Events

The Night Owl Café returns to the Adventist Ministries Convention

The Night Owl Café was created at our last AMC to give Best Practices readers a chance to dialog in a relaxed evening setting about important topics with important people. Here's our schedule for next week:

Sunday, January 15 - 9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.
Roger Hernandez, Hispanic ministries director, converses with us about why Hispanic churches are growing, what the rest of us can learn from them, and what Hispanic churches will have to do as they move into their second and third post-immigration generations.

Monday, January 16 - 7:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
Our NAD president Elder Dan Jackson has agreed to meet with us for a conversation about being a North American pastor in a world church. Dan writes, “Pastors are the life-line of the church where it is at it's most vital and vulnerable. I'd be honored to have a dialogue with them.” If you've got questions you'd like to ask Dan, be there!

Tuesday, January 17 - 8:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
Susan Nienaber from the Alban Institute wants to converse with us about the dynamics of conflict in SDA churches, in preparation for her keynote address on Wednesday morning.

Location:
Stirling Hall, Terrace Salon G-H

For more information about the Night Owl Café, email bestpractices@ameritech.net
What Does Membership Mean?
Part 1: Doing a Membership Audit.
by Monte Sahlin

The Christian church didn’t adopt the idea of membership until the Reformation. For Adventists, it’s embedded in the “free church” part of our heritage, as illustrated in the New England town hall meeting where the emphasis is on self-governing institutions instead of institutions run by the powerful few.

Yet membership generally is in decline in contemporary society. The book Bowling Alone documented that bowling leagues and all the traditional civic groups in America have been hard hit. Starting with the Baby Boom generation, individualism has changed the social structures of churches, organizations and the workplace. Note the growth in the number of couples living together outside of marriage: relationships with social structure of any kind are not what people prefer.

Because we Adventists see “kingly power” as something that God prohibits, we must regard membership as essential to maintaining a self-governing organization. Ours is not to be merely a consumer religion - a store where we go to obtain "religious groceries," supplies of inspiration and spirituality. It is a community of disciples charged with a mission to impact the world in which they live, an expeditionary force with assigned goals in an alien world. Its capacity to sustain and govern itself is absolutely essential. Membership is foundational to that capacity. So how do we understand church membership in a non-joining world?

Begin with an audit of your church membership. Here’s how its done:

Go through the membership list name by name and code each individual in one of the following categories: (1) People who attend at least once a month most of the year. (2) People who do not attend because of disability, age or they are away at school or in military service, etc. (3) People who have moved out of the area but not yet transferred their membership. (4) The leftovers, who live in the area but attend less than once a month, perhaps not at all.

Over the last couple of decades my graduate students and I have done this with more than 1,000 local churches and usually about 25% to 35% of the names fall into the 4th category and can be called "inactive." I do not see any evidence that this percentage is increasing across the board, although many people express that opinion.

You’ll also find that about 5-10% of the regular attenders have not joined the local church. Some of these are spouses of Adventists who have never been baptized, some are people preparing for baptism. And there are usually a number of baptized members of the denomination who attend regularly, turn in tithe and offerings, and even hold church office but have not transferred their membership.

People express various reasons for not transferring their membership. Some seek to provide support for a small church in a rural area that they are afraid will be closed if the membership dwindles too far. Others find no spiritual value the "bureaucracy" of membership transfers. Younger adults may see "membership" as an out-dated practice. That's why many of the more contemporary Evangelical churches ignore membership as a category and keep records simply of participation—people who attend, people who join activity groups, people who register for programs, etc. They often have much more up-to-date and useful records than the average Adventist congregation.

Discuss this article on our Facebook page.

Next issue: Part 2: four metrics for improved congregational analysis

More Best Ideas

What Idea is God Blessing in Your Church?

That question was asked to pastors attending the Southwest Union Conference Pastoral Convention in Ft. Worth Texas on January10-12, 2012. Dozens of outstanding answers were uploaded to the Best Ideas in Ministry video on demand channel.

Pastor Mavis Rojas has energized the evangelistic potential of inspiring them to ‘jam in the streets’ and then inviting the growing crowd of kids to her apartment where she gives them Bible studies and invites them to of the month for Youth Sabbath.

Smaller churches may not have all church but Pastor Travis Patterson churches each could share their both churches would win. He pulling leaders out of both churches they got to know each other in a enough trust developed so that they within the district.

her youth group by crowd of kids to her church on the 4th Sabbath of the resources of a large discovered that if district own distinct resources started the process by for a mission trip. Once neutral location there was could pool resources
Pastor [Gregory Stinson](#) divided his congregation into four parts: The North Wind, The South Wind, The East Wind, and the West Wind, with each part responsible for one quadrant of the city. Members then could focus on reaching the needs of a specific part of the community.

Pastor [Ricardo Viloria](#) has discovered tremendous ministry opportunities in performing funerals for community families. At the funeral church members bring food for a meal after the funeral. He then invites the grieving families back to the congregation for a special prayer meeting at the church where the congregation prays for the grieving families.

**Reading for Pastors**

What is the "halo effect" of churches worth economically to a community? A UPenn professor studied twelve Philly congregations and gave them a community value of $50,577,098 in annual economic benefits!

