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Best Practices for Adventist Ministry

Editorial

Visiting the Saints at Home
by Loren Seibold, Best Practices editor

When I was child, it wasn't unusual for people to drive up to your house unannounced and be invited in - relatives, salesmen, friends just passing by. One of those was the pastor. He'd stop in just to pray for us, and if it was mealtime, he'd stay to eat.

In my mind, doing home visits is kind of a quaint idea, harking back to rural times when someone was always home. Which is probably why, when I announced that I'd be visiting all the homes of the people on my church membership lists, the response from the older members was enthusiastic. "That's just what we need. We haven't had that for a long time."

While the older set (50+) was enthusiastic, the younger families (below 40) seemed puzzled. They'd heard of pastors visiting members' homes, but some couldn't quite picture it. One younger man put his hand over the phone mouthpiece (which, by the way, doesn't work and never has) and I heard this, muffled: "The pastor has this strange notion that he has to visit everyone's home. Can he come over here?" Apparently his wife said yes.

Even among those who thought visiting was a good thing, it's been awfully hard to get it done. When I was a child, nearly
every mom was home and could get ready for guests. Nowadays no one is home for most of the day, and people don't necessarily want guests. Except perhaps for those in nursing homes, every visit has to be scheduled. You can suggest a dozen times and not find one that works. Some just said, "We'll call you" - which hasn't happened either. Visiting is great in principle. It just doesn't fit into reality of busy families. Which is why with some we settled on meeting somewhere for lunch.

I know a pastor who's an exceptional preacher and leader, who told his large institutional church from the time that he interviewed there that he'd not visit anyone. His role was preaching and administration - he had associates to do the personal work. In fact, his church is so large that he'd probably never get to but a fraction of the people anyway, and he's got plenty of other things to do. Still, I wondered whether it was wise for him to make that announcement.

Do you visit the homes of your church members? How often, and for what purpose? Is it an idea whose time has passed? Or is it still needed? Let's talk about it on our Best Practices Facebook page.

Media

Adventist pastors (or pastors of any faith) aren't supposed to be addicted to pornography. Yet several years ago, Bernie Anderson found himself in this uncomfortable spot. Learn how God took Anderson's recipe for disaster and turned it into a powerful healing ministry in this winner of the 2011 SONscreen Film Festival professional category. Currently Anderson serves as Lead Pastor of the Wasatch Hills Seventh-day Adventist Church in Salt Lake City, UT.

The next Adventist Media Summit presentation is uploaded and ready to view. Brian Solis is globally recognized as one of the most prominent thought leaders and published author in new media. A digital analyst, sociologist, and futurist, Solis has influence the effects of emerging media on the convergence of marketing, communications, and publishing. He is principal at Altimeter Group, a research-based advisory firm, and has led interactive and social programs for Fortune 500 companies, notable celebrities, and Web 2.0 startups. Brian works with business on new media strategies and frameworks to build bridges between companies and customers, employees, and other important stakeholders.

The secret password has been removed from the video about the implosion of the Marion Church. Thanks to Mark Piotrowski for catching the mistake. Marion Seventh-day Adventist church, founded in 1888 has long passed its glory days. Pastor Mar de Oliveira, in trying to bring some life back into the church somehow alienates the key leaders. He is left with as few as eight people attending. Listen to Mar as he tells the story of how the church is beginning to rediscover itself after the church leadership meltdown.

NAD Communication Department is launching a new show entitled Tech Talk. Listen to Pastor Bryant Taylor and Chip Dizard share some of their excitement about the potential that the iPad has for ministry.

Reading for Pastors

Focus on the Family was a major resource early in my ministry, and I appreciated much of what they produced. Through the years my allegiance waned because of Dobson's persistent political drumbeat. Its new president, Jim Daly, has the notion that Focus on the Family should be about families! (Read the whole Christianity Today interview here.)

Christianity Today editor David Neff remembers his Seventh-day Adventist father. Quote: "Fathers and sons often don't see eye to eye.... But on this we agreed: The Christian faith is essentially eschatological."

Video: How to remember names of people you've just met.

Is church membership Biblical? Matt Chandler thinks it is. Quote: "If there is no understanding of local church membership, then who are we to submit to and obey?"

From a stewardship specialist: 11 reasons not to offer online giving. Quote: Reason #1: "You want to frustrate those who no longer use checks or carry cash."

A fantastic piece to share with your church board! Greg Atkinson gives 8 reasons people come once and don't come back. Quote: "One way to assure guests will not return is to have a confusing, long or hard to find process for getting their kids registered and in the right classroom."
The sad end of one of the most successful American ministries: Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral.

- Bankruptcy
- Sale
- Robert Schuller voted off board
- A Roman Catholic Crystal Cathedral?

What will happen if there’s no federal budget agreement by August 3? Monte Sahlin asks. Is your congregation ready to help your people who don’t get full Social Security checks?

Josh McDowell: the internet is destroying Christianity. Quote: “I made the statement off and on for 10-11 years that the abundance of knowledge, the abundance of information, will not lead to certainty; it will lead to pervasive skepticism. And, folks, that’s exactly what has happened. It’s like this. How do you really know, there is so much out there... This abundance [of information] has led to skepticism.” Do you agree?

Recently a church member told me that we shouldn’t organize church because we should let the Spirit lead, even if it leads to 3 or 4 hour services. Apparently the English bishops don’t agree. They want church to be shorter.

**To the Point**

A collection of quotes from the Scottish-American preacher and senate chaplain Peter Marshall:

A different world cannot be built by indifferent people.

Give to us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for - because unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything.

God will not permit any troubles to come upon us, unless He has a specific plan by which great blessing can come out of the difficulty.

If you hug to yourself any resentment against anybody else, you destroy the bridge by which God would come to you.

It is better to fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than to succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail.

Lord, where we are wrong, make us willing to change; where we are right, make us easy to live with.

May we think of freedom, not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to do what is right.

Most of us know perfectly well what we ought to do; our trouble is that we do not want to do it.

One person with a belief is equal to a force of ninety-nine who have only interests.

Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned.

Teach us, O Lord, the disciplines of patience, for to wait is often harder than to work.

The measure of life is not its duration, but its donation.

When we long for life without difficulties, remind us that oaks grow strong in contrary winds and diamonds are made under pressure.

**News, Ideas & Reminders**

- the One project: Seattle // February 13-14. A gathering of Adventists celebrating the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Your call to ministry came from Jesus, your passion for ministry finds its flame in Him, and your strength for ministry comes from Him; so come be refreshed and re-calibrated. For more information, contact info@the1project.org or visit http://www.the1project.org.

- Pacific Press is recommending Steve Wohlberg’s Exposing Harry Potter to coincide with the release of the latest in that franchise. Wohlberg asks, does this kind of entertainment give people a taste for the occult?

- Humor: The message for today is, pull your pants up on your rear end! (And who can disagree?)

- Humor: Was this effective back then?

- Previous resource links:
  - Andrews Study Bible
Upcoming NAD Events

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

Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day. Aug 27, 2011, World Wide. Order a FREE kit from AdventSource to help you plan an event for your church. If the fourth Sabbath in August is not a convenient date for your church to observe Abuse Prevention Emphasis Day, please work with your pastor to find another date. This year's resources will be available on the web site beginning in June. Phone: 800-328-0525. For more information, email: service@adventsource.org.


Men's Ministries Day of Prayer. Sep 3, 2011, North American Division. Across the North American Division churches rally their men to pray for their families and churches. For more information, email: mlabrador@carolinasda.com.


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Focus on the Family refocuses on, well, family – CNN Belief Blog - CNN

Jim Daly, Focus on the Family's new leader, is trying to take the group in a new direction that may concern some evangelicals.
July 11th, 2011
10:56 AM ET

Your church sign photos

Posted by: kimbertee
April 21, 2011

Focus on the Family refocuses on, well, family

By John Blake, CNN
A quick word association test: when I say “evangelical leader,” what comes to mind?

A critic of gay rights? A fierce defender of “family values?” A media-savvy preacher who blurs the lines between religion and politics?

Evangelical heavyweights like Focus on the Family founder James Dobson pioneered that brand of leadership. He and fellow broadcasters like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were big players in church and national politics.

But Christianity Today profiles an emerging evangelical leader who’s offering a different leadership model.

Jim Daly, the newish president of Focus on the Family, is steering the group in a new direction, according to a lengthy profile in the evangelical magazine by Sarah Pulliam Bailey.

Daly is trying to reduce the group’s emphasis on politics. He says he doesn’t want Focus to be driven by a “personality” but by a sense of mission because mission-driven groups have “greater staying power.”

Daly told Christianity Today:

We tend to shut down the ears of people to hear the gospel because they only see you in a political context or as a conservative. Christianity must transcend politics in order to change culture and politics.

Daly’s predecessor, Dobson, may not share that point of view. The pugnacious Focus chief led the group to get involved in culture war issues such as opposing gay marriage and fighting back against the alleged “war on Christmas.”

Dobson, who founded Focus in 1977, once accused President Obama of holding a “fruitcake interpretation of the U.S. Constitution” and of deliberately distorting the Bible.

Dobson resigned as Focus board chairman in 2009. Bailey’s piece said that he was “asked to resign” at a board meeting. (Dobson declined several interview requests through an assistant, Bailey reported).

As the group’s president and chief executive officer, Daly's leadership style is being felt ways big and small. He has relaxed the dress code at the group’s headquarters - men can now go without a tie, and women don’t have to wear dresses, skirts and pantyhose.

He’s also hired Esther Fleece, a 28-year-old, to lead the group’s efforts to connect with the millennial generation on issues related to sex trafficking, poverty, and the environment.

Daly's ultimate goal: Returning the organization to its original focus on marriage and family advice, according to Bailey.

Daly said that one of the reasons he’s so focused on families is because of his own upbringing. He was born to alcoholic parents, entered the foster care system and endured the suicide of his father.

He told Bailey:

I come from a broken childhood. That's what gives me the energy. I don't have a Ph.D. in it, but I guess it's the school of hard knocks.

Some say evangelical leadership is experiencing its own hard knocks. There’s been a lot written about their efforts to connect with a generation of younger evangelicals.

Daly’s apparent strategy to do that apparently involves dialing back political activism. Should other evangelical organizations follow his example? Or is it dangerous for evangelical groups to cede any political ground given the issues at stake today?

posted by: John Blake - CNN Writer

filed under: Barack Obama • Christianity • Church and state • Culture wars • Evangelical • Faith • Gay rights • Politics • Uncategorized
July 13, 2011 at 5:21 pm | Report abuse | Reply

---+TROLL ALERT – don't bother watching this garbage, click the report abuse link to get rid of this TROLL.

July 14, 2011 at 7:23 pm | Report abuse |

2. DiamondSky

Yes, CNN, you have bias against conservatives and Christians. We knew it all along, but be more fair. Don't help your nation collapse more rapidly.

