"The real work of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me. To gently push aside and silence the many voices that question my goodness and to trust that I will hear the voice of blessing - that demands real effort."

- Henri J.M. Nouwen, Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World

The state of the dead is one of Seventh-day Adventists' most important contributions to Christian theology, but it can be a dark theme. I used to approach it from the direction of correcting the erroneous doctrine held by others. The way I preach it now gives it a sweeter and more encouraging face.

The common view of death as the doorway to heaven is correct from the point of view of the person who dies. In the experience of the person dying, death is trivial. Blink your eyes closed in this world and blink them open in the next. An instant. A twinkling of an eye. No big deal - for the person who dies. But for those who are left alive, death is a devastating loss, a sometimes decades-long grief.

The Adventist doctrine of death addresses this reality, the pain of those who live.

In the conventional view of death as the doorway to heaven, when someone dies, God delightedly welcomes his child home. Meanwhile, back on earth, humans grieve. In this view, human grief is the cost of divine pleasure. But Adventists see a
deeper truth, one that brings God close to those facing life in a world touched by death. Our grief is, in fact, a reflection of the grief of our Maker. God participates fully with us in the pain of separation. God, too, is grieved. Just as our communion with our beloved has been interrupted, so, too, with God. God no longer hears their voices in prayer and worship. He no longer experiences the joy of cooperating in ministry, of sharing together in the beauty and wonder of Creation. Human grief is a mirror of divine grief. Grief is the cost of love. So God, the greatest lover, bears the sharpest grief. He genuinely keeps company with us in our loss.

When we understand God's grief, our own grief becomes a severe mercy, a piercing testimony to the love of God. Like a mother whose grief is undiminished by time, so God's grief never goes away. It remains a perpetual longing for the reunion of resurrection, God's own reason to hasten the day when love again will be awake and alive. The day when God's grief over the sleep of his children is swallowed up in the joy of eternal morning.

Discuss this topic on our Best Practices Facebook page.

News from NAD Ministerial

NAD Ministerial Team Adds Two New Members!

by Ivan Williams, Director NAD Ministerial

On July 1, 2011 Dave Gemmell and Shawn Boonstra joined the NAD Ministerial team. Dave Gemmell serves as an Associate Ministerial Director transferring from NAD Church Resource Center. He will continue to to discover, develop, and distribute resources for the pastors of the NAD just as he did at CRC. He also serves as a volunteer Associate Pastor for New Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland. He brings a wealth of passion, experience, and creativity to serving pastors for the Lord. Welcome Dave!

Shawn Boonstra will serve as an Associate Ministerial Director. His role at Ministerial is to inspire, train, and equip pastors and churches for evangelism. As the former speaker/director of It Is Written television program, he brings a vast experience of soul winning and evangelistic initiatives to the NAD team. Pray for Shawn as he moves from the sunny beaches of San Diego to the fickle east coast weather of Washington DC!

Media

The Paradise Seventh-day Adventist church has developed a unique series of dramatic sessions that feature stories about Jesus. Through video, drama and creative dialogue, Pastor Ben Maxson, David Vixie and others share the gospel in compelling ways. ChurchApplied traveled to Paradise in February to capture the essence of what took place.

Our apologies. The link was broken in our last issue of Best Practices, but I think we've got it working again. 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

Another film stirring controversy in the Christian community. "Salvation Boulevard" is about a hypocritical megachurch pastor - and Christian groups are suing to prevent its release into theaters.

Can they do that? Judge blocks megachurch pastor from taking up offerings because of conflict between congregational leadership factions.

Three pieces about electronic communication:

- Mobile devices overtaking desktop computer for communicating - are you using it?
A good church web presence checklist
When’s the best time to Twitter or FB?

More evidence that "membership" is increasingly a useless metric: **80% of members are inactive.**

Gay in the church?

- **Hard times for Exodus International, the gay-change ministry.** [A split with Willow Creek is only the latest of a series of rejections.](#) An indication of a change of attitude toward homosexuality in the Christian community?
- **Southern Baptist prez warns that we are in the midst of a moral revolution on homosexuality.**
- **Some United Methodist clergy are defying their denomination’s ban on officiating at gay marriages.**

When is it time to quit your job? **Four signs that it’s time to start looking elsewhere.**

Was Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian assassin, a Christian? Although he self-identified as one, there’s very little evidence that was his motivation. Quote: "He was a flaky extremist who might as well have claimed to be fighting for the honor of Hogwarts as for the cause of Christ," said Philip Jenkins, a Pennsylvania State University professor who studies global religion and politics, describing the suspected Norway attacker. "He did not represent a religious movement. … People should not follow that Christian fundamentalist red herring."

**To the Point**

*These quotes are from mid-century self-help guru [Dale Carnegie]:*

All of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon - instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our windows today.

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain - and most fools do.

If you can't sleep, then get up and do something instead of lying there and worrying. It's the worry that gets you, not the loss of sleep.

It is the way we react to circumstances that determines our feelings.

Many people think that if they were only in some other place, or had some other job, they would be happy. Well, that is doubtful. So get as much happiness out of what you are doing as you can and don’t put off being happy until some future date.

Take a chance! All life is a chance. The man who goes furthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare.

When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bustling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity.

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

**News, Ideas & Reminders**

- **From Monte Sahlin: Last year a new group raised funds** to re-start the publication of *Christian History*, a magazine that was published by *Christianity Today* for decades and went under a couple of years ago. They have rushed out a special issue on "The History of Hell" in response, I think, to the storm kicked up by Rob Bell's book that came out earlier in the spring.

