“To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

WHAT I LEARNED IN A CHURCH PLANT

Edwin Vargas, pastor and church planter, Portland, OR

I am pastoring a church plant in under-churched Portland, Oregon. Here are three things I learned in my first year.

1. **We bring assumptions, DNA and personal definitions.**
   "Pastor, I had never experienced our mission till I saw my co-worker responding to a baptism call." It had been 7 months since this 27 year old, 2nd generation PK Adventist, had been a part of the church plant's core and she was finally understanding the mission. I'm learning that pastors and members bring to church plants 3 things: assumptions, DNA and personal definitions. Being aware of our assumptions can help us understand each other better and facilitate mission. Each one of us brings to the church plant a portion of our previous church DNA. Some of that DNA may be good to perpetuate while some can be harmful to keep around. It is important to identify what to keep and what to get rid of right now. Success, sacrifice, and excellence can be described in very personal, different ways. I'm learning that the more specific we are about our definitions the more accurate we are in setting goals.

2. **Collaboration leads to multiplication**
   Instead of looking at the church we rent from as landlords or rivals, we see them as partners in ministry. The Discovery Church and their pastor Dan Snavely have been instrumental in helping our church plant grow. They believe that by helping our church plant they're investing in God's Kingdom. In the last few months we've had 10 baptisms-most of them young adults committing their lives to Christ. Our collaboration has led to multiplication from averaging 30 in attendance to almost 100 in the last few weeks.

3. **Excellence is a good core value - for most**
As I visited this 25 year old guy I noticed his tattoos. There was also a big smile on his face as he told me, "I have been overwhelmed with the desire to raise my voice and praise Jesus. I'm counting the days to next Sabbath". But I heard another view from an Adventist brother: "The service is a show." It almost seemed that excellence in music, lights and graphics made it a show. Clearly, two people can participate of the same service and experience different things. Yet excellence was a core value in the Old Testament sanctuary and the temple. If everything exalts Christ and presents the Gospel, it should be excellent. Even if some don't think so.

Please pray for us as we go forward. To connect with us, please check out our Facebook page

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SIMPLE CHURCH AT HOME

By Milton Adams

People often ask me, "How is Simple Church going?" to which I respond, "Better than I ever dreamed." But what does that really mean?

In the next few paragraphs I will share the good and bad, what we have learned and mistakes I have made, a few statistics and most importantly--the driving conviction that unites Simple Church CORE4 missionaries around the world. Additionally, for those interested, I will share some of the challenges we face, give some links to the differences between Church Planting Movements (CPM) and institutional church structures, and highlight some steps for conferences who wish to partner with the Simple Church Global Network, as well as next steps for lay people who are willing to leave their comfort zone to reach people who will most likely not walk into conventional churches.

Simple Church is now a global network of house churches that are planted by committed missionaries who are willing to leave their comfort zone to reach people who, most likely, will not walk into conventional churches.

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FINANCIAL INFIDELITY

By John Matthews

In the book *The 5 Money Personalities: Speaking The Same Love And Money Language* the "Money Couple" says that today's marriages suffer from "financial infidelity," defined as when you secretly spend money without your spouse knowing about it. Others define it simply as "you lied." No transparency about money in a marriage is one of the major reasons for divorce. It undermines a relationship.

Here are six ways for pastoral couples to avoid financial infidelity, and they should be developed in the following order. Remember, your ultimate success depends upon how well you implement these principles. Excellence is achieved by constant focus and effort.

Discuss this on our Facebook page!

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READING FOR PASTORS

I've often opined that since I became a pastor, I've had very few non-working Sabbaths! Monte Sahlin takes on this topic in a great piece from Adventist Today. What's the quality of the pastor's Sabbath?

Interesting argument: that just having more Christians won't in itself change culture, unless a few strong people are cultural change agents. Quote: "Culture is defined by a relatively small number of change agents who operate at the top of cultural spheres or societal mountains. It takes less than 3-5 percent of those operating at the top of a cultural mountain to actually shift the values represented on that mountain."

Why small churches are the next big thing. Quote: "There's growing evidence this new generation will bring the greatest opportunity for small church ministry in 2,000 years. Why? Because, as the first generation with a majority born and raised outside traditional marriage, genuine relationships and intimate worship - what small
churches do best - will matter more to them than it did to their parents."

How churches clap - and who shouldn't!

Church in a box? Quote: "When churches are portable, they have to create the culture of ownership. You need everyone to buy into what's happening on Sunday morning or Saturday night worship service. Get people excited and get people to help. This frees you to focus on body of Christ and service."

Rick Warren identifies the most important key to a growing church. Quote: "We must love unbelievers the way Jesus did. Without His passion for the lost, we will be unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to reach them."

