



April 2013

# The American Church Magazine



**Have We  
Ceased  
To Be The  
Light?**



# The American Church Magazine

Dedicated to helping the church in America find their purpose, define their mission and reach their community.

April 2013

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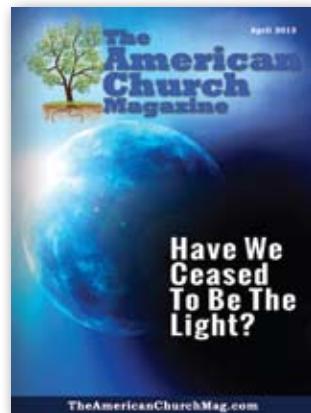
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# Judge, Rebuke and Shun!

Is this really the way we should go?

After we sent out last month's issue of The American Church Magazine, I received an email from a person I will call John (not his real name). Here is what he had to say, "I am receiving an email that gives access to your magazine. Now I didn't read it but honest truth is, I scanned it for numbers (Bible verses). Is it true that your 'church' magazine quotes no scripture? You should be ashamed to no end for this anti-biblical approach. No doubt your anti Bible magazine must be the philosophies of men. I will unsubscribe..."

John's email shows the typical way that many of us handle things pertaining to the Lord. We judge, rebuke and then shun. My response to John included sharing with him the purpose of The American Church Magazine. Our purpose is to help the church find its purpose, discover its mission, and chart a path for the future. For many, we hope The American Church Magazine will help people discover the true nature of the church (which is people, not a building, organization, denomination, doctrine, etc., etc.) The American Church Magazine does not seek to provide Bible study materials or sermon outlines. There are plenty of great sources for that already. We want to initiate a discussion on the purpose and future direction for the church in America.

John's email shows one of the main obstacles we have to overcome. America has already judged the church to be ineffective, judgmental, angry, and full of hate. As long as we continue to judge, rebuke and shun each other, we will continue to decline. I encourage you to take a look at your own life. Who might you judge? Is your communication with others

an encouragement or a rebuke? And, what do we accomplish separating ourselves from others, from new ideas, from the conversation?

I wished John well. I looked him up on the Internet, and I see he is younger than I am, and that he is looking for a church to pastor. If The American Church Magazine and other efforts aren't successful, half of our churches in America may be gone in ten years and John is going to find it even harder to find a church that wishes to center their efforts on judge, rebuke, and shun.

I know some might wish to reply with scriptures (John didn't provide any) to endorse our need to judge, rebuke and shun. If you feel the need to do so, you can drop me an email (I promise not to use it in an editorial), but after all of my years of study, my degree in Christianity, and my years of pastoring, I simply have moved away from such debates. If you read this month's cover story, you will have a better idea where I think we need to be putting our efforts!

Together We Serve Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink.

Steve Hewitt  
President, Christian Digital Publishers, Inc.,

# Have We Ceased To Be The Light?

It's time for a rant, and for dozens of uncomfortable questions!

By Steve Hewitt



We all know that Christ was the light of God, and that he passed this on to us. We are to be the light. We use candles in church to represent this, and this was behind the use of Christmas lights during the celebration of the birth of Christ. But have we missed the mark on being “the light” and is this one of the reasons our churches are dying?

In Matthew 5:16 it says “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” If you ask most Christians about “good works” they would say that they include items such as going to church, reading their Bible, or refraining from foul language. However, it seems clear from this passage that none of these things would qualify as good works. By doing these, and many other “godly” pursuits, if it doesn’t cause those around you, those

without God, to “glorify your Father which is in heaven”, it may fall short of really shining our light as God intended. In fact, if you go to church on Sunday and this causes your neighbors to praise God because you left the neighborhood, you are probably really failing in what God intended.

So what “good works” could we be involved in that WOULD cause those in our community to glorify our Father? Does adding on to our buildings have this impact in our communities?

I am reminded of Max Strother's words to me that a church isn't really doing its job unless "the community would mourn if they closed their doors!" In many of our cases, if the church in our community closed, people would yawn and go on with their day.

Do we think we are "shining" to our communities if we play hymns from our bell towers, or put a large cross in the front of our churches? Do we accomplish the real meaning of "shining" when we put cute sayings on the church sign for people to read as they drive by? And, are we really accomplishing "good works" when we hold programs and invite people to come to us so we can minister to them?

This morning, I heard another one of those stories that makes you cringe. It was told to me by one of our staff members, and it related to what is happening in their neighborhood. It seems that a single woman (I wasn't told her age), walked out to her car to go somewhere, only to find she had a flat tire. At that same moment, her next door neighbors walked out, a husband, wife and child. The woman got their attention and asked if they could help with her flat tire, as she had never changed one before. The response from the couple was that they couldn't help right then because they were on their way to a church dinner and prayer meeting. Do you see the opportunity that was lost? Now, others might not have stopped to help as well, but the very reason this story was being shared up and down the street was because of the irony. The very people you would think would be willing to help a neighbor, were asking to be excused so they could attend a dinner at church so they could be fed. This is the opposite of "shining our light"!

