December 2, 2011 - Networking church members and leaders with ministry resources, ideas and people

**Quiet Flame**

ChurchApplied

Dorothy Stiegler always believed that God was real and that He cared for her. Along the way that belief was severely tested by people and circumstances. Discover how Stiegler, a blacksmith artist, became passionate about using her artistic abilities to bless others.

[View video](#)

**Waianae Miracles**

ChurchApplied

For many, Waianae, Oahu, Hawaii has a reputation for being a tough place to live and grow up in. Some have even asked, "Can any good thing come out of Waianae?" Follow this amazing story about Taj Pacleb and Beejay Crisostomo to discover the answer.

[View video](#)
Sharing Jesus Through the Arts

Church Support Services

If you are an Adventist songwriter, poet or artist living in Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada or Utah, we would like to connect with you. Whether your creative efforts are considered professional or amateur, you have unique gifts that can uplift your faith community and the world. We want to celebrate your gifts and challenge you to think of them as potential doorways to ministry!

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Waipahu Leads The Way

ChurchApplied

The Waipahu Samoan Seventh-day Adventist church on the island of Oahu, Hawaii believes in sharing Christ with all people, including Tongans. Learn why this is a miracle and how these two groups are rising above their ancestral traditions to fulfill the Gospel Commission.

View video

DVDs of Your Sabbath Sermons?

ChurchApplied

Recently a small church requested advice regarding a desire to record and provide DVDs of their pastor's sermons. They don't want to do any editing, just record the sermons and burn DVDs. They want to know: 1). What camera should we get? 2) What DVD duplicator should we buy? 3). What other cables or equipment do we need. If you are doing this in your church and like how it's going, please tell us what you use.

Share your feedback here

Occupy Gratitude

When you think of your life, are you a giver or a taker? Do you live with open-handed generosity, or is your hand curled into a tight fist? What kind of person are you? God established the ultimate definition for selfless generosity for all time at the cross. *"For God so loved the world that he gave—His one and only son"* (John 3:16). This holiday season may our hearts be occupied by the same spirit that prompted God to give heaven's best.
Resources You Can Use


Are You OK With Church Failure? - This article looks at our successes and failures from a different angle. Maybe we need to redefine what failure really is.

ChurchApplied Facebook - Please LIKE our FB page and help us transform how we share God's love with our world. Follow this link

FREE Literature - Need some FREE sharing literature to pass out at a street fair, Farmer's Market booth, or for Sabbath afternoon literature distribution? We have a quantity of sharing brochures that we are making available to churches that are willing to give them away. Contact us here.

Pacific Union Recorder - Click here to view Recorder Archives.

SpiritRenew - Free iPhone and Android devotional app. Produced by the Pacific Union Conference, this is a great sharing tool you can tell your friends and family about. Contact us for a free supply of give-away fliers.

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Editor - Rich DuBose
Editorial Assistant - Sharon Edwards

Contact us by email

Church Support Services
Pacific Union Conference
P.O. Box 5005
Westlake Village, CA 91359
Phone (805) 413-7372

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December 1, 2011

**Why I'm Okay with Church Failure**

At the end of the day, Christians' ministry success is not about money and buildings.

Mary DeMuth, guest blogger

Recently a headline caught my eye: [God Provides Nearly Homeless Megachurch $5 Million](http://www.outreach.com/article_news.php?article_id=31244). John Bishop, the pastor of [Living Hope Church](http://livinghopechurch.org) near Vancouver, Washington, appealed to his congregation and other churches to help raise the remaining money needed to keep their home, a revamped K-Mart. *Outreach* magazine listed the church as one of the fastest growing churches in the nation. The church raised $4 million by itself before Bishop started the FortyFirstDay.com campaign, asking churches around the nation to give $1,000 toward the $1 million shortfall. They actually ended up raising more than what was needed, and they plan to use the excess in homeless outreach.

It got me thinking. Although I love the heart of this church and in no way disparage God's provision for their building, underneath reports like this is an assumption: When God's in a thing, it will succeed. We experienced quite the opposite when we tried to plant a church in southern France from 2004-2006. Constant spiritual warfare, financial stress, and team issues contributed to our return to the States. When we came home earlier than expected, someone emailed and asked me if I thought we missed God by going there in the first place. What she basically meant was that God must not have led us there because it didn't "succeed." Therefore the simple formula is this: **God leads + We obey = Outward success**.

I wondered about the small churches around this nation whose pastors might've read the report of the $5 million in provision. When a church closes, grief enters in. Even so, churches have found joy in the grief. In March this year, Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas, shuttered its doors. The grief they experienced, though, was tempered by another church moving into their building. Another congregation, Bethany United Methodist Church, voted to close, but chose to give away their furnishings to a congregation that had lost its building to a fire.
As church members struggle to make ends meet in a difficult economy, as folks shift and move like migrating monarchs, how do pastors feel? Do they question their calling because they can barely pay the light bill for Sunday services? Did they look on with envy at God's extravagant provision elsewhere? According to Fox News and NPR, one of the economic fallout issues from the past three years has been churches foreclosing.

And what of the house churches in China where leaders have been taken in the night, beaten, imprisoned? This last week, China Aid Association reported about a congregation in China who were visited and threatened by the authorities. Their pastor had been sentenced to two years of “re-education through labor” this July. What of the churches that meet under wide-limbed trees in the heart of Africa who serve God faithfully but see little material blessing? How about the struggling pastors in Haiti who adopt orphaned children and have no church buildings?

Wherever we look, we see the dichotomy. Some churches flourish, others do not. Does this mean God is not in it?

The statistics about church death in America are not clear-cut. Christian web strategist D. J. Chuang has a fascinating exploration of the topic at his blog, complete with a collection of statistics from a variety of surveys. According to Shiloh Place Ministries, 1,500 pastors leave the pastorate each year, and 7,000 churches close. Do all those shifts constitute failure?

After I read the e-mail about us possibly missing God by going to France in the first place (only to fail), I realized that it's not a biblical idea that if God is in a thing, it will automatically prosper. God uses hardship and failure for our growth, to stretch us, to make us more like Jesus. True, Joseph saved a kingdom, but not before he experienced abandonment, slavery, wrongful accusation, and prison. Paul planted churches, yes, but he penned many words from prison, hardly a lofty position. Even Jesus at first sight didn't "succeed." He who was supposed to liberate Israel from Rome died on a cross. Yet that very defeat (one in which he clearly had followed God's will) led to resurrection, the church, and redemption for countless people.

Perhaps we need a shift in the way we think. Instead of measuring church success by numbers or money or buildings, we measure everything in light of an upside-down kingdom. The first will be last. The least will be counted worthy. Those who serve under the radar, unnoticed, will be exalted. Those who obey, then "fail," yet rise up again to trust God for worth and life and hope, measure that as success.
God may not call us to create large ministries. He may even ask us to do the counterintuitive. We have to remember that Paul succeeded sometimes (in the world's eyes) as a church planter, but he also wrote a legacy from prison, hardly a heralded place of honor. Wherever we serve, we can rest in the fact that God, El Roi, is the God who sees the unseen, who perceives the greater worth beneath the ashes, and whose blessings often look like paradox.

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Posted by Sarah Pulliam Bailey on December 1, 2011 9:06 AM