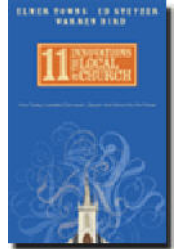


# 11 INNOVATIONS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Review of the Book Authored by Elmer Towns, Ed Stetzer, and Warren Bird  
Compiled as a Resource Study Guide for Regal Books by Brandon S. Park

## The Church Changed and Nobody Told Us!

A recent PBS series on colonial life in America in 1622 was a great reminder about how much the norms for “church” in our country have changed during the last 400 years. In the 1600’s, sermons were regularly more than 2 hours long and people were fined for sleeping in church! It was even *required* that everyone in town attend church weekly. Musical instruments such as the organ were considered worldly. Steeples or outdoor crosses on church buildings were looked upon as inappropriate. Playing golf on Sunday could get you put into the stocks, and having the “wrong” view about topics such as baptism could get you kicked out of the colony. Aren’t you glad that at least some of those ways of doing church have changed?



Today, the only continent where Christianity is not growing is North America! That’s a fact we dare not ignore. The premise of this book is that when culture changes, we must adjust our methods or we will lose our effectiveness. But we must never change our message or our principles. *When methods no longer work, don’t blame the harvest as being unreachable; instead, ask God if its time to change your methods.*

Churches are arguing over what is appropriate and what is not appropriate innovative methods of how to do church and they tend to do so based more often on their personal preference rather than on the teachings of Scripture. It’s like reading the book of Acts, picking a favorite chapter and throwing away the rest. Acts clearly demonstrates a wide variety of methods that the Holy Spirit used to grow the Church. Therefore, it seems to make sense that God, the Author of creativity, would continue to bless a wide variety of methods for conveying His timeless, unchanging gospel.

Some of these innovations you may like and others you will not like (I don’t like them all either). However, lives are being changed in these churches and we may do well to glean from them and learn what is making their ministries effective.

## The Organic House Churches



The pioneer of the house church movement is perhaps none other than Neil Cole. He believes that church should be simple and easy to reproduce. He does not want a big church, he wants a reproducing one. He does not want a quality church;

he wants a transforming one. He explains, “We must lower the bar of how we do church and raise the bar on what it means to be a disciple.” The goal of this Christian community is to be a “home-based church that is missional rather than attractional.”

For Cole, simplicity boils down to the right DNA:

**D--Divine Truth**

**N--Nurturing Relationships**

**A--Apostolic Mission**

Cole believes that we have created a culture of clergy codependency. The church leadership is codependent and the parishioners are the irresponsible dependent ones.

In his book, *Organic Church*, Cole observes that “the world is interested in Jesus; it is His wife (the Church is the bride of Christ) that they do not want to spend time with.” Lamenting that “the local church no longer has the influence to change the world,” he observes, “Something is wrong with the way we are doing church here...we don’t go to church, we ARE the church.”

For many, including an increasing number of evangelical Christians, church is not about a building, a program, or budgets--it’s about a relationship and a community. This also coincides with a trend in culture in which more and more people see themselves as spiritual but not religious. According to the same poll, 22 percent of respondents think of themselves as being spiritual but not religious. This is especially true of those who attend church rarely or never.

What does a typical house church look like? Many house churches (80%) meet every week, the most common meeting days are Wednesday (27%) and Sunday (25%). The typical house church gathering lasts for about 2 hours. During that time they share personal needs or experiences, have a formal teaching time and discuss the teaching provided, and spend time talking or eating before or after the meeting. 70% of house churches also incorporate music and singing. Most house churches are family-oriented and have children involved. The average size is 20 people with typically 7 children under the age of 18 involved.

Today in the foreign mission field, there is the amazing growth of Christianity behind China’s Bamboo Curtain. Today it is estimated that there are between 80 to 100 million believers in the underground church that meets in Chinese homes. The New Testament church was primarily a house church movement for the

first two centuries of Christianity's existence. There was no other option. All believers met in homes, lived in Biblical community, and functioned relationally. So the question today is, what do we need to *relearn* from house churches about church in general.