This is a personal example of an opportunity lost, but what about your church as a whole? Are they shining? Does having a live nativity during Christmas "shine" to your community and cause people to "glorify your Father which is in heaven"?

The church has passed off to our government many of our opportunities to do "good works" to our communities. When it comes to feeding the poor, taking care of the elderly, providing housing for the homeless, our communities have learned to look to Uncle Sam instead

of their local church. Granted, there are some great examples of churches and ministries that are working hard to fill in the gaps where our government fails to meet every need, but by far, most churches are not heavily involved in such "good works".

Sometimes, we think we are doing a great work when we get excited and raise a million dollars to build a multipurpose building to add on to our church campus, with the goal of inviting the youth in the community to come to us for recreation (with the hope of creating relationships and leading them to the relationship with Christ). Someone theorized that the impact on a community would be much greater if a local church had a "stewardship" campaign and bond drive to raise the million dollars and then gave it to the local school to help them provide a better education, lunch program, extra-curricular activities, etc. However, we will probably never get to see this tested, since most churches might not find the same enthusiastic response to raise funds to help something or someone outside of their campus.



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Last year I spoke at a Christian leadership gathering and lamented about the opportunities lost to the church because we elected representatives and asked them to come up with government programs to take care of our elderly, feed our poor, etc., when these were obligations, gracefully and happily undertaken by the churches that settled this great nation. One leader met with me afterwards and raised an interesting point. He was grateful that these programs had passed from the church to our government, because the church has become so judgmental today that many, who receive help from our government, would probably be turned away by the church. While his response was uncomfortable, it did help raise some awareness as to a possible reason why many churches have ceased to be the "light" in their communities. They may feel their communities aren't "worthy" of their "good works". Would we, as a church, offer to feed 5,000 today, one and all, free lunch, without passing judgment on those that showed up with an empty plate? Would we refuse some because they are homosexual? Would we turn down others because

we "feel" they are just lazy and should get out and get a job? Would we give food to those we knew were wasting their money on alcohol? We find no line to qualify when Jesus did his "good works". He did them out of love, without judgment, and those blessed by his ministry DID glorify his Father in heaven.

Here in Kansas City, there is a great church that draws thousands of visitors each year. It is the Community Christian Church on 4601 Main St. The church was designed by the famous Frank Lloyd Wright and the steeple is why people come. You see, there actually isn't a steeple, but rather some very powerful spot lights that shoot up into the night sky. I love what it represents; but I am pretty sure that the thousands of visitors each year are already Christians, and that such expressions do not really embrace the true purpose of what Christ meant in Matthew 5:16. What do you think? Drop me a note, [steve@cdpublishers.com](mailto:steve@cdpublishers.com).



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WHAT'S YOUR ACTIVE?



# Seven Common Ministries for Successful Outreach & Church Growth

## #4 in the Series: “The Care Group Ministry”

By Mike Turner

**H**ave you ever heard someone say let's just give it the "Duck Test?" Well, the duck test is this: if it looks like a duck and walks/quack/flies, etc., like a duck... it is a duck. Now regardless of what you might call small groups of people that meet every Sunday for Bible study at your church, I call it "Sunday School" and I think that within your Sunday School, you should have an organized "Care Group Ministry".

We can trace the history of Sunday School all the way back to the 1781 and a gentleman named Robert Raikes. Raikes was from Gloucester, England. There was no free schooling at the time. Education was considered a family purchase—if you had enough money, you sent your children to school. If you were poor, your children did not learn to read or write and were probably destined to a life of poverty—since they could not even read! In that growing, factory-based society, the poor never seemed able to rise out of their abject poverty. Raikes recognized a need, and had a vision to start a school on Sundays for poor children.

He envisioned that good Christian people would teach children to read and write, teach them the Ten Commandments, and instruct them in moral living. He thought that maybe with a basic education they might be able to escape their dreadful life.

From Raikes' vision, the idea of Sunday School within the churches spread all across the world. Sunday School was an idea whose time had come. By 1832, there were more than 8,000 Sunday Schools. The idea spread so fast that by 1875 there were more than 65,000 schools, by 1889 there were ten million children in American

Sunday Schools. Sunday School was performing the heavy task of public education, sponsored by Christians out of their own pockets. In America today, public education is free and available to everyone but does not teach the Ten Commandments or instruct students in moral living. Those things are not taught, demonstrated, or even allowed to be on display in most public school systems. With this being the case, traditional Sunday School is just as important today, if not more important, than it was when it started centuries ago.

Churches have demonstrated and stressed the importance of Sunday School within the church for many years. However, many have lost their focus on the real purpose and ministry functions that Sunday school should be demonstrating. If someone asks you today to give a definition for "Sunday School" how would you answer them? Well, here is the definition of Sunday School as I see it: Just as it has been from the beginning, Sunday School should teach the Ten Commandments and instruct our congregations in Biblical moral living through effective Bible study and leadership

examples. Also, Sunday School should be structured for demonstrating the importance of community evangelism with an organized care group ministry in place to minister to its members.