This piece from Barna on what people experience when they go to church contains some interesting conclusions. One surprise: in spite of all of the negativity you'll hear about the church experience, "Connecting with God is perhaps the most important outcome facilitated by churches. Most people (66%) feel they have had 'a real and personal connection' with God while attending church."

[Rob Bell leaves Mars Hill](#) and his co-pastor reflects on his departure.

Be careful what you tweet! [Could social media get you or your church sued?](#) (See below, [downloadable social media safety policy](#)).

People who are generous in church are generous elsewhere. According to this study, churches aren't in competition with charities, but both tend to draw from the same sources.

So, what if you're preacher isn't a superstar? Quote: "When hearing lackluster (even if biblical) preaching, immature worshipers will typically not listen to the message because they wish the messenger was more exciting. Conversely, mature worshipers eagerly receive the truth as it is proclaimed, even if it sounds like the preacher is reading a phone book."

What do the millennials think of church? [Interesting book review/summary here.](#) Quote: "I did attend church for several months about three years ago. But the more I got to know people in the church, the more I heard about infighting and fussing. That made me notice how negative church people and preachers are in general. You know, it seems like every time I read about a Christian leader, he's telling people what he's against."

Demography:

- Census says America more suburban, more diverse, and people are moving for opportunity rather than sun - which is good new for some of us in northern climes.
- (See below: [how to use the American Fact Finder](#))
- [Number of US Muslims will double](#)
- (See below: [how to map your community's religious demographic online](#))

**New Book in the iFollow Discipleship Series**

**A Deeper Look at Your Church**

*Discipleship Resource for New Members*

After an evangelistic series, and sometimes baptism, new members may feel at a loss, unsure of where they fit in their new church family. The purpose of this book is to explore what it means to be an Adventist, how the church is organized, its core values, and more. This information seeks to help new members move forward with confidence and courage. Most of all, this book seeks to center believers in a vital friendship with God. [A Deeper Look at Your Church](#), Paperback. Copyright 2010. 221 pages.

iFollow is the first comprehensive discipleship series created by the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Each iFollow book features a clear statement of purpose, flexible content you can tailor to your situation, and activities you can use.
To the Point

All quotes from evangelical writer/scholar A.W. Tozer.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which he must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves.

One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team.

It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.

Rules for Self Discovery:
1. What we want most;
2. What we think about most;
3. How we use our money;
4. What we do with our leisure time;
5. The company we enjoy;
6. Who and what we admire;
7. What we laugh at.

The yearning to know what cannot be known, to comprehend the incomprehensible, to touch and taste the unapproachable, arises from the image of God in the nature of man. Deep calleth unto deep, and though polluted and landlocked by the mighty disaster theologians call the Fall, the soul senses its origin and longs to return to its source.

Sometimes I go to God and say, "God, if Thou dost never answer another prayer while I live on this earth, I will still worship Thee as long as I live and in the ages to come for what Thou hast done already. God's already put me so far in debt that if I were to live one million millenniums I couldn't pay Him for what He's done for me."

We can afford to follow Him to failure. Faith dares to fail. The resurrection and the judgment will demonstrate before all worlds who won and who lost. We can wait.

Philosophy and science have not always been friendly toward the idea of God, the reason being they are dedicated to the task of accounting for things and are impatient with anything that refuses to give an account of itself. The philosopher and the scientist will admit that there is much that they do not know; but that is quite another thing from admitting there is something which they can never know, which indeed they have no technique for discovering.

News, Ideas & Reminders

- Humor: If you love Facebook, you need this.
- Check out "Using Social Media Safely," a downloadable training resource on ChurchSafety.com that includes help in forming a use policy for church staff who Facebook and Tweet.
- Humor: A t-shirt for after some of those rough board meetings.
- Find out anything demographic about your community at the American Fact Finder. (Helpful video tutorial here.)
- From the Association of Religious Data Archives: map your community's religious demographics.

Previous resource links:
- Andrews Study Bible
- The Hope of Survivors, ministry to victims of pastoral sexual abuse
- iFollow website
- NAD NewsPoints (formerly Friday Fax): by email, or on a web page.
- Back issues of REACH North America News
- Adventist Parenting e-newsletter
- The one Project
- Facts with Hope, evidence-based health messages for bulletins
- NAD Volunteer Screening Guidelines and Screening Form
- InMinistry fall classes in NAD
- The Andrews Study Bible is now digital
- Adventist Family Ministries
- REACH North American Resources Guide
Adventist Meetings Speaker Registry
- World Life Expectancy website
- The ONE project, Seattle
- Archive of Best Practices newsletters
- NAD Calendar of Special Days
- Facebook page for Adventist songwriters, poets and artists
- Facebook page for pastors’ spouses

Got a tool, resource, site, article 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.