July 13, 2011 at 9:42 am | Report abuse | Reply

3. Erik

Hey, CNN. Why are ultra-liberal comments permitted to be rude, insulting, crude, and inappropriate, but when someone reminds you of the truth in a polite way, you don't even allow the post? It is because CNN is a dishonest servant of the devil, who Jesus referred to as the father of all lies. May God deal with the human race as he sees fit, and in the meantime, people who have their head on straight will not waste their time looking at CNN.

July 12, 2011 at 8:58 pm | Report abuse | Reply

o Rhonda

Chill, Brother. Sometimes you have to reword your comment to get it by the banned words mechanism.

July 12, 2011 at 10:26 pm | Report abuse |

o Reality

The moderators of this blog have set up a secret forbidden word filter which unfortunately not only will delete or put your comment in the dreaded "waiting for moderation" category but also will do the same to words having fragments of these words. For example, "t-it" is in the set but the filter will also pick up words like Hittite, tittle, beats-tude, practi-tioner and const-tution. Then there are words like "an-al" thereby flagging words like an-alysis and "c-um" flagging accu-mulate or doc-u-ment. And there is also "rap-ae", "a-pe" and "gra-pe", "s-ex", and "hom-ose-xual". You would think that the moderators would have corrected this by now considering the number of times this has been commented on but they have not. To be safe, I typically add hyphens in any word that said filter might judge "of-fensive".

• More than one web address might also activate "waiting for moderation". Make sure the web address does not have any forbidden word or fragment.

Sum Dude routinely updates the list of forbidden words/fragments.

Two of the most filtered words are those containing the fragments "t-it" and "c-um". To quickly check your comments for these fragments, click on "Edit" on the Tool Bar and then "Find" on the menu. Add a fragment (without hyphens) one at a time in the "Find" slot and the offending fragment will be highlighted in your comments. Add hyphens and then hit the Post button. And remember more than one full web address will also gain a "Waiting for Moderation".

And said moderators still have not solved the chronological placement of comments once the number of comments gets above about 100. They recently have taken to dividing the comments in batches of 50 or so, for some strange reason. Maybe they did this to solve the chronology problem only to make comment reviews beyond the tedious.

Zeb’s alphabetical listing

• "bad letter combinations / words to avoid if you want to get past the CNN "awaiting moderation" filter: Many, if not most, are buried within other words, so use your imagination.

You can use dashes, spaces, or other characters to modify the "offending" letter combinations.

---

ar-se......as in Car-se, etc.
ba-stard
co-ck.....as in co-ckatiel, co-ckatrice, co-ckleshell, co-ckles, lubco-ck, etc.
co-o......as in rac-o-on, coc-o-on, etc.
cu-m......as in doc-u-ment, accu-mulate, circu-mnavigate, circu-mstances, cu-mbersome, cu-cumber, etc.
cu-nt.....as in Scu-nthorpe, a city in the UK famous for having problems with filters...!
do-uche
ef-fing......as in ef-fing filter
f-w......as in soft-ware, delf-ware, swift-water, etc.
f-u-ck......!
ho-mo......as in ho-mo sapiens or ho-mose-xual, ho-mogenous, etc.
ho-my......as in tho-roy, etc.
jacka-ss......yet "ass" is allowed by itself.....
ja-p......as in j-apanese, ja-pun, j-ape, etc.
ji-sm
ko-oo-ch......as in koo-chie koo..!
nip-ple
pi-s......as in pi-stol, lapi-s, pi-essed, therapi-st, etc.
pr-ick......as in pri-ckling, pri-ckles, etc.
r-r......as in scra-pe, tra-peze, gr-ape, thera-uptic, sara-pe, etc.
s-e-x......as in Es-s-x, s-exual, etc.
sh-@t......but shat is okay – don’t use the @ symbol there.
sh-it
sl-ut
sp-atch
sp-ic.....as in disp-icable, hosp-ice, consp-icuous, susp-icious, sp-icule, sp-ice, etc.
t-i-t......as in const-tution, att-i-tude, ent-tites, alt-tude, beat-tude, etc.
tv-at......as in wristw-watch, nightw-watchman, etc.
va-g......as in extrava-gant, va-gina, va-grant, va-gue, sava-ge, etc.
whoo-......as in who're you kidding / don't forget to put in that apostrophe!
wt-f....also!!!!!!!
-
There are more, some of them considered "racist", so do not assume that this list is complete.

Allowed words / not blocked at all:
anal
anus
ass
boob
crap
damn
demand
execute
hell
kill
masturbation
murder
penis
pubic
raping (ra-pe is not ok)
shat (sh-@t is not ok)
sphincter
teses
testicles

Reality

Focus on the family? Of course but don't complicate said families with the superstitions of religions.

To wit:
Reiterating the obvious:

Recognizing the superstitions, flaws, follies and frauds in the foundations of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Paganism, and Christianity by the "hatters", "bowers", kneelers" and "pew peasants" will quickly converge these religions into some simple rules of life. No koran, bible, clerics, nuns, monks, imams, evangelicals, ayatollahs, rabbis, professors of religion or priests needed or desired.

Ditto for houses of "worthless worship" aka mosques, churches, basilicas, cathedrals, temples or synagogues.

July 13, 2011 at 12:21 am | Report abuse |

4. GodPot

A quick word association test: when I say “evangelical leader,” what comes to mind? A critic of gay rights? A fierce defender of “family values?” A media-savvy preacher who blurs the lines between religion and politics?” – Article

Feb 2011 - founder and senior pastor of Glory House London, Dr Albert Odulele was charged with two counts of sexual assault

2010 – former pastor Vaughn Reeves serving consecutive six-year terms for each of nine fraud counts, in a scheme that cost about 2,900 investors $13.1 million

2010 – complaints were filed against Eddie L. Long by men that stated Mr. Long used his position as the church leader to entice or coerce the men into consensual sexual relationships in exchange for money, travel and goods.

April 13, 2010 – Christian leader George Alan Rekers photographed at Miami International Airport returning from an extended overseas trip with a twenty-year-old "rent boy", or gay male prostitute

2007 – Coy Privette resigned as president of North Carolina’s Christian Action League and from the Board of Directors of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, following revelations on July 19 that he had been charged with six counts of aiding and abetting prostitution

2007 – Earl Paulk founder and head pastor of Chapel Hill Harvester Church in Decatur, Georgia from 1960 until the 1990s. A number of women from the congregation came forward during the 1990s and 2000s, claiming that Paulk had sexual relations with them charges of child molestion were also made.

2006 – Lonnie Latham, the senior pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church and a member of the powerful Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, was arrested for "offering to engage in an act of lewdness" with a male undercover police officer

2006 – Paul Barnes founder and former senior minister of the evangelical church Grace Chapel in Douglas County, Colorado confessed his homosexual activity to the church board, and his resignation was accepted.

2006 – it was alleged that Ted Haggard, pastor of the New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado and was the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, had been regularly visiting a male prostitute who also provided him with methamphetamine

2006 – Kent Hovind, an American Baptist minister and Young Earth creationist, was charged with falsely declaring bankruptcy, making threats against federal officials, filing false complaints, failing to get necessary building permits, and various tax-related charges. He was convicted of 58 federal tax offenses and related charges, for which he is currently serving a ten-year sentence.

2004 – Douglas Goodman, an evangelical preacher and pastor of Victory Christian Centre in London, England, was jailed for three and a half years for the sexual assault of four members of his congregation. Douglas has upon his release resumed full pastoral ministry alongside his wife.

July 12, 2011 at 10:47 am | Report abuse | Reply

Rhonda

The only point GodPot makes here is that no group of people is without offenders. Just because someone wears a particular tag does not mean that they rightly represent all under that name or that they are consistent in living according to the precepts of that group. Such generalization is untrue and even bigoted. If anything, the universal weakness of people to live up to the standards that we choose is evidence for the Bible's concept of sin.

July 12, 2011 at 11:33 am | Report abuse |

Laughing

@ Rhonda,

These aren't just random people though within the greater congregation. These are the leaders of those congregations that are trying to preach the values that they themselves don't possess. I don't ask perfection from people because I know I'm not perfect, so why should these people who have a fair amount of power not only expect people to act like the facade they put on, but actually turn to rage and hate against the very people that the preachers/leaders are a part of.

Doesn't the bible say, "he who is without sin should cast the first stone?"

July 12, 2011 at 12:40 pm | Report abuse |

GodPot

The only point I am making here is that when you say “evangelical leader,” this is what comes to my mind, and likely many others. And rightly so.

July 12, 2011 at 12:43 pm | Report abuse |

donna

LOVE IT!! The best response ever! Yep.

July 12, 2011 at 1:15 pm | Report abuse |

JZ

Now take that many number of cases and divide that by the number of preachers in the U.S., or in the world, and you have a .000001% of preachers who are offenders.

Most pastors are God-fearing, law abiding, and people loving, like mine is.

You see only what you choose to see.

July 12, 2011 at 1:21 pm | Report abuse |

Laughing

@JZ

And how do you know what yours does in the privacy of his own home? These are the cases of people getting caught, it stands to reason there are a lot more out there who are getting away with it.....food for thought.....

July 12, 2011 at 1:23 pm | Report abuse |

GAW

I'm sure that If someone wanted to make a case against Jews or blacks they could create a list like yours as well. Without making a case for any expression of faith It must be admitted that there will always be bad apples in the batch. It grieves me that it was the secular news media that bought their hypocrisy/crimes to light and not the religious
community. btw. I little rule from logic states that "What is true of the part is in most cases not necessarily true of the whole". The problem with word association is that it can lead to misguided stereotypes that helps to feed racism and other misconceptions.

July 12, 2011 at 1:28 pm | Report abuse |

i mean thats a valid point.

I'd say innocent till proven guilty. If you start with hate, you will only be a cynic. If you see people for what they are, you might actually think people can be decent.

I've known my pastor for 10+ years. Why should I give you the benefit of the doubt, and not him?

July 12, 2011 at 1:28 pm | Report abuse |

Valid, I was using yours as an example and I didn't mean to imply that you should immediately suspect him of being false, however to say that those are the only case and so obviously don't represent the whole is also painting a false picture. Keep in mind many of these men also had the same sort of relationship with their parishioners which made it even worse for them when they found out the acts these men were committing. To say that all evangelist preachers are gay and evil is obviously a misnomer but you have to admit that for a community that publically denounces these acts, a bigger portion than you would expect are the people committing these acts in the first place, doesn't that seem a little wonky to you?

July 12, 2011 at 1:35 pm | Report abuse |

Re ... why should these people... actually turn to rage and hate against the very people that they are part of??? The phrase, "metinks thou dost protest too much", comes to mind. It seems like people who are trying to hide something often overcompensate with an over-the-top condemnation the thing that they fear seeing exposed in their own lives. This is a human defense mechanism, not a religion thing.