When asked, "What is a Sunday School class Care Group Ministry?" I answer saying it is simply a grouping of all class members for the expressed purpose of making regular contacts for prayer, communication, discovery and meeting of needs. A friend of mine, Dr. Steve Parr, authored a bestselling book in 2010 entitled, "*Sunday School That Really Works*". In a section of chapter seven, Dr. Parr described one major function of Sunday School as "The Contact Tool". Here is how he put it: "How would you feel if you missed church several weeks in a row and no one noticed that you were absent? How would you feel if your family was going through a crisis and no one from your church acknowledged it or offered support in any form? How would you feel if you visited a new church and no one acknowledged that you were ever there? If you are like most people that I know, you would be hurt or maybe offended."

What Dr. Parr is describing would not happen with a structured, functioning care group ministry in place. Dr. Parr continues and states that a care group ministry is a strategy that can enable your Sunday School classes to maintain contact with every member. I would encourage all pastors and church leader to purchase and read his book. Dr. Parr's book, "*Sunday School That Really Works*" will help you structure and organize a successful and growing Sunday School ministry within your church. The book is available in most Christian bookstores, or online at <http://bit.ly/17qnQpD>

What can churches do to get Sun-

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day Schools back on track, and growing? Well, it is only when a church is truly alive with the resurrection Life of our Lord Jesus that it can fulfill her scriptural mandate to become a channel of blessing and Life to the world. Sunday School and Small Group Ministries within the church should be organized and structured to assure this mandate is taught and fulfilled. While the church may seek to offer many things that help people on a certain natural, human level, ONLY that which originates from the Spirit of God will bring genuine spiritual benefit and make an eternal impact on human hearts.

The church in our day must experience authentic, Biblical revival or we will never be able to glorify God in obedience to the desires of HIS heart. Heaven-sent revival is the great need of the hour in our churches! Evangelism through the church should be taught and experienced within the Sunday School Ministry. The teachings and Christian examples provided through growing Sunday School Ministries are very important in fulfilling the scriptural mandate found within “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28: 18-20). To say it another way... it is only as the church is set on fire by God’s presence (a glowing church) that she can effectively fulfill her calling as an evangelistic body (a going church), and then see the results that come from the outflow of her obedience and discipleship (a growing church).

Revival is not just important...it is imperative! Surely, it is the only hope for the church in North America. God is faithful and is raising up a growing group of saints in the churches across our land who have a sense of urgency and passion for a fresh move of the Spirit of God. We must encourage each other, and set Christian examples to be sure that we are part of that group of intercessors who are longing for “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” Remember, no one wants to see a revived church more than our Lord Jesus!

While certain local churches, possibly for many reasons, might not be willing to place themselves in the position to experience corporate revival, any individual believer may lay hold of the experience of personal revival if they are willing to face honestly the conditions for such blessings. Individual believers are a necessary part and are always found in leadership positions within growing Sunday School classes.

Here is how CAA Ministries, a division of

CAA Software, Inc., can assist local churches in developing or strengthening Care Group Ministries:

- We at CAA want to help you with organizing and structuring a successful Care Group Ministry program within your Sunday School. We can provide you with our free resources. It is our prayer and mission to help churches become healthy, growing churches committed to fulfilling The Great Commission and reaching their communities for Christ.
- CAA has produced a helpful informational document along with a Care Group Ministry training PowerPoint presentation. *The American Church Magazine* readers may have these tools at no cost (and without any CAA registration required) by clicking this link: <http://bit.ly/XShmRy>
- CAA offers what we call “an affordable, meat and potatoes” church membership system and church outreach system that are easy to use. These are Internet-based, nothing to install on your church computers. The package costs only \$15 per month. Detail training and conversion of your current data into our system is included at no extra cost. Our database is customizable by you—or we will help—so that you may track any member information you need.
- This system offers an excellent way to become organized and efficient, not only with your membership management needs, but with your Care Group Ministry management as well. *The American Church Magazine* readers may request a free demo of the system by clicking this link: <http://bit.ly/16Wt5zY>

In the upcoming issues of *The American Church Magazine* CAA Ministries will share further on how you can structure, organize, and reach the expectations you desire for your church. Next month we continue in this series of “Seven Common Ministries for Successful Outreach and Church Growth.” The featured strategy in the next issue will be the importance of an organized “Outreach Ministry” within your church.

# Who Are the ‘Nones’?

## Part 4

By Robert at Icon Systems Inc.

**A**ccording to “[“Nones’ on the Rise”](#) – a report from the Pew Research Center – 20% of US adults don’t affiliate with a religion. This growing group of Americans (called “Nones”) has some negative perceptions about religious organizations like churches, and a full two thirds of them believe religious organizations are “too involved in politics.” What’s behind this perception? How might churches respond?