- *The Christian life is more naturally lived in an authentic community.* The Christian faith is not a decision, class, and membership card. Our small groups are not working as promised (Randy Frazee may have some good ideas to consider in his book *The Connecting Church*).
- *Churches need to make a decision to create community.* It is difficult to live life together when your life is lived in non-relational programs and activities. Some churches have realized that they need to stop doing certain things in order to do community well. Some churches have reduced their focus to 2 things: celebrative worship and cell groups in homes. House churches combine those into one experience.
- *Church is way too complicated.* Most churches are far from simple. They are filled with committee's, long term plans, budget needs, etc. Churches must find a way to become simple disciple-making communities, not large bureaucracies to perpetuate themselves. The church is not the end; it is

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## The Recovery Churches

When Dale Ryan (founder of National Association of Christian Recovery--[www.nacronline.com](http://www.nacronline.com)) entered the pastorate, he was amazed at the incidents of sexual abuse among church members, alcoholism, and other serious addictions. As he looked around for solutions, he was even more amazed over the fact that he could not find many resources to address all of the hidden pains facing his congregation. Ryan lamented: "I was frustrated to learn that there are far more resources for training someone to be a hand bell choir leader than to lead a recovery group."

Most studies of sexual abuse project that 25 to 30 percent of woman in any given church are victims of sexual abuse. And within every church there are "seas of addiction" and "pain is on every pew." Why is there so much addiction in the 21st century? Some say the lack of moral purpose by Americans has resulted in a moral vacuum within their heart. Therefore Americans fill that vacuum by becoming addictive. It is estimated that only 2% of churches across

God's chosen means to an end--the transformation of life by the power of the gospel.

What about the negative aspects of this movement? House churches tend to have more theological problems. It is interesting that many Christians with odd theological beliefs seem to be attracted to house churches. There are also certain elements of a biblical church that is missing as well. The Bible does give guidance about the biblical roles of pastors / deacons. If these did not matter, why does the New Testament give so much detail about the leadership to the house churches of early Christianity?

Here's some final thoughts: if people in the church require prompting and nagging to care for each other, you may have a *system* of pastoral care but not a *community* of people who care. There's a big difference. People are not looking for a friendly church; they are looking for friends. If our churches could become places of biblical and authentic community, the change would be significant and would have a powerful impact.

the country help support at least one recovery-related group beyond merely providing space.

The most highly visible recovery ministry today originated from Saddleback Church with a transferable curriculum called "Celebrate Recovery" which balances the Twelve Steps from Alcoholics Anonymous with the eight Beatitudes.

One example of a "recovery church" would be NorthStar Community Church in Richmond, Virginia. In that church, everything is shaped with the recovery community in mind. Even the back of the bulletin contains an adapted version of the Twelve Steps of AA and the preaching consistently references one of the Twelve Steps.

How can churches "do" recovery? One strategy is to constantly provide resources. Churches like this post sheets with locations of where various groups meet across town. The women's bathroom stalls have small cards with the phone number to the hotline for the battered women's shelter, and the name and number of a Christian counselor. Dale Ryan says, "Recovery at heart is simply hurting people helping other hurting people, a value that is one of God's central purposes for His church."

Here are a few considerations:

- *Churches need to recognize that most people have deep-seated hurts, challenges, and needs.* It is surprising to church leaders when one discovers just how many problems people have. People have become better skilled in masking their issues.
- *For too long, Churches have not recognized deeper issues.* We have made the assumption that if people just got "saved" their lives would be instantaneously "fixed." The irony is that



most adults come to Christ because of a personal crisis, yet the church is not able to deal with the crises when they come for help. Dan Morgan says, "New believers need stability in three areas: spiritual stability, relational stability, and functional stability."

- *Sin is a complicated issue.* Not all recovery issues involve sin problems, but some do--and some sins are harder to overcome than others. Scripture calls these "besetting sins." It often takes steps, friends, time, and commitment to become victorious in these areas.
- *Pain is bigger than most of us think.* Many people wonder, "Why can't you just get over it?" The reality is that some things you don't "just get over" but instead have to work through.