  Right up front it defines "three views of hell," including "conditional immortality or annihilationism." It includes a short article on Seventh-day Adventists on page 23. (All articles are short; the issue is only 32 pages.) In the annotated bibliography it includes Samuele Bacchiochi (noting that his book has a forward by noted Evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock), Jonathan Butler, and L. E. Froom's *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, noting that Clark Pinnock called it "a classic defense of conditionalism." It also includes two books by Edward Fudge that we have made much use of in recent decades, although he is not an Adventist. All in all, it is a very even-handed and clear-headed, concise coverage of a much-controverted issue. It unblinkingly concedes that in recent decades the nontraditional view on this topic has gained much ground among conservative Protestants.

  They have been selling extra copies of back issues, and you can also read the current issue online at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](http://www.christianhistorymagazine.org).
Humor: You've never heard a prayer like this!

Previous resource links:
- Andrews Study Bible
- The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
- iFollow website
- Dissertation on house churches from Milton Adams
- NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
- Clouzet - Standish presentation on creation and evolution
- Back issues of REACH North America News
- Federal Regulation Forces Crib Replacements in Church Nurseries
- Special creation-evolution edition of REACH North America News
- Investigating Faith newsletter - Lee Strobel
- Babylon Rising from IIFW
- Vibrant Life magazine "Forks Over Knives" edition
- Clergy sexual abuse awareness day
- Tony Morgan's free e-book on big churches getting bigger
- Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
- Exposing Harry Potter
- The one Project

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

Upcoming NAD Events

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

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

Pacific Union Ministerial Council. Aug 29, 2011 - Aug 31, 2011, Ontario Convention Center, 2000 E Convention Center Way, Ontario, CA 91764. Be enriched by outstanding preaching, practical workshops, inspirational music and refreshing fellowship with pastors from around the Pacific Union. Phone: 805-413-7254. For more information, email: vivienne@puconline.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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Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
A chain of evangelical Christian mega-churches is attempting to halt the film, *Salvation Boulevard*, which played at Sundance this year and has just been released theatrically.

The subject of the film has the potential to generate some controversy -- it mixes politics and religion. So too does the lawsuit from the *Church of God* -- the plaintiff claims to have copyrighted a design based on the Christian cross symbol and intends to stop it from being shown in the film.

*Salvation Boulevard* sports a stellar cast (Pierce Brosnan, Greg Kinnear, Jennifer Connelly, Marisa Tomei and Ed Harris) and tells the story of a former Deadhead married to a devout wife who discovers their mega-church's pastor has committed a sinful act that will be protected at all costs. The film, produced by *Mandalay Vision*, was snapped up by *IFC/Sony* for $1.5 million after getting some laughs at Sundance this year.

The satire may not be going over too well with the evangelical community.

The Church of God, a Tennessee-based organization that runs a number of mega-churches throughout the United States, has filed a lawsuit against Mandalay, IFC, Sony, and *Comcast* for distributing a feature film that shows a design alleged to be legally protected. Here's the design and how it's being used:

The Church of God says in a lawsuit filed on Thursday in Tennessee federal court that use of the Cross Mark by the defendants constitutes willful and deliberate commercial infringement upon its exclusive rights. The church is asking for an injunction and further monetary damages.

Nobody at the Church was available to take questions whether the lawsuit is intended to punish a violation of the commandment, "Thou Shall Not Steal," or whether intellectual property is being used as a pretense to stop a film that paints mega-churches in a somewhat unflattering light. Since many churches use derivatives of the famous Christian cross symbol, we find it questionable whether a geometrically and historically-common design meets the threshold of "originality" for purposes of valid copyright registration.

The Church is also suing for trademark infringement, unfair competition, and violations of Tennessee's consumer protection act. The matter now goes before a higher authority -- a Tennessee judge --- whose feelings on the intersection between intellectual property and religion may be tough to predict.

E-mail: eriqgardner@yahoo.com

Twitter: @eriqgardner
A Prince George’s County Circuit Court judge granted a temporary restraining order Friday forbidding the Rev. Joel R. Peebles, the pastor at the center of a battle for control over the multi-million-dollar Jericho City of Praise in Landover, from collecting tithes and offerings during church services.

The court order is the first legal action in a court battle that began in October, just days after the death of Peebles’s mother, Apostle Betty Peebles, who co-founded the church and grew it into one of the region’s largest and most influential ministries, with more than 15,000 members and millions in assets.

A group of church employees who claim that in the months before her death Betty Peebles gave them authority to manage the church’s finances had petitioned the court for the restraining order to block Joel Peebles, 41, from handling the money. Joel Peebles, who has been acting as senior pastor of the church since his mother’s death, has countersued, challenging the employees’ authority and the way they have managed the church’s money.

In a two-hour hearing, Judge Dwight Jackson also approved a motion to establish a mediator to help negotiate a resolution and ordered the employees to provide the church’s financial records, which attorneys for Joel Peebles requested five months ago.

“You can’t have drama like that” in church at offering time, Jackson said, admonishing the participants.

The order will be good for 10 days in the interest of “peace and order and maintaining the status quo,” he said.

Afterward, both sides claimed victory.

“I feel like this is a tremendous victory,” said Joel Peebles, the only surviving child of the ministry’s founders. “We have been able to gain transparency in all things. We were negotiating for exactly what was produced in this hearing.”

Isaac Marks, the attorney for the employees, countered that they had been successful in preventing Joel Peebles from collecting money. A church official testified that Jericho collected upwards of $300,000 a month for the first several months of the year.
“They are happy there will not be drama in the church,” Marks said. “They didn’t like drama and don’t want drama. They want the church services to run as they should.”

Jackson’s order follows a dust-up over the offering at the 11 a.m. service two weeks ago, when the church’s security team stepped in when Joel Peebles’s 28-year-old nephew, Joshua, who has sided with the employees, tried to grab an offering basket. As dozens of church members watched in disbelief, Joshua Peebles, the son of Joel Peebles’s late brother, James Peebles Jr., was hauled out of the sanctuary by the security officers.