This is the last of a series of four posts about the growing group of Nones in the US and their negative perceptions of religious organizations. The starting point for these posts is the report “Nones’ on the Rise” from the Pew Research Center. This report finds that two thirds or more of the Nones view religious organizations as

1. “too concerned with money and power.”
2. “too [focused] on rules.”
3. “too involved with politics.”

In the previous posts, we explored the first two negative perceptions listed above, trying to figure out where the perceptions come from and how churches might respond. Now, we’ll delve into the third: “religious organizations are too involved with politics.”

**“too involved with politics” – What are they really saying?**

If we dig below the surface of this survey item, what’s the real criticism? What do the Nones really think about churches and politics? Is it that they think churches should stay on the political sidelines and keep neutral? Do they dislike the methods churches use in their political involvement? Do they question churches’ motives?

Or maybe they just flat disagree with many of the positions churches take.

That last option likely plays a part in Pew’s results. Most (but certainly not all) religiously unaffiliated people tend to have less conservative political views than most (but certainly not all) churches.

Still, Nones aren’t the only ones saying churches are too politically involved. The perception is

more pervasive than that. Forty-six percent of all those Pew surveyed – and 41% of those who are religiously affiliated – answered that religious organizations are too politically involved. The prevalence of this impression of churches and other religious organizations suggests that it comes from more than just some people's disagreement with the political positions many churches take.

Other research suggests that people aren't so much critical of churches' stances as they are of the perceived motives and attitudes behind them. [The Barna Group](#), headed by David Kinnaman, researches public perception as it relates to Christianity, the largest religious category in America. Along with surveys, Barna conducts in-depth interviews in order to get under the topsoil of people's perceptions to see what really drives them. As Kinnaman relates in his book [unChristian](#), Barna's research finds that 75% of those outside the Christian faith view Christians as too political. Kinnaman and coauthor Gabe Lyons, founder of the website [Q: Ideas for the Common Good](#), write the following about this finding:

You might ask, "Since every group seems to have a political presence and agenda, why should Christians be subject to special criticism?" "Are outsiders asking us to stay out of politics?" According to our research, not exactly. Many outsiders clarified that they believe Christians have a right (even an obligation) to pursue political involvement, but they disagree with our methods and our attitudes.

Kinnaman and Lyons go on to explain that many of the outsiders they interviewed question the motives behind churches' political involvement. They see self-serving bias rather than love. They also believe Christians take a needlessly condescending and uncharitable tone in political discussions, focusing more on attacking the views that they stand against than on ways to make positive changes.

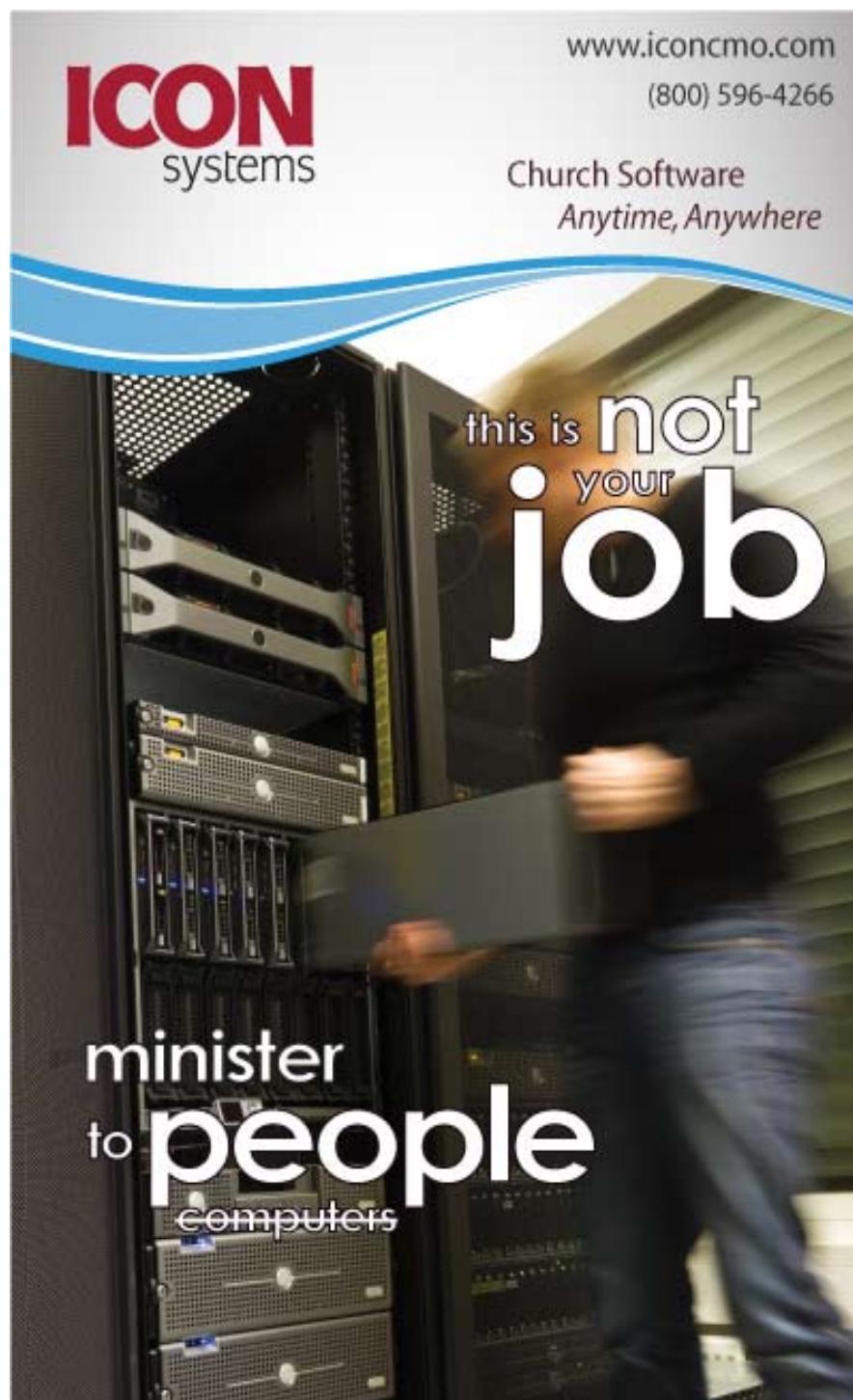
So this criticism against churches, as seen in the Pew survey item, likely has a lot to do with churches' meth-

