify with now?
- Who are other persons who might identify with the same or similar issues?
- What actions might you take to begin to work through some of the identified issues?
- What is your next step now?