July 12, 2011 at 6:06 pm | Report abuse |

@Rhonda, By putting a "...", after I say these people completely misses the point. You removed the crux of my argument and then tried to debate with me. I protest too much because people with a lot of power in prestige in a community are inciting hate and violence against the very communities they are a part of? Well then, lock me up! You are right that it's a human defense mechanism, but two things to that, I had religion not been there these people wouldn't have needed to deny, and deny so vehemently, and 2 religion has given them a very tall soapbox in which to channel that self-hate to reach many more people than they probably should be able to. You definitly missed my whole argument if you think my reply was, "these people complain about feelings they have.....and that's religion's fault"

July 13, 2011 at 9:57 am | Report abuse |

GodPot For those bringing out the "bad apple" defense, I wonder how many Islamic leaders you could list that have committed crimes or been charged with aiding terrorism? With a google search you might be able to get a list almost as long as the above one, and yet I rarely hear the "bad apple" defense coming from you when conservatives use a handful of bad Imam's to disparage Islam. Funny how that works...

July 14, 2011 at 1:52 pm | Report abuse |

6. Civiloutside You can always count on Cracked for a bit of perspective...


July 12, 2011 at 10:38 am | Report abuse | Reply

@Civiloutside Hello, my friend.

Nice link. Good read...

Regards,

Peace...

July 12, 2011 at 11:00 am | Report abuse |

GHW Thanks for the link. I guess that most Americans are fed up with both groups. Do we want to be told that we are either A. Going to hell because we don't meet all of the moral and theological standards of Fundamentalists or B. Endure being called a moron, idiot or dummy because we either believe in some sort of deity or entertain the possibility that one might exist.

July 12, 2011 at 11:55 am | Report abuse |

Steve? Good article. I particularly enjoyed the 'communion wafers is PEOPLE' picture.
**Max**

Even here the far left wing bias is so blatantly obvious.

Notice:

A critic of gay rights? A fierce defender of “family values?” A media-savvy preacher who blurs the lines between religion and politics?

and not:

A critic of "gay rights”? A fierce defender of family values? A media-savvy preacher who blurs the lines between religion and politics?

and, again:

The pugnacious Focus chief led the group to get involved in culture war issues such like opposing gay marriage and fighting back against the alleged “war on Christmas.”

and not:

The pugnacious Focus chief led the group to get involved in culture war issues such like opposing "gay marriage" and fighting back against the alleged war on Christmas.

---

**Kathleen**

What a poorly researched article - I’m surprised that the reporter took Daly’s word for it, given that Focus on the Family is known not just for its bigotry but also its dishonesty. This is a classic case of putting lipstick on a pig - Focus on the Family is still actively and aggressively involved in pressuring and lobbying lawmakers to pass laws targeting gay and lesbian Americans for discrimination, along with all their other rightwing efforts to deny women reproductive rights, to force the teaching of Creationism in schools, to oppose anti-bullying programs for kids (because it might protect a gay kid, you know), to denying global warming, to opposing unions, etc. John Blake, do your homework. Investigate what Focus on the Family actually DOES, not just what it says. Look at their Citizenlink political pressure group - and stop writing puff pieces for bigots and hate groups like Focus on the Family.

---

**Lycidas**

Whether you like it or not, they have the right to express their feelings on such topics. If you want to ban selective free speech, then you have a larger problem with the way our nation operates.

---

**herbert juarez**

lycidas: your white robe and hood are back from the cleaners

---

**Lycidas**

[@herbert juarez] How cute, you are trying and failing to make me out to be racist. But...go ahead and imply your lies all you want. Obviously facts are not your strong suit. 😆

---

**Peace2All**

[@herbert juarez]

As much I may agree with @Kathleen's original posting above, I am also in agreement with my friend, @Lycidas here. Regards,

Peace...

---

**herbert juarez**

to lycidas and truth is not your strong point.

---

**Lycidas**

Your biased opinion herbert 😊

---

**herbert juarez**

[@lycidas] maybe biased, but have read many of your posts on a variety of religion stories. note you are drawn to be a self appointed defender of the faith of the far right, perhaps others notice this as well. At the same time you lay claim to being an independent/this and several other misrepresentations lead me to post that truth is not your strong point, perhaps i am not the only biased reader, but hey that and other noted possibilities are things you have to live with aren't they?

---

**Believer**

Blessing and peace to all. It looks like every one might have steered off from the purpose of this article, but there are so many interesting points being made. I think it could be a great change for the company, and I believe all things should be spirit led. I can relate with the Daly, I too grew up in a chaotic family. As a child growing up into an adult, I carried a lot of baggage with me. I struggled to just find guidance/order in my life because I had so much negativity/abuse. I would love to

July 11, 2011 at 8:16 pm | Report abuse | Reply
– herbert juarez
  i don't recall mentioning eve but thanks for putting words in my mouth.don't really need your education or help but hey cheers back and feel free to kiss my related...

July 11, 2011 at 8:23 pm | Report abuse | Q
  The quote infers a single mother of modern humans which is incorrect. That someone might assume your inherent reference to Mitochondrial Eve was the "Eve" of the Genesis myth was a logical deduction.

July 11, 2011 at 11:53 pm | Report abuse | herbert juarez
  to q you too maykiss my...and stuff your egghead logical deduction where the sun don't shine.the ah put a word in my mouth i did not say.and bottom line you don't really know what you are talking about, do you?

July 12, 2011 at 6:02 am | Report abuse |
Peace2All

@herbert juarez

I think you may be missing @ Q's point in reference to your quote. You may want to re-read what both Q and DJ are saying and see where they may have a point about your quote.

Insults, IMHO, aren't necessarily making your assertion appear any stronger here.

Just some suggestions.

Regards,

Peace...

July 12, 2011 at 10:24 am | Report abuse |

herbert juarez

to peace 2 all: you should read the entire posts before running your mouth, the original post stemmed from a atheist guru ragging on another guy and putting words in his mouth as well. insults are my response to the butinski know it alls and as long as your head is that far up your colon why not check yourself for polyps. peace

July 12, 2011 at 6:32 pm | Report abuse |
Refocusing on the Family

Like many evangelical organizations that were built in the past 50 years, Focus on the Family is attempting to thrive—and survive—past its founder.

Sarah Pulliam Bailey | posted 7/01/2011 10:27AM

A chunky silver bracelet flopped around the Ichthus tattoo on Yvette Maher's wrist as she told me about her work at Focus on the Family.

Initially, the senior communications specialist said, she covered up the tattoo, inked right after a change in the company's dress code. The shift meant that men could go without a tie, women didn't have to wear dresses or skirts and pantyhose, and employees could display tattoos. Eventually, the tattoo came out, as did her story: She and her two daughters had gotten the tattoos to show solidarity before an intervention for her two nephews, who were addicted to black tar heroin.

At the time, founder James Dobson was slowly moving out of his leadership role. Less than two weeks after Focus's board meeting where Dobson was asked to resign, his new radio program, Family Talk, was incorporated in California. This raised questions about whether constituents would remain more loyal to Focus on the Family or its dynamic founder.

Even though Jim Daly had taken the reins as president of Focus in 2005, employees said that the new dress code in 2009 was one of the first internal signs that Focus would have a new atmosphere.

"It may not seem like a big deal to a lot of people, but to a lot of the employees, it was like, "Wow that's new,"" says Maher, who sported a choppy, gelled haircut and dress pants. "God bless Jim Daly. He has launched us into the 21st century." She pauses to reconsider. "Or the 19th."

Choosing Loyalties

Daly, the youngest of five children born to alcoholic parents, entered the foster care system after his stepfather walked out during his mother's funeral, a story Daly tells in his 2007 book, Finding Home: An Imperfect Path to Faith and Family. After he and three of his siblings moved into a foster home of 10, his foster father accused Daly of trying to kill him. His biological father, who had left the family when Daly was 5, returned to take the boy from his increasingly mentally ill foster father. After a year of living together, Daly's father fell back into alcohol abuse and committed suicide.

"I come from a broken childhood. That's what gives me the energy. I don't have a Ph.D. in it, but I guess it's the school of hard knocks," Daly says, wearing a striped blue shirt and grey suit but no tie. "I have a driving passion to try to get every child a better home and to be an advocate for that child who has no home."

At 17, after living with his brothers, Daly found his own place—a trailer. He began pursuing his bachelor's degree and an MBA. He married at 25, and he and his wife, Jean, now have two boys, Troy, 10, and Trent, 8. They attend Red Rock Church, which is connected to Andy Stanley's Atlanta-based North Point Community Church. Daly was working at International Paper when he joined Focus in 1989 at one-third his previous six-figure salary at the Fortune 500 company.
Focus has made cuts of its own in the years since Daly became its president and chief executive officer. Last August, Focus slashed its staff to about 700, about half of its peak of 1,400 in 2002. It also reduced its 2010-2011 budget to $105 million after missing the previous year's $137 million income budget by $23 million. And that 2009-2010 budget was already more than 14 percent lower than its 2008-2009 budget of $160 million. (Income actually increased during Daly's first years as president, from about $149 million in 2006 to $152 million in 2008.) Listenership of Focus on the Family's flagship radio program dropped about 5 percent between winter and the following spring in 2010, according to the latest numbers from the Arbitron research firm.

Exactly how much of the financial decline was due to changes at Focus, and how much was due to the recession and other changes in the broader culture, is hard to determine. But there’s little doubt that the loss of the symbiotic relationship between Focus on the Family and Dobson had an effect. Focus benefited from having Dobson at the helm, while the popular author and radio host promoted his materials on his radio show and to the ministry's constituents. For instance, *Bringing Up Boys* brought more than $3 million to the ministry, according to Dobson's 2005 authorized biography, *Family Man*.

Dobson never quite rose to the level of name recognition achieved by Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell. Surveys from different polling groups regularly showed that only about 1 in 3 Americans could identify him (half the percentage that could identify Robertson and Falwell). But Dobson vastly outpolled every other Christian figure, both in name recognition and favorability. Americans who could identify him liked him by a 2-to-1 margin (or nearly 4-to-1, according to Barna Research).

At work, Dobson was more than a celebrity. On his final day at Focus in February 2010, many employees stood in line for four hours to speak with Dobson and his wife. And while most of them carry business cards with a new logo, some still hand out cards that proudly proclaim, "Founded by James C. Dobson, Ph.D."

**A Cultural—Not Political—Moment**

America is still a celebrity culture, especially in its media. And Focus on the Family is still celebrity-friendly. But the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* articles framed in the main lobby are not about a Focus executive. They're all about a quarterback.

Just before Dobson's departure, Daly made one of his first media splashes by buying time for a widely discussed 2010 Super Bowl commercial featuring Heisman Trophy winner Tim Tebow.

For many employees, the move was indicative of the new tone Daly is working to create. Dobson had made headlines mostly for his political involvement. For example, during the 2008 presidential campaign, he said he would not vote for John McCain "under any circumstances," then changed his mind after McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate.

Daly, however, was bringing attention to Focus during a national sporting event, highlighting someone with no direct ties to the ministry, with a fairly noncontroversial message to "celebrate family, celebrate life."

The money for the ad came from an external donation and grew Focus's website traffic by a reported 41 percent in January and February 2010.

**The Facebook Factor**

Many evangelical organizations founded in the past half-century have wrestled with defining themselves after the tenure of their famous entrepreneurial founders: the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Oral Roberts University, Bill Bright's Campus Crusade for Christ, and Falwell's Liberty University, to name a few.