TO THE POINT: FRIENDSHIP

"An insincere and evil friend is more to be feared than a wild beast; a wild beast may wound your body, but an evil friend will wound your mind."
- Buddha

"In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit."
- Albert Schweitzer

"A friend should be one in whose understanding and virtue we can equally confide, and whose opinion we can value at once for its justness and its sincerity."
- Robert Hall

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'"
- C.S. Lewis

"I don't need a friend who changes when I change and who nods when I nod; my shadow does that much better."
- Plutarch

IDEAS, EVENTS, RESOURCES, ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Center for Creative Ministry has just released its newest resource: Sharing Scripture Mobile. It's inspirational content for individuals on-the-go; refreshed every week and available on any smart device. The theme correlates with that week's topic and Scriptural focus found in the Adult Quarterly of the Sabbath School Lesson. Sharing Scripture Mobile is for the person who wants to reflect on God's grace any time, any place, whether or not he or she attends a church group.

Previous resource links:

- New PlusLine at AdventSource
- NY13
- Pastor's convention, NAD Ministerial Department
- The Seven Campaign to stop child abuse
- Andrews University Press, Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church
- General Conference International Field School of Evangelism
- Jesus 101 Biblical Institute with speaker/director Elizabeth Talbot
- The ADVENTISTS - 2, by Journey Films
- The Great Controversy Project e-newsletter
- Real Family Talk
- interactive health program on Hope Channel
- Meet Hiram Edson
- Free guide to using Facebook for your church
- 7 critical church security issues
- Tony Romeo's church banners

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Simple Church At Home

By Milton Adams

SimpleChurchAtHome.com

For the Mission Field that Lives Where You Live

People often ask me, “How is Simple Church going?” to which I respond, “Better than I ever dreamed.” But what does that really mean?

In the next few paragraphs I will share the good and bad, what we have learned and mistakes I have made, a few statistics and--most importantly--the driving conviction that unites Simple Church CORE4 missionaries around the world. Additionally, for those interested, I will share some of the challenges we face, give some links to the differences between Church Planting Movements (CPM) and institutional church structures, and highlight some steps for conferences who wish to partner with the Simple Church Global Network, as well as next steps for lay people who are willing to leave their comfort zone to reach people who will most likely not walk into conventional churches.

Simple Church is now a global network of house churches that are planted by committed missionaries who are willing to leave their comfort zone to reach people who, most likely, will not walk into conventional church buildings.

After four years of missionary work, we highlight some of God’s blessings:

- 49 Simple Church plants, including those who are in training.
- 6 of the 49 have multiplied as 2nd generation Simple Churches
- 11 Countries, 6 languages, 31 baptisms
- Typical attendance is about ten. (Gatherings have ranged between a new CORE4 to 52 people).
- Simple Church has grown from two families to 490 people (49 simple churches times a typical attendance of 10) with 51% being secular and/or unchurched.
- About a 1:$6,000 member/tithe ratio (the NAD is about a 1:$950 ratio)
- 25,160 people visit the web page in the last twelve months. 55.64% are new visit.
- 4,725 have downloaded the NAD Simple Church webinar introduction in the last twelve months.
- Simple Church is working with about two-dozen conferences.
- Every Simple church has a coach[1]

6 Lessons Simple Church has learned:

1. God sent the first missionary, Jesus.
2. God invites us. We only accept His invitation to join Him in His missionary work. Ellen White captures the urgency of joining God when she says, “God selects his messengers, and gives them his message; and he says, ‘Forbid them not.’ New methods must be introduced. God's people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living.” Review & Herald, September 30, 1902 par. 13
3. God’s invitations are not limited to geographic boundaries. The gospel commission says, “Go, therefore, and...
make disciples of all nations . . .” Matthew 28:19. White echoes this when she says, “Thus Christ sought to teach the disciples the truth that in God's kingdom there are no territorial lines, no caste, no aristocracy; that they must go to all nations, bearing to them the message of a Savior's love.” *Acts of the Apostles*, page 20.

4. Opposition is a given.

5. God uses all kinds of methods to reach people. “He will bless all who work out the spirit which He works in. To such workers He will give favor and success. As field after field is entered, new methods and new plans will spring from new circumstances. New thoughts will come with the new workers who give themselves to the work. As they seek the Lord for help, He will communicate with them. They will receive plans devised by the Lord Himself.” *Testimonies*, page 476. Simple Church is just one of the many methods God is using to reach people.

6. Lay-people are not asking the church for permission to accept God’s invitations. The role of church leadership is changing.[2] This can be disturbing for some church leaders. Culture has shifted and church leaders must support, encourage, resource, and affirm what God is *already* doing among the lay people. Mahatma Gandhi understood this leadership principle when he said, “There goes my people. I must follow them, for I am their leader.”

*Mistakes I have made:*

1. I underestimated what God has invited His people to do - specifically lay people. It has been one of the most fulfilling honors to work with front-line simple church missionaries who are giving up their comfort zones for one purpose - reaching people with the Everlasting Gospel. This is the heartbeat that unites Simple Church missionaries around the world.

2. I tried to herd cats. In most Western cultures people are losing confidence in many institutions, no matter what form they come in – government, profit or non-profit. Home schooling, home birthing, and home churching are here to stay. Even in house church networks, if the network tries to micro-manage lay people, they will quietly go somewhere else. There is no substitute for authentic sola Scriptoria empowerment. Today’s culture seems to be hyper sensitive to pat answers that begin with “The policy manual says…”.

