Leadership: Authority and Church Leadership

William S. Davis D.Min., Northeast Wyoming District of Seventh-day Adventists

In the church, authority is a nebulous thing. It is given to pastors by the denomination which ordains them and places them in a congregation or district. Local church leaders receive authority from their peers through nomination and election in many denominations. Authority for the most part comes from outside of the leader.

But with God, authority is inherent in who God is and what God does. The Bible begins by establishing the basis for God's authority: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth." (Genesis 1:1) When discussing his father's authority comedian Bill Cosby quotes his own father: "I brought you into this world, and I'll take you out and make another one that looks just like you!"("Cosby Himself" TV Special). God has a platform for authority which has nothing to do with us. The biblical argument for God's authority is that God made us in God's image, and not the other way around (Psalm 100:3).

So what does this have to do with leading the church? The church is God's! (Colossians 2:19). Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22;4:15,16.) The Holy Spirit is the power of the church (Acts 1:8;2:1-4). This helps the church leader to keep things in perspective when dealing with the issues of the day, just as it must deflate the egos of leaders who contend for authority in the church.

God's authority is a liberating concept for church leaders. We spend countless hours worrying about the church as if we were...
the ones who are responsible for it rising or falling. If we would let God be God and allow the Holy Spirit to be our leader as we work in agreement with God, such cares would be lighter. We are the "undershepherds" (1 Peter 5:1-4) and depend upon the Good Shepherd (John 10), so we can lead with confidence knowing that the church is ultimately in under God's care, and we need not fear for it personally. In an age when the church seems to be falling behind in its mission to disciple the people of the world, God has the power and the will to build up the church so that it will assail the gates of Hell and they will fall. (Matthew 16:18)

Our role is to align ourselves with the Head of the church Jesus Christ and follow as He leads!

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**Excerpt**

**Successful Clergy Leaders Focus on Three Key Tasks**

*From Faith Communities Today Newsletter*

Developing and promoting vision, evangelism and the recruiting and training of lay leaders are the tasks in which the clergy leaders of thriving congregations are most likely to invest a great deal of their time. This is true for congregations with attendance growth as well as those rated high on spiritual vitality.

Among growing, vital congregations across all faiths and denominational families, nearly two-thirds of clergy leaders (64 percent) report that they spend "a great deal" of their time in the recruitment and development of lay leaders. The majority spend "a great deal" of time in the recruitment of new congregations where attendance is declining or stable and spiritual vitality is seen as weaker are likely to report spending less time on these three tasks.

Two other tasks have a weaker relationship with congregational growth and vitality-leading small groups and contacting inactive members. Four other tasks have a considerably less pronounced correlation with vitality and growth, and only in some faith groups and denominational families while not in others: worship planning, pastoral care, teaching and dealing with conflict.

(These data are reported in more detail on pages 34 through 37 of *American Congregations 2008*).

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**Media**

**New from Vervent: Behind the Scenes of Hollywood Blvd**--Hot out of the editing suite is this interview with film maker Melody George who directed and filmed the Hollywood Blvd documentary. This behind the scenes interview reveals the challenges of telling the story of a church while you are actively involved in that same church.

**Hollywood Blvd Stained Glass Documentary**--If you missed the first screening of this documentary do not despair. You can watch it again on the Stained Glass website.

*The Hollywood church is confronted with a dwindling congregation that has reflected the recent troubles of their city. With only a handful of disconnected people struggling in for worship service, an idealistic new pastor and a gifted musician decide to take action. Under their guidance, a group of young professionals commit to wrestling with the pivotal question, "How can we be a people among whom God dwells?" Watch this documentary of the church that won the 2010 North American Division Innovative Church of the Year Award.

**Adventist News Feeds App**--This app catches feeds from Adventist News Network, Adventist World Radio, Ground 7 podcast, UK News, Spectrum blog, and Adventist Today. With your permission the app will push the latest news directly to your iPhone. The news pieces include pictures with captions so you can see what’s going on all around the Adventist world. This app is available at no charge from the app store. This app was created independently of Adventist News Network. ANN’s app is in development and should be up in a few weeks.

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**Reading for Pastors**

A sign of the financial times: surge in church foreclosures. Quote: "In many cases, churches ran into trouble after borrowing to build bigger houses of worship needed to accommodate growing congregations in once-booming housing markets."

"... and I'm a Mormon" ads are the latest in a series of public image-building by religious faiths. Quote: "The message of these ads is not just that we -- Mormons, Methodists, Muslims -- are normal, said [Mara] Einstein, who wrote *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*. It's that 'we are you.'"

Campaign hopes to change Christianity’s hypocritical image by confessing faults publicly but anonymously.

It's ridiculous to think that all religions are somehow equivalent, says Phil Cooke. Quote: "No matter what you think..."
about religion, the statement, 'All religions are just the same' is just a dismissive line, intended to squelch debate about the subject. In an age of supposed 'toleration,' the one thing we don't tolerate is the possibility that one type of religious belief trumps all others."

Are you a member of a church staff, pastor or lay volunteer? Then you should read these 7 "gut check" questions. For example, "Would I attend this church if I were not on staff?"

What are the implications should people be allowed to bring guns to church? Do you want them in yours?

Secularism makes excuses for bad behavior, while faith demands personal responsibility, according to this author. Quote: "Those who leave religion behind, we are led to understand, will begin to think for themselves and thereby exercise real freedom as responsible citizens.... [But] Instead of promoting personal freedom, and the responsibility that comes with it, secularism has given us an expansive vocabulary for saying, 'It's not my fault.'"