ods, motives and tone, not just their stances.

Whether these negative perspectives are justified or not, a religious organization should be aware of them as it interacts with people outside their faith community. How might a church use this knowledge to temper their actions and interactions?

### Lessons from History: Some Poignant, Heroic, and Religious Voices

Here's where Bonhoeffer, Wilberforce and



Gandhi come into it, as well as author Eric Metaxas. (Actually, the Gandhi part is uncertain, but more on that later.)

Metaxas thinks that, in response to the too-political charge, churches should look to some powerful voices from the past. He believes that religious organizations could inject a lot of zeal and wisdom into their political involvement if they would examine and highlight some of history's great political activists whose inspiration and work took root in – and grew out of – their faith. Two of his most popular books ([Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy](#) and [Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery](#)) are about two historic figures, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and William Wilberforce, whose religious convictions led them to take political stands and heroic action. By highlighting the examples these men provide, Metaxas reminds today's up-and-coming generations that deeply religious people, lead by their faith, have taken some of history's great political action. It's a powerful reminder of some of the gifts that have come to society and culture when religious conviction joins hands with political action.

[Wilberforce](#), a member of the British Parliament, was the most instrumental figure in ending the British slave trade in the 19th Century. With his gifts for public speaking and statesmanship, and with an incredible never-say-die-ness, he continually brought bills and measures before an often hostile parliament for nearly 50 years until Britain abolished slavery in 1833.

[Bonhoeffer](#), a German pastor and theologian, spoke heroically against the rising Third Reich, left the safety of the US to return to a Germany languishing under Nazi rule, and eventually even took part in a plot to assassinate Hitler. He was imprisoned in a concentration camp in 1943 and hanged in 1945.

And of course, no discussion of religious, political involvement would be complete without Martin Luther King, Jr., who called on communities, politicians, and churches to raise a loud, unified

voice against the injustices faced by African Americans.

Both were men with a deep religious conviction that they had a calling to stand against the injustices faced by their fellow men, be they slaves or Jews. Their belief in God compelled them to stand in the political square of ideas and decry the wrongs they saw. Bonhoeffer wrote, "Only he who cries out for the Jews may sing Gregorian chants," underscoring the principle that religious faith shouldn't sit in a corner but rather should lead to action.

Churches may be able to highlight some of their current efforts in much the same way. Many will likely have less criticism for the political involvement of churches if they see behind the politics congregations who are motivated by love to help hurting people and take a stand for honesty, justice, the well being of the marginalized, the forgotten, the unvalued.

Do the unaffiliated see this motivation of love and justice? The research says they often don't.

Of course, the kinds of conviction held and action taken by Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce won't necessarily lead to popularity; something that stands out about those men is their willingness



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to be unpopular. Still, some of their staunchest critics couldn't help but respect the courage and selflessness of their work. Few if any could look at them and claim they were just looking out for their own interests, or they didn't really care about others.

Kinnaman and Lyons also have a suggestion that intrigued me, one that may inject church political involvement with the same kind of vibrant, positive vibe that Metaxas is going for. Michelangelo once said, "Critique by creating." The authors think that could be a refreshing mantra for the church world, to spend less time and energy criticizing the people and ideas they oppose and spend more time developing creative solutions for the problems they see. That kind of work could act as a kind of indirect criticism of the current culture that is in a way more powerful. As Gandhi purportedly said, "We need to be the change we wish to see." (No one has been able to verify that these are Gandhi's words, but he supposedly said this in an interview and the quote is widely attributed to him. Whether he said it or not, his life exemplified it.)