3. *Signs of the Times*, Jun 2013 cover article is called “spiritual but not religious?” This demographic is the fastest growing religious group in America. I believe this shift will significantly impact our churches ability to reach people much more then I had originally anticipated.

**Institutional values and church planting movement values:** Much has already been said regarding these differences and the tension that comes from them. These three videos summarize the main issues:

- **Institutions verse Cooperative Collaboration** by Clay Shirky (20 minutes)
- **Upside Down Leadership** (20 minutes)
- **10 Characteristics of Church Planting Movements** (10 minutes)

Next steps for conferences who want to partner with this network. The first step is to call Milton Adams, (407-745-1805), email, or skype (miltonbrendaadams).

The General Conference Adventist Missions Department and the North American Division sponsor Simple Church.
Gary Krause, Adventist Mission’s Director, and Dan Jackson, NAD president, have written letters of support and recommendation. 

Download Gary’s letter and Dan’s letter.

**How to start a new Simple Church gathering:** How many people do you know who will most likely *not* walk into a church building? You are not alone. Western cultures are facing a major crisis. With some 87% of North America (and 95% of other western cultures like Australia, Europe, and New Zealand) *not* attending a conventional church on a given weekend, we are praying that God will raise up an epidemic of simple church missionaries.

Visit SimpleChurchAtHome.com to get started.

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[1] A Simple Church coach is a person who is part of another CORE planting team actually doing what they are coaching others to do. Coaches have weekly contact by reading weekly reports and replying to reports.

[2] Mark Finley first brought my attention to this 5 years ago when he helped with the development of the Simple Church Global Network.

[3] I want to thank several people who were instrumental in the birth of this Simple Church Global network. God, who invited me to join Him in this work. Russell Burrill, who first planted seeds in my heart and who has spent years writing books and teaching classes. Burrill’s dissertation, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church* is worth reading. Mike Cauley, president of the Florida Conference, has mentored this network from its infancy and provided wisdom and encouragement along the way. Tom Evans (NADEI/Texas Conference) and Gary Brady (Texas Conference) gave me a workbook (Experiencing God, by Henry Blackaby) that pushed me to risk accepting God's invitations to join Him in His missionary work of developing a house church network that would empower lay-people to reach the mission field that lives where they live. These people, along with many others (Gary Krause, Mark Finley, Dan Jackson, Ken Denslow, Bill Knott, Peter Roennfeldt, Monte Sahlin, Don James, and Kurt Johnson), have been very supportive and encouraging.
Years ago while looking at the newspaper want ads I had an irresistible idea. The urge grew as I perused the paper and the free magazines found at the entrance of Wal-Mart and other stores (This was before the Internet). As I searched I began to understand the market value of my dream.

One day I saw an ad that was close to what I was wanting. I had to check it out. I remember the feeling of excitement and anticipation as I made the phone call. After a few minutes of conversation I knew I had found my prize. It was as if a mental switch disregarding all reasoning had been flipped. I had made my decision, and it was a matter of time before I would have what I wanted.

The exhilarating, driving force of my desire got stronger as I drove to the address given me on the phone. My dream was a used five speed MG convertible with wire wheels in perfect condition. The owner said it had been sitting in his garage for five years without being driven. When the owner opened the garage door I fell in love with this little British car. I actually felt my mouth watering. WOW. It did not matter that I had to borrow money to buy the car (Cash would have allowed me to negotiate a better price). I decided then and there to buy it without telling my wife, who was on a business trip. It would be a surprise. I had been formulating in my mind for some time that the car would be a surprise.

With the MG secretly parked in my garage, I could hardly wait to show Jan the new toy. But when she arrived home the surprise didn’t turn out the way I thought it would. She was not happy or excited, and stated in clear terms that she was not going to ride in it. Flustered, I couldn’t understand why buying this car generated such a reaction.

We had several conversations about this car and my unilateral, premeditated decision to purchase a toy without her knowledge. “Why should you buy a toy when I am trying to be careful with our money,” she said. She was upset that I had not discussed the purchase and felt I had cheated on her. “We are living on a pastor’s salary and there are more important things than a toy car.”

She finally came to the place where she would ride with me, but I eventually sold the car to a guy who said he wanted to surprise his wife. I wished him well as he drove away, smiling to myself about what awaited him when he got home.

In the book *The 5 Money Personalities: Speaking The Same Love And Money Language* the “Money Couple” says that today’s marriages suffer from “financial infidelity,” defined as when you secretly spend money without your spouse knowing about it. Others define it simply as “you lied.” No transparency about money in a marriage is one of the major reasons for divorce. It undermines a relationship.