What are some things we should be concerned about? First, do recovery ministries justify sin? When we call sin a "disease" do we justify that sin? Good recovery churches and

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ministries recognize that we might have a propensity toward certain sins, but the cross covers them all--even those of addictions. That's the point--we are powerless, but God is not.

Secondly, some recovery ministries can enable rather than transform. If people confuse sin with disease and go to meetings where others reinforce that view, it can be easier to "get sick" again. The best recovery ministries hold each other accountable to get better in every sense of the word.

Thirdly, churches can segregate themselves if they become recovery churches. Those churches that focus heavily on recover need to make it clear that they are a welcoming place for all people, not just for those whose lifestyles have been affected, such as the alcoholic who cannot hold a steady job or whose chain smoking fills the church parking lot with cigarette butts. We all have needs, and we all need each other. Those without those pasts or addictions need to journey with those who still have them.

## Multi-Site Churches

The Multi-site church has a variety of names. It is referred to as a "satellite campus," or a "video venues," etc. Calvary Chapel churches were probably the first to utilize an "overflow room" with live feed from the main worship center. Other churches then followed suit by adding a specially equipped room for Moms and Dads with small children. This separate room was easily accessible, filled with potential friends, and supplied in a way that you could worship and grow spiritually while also caring for their baby(s). Other examples range from a church at a mall (community center location) to a residential drug rehab center (they're not allowed to leave the premises, so why not bring the church to them?)

Most commonly, a multi-site church involves on site worship with a live worship team / instrumentalists, coordination by a campus pastor, and teaching (pre-recorded or live) by videocast. It is a tool many churches are using to extend their ministry beyond one location.

The multi-site idea has caught on mainly because of its "low risk" level. It requires a low cost, low amount of administration, and low drain on the sponsoring church. Yet the potential return is high--both in the spiritual response from the community as well as the lives of the team members that conduct the services.

The idea of becoming one church in multiple locations is not new. Circuit riding Methodist pioneer John Wesley did it by horseback in the 1700's allowing Methodism to spread faster than any other denomination in its day.

A congregation that is one church but in many locations has the same core values, mission, administration, and budget as a single-site church. According to a survey by Leadership Network, 69% of multi-site churches report that by becoming multi-site, they've become *more* evangelistic. Within the box, church leaders think location; beyond the box, they think mission. These leaders aren't tethered to one place. They are developing an untethered church.

What are the advantages of being "multi-site"? The book, *The Multi-Site Church Revolution*, summarizes 13 advantages:

1. It brings together the best aspects of larger churches and smaller churches.
2. It increases the total number of seats available during optimal worship times.
3. It overcomes geographic barriers when a church facility is land-locked or tightly zoned.
4. It enables untapped talent to emerge each time a new venue or site is opened.
5. It mobilizes volunteers through an added variety of ministry opportunities.
6. It increases options of location and sometimes of worship style too.
7. It assists in reaching friends and family unwilling to travel a great distance to church.
8. It accelerates the climate for diversity, creativity, and innovation in ministry.
9. It improves a church's stewardship of funds and resources.



*A Satellite Campus of North Point Community Church (Andy Stanley)*

10. It enables a church to extend itself into niches like a cancer ward or office complex.
11. It helps a congregation see evidences of how its part of a larger Kingdom mission.
12. It models and trains people for church planting elsewhere.
13. It provides a pipeline for the development of emerging leaders and future staff.