During Friday’s hearing, Marks showed scenes from a DVD of two church services July 3 that allegedly showed members being “intimidated” by offering collectors for Joel Peebles as they attempted to place their envelopes in the white buckets.

In his lawsuit, Peebles is seeking to have the employee group stripped of any power over the church, claiming that it seized control after his mother’s death without appropriate authority, is not qualified to run the business side of the church and is secretive in the way it spends the church’s money.

The attorneys for both sides met with Jackson in chambers after the hearing. They agreed on retired Circuit Court judge Stephen Platt as the mediator. Marks agreed to submit the financial documents that Joel Peebles requested by July 22, and Jackson set a hearing for Aug. 2, when he is likely to tackle the issue of which group has the legal right to control the church’s finances.

Jackson refused a request by the employees to order Joel Peebles to return $70,000 in offering he collected in recent weeks. During the hearing, Peebles testified that he has deposited the money in an account at PNC Bank and uses it for church-related expenses.

He has pledged that none of the money he collected will be used for legal fees.

After the hearing, Peebles’s attorney, Timothy Maloney, said that he was pleased by the result of the hearing. “Pastor believes the business of the church should be taken out of the courts and put back into the sanctuary,” Maloney said.

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Users abandoning desktop email clients for mobile, study reports

Many of the tasks we’ve traditionally undertaken have been moving over to mobile over the past few years thanks to devices like the iPhone that have shifted our expectations.

Email usage is one of those tasks, with email marketing company Campaign Monitor revealing some interesting patterns from the last two years of data it has collected from — and here’s a sample size for you — over 2 billion recipients.

The percentage of emails opened on a mobile device has risen from just 4% in May 2009 to 20% in May 2011 while desktop client usage has declined by 11%. Webmail has shown the least change over two years, with a 4% decline.

As one might expect, among mobile devices the iPhone is leading the pack with a whopping 71.98% lead. The iPad actually appears next at 14.95% before other smartphones such as Android, which makes up 8.24% of the mobile email use.

One of the points that David Greiner, co-founder of Campaign Monitor, makes is that CSS support on mobile devices is generally far superior to support in desktop clients. If these trends continue and clients with CSS support become the norm we could be moving toward a golden age for email design, like the one we’ve seen on the web this year as HTML5 and CSS3 support has become more widespread.

The advantages available on the web to your church are so vast and inexpensive that churches not taking advantage of them are really missing out. The list below is not comprehensive, but gives a good starting point for your church when thinking about starting or re-developing their web presence.

1. **Don’t overcomplicate your domain name.** - If it’s your churches name, use it, even if it’s long. Most first time visitors or people looking for your church are not going to know the “inside names” or nicknames you have for the church. They are also not going to know your church’s mission or other statement you use.
   - Now there is nothing wrong with purchasing those other names and forwarding them to your main site, but the main URL needs to be your churches name spelled out.

2. **Use caution when hiring a relative, close friend, high school student or church member who says they can do it.** - *Every church has dealt with it, contracting with a member or friend.* While in theory it’s not a big deal, when it comes time to a problem, it becomes a big deal. Don’t give your website development project to someone without experience.
   - *I’ll admit there was a day when we were there.* Scrapping along for and building sub-par websites. What that taught me was that your churches web presence is too important to entrust to someone with no credentials.
   - *But Sue needs a job.* That’s fine, give her benevolence, make her do odd jobs around the church. The church’s website is often the first impression people will get of your church.
   - *Bobby built a site using Website Tonight (or insert another free tool here), he says he’s a web designer.* There are tools that make building a website fairly simple and give some people an over-inflated sense of ability. Just because someone has used one of these tools doesn’t mean they will be able to meet your needs. *Speaking of tools...*

3. **Use free tools sparingly.** - We are all very well aware of the amount of free and inexpensive church web tools that are available. Just remember, like everything, you get what you pay for. Just because it’s free and does the job, doesn’t mean it’s the best solution for you.
   - Often, these “free” tools come with introductory offers, restricted abilities and other issues that will end up being more hassle than you would have had if you’d paid up front. If you must use free tools, use them sparingly and do your homework.

4. **Consider the website an investment** - The website of your church is many times the first impression someone will get of your church. You take pride in your building, make sure the grass is cut before Sunday Morning, take out the trash, clean the windows, and make sure there is no paper in the pews. Why do you neglect what most people will see before that?
- I am shocked at what some churches will spend for buildings and still have a cheap template website. I’m also shocked of churches that have budget struggles that are not taking advantage of the vast potential on the Internet for ministry communication and opportunities.

5. **Utilize your website as a ministry of your church**- I meet with numerous pastors that have told me that they are struggling to see value in their website. When I ask how they utilize the site, its usually the same answer. They put basic info on it and let it sit.  
- Take advantage of the communication opportunity. Link your site to Social Media and utilize it for your church.

6. **Create a Web Desination**- This is a relatively new trend in web development, however it makes great sense. A website is boring, bland, static, and virtually useless unless handled perfectly.

- Why not create a web destination where people can get engaged and connected with your church. Make it a resource, a place to become part of your church community.

If you’re interested or looking at finding some new ideas for your church’s web needs, I’d invite you to check us out. We are here to be sure you are taking advantage of the huge potential available on the web for your ministry. And just so you know, there is no church too small to not need a website!

Josh Henry is a Managing Partner with theChurchBusinessGuys.com. They partner with churches to handle their business operations so the church leaders can focus on ministry. Everything from accounting to design, they have resources designed to meet “Virtaully Everything for Church”
You can contact Josh at josh@thechurchbusinessguys.com check out their website at www.thechurchbusinessguys.com or call 618-283-9542.
Here is a great new infographic from KissMetrics on the science behind great social timing. If you happen blog like me, you’ll probably know the difference between posting any-time and the time when your audience is more likely to consume your content… It can be the difference between getting hundreds of re-tweets and FB likes… or just your standard uptake.