Here are six ways for pastoral couples to avoid financial infidelity, and they should be developed in the following order. Remember, your ultimate success depends upon how well you implement these principles. Excellence is achieved by constant focus and effort.
First, couples should establish values to embrace throughout their married lives. A value is an important principle that governs how we act and react to life situations. Values form the foundation of the family and have significant influence on financial decisions. For example: teamwork is a value. The idiom, “on the same page” describes how spouses should work together. Ellen White wrote, “The happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of the parties.”[1]

Second, couples should set goals after they have established their values. Values influence goals. If teamwork is a value, then a financial goal will be to work together to reach financial stability, because other goals require financial stability. For example, if you value Christian education, the goal would be to have your children attend Adventist schools. If you value living without debt, the goal would be to have your children finish college, also debt free. You need teamwork and financial stability to reach this goal. Goals are easier to achieve when couples work together; they give a marriage direction, focus, and discipline. Jesus approves of setting goals; “counting the cost” should come before building a tower (Luke 14:28).

Third, there should be no financial secrets in marriage. In a recent survey 46 percent said they lied about money to their partners, and 70 percent of women considered honesty about money as important as monogamy.[2] Secrets between spouses contribute to a lack of intimacy and undermine a relationship of trust. The best antidote to secrecy is openness. Remember, as a team you must be open. Ellen White wrote, “The wife should have no secrets to keep from her husband . . . and the husband should have no secrets to keep from his wife”[3]

Fourth, spouses must learn to communicate. Communication builds trust and understanding. It requires us to listen as well as talk. It’s easier to talk without thinking than it is to listen with understanding. Listen carefully. It is not necessary to yell, you are not competing for airtime. Dial down negative emotions and stay objective. In other words, you really want to understand what your spouse thinks and feels. If both parties achieve this you have open communication. We often hear the phrase “stay in the moment.” Aim for the experience of being totally focused and immersed in the conversation. Stay in the moment. This helps a great deal when you talk about finances in general, and your joint bank accounts in particular.

Fifth, create and discuss a family budget. Have a time each month when you discuss family finances. Call it an ‘honesty party’ and pay your bills together. You may have his and her checking accounts for convenience, but all accounts should be joint accounts. Each spouse has the right to access credit card and bank account information online. This is not to check up on the other, but a matter of trust and openness. You are building trust through transparency. Discussing the budget helps control spending. An honesty party helps couples manage how to get out of debt, for example. Focus on this issue together. The budget reflects the values, the goals of the home, and how the parties get along with each other. Treat your money as a resource. Managing family finances is more successful when partners work together rather than working alone.

Sixth, pray. Prayer shouldn’t be considered the last step; it should be incorporated throughout the process. Without prayer you live alone. Pray for unity and happiness in the home. Rather than praying for money, pray for contentment and that God will supply your needs. Ask God to give you wisdom to manage money wisely. The wisest man who ever lived wrote, “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle” (Prov. 23:4, 5, NIV). It’s a matter of focus. If pastoral couples pray for wisdom from God to be content with what they have and to manage their resources according to biblical principles, their homes will be happier places to live. Why not give it a try?


How Do Clergy Observe the Sabbath?

Submitted: Jun 13, 2013

By Monte Sahlin

Last week Alban Institute, a research organization and resource center affiliated with the Episcopal Church, published in its regular newsletter a piece on the Sabbath. It indicates the increasing interest in the topic among Protestant clergy and others. And it highlights some of the ways that other Christians approach the topic differently than do many Adventists.

Which day of the week is the Sabbath is never mentioned in the Alban newsletter. The focus is entirely about the quality of the Sabbath experience. Listening to the recent interview about the 150th anniversary of the General Conference on NPR, I heard a similar perspective from the Baptist historian who joined Dr. David Trim, director of the GC office of Archives, Statistics and Research, in the interview. The Baptist scholar readily admitted that Seventh-day Adventists are correct about Saturday being the seventh day identified in the Bible as the Sabbath.

The Alban newsletter reported on group interviews with support groups for clergy. One of the issues that the researchers asked the groups about was Sabbath-keeping. They asked if the time spent by pastors in these support groups was experienced by them as a "Sabbath" or time of rest. They reported "a debate not only about whether the group time is Sabbath but what Sabbath is, period. Participants identified elements of Sabbath in their time together: It separates them from their work routine. No one is judging anyone else. ... Others hold back from calling it Sabbath because it involves the hard work of exploring and understanding" the topics under discussion.

The authors pointed out that the two versions of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy root the Sabbath in two different foundational ideas. In Exodus "the Sabbath command is warranted because God rested on the seventh day of creation. ... In Deuteronomy the command is warranted by" God's freeing of His people from slavery. Adventist theologian Samuele Bacchiocchi has written about this, pointing out that the Sabbath is both a memorial of creation and a celebration of social justice, but most Adventists have sidestepped this analysis and focused instead on the old fight about "which day" and who changed it.

"It may be that no other commandment is more difficult to translate in our culture than Sabbath observance," the Alban newsletter stated. "Translating Sabbath from an ancient agrarian culture into a diverse postmodern one is complicated. While Sabbath is essential ... it is important to honor the complexity of what seems to be a simple command to rest. How could a command to rest be so challenging?"