But Focus is not just another famous parachurch ministry experiencing leadership change. It’s also an advice-driven, media-driven ministry in an industry that has seen massive upheaval, with an audience undergoing tremendous cultural shifts.
"People have only so much time and money and hours in a day to listen to the radio," says Dean Merrill, a former publishing executive who worked at Focus from 1989 to 1996. And today's parents "are not nearly as attuned to expert advice from an authority" as parents in previous generations. "They're more likely to jump on Facebook and see, 'What do my friends think?' That's a cultural shift that's not working in [Focus's] favor. Focus has hit a perfect storm here. You walk through the building, and there are whole sections that are ghost towns."

The struggling economy forced the organization to cut programs. Daly has repeatedly stated that Focus cannot tackle every social problem that needs attention or take a stance on every issue. In 2009, the organization sold its Love Won Out conferences on homosexuality to Exodus Ministries. It also stopped publishing three teen magazines, Brio, Brio and Beyond, and Breakaway (which had a combined circulation of 200,000). Focus gave the magazine licenses to Ryan Dobson, saying he outbid the competition because he did not request the subscription fees. But in the year since Ryan joined his father in creating Family Talk, the small footprint that remained of the magazines faded. In April, the websites disappeared altogether.

After moving on from niches like teen magazines, Focus will have to take stock of what it is and what it's trying to accomplish, says Larry Eskridge, associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College. The more connected the generation, the more likely it is to find advice from a mishmash of outlets.

"It raises the question of whether you can ever again build entities this large in such a culture that's so segmented and so individualized for communication and connecting," he says. "I don't think there's any shortage of angst about marriage and child-raising. It'll be interesting to see how they refocus—no pun intended—or how they re-conceive their mission."

All in the Family
Daly, who turns 50 this month, seems to be responding to the increasingly networked world by making the organization itself more cooperative.

Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), says he and Dobson would often speak at the same events, but they never met. Now, he says, there are informal conversations between Focus and the NAE more often than before. Anderson says he has seen a similar shift in interest from other evangelical leaders in partnering with Focus.

"What I'm most hearing now is friendship and a sense of collegiality, that we're on the same page and going the same direction," Anderson says. "There's a sense of transparency, that organizations can relate to Focus, introduce their agenda, and not just adopt an agenda that's already been established."

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, agrees. He notes that Focus on the Family has long had a Hispanic ministry, but has significantly stepped up its efforts to network with leaders in the evangelical Hispanic community.

"The focus of its previous endeavor was translating and disseminating Focus materials in Spanish," says Rodriguez, who has discussed partnerships with Daly. "There was no engagement component."

Still, Focus has not taken a stance on an issue near and dear to many Hispanic evangelicals: immigration. Daly says that the issue is a family issue because families could be separated, but emphasizes that Focus is not an expert on the topic.

Rodriguez admits that's a reality for many evangelical organizations.

"My speculation would be that any evangelical organization that has a predominantly white evangelical donor base risks losing a revenue stream if these organizations take a definitive stance on an issue as polarizing as immigration reform."
Dobson himself was not known for shying away from polarizing political issues. He participated in networks like the Arlington Group (a coalition of politically conservative Christian groups that, notably, he did not found but for which he served as national chairman), and clashed with many evangelical leaders on policy, hiring decisions, and other issues. Famously among them was Wayne Pederson, who resigned as president of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) under pressure in 2002 when Dobson took personally comments Pederson made that Christian broadcasters should focus more on preaching the gospel than on political matters.

"Certainly it hurt deeply to be maligned so publicly," Pederson says. "That was interesting and that was nasty, but you move on." After Pederson became president of the media and health-care ministry HCJB Global in Colorado Springs in 2008, Dobson invited Pederson to lunch, though he did not mention the NRB events. (Through an assistant, Dobson repeatedly declined interview requests for this article.)

Pederson has met with Daly a few times since the transition.

"He wants to take Focus back to the original mission of helping marriages and family, distancing themselves from the more political emphasis that they had under Dr. Dobson," says Pederson, who has spoken with Daly several times. "The stations that carry Focus have noticed that and appreciate the change."

**A Political De-Emphasis**

Daly does not address politics nearly as much as his predecessor, reflecting a return to the organization's original priorities of marriage and family advice. Of the 121 new radio programs in 2010, 55 percent of the programs were on marriage, family, and parenting, 24 percent were on spiritual growth, and 7 percent were on public policy, according to a 2010 internal survey. (Daly began hosting the daily program in March 2010 with Dobson's former co-host, John Fuller, and Juli Slattery, who replaces Dobson as the expert with a Ph.D.)

"We tend to shut down the ears of people to hear the gospel because they only see you in a political context or as a conservative," Daly says. "Christianity must transcend politics in order to change culture and politics."

Many Focus employees acknowledge the organization's shift in tone but not in policy.

For instance, earlier this year, Daly announced on Focus's show that it would sit down with pro-choice organizations to discuss how to decrease the number of abortions. A spokesman declined to say which organizations Focus is talking to, and said Focus would likely use the conversations to encourage the use of ultrasounds.

"The media is having a tough time figuring us out," says Tom Minnery, senior vice president of public policy for CitizenLink, Focus's legally independent political arm. "They say we're changing in tone and say, 'Aha! They're in a Rick Warren or Joel Hunter cubbyhole.' Then we are active in the defense of traditional marriage, which is seen by the media as hateful and homophobic, so they scratch their heads and say, 'Wait, I thought they were changing their tone.'"

In May 2010, the organization rebranded Focus on the Family Action to CitizenLink to downplay the parent organization's political emphasis. And the editorial tone of CitizenLink has shifted in the past few years. For instance, Focus Action published an article just before the 2008 election that suggested that under an Obama administration, terrorists would strike four American cities, a nuclear bomb would hit Israel, and gay marriage would be legal in every state.

CitizenLink clearly displays antipathy for President Obama, but such dire prognostications are rare at Focus.
now, while Dobson continues to make them. "At stake are policies that should concern millions of Americans, including federal funding for abortions, amnesty for illegal aliens, open homosexuality in the military, further assaults on religious liberty, and universal health care legislation amounting to rationing and the denial of medical services for older Americans," Dobson wrote in a Family Talk newsletter. "The possibility of 'death panels' looms before us."

The distinction may be lost on the public, however. Even though Dobson has left Focus, his name remains attached in many ways. For instance, as he endorsed candidates and made predictions about the 2010 midterm elections, media outlets regularly referred to him as founder of Focus on the Family, with no reference to Family Talk.

Meanwhile, Focus could pay a price for its shift in tone, says Nathaniel Klemp, who wrote his Princeton University dissertation, "The Morality of Spin," on the rhetoric of conservative Christian activists and organizations like Focus on the Family.

"As they're making a turn towards a less contentious, less polarizing rhetoric, they may not be able to create the same kind of outrage and passion," says Klemp, now professor of political theory at Pepperdine University. "They'll still be around, but I don't know if being a political player will continue."

The shift may have economic consequences as well. The independent political arm of Focus has encouraged people to donate to the organization. For instance, in his editorial position at Citizen magazine, Tom Hess produced a $300,000 surplus in 2008-2009. (Hess left the organization in 2009 before he filed for divorce. He declined to interview with CT due to the terms of his severance.) But CitizenLink's July webcast included a plea for funds, with hosts noting that they had not previously needed to use the platform for fundraising.

Even non-Christians have noted a shift at Focus. "Friendly atheist" blogger Hemant Mehta wrote about how surprised he was when he attended a Wheaton College event where Daly spoke and did not mention gay marriage. A Focus spokesperson e-mailed Mehta and said he appreciated the feedback. "I wasn't expecting that type of outreach." Still, Mehta says, he and his friends see Focus on the Family as an obstacle when it comes to issues like same-sex marriage.

"I assure you no gay people are saying, 'Focus on the Family is a great organization now that James Dobson has left!'" Mehta says. "The group may have a more affable public face in Jim Daly, but its positions haven't changed, so Daly has a very uphill battle ahead of him if he wants to build bridges to the non-Christian community."

Daly believes the tension between gay rights and religious freedom is one of the biggest cultural issues facing Christians.

"The collision course between religious liberties and same-sex rights is right in front of us," says Daly, who will publish a book next year with Zondervan on Christian engagement in the public square. "The challenge will be, how do we respond, and can we respond in a way that always keeps the souls of those who oppose us at the forefront?"

Focus maintains a presence in Washington, D.C., but it is significantly quieter than other politically active organizations like Family Research Council (which Dobson and Focus launched and, for a time, operated). Focus hired Tim Goeglein, a White House aide under President George W. Bush charged with connecting with conservative leaders. But he gained the most attention by resigning in 2008 after admitting to writing columns that contained plagiarized passages.

"Tim is repentant, he's asked for forgiveness, and he's moved on," says Stuart Shepard, senior director of CitizenLink media. He noted that Focus's employee group includes recovering alcoholics and former prostitutes. "This is not a building of people who have never sinned. We're in the redemption business."
Goeglein's job is not to make headlines, but he meets with movers and shakers in Washington. Few people realize, Shepard says, that Focus's political wing receives only about 5 percent of the overall budget.

**Not your Mother's Focus**

Daly is also expanding into new areas. Between layoffs in 2009, the ministry hired Esther Fleece, an energetic 28-year-old, to spearhead engaging the millennial generation. She reports directly to Daly. CitizenLink, meanwhile, launched Rising Voice at the 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference as an effort to reach young adults on issues related to sex trafficking, poverty, and the environment.

In the past, Focus has engaged in what some call "Christmas Wars," asking consumers to consider whether stores use phrases like "Happy Holidays." Last year, however, Rising Voice asked consumers to consider organic or eco-friendly clothing and fair-trade products.

As this issue of *Christianity Today* goes to press, the ministry is scheduled to highlight the work of Blake Mycoskie, the founder of TOMS, a company that donates shoes to an impoverished child for every pair sold.

"A year ago, they were like, 'Who's that?'," Fleece laughs. Now the company is working to become a TOMS international distributor in Africa. "We're making slow strides here."

In many ways, Focus represents a larger struggle in evangelicalism over political and cultural engagement and the issues it prioritizes.

"Many traditional evangelicals are struggling with, *What does evangelicalism mean?*" says Dale Buss, author of Dobson's biography. "They still care about the same issues and they still agitate politically. But do we keep going back to abortion and gay marriage or be more responsive on issues the millennial generation is interested in, like sex trafficking and other social justice issues?"

Apart from its public policy work, Focus emphasizes the 500 ultrasound machines it's placed in pregnancy centers and the 1,500 families in its adoption program. In June, Greg Smalley, son of marriage author and speaker Gary Smalley, became Focus's executive director of marriage. Marriage and family, Daly says, are what the organization was built to focus on.

Back in his office, Daly and I spoke about the souvenirs from trips to Africa that sit on his office shelves after we talked about other ministries that found success with personality-driven branding, such as Joyce Meyer Ministries and Oral Roberts University.

"Except organizations like World Vision or Compassion," Daly jumped in. "It's interesting—the more orthopraxy, the less personality. The more orthodoxy, the more personality: 'This is what I believe the Bible says.' It is kind of interesting that they tend to fall into those camps."