NAD Pre-Convention Prayer Summit. Jan 12, 2012 - Jan 15, 2012, Innisbrook Resort & Golf Club, 26750 U. S. Highway 19 North, Innisbrook, FL 34684. "Revolution on Our Knees". Featured Speakers: Dan Jackson, President, North American Division; José Rojas; Director, Volunteer Ministries, North American Division; Jonathon Henderson, Pastor, Northern California Conference; Jim Moon, Pastor, Rocky Mountain Conference; Pavel Goia, Pastor, Kentucky-Tennessee Conference. For more information, email: ruthie@earthlink.net

NAD Adventist Ministries Convention. Jan 15, 2012 - Jan 18, 2012, Innisbrook Resort & Golf Club, 36750 US Highway 19 N, Palm Harbor, FL 34684. The NAD Adventist Ministries Convention (AMC) features keynote speakers, guest musicians, ministry advisories and a menu of training seminars for Seventh-day Adventist Ministry facilitators and leaders throughout North America. It is an opportunity for ministry professionals to re-think, re-evaluate, re-tool, and re-discover. Phone: 301-680-6429. For more information, email: chariolett.johnson@nad.adventist.org

Religious Liberty Week. Jan 15, 2012 - Jan 21, 2012, North American Division. Religious Liberty offering will be taken January 21, 2011. Resource materials are being mailed to each pastor and religious liberty leader. For more information, email: latha.bithini@nad.adventist.org

NAD Health Summit Orlando 2012. Jan 27, 2012 - Feb 5, 2012, Orlando Mariott Lake Mary, 1501 International Parkway, Lake Mary, FL 32746. "Equipping Health Leaders to Reach Out." For a list of seminars, click here. Phone: 407-252-6554 (after 5:30pm EST) For more information, email: yasminthen1@yahoo.com


The ACS Outreach Leadership Conference is sponsored by the Adventist Community Services - Washington, the North Pacific Union Conference and NAD Adventist Community Services. It will be held at the Washington Conference Office in Federal Way, Washington on March 2-4, 2012. Participants will hear challenging speakers and choose from 30 training seminars. For registration and more information: www.washingtonconference.org/ACS.

Nonprofit Leadership Certification Program

- Southeastern Conference: 1701 Robie Ave, Mt. Dora, Florida 32712,
  - Session I, June 3-7, 2012
  - Session II, September 23-27, 2012
- ACS Outreach Leadership Conference, Washington Conference Office
  - March 2-4, 2012

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Not spam
Forget previous vote
A study asks: What's a church's economic worth?

February 01, 2011 | By David O'Reilly, Inquirer Staff Writer

What is the dollar value of a marriage saved? A suicide averted? An addiction conquered? A teenager taught right from wrong?

In short: What is a church's economic worth to the community it serves?

Last summer, a University of Pennsylvania professor and a national secular research group based in Center City took up that seemingly unanswerable question.

With a list they devised of 54 value categories, they attempted to calculate the economic "halo effect" of a dozen religious congregations in Philadelphia - 10 Protestant churches, a Catholic parish, and a synagogue.

They added up the money generated by weddings and funerals, festivals, counseling programs, preschools, elder care. They tallied the salaries of staff and the wages of roofers, plumbers, even snow shovelers. They put dollar signs on intangibles, too, such as helping people find work and teaching children to be socially responsible.

They even measured the diameter of trees on church campuses.

The grand total for the 12 congregations: $50,577,098 in annual economic benefits.

The valuation for 300-member Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church in Queen Village, for instance, was a middle-of-the-road $1.65 million. By contrast, the figure for Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic parish in Kensington, with 7,000 congregants, a parochial school, and a community center, was $22.44 million.

The numbers, culled from clergy and staff interviews, "just blew us away," said Robert Jaeger, executive director of the research group Partners for Sacred Places.

The study is not yet published. When it is, the robust sums are likely to be challenged, predicted lead author Ram Cnaan, a Penn professor of social policy.

Some valuations were drawn from existing academic research, such as $19,600 for pastoral counseling that prevents a suicide and $18,000 for an averted divorce. Cnaan himself arrived at other values - for example, $375 on "teaching pro-social values" to a young child.

"Look, it's quite possible that someone will say we calculated all wrong" in some categories, he said. But, he added, he welcomed scrutiny.

He and the 21-year-old Partners have well-established reputations in the valuation of houses of worship. In 1998 they began a landmark research series on urban congregations' services to the poor (worth an..."
annual average of $140,000). It led George W. Bush in 2000 to create the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, which continues in the Obama administration.

What People Experience in Churches

January 9, 2012

Most Americans have first-hand experiences in churches or parishes. What happens, if anything, in the hearts and minds of those who attend? To explore this matter, Barna Group surveyed Americans who have attended a Christian church sometime in the past and discovered what they say about their experiences in these congregations.

Connecting with God

Connecting with God is perhaps the most important outcome facilitated by churches. Most people (66%) feel they have had “a real and personal connection” with God while attending church. However, that means one-third of those who have attended a church in the past have never felt God’s presence while in a congregational setting. Also, when asked about frequency, most of those who have attended church describe these encounters as rare. One-third of all adults in the country report connecting with God at least monthly (35%) via a congregational setting. Among those who attend church every week, 44% said they experience God’s presence every week and 18% do so on a monthly basis.

Experiencing Transformation

The survey also probed the degree to which people say their lives had been changed by attending church. Overall, one-quarter of Americans (26%) who had been to a church before said that their life had been changed or affected “greatly” by attending church. Another one-fourth (25%) described it as “somewhat” influential. Nearly half said their life had not changed at all as a result of churchgoing (46%).