### Looking Ahead

The good news from the Pew report is that, as many Nones criticize churches' political involvement, even more believe religious organizations "bring people together and help strengthen communities" and "play an important role in helping the poor and needy." So there's a willingness to see the good that can come from churches.

Religious organizations will always face criticism. It can't be avoided. But if onlookers in the broader community can see in churches a serious, genuine desire, grounded in their faith, to make things better, to look out for each other as well as those beyond the church walls, they may take a closer look before they call churches too political, overly focused on rules, or motivated by power and money.

They may even see a family they long to have a place in.

Churches face a challenge – to cultivate, communicate and carry out that serious, genuine desire.

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# Effective Leaders Learn to Dance

By Max Strother

**H**ere is a simple but real truth: Pastor if you are going to be successful in ministry, you must be able to dance. Those are hard words for this old boy, who comes from the side of the theological tracks that espouses the three quickest roads to hell involve cards, going to movies, and dancing. Here is the second simple truth, 99.9% of all leaders cannot learn to dance without some hands-on one-on-one help.

Dance you say, what do you mean by that? Pastoral leadership really is much like a dance. A great dancer can make his/her partner look good no matter what music is playing. Average dancers can make their partner look good when the type of music is right. Mediocre dancers never look good but at least will not look foolish when their song is playing. Bad dancers are just that: bad. And, want-to-be dancers just keep telling themselves they could be great if they just had the right song or the right partner.

To be honest, most pastors are trained to be want-to-be leaders/dancers. Ouch, that hurt; but let's be honest. When I hang around pastors, they are always talking about how brother so-and-so got lucky so his church has grown. You know the

mindset we all slip into, if someone would give our church \$50,000, or if I could just get that wireless mic, or if I could get the people to get off their lazy..... It's all the same, want-to-be leadership/dancing. Great leaders and dancers make it look good no matter what are the circumstances/song is playing.

Here is the simple truth: Pastor if you are going to be successful in ministry, you must be able to dance!

I had to learn to dance both literally and figuratively. Susan and I were invited to my sister's son's wedding. Dancing was part of the reception. I was goaded into trying the dance floor and quickly found out that I was a really, really bad dancer. I watched the good dancers and noticed

that no matter what, they not only looked good but their partner looked good, too. With that very humbling experience, I signed up for Swing Dance lessons. Lesson number one, good dancers stay in rhythm with the beat of the song. Here is how they taught me to do it. Listen to the music, tap my foot, start to move my body in the rock step, keep rock stepping, and add the more complex moves.

Good leaders are able to enter the room listen, and observe. They figure out the beat of the room. Great leaders adjust their attitude and demeanor to match the room. Then, they step onto the dance floor and dance in step to the music already playing in the room. Most pastors don't do that very well. Usually one of two things happens when pastors enter the room. One, they take over. Two, they sit on the sidelines and just watch, talk about dancing, but never dance.

Henry Blackaby says it this way, "find out where God is moving and join Him." It is so much easier to lead people to where they want to go rather than spend all your energy trying to convert them to your way of thinking. My belief is people are intrinsically wired to seek God and to be used in His vineyard. Leaders who know how to get in step with the beat of the music God is already playing in people's hearts are considered Great Leaders. The very best preachers are those who are able to capture and communicate the seed of a thought or idea that God has already implanted in the listener's heart. Everything starts with God's leading. Our job as pastors is to dance with that kernel of an idea and watch it catch fire. When we do that, not only

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do we look like great dancers but also we make other's look good on the dance floor. So tell me, what is the beat of the music in the hearts of your people, how about that one member who you just wished would get of their lazy....., how about the other member that always is so negative, what is the beat of the community, what song is playing in the local high school principal's head? What is the Spirit's song that he is playing in the hearts of the lost in your community? The Spirit is calling. He is playing a love song? Can you tap your foot to it? How's your Rock Step? They say a picture is worth a thousand words so a video must be worth a million. Here is a 4 minute clip that will really help unpack this basic dance step: Paradigm Shift: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gc0yjdCUu38>

The second lesson I learned about dancing is learn to dance to all types of music. I quickly learned that my 10 or so basic Swing Dance moves can be used for just about all types of music. Great dancers have hundreds of moves for all different beats. Great leaders do, too. But, how about you and me? You know – average folk who want to do something greater than they can ask or imagine. Here is what I have learned. If the music is playing, I got to be dancing. It doesn't matter if the song does not allow me to be great. I am dancing with the steps I know. Pastors spend WAY TOO MUCH TIME and EFFORT trying to change the music. Forget that, just work with what you have. One common situation I run into is churches in which all the members drive into the church and no one lives around the church anymore. Years ago, the members all lived close. But now... they drive in. When I talk with those pastors, they say that wished they could relocate to be closer to their people. Sometime relocation is God's answer. Most times, God is saying to learn to dance to the music that is playing right around you.