A plaque with the definition of orthopraxis sits on one of Daly's shelves: "'Right doing,' the complement of orthodoxy." Daly sets the tone and the pace. Focus may have become successful under Dobson, but Daly does not see himself as the driving force behind the ministry.

"I don't think Focus on the Family needs to be personality-driven by anybody," Daly says. "Mission-driven organizations, I think, have greater staying power."

**Related Elsewhere:**

See our sidebar "Family Talk, Family Business" for more on James Dobson's new radio show and "Inside CT:
A Change of Focus" for more on Focus on the Family.

For more on Focus on the Family, visit their website or its family advocacy organization, CitizenLink.

The ministry maintains a profile page for Jim Daly with a detailed testimony, messages, and other media.

Previous Christianity Today coverage of Focus on the Family, Jim Daly, and James Dobson includes:

Dobson Says Goodbye (for Now) | Today is his last broadcast of Focus on the Family. But he’ll be back on the air soon. (February 26, 2010)

James Dobson Resigns from focus on the Family | Dobson will still host the radio show, write a monthly newsletter, and speak on moral issues. (February 27, 2009)

Focus on the Family Action Taps Former Bush Aide who Resigned for Plagiarism | (January 28, 2009)

Focus on the Family Eliminates 202 Jobs | The organization’s budget will drop to $138 million. (November 17, 2008)

An Obama Administration in the Eyes of Focus on the Family Action | (October 24, 2008)
The ‘blessed hope’ was the linchpin of my father’s faith.

A Second-Coming Christian

My father didn’t plan to die. He planned for his death, of course, arranging for a burial plot next to my mother’s and providing in his will for my stepmother. He was provident about such matters, as a good Christian should be.

But he didn’t plan to die. He planned instead to "meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). As he approached his 90th birthday, it seemed like he might indeed live to see the Second Coming. While his friends fought cancer, heart disease, and dementia, his body presented him with only minor challenges. He worked actively on his land and served in his community. As his friends succumbed to their diseases, he shrugged and said, "I plan to live until Jesus comes."

And then he was dead. Suddenly. With no warning.

Fathers and sons often don’t see eye to eye. Dad listened to Rush Limbaugh. I listen to NPR. Dad played Alan Jackson on his stereo. I have Thomas Hampson on my iPod. But on this we agreed: The Christian faith is essentially eschatological.

Jesus came preaching the arrival of God’s reign, the goal of history. When Jesus died and rose again, the door of history swung on its hinges, and the world moved from expectation to fulfillment. The apostles persistently taught that we are to live in the light of the Last Day, with hope and patient forbearance. The church permanently enshrined that apostolic hope in the Nicene Creed: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead."

A good friend of mine—a Jewish rabbi—says that it is part of a parent’s job description to embarrass one’s offspring. It didn’t happen too often, but there were times that my father did his job—such as when we would go to a restaurant and he would ask the wait staff to pray before our meal. (One of my children once told him, "Grandpa, you’re weird, but weird is good.")

I didn’t always like the manifestations of Dad’s religion, but I admired his zeal and cherished his core convictions. He knew that he was saved by grace through faith in Jesus, and that gave him a confidence that easily overflowed in generosity.

Confidence in God meant that he happily spent himself for others. My mother’s decade of dementia demanded round-the-clock devotion. When she was done with the troubles of this world, he went where people needed him, faithfully leading twice-weekly Bible studies at a penitentiary and dispensing canned goods at a food pantry.

When he wasn’t serving, he was welcoming. His retirement home perches on a prime hillside of private land surrounded by national forest, a mecca for birders (including John R. W. Stott, who told me he had visited that locale three times). Dad’s veranda became a place of...
spontaneous welcome for visitors from around the world. In season, you could observe 12 species of hummingbirds while sitting and rocking on that porch.

The day he died, he once again entertained strangers.

On weekends with beautiful weather, the park land adjacent to his home was usually crowded with picnickers, hikers, campers, birders, and nature buffs. April 4 was no exception.

Dad noticed a Mexican American family wandering about. He asked if he could help, and when they said all the picnic spots were taken, he invited them onto his land and showed them where they could safely build a fire. They had driven a long way, and he didn't want them to be disappointed.

Dad had been unduly influenced (in my humble NPR-ish opinion) by talk-show hosts to be suspicious of migrants. In Arizona, the law had turned anyone of Mexican origin into a suspect.

Happily, Dad’s faith was stronger than his prejudices. On his last day, he welcomed a Spanish-speaking family onto his turf. After they had a chance to cook and enjoy their meal, my dad returned—with Bible in hand. He asked if they would want to study the Bible with him. They agreed, and he shared the gospel and the blessed hope.

After he died, I walked his property and let the place he loved speak to me. There, in the dirt, I saw the ashes of a fire: a sign of his final act of hospitality and of his final testimony to his passion for the Second Coming.

A little bit farther up the hill, I saw bloodstains on the ground where he had fallen. A sign of his mortality, a hard truth he resisted acknowledging. He didn't live until the Second Coming, but he lived with a gospel passion till the end.

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Previous "Past Imperfect" columns by David Neff include:

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Dwelling in Heaven’s Suburbs | Creating a culture of resurrection is key to full-orbed ministry. (September 28, 2010)

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Additional Christianity Today articles on eschatology include:

The Case for Christendom | A renewed sense of Christian culture could be the key to younger evangelicals' angst. (August 24, 2009)

Second Coming Ecology | We care for the environment precisely because God will create a new earth. (July 18, 2008)

What Hal Lindsey Taught Me about the Second Coming | At UCLA, amid war protests and police helicopters, teachings on an imminent end made a lot of sense. (October 25, 1999)
experience, and at that time I was not fully out of my “disenchanted with the local church” phase. In all honesty, I wasn’t sure at the time that church membership was biblical. Despite that, the Spirit had made it all too clear that I was going to be pastoring this small church in the suburbs of Dallas. That was one of the many ironies of my life in those days.

Highland Village First Baptist Church was a “seeker-sensitive” church in the Willow Creek mold and had no formal membership process, although they were actively working on one and wanted the new pastor’s input. I had a strong understanding of the church universal but wasn’t well versed—and, as I said, somewhat skeptical —about the church local. We started growing quickly with young and oftentimes disenchanted 20-somethings who usually had no church background, or bad church backgrounds. They liked The Village because we were “different.” This always struck me as strange because we weren’t doing anything but preaching and singing.

In conversations with these men and women I began to hear things like “The church is corrupt; it’s just about money and a pastor’s ego,” or “I love Jesus, it’s the church I have a problem with.” My favorite one was, “When you organize the church it loses its power.” Although something occasionally resonated in me with these comments (along with most of my generation, have authority and commitment issues), I found them confusing since they were being made to me by people who were attending the church where I was the pastor.

Two Questions from Hebrews 13:17

With conflicts already brewing over other doctrines that I viewed as far more central, I wondered if we should let this church membership thing slide and come back to it later. I was preparing at the time to preach through the book of Hebrews and “happened” to be in chapter 13 when verse 17 leapt off the page: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be no advantage to you.”

Two questions occurred to me:

First, if there is no biblical requirement to belong a local church, then which leaders should an individual Christian obey and submit to?

Second, and more personally, who will I as a pastor give an account for?

These two questions started my search for a biblical understanding of the local church, and they began around the ideas of authority and submission.
local church membership, then who are we to submit to and obey? Is it anyone with the title “elder” from any church? Should you as a Christian obey and submit to those at Westboro Baptist? In order to obey Scripture, must you picket soldiers’ funerals, as the pastor of Westboro seems to imply?

Regarding the second question, the Scriptures clearly command an elder body to care for specific people (1 Pet. 5:1-5; also, Acts 20:29-30). Will I as a pastor be held accountable for all the Christians in the Dallas Metroplex? There are many churches in Dallas that I have strong theological and philosophical differences with. Will I give account for what they teach in their small group, how they spend their money, and what they do concerning international missions?

What about Church Discipline?

After considering questions of authority and submission, the second issue that came up in my study of the local church was the biblical teaching on church discipline.

You see it in several places, but none so clearly as 1 Corinthians 5:1-12. In this text Paul confronts the church in Corinth for approving of a man walking in blatant, unrepentant sexual immorality. The Corinthians are celebrating this as God’s grace, but Paul warns them that this type of wickedness shouldn’t make them boast, but rather mourn. He calls them arrogant and tells them to remove this man for the destruction of his flesh and the hopeful salvation of his soul. In verses 11-12, he pulls no punches: “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?”

Church discipline won’t work if local church membership doesn’t exist.

It has been my sad experience that very few churches still practice church discipline, but that’s another article for another day. My question out of this text is simple: How can you kick someone “out” if there isn’t an “in”? If there is no local commitment to a covenant community of faith, then how do you remove someone from that community of faith? Church discipline won’t work if local church membership doesn’t exist.

Lots of Other Evidence for Membership

There are other evidences to support local church membership in the Scriptures.

In Acts 2:37-47, we see that there is a numerical record of those who have professed Christ and been filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 41) and an acknowledgment that the church was tracking the growth (v. 47).

In Acts 6:1-6, we see elections take place in order to address a specific problem and accusation.

In Romans 16:1-16, we see what appears to be an awareness of who is a church member.

In 1 Timothy 5:3-16, we see a clear teaching on how to handle widows in the church and in verses 9-13 we read this:

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

In this text we see criteria for who would or would not qualify for Ephesus’s widow care program. The local church in Ephesus is organized, and they are working out a plan.

We could go on and on here, asking questions about how we could be obedient to the commands of God in 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12 if we aren’t connected to a local covenant community of faith. But to unpack all the possible texts would require longer than I have for this article.

When church is just a place you attend without ever joining, like an ecclesiological buffet, you just might consider whether you’re always leaving whenever your heart begins to be exposed by the Spirit, and the real work is beginning to happen.
God's Plan is That We Would Belong to Local Churches

When you begin to look at these texts it becomes clear that God's plan for his church is that we would belong to a local covenant community of faith. This is for our own protection and maturation, and for the good of others.

If you view church as some sort of ecclesiological buffet, then you severely limit the likelihood of your growing into maturity. Growth into godliness can hurt. For instance as I interact with others in my own local body, my own slothfulness in zeal is exposed, as is my lack of patience, my prayerlessness, and my hesitancy to associate with lowly (Rom. 12:11-16). Yet this interaction also gives me the opportunity to be lovingly confronted by brothers and sisters who are in the trenches with me, as well as a safe place to confess and repent. But when church is just a place you attend without ever joining, like an ecclesiological buffet, you just might consider whether you're always leaving whenever your heart begins to be exposed by the Spirit, and the real work is beginning to happen.

What's the bottom line? Local church membership is a question of biblical obedience, not personal preference.

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11 Reasons to NOT Offer Online Giving

I am often asked to support my recommendations that ministries offer technological solutions to giving. Let’s look at the flipside of the question – what happens when we don’t make it easy for our constituents to contribute financial support?