A trend that may affect our tax-free status: when communities impose usage fees on churches. Quote: "Houses of worship are generally exempt from federal and state taxes, in part because nonprofits are viewed as providing beneficial services for society. As a result, municipalities often don't gain any revenue from the property on which they sit, and Stanley views the fees as a way to get around the churches' tax-exempt status."

Prayer in public schools: the infamous "moment of silence" is back in Illinois.

Could a scientist lose out on a promotion just because he's a creationist? Martin Gaskell believes he did.

To the Point

Quotes from Acts of the Apostles, by Ellen G. White. Thanks to Carolyn Winchell for these.

Those who have never experienced the tender, winning love of Christ cannot lead others to the fountain of life. His love in the heart is a constraining power, which leads men to reveal Him in the conversation, in the tender, pitiful spirit, in the uplifting of the lives of those with whom they associate, Christian workers who succeed in their efforts must know Christ: and in order to know Him, they must know His love. In heaven their fitness as workers is measured by their ability to love as Christ loved and to work as He worked.

- AA 550-551

The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within. It is the atmosphere of this love surrounding the soul of the believer that makes him a savor of life unto life and enables God to bless his work. Supreme love for God and unselfish love for one another--this is the best gift that our heavenly Father can bestow.

- AA 551

This redeeming power, filling the heart, would control every other motive and raise its possessors above the corrupting influences of the world.

- AA 551-552

Centuries, ages, can never lessen the efficacy of His atoning sacrifice. Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast.

- AA 553

News, Ideas & Reminders

- Humor: Was there a world before the internet?

- A way to block time-wasting web sites (aka the Bermuda Triangle of productivity).

- Humor: You really are super cool!

- Previous resource links:
  - Andrews Study Bible
  - Branded Faith, by Rajkumar Dixit
  - Matt Gamble, VagaBondservant ministry
  - The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
  - iFollow website
  - Dissertation on house churches from Milton Adams
  - NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.

Got a tool, resource, site, article, idea or seminar that you like a lot? Share it with us at BestPractices@ameritech.net.
Upcoming NAD Events

Do you have an event you’d like to invite NAD pastors to? Send details to BestPractices@Ameritech.net.


Andrews University Music & Worship Conference. Mar 24, 2011 - Mar 26, 2011, Andrews University, 100 US 31 Highway, Berrien Springs, MI 49104. The eighth annual Andrews University Music and Worship Conference. If you're interested in exploring worship and worship music in ways that are theologically profound, practical, and inspiring, you will definitely want to join us. Sponsored by the NAD Church Resource Center and Andrews University's Department of Music, Department of Christian Ministry and Center for Youth Evangelism. Phone: 800-968-8428 x4 or 269-471-8352. For more information, email: worshipconference@andrews.edu.

United Youth Congress 2011 - iServe. Apr 6, 2011 - Apr 9, 2011, Orange County Convention Center, 9860 Universal Blvd, Orlando, FL 32819. Youth, young adults, youth leaders and parents/chaperones are invited to attend. We will have inspiring worship, training seminars, service projects in the community, an evening at Universal Studios, Saturday night concert, recreation, and much more! This package includes hotel and meals. For those who do not want hotel and meals, click here. For Sabbath Only, click here. Phone: 800-732-7587. For more information, email: events@adventsource.org

From Walt Williams, Andrews University InMinistry Center Director, the list of Spring 2011 InMinistry intensive classes for each union - April 3-14

STANDOUT. Apr 15, 2011 - Apr 17, 2011, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI. STANDOUT is a spiritual retreat for high school students, hosted on the campus of Andrews University. Throughout two days of spiritual exercises and group activities, we’ll challenge you to tap into the amazing power of God so that you will STANDOUT and set your faith in motion! Phone: 269-471-6372. For more information, email: standout@andrews.edu


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Churches Find End Is Nigh
The Number of Religious Facilities Unable to Pay Their Mortgage Is Surging

By SHELLY BANJO

ROSEVILLE, Calif.—Residential and commercial real-estate owners aren't the only ones losing their properties to foreclosure. The past few years have seen a rapid acceleration in the number of churches losing their sanctuaries because they can't pay the mortgage.

Just as homeowners borrowed too much or built too big during boom times, many churches did the same and now are struggling as their congregations shrink and collections fall owing to rising unemployment and a weak economy.

Since 2008, nearly 200 religious facilities have been foreclosed on by banks, up from eight during the previous two years and virtually none in the decade before that, according to real-estate services firm CoStar Group, Inc. Analysts and bankers say hundreds of additional churches face financial struggles so severe they could face foreclosure or bankruptcy in the near future.

"Churches are the next wave in this economic crisis," says Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr., president and founder of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, a non-profit civil-rights group, who works with pastors around the country to help churches negotiate better terms with their bankers.

Religious denominations of all kinds have suffered in recent years as donations have declined, with many Catholic parishes closing and synagogues merging their congregations. But the property-financing problems have been concentrated among independent churches, which while seeking to expand lack a governing body to serve as a backstop to financial hardship.

"Religious organizations may be subject to the laws of God but they are also subject to the laws of economics," said Chris Macke, senior real-estate strategist at CoStar. Many troubled churches, he said, are in states such as California, Florida, Georgia and Michigan, which also have some of the highest home-foreclosures rates in the country.

In many cases, churches ran into trouble after borrowing to build bigger houses of worship needed to accommodate growing congregations in once-booming housing markets.
Pastors Rich and Lindy Oliver decided their Family Christian Center needed more space after their congregation rose from a few hundred in the early 1990s to 650 by 2002. The church borrowed $4.2 million and began building a new 1,000-person sanctuary on 11 acres in Orangevale, Calif., including classrooms and a space for adult learning.