Gaining New Insights

One of the most significant gaps uncovered by the research was the fact that most people cannot recall gaining any new spiritual insights the last time they attended church. Asked to think about their last church visit, three out of five church attenders (61%) said they could not remember a significant or important new insight or understanding related to faith. Even among those who attended church in the last week, half admitted they could not recall a significant insight they had gained.

Feeling Cared For

Another aspect of the research was to explore whether people feel connected with other human beings at church. The study revealed that nearly seven out of 10 respondents (68%) said when they attend church they feel “part of a group of people who are united in their beliefs and who take care of each other in practical ways.”

On the other hand, one-quarter (23%) of those with church experience selected the description that church feels “like a group sharing the same space in a public event but who were not connected in a real way.” One in 11 (9%) said they were simply “not sure.”

Helping the Poor

Finally, the study examined whether people believe their church prioritizes caring for the poor outside of the congregation. The survey asked respondents to consider the budget, activities, and encouragement of the church they usually attend and to rate how much of an emphasis is placed on serving the poor. In total, 40% of adults with church experience said caring for the poor was emphasized “a lot,” while 33% indicated it was “somewhat” of a priority.

Does Church Size Matter?

Many heated discussions occur about the optimal size for a church, but this data suggests that church experiences
do not differ all that much based on the size of the church. For the most part, attenders of small, medium and larger churches described similar outcomes from their church engagement. Looking at moderate differences, attenders of mid-sized churches (defined as those with 100-299 adult attenders) were slightly less likely to report positive outcomes from church than were those attending larger and smaller congregations. Also, those attending larger churches (300+ attenders) were more likely than average to say they had gained new spiritual insight and understanding and that their church clearly prioritizes serving the poor.

### Church Experiences, by Church Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Under 100</th>
<th>100-299</th>
<th>300+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel part of a group that cares for each other</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt a real and personal connection with God</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained new spiritual insight or understanding</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church puts a lot of emphasis on serving poor</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending church affected my life greatly</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Barna Group | OmniPoll™ | www.barna.org

### Generational Experiences

Another noteworthy research finding is that older adults generally report the most favorable experiences at churches. This is not altogether surprising, but the level of disaffection of young adults is striking. The youngest generation—a segment Barna Group labels Mosaics, ages 18 to 27—is significantly less likely to describe positive outcomes while attending congregations. In particular, there were significant gaps between young adults and older adults when it came to feeling part of a group that cares for each other, experiencing God’s presence, knowing the church prioritizes assisting the poor, and being personally transformed.

### Church Experiences, by Generation

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel part of a group that cares for each other</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt a real and personal connection with God</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained new spiritual insight or understanding</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church puts a lot of emphasis on serving poor</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending church affected my life greatly</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Barna Group | OmniPoll™ | www.barna.org

### Denominational Experiences

Barna also compared the experiences of Catholics, mainliners and non-mainline attenders. To control for differences in participation, the analysis of these data was limited to those who are “practicing Christians” —that is, those who go to church at least monthly and who say their religious faith is very important in their life. The research revealed that practicing Catholics generally had less positive outcomes in their congregational experiences than did Protestant attenders. Statistically speaking, non-mainline Protestants were only distinct from mainline Protestants in their likelihood of gaining a new spiritual insight at church.
Perspective on the Findings

David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group, commented on the findings. “This research points to both good news and causes for concern. On the positive side, many churchgoers receive a diverse and rich set of inputs by being involved in a church or parish, most notably connecting with God and others.

“Yet, the research results are also a reminder that faith leaders cannot take these things for granted. Millions of active participants find their church experiences to be lacking. Entering the New Year, consider spending time thinking and praying how your faith community can identify, plan, and measure a deeper, more holistic set of experiences and outcomes so that people are not mere observers of ministry but genuine participants.”

About the Research

This report is based upon telephone interviews conducted in the OmniPoll℠ (part of Barna Group’s Barna Poll series). This study consisted of a random sample of 1,022 adults selected from across the continental United States, age 18 and older. The research included 150 interviews conducted among people using cell phones. The maximum margin of sampling error associated with the aggregate sample is ±3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Minimal statistical weighting was used to calibrate the aggregate sample to known population percentages in relation to several key demographic variables.

Elders are those born before 1946; Boomers are the generation born from 1946 to 1964; Busters are individuals born between 1965 and 1983; and Mosaics are adults born between 1984 and 1993.

“Practicing Christians” are adults who describe themselves as Christians, attend a worship service at least once a month, and say their religious faith is very important in their life.

Mainline denominations include American Baptist Churches in the USA; the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Church. Non-mainline denominations are Protestant churches other than those included in the mainline category described above.

About Barna Group

Barna Group (which includes its research division, the Barna Research Group) is a private, non-partisan, for-profit organization under the umbrella of the Issachar Companies. It conducts primary research, produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries.