How is the multi-site model different from other models of church growth? It is different in four primary ways:

- *Relationship vs. Rescue* -- The attitude motivating most multi-sites is relational. The desire is to not only proclaim the gospel but to also establish a presence and a relationship.
- *Stepping stone vs. Limited-Service Mission* -- A multi-site becomes a stepping stone for greater local church involvement. A televised broadcast of a church service, does nothing toward the creation of a local worshipping community, but a multi-site approach does. For example, if a church has developed an off-site service at a local firehouse, when firefighters have a day off on Sunday, it's a short step for them to join people they know at one of the full-service campuses of the church.
- *Personalization vs. Cookie-Cutter* -- Most multi-site locations designate someone as the campus pastor (a face to go with the place), who personalizes the church. This person, usually backed with a team of volunteers, helps adapt the church service to the unique local context.
- *Lay empowerment vs. Clergy dependency* -- Multi-site churches are not just about touching new people but also

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about growing a church's ministry capacity--deploying new volunteers. Multi-sites should not be looked at as just another task for the church staff's to-do list but as a means for more of the church's people to be involved spreading the gospel in their surrounding community and affinity groups.

So what does a multi-site / video venue church look and feel like? Typically, a live band begins to lead the people in worship promptly at the announced service time. The Campus Pastor is also present in person to welcome and greet the people, share announcements, and devotional thoughts during the worship time. In those campuses where a live video feed is sent from the main church to the video venue churches--a countdown monitor located in the rear of the worship center informs the campus pastor and worship band how much time is left before the Senior Teaching Pastor delivers his live message. In some multi-site churches, 3 video screens are utilized: one screen sits center stage in which the Pastor is projected as if he were really there (on screen, he is six feet tall with respect to the audience's viewpoint), and two ancillary screens are used on either side to provide close up video and PowerPoint slides for Biblical and sermon content.

Although many traditional churchgoers are skeptical over this innovative method, when a person attends a multi-site church--it is fascinating to see how each individual is equally engaged. They respond to the pastor as if he were really there in person. One church member said, "We didn't think we would like the video, but after a few minutes we didn't really notice that the speaking wasn't live."



## Ancient-Future Churches

Interest is growing, especially among younger Christians, in the kind of worship that is both relevant to today and connected with the past. This ancient-

future worship ranges from the use of candles to the more general sense of the mysteries of God. It may occur in a historic building with stained glass or a converted warehouse with a digital stained glass image from projection equipment. Christians increasingly desire to participate in worship as an experience, and often find help in feeling connected with the 2,000 year stream of Church history. Instead of being turned off by the rich symbolism of the Christian faith, an increasing number of postmoderns find it to be surprisingly relevant, especially if it engages both their minds and their emotions. At Second Baptist Church in Houston, the worship services led by Ben Young often include the Nicene Creed.

Unlike the easily predictable, little-varied liturgies of the past, ancient-future worship typically takes on an eclectic approach, tailoring worship to each particular context. The teaching portion of the worship often involves an intersection of culture and the arts. They sing a mix of God-centered hymns and choruses

(they tend to sing more hymns but they are done in a contemporary manner). They use a lot of Indelible Grace music and love hymns after they have been "Crowderized" to the style of popular praise and worship leader -- David Crowder.

The Journey Church in St. Louis, Missouri ([www.journeyon.net](http://www.journeyon.net)) is a Southern Baptist Church, but you would never know it from its looks. The church recently purchased a large, vacant, Catholic church building. While many low-ritual churches would see its cathedral ceilings, ancient glass, and wooden pews to be a hindrance to cultural relevance, Pastor Darrin Patrick views it as an opportunity to connect in the educated, young, trendy community in the city of St. Louis. The church has retrofitted the building with new sound systems, plasma screens, and other current technology. The end result is a cutting edge congregation in an ancient, symbolism-rich church building.

What can we learn from the "Ancient-Future Church"?

- *The gospel can be illustrated through images.* In our post-literate era, people are educated but they are looking for more than text. More and more people are turning to images for learning, and the church needs to take notice. God uses

visualization to make His Word come alive in our hearts.



- *Most churches have failed to engage beyond our ears.* Ancient-future churches recognize that people hear with more than their ears. Some people connect with liturgical churches that have a smell (incense), a look (banners, stained glass), a sound (bells and music), and a reverent feel (pews and kneelers). Many people are seeking something that engages all the senses.
- *The Church did not start in 1980 or even 1780.* Ancient-future churches recognize that for two millennia there has been a church worshipping, learning, and reaching out. We can learn from and participate in this Christian communion with saints in eras with which we are unfamiliar.