Nowhere are these issues more clear than for pastors. "The Sabbath is the day I worked the hardest," one pastor friend told me long ago. Imagine if your pastor announced, "I am going to stop working on the Sabbath. You will need to get someone else to preach and lead worship from here on out." Would your elders and church board petition the conference to fire the pastor, or step forward to cover the functions needed?

I still remember a man that I once gave Bible studies to. When we got to the Sabbath, he challenged me. "Do you get paid to preach on
Sabbath?" I confessed that it was my understanding that if I stopped preaching on Sabbath it was likely that my paychecks would stop arriving. He replied that the same thing would happen to him and asked, "If it is OK for you to work on Sabbath, why can't I work on Sabbath? Is my job less acceptable in God's eyes?" He was a police officer who had night shifts, patrolling the city, keeping the peace and assisting in emergencies. Once every three weeks it included a Friday night. Was I ready to advocate that the city, or at least he, should take the view that God would care for things on the Sabbath?

Another Adventist theologian, Fritz Guy has admonished denominational leaders that it is really not biblical Sabbath-keeping to schedule training seminars, rallies and similar events on the Sabbath. I remember reviewing my notes from college classes that I took from Dr. Guy when I was part of a conference staff committee trying to figure out how to keep people occupied during a seminar until sundown, so we could open the book table and make sales after the Sabbath on Saturday night. I was uneasy, but I confess I did not come up with a good solution that accommodated both the Sabbath and our need to sell books and distribute information.

"Our clergy participants were in a hurry," the researchers reported in the Alban newsletter. "They had long to-do lists and they were pursued by guilt that told them, 'You're not doing enough!' They led congregations that were saturated in expectations of production and progress." Are Sabbath-keeping Adventists less interested in productivity and less focused on progress? Are we comfortable with a slower pace and lower expectations? A young man explained to me once why he had decided to stop attending the Adventist Church, although his father and grandfather had both been pillars in his home church. "It's a workaholic club."

Do you savor the Sabbath? Do you put too many unnecessary expectations on the people around you, in terms of how they dress, spend their time and rest? Do Adventists actually have, in practice (not theory), an exceptional quality of life on the Sabbath? Can people such as the participants in this Alban Institute study come amongst us and taste, smell and see a real qualitative difference about our life together on the Sabbath? Or do most Adventist churches simply experience a copy of what happens on Sunday in most Protestant churches?

I am asking these difficult questions not because I have answers, and certainly not because I want in any way to undermine or downplay the Sabbath. I am asking because it seems to me that all around us (at least in North America and Europe) there is growing interest in the concept of the Sabbath by other Christians, and I am concerned that we are missing a Divine opportunity because we have allowed the quality of this jewel to become clouded because we have fallen into ruts and are not making it relevant to the contemporary world. Now, I know many will jump to the conclusion that what I mean by "relevant" is lowering the standards. Surprise! This is a plea to raise the standard and make our practice of the Sabbath a richer experience and perhaps a simpler one.

Why Having More Christians Won't Necessarily Change Our Culture

William Wilberforce was a British politician and philanthropist who lived in the late 1700s and was a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade.

For centuries, Christians thought culture would change if we just had a majority of Christians in the culture. That has proven to be a false assumption. Culture is defined by a relatively small number of change agents who operate at the top of cultural spheres or societal mountains. It takes less than 3-5 percent of those operating at the top of a cultural mountain to actually shift the values represented on that mountain.

For example, this is exactly what advocates in the gay rights movement has done through the "mountains" of media and arts and entertainment. They have strategically used these avenues to promote their cause and reframe the argument. They are gradually legitimizing their cause through these two cultural mountains through a small percentage of people in society operating at the top of the media and arts and entertainment mountain.

Mountains are controlled by a small percentage of leaders and networks. James Hunter, in a book entitled How to Change the World, highlights what sociologist Randall Collins says about civilizations in his book The Sociology of Philosophies. According to Collins, civilizations have been defined by a very small percentage of cultural philosophers who influence seven gates and supporting networks since our birth as a civilization.

Hunter summarizes, “Even if we add the minor figures in all of the networks, in all of the civilizations, the total is only 2,700. In sum, between 150 and 3,000 people (a tiny fraction of the roughly 23 billion people living between 600 B.C. and A.D. 1900) framed the major contours of all world civilizations. Clearly, the transformations here were top-down.”

What an amazing piece of information. Imagine that. Culture has been defined since the beginning of time by no more than 3,000 change agents, a tiny fraction of the population.

That is why we must realize that making more converts will not necessarily change culture. It is important to have conversions, but it is more important to have those who are converted operate at the tops of the cultural mountains from a biblical worldview.

Those at the tops of these mountains are expressing their liberal worldview through these cultural spheres. The more godly the change agent at the top, the more righteous the culture will be. The more ungodly, the more liberal we will become. It doesn’t matter if the majority of the culture is made up of Christians. It only matters who has the greatest influence over that cultural mountain.

Our Current Status in Culture

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan” (Prov. 29:2).