Unfortunately, I don’t have enough time to always post, or even schedule posts, at the most effective times, but this infographic will probably help us all out! (thanks Michael)

On any given day, the best time to tweet is about 5pm, when about 6% of all re-tweets are made. While about 1-2 tweets per hour seems optimal for click through, mid-week or on weekends, at noon or 5-6pm. Meanwhile, Facebook is much more likely to drive shares and CTR on Saturday, around lunchtime, so long as you don’t post more than once.
THE SCIENCE of SOCIAL TIMING

PART 1: Timing & Social Networks

It's important to know when the highest percentage of your audience is eavesdropping on your social networks—so that when you share content you'll get maximum exposure. Use the following data to learn when your audience is most likely to tune in. Data courtesy of Dan Zarella (@danzarella). Note: All of the data below is presented in Eastern Time (EST) unless otherwise noted.

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BY TIME ZONE (U.S.)

The chart below represents the percentage of population by timezone. Take this into account when publishing content.

ALASKA & HAWAII: 1%
PACIFIC: 14%
MOUNTAIN: 4%
CENTRAL: 33%
EASTERN: 48%

KEY TAKEWAYS

50% Nearly 50% of the U.S. population is in the Eastern Time Zone.
80% The Eastern and Central Time Zones combined represent almost 80% of the U.S. population.

TIMING AND TWITTER

PERCENTAGE OF RETWEETS BY HOUR

6%

KEY TAKEAWAY

5PM: The best time to tweet.
Posted by: Aden Hepburn
Churches' Dilemma: 80 Percent of Flock Is Inactive

Sun, Jun. 26, 2011 Posted: 08:24 PM EDT

There is a secret inside many churches. According to researchers Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, most churches – mega-sized and small, black and white – are actually run by 20 percent of the congregation. The other 80 percent, they say, tend to act like spectators: they are minimally involved and attend infrequently or not at all.

A National Congregation Survey shows the Southern Baptist Convention had a membership of 16,160,088 people in 2008, but a yearly attendance rate of 38 percent. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had a membership of 4,542,868 in 2009, but the yearly attendance rate rested at 28 percent.

Though many churches are struggling to boost attendance and participation, Thumma states, pastors and church leaders rarely address the issue.

"So many pastors that I've talked to recognize the problem, don't know what to do about it and then instead of trying to tackle it, they kind of put it aside," described Thumma.

He and Bird traveled to 12 different churches, interviewing congregants to learn why some are involved in church ministry and others are not. Thumma said they found that "almost all congregations were operating below their potential because they (the churches) weren't finding ways to invigorate and keep their own membership interested, involved and committed."

In the book *The Other 80 Percent*, the researchers use their findings to help church leaders find the root of the problem.

Pastors, Thumma says, put too much of their ministries' focus on bringing new people in to the church.

According to a 2010 Barna survey, 46 percent of 600 senior pastors reported that outreach/evangelism is the area their church or ministry would like to develop in 2011. The poll also showed that outreach/evangelism ranked higher in priority than any of the other nine areas.

Those churches that focus primarily on the new people walking through the front door may be leaving the back door wide open, Thumma cautions.

"If you're not thinking about hospitality at the front door as well as at the back door, they (members) will all just flow through, and that's not what God is calling the church to do," he states.

The authors refer to the parable of the good shepherd as an ideal example. The good shepherd is troubled by one stray sheep and pursues that sheep until he is able to bring it back to the 99 members in his fold.

However, the book portrays most pastors as shepherds who dismiss the lost sheep because they think "Not to worry ... I still have ninety-nine." As the number of sheep decreases, the pastors of today try to entice sheep from their neighbor's flock or search after wild rams to enter into their folds rather pursuing their lost lambs.

The book calls on pastors to pay greater attention to the 80 percent of the congregation who are lost and uninvolved. To do that, Thumma recommends pastors refocus their church to offer continued spiritual growth through greater engagement.

Only 28 percent of pastors reported that spiritual growth was an important area of development in 2011 in the Barna poll. Even fewer pastors –19 percent – reported that engagement was an important area for development.

Spiritual engagement, however, becomes more important the longer a congregant remains in the church, Thumma stresses. The top reason given for decreased participation in the last two years is faith has gotten weaker, according to a cited Parish Inventory Survey. Yet very few churches have programs for long-standing members, he says.

"Once you've been at the church for five years, 10 years, 20 years, 40 years, there's hardly any programs aimed at those groups to continually keep them engaged," laments Thumma.

The book recommends churches first correct this error by forming a listening team. The goal of the team is to conduct individual interviews with members to find out how they want and need to be nurtured spiritually.

When authors Thumma and Bird employed this approach to write *The Other 80 Percent*, inactive congregants shared that issues such as no close friendship, and a lack of adult classes led to their decreased role in the church.
Second, churches are urged to create a learning team to uncover the external social and cultural dynamics in their communities hampering members' church involvement. The team may learn that a Sunday morning sports league is keeping church youth and their parents from service. The learning team can also discover new areas for ministry such as a food assistance program to reach a low-income community.

Once both groups have finished collecting information, Thumma says, "Each church needs to contemplate their own context and come up with their own strategy based on what God wants for their congregation."

Thumma says that pastors will not be able to get 100 percent of their congregation involved all the time, but pastors are called to care for every member of their flock, not just the active 20 percent.

Stephanie Samuel
Christian Post Reporter
Willow Creek Splits with Exodus International

*Decision is among a series of departures for ex-gay organization.*

Chris Norton | posted 7/21/2011 09:48AM

Willow Creek Community Church's formal relationship with Exodus International has ended.

While the decision to part ways dates back to 2009, news that the South Barrington megachurch had cut ties with Exodus, the world's largest ministry addressing homosexuality, did not surface until late June.