But when housing prices across California began tumbling in 2006, followed by a surge in unemployment and foreclosures, many congregants moved away, and those who were left reduced their tithing sharply. Meanwhile, the property, valued at $8.5 million in 2002 was appraised at just $2.5 million in 2008.

Stretched to the limit, the pastors stopped making payments. "I just told the bank to take it," Mr. Oliver said. "If you're a church with a piece of property upside down and no one will refinance the loan or lend you more money, there's not really another choice but to walk away."

Bankers and lenders typically are reluctant to "foreclose on God" and seek to work out deals with churches. But none proved possible in the Olivers' case.

These days, Mr. Oliver said his church, renamed The Family Church, was "doing what the rest of America is doing—we're cutting back and simplifying." In November, the Olivers raised $700,000—not nearly enough to rescue the previous church—from donations and personal loans from church members and used it to lease a former furniture store in a strip mall in Roseville, Calif.

Traditionally, lenders considered churches good risks because of the weekly cash flow generated by tithing, as well as the moral compulsion felt by most pastors to pay down debt.

Like many churches, Mr. Oliver used bond financing, not a straight mortgage, to fund construction. Historically, churches wanting to build turned to their governing bodies or to specialized lenders that originated fixed-rate 25-year to 30-year mortgages. During the real-estate boom,

But during the real-estate boom, regional and community banks attracted churches with lower rates on shorter-term loans. At the same time, some bond underwriters began offering churches more money up front if they issued so-called compound-interest bonds. In such cases, churches often paid nothing until the bonds came due years later, but then had to pay both the principal and accrued interest, which often doubled the amount they owed.

Many such bonds come due in the next few years. But with property values down and cash in short supply, many churches won't have the funds to pay and will have trouble refinancing. "In 2011 and the next couple of years, we're going to see a big maturity wall hitting these churches," said Scott Rolfs, head of Wisconsin-based investment bank Ziegler and Co.’s Religion and Education practice.

Many churches have also been upended by plain mortgages. Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Sacramento took out a $1.9 million mortgage to acquire a $2.3 million 18,000-square-foot property in 2004 that included a

Across the U.S., churches are losing their sanctuaries because they can't pay their mortgage debt. Some borrowed too much or built too big during boom times and now are struggling as congregations -- and collections -- shrink.
church and two retail spaces. Johnny Zapara, the pastor, had refinanced his own home for $400,000 to make a
down payment and expected to pay most of the $17,000 monthly payment with income from retail tenants.

When one of the tenants went out of business and a new one couldn't be found, Vineyard subsidized the payments
for two years. Eventually the church ran out of money, and couldn't refinance because the value of the property
had fallen sharply. The lender foreclosed earlier this month.

"A building does not make a church. We will find a way to continue," Mr. Zapara said.
Faiths Ad Campaigns Chase After The Great 'I Am'

By Peggy Fletcher Stack
Salt Lake Tribune

(RNS) To many viewers, the "I'm a Mormon" ad blitz from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seemed hip, refreshing and original.

The campaign, launched last year in nine U.S. cities, generated a lot of national buzz. Its short videos featured regular folks talking about their lives as doctors, skateboarders, tax attorneys, environmentalists, surfers or former felons before announcing that they are Mormons.

Turns out, lots of other faiths take a similar tack.

Scientologists, with longtime connections in Hollywood, have produced personal-story videos for a marketing effort known as "Meet a Scientologist." The Episcopal Church has an "I am Episcopalian" series. A Muslim agency links modern believers with their founder in an "Inspired by Muhammad" push.
Catholics reach out to lapsed members in their "Catholics Come Home" drive. Methodists seek the younger crowd by redefining what church is.

The styles and motivations for all these campaigns vary -- some clearly are proselytizing; others are correcting mistaken impressions. But all of them follow the "I Am" national trend in advertising.

As Americans became less religious, they began to look to consumer goods for their identities, explained Mara Einstein, a professor of media studies at Queens College in New York. They saw themselves as the person who used a "PC" or a "Mac," drove a Volkswagen or a BMW or sipped a Starbucks latte.

That personal approach eventually circled back to spirituality. Religious groups began trying to tell potential members that theirs was a faith for someone who looked and acted like themselves, Einstein said.

The message of these ads is not just that we -- Mormons, Methodists, Muslims -- are normal, said Einstein, who wrote *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*. It's that "we are you."

**Scientologists**

The Church of Scientology International launched its "Meet a Scientologist" series in the early 1990s, putting personal descriptions on T-shirts, brochures and magazines.

The movement started by devotees of science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard claims more than 8 million members but has faced stiff criticism in several countries, in the media and by some former followers.

In 2008, the church posted video profiles on its own YouTube channel. Today, the site features more than 200 Scientologist testimonials, including ones from educators, teens, skydivers, a golf instructor, a hip-hop dancer and engineers, Scientology spokesman Tommy Davis said. They tell their stories, what attracted them to the faith and how it has helped them.

The church is not motivated by bad press or critics, Davis said. "To the degree that there's any sort of misunderstanding of Scientology, it comes from ignorance and lack of firsthand experience."

Since the videos began airing in 14 U.S. markets, the number of people wanting more information about the church has skyrocketed.

"Frankly, (our) interest is in proselytizing," Davis says. "We want people to see what Scientology does and the tools for people to use to improve their lives."