Located in Ventura, California, Barna Group has been conducting and analyzing primary research to understand cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors since 1984. If you would like to receive free e-mail notification of the release of each update on the latest research findings from Barna Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna website (www.barna.org). Additional research-based resources are also available through this website.
Rob Bell Leaving Mars Hill Church To Embark On 'Fit To Smash' Tour (VIDEO)

First Posted: 9/23/11 07:50 PM ET Updated: 11/23/11 05:12 AM ET

React
▷
Amazing
Inspiring
Funny
Scary
Hot
Crazy
Important
Weird
Follow
▷
Christianity, Evangelical Christians, Video, Mars Hill, Rob Bell, Farewell-Rob-Bell, Mars Hill Church, Rob Bell Leaves, Rob Bell Leaves Mars Hill, Rob Bell Leaves Pulpit, Rob Bell Leaving, Rob Bell Leaving Church, Rob Bell Leaving Mars Hill, Rob Bell Mars Hill, Religion News

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service
For pastors with ambitions to reach huge audiences, there's often no better platform than the megachurch, which has given rise to powerhouse media empires from T.D. Jakes to Max Lucado to Joel Osteen and many others.

But some high-profile pastors are opting to leave congregational ministry altogether to pursue publishing and other media ventures full time. And that, some observers say, carries its own risks and rewards.

On Thursday (Sept. 22), up-and-coming pastor Rob Bell announced he's leaving Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich. in December.

"Our founding pastor, Rob Bell, has decided to leave Mars Hill in order to devote his full energy to sharing the message of God's love with a broader audience," the church said in a statement.

Bell's resignation makes him the latest in a string a celebrity pastors who have said goodbye to weekly sermons, potluck dinners and other staples of church life. "A New Kind of Christianity" author Brian McLaren, "Crazy Love" author Francis Chan, "Deep Church" author Jim Belcher and the popular British Bible scholar N.T. Wright have all left their church leadership positions in recent years.

Having left high-profile pastoral roles, these big-name pastors have become prolific publishers. But not all evangelicals are convinced the gospel is well-served when pastors trade a local flock for a global one.

Within hours of the Mars Hill announcement, best-selling author and Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren was on Twitter, saying pastors who leave churches have less impact and no base for credibility.

"Speaking tours feed the ego = All applause & no responsibility," said one Thursday tweet from Warren. "It's an unreal world. A church gives accountability & validity."

It's not uncommon for megachurch pastor-authors to consider leaving church leadership, according to Rick Christian, president of Alive Communications, a Colorado Springs, Colo., literary agency that represents megachurch pastors. At a certain point, some feel more like a CEO than a shepherd, Christian said, and can be tempted to leave the headaches behind -- especially when they're making good money from royalties.

But he encourages them to go slow and remember that "there's something inherently great about the accountability that comes with" leading a congregation. Authors who leave that world incur new risks, he said.

"You can have somebody who leaves for the wrong reasons and becomes a lone ranger," Christian said. "They're just running and gunning for the Lord on planes, in hotels, zipping around at 30,000 feet. You can lose touch very quickly."

Others agree parish life keeps communicators grounded. Elaine Heath, associate professor of evangelism at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, noted a long history of leaving the parish for wider outreach opportunities -- even Methodism founder John Wesley gave up a settled pulpit to be an itinerant preacher.

But in today's world, she said, book tours and online virtual relationships are not enough to sustain a pastor's moral authority.

"Sometimes God calls someone like Brian McLaren to a 'global parish,'" Heath said. "What I need to know in order for such a person to..."
remain credible, is that they are still part of a local faith community with whom they pray, worship, and serve in ministry... Nothing can take the place of flesh and blood community."

To be sure, many megachurch pastors still find value in sustaining congregational ties. Lucado, for instance, earns his living from various publishing ventures and the royalties on more than 80 million books sold, but he still serves without salary as minister of preaching at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio.

"From a business standpoint, I just think there is a grounding that happens in the local church," Christian said. "It's not for everybody. Seasons can change; callings can change. But if you're called in (to church ministry), make sure you're called out for all the right reasons."

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- PHOTOS: Celebrating The Immaculate Conception...

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HOT ON FACEBOOK
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What's Real About The Rapture?
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12 Really Stupid Things I Never Want To Do Again
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HOT ON TWITTER
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alyssa_milano
Martin Luther King Day 2012: Remembering His Life, Legacy http://t.co/Ioe0rIS7 /via @heykim #MLK
Retweet

jsmooth995
Ten Other Things Martin Luther King Said http://t.co/MT6Vto28 Retweet

HUFFPOST'S BIG NEWS PAGES
Rob Bell Leaving Mars Hill Church To Embark On 'Fit To Smash' Tour (VIDEO)

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Religion News Service

(RNS) For pastors with ambitions to reach huge audiences, there's often no better platform than the megachurch, which has given rise to powerhouse media empires from T.D. Jakes to Max Lucado to Joel Osteen and many others.

But some high-profile pastors are opting to leave congregational ministry altogether to pursue publishing and other media ventures full time. And that, some observers say, carries its own risks and rewards.

On Thursday (Sept. 22), up-and-coming pastor Rob Bell announced he's leaving Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Mich. in December. Bell's best-selling book, "Love Wins," raised more than a few eyebrows with the premise that hell doesn't include eternal torment. Now he's moving on.