Scott Vaudrey of the elder response team said in writing that Willow Creek's decision was not intended as a social or political statement, but rather an indication of "a season of reviewing and clarifying some of our affiliations with outside organizations."

Alan Chambers, president of Exodus, disagrees. "The choice to end our partnership is definitely something that shines a light on a disappointing trend within parts of the Christian community," he said, "which is that there are Christians who believe like one another who aren't willing to stand with one another, simply because they're afraid of the backlash people will direct their way if they are seen with somebody who might not be politically correct."

Chambers said he sympathizes with Christian organizations that deal with social, political, and financial backlash, but added, "Biblical truth is unpopular, and when you're supporting unpopular truth, you are unpopular too; which means, some days, getting upwards of 10,000 phone calls and emails, and it can be overwhelming."

Willow Creek had been heavily targeted by the group Soulforce, Chambers said, and he believes that the group's 2008-2009 campaign (which included a meeting with pastor Bill Hybels) led to the disassociation.

Willow Creek had affiliated with Exodus throughout the late 1980s and '90s as a church partner. Exodus referred Chicago-area people to Willow Creek's ministries, including the church's "A Safe Place" and "Someone I Love." Willow Creek, meanwhile, partnered with Exodus for "equipping events" at the church to help Willow Creek leaders and other local pastors work with those experiencing same-sex attraction. Chambers also spoke at Willow Creek events.

Susan DeLay, director of media relations at Willow Creek, said the church's decision to end its relationship with Exodus doesn't mean it has become less welcoming to people with same-sex attraction or more averse to big problems. "It's quite the contrary," she said. "Willow Creek has a whole host of ministries for people dealing with these issues, and we would never intend for them to feel sidelined. All we've changed is how we've gone about inviting them into the church, which is the primary issue here."

Mark Yarhouse, executive director of the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity at Regent University, agrees that the primary issue in the split is not abandonment of the gay community but simply a shift in tone toward gays.

"Churches are realizing that while there is a small contingent of the gay community responding to language like 'freedom from homosexuality' or 'freedom is possible,' the vast majority strongly disagree. They're angry and they believe it's impossible to change, and to hear this is so offensive that they will have nothing to do
with Christians. So I think churches, in response to that vast majority who say, 'We're not interested,' have decided to look at other approaches in an attempt to connect with the gay community on at least some level. That doesn't mean that churches disagree with the language of 'freedom from homosexuality' doctrinally; they've just found that it doesn't work on a social level."

Chambers said his main regret about the split is that it was predicated on a false perception that for Exodus, "freedom from homosexuality" means changing orientation and eventually being in a heterosexual marriage. "In reality, the majority of people we minister to at Exodus are single, and marriage isn't the answer—it's just one part of our ministry."

News of Willow Creek’s break from Exodus arrived just before tensions erupted between TOMS Shoes and Focus on the Family over the organizations' apparently conflicting stances on homosexuality. It is also the latest in a series of public separations from Exodus, which has 240 North American affiliates. Where Grace Abounds and Mastering Life Ministries, both Christian ministries that focus on issues of sexuality, parted ways with Exodus in 2008. New Direction, a Canadian ministry, split with Exodus in 2009 after announcing on its blog that it had "become uncomfortable with some of the messages expressed in a variety of ways through the very diverse Exodus network." Dawson McAllister, a longtime Exodus partner and personal inspiration to Chambers, also announced the separation of his organization from Exodus last year.

On a political level, government charity regulators in New Zealand recently voted to repeal Exodus' tax-exempt status because of inadequate evidence that homosexuality can be cured. The opposition New Democratic Party of Canada petitioned the nation's government to revoke the charity status of ex-gay organizations, including Exodus International, in early June.

Chambers said that these departures are unrelated and may have happened for a variety of reasons: the financial crisis, public backlash, political developments, and the maturation of Exodus as a ministry.

But he does see a thread: "I really do think decisions like this, ultimately, highlight a reticence in the church to stand up for biblical truth, and they're coming at a time when we're going to have to stand up for what we believe. I think there's a way to stand up. We have to find that way."

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- Why Exodus Was Especially Upset by Advice Show's Rejection | Dawson McAllister Association dropped ex-gay group as partner under pressure from Clear Channel. (April 21, 2010)

- An Older, Wiser Ex-Gay Movement | The 30-year-old ministry now offers realistic hope for homosexuals. (September 13, 2007)
Mohler: church facing a ‘moral revolution’ in homosexuality
Posted on July 1, 2011 by cherie

[Ed. Note: As I have written many times in the past, Dr. Mohler is a clear, consistent voice in the national debate about the place of homosexuality within our society, our cities, our churches and our schools. This editorial in today’s Wall Street Journal is no exception. An important read. Cheryl M. Wetzel]

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304584004576416284144069702.html

the Rev. Dr. R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, KY

Posted on July 1, 2011, The Wall Street Journal

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The Christian church is living in the midst of a cultural “moral revolution” on the subject of homosexuality that will test its commitment to the Gospel.

To many onlookers, this seems strange or even tragic. Why can’t Christians just join the revolution?

And make no mistake, it is a moral revolution. As philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah of Princeton University demonstrated in his recent book, “The Honor Code,” moral revolutions generally happen over a long period of time. But this is hardly the case with the shift we’ve witnessed on the question of homosexuality.

“The Christian church has faced no shortage of challenges in its 2,000-year history. But now it’s facing a challenge that is shaking its foundations: homosexuality, ... In less than a single generation, homosexuality has gone from something almost universally understood to be sinful, to something now declared to be the moral equivalent of heterosexuality — and deserving of both legal protection and public encouragement.”

Theo Hobson, a British theologian, has argued that this is not just the waning of a taboo. Instead, it is a moral inversion that has left those holding the old morality now accused of nothing less than “moral deficiency.”