**Episcopalian**

The Episcopal Church, meanwhile, has been around for centuries and believes it has much to offer religious seekers. But, like many mainline Protestant churches, its numbers are shrinking. Plus, it has no marketing budget.

"We are seen as a normal, old denomination and kind of forgotten," said Anne Rudig, the church's director of communications. "I wanted a way to show that even though we have an
ancient liturgy, our church is pretty contemporary. We are relevant."

She reasoned that the best way to spread that message would be to hear from longtime members such as Gail Bennett, who likes the church’s emphasis on justice and peace, or new converts such as Diane Caruso, who finds beauty in the faith’s music and liturgy.

"It's a place where I really could talk to God," Caruso says in a video.

The campaign started in 2000 with dozens of testimonials. So many Episcopalians logged on to the site it nearly crashed. The effort took off from there, with many members filming themselves and sending their videos to the New York headquarters.

"I still get e-mails from people who say, 'I had no idea the Episcopal Church was like this,'" she said. "It's not all old white men."

Now, Rudig says, if she only had a marketing budget as big as the Methodists.

United Methodists

The United Methodist Church took a different branding path -- describing what it does, not who is in it.

The $20 million marketing push began in May 2009 and targeted 18- to 34-year-olds, many of whom have rejected organized religion altogether. Creators dubbed the campaign "10,000 doors" to suggest the myriad ways to become engaged with the church.

"Whether it's helping to provide an anti-malaria bed net for a child in Africa, volunteering to help in the community, or joining a church's recreation league, we want you to feel welcome," the Rev. Larry Hollon, chief executive of United Methodist Communications, says in a news release. "There is a doorway through which you can approach The United Methodist Church."

The effort, part of a grander scheme known as "Rethink Church," uses "nonchurch language" and "positive land mines" to attract young people by inviting them to look at the faith with fresh eyes, Einstein writes in a forthcoming essay, "The Evolution of Religious Branding." "These 'land mines' are issues like Darfur, theology of ecology, homelessness and so on."

Some of the messages, sprawled across billboards, asked questions such as: "What if church were a literacy program for homeless children? What if church considered ecology part of theology? What if church could bring sides together? Would you come?"

Muslims

Muslims in the United States and Britain clearly have faced perception problems and misunderstandings -- if not outright hostility -- of their faith. Hoping to counter such negativity, a group known as the Exploring Islam Foundation created an ad campaign for subway walls and taxis in central London, as well as video interviews on its website, inspiredbymuhammad.com.

The spots contain messages such as: "I believe in social justice. So did Muhammad; I believe in women's rights. So did Muhammad; I believe in protecting the environment. So did Muhammad."

British values are "synonymous with Islamic values," Remona Aly, the foundation's campaigns director, said in a release, "those of being committed to social justice, caring for the environment,
of mutual respect and tolerance, and contributing positively to your society."

In other words, they say, Muslims are us.

**Mormons**

The Mormon effort sprouted from research, too, showing that many Americans either know nothing about the faith or harbor stereotypical, even false impressions.

Several recent studies, including one by the authors of *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, rank Mormons among the least liked U.S. faiths.

To modify that impression, producers of the "I'm a Mormon" series sought members who were atypical, articulate and photogenic.

"Mormons are doing an impressive job using new media to reach people and connect with individuals in a way that ... works for them," Catholic blogger Matthew Warner writes at *National Catholic Register*.

The Latter-day Saints were "smart in their approach," he writes, building on two basic facts: lots of people think Mormons are weird, and once people get to know a Mormon personally, that impression changes.

Warner believes the campaign will be effective "for actually improving the public perception of Mormons for many people," he said in an e-mail.

*Peggy Fletcher Stack writes for The Salt Lake Tribune.*
A group that seeks to reverse the bad image of Christianity in America launched a new campaign Tuesday that encourages Christians to publicly confess their shortcomings by leaving notes in public places and reporting them on a website.

The My Confession campaign, organized by Changing the Face of Christianity, Inc., hopes to get Christians to acknowledge problems such as hidden hypocrisy, intolerance and homophobia – failings that give the faith a bad name.

"We are trying to help Christians actually change for the better. This begins by acknowledging we have a problem through heartfelt confession," explained R. Brad White, founder of Changing the Face of Christianity.

White is a former atheist who is now a devout Christian. He says his mission in life is to help reverse Christian intolerance and restore the true message of Jesus Christ among those who carry his name.

The CFC founder shared his confession about being a "homophobic Christian."

"My confession is I've allowed my religious convictions to make me numb to the human rights of gays and lesbians," confessed White. "I haven't consciously fought against gay marriage, but I've allowed outspoken Christian political activists to limit the human rights of LGBTs and let them speak for me through my silence,"

"My confession is I've been a homophobic Christian. The gay community deserves love, not discrimination," he said.

White anticipates other Christians will make confessions about a judgmental attitude, secretly hating someone, or not reading the Bible or going to church.

The My Confession campaign is similar to a project called PostSecret, which collects anonymous postcards confessing suicide attempts, incidents of rape or incest, awkward habits and old hates. The 4-by-6-inch postcards are generally very creative and made out of various materials such as book covers, cereal boxes, and paintings. The postcards are mailed directly to founder Frank Warren's Germantown, Md. address.

Warren, a former volunteer on a suicide prevention hotline, founded the project in 2005 to give people an outlet. The project has since led to four books and a travelling art exhibit.

White's Christian confession project asks participants to put their notes in a public area such as on a public restroom mirror, bank ATM, or gas station pump instead of sending them to him. Once the secret confession has been posted publicly, White encourages participants to take a picture and post it to the My Confession website.