The third lesson I learned is to never stop dancing. Great dancers can make just about anything look like it is part of the dance. When we meet people there is always a "little dance" of getting to know each other. No matter what they throw down on the table, do not stop. You know what I mean, the couple that visited the church last week when they told you they were living together. I am in no way saying we should wink at sin. What I am saying is God is moving in their hearts in His way. Get in step with that and fan that into a warm fire.

It is so easy to stop dancing when someone drops "da bomb."

OK, let's land this conversation. The truth is that leaders/pastors have to be good dancers. The reality is most of us do not have the "where-with-all" to figure it out on our own. Thus, WE ARE STUCK! So, are you stuck? Don't stay stuck! There is no shame in being stuck – only in staying stuck. Stop believing the lie you can fix it on your own. The truth is: If you could have – you would have! It is time to change. My heart is to see pastors be successful in their calling to ministry. Dial me up – 407-221-4245 or shoot me an email, and we can set up a time to talk.

*About Max: Max Strother is the executive director of Maximum Impact Churches. He has been a turnaround pastor, denominational leader, trainer, and coach. Maximum Impact Churches works with churches from 50 to 9,000 in size. They can help your church too. Max is featured in the American Church Magazine.*



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# The Upside of Church Decline

By **Thom Schultz**

**J**ust as we received more bad news about church health in America, the analysts have found a positive spin. The Association of Religion Data Archives released the latest downward data in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, citing “stark evidence of the aging and shrinking of many congregations.” But the organization’s [news release](#) carried the headline: “Five Hopeful Signs for U.S. Congregations.”

The headline puzzled me after I read the opening paragraph: “The number of Americans with no religious affiliation continues to rise. Fewer young people are going to church. And the effects of recession have placed greater burdens on religious institutions in a time of shrinking resources.”

What’s “hopeful” about that? Well, here’s what the researchers cited (followed by a few of my questions).

1. “More caring activities.” Worshipers are more likely to be involved in social service or advocacy groups outside the congregation, and contributed to charitable groups other than the church. (Is this a sign the church is becoming more outward-focused,

or a sign the church’s inward focus requires members to look outside for opportunities to serve?)

2. “Climbing the academic ladder.” More worshipers (47 percent) have a college degree. (How should we interpret the finding that as congregations become more academically inclined they also report a shrinking excitement about the congregation’s future?)
3. “Keeping up with the technological times.” The share of congregations with websites has risen from 43 to 77 percent. And 74 percent of churches use email. (What does this tell us about congregations’ success with connecting technology to spiritual growth?)

- “More diverse leadership.” The proportion of female pastors in mainline churches has grown to 28 percent. (How much has male clergy dominance contributed to church decline?)
- “Happy people in the pews.” Most members say they’re satisfied with their spiritual life and their worship services. (Does contentment with the status quo help or hurt a shrinking church’s willingness to change in order to reach the majority?)

I’m not sure I’d characterize all these observations as “hopeful signs” of church decline.

But, aside from these signs, I do see some encouraging byproducts coming from the current challenges facing the church. Here’s my list:

- The heightened pain of decline causes more church leaders and members to seriously evaluate their mission, ministries, and methodologies. That’s a good thing. The willingness to consider healthy change becomes more tangible as pain and loss increase.
- Diminishing budgets lead to staff cuts. Fewer paid staff means a de-professionalizing of ministry. That’s a good thing. Part of what’s killing the church today is the congregation’s assumption that ministry is something that paid professionals do. Increasingly, as paid staffs shrink, members will realize that the ministry of the church is their responsibility.
- The older members who currently fund many churches are dying. The old endowments are draining away at a quickening pace. It’s increasingly difficult to pay for and maintain empty church buildings. That’s

- a good thing. More people will realize the church is not a building.
- As congregations get smaller, more people will recognize the forgotten benefits of small. People know one another. People notice when someone’s missing. People care for one another. These are good things.
- More churches in town will see the need and the value in cooperating and sharing resources. That’s a good thing.

Most importantly, whenever our human efforts begin to stall, fail and crumble, we’re compelled to admit we’re ultimately not in control. That’s a good thing. Sometimes God has a way of reminding us of his supremacy. He wants his church to rely more on him than on glib speakers, sprawling “campuses,” clever marketing, showy theatrics, fat bank accounts, or throngs of fans.

Through this recalibration of the church, God is up to something good.



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## We Need Turnaround Pastors

By Lavern Brown



**O**ne of my great joys is laying face down in eighty feet of clear water, floating above an ocean reef teeming with life decorated by circus clowns. I've weathered hurricanes, piloted a becalmed sailboat in middle of the Pacific, traversed torrents of white-water in flood season and frolicked with white-tipped reef sharks in the Caribbean. In all my adventures in the rivers, lakes and seas I've never been fearful.

Except once.