The liberal churches and denominations have an easy way out of this predicament. They simply accommodate themselves to the new moral reality. By now the pattern is clear: These churches debate the issue, with conservatives arguing to retain the older morality and liberals arguing that the church must adapt to the new one. Eventually, the liberals win and the conservatives lose. Next, the denomination ordains openly gay candidates or decides to bless same-sex unions.

This is a route that evangelical Christians committed to the full authority of the Bible cannot take. Since we believe that the Bible is God’s revealed word, we cannot accommodate ourselves to this new morality. We cannot pretend
as if we do not know that the Bible clearly teaches that all homosexual acts are sinful, as is all human sexual behavior outside the covenant of marriage. We believe that God has revealed a pattern for human sexuality that not only points the way to holiness, but to true happiness.

Thus we cannot accept the seductive arguments that the liberal churches so readily adopt. The fact that same-sex marriage is now a legal reality in several states means that we must further stipulate that we are bound by scripture to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman—and nothing else.

We do so knowing that most Americans once shared the same moral assumptions, but that a new world is coming fast. We do not have to read the polls and surveys; all we need to do is to talk to our neighbors or listen to the cultural chatter.

In this most awkward cultural predicament, evangelicals must be excruciatingly clear that we do not speak about the sinfulness of homosexuality as if we have no sin. As a matter of fact, it is precisely because we have come to know ourselves as sinners and of our need for a savior that we have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Our greatest fear is not that homosexuality will be normalized and accepted, but that homosexuals will not come to know of their own need for Christ and the forgiveness of their sins.

This is not a concern that is easily expressed in sound bites. But it is what we truly believe.

It is now abundantly clear that evangelicals have failed in so many ways to meet this challenge. We have often spoken about homosexuality in ways that are crude and simplistic. We have failed to take account of how tenaciously sexuality comes to define us as human beings. We have failed to see the challenge of homosexuality as a Gospel issue. We are the ones, after all, who are supposed to know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only remedy for sin, starting with our own.

We have demonstrated our own form of homophobia—not in the way that activists have used that word, but in the sense that we have been afraid to face this issue where it is most difficult . . . face to face.

My hope is that evangelicals are ready now to take on this challenge in a new and more faithful way. We really have no choice, for we are talking about our own brothers and sisters, our own friends and neighbors, or maybe the young person in the next pew.

There is no escaping the fact that we are living in the midst of a moral revolution. And yet, it is not the world around us that is being tested, so much as the believing church. We are about to find out just how much we believe the Gospel we so eagerly preach.

*Rev. Mohler is the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.*

This entry was posted in gay agenda and tagged gay marriage, the Rev. Dr. Albert Mohler. Bookmark the permalink.
More clergy offer to bless same-sex unions | Church Executive

Posted by admin Latest News Tuesday, July 19th, 2011

From UMNS

By Heather Hahn

During annual conference season, hundreds of United Methodist clergy around the United States expressed their willingness to defy the denomination’s ban on officiating at same-sex unions.

Organizers say at least 900 active and retired United Methodist clergy have signed on to blessing such unions. That’s about 2 percent out of the nearly 44,400 United Methodist clergy in the United States. However, the raw numbers do not convey the full scope of support in some conferences. In Northern Illinois, for example, nearly a third of the conference’s clergy — 212 of 696 — signed the statement.

Longtime church observers say the number of clergy who indicate they are willing to bless same-sex unions regardless of church law is a new turn in what has been a longstanding church debate.

The topic of homosexuality routinely surfaces at annual conference sessions the year before General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body. Since 1972, delegates to the gathering consistently have voted to keep the language identifying the practice of homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

The public stand by the clergy this year came first in the Minnesota Annual (regional) Conference, where 70 clergy signed a statement saying they would “offer the grace of the Church’s blessing to any prepared couple desiring Christian marriage,” including same-sex couples.

Similar statements were signed by clergy in at least four other conferences including the New England, Northern Illinois, Oregon-Idaho and Tennessee conferences.

The unofficial caucus Methodists in New Directions is gathering signatures in the New York Conference for “A Covenant of Conscience” that declares signers will make marriage available “on an equal basis.” That effort has gathered signatures from 150 clergy and 619 lay people so far and is continuing until the group’s marriage initiative officially launches Oct. 17.

“Signed statements like what happened in Minnesota do seem to be a departure from bringing in resolutions seeking change or resolutions urging that everything stay the same,” said the Rev. Robert J. Williams, the chief executive at the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History.

He pointed out that the clergy are saying they will participate in the church version of civil disobedience, or as he called it, “ecclesiastical disobedience.”

What church law says

The Book of Discipline, the denomination’s law book, states: “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

The signers believe the statements take a stand against discrimination and extend ministry to all. To
many others, the statements flout church teaching and the clergy’s ordination vows.

The Rev. Gregory Gross, who helped lead the signing effort in Northern Illinois, said the signers are serving “a higher calling and covenant that we make with our God.”

“We are saying as clergy that we are honoring our ordination vows to be in ministry with all in our congregations,” said Gross, a deacon who manages the HIV-testing and prevention program at a community center in Chicago.

The Rev. John Miles II disagrees. Miles, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Jonesboro, Ark., advocates maintaining the church’s stand.

“If we’re going to be in a connectional system, we have to obey the rules of that system,” Miles said. “If you don’t want to follow the church policy, perhaps you should consider ministering in another denomination.”

Both Gross and Miles will be first-time delegates at General Conference, which will next meet April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Fla.

No one knows what impact the statements will have on next year’s gathering or the church’s long debate over homosexuality.

**Petitions and beyond**

At least 13 conferences in the United States approved resolutions petitioning General Conference to change the language in church law related to homosexuality. Similar petitions failed to gain support in at least three conferences — Arkansas, Nebraska and Virginia.

Many conferences did not address the issue. The United Methodist Church has 59 annual conferences in the United States and 71 outside the country.