White says the ultimate purpose of his project is to prompt Christians to find maturity in their faith.

"Through confession, we are inviting God into our hearts and minds and allowing Him to do His transforming work in our lives," he stated.

Changing the Face of Christianity, Inc. is a Texas-based non-profit focused on tackling issues of hypocrisy, judgmentalism, intolerance and homophobia within the faith. The group, founded last year, also has a bible study to help Christians struggling with these issues.

On the Web: myconfession.org

Stephanie Samuel
Christian Post Reporter

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No matter what you think about religion, the statement, “All religions are just the same” is just a dismissive line, intended to squelch debate about the subject. In an age of supposed “toleration,” the one thing we don’t tolerate is the possibility that one type of religious belief trumps all others. It’s amazing actually – we evaluate doctors, schools, political ideas, movies, food, books, business, art – everything else. But the idea of actually saying that “I’ve seriously evaluated the options and have come to the conclusion that _______ is the one true faith” pretty much makes you a crazy person. Perhaps it’s because we live under the threat of radical Islam. Most people don’t commit violence over evaluating a piece of art; but religion? We’re scared to death of offending someone. But the truth is, what could be more important than coming to terms with the biggest questions? Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Is there a God out there?

Plus, I’m tired of the lame idea that being confident that you’re right, means you hold everyone else in contempt. Once again, we don’t feel that way when we express our opinions about anything else.

That’s why I think it’s time for a serious, honest, and civil discussion about religious faith.

So let’s do this: Ask your Facebook friends, re-tweet, and blog the question. Then do the same with your answer. (No one-word answers. We want to know why you believe what you do.) Let’s start a global conversation that points out the hypocrisy of expressing everything but our true feelings about faith.

Let’s see what happens…
Seven Gut Check Questions For Staff Members

I shared these questions with our staff here at NewSpring Church in last week’s staff meeting and thought it might be helpful if I shared them here on my website.

#1 – Would I attend this church if I were not on staff? If the answer is “no,” then you should resign…immediately. God hasn’t called people in the ministry to work with a half-hearted effort…and if you don’t believe in the vision/mission of your church enough to say that you would be there if they were not paying you then I am afraid your heart isn’t there anyway.

#2 – Would I volunteer in the area I am working in if I were not on staff? This question speaks to motive…if you would not volunteer to do the job you are being paid to do then, once again, you’ve got to ask if your heart is really there. (If you do not LOVE what you do then you are not going to be able to do what Scripture commands in Philippians 2:14 and Colossians 3:23-24).

#3 – Do I feel entitled? There is nothing worse than a staff member (including a senior pastor) who has an entitlement mentality. These people believe the church has latched on to them and would sink if they were to leave (which is never the case.) Reality is the church doesn’t owe anyone…she’s God’s Bride and we (volunteers and staff) are the ones who latched on to her in regards to our gifts being pulled out of us and developed for HIS Kingdom.

#4 – Am I a tither? If you are not tithing and giving generously to your church…your heart isn’t there. Don’t argue with me…JESUS said it! (Matthew 6:21) Also…how in the world can someone who claims to have integrity work on a church and spent the tithe money of other people when they are not actually giving any themselves?

#5 – How clean is my office/work area? The answer to this question determines how well a person is willing to steward the resources that God allows them to use…AND how they feel about the church as a whole. (And…a staff member CAN and should be held accountable for this.)

#6 – How much do I complain about my job? A staff member who is always complaining most likely is not operating in their area of gifting. I’ve told my staff, “I KNOW your job is hard…it’s ministry, we’re on the front lines. A marine on the front lines in a way is never surprised when someone shoots at him…he doesn’t begin to whine and tell people how hard his job is. Ministry is, hands down, the hardest job you will EVER have!

#7 – Am I concerned about my particular area/team…OR about the church as a whole? Staff members need to be willing to have uncomfortable conversations with people if they ever perceive something to be “off mission”…even if it is not in their direct area of responsibility. A staff is a team…and everything impacts everything else. Staff members who fail to realize this will eventually create silos that actually begin to compete with other departments on staff rather than partnering with other staff members to kick satan in his cookies and advance God’s Kingdom!

Tagged: Church Issues, Staff Issues
Group to appeal ruling against guns in church

By Rhonda Cook
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

6:03 a.m. Thursday, January 27, 2011

A gun rights group filed a notice Wednesday that it will appeal a federal judge's dismissal of a suit challenging a state law banning weapons in churches, mosques and synagogues.

John Monroe, the attorney for GeorgiaCarry.org, filed a notice that he plans to ask the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to review U.S. District Judge Ashley Royal's decision. Royal ruled Monday that a 2010 law that lists places of worship among locations where guns are not allowed did not violate the First Amendment right to freedom of religion or the Second Amendment guarantee of a right to bear arms.

The lawsuit -- brought by GeorgiaCarry.org, the organization's past president and the minister at the Baptist Tabernacle of Thomaston -- challenged the inclusion of places of worship on a list of places where guns are not allowed -- government buildings, courthouses, jails and prisons, state mental hospitals, nuclear power plants, bars without the owner's permission and polling places.

The suit called the handgun "the quintessential self-defense weapon in the United States." Former GeorgiaCarry.org president Ed Stone and other worshipers argued that they should be able to arm themselves "for the protection of their families and themselves" without fear of arrest and prosecution on a misdemeanor charge. The Rev. Jonathan Wilkins of the Baptist Tabernacle said he wanted to have a gun for his protection while working in his church office.

The church claimed members' efforts to practice their faith had been "impermissibly burdened" because they felt they needed to be armed but feared being arrested if they brought their guns to services.