A riptide at Ocean Beach was dragging a friend and me further and further from shore, despite our best efforts to swim, paddle and kick against the tide. The surge of water flowing seaward from shore overpowered us.

### The church is being swept away

This is a perfect metaphor for the American church of the twenty-first century. It is in danger of being swept away by powerful currents, destined to become irrelevant if something doesn't change. Soon. The stats are sobering: less than one out of twenty churches have grown by 10% or more from 1992 to 2003 ; total church attendance on any given weekend is only 17.5% of the population ; and the net gain in churches (annual closures – annual starts) is less than 1/10th of what is needed to merely keep up with a burgeoning population.

In spite of heroic church planting efforts mounted by various organizations, associations and denominations, new churches cannot be brought online fast enough to swim out of the riptide.

### Church renewal is the only viable solution

For many reasons the best solution is for churches, denominations, graduate training institutions and clergy to join forces to renew existing churches. This approach makes good financial sense because existing churches already own property and material resources. They already have a core team which could carry the renewal forward with proper training.

Besides making good economic sense, church renewal is in many ways a simpler task for the pastor. There is an embarrassment of riches in the church growth and church renewal literature. A quick trip to your favorite online bookstore will quickly turn up a wealth of material that is timely, helpful and effective.

### The need: turnaround pastors

A transforming pastor is very much like a church planter: someone capable of gathering people around a mission, of infusing them with passion and vision and of deploying them into the community to turn dreams into reality. The only distinction between them is that unlike the church planter, a

transforming pastor starts with a low-functioning church rather than with no church at all.

But not all pastors are hard-wired to be turnaround pastors; they have to work at it.

Gordon Penfold's research has shown that "turnaround pastors" (his term) – those whose ministries demonstrate an annual growth rate of at (least) 2.5% for five or more years – have a unique temperament profile. His research demonstrates some common characteristics of pastors who have proven success in turnaround churches:

- Score 5 or higher on the D and/or I scales of the DiSC profile
- Communicate passion and vision that draws followers to the cause
- Usually have a mentor or coach
- Excellent people skills
- Innovative and energetic
- Team players who empower other leaders in the cause
- Relentless focus
- Willing to pay the price for making needed changes

This probably sounds like a tall order for some of you! Don't fret; this is not a sure-fire formula, merely an observation of the personalities and behaviors that are well suited to transforming low functioning churches. Yes, God can and does use every conceivable temperament profile in service to his Church. The research simply shows the leadership behaviors that are more likely to result in a transformed congregation that operates at a high level of kingdom effectiveness.

### Professional development

Don't be discouraged because you don't fit the pattern. Rise to the challenge of professional development. Polish skills, acquire new abilities and expand your leadership portfolio so you too can be a turnaround pastor.

For example, if you score higher on the C (Compliance) scale of the DiSC profile you should monitor your inclination to avoid confrontation. If holding your tongue is your default behavior, recognize that too much restraint leaves tension unresolved. This is a serious handicap if you try introducing change into a dysfunctional church. You should deliberately act out a key leadership behavior: get conflict in the open and resolve it. You can provide leadership be-

havior even if you're not hardwired as a dominant personality.

Passion and vision are crucial qualities for a turnaround pastor. Vision guides their decision-making, leadership behaviors and decision making. The research indicates that they don't always clearly communicate their vision, but the church catches it nevertheless. If you do not have a clear vision for your church you must begin working on that problem immediately. Apart from vision you have little rational basis for deciding how you will use your time, invest your resources, focus your energies and select which opportunities you will choose to follow. There is ample material readily available in print that will help you develop vision and train you to operate on vision-based principles.

All of the elements Penfold's research has uncovered – people skills, teamwork, focus, energy, innovative thinking – can be developed with the help of a professional coach or an experienced mentor. May I be so bold as to suggest that you get your hands on a copy of his research, study it carefully and write out a professional development plan. The objective is not to operate outside of who God has made you to be. Rather, it is to learn how to execute the leadership behaviors that will increase your likelihood of being an effective turnaround pastor.

The rip tide of an increasingly secular culture threatens to sweep the church in America out into the void. We take comfort in Jesus's words, "I will build my church." The need of the hour is skilled workman who are ready and able to help him in that kingdom task.

Will you join us?

. George Barna, *Today's Pastors*, 76.

Cited by Thom Rainer, *Eating the Elephant, Revised and Updated Edition*, 10.

. David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 29.

. *Ibid.*, 147.

. A church plant on average requires \$200,000 to \$300,000 in its first two years. Source: *Missional Challenge "How Much Does it Cost to Start a Church?"* <http://bit.ly/11kDMf6> accessed 3/20/13.

. "Will All Pastors Be Church Planters and Turnaround Specialists?" <http://bit.ly/15swa7d> accessed 3/20/13

. Gordon Penfold, "Characteristics of Turnaround Pastors" *Great Commission Research Journal* 3:2 (Winter 2012), 177-196. Available online at <http://bit.ly/ZeazeA>.