For the last several decades, culture has become increasingly secular and liberal in the United States. But God has always raised up His change agents to represent His interests and agenda on Planet Earth. God is raising up His change agents for such a time as this.

We know that Jesus will return for a bride, that “He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). So, despite the trends we may see, I believe we need to operate from a victorious eschatological viewpoint. God’s current activity in the marketplace is part of this.
He is calling us in His church to “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] mind” (Matt. 22:37). This means applying God’s mind to the natural order expressed through the cultural mountains of society.

Changing culture rarely happens without the cooperation of other like-minded change agents pooling their resources and influence capital to make change.

**William Wilberforce Solves the Slave-Trade Problem**

William Wilberforce was a British politician and philanthropist who lived in the late 1700s and was a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. A native of Hull, Yorkshire, he began his political career in 1780 and became the independent member of Parliament for Yorkshire (1784-1812). He was a close friend of Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger.

In 1785, he underwent a conversion experience and became an evangelical Christian, resulting in changes to his lifestyle and his interest in reform. He was 28 years old at the time and wondered whether he could stay in politics and remain a follower of Jesus Christ. His good friend John Newton, who was a converted slave trader and author of the famous hymn "Amazing Grace," convinced him to stay in politics to model his faith in the public sector. His life was dramatized in a 2007 movie production from Walden Media entitled *Amazing Grace*.

In 1787, Wilberforce came in contact with Thomas Clarkson and a group of anti-slave-trade activists, including Granville Sharp, Hannah More and Lord Middleton. They persuaded Wilberforce to take on the cause of abolition, and he soon became one of the leading English abolitionists, heading the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade until the eventual passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807.

**The Clapham Group**

Wilberforce was part of a small band of influential leaders in England called the Clapham Group. They were a small group of leaders operating in the governmental "mountain" of influence. Its members were chiefly prominent and wealthy evangelical Anglicans who shared common political views concerning the liberation of slaves, the abolition of the slave trade and the reform of the penal system.

The group's name originated from Clapham, then a village south of London (today part of southwest London), where both Wilberforce and Thornton, the sect's two most influential leaders, resided and where many of the group's meetings were held. They were supported by Beilby Porteus, bishop of London, who sympathized with many of their aims.

After many decades of work both in British society and in Parliament, the group saw their efforts rewarded with the final passage of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, banning the trade throughout the British Empire and, after many further years of campaigning, the total emancipation of British slaves with the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. They also campaigned vigorously for Britain to use its influence to eradicate slavery throughout the world.

It was not a large group. It consisted of less than 20 leaders. However, these leaders were passionate about their faith, their causes and their commitment to those causes.

If we are going to have a positive influence in culture, we must rethink our strategy from "getting more people saved" to "getting more kingdom marketplace leaders operating in the places of influence." Both strategies are important, but cultural change will only happen when a small group of kingdom marketplace leaders operate at the top of these cultural mountains by solving societal problems and bringing a Christian worldview into their leadership.

**Os Hillman** is president of Marketplace Leaders and author of *Change Agent* and *TGIF Today God Is First* daily devotional.

**Contribute to this story**

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Why Small Churches Are the Next Big Thing

There’s no shortage of studies bemoaning the next generation’s exodus from the Church. Yet while some have written off Millennials’ spiritually, this is a mistake—for the Church and for the Millennials.

In the face of this reality, a new opportunity is emerging. In fact, there’s growing evidence this new generation will bring the greatest opportunity for small church ministry in 2,000 years.

Why? Because, as the first generation with a majority born and raised outside traditional marriage, genuine relationships and intimate worship—what small churches do best—will matter more to them than it did to their parents.

But this opportunity comes with one, big condition: Millennials won’t give up quality to gain intimacy. And they shouldn’t have to.

Of course, Millennials have the same spiritual needs people have always had, including the desire to worship something or someone bigger than themselves, and to do so with others who have similar inclinations. In other words, Millennials need church.

But not just any church, and not the churches their parents built. Millennials are used to a high-quality experience in everything, and they won’t settle for less. In addition, Millennials don’t want a big Sunday morning stage show as much as they want genuine intimacy and relationships.

So how can churches provide this?

Simply put, churches can start small. Small doesn’t mean cheap, shoddy, lazy or low-quality—at least it shouldn’t. But what Millennials mean by quality will also be different than what their parents meant.

Too often, for Boomers, quality has meant excess. Glitz. Over-the-top. Bling. For any kind of church, however, quality can be summed up in one word: health. Health starts by getting the basics right.

Real-world Bible teaching Genuine relationships Practical ministry opportunities Clean, safe childcare And yes, competent musicianship on the worship team The good news is, your church doesn’t have to be big to do any of this. And even if one or two elements aren’t at the level you’d like, you can build on them if there’s high quality in other areas. People may even be compelled to step up and help where the church is weak.

Without such health, it’s no wonder Millennials aren’t interested in going to church. In a recent poll, the Pew Forum found what everyone has suspected: Millennials attend church less often than their parents.