As we begin the new year in 2011, here are 11 reasons to not offer online giving:

1. **You want to frustrate those who no longer use checks or carry cash.** Many today, especially those under age 30, do not carry or use checks. Nor do they carry much cash. Their financial lives revolve around the use of debit and credit cards. So when offering time comes, they are frustrated, even embarrassed that they are unprepared to participate.

2. **You do not want to link stories of life change to generosity.** After watching a video you’ve uploaded that tells the story of a new life in Christ that occurred as a result of your church’s ministry, why not provide a link to your online giving page? Help your donors connect the dots between their generosity and the impact it is having through your ministry.

3. **You would prefer people give to other non-profits who DO offer online giving.** Just a reminder – there are over 1.2 million charities in the United States alone. If one is led to give and doesn’t find an easy, convenient way to give to your mission, they will find another one that does and make their gift there.

4. **You do not want to tempt your donors to use credit cards.** That’s great! You don’t have to. Several online giving providers offer the option of accepting debit cards without taking credit cards.

5. **You do not want to pay transaction fees** – while there is a small percentage fee (less than 3%) for contributions made from debit and credit cards, those fees are more than covered by the new money you will receive from donors who begin to give to your ministry now that this option is made available to them. Many invite online donors to add 2-3% to their gift to cover the transaction fees.

Know too that electronic funds transfers (EFT) and similar options a donor can select have a small $.25 – $.50 fee, but no percentage fees that credit cards charge.

You will save money in at least a couple of ways, including administrative time saved not having to manually enter gift data or processing checks each week along with occasional insufficient funds charges.

6. **You want people to view giving as if they are paying bills.** People can use online bill pay through their bank so we don’t need to offer online giving. Yes, they can. I pay most of my bills that way each month. But do we really want our people to view giving to God as if they are paying a bill? That truly is not the heart position from which we want our people giving.
7. **You do not want to receive impulse gifts** – often a donor will be led to make a gift on the spur of the moment – perhaps due to a story they’ve read on your website, or a sermon they just heard online. Maybe they just finished their morning devotional and are moved to be generous. With a link on your site to make an online gift, they can do so quickly and easily. Without an online giving option, the urge passes and the gift is lost.

8. **You do not want gifts from Unique visitors to your site** – the webmaster at our church tells me that our website had 12,000 UNIQUE visitors to our site in the first six months of this year. That is an incredible number. Many are accessing our pastor’s sermons weekly. An online giving portal would provide a way for those visitors, people who may never cast a shadow on our physical campus to offer generous support for the ministries of our church.

9. **You do not want to receive larger gift amounts** – Dave Ramsey’s organization reports that users of debit/credit cards at McDonald’s spent 47% more than those using cash. Statistics exist that people typically spend between 18 – 30% more when using a debit/credit card over cash or check. Would not the same trend hold true when giving with a debit card? Consider the Salvation Army – when they began testing electronic payment machines at their kettles in 2008, average donations jumped from $2 to $15. Big surprise…they are rolling out those payment machines in more locations this year.

10. **You are not interested in receiving year-end gifts** – According to Network for Good, 22% of all online giving occurs during the last two days of December! This seems to indicate that tax implications may be a bigger motivation than some believe. In Australia, where the tax year ends on June 30, there is a similar bump in online giving the last few days of June. So if a donor desires to make that last-minute tax-implication gift online and doesn’t find an option on your webpage, she will find another place to make that gift.

11. **You do not need offerings on weekends when you have to cancel services**. We had snow last weekend – did you? The list of cancelled worship services scrolling on the TV screen was really long. With online giving, you can offer a reminder and a link to your people reminding them to remain faithful with their giving even when they physically are unable to get to your campus.

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Rusty Lewis joined the Generis team in 2001, following a fourteen-year career raising money for schools and non-profit youth groups. With experience in education and as vice-president of a $22 million corporation, Rusty’s breadth of experience fuels his calling to serve churches and faith-based non-profits.
Today, I’m flying back from San Diego, CA after doing a secret shopper visit for the Rock Church. As a secret shopper or mystery worshiper of churches around the country, I’ve found there are some reasons that I will tell a church I would not return for a second visit and some may be news to you. Whether I’m working with a church plant of 60 people or a mega-church of over 15,000, some things are universal and should be present regardless of church size. Throughout this post we’ll look at actions and areas every church needs to address.

The Front Door

Before a guest ever steps foot on your church’s physical campus, he or she has probably already checked out your church website. What every church should have clearly visible on their homepage is a section or button for first-time guests. Once clicked on, this should take you to a page that addresses FAQ’s, service times, directions, parking instructions (Is there a side of the building that is better to park on if one has kids?), what to expect (upbeat music and relevant, practical, Biblical preaching in a come as you are atmosphere, etc.), what to wear (Are jeans okay? Are shorts okay?), and encouragement for them to be sure to stop by Guest Central or your church’s Information Booth to pick up a first-time guest packet.

What Stinks?

It’s important that no church ever underestimates the sense of smell. While sight is the strongest sense for short term memory, the sense of smell is the strongest and most vivid for long-term memories. If you’ve ever smelled something and had memories you hadn’t thought of in years come flooding back, that’s your sense of smell in action. Every church has the potential for positive or negative smells. Mold is a bad smell. Coffee is a good smell. Bleach is a bad smell. Citrus is a good smell. Many churches have restrooms that are disgusting and smell like urine. This lack of attention to detail can be costly and discourage many from ever returning. As best you can, try to walk into the lobby or entrance of your church with a new nose.

Park Here

One of Tim Stevens’ three “growth lids” that he thinks every growing church should have someone who is constantly watching is parking. Tim says, “This is why Visitor Parking is so crucial. If it’s difficult for
newcomers to go to your church, they won’t go.” Some would argue that guests want to remain anonymous and don’t want special parking. Of course some want to go unnoticed and will choose to park in regular parking (a minority), but for the rest of newcomers, they are appreciative for a close parking space; it’s a kind gesture in an already intimidating and nerve-racking experience of attending a church for the first time, especially a large one with a huge campus.

This Way Parents

One way to assure guests will not return is to have a confusing, long or hard to find process for getting their kids registered and in the right classroom. Wise churches have signs for first-time guest kids’ check-in and make the process quick and painless. Regular attendees may know to go up to the check-in kiosk and enter their phone number or swipe their card, but guests will be clueless and need a manned station that is clearly marked for guests and have a volunteer walk them through the registration. Then have that person or another helper walk you to your kid’s class explaining what will be going on and how to go about picking their kids back up. If they must have a sticker with corresponding numbers on it to get their kids, this needs to be explained to them. Signage for the kids check-in should start in the entryway of the guest parking. Do not assume people know where to go once they enter the building.

Give It Away

Something subtle, but powerful is a church that has a generous spirit. Chris Hodges at Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, AL is big on this. They have a coffee shop, but they also have a designated area where people can get free coffee and not pay anything. They also give away their message CDs. Too many churches charge for everything and wonder why no one buys CDs of the message. If you want to bless people and create a generous spirit throughout your church, give away free coffee and message CDs (and other surprises throughout the year). Chris Hodges will have ice cream trucks pull up outside the church doors and give away free ice cream to congregants leaving on a hot, summer day.

Security Counts

One issue that is huge to a secret shopper and visiting families is security. If a parent is worried about their child’s safety, they will not enjoy the service and will likely not return. A children’s classroom must be clean, safe and secure. Security also includes the check-out process. If anyone can walk into a classroom and pick up a kid, you’re asking for trouble and will turn off potential newcomers. It’s important that your kids’ volunteers are trained well and know to ask for the parent’s sticker when picking up their kids. This is vital and goes a long way to ensuring a tragedy doesn’t occur and a parent has peace of mind.

The Visible Pastor

Accessibility of the senior pastor is another subtle and powerful statement of a church. Even pastors of the largest churches in America make an intentional and strategic effort to be seen, greeted and hugged after a service. They may have a body guard present for security reasons, but they are available and willing to pray with people that need to speak to their pastor. Some churches have a designated “Guest Central”, like Steve Stroope at Lake Pointe in Rockwall, TX or Brady Body at New Life in Colorado Springs. Some have a “Meet and Greet” like Charles Hill in Utah. Some pastors stand down at the altar and meet and pray with people like Kevin Myers at 12Stone in Atlanta. Some walk around the campus shaking hands like Don Wilson at Christ’s Church of the Valley in Phoenix. Erwin McManus at Mosaic LA has an “After Party”, at which the pastor is present and available to meet with newcomers. This, especially in a large church, goes a long way toward countering the rock star or unavailable pastor stigma that so many guests walk into the church expecting.

Finish Strong

It’s simply not enough for greeters and parking lot attendants to say “Hello” or “Welcome” when one walks
into their church. To go to another level, have your first impressions team stationed at their posts when the service ends to say “Goodbye” or “Have a nice week”. This goes a long way to wrapping a bow around the entire morning experience and will send them off with a lasting positive impression.

Do these 8 things and you’ll see a greater return and higher percentage of second and third-time guests.

*This article originally appeared in Outreach magazine.

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Bankruptcy in the Cathedral

Fri, Oct. 22, 2010 Posted: 10:41 AM EDT

The news that the Crystal Cathedral had filed for bankruptcy protection made for an instant sensation. The church established by Robert Schuller, the very prophet of “Possibility Thinking,” was now forced to seek protection from its creditors, listing $55 million in debt, including a $36 million mortgage.

The Los Angeles Times ran “Cracked Crystal” as a headline. The New York Times reported that the “landmark megachurch” would continue, even as it sought protection from its impatient creditors. From coast to coast, the news traveled fast.

A statement posted on the church’s website dated October 18 was titled, “A New Chapter for the Crystal Cathedral.” It began by stating that recent financial reports “indicate the best cash flow the Ministry has experienced in 10 years.” But, after describing efforts to forestall action by its creditors, the statement read:

As is often the case, negotiations and decisions do not move fast enough to satisfy all parties. A small number of creditors chose to file lawsuits and obtained writs of attachment. Ultimately, the Creditors Committee decided not to extend the moratorium. For these reasons, the Ministry now finds it necessary to seek the protection of a Chapter 11. The Ministry is extremely grateful for the time and effort expended by the Creditors Committee to date, and looks forward to working with them to finalize a payment plan that is fair to all vendors and consistent with our belief as a Ministry and emerge from Chapter 11 as quickly as possible.

Dr. Sheila Schuller Coleman, daughter of founding pastor Robert H. Schuller and the church’s senior pastor, told The New York Times that the church had been unable to cut its budget quickly enough to avert the crisis. The church pledged to continue its worship services and its weekly “Hour of Power” television broadcast, the longest-running religious broadcast in the nation. At the same time, the church has sought to sell unused property and was forced to lay off staff.

Sheila Schuller Coleman told the Los Angeles Times, “Tough times never last, every storm comes to an end. Right now, people need to hear that message more than ever.” She continued, “Everybody is hurting today. We are no exception.” The elder Schuller commented, “Challenging situations are nothing new to our 55-year-old ministry.”

Without doubt, the media impact of the news was guaranteed by the fact that Robert Schuller has been so closely identified with his own version of prosperity theology. How does the ministry built on “Possibility Thinking” declare financial bankruptcy?