"Our founding pastor, Rob Bell, has decided to leave Mars Hill in order to devote his full energy to sharing the message of God's love with a broader audience," the church said in a statement.

Bell's resignation makes him the latest in a string a celebrity pastors who have said goodbye to weekly sermons, potluck dinners and other staples of church life. "A New Kind of Christianity"
author Brian McLaren, "Crazy Love" author Francis Chan, "Deep Church" author Jim Belcher and the popular British Bible scholar N.T. Wright have all left their church leadership positions in recent years.

Having left high-profile pastoral roles, these big-name pastors have become prolific publishers. But not all evangelicals are convinced the gospel is well-served when pastors trade a local flock for a global one.

Within hours of the Mars Hill announcement, best-selling author and Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren was on Twitter, saying pastors who leave churches have less impact and no base for credibility.

"Speaking tours feed the ego = All applause & no responsibility," said one Thursday tweet from Warren. "It's an unreal world. A church gives accountability & validity."

It's not uncommon for megachurch pastor-authors to consider leaving church leadership, according to Rick Christian, president of Alive Communications, a Colorado Springs, Colo., literary agency that represents megachurch pastors. At a certain point, some feel more like a CEO than a shepherd, Christian said, and can be tempted to leave the headaches behind -- especially when they're making good money from royalties.

But he encourages them to go slow and remember that "there's something inherently great about the accountability that comes with" leading a congregation. Authors who leave that world incur new risks, he said.

"You can have somebody who leaves for the wrong reasons and becomes a lone ranger," Christian said. "They're just running and gunning for the Lord on planes, in hotels, zipping around at 30,000 feet. You can lose touch very quickly."

Others agree parish life keeps communicators grounded. Elaine Heath, associate professor of evangelism at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology, noted a long history of leaving the parish for wider outreach opportunities -- even Methodism founder John Wesley gave up a settled pulpit to be an itinerant preacher.

But in today's world, she said, book tours and online virtual relationships are not enough to sustain a pastor's moral authority.

"Sometimes God calls someone like Brian McLaren to a 'global parish,"' Heath said. "What I need to know in order for such a person to remain credible, is that they are still part of a local faith community with whom they pray, worship, and serve in ministry... Nothing can take the place of flesh and blood community."

To be sure, many megachurch pastors still find value in sustaining congregational ties. Lucado, for instance, earns his living from various publishing ventures and the royalties on more than 80 million books sold, but he still serves without salary as minister of preaching at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio.
"From a business standpoint, I just think there is a grounding that happens in the local church," Christian said. "It's not for everybody. Seasons can change; callings can change. But if you're called in (to church ministry), make sure you're called out for all the right reasons."
Yesterday, we had a final service to send Rob Bell into his next calling. It was a beautiful service the team put together with some incredible moments (thank you Dave Livermore).

A number of people over the last few months have been asking how I’m doing since the announcement that Rob would be leaving Mars Hill. I made some of these comments on Sunday, but for those who weren’t able to be there, I’ve included them here.

I learned when I become a pastor that it is a unique vocation. Becoming a leader in any profession can be a lonely experience. This isn’t always bad, in many ways it forces you to grow up fast. In time you learn to allow the loneliness to become a divine ingredient in cultivating depth and resilience. Over the years I learned to befriend it as a teacher. And as I’ve said here before, there is a difference between being alone, and being lonely.

When I accepted the call to become the co-teacher with a beloved friend it was a strange experience. We were both so used to being alone in leadership that we didn’t realize the unexpected gift that comes with having a partner. It was a fantastic experience, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Rob is almost entirely ego-less and extremely generous in sharing his platform with others. I experienced an incredible hospitality from him. And it gave me a chance to build a really beautiful relationship with a community that I love.

In South American I’m told there is an expression, one ox can do the work of one. But two oxes can do the work of ten. That was true for me.

Rob’s decision to move on, was not surprising to me. I was aware of something stirring in him for some time. While I wasn’t surprised, I was full of grief and joy. There is a funny thing about these two emotions. In my experience, situations like this, they are not twins.

They are like two different kinds of athletes. Grief is like a sprinter, and joy is like an endurance runner. Grief comes out fast and furious, but it doesn’t have staying power. Joy on the other hand comes on steady, and just keeps going and going. Eventually it outpaces the grief, and all that remains is joy.

Today I have joy. So, Rob thank you for your partnership and friendship in ministry. It was a joy. And now my joy goes with you as you continue to follow your purpose in the world.

Love, Grace, and Peace

3 Responses to “Reflections on Rob Bell’s Departure”

ianclark says:

well said Shane. I, amongst many others, look forward towards the future. May you lead Mars Hill well, and may you continue to do the good work the LORD has called you to do.

3:56 am January 10, 2012 - Log in to Reply
Can Social Media Get a Church Sued?

Recent incident involving alleged misuses of social media in both the public and private sectors have government officials and business executives scrambling to implement social media policies for employees.

Church leaders should take the opportunity to do the same before a situation arises, casting negative light on their congregations, or worse, landing them in court.