But that’s not all. “Among Millennials who are affiliated with a religion, however, the intensity of their religious affiliation is as strong today as among previous generations when they were young” (emphasis theirs).

So, fewer of them attend religious services, but among those who do, their faith is as strong as ever. Their faith, instead of fading, is being carefully refined. And as typically happens when you find yourself in the minority, that dedication is likely to grow.

Studies about church demographics and attendance work well to illustrate the problem, but what we need next is to start working together toward a solution. What if we paved the way in showing the world what loving one another really looks like?

There’s no better place to express or sense that kind of love-leadership than in a small church. For this reason, I believe small churches are uniquely poised to meet the needs of Millennials and perhaps turn the tide on the trend of the unchurched.

No, megachurches won’t disappear, despite all the predictions to the contrary. And I hope they don’t. I hope any church preaching Christ and His gospel of grace continues to continue its good work.

Alongside megachurches, however, I see a growing hunger for healthy, high-quality, innovative small churches to meet the needs of upcoming generations.

The main reason I’m convinced small churches will be the next big thing is because they’ve *always* been a big thing. Since the day of
Pentecost, innovative small churches have been the way the majority of Christians have done church. They’ve just stayed under the radar for 2,000 years.

If healthy small churches can provide opportunities for genuine relationships with God and each other—with practical ministry to the surrounding community—we can be the vanguard of a new church movement. Of course, it really won’t be a new movement—it will be the oldest one of all.
'Instant churches' convert public schools to worship spaces

Updated

Reprints & Permissions

Praise the Lord and pass the crates with the pre-fab pulpit and the portable baptistery inside. The Forest Hills Community Church is moving into P.S. 144 — sort of.

By Todd Plitt, USA TODAY

Congregants pray and sing during a service at the Forest Hills Community Church inside P.S. 144 in Queens, N.Y., where a permit is bought to use the public school for worship.

Every Sunday morning, the elementary school in Queens, like dozens more schools in New York City and thousands more nationwide, is transformed into a house of worship for a few hours.

There's no tally of how many churches, synagogues and mosques convert public school spaces into prayer places for the nominal cost of permits and promises to make no permanent changes in the school setting. What's clear is that there has been a steady rise in numbers as congregations find schools are available, affordable and accessible to families they want to reach.

Critics, including some courts, are concerned that these arrangements are an unconstitutional entanglement of church and state. They say these bargain permits effectively subsidize religious congregations who would have to pay steeply higher prices on the open market. They also note that the practice appears to favor Christian groups, which worship on Sundays — when school spaces are most often available.

PHOTOS: Public schools used for worship

Caught in the middle: churches such as Forest Hills, which spent $3,000 for a permit to use P.S. 144 from February through June and just renewed for July and August. For September and beyond, however, nothing is certain.

The city's Department of Education, which has been trying for a decade to oust the congregations and end the weekend worship practice, won the latest legal round in June. As the case winds its way through more appeals, an injunction allows about 60 congregations to remain in place and the permit process to continue.

So Forest Hills' evangelical founder and pastor, Jeremy Sweeten, still rises early each Sunday, hitches up a 20-foot trailer packed by PortableChurch.com with every bit of paraphernalia needed to create a sanctuary and children's Bible classes, tows it to the school.

Arriving at P.S. 144, the trailer is swarmed by volunteers such as Bible college student Bill Dupree, who hoists the trusses for the sound stage in the cafeteria, and Nicki Stepp, who organizes a little classroom between colorful plastic snap-together partitions in the gym.

Worship in public school spaces

All of the five largest and the five fastest-growing public school districts in the continental USA permit religious groups to hold regular weekend worship in school facilities.
Largest districts

New York City: 1,685 schools, 60 permits to congregations
Los Angeles Unified School District: 900 schools, 35 permits
City of Chicago School District 299: 675 schools, 45 permits
Miami-Dade County Public Schools: 435 schools, 107 permits
Clark County School District, Las Vegas: 357 school, 24 permits

Fastest-growing districts with population over 150,000
Salt Lake City School District, Utah: 39 schools, 1 permit
Frisco Independent School District, Texas: 52 schools, 6 permits
Dysart Unified School District: 24 schools, 16 permits
Kern High School District, Calif.: 18 schools, 4 permits
Tolleson Union High School District, Ariz.: 5 schools, 2 permits

Source: USA TODAY research

By 10 a.m., the Assemblies of God congregation of about 60 adults is raising their voices in song and prayer.

Then about 1 p.m., as swiftly as they came, they're gone. Every offering basket stashed. Every Bible coloring book boxed. Every sign that a church meets here whisked away, so P.S. 144 looks like its Monday-morning self once more.

The push into schools

It's a familiar scene in many communities across the nation:

•A USA TODAY look at the five largest and five fastest-growing school districts in the continental USA found that all 10 had granted permits for religious congregations to hold weekend worship.

New York City, the largest, is typical: Christian churches are the primary clients because Muslims and Jews worship on Fridays and Saturdays, when school spaces usually are being used for student activities.