And Stone wrote in a filing that his "motivation to carry a firearm as a matter of habit derives from one of my Lord's last recorded statements at the 'last supper,' that ‘whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one ... I believe that this injunction requires me to obtain, keep and carry a firearm wherever I happen to be."

But Royal wrote that the Thomaston church had not claimed "its members' religious beliefs require that any member carry a firearm into the Tabernacle, whether during worship services or otherwise."

Royal wrote worshipers were free to leave their guns in the car or they could secure or temporarily surrender their weapons with security or management at door as they go inside to worship.

In the case of the minister, Royal wrote Wilkins could have a gun in his church office if he had permission from the Tabernacle's management. "If management or security personnel at the Tabernacle, which presumably includes Wilkins as CEO, did not grant him permission to secure or store a firearm in his office, then that would be at their discretion," Royal wrote.
The judge goes on to write that the only risk of criminal sanction is if “they refuse to comply with the law’s mandates about carrying firearms in places of worship.

"Complying with the law's requirements does not prohibit them from attending worship services nor does it place an 'unmistakable' pressure on them 'to forgo religious precepts.'"

Just before Royal filed his decision on Monday, Rep. Bobby Franklin, R-Marietta, filed a bill to remove the restriction on guns in places of worship.
Religion can be a real drag. So it is little wonder that many Canadians have fled the pews for a life of freedom under reason instead of dogma.

Who needs all that guilt and all those rules? We’re all adults here, are we not?

The most popular objection to religion is that it replaces thinking with sets of unprovable truths — and that the rules flowing out of those truths turn adherents into robots. Those who leave religion behind, we are led to understand, will begin to think for themselves and thereby exercise real freedom as responsible citizens. This is the theory. But that is not how things have turned out.

As Western societies have become more secular, they have become even more self-pitying and more likely to blame their travails on amorphous entities. Instead of promoting personal freedom, and the responsibility that comes with it, secularism has given us an expansive vocabulary for saying, “It’s not my fault.”

More people are willing to blame their own mistakes and sins — from consumption of pornography, to rampant consumerism, to burdensome debt — on the media, the government, the banks. Or they refashion their choices as a response to an “addiction.”

Late last year, the Governor of the Bank of Canada warned Canadians about the amount of personal debt they were carrying. He was right to worry because a debt-laden populace will suffer greatly when really tough economic times hit. Debt also leads to family strife, and constitutes a source of debilitating stress.

But did we really need the government to tell us something that is plain common sense? Apparently so.

What religion teaches is that the dignity of each person is paramount. It also teaches that with this exalted state comes responsibility. Never go into a Catholic confessional and blame your abusive behaviour toward your own wife and children on a “culture permeated with violence.” God gave you the right to choose right or wrong, a smart priest would say, and you made the wrong choice. Now get help, repent, pray and fix it.

Never tell a Baptist minister that you spend half your evenings in the basement cruising porn sites because “television and advertising is saturated with sexually explicit material.” Even the least clever of clergy might suggest not watching those shows.

So simple; so difficult.

Jews fast on Yom Kippur to make up for the things they have done wrong through the year. It is not a magic solution to making guilt disappear. In fact, being forced to face one’s own sins can produce guilt, as it should. The point is to feel the pain of those wrongs, make it right with God and move on. It is the reason it is called the Day of Atonement and not the Day of Whining.

The Jesuits have a spiritual practice called the “examination of conscience.” It is a daily review of what happened in one’s day — all of it. It assumes a subscription to a set of moral truths that are not up for debate.

In this world view, freedom comes from an obedience to greater truths. It demands attention to the details of life. It asks that life not be a blur of excuses but freely exercised choices. And then it asks you to be an adult and take responsibility for all that you do.
Churches cry foul when cities impose usage fees

By ADELLE M. BANKS Religion News Service | Posted: Saturday, January 22, 2011 12:00 am

When a community needs to rebuild crumbling roads, should houses of worship pay fees for the number of times their congregants drive on them?

That's the question behind a recent suit filed by churches in the small city of Mission, Kan., who argue the city's new "transportation utility fee" is a tax they should not have to pay.

With cash-strapped states and cities facing a slew of tough choices, there's a growing debate nationwide about whether religious congregations should help foot the bill.

"It makes no sense to tax churches and to limit their ability to provide their services, and it does damage to the constitutional separation between church and state," argues Erik Stanley, senior legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, which is representing Catholic and Baptist churches in the city of 10,000.

He acknowledges that church-state separation is generally not an argument made by his conservative Christian law firm; but in this instance, he says, "There should be a separation here."

Houses of worship are generally exempt from federal and state taxes, in part because nonprofits are viewed as providing beneficial services for society.

As a result, municipalities often don't gain any revenue from the property on which they sit, and Stanley views the fees as a way to get around the churches' tax-exempt status.

According to the lawsuit filed in December, the city calculated the number of trips generated to and from a property based on a manual of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

The manual estimates that a church produces an average of 5.8 vehicle trips per week for each seat in a sanctuary. That led to a fee of $898.77 for First Baptist Church of Mission, and $1,685.19 for St. Pius X Catholic Church.

Stanley said state courts in Idaho and Florida have ruled against similar fees, determining that city-imposed fees were invalid because they were not authorized by state legislation.

Mission officials deny that the churches should be exempt, as well as the notion that the fee amounts to a tax.

"It was just a fair way to spread the cost among those who are generating the traffic," said Mission Mayor Laura McConwell, "to help pay for the roads that you need to bring people in either for your business or for the churches or to people's homes."