What are the dangers to this methodology of “doing” church? First of all, our faith cannot neglect the Word. A vital relationship with Jesus Christ can only be lived out with His Word at the center. Anything that takes the place of the Word is a

distraction and not a help. Other things can illustrate the Word but only the power of God through the Word can change lives.

Secondly, the gospel is not a smell. The gospel centers on Jesus as presented in Scripture. Therefore the gospel is not a smell, a picture, a song, a play, or anything other than a divine person described in Scripture.

Thirdly, ancient rituals have often led to ancient errors. The reason why the Reformers abandoned icons and ritual prayers was not because those things did not have meaning; but because they had the *wrong* meaning.

The church of God was not born yesterday. Ancient-future churches embrace a church that spans two millennia. They draw on traditions and practices that God has used in the past and they give new meaning to them today. In a word that is increasingly post-Christian, faith symbols are becoming new all over again. For many, even the cross has little meaning. That provides us an opportunity to recast symbols with biblical meaning. This can be meaningful for believers and unbelievers alike.

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## City Reaching Churches

Steve Johnson said, “Over the next 20 years, 80 percent of the worlds population is expected to live in large cities. If we are going to truly make a Kingdom impact, it is going to take place in the city. Our vision has been to saturate those cities with a self-sustaining church-planting ministry that will seek to transform those communities for Christ.”

The phrase “city reaching” was probably coined in 1972 when Jerry Falwell and Elmer Towns wrote *Capturing Your Town for Christ*, which became an instant best-seller. It proposed that one church could evangelize its town and that every church should have that as its goal. Falwell referred to his strategy as “saturation evangelism: using every available means, to reach every available person, at every available time.” In November 1971, Falwell sponsored an evangelistic crusade at the church and saturated Lynchburg, Virginia with the gospel. He tore 107 pages from the local telephone book and recruited 107 church members to phone every number on their sheet to share the gospel and invite people to church.

Frank Damazio uses the phrase “city-reaching” to suggest all churches in one area making a concerted effort to reach their city for Jesus Christ. City-reaching churches do have one thing in common: they believe they have a call to the whole city--it is a part of their DNA.



Downtown Miami Skyline

Perhaps evangelical Christianity has not won whole nations to Christ because we have focused mainly on rural areas or suburban areas and have neglected the cities.

What can we learn from city-reaching churches?

- Christians need to see the cities as places *they should live*. Many Christians see the city as a place of sin and worldliness, which it does tend to be. But they also forget that cities are places of impact and influence. City-reaching churches teach us that too many Christians have neglected the city. More churches are seeing their call to reach their city--and that’s a vision that fits well when our Savior wept over the city as “a sheep without a shepherd.” (Luke 19:41).
- Christians need to see cities as places *they must understand*. Every church reaching a city needs to know its community, its history, its people, and its challenges.
- Christians need to see cities as places *they should reach*. Simply put, Christians and their churches need a vision that’s bigger than their neighborhood. They need a vision to reach a city, its people, and its potential.
- Christians need to see cities as places *they should transform*.

It is not enough to want to convert the city--as important as that is. City-reaching churches know that it is essential to *transform* the cities. Being a transforming community of faith is more

than just building a big church. It requires being a transformed and *transforming* church—a church that is transformed by the gospel and seeks to transform its community. That means it impacts its community more than by just *existing* within it.

City-reaching churches are beginning to make an impact, but we think their impact in North America has not yet been fully experienced. As more churches choose to impact their *entire* community, perhaps their vision will lead to transformed communities and changed lives.