The Rev. April Hall Cutting, one of the pastors who collected signatures in the Oregon-Idaho conference, thinks the statements will help make a difference as the church heads toward General Conference.

“I personally believe things won’t change unless there are significant numbers of people voicing the protest,” said Hall Cutting, pastor of Sweet Home (Ore.) United Methodist Church.

“Ordained clergy vow accountability to the laws of the church and are bound by that vow.”–Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Officiating at same-sex unions is a chargeable offense under the Book of Discipline. Clergy convicted in a church court can face a loss of clergy credentials or lesser penalties.

However, church law does not censure those who disagree with church teaching on this matter — only those who actually take actions that violate church law.

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, who leads the Northern Illinois conference, said that the clergy who signed their intent to perform civil unions would find themselves in trouble only if they do the deed.

“Ordained clergy vow accountability to the laws of the church and are bound by that vow,” Jung said in a statement.
The Book of Discipline gives juries in church trials a great deal of discretion in determining penalties. For example, the Rev. Amy DeLong — convicted in June for performing a same-sex union — is undergoing a 20-day suspension and a yearlong process to “restore the broken clergy covenant relationship.”

In the Northern Illinois and Oregon-Idaho conferences, clergy approved nonbinding resolutions that recommend a maximum penalty of 24-hour suspension for clergy convicted of performing same-sex unions.

The Rev. Brian Shimer, pastor of Westside United Methodist Church in Beaverton, Ore., was among the minority of Oregon-Idaho clergy who disagreed with that recommendation.

“If they believe (performing same-sex unions) is prophetic, then they can take the consequences for their prophecy,” Shimer said. “I think the idea of a 24-hour suspension is a mockery of the disciplinary language, and it’s a mockery of who we are as a church.”

Shimer said he worries that church leaders are following the culture instead of trying to shift the culture’s direction.

**Impact of state laws**

United Methodist clergy have publicly expressed their willingness to break church law before, though never on this scale.

As recently as 2008, the California-Nevada Conference approved a measure listing 67 retired United Methodist clergy in northern California who offered to conduct same-gender marriage ceremonies. That year, the California Supreme Court struck down the state’s ban on same-sex marriage. Voters later overturned that decision with Proposition 8, which now is facing challenges in the federal appeals court.

Not one of the 67 has faced a formal complaint that they officiated at a same-sex union, said Cate Monaghan, the spokeswoman for the California-Nevada Conference.

The church debate over homosexuality is likely to become more widespread as more states offer legal recognition of same-sex unions. Massachusetts, Iowa, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York and the District of Columbia have legalized same-sex marriage. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, an additional 10 states offer civil unions or domestic partnerships with at least some state-level spousal rights.

Months before annual conference, Gross of Northern Illinois said he and fellow clergy discussed what they would do when Illinois legalized civil unions on June 1.

Some suggested sending gay and lesbian church members seeking holy unions to an Episcopal priest or a United Church of Christ pastor. Those denominations permit such ceremonies.

“We feel that’s not authentic ministry: How can we send members to other churches when they are United Methodist at heart?” Gross said. “We feel this is also evangelism, reaching out to people who have not been churched or who have left the church.”

Williams, the church historian, said tension between state and church law is nothing new. “For many, many years, clergy weren’t allowed to smoke or drink, and actually up until 1968, they had to sign
pledges that they wouldn’t do it,” he said. “If someone is going to have integrity in the system, you
don’t do it.”

Change seen as unlikely

Even some individuals who would like the church policy to change know they face stiff opposition at
the 2012 General Conference.

The denomination is growing in Africa and the Philippines. It also remains strong in the U.S.
Southeast. Most delegates from those geographic areas traditionally have sought to maintain the
church’s current policy.

The Rev. Rebekah Miles, an ethics professor at Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of
Theology, will be part of Arkansas’ General Conference delegation for a third time. She and her
brother and fellow delegate, the Rev. John Miles II, disagree on the Book of Discipline’s language
regarding homosexuality. However, they both agree it is unlikely to change any time soon.

“With the demographics of the church,” she said, “the votes simply are not there.”

Heather Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Form more
information visit www.umc.org.

News media contact: Heather Hahn, Nashville, Tenn., (615) 742-5470 or
newsdesk@umcom.org.
When It Is Time To Leave Your Job

February 24th, 2011 · 13 Comments

Regardless of how unhappy they are, people are always afraid to move jobs. Though the odds of success may be higher at another company, it is the uncertainty that clouds their judgment.

I have seen candidates wait out an impending lay-off just to keep some glimmer of hope that it may not come. If you work hard enough and become very good at what you do, you should feel comfortable moving to another company. It’s worth the risk, if you make an educated, carefully considered decision.

Below, you will find some signs that it is time to jump ship and pursue a career at another company where you can excel.

Your Job Focuses On All Of Your Weaknesses

There are certain facets of business that some people are not effective at doing for the sole reason that they don’t like doing those things. For me, it’s numbers. Even though I had a minor in accounting, I can’t stand looking at them nor do I waste my time with them.

Good managers take their team and divide tasks according to each person’s strengths. This is all well and good, but the problem is that there are not many good managers.

If your boss is not implementing this sort of strategy and you find yourself waking up in the morning in agony, then it’s time to leave.

Getting A Promotion Seems Years Away

Personally, I don’t like working with large companies nor did I enjoy my short stint in the corporate world before I started my business. The minute a company goes public, they have little loyalty for their employees.

Most firms could care less about the talent that lies within the company. Sadly, some firms refer to people as human capital. Large companies have to produce in 90-day clips.

They have to increase numbers from the last quarter and many of the executives are too busy being stressed by this. The outcome is that they don’t care to spend 10 minutes with you. Corporations are not in the business of making you rich.

If you have this feeling and don’t see much of a future within the firm, leave.