Indiana’s deputy attorney general was fired after making controversial remarks through his personal Twitter account and blog, according to a USA Today article (The Nonprofit Quarterly also blogged about it last week). Jeff Cox “tweeted ‘use live ammunition’ in response to a Mother Jones tweet that riot police had been ordered to remove union supporters from the Wisconsin state Capitol in Madison,” the USA Today article explains.

The article continues:

“Corbin, the attorney general’s spokesman, said the agency has no formal rules on social media but is developing them. He said the employee handbook, however, is clear that employees should conduct themselves in a professional manner during and after working hours.”

A few days later, Inc. magazine’s website published “How to Avoid a Social Media Lawsuit,” which includes links to resources and books that can help organizations craft effective social media-use policies. Some of the more notable liabilities, according to Inc., include:

- Copyright/Trademark
- FTC Advertising and Full Disclosure
- Privacy
- Illegal Development

What’s the takeaway for church leaders?

“If your staff is going to talk about anything work-related on any webpage, that posting may create problems for your church, and, in some cases, a liability for your church,” writes Frank Sommerville in “Can Social Networking Get Us Sued?” ”The best way to avoid liability for staff members’ postings to social media is to require them to agree that all postings will comply with the church’s terms and conditions for social networking by its staff members.”

Sommerville’s article is included in “Using Social Media Safely” a downloadable training resource on ChurchSafety.com that includes help with forming a use policy for church staff.

Matt Branaugh is director of editorial for Christianity Today International’s Church Management Team, which means he leads a great group of editors and designers who create print and electronic resources that help churches stay safe, legal, and financially sound. He also edits the Church Law & Tax Report and Church Finance Today newsletters.

[Comments]

March 8, 2011 8:00 AM

March 11, 2011 1:41 PM

COMMENTS

Very Important Info

Posted By: REV. OLUJEDE | March 11, 2011 1:41 PM

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Church Givers Also Give To Charities

(RNS) Houses of worship and other charities often aren't in competition for dollars but instead tend to reap donations from similar donors, a new study shows.

Slightly more than 50 percent of people who financially supported congregations also gave to at least one charitable organization in the last year, according to a study conducted by Phoenix-based Grey Matter Research Consulting.

Researchers also found that the more Americans give to a house of worship, the more they donate to other groups. And the trend continues with the generosity of the donor.

For example, donors who gave less than $100 to a house of worship also donated an average of $208 to other charities. Those who gave between $100 and $499 to a congregation gave an average of $376 to others. Donors of between $500 and $999 to places of worship gave an average of $916 to others.
"Americans who give to their church or place of worship are more likely to give, period -- including to charitable organizations," said Ron Sellers, president of the Phoenix-based research firm, formerly known as Ellison Research. "Rather than be in competition for the donor dollar, it seems that giving fosters giving."

The study, which was commissioned by the nonprofit fundraising firm Russ Reid Co. of Pasadena, Calif., was conducted last May by telephone and online among a nationally representative sample of 2,005 American adults. It had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 percentage points.
When Your Preacher Is Not John Piper

Many who have had the privilege of hearing John Piper preach in person would testify that it felt like a monumental event. His preaching powerfully combines truth and passion, leading to convicted and exhilarated listeners. After the sermon, certain hearers might leave wondering if they were just in the presence of a figure who will be talked about in future centuries.

Then they go back to their home church, where several things are different, including the preaching. Thankfully, the gospel is still proclaimed. In fact, the sermons are thoroughly biblical, but the ability of their regular preacher simply does not measure up to the phenomenal preaching they recently heard.

Unless you attend a church led by one of the celebrated preachers of our day, you most likely have faced a similar situation. Either at a conference or on the internet, you have heard exceptional preaching, but each Sunday you're back in your simple little home church that hardly anybody beyond your town knows about, with its "nobody" of a pastor who will probably never preach to thousands.

What if your gospel-preaching pastor is not as good as one of the great orators of our day? Is it time to sell the house, pack up the family, and change churches? No, I don't think so. But what should you do?

Five Suggestions

First, rejoice that your preacher is a man who proclaims the gospel. In some towns, finding someone who preaches the true gospel is as difficult as locating that precious new golf ball you sliced 100 yards into the thick woods. I once endured a 40-minute sermon that consisted mainly of the preacher telling about his family's vacation. Though that might be an extreme example of non-gospel preaching, too many preachers fail to speak of the holy God, sinful humanity, and the redeeming work of Christ. But not your preacher. He speaks honestly about sin, boldly proclaims "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), and then lovingly invites listeners to repent and believe. That is a reason to rejoice.

Second, recognize that certain men are uniquely gifted by the Lord to have an international ministry and appeal, but this is not the norm. The typical local church should be satisfied to appoint as pastors men who are "above reproach" in their lives, who believe the gospel and are able to teach God's Word, and who have an aspiration to serve as shepherds (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Most preachers will not be strikingly smooth and polished. They may never be the keynote speaker at a big conference, but this is not a tragic shortcoming in your corner of God's kingdom. It is precisely
his design.

Third, if your pastor is (honestly) dull, but he preaches the truth faithfully, a little statement I once heard might be helpful for you to remember: "The mature worshiper is easily edified." When hearing lackluster (even if biblical) preaching, immature worshipers will typically not listen to the message because they wish the messenger was more exciting. Conversely, mature worshipers eagerly receive the truth as it is proclaimed, even if it sounds like the preacher is reading a phone book.