She said calling the fee a "driveway tax" is a misnomer.

"We discussed it also with our attorneys ... to make sure we weren't stepping on anyone's constitutional rights before we instated it," she said. "I'm pretty comfortable with what we've chosen."

McConwell said her city's fees are due to aging infrastructure, not the faltering economy. But experts say economic pressures have led municipalities to levy fees on nonprofits with increasing regularity.

"Given the current economic conditions for cities, we're seeing cities are looking for other ways to find revenue in order to pay essential services," said Gregory Minchak, spokesman for the National League of Cities.

Robert Tuttle, a church-state expert at George Washington University Law School, said the fee debates in Mission and elsewhere aren't about churches' tax-exempt status, but whether a government institution is authorized by state law to impose a fee.

Cash-strapped governments are nothing new, he said, but current economic challenges are prompting creative ways of dealing with money woes.

A drainage fee in Houston, adopted last year in a close public vote, has been criticized by churches, which could pay thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars for a new city initiative to control flooding.
The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston said early estimates suggest costs for it and its 78 parishes could reach $1 million.

"We especially realize this fee will place a particular burden on our poorer inner-city parishes, which have very limited resources," said Jenny Faber, spokeswoman for the archdiocese. "We hope for a more equitable solution for our parishes, other religious entities and nonprofit groups."

Jessica Michan, press secretary for Houston Mayor Annise Parker, said the City Council still needs to vote on how the fee will be calculated and what organizations will be exempted. But a city document about the initiative notes that eight of Texas' 10 largest cities have drainage fees — and none exempt churches.

As in Mission, there's been a suit filed to try to halt the fee, charging that it was vague and therefore invalid.
Moment of silence back in effect in Ill. schools

By KAREN HAWKINS - The Associated Press

CHICAGO – An Illinois law requiring a daily moment of silence in public schools is back in effect after a two-year hiatus.

U.S. District Judge Robert Gettleman has lifted a federal injunction on the law's enforcement, and the Illinois State Board of Education notified districts Friday.

Gettleman's action Thursday came after the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit ruled in October that the law is constitutional because it doesn't specify prayer. The court ruled legislators who supported the bill said the moment of reflection had a secular and practical purpose in settling down students at the start of the school day.

Illinois legislators approved the Silent Reflection and Student Prayer Act in October 2007. The law reads, in part, that the brief period of silence at the opening of every school day "shall not be conducted as a religious exercise but shall be an opportunity for silent prayer or for silent reflection on the anticipated activities of the day."

But Rob Sherman, an outspoken atheist, filed a legal challenge to the law on behalf of his daughter, Dawn, a student at Buffalo Grove High School in suburban Chicago. Sherman claimed the law was unconstitutional, and while Gettleman agreed at trial, the appeals court reversed his ruling.

Sherman said Friday he intends to fight the law all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Don't allow this unconstitutional law to sabotage public education," he said.

Sherman said his daughter was a freshman when the law was passed, and "through this litigation process we have successfully stalled the moment of silence from taking place until now, just a few months before Dawn graduates" from high school.

Mary Fergus, spokeswoman for the state board of education, said notices were sent to the state's 868 districts on Friday explaining that the law is now in effect and what it states.

"We point out that (the law) does not define the length of the period of silence," Fergus said. "We are telling districts that we have no intention to limit their flexibility to implement in a manner that works best for the district and its students."

The law takes effect immediately.

For more government coverage, visit the Daily Chronicle Government Center
LOUISVILLE, Ky. — An astronomy professor who sued the University of Kentucky after claiming he lost out on a top job because of his Christian beliefs reached a settlement Tuesday with the school.

The university agreed to pay $125,000 to Martin Gaskell in exchange for dropping a federal religious discrimination suit he filed in Lexington in 2009. A trial was set for next month.

Gaskell is currently working as a research fellow in the astronomy department at the University of Texas.

Gaskell claimed he was passed over to be director of UK's MacAdam Student Observatory because of his religion and statements that were perceived to be critical of evolution.

Court records showed Gaskell was a front-runner for the job, but some professors called him "something close to a creationist" and "potentially evangelical" in interoffice e-mails to other university scientists.

"We never thought from the start that everybody at UK was some sort of anti-religious bigot," said Frank Manion, Gaskell's attorney. "However, what I do think this case disclosed is a kind of endemic, almost knee-jerk reaction in academia towards people, especially scientists, of a strong religious faith."

A statement from University of Kentucky counsel Barbara Jones Tuesday said the school's "hiring processes were and are fundamentally sound and were followed in this case." The university does not admit any wrongdoing.

"This successful resolution precludes what would have been a lengthy trial that, ultimately, would not have served anyone's best interests," Jones said in the statement.

Gaskell has said he is not "creationist," or someone who believes the Bible's origin story puts the age of the universe at a few thousand years. He also said his views on evolution are in line with biological science.

After applying for the job in 2007, Gaskell said he learned from a friend at UK that professors had discussed his purported religious views. E-mails turned over as evidence in the case showed that university scientists wondered if Gaskell's faith would interfere with the job, which included public outreach and education.

One astrophysics professor at UK told department chair Michael Cavagnero in an e-mail that hiring Gaskell would be a "huge public relations mistake."

Gaskell referred questions from a reporter Tuesday to Manion, a Kentucky lawyer with the American Center for Law & Justice, which focuses on religious freedom cases.

Manion said documents and e-mail communications turned over by UK in the case showed strong evidence of religious bias, including a professor who surmised that Gaskell was "potentially evangelical."