Robert H. Schuller founded the Garden Grove Community Church in 1955. Within six years he had led the young church to build a multi-million dollar church facility designed by architect Robert Neutra. In 1981 the church dedicated the famous “Crystal Cathedral,” a massive glass sanctuary designed by Philip Johnson, one of the most famous architects of the twentieth century. The church became familiar to millions of Americans through the broadcasts of the “Hour of Power.”

“Possibility Thinking” was Schuller’s central message. He told his fellow preachers not to worry about repeating themselves in sermons, insisting that every message (he did not like to call his messages “sermons”) must be about the development of a positive mental outlook.

Though ordained in the Reformed Church in America, Schuller minimized historic Christian orthodoxy and stressed instead the message of positive thinking. In his 1982 book, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation, Schuller explicitly replaced the message of salvation from sin with a message of rescue from low self-esteem. In his 2001 autobiography, My Journey, Schuller told of the massive influence of Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale on his thinking and theology. He told of his decision early in his ministry to replace theology with therapy. “I realized that every sermon I preached (whether formally from the pulpit or casually at a coffee shop) should be designed, not to ‘teach’ or ‘convert’ people, but rather to encourage them, to give them a lift. I decided to adopt the spirit, style, strategy, and substance of a ‘therapist’ in the pulpit.”

Dennis Voskuil, a professor of church history at Schuller’s alma mater, Western Theological Seminary, placed Schuller within the context of the New Thought movement. “Robert Schuller is indirectly related to a long line of popular religious leaders who have proclaimed the gospel of this-worldly well-being through positive thinking,” he wrote. “His lineage includes such disparate figures as Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, Ralph Waldo Trine, and Norman Vincent Peale. While there are many ideological branches on this family tree, all of its members have stressed a utilitarian message of self-help through some form of mind-conditioning.”

After detailing Schuller’s distinctive pilgrimage, Voskuil concluded: “By several standards, then, Schuller is an unconventional evangelical. But while he may be unusual, he is by no means unique, for he is merely one of the most prominent of a large and growing group of evangelicals who are promulgating the gospel of success.”
Those words were written almost thirty years ago. How does the “gospel of success” deal with bankruptcy? The filing of bankruptcy papers would be humbling enough for any ministry, but how does the very epicenter of “Possibility Thinking” deal with the stark reality of financial calamity?

In his 1986 book, Your Church Has a Fantastic Future, Schuller provided what he called “A Possibility Thinker’s Guide to a Successful Church.” The book is a manual for a ministry built on pure pragmatism, sensationalistic promotion, a therapeutic message, and a constant and incessant focus on thinking positively.

His message about money was simple: “No church has a money problem; churches only have idea problems,” he asserted.

In an odd and upside-down way, the news of bankruptcy at the Crystal Cathedral makes that point emphatically. The most significant problem at the Crystal Cathedral is not financial, but theological. The issue is not money, but this ministry’s message. The “gospel of success” is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, therapy is no substitute for theology, and “Possibility Thinking” is not the message of the Bible.

It turns out that Robert Schuller offers the best analysis of this crisis with his own words. “No church has a money problem; churches only have idea problems.” The theological crisis in Garden Grove is far more significant than the financial crisis.

Adapted from R. Albert Mohler Jr.’s weblog at www.albertmohler.com. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. For more articles and resources by Dr. Mohler, and for information on The Albert Mohler Program, a daily national radio program broadcast on the Salem Radio Network, go to www.albertmohler.com. For information on The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, go to www.sbts.edu. Send feedback to mail@albertmohler.com. Original Source: www.albertmohler.com.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Christian Post Guest Columnist

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The Crystal Cathedral, seeking a way to resolve its debt woes, will sell its church and 40-acre campus for $46 million to an Orange County developer, according to the federal bankruptcy plan filed Friday.

Greenlaw Partners of Newport Beach will buy the property in Garden Grove, Calif., and plans to build apartments on the land, the Chapter 11 exit plan filed at the federal courthouse in Santa Ana disclosed.

The real estate developer will lease the property back to Crystal Cathedral for $212,000 a month and guarantee exclusive lease rights for 15 years, according to the reorganization plan.

The church administration will have the option of buying back the church, the landmark venue of its "Hour of Power" broadcasts, for $30 million within the next four years.

The bankruptcy plan is awaiting approval. It could be approved as early as late summer.

Crystal Cathedral, whose founder is Robert H. Schuller, has been looking for an exit strategy from its millions of dollars in debt ever since filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection last October.

Only a portion of the 550 creditors listed in the filings were designated as eligible for full repayment. The California megachurch plans to pay back any remaining vendor debt over the next 42 months.

The reorganization plan also revealed that Chief Executive Sheila Schuller Coleman, the founder's daughter, will receive a salary of around $70,000 a year.

A chief financial officer will be hired by the church and receive a salary of no more than $300,000 a year, the filings reported.

"We are pleased that we are able to honor the debt that we have incurred and to honor the creditors who are due their payment. We are thankful to the vendors for their patience and we are so sorry for any pain that they have incurred. To pay them back 100 percent has always been a top priority and we are grateful to God for providing the resources to be able to do just that," said Coleman in a statement ahead of the exit plan filings Thursday.

"The Crystal Cathedral Ministries would like to thank our church members and friends around the world who have given from their hearts to help rebuild a solid foundation from which we can continue our ministry and launch the new vision for the Crystal Cathedral Ministries."

Crystal Cathedral said the exit plan does not affect its current ministries. It will continue its local worship services and community outreach programs as well as its weekly "Hour of Power" broadcast as it has for the past 50 years.

Elena Garcia
Christian Post Reporter
Robert H. Schuller Latest Drama of Crystal Cathedral Mess

Mon, Jul. 04, 2011 Posted: 11:07 PM EDT

Amid reports that Robert H. Schuller, the founder of Crystal Cathedral Ministries, had been voted off the board of directors, a statement from the church Monday said that only his position changed.

“Recently, the board of directors of Crystal Cathedral Ministries voted to change Dr. Schuller’s position from that of a voting board member to the honorary Chairman of the Board Emeritus, a non-voting position,” said the statement released by the church.

The move is apparently aimed at relieving the 84-year-old pastor of administrative burden so that he may have more time for speaking and writing.

“This will free up Dr. Schuller’s time for more speaking engagements and a writing project he has wanted to tackle. He will also continue to speak in the pulpit of the Crystal Cathedral and on the Hour of Power, and meet with staff in creative and vision-casting meetings,” the statement added.

This comes a day after Schuller’s son, Robert A. Schuller, told The Orange County Register that his father was ousted because of his differences with the other board members. The elder Schuller had been pressing to add more members to the board, a move resisted by the other members.

“A majority of that board consists of paid employees of the church and that’s a serious conflict of interest,” Robert A. Schuller added.

He said that in a vote that took place more than a week ago, his mother Arvella, a member of the board, was in the minority who voted against the move to remove her husband.

“They kicked him off. ... I feel bad for him because he’s had to watch his life’s work go down the toilet the last three years,” The Los Angeles quoted the younger Schuller as saying, who was himself ousted by the board in 2008, two years after he had replaced his father as the senior pastor at the Garden Grove megachurch.

The longstanding family dispute has only become more acute in view of financial problems of the church, which last year sought Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization. And this year in May, the church decided to sell the building and 40-acre campus for $46 million to an Orange County developer.

The reins of the church are currently in the hands of two of Schuller’s daughters: Shiela Coleman Schuller and Gretchen Schuller Penner.

Schuller’s eldest daughter, Sheila Coleman, is not a board member but controls the ministry as the executive director of ministries and missions. Her husband, Jim Coleman, is the president of the Crystal Cathedral Ministries. Meanwhile, Gretchen Schuller Penner leads the television ministry.

“Dad will continue to provide leadership for this ministry through me for as long as possible,” said Sheila Coleman in the statement. “I have and will continue to defer to his wisdom and honor him for his unprecedented accomplishments.”

The father and daughter, however, have been known to have differences of opinions. More recently, it was regarding a controversial step by Sheila Coleman, in which she had asked the choir members to sign a “covenant” that they would adhere to a biblical lifestyle and abstain from homosexual behavior. The covenant also strongly emphasized that church leaders and choir members be all Christians. The father reportedly wasn’t very pleased with this and told The Orange County Register that he would have never personally approved it.

In any case, the statement made by the executive director Monday will do little to silence her critics, among whom her niece, Angie Schuller Wyatt, is the most vocal.

In a guest column she had written for The Christian Post after the May decision to sell the church, she said: “This abhorrent behavior conveniently hides the perpetual underlying issue among Crystal Cathedral leadership. The leadership (my aunts to be more specific) do not want to relinquish control even AFTER they have failed on an epic national scale. In any U.S. corporation, the leadership would be REMOVED in the face of bankruptcy.

“As long as the current leadership maintains control, there will be no positive change at the Crystal Cathedral. They’re buying time by hawking one of America’s greatest cathedrals. Their actions will only delay the inevitable. It’s like loaning money to a
gambler."

According to CNN, about her grandfather’s ouster, Wyatt said: “It was surprising, but not completely unexpected,” hinting that there was a pattern in the way, both her grandfather and father, Robert A. Schuller, were voted out.

“They did it behind his back, just like they did to my dad. They conspired behind his back and made this happen,” Schuller Wyatt said. “This board is causing the demise and the destruction of the Crystal Cathedral.”

“They weren’t letting him do anything anyway. Those of us here see it as symbolically awful,” said Pastor James Kok, who has been on staff with Crystal Cathedral Ministries for 28 years. “They had effectively stopped listening to him two or three years ago. It’s symbolic, not functional. He was mostly put on the shelf by his daughters.”

About the leadership style of the sisters, Kok said, “They just do things. They don’t ask anybody.”

Subodh S. Lal
Christian Post Contributor
Crystal Cathedral draws Catholic interest
Published: July 6, 2011 at 4:22 PM

GARDEN GROVE, Calif., July 6 (UPI) -- The Catholic Diocese of Orange said Wednesday it is looking into the possibility of trying to acquire the Crystal Cathedral complex in southern California.

The diocese said in a statement on its Web site Bishop Tod D. Brown has authorized a law firm and other lay advisers to explore whether the church should try to purchase the expansive property in Garden Grove, which is tied up in federal bankruptcy court.

The diocese said in its statement the bishop has followed the bankruptcy proceedings and is concerned about the future of the landmark facilities. It also noted the diocese does not have a cathedral to meet the needs of the 1.2 million Catholics in the county, the 11th largest diocese in the nation.

"While we continue to develop plans for a cathedral in Santa Ana, it is prudent to evaluate the opportunity to engage in the pending auction of this property and to mitigate the chance that it cease to function as a place of worship, if acquired by others," Brown said.

"I have authorized our advisers to contact the appropriate parties in the proceedings to determine a possible course of action. If the Diocese of Orange can prevent the loss of this important Christian ministry and what the Crystal Cathedral has represented to so many for so long -- and meet its own priorities for a new cathedral, we have a duty to at least review the options."