Your Coworkers Are Creating An Atmosphere That Is Not Conducive To Success

My applicants who come from the financial sector have miserable stories about their co-workers. I’ve been told by a plethora of people that there are drugs being used, and the worse part about is that this is the norm; the financial-related applicants tend to describe such illegal and dangerous situations with a blasé attitude.

The people around you can have a tremendous impact on how you behave at work and how complacent you may get, sensational stories about office drug use aside. If the attitude is one that gives the message of, “I don’t feel like doing it,” take the risk, leave the firm and find a company that has ambitious people within.

Incoming Business Is Screeeching To A Halt

The moment the phones die, your career begins to deteriorate. Cold-call all you want, but it’s still not going to do any good. The determination as to whether to stay at your company comes down to incoming business. If the phones go silent, don’t think that you have this undying loyalty to the business owner.

It’s business. Leave and get a new job at a better company.
Is 'Christian fundamentalist' label correct for Norway terror suspect?

By Dan Gilgoff, CNN.com Religion Editor

(CNN) – Given initial suspicions that Friday's bombing and mass shooting in Norway were carried out by Islamic militants linked to al Qaeda, the way police ended up describing the suspect behind the attacks came as a big surprise even to many security experts: The alleged attacker was called a "Christian fundamentalist."

But experts on European politics and religion say that the Christian fundamentalist label could overstate the extent to which the suspect, Anders Behring Breivik - who has told authorities that he carried out the attacks - was motivated by religion, and the extent to which he is tied to a broader religious movement.

"It is true that he sees himself as a crusader and some sort of Templar knight," said Marcus Buck, a political science professor at Norway's University of Tromso, referring to an online manifesto that Breivik appears to have authored and which draws inspiration from medieval Christian crusaders.

"But he doesn't seem to have any insight into Christian theology or any ideas of how the Christian faith should play any role in Norwegian or European society," Buck wrote in an email message. "His links to Christianity are much more based on being against Islam and what he perceives of as 'cultural Marxism.'"

From what the 1,500-page manifesto says, Breivik appears to have been motivated more by an extreme loathing of European multiculturalism that has accompanied rapid immigration from the developing world, and of the European Union's growing powers, than by Christianity.

"My impression is that Christianity is used more as a vehicle to unjustly assign some religious moral weight," to his political views, said Anders Romarheim, a fellow at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies. "It is a signifier of Western culture and values, which is what they pretend to defend."

"I would say they are more anti-Islam than pro-Christian," Romarheim said in reference to what appear to be Breivik's views.

The manifesto is religion-obsessed in that it rants for long stretches against Muslims and their growing presence in Europe.

It calls for a European civil war to overthrow governments, end multiculturalism and execute "cultural Marxists." The manifesto includes a link to a video asserting that the majority of Europe's population will be Muslim by 2050 "unless we manage to defeat the ruling Multiculturalist Alliance."
The author of the document identifies himself as Breivik, but CNN could not independently verify that he wrote the document, and Norwegian authorities would not confirm that the man in their custody wrote the manifesto, saying it was part of their investigation.

Opposition to booming Muslim immigration to Europe, exacerbated by high birth rates in the Muslim community, has become a mainstay of Europe's burgeoning far-right, helping right-wing parties gain seats in parliaments across the continent.

But those right-wing movements are mostly secular. Europe's hard right does not have deep ties to Christianity in the way that the United States' conservative movement is entwined with evangelical Christianity and other theologically conservative religious movements.

Recently adopted European laws aimed at curbing Islam's public visibility, including France's new burqa ban and Switzerland ban on minarets - towers that a part of mosques - were secular causes, not ones championed by Christian interests. Many Christian groups oppose such bans.

"The bulk of the anti-Muslim sentiment is not against Muslims as such, but is a secular rejection of how some Muslims allegedly want to place Islam at the center of society," Buck said. "It is more anti-religious than anti-Muslim."

Breivik's apparent manifesto, by contrast, cites biblical verses to justify violence for political ends.

"Clearly, this is not a pacifist God we serve," it says. "It's God who teaches our hands to war and our fingers to fight. Over and over again throughout the Old Testament, His people are commanded to fight with the best weapons available to them at that time."

"The biggest threat to Europe is the cultural Marxist/multiculturalist political doctrine of 'extreme egalitarian emotionalism,'" the manifesto goes on. "This type of political stance involves destroying Christendom, the Church, our European cultures and identities and opening up our borders to Islamic colonization."

The video that's linked to in the manifesto also includes some religious language: "Celebrate us, the martyrs of the conservative revolution, for we will soon dine in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Experts on religion in Europe said those faith-infused views are likely peculiar to the suspected gunman and do not appear reflect wider religious movements, even as they echoes grievances of Europe's right-wing political groups.

"He was a flaky extremist who might as well have claimed to be fighting for the honor of Hogwarts as for the cause of Christ," said Philip Jenkins, a Pennsylvania State University professor who studies global religion and politics, describing the suspected Norway attacker. "He did not represent a religious movement. ... People should not follow that Christian fundamentalist red herring."
At the same time, Breivik told investigators during interviews that he belongs to an international order, The Knights Templar, according to Norwegian newspaper VG, which cited unnamed sources.

He described the organization as an armed Christian order, fighting to rid the West of Islamic suppression, the newspaper said. He also told investigators he had been in contact with like-minded individuals and said he counts himself as a representative of this order, it said.

For many in Norway, the potential implications of the suspected killer's religion are still settling in.

"This is the first time we've heard of Christianity/religion as a driving force behind right-wing extremism," Buck said. "The mainstream right-wing movements in the Nordic countries (very small and disorganized groups in Norway) would generally point to the Old Norse beliefs, if anything."

"Norwegian, Nordic and European society," he said, "were totally unprepared for a violent attack from someone who calls himself Christian."

Dan Gilgoff - CNN Belief Blog Co-Editor