•Acts 29 Network, an inter-denominational, Seattle-based evangelical coalition that has started 350 churches across the nation in the past five years, estimates about 16% of these meet in school spaces.

"We don't have a hidden agenda. Our heart is to serve the community just like schools serve the community. … They're designed for large groups, and they've got parking," says Scott Thomas, Acts 29 president.

•A 2007 national survey of newly established Protestant churches found that 12% met in schools, according to LifeWay, a Nashville-based Christian research agency.

LifeWay Director Ed Stetzer says the major draw is that start-up congregations and expanding multisite churches can offer worship close to families' homes for a fraction of the cost of creating their own building.

However, Stetzer, who also leads church-planting efforts, says he sees the constitutional dangers. When asked to address this with school districts, Stetzer says he cautions they will have no control over the religious preaching and teaching.

"So if a Wiccan coven (wanted a use permit), you would have to be as neutral as you would with an evangelical church. Even Westboro
(the Topeka, Kan., congregation that pickets funerals with signs denouncing gays) could move in and you would have no way to stop them," Stetzer says.

**Bronx church loses in court**

Potential hate speech in the gym isn't the primary concern in the New York City case.

The city school board's legal briefs argue the practice "improperly advances religion" by, in effect, subsidizing the churches with facilities below market rate and shows "favoritism" to Christian churches as religions that don't worship on Sundays are generally shut out.

The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals agreed. In his June ruling, Judge Pierre Leval wrote that the Bronx House of Faith, ensconced since 2002 in P.S. 15, "has made the school the place for the performance of its rites, and might well appear to have established itself there. The place has, at least for a time, become the church."

The Bronx church is seeking a rehearing. Jordan Lorence, senior counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, which represents the church, expects the U.S. Supreme Court will overturn the ruling. Lorence said in a news release, "Religious groups, including churches, shouldn't be discriminated against simply because they want to rent a public building just like other groups can."

Meanwhile, groups such as Sweeten's carry on, knowing that their permit might be revoked if, or when, the injunction is lifted.

Permits cover security, utilities, janitor service and insurance costs for the public facilities and generally forbid any permanent signs that worship was here. No nailing a cross to the gym wall, adding the church name to the school sign out front or altering bulletin boards.

So congregations such as Sweeten's buy the goods — pulpit to prayer books, tot tables to video screens — from retailers such as Portable Church or its budget subsidiary, Church in a Box, or competitor, Church on Wheels. The companies sell packages ranging from the bare necessities for $15,000 pre-packed in a trailer, to $200,000 for everything right up to the coffee urns for the social hour.

Kendra Malloy, marketing director for Portable Church and Church in a Box, says the New York court ruling may have been a "warning shot" but she doesn't expect it will ice the trend.

The company estimates there are about 24,000 trailer-stored churches in the USA and Canada. Of the,1,700 pre-packed trailers her company has sold since 1994, Malloy estimates 75% to 80% of those are in public, private or charter school spaces.

"When churches are portable, they have to create the culture of ownership. You need everyone to buy into what's happening on Sunday morning or Saturday night worship service. Get people excited and get people to help. This frees you to focus on body of Christ and service."

And that's the whole point, Sweeten says. If he one day has to tow away from P.S. 144 forever, it still will be fine. "We'll still be here, somewhere. The scriptures tell us a church is never a building. You don't go to church. You are the church."

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I believe the most overlooked key to growing a church is this: We must love unbelievers the way Jesus did. Without His passion for the lost, we will be unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to reach them.

Jesus loved lost people. He loved spending time with them. He went to their parties. From the Gospels, it is obvious that Jesus enjoyed being with seekers far more than being with religious leaders. He was called the “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34). How many people would call your church that?

Jesus loved being with people and they felt it. Even little children wanted to be around Jesus, which speaks volumes about what kind of person He was and what kind of pastor He’d be. Children instinctively seem to gravitate toward loving, accepting people.

The honest reason many churches do not have a crowd is they don’t want one! They don’t like having to relate to unbelievers. Attracting a crowd of unbelievers would disturb their comfortable routine. Selfishness keeps a lot of churches from growing.

The command to love is the most repeated command in the New Testament, appearing at least 55 times. If we don’t love people, nothing else matters. “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).

I like to ask the new converts I baptize, “What attracted you to our church family?” Out of all the people that I’ve asked this question, I’ve never had one person say, “It is because of the Reformation theology you believe.” No one has ever said, “It was your beautiful buildings,” or, “It was your full calendar of activities.” Instead, the most common response was, “I felt an incredible spirit of love toward me that drew me in.”

Did you catch the focus of the love in that sentence? Many churches are full of members who love each other, but still the church is dying or at least not growing. In a small church, the fellowship can become so tight that newcomers are unable to break into it. They have a wonderful fellowship among the members, but they don’t have a love for unbelievers.

It is simply a myth that large churches are always cold and impersonal and small churches are automatically warm and loving. Size has nothing to do with love or friendliness. The reason some churches remain small is because they aren’t loving. People want to go where love is.

Love draws people in like a powerful magnet. A lack of love drives people away.