Chapman University, a private Christian college in nearby Orange, submitted a $46 million offer Tuesday. Earlier, Greenlaw Partners, a Newport Beach real estate developer, offered the same amount. The two offers differ in some aspects, including how much they would charge the megachurch to lease back buildings for its use.

The Crystal Cathedral, founded by televangelist Robert H. Schuller, is mired in financial problems compounded by an internal feud concerning control of its operations. Schuller's son, Robert Anthony Schuller, was voted off the board three years ago and just recently claimed his father also has been booted. However, Crystal Cathedral spokesman John Charles has said the elder Schuller remains board chairman emeritus.

Is Your Church Ready for August 3?

It is difficult to predict the complicated politics that surround the current situation in the United States. It is my prayer that our elected leaders will come to their senses and work out a compromise that avoids an economic disaster. But what if they do not? Are there immediate implications for your congregation and ministry? Are you making preparations and coasting along in faith that things will work out?

According to politically neutral sources if there is no compromise that raises the debt ceiling then on August 3 the Social Security checks that are scheduled to go out cannot be more than two-thirds what those senior citizens have usually received each month. Due to other needs that must be covered, such as essential security services and wages for the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is more likely those checks will be half the normal monthly amount.

Most congregations have a number of senior citizens who will not be able to pay their rent in August. All Christian churches will have neighbors who will not be able to pay their rent. "Who is your neighbor?" What will Jesus expect of His followers? What plans are you making to be faithful followers if such an emergency comes about?

Income will drop in almost all congregations. If your congregation has members who are employees of the Federal government, there is a high chance (about one in five) that they will be without paychecks. For those who are faithful tithers, 10 percent of nothing is nothing.

There is a tendency for pastors and local church leaders to look at this has unlikely and a political problem which the church should stay out of. It is my prayer they are right, but is it good stewardship to sail into this with no preparation; no alternative plans just in case?

July 15, 2011 in Current Affairs | Permalink
Atheists and skeptics now have equal access to our children as we have, which is why the number of Christian youth who believe in the fundamentals of Christianity is decreasing and sexual immorality is growing, apologist Josh McDowell said.

“What has changed everything?” asked the apologist from Campus Crusade for Christ International as he spoke on “Unshakable Truth, Relevant Faith” at the Billy Graham Center in Asheville, N.C., Friday evening. His answer was, the Internet.

“The Internet has given atheists, agnostics, skeptics, the people who like to destroy everything that you and I believe, the almost equal access to your kids as your youth pastor and you have... whether you like it or not,” said McDowell, who is author of two books on Christian apologetics, *More than a Carpenter* and *New Evidence that Demands Verdict*.

The belief or worldview, McDowell said, forms values, which in turn drive one’s behavior. The worldview “is where we are falling down the most anywhere in the world.” So what is the prevalent worldview in America today? “There is no truth apart from myself,” that’s what even many young “evangelical, fundamental, born-again Christians” believe, he said.

While 51 percent of evangelical Christians did not believe in absolute truth in an earlier survey, the percentage escalated to 62 in 1994. In 1999, it jumped to 78 percent. “You know what it is now?” asked McDowell. “One of the most staggering statistics in history of the church… 91 percent said there is no absolute truth apart from myself.”

Another study, added McDowell, showed that only six percent of all teenagers in America, including Christians, said there isn’t any truth apart from myself. There was a difference of only five percent between believers and non-believers, he noted. Moreover, less than four percent of evangelical born-again Christians believed the Bible was infallible in every situation, and 63 percent of them believed He is “a” Son of God and not “the” Son of God, he added.

“Now here is the problem,” said McDowell, “going all the way back, when Al Gore invented the Internet [he said jokingly], I made the statement off and on for 10-11 years that the abundance of knowledge, the abundance of information, will not lead to certainty; it will lead to pervasive skepticism. And, folks, that’s exactly what has happened. It’s like this. How do you really know, there is so much out there… This abundance [of information] has led to skepticism. And then the Internet has leveled the playing field [giving equal access to skeptics].”

McDowell, who lives in southern California with his wife Dottie and four children, said atheists, agnostics and skeptics didn’t have access to kids earlier. “If they wrote books, not many people read it. If they gave a talk, not many people went. They would normally get to kids maybe in the last couple of years of the university.” But that has changed now.

Around 15 years ago, the apologist added, when Christian youth ministries were raising money for youth projects, the big phrase was, “If you don’t reach your child by their 18th birthday, you probably won’t reach them.” What is it now? “If you do not reach your child by their 12th birthday, you probably won’t reach them.”

The Internet is weakening Christian witness and “we better wake up to it because it’s just beginning.” McDowell added that his greatest asset, value-wise, used to be his time until a year and a half ago. “My greatest asset now is my focus. There is so much out there just one click away, what am I going to focus on?”

McDowell, who considered himself an agnostic before accepting Christ, warned that the sexual immorality through the Internet was “marginalizing the maturity of the witness of Christ...all over the world.” It’s an “invasive, intruding immorality… that is all just one click away.” He said the majority of questions young people ask him are about sex, mainly “oral sex.”

The majority of all the 2.2 billion people who go to the Internet daily are between 15 to 25 years of age, he said. And there are 4.2 million pornographic sites. “Do you know how many pornographic emails would be circulated just today? 2.5 billion...just one click away.”

The Campus Crusade staff also said around 90 percent of the 16-year-olds, according to the latest statistics, had viewed pornography. And 80 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds had had exposure to hardcore pornography. In a recent study, teenagers were asked if pornography was acceptable, and 67 percent of the men and 59 percent of the women said “yes,” he added. “For 47 percent of Christian families, pornography is a major problem. Association of Divorce Lawyers came out and said that over 50 percent of divorces were directly related to pornography.”

How can this be checked? You can use the content control on a computer, but what about their cellphone, and their friends’ computers? “Folks, you can’t isolate your kids.”
McDowell proposed three ways to deal with the problem. "First, we have to model the truth. If you don’t model what you teach your kids, forget it. If they don’t see it, they won’t believe it… Second, we have to build relationships.” Just as truth without relationship leads to rejection, rules without relationship lead to rebellion, he said. "Kids don’t respond to rules. They respond to rules in the context of a loving, intimate relationship.” And third, he said, we have to use knowledge. “You better arm yourselves to answer your children’s and grandchildren’s questions…no matter what the question is…without being judgmental.” Kids’ greatest defense, he said, was the knowledge of truth.

However, McDowell said, as many as 85 to 90 percent of the evangelical Christian parents in America are not equipped to handle their kids. Christians, he urged, needed to understand the time, quoting 1 Chronicles 12:32: “Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do…”.

Anugrah Kumar
Christian Post Contributor

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One church leader says worship services today are too time consuming, speaking out during an era when discussions about long church services seem to be a touchy subject for many Christians.

The Rev. Jonathan Gledhill, the Bishop of Lichfield, told a group of clergy in a speech in his London diocese this week that church services have become too long, recommending “clergy should aim to keep the time of worship to no more than 50 minutes.”

The bishop continued to say that worship has become “too complicated, leaving people who are not regular churchgoers feeling confused and excluded.”

"One of the reasons for our recent decline in churchgoing is we are not making the occasional worshipper feel welcome," he said.

"You have got to be quite tough to come to some of our services if you are not a regular attender. We're praying for longer and we're singing for longer."

Most religious leaders say Sunday morning church services already have to compete with shopping, lying in bed, or taking the day off, and the idea of spending two hours dedicated to worship is not very appealing in today’s society.

One blog reported that people who are in favor of longer church services frequently use the argument that “we need to give God the time that he deserves. If we can make time for everything else, we can make time for God."

"In my opinion, being in service for 3 hours on Sunday is not a badge of honor. It means that there are a lot of people in your church that waste a lot of time during service,” said Clifton Holmes, a Christian writer for the Gospel Blog.

“There is no point in any of us bashing people for how much or how little time they spend in church on Sunday. If you really want to score points and find favor with God, then focus on how much time you spend with him outside of the walls of your cathedral, worship center or sanctuary.”

Research conducted over the last year by anonymous worshippers for the church website Ship of Fools found some Anglican clergy are preaching for as long as 42 minutes. Throw in songs of praise, fellowship and prayer and the worshipping public spends about two hours in church.

Bishop Gledhill said there had been a tendency to devise "more and more intricate and beautiful services for our own use, forgetting those who might come if we made things simpler for them to start with.”

He said that clergy need to make sure that their sermons are not too long, arguing that people's "attention spans aren't what they used to be."

Attention spans remain a major area of investigation within research for psychology and neuroscience. Medical professionals generally believe that there is an "epidemic-level shortness in the attention spans of American citizens," according to a federally-funded study on improving attention spans of Americans.

Kirk Johnson, a behavioral psychologist at the University of Minnesota who took part in the attention span study, said one explanation for the plummet in American attention spans may be, in part, an increasingly intrusive overabundance of often irrelevant and distracting information.

“From reality television to advertising on mobile phones to giant screaming headline broadsheets on every street corner contributes to the problem,” he said.

In another recent poll conducted by City Data, nearly 20 percent of those surveyed said their church services were timed just right.

Others surveyed for the poll, reveal 50 percent saying they spend about 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes in church.

Recent research shows only 26 percent of the world attend church services.

Last year, the Vatican told Catholic clergy to keep their sermons under eight minutes to cater for people who found it hard to
concentrate for long periods.

According to Christian Research, there is no doubt that the long term downward trend in Church attendance continues as does the increase in average age of Churchgoers.

So far, research shows nothing the Church leaders have done seems to have brought about any change in the decline in church attendance that started in the 50's.

R. Leigh Coleman
Christian Post Reporter
Exposing Harry Potter and Witchcraft

Steve Wohlberg

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The menace behind the magic.

Kids, teenagers, and adults around the world have become fascinated with mysterious energies flowing through witches. In rapidly increasing numbers, young and old are visiting popular witchcraft Web sites, buying spell books, joining covens, mixing potions, and practicing magic.

The best-selling series of children's books ever written is Harry Potter, a tale about a young sorcerer. Most parents view Harry Potter as harmless entertainment, yet others are certain dark spiritual forces lurk beneath those magic-made-fun pages. In this book, Steve Wohlberg offers penetrating insights into this apocalyptic phenomenon as it explores the controversial worlds of Wicca witchcraft, Harry Potter, and the Bible.

Steve Wohlberg

Steve Wohlberg was raised in a Jewish home in the Hollywood Hills of Southern California. As a teenager, he took a sharp turn toward wild living which could easily have ruined his life, but at age 20, he was transformed by God's grace (see his book, "From Hollywood to Heaven," published by Pacific Press).

With B.A. and M.Div. degrees in theology, Steve has now become widely known for his books, tapes, videos, radio programs, and TV appearances. A much-respected speaker on biblical topics, he has held seminars in Russia, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, and throughout the U.S. Steve is also the speaker/director of White Horse Media.

Steve enjoys riding his bike, swimming, backpacking, camping, and taking long walks. While he enjoys being social, sometimes he enjoys simple quiet times away from the crowd. He currently lives in Auberry, California, with his wife, Kristin, and their two-year-old son Seth.