Fourth, listen "outwardly" to the preaching. Here's what I mean: Sit with your Bible open and routinely make eye contact with the preacher. An occasional nod of your head when he makes a point will encourage him and stir up his confidence. In my experiences of both preaching and listening to sermons, I can confirm that yawning listeners with glazed-over eyes make mediocre preaching worse, while eager listeners inspire better preaching.

Fifth, verbally encourage the preacher(s) in your church. Every preacher who is not extraordinarily gifted has heard remarkable preaching and moaned, "After listening to that, why do I even try?!" This is a strange phenomenon, but great preaching from the renowned teachers of our day makes many "ordinary" pastors discouraged. Here's a simple way you can buoy your pastor: After a sermon, instead of just saying "Nice sermon!" as you head out the door, take a few moments to tell him what was especially helpful and/or convicting from the sermon. In the first church I served as a pastor, one young couple would stay after the service, about once a month, conversing with me about what they learned. These helpful conversations sometimes lasted for more than an hour. Even today, I am heartened when I recall their zeal for what was taught.

We should praise the Lord for giving us outstanding, well-known preachers, but let us not forget Paul's command to Timothy, who was entrenched in a local church with pastors whose names none of us knows: "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17).
The millennials generation is here.

I have written before about some of the generational struggles that are going on in churches and other organizations, and how there is a clash between the perceptions of arrogant impatience of the millenials and the boomer’s stubborn refusal to empower the next generation. While we know that the truth lies somewhere in between the generalizations, I think it is incredibly helpful to get a better understanding of just what makes the coming generation tick.

This is why I am grateful for Thom and Jess Rainer’s book The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation. The book is a walk through of the results of a study on the older half (those born in 1980-1991) of the largest generation in this nation’s history. While the book is a little wordy, it is still a solid reference to help get a better understanding of who this generation is, what working with them looks like, and how to minister to them. Here are my biggest take aways from the book:

- **High Value on Family.** This is a generation that seeks to keep connected with their family. Whereas past generations may keep in touch with their parents, the millennials are regularly connecting with their parents through many different mediums and seek to involve them in many of their important life decisions.
• **A Colorblind Generation.** This is the most diverse generation in this nation’s history. Relationships with those of different races are not uncommon in this generation and many of the old stigmas are disappearing with this group. While this book is written by two white men (I would be interested in hearing views of those in a different demographic) the results of their study seem to point to the beginning of the end of racial division.

• **The Mediators.** The millennials have grown weary of the shrill voices, the shouting, and the divisiveness of much of our society. They have a desire to bring people together for the betterment of the world as opposed to engaging in the politics of division. Thinking back to the 2008 presidential election it is no surprise that the millennials voted overwhelmingly for Barack Obama: the candidate that used a great deal of inclusive, hopeful language.

• **Checking Out of Religion.** This is the concerning one for me. This generation has largely checked out of religion. According to the book, **13% of those studied viewed religion and spiritual matters with any degree of importance.** Read that again, I dare you. That number is not about any one religion in particular, that is all religions combined. While they are not anti-religion, or hostile towards it, they have decided that it does not have any relevance for their life. Here are some quotes from the book that we need to be listening to:

*Look, I wish we didn’t always have to look to the government for solutions and help, but where are we to look? The American family is in terrible shape, and churches are too busy fighting among themselves to make any difference. Is there any other place to turn?*

- Rob

*I did attend church for several months about three years ago. But the more I got to know people in the church, the more I heard about infighting and fussing. That made me notice how negative church people and preachers are in general. You know, it seems like every time I read about a Christian leader, he’s telling people what he’s against. It just all seems so negative.*

- Tabitha

*I’m not anti-church, but so much of what takes place in my parents’ church is just keeping the doors open. Pay the staff. Keep the building nice. And give 10% or more of the church’s income for someone else to do missions… but that’s plodding Christianity, it has no urgency about it. It’s more concerned about the people in the church than those outside the church. It breaks my heart that people are going to hell each day while so many churches have members who argue about Roberts Rules of Order, or which members will serve on the personnel committee. We just don’t have time for such foolishness.*

- Leslie

The church is reaping what it has sown over the past few decades. The millennial generation is here, it is passionate, desires relationship, and wants to connect to something bigger and better than itself. It is tired of the squabbles over meaningless trivialities and is desperately searching for someone to step up and take the lead in making this world a better place.
What will you do, as a church leader, to reverse the trend? Maybe a better question is this: what are you, and your church, unwilling to do to reverse this trend? Don’t bother with the canned lines about not straying from orthodoxy… that is an understood. Answer honestly.

**What are YOU, and YOUR church, unwilling to do when it comes to engaging the millennials?**

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**About the Author:** Matt Steen

Over the last fifteen years I have been a Church Planter, Youth Pastor, Executive Pastor, and now I serve as a Church Concierge with churchsimple.net. I love Jesus, my wife, the Redskins and Capitals and am currently living on Long Island striving to properly pronounce the word G'island.

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