"The fact that somebody could say that without realizing the implications, speaks volumes," Manion said. "Because all you have to do is substitute any other label — potentially Jewish, potentially Muslim. Nobody would say that."

Associated Press Writer Brett Barrouquere contributed to this report.
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The World Before the Internet [COMIC] 9 days ago by Matt Silverman 34
Do you remember the world before the advent of the Internet? Me neither, but I'm sure it was filled with horrifying things like libraries, retail stores and radio commercials.

..and if you wanted to see a funny video, you had to go through Bob Saget.
What’s your favorite thing about living in the 21st century (besides bacon-flavored ice cream, of course)?

More Mashable Comics:

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- The Existential Trouble With Social Gaming
- Obi-Wan Kenobi: Mobile Sales Rep [COMIC]
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10 people liked this.

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Showing 15 of 34 comments

I remember watching America's Funniest Home Videos with Bob Saget in the 90's.

and now he's just sort of creepy.

yeah but in a good way

Wait, I thought he said "funny"...
Funny videos not Funny bob...at least I hope that's what he meant.

1 week ago  in reply to Chris Wilson

This is marginally better than usual, but Mashable needs to stop with these comic writers who don't know how to properly structure a joke or a comic.

1 week ago  3 Likes

Glad your post was rife with hilarity, and I would like to thank you for your contribution.

1 week ago  in reply to sumdumgoi  2 Likes

There's nothing funny about my post not was it intended that way. Comments on the Internet aren't always about comedy. Stick to what you know "guru" - butt plugs and fleshlights

1 week ago  in reply to Sex Toys Guru

There are still libraries. Millions of people use them every day. #savelibraries was trending on Twitter last week. The public library is the only place the only place many people can access the Internet. Please don't use libraries as an example of an obsolete social institution.

(Edited by author 1 week ago)

1 week ago  4 Likes

ture, maybe certain technologies that libraries used are fair game though: card catalogs, Index books, etc. Certainly you cant think that having to go to a physical place every time you want to read an article from a periodical you dont have sent to you in the mail is something that's worth preserving, right?

1 week ago  in reply to Natalie Binder

I think it was just a joke. Obviously.

1 week ago  in reply to Natalie Binder  1 Like
Oh do one about how only doucheb's called themselves gurus and...
oh wait that hasn't changed!

You damn kids and your tweeters and bookface and what not. Back in my day, we read a newspaper at breakfast that was actually made of paper. Our phones were wired to the wall. The handsets had wires connecting them to the phone! When you talked to someone in public, they never, ever interrupted you to check the text they just got. In fact, sending texts in class was done by writing it on a piece of paper and physically throwing it at the other person. Unfortunately this proved to be insecure on many occasions, these texts got intercepted fairly often. You want to look something up, you went to something called an encyclopedia, which were books made of paper.

But basically, it was all the same, we just used a lot more paper. Now get off my damn lawn!

what about the first time someone started using too many periods?

My internet went out yesterday. After a particularly frustrating hour and a half of trying to fix my network connection to no avail, a sense of panic started taking over my body, nay...my soul. I had set aside time to blog last night and listen to a heap load of new music and now I was stranded in a world with no internet and password protected networks taunting me. “You want access to me?” they said, “Yes!” I yelled as I tried figuring out the password to the “SkeetsandSues” network. No luck. The connection was protected by armed guards seemingly stabbing me with little swords saying “get away from here YOU!” So after probably a good three hours of frustration, I gave up. I needed a brief internet detox it seemed, so I picked up PR Guru Kelly Cutrone’s book “If You Have to Cry, Go Outside.” I spent five hours reading and looked up maybe once. After I read her book cover to cover I realized that I hadn’t done that in a long time. It felt damn good.

That being said, as soon as I woke up, I checked Facebook and updated my Twitter.
The World Before the Internet [COMIC]

http://mashable.com/2011/01/21/world-before-internet-comic/?utm_source...
How to Temporarily Block Time-Wasting Websites

Block employees access to certain sites with GFI WebMonitor. Try free
You have certain important tasks to complete in the next hour or so and yet you have trouble staying focused for long because of all these online distractions coming through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other websites.

It maybe slightly unfair to categorize some of these sites as “time wasting” but at the same time, the endless stream of new content available on these sites can consume lot of your precious time before you even realize it.

LetMeWork - A Toggle Switch for the Time-Wasting Web

If you have trouble exercising self-discipline and can’t seem to stop yourself from constantly checking your social sites and email accounts for new updates, here’s an easy solution. Download and unzip the file – LetMeWork.zip – to your desktop and double-click it to instantly block some of the distracting sites on your computer. When you are done with your work, double-click the same file again to unblock access to all the sites as before.

[*] You may see a User Access Control warning dialog in Windows Vista or 7 – just say yes.

How the script blocks and unblocks websites

The standard way for blocking any site on your computer is through the HOSTS file that's available in the Windows directory.

It does take some effort to edit the HOSTS file and what the above script (source code) does is hide all the complexity from the user and lets you block as well as unblock sites with a click.

The list is customizable. You may open the vbs file in notepad and edit the WebsitesToBlock array to include any other website(s) in the banned list.

WebsitesToBlock=Array("twitter.com", "www.youtube.com", "facebook.com")

There are some browser extensions that seem to solve the same problem but this script is run-once, use-everywhere. You execute it from the desktop and it will block /unblock access to select sites across all browsers.
Do you also find yourself trapped in this Bermuda triangle of productivity? Here’s a one-click solution that should help you get back to work. Illustration by Fuchsia Macaree via @swissmiss and @brainpicker.