## Community Transformation Churches

People perceive Christians differently when they are living like Jesus lived, loving the way Jesus loved, and leaving behind what Jesus left behind. Community transformation churches provide a holistic approach to ministry that is often missed by those unconcerned with physical needs. Bob Roberts, in his book *Transformation* describes this church model by stating this rhetorical question, “What do you get when a church combines Billy Graham with Mother Theresa?” In many communities, the church is viewed as a parasite rather than a contributor. Many secular city officials view the churches as existing for their own benefit. They pay no taxes and give nothing of visceral, tangible value back to the community. Imagine if communities *wanted* churches because of the community transformation that they bring!

In their book *Externally Focused Church*, Rusaw and Swanson point out that First Baptist Church of Leesburg, Florida has spawned nearly 70 ministries that intersect the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the people in that community. Through their men’s shelter, women’s care center, latchkey ministry, children’s home, community medical care center, and dozens of other ministries, they regularly lead hundreds of people to Christ and disciple them toward maturity.

Robert Lewis, in his book *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, asked a very thought-provoking question. He said, “If you church closed its doors today, would anyone but its own members notice? Would the city be saddened because such a great community transformation partner was gone?”

The mere presence of Christians in a community does not transform the culture, however, cultural transformation only takes place when Christians consistently practice their faith in their personal lives and allow their values to be shaped by biblical principles. When that doesn’t happen, it has an adverse affect on the community. Karl Marx called Christians the opiate of the people because he failed to see Christians allowing their faith to motivate them and to address the social problems in London, England. Mahatma Ghandi studied Christianity and the teachings of Jesus at a time when Christians refused to address the issue of Apartheid in South Africa and concluded, “I would be a Christian if it weren’t for Christians.”

What can we learn from community transformation churches?

- *Churches interested in community transformation changed the Roman world.* Although the Early Church did have remarkable growth in the first century, the truly remarkable growth did not take place until the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

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Sociologist Rodney Stark noted that a great plague spread throughout the Middle East in the year 165. As much as 1/3 of the population died. In 251, a second major epidemic caused entire towns to be abandoned. According to Stark, Christianity grew rapidly because Christians responded differently than others: they stayed and cared for the sick and dying.

- *The Poor are central to the Message of Scripture.* Rick Warren said, “Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor... For a long time, I had blinders on about this...it wasn’t until a couple of years ago that I asked, ‘How did I miss 2,000 verses about the poor?’ I just didn’t see it.” Part of the role of Christians in society is to evidence Christ’s love through acts of mercy and to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you.” (Jer. 29:7).

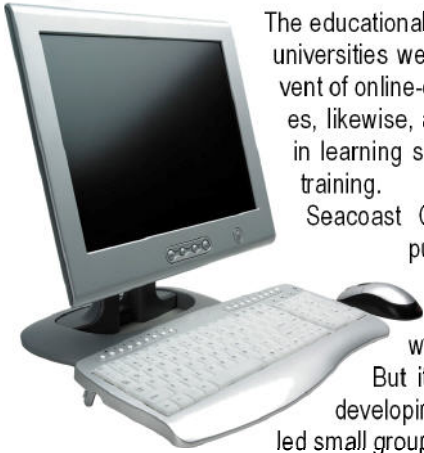
There are also some areas in which we should be cautious—not about transforming communities, but about balance. First of all, the social gospel really is a concern. Many churches with a passion for social justice tend to soon lose their passion for those without Christ. To the “social gospel theologians,” Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God means not the community of the redeemed but the transformation of society on earth. Some community transformation churches have slid down this slippery slope.



Secondly, the gospel must not be lost. In their book *Into the Future*, Towns and Bird offer a checklist of concerns to guard the gospel from being watered down:

1. Are we teaching a practical atheism (compromised theology)? We are if we make little reference to God and show little dependence on the Holy Spirit.
2. Are we controlled more by methodology than theology (unbiblical principles)? We are if our theological understanding is superficial and our primary interest is in methodology.
3. Are we ignoring the warnings of history (naive view of culture)? We are if we display a minimal sense of historical awareness from similar situations in the past.
4. Are we overly concerned with numbers and bigness (inappropriate methods)? We are if our goal is anything less than being fully committed followers of Jesus Christ, growing toward maturity in the local church.
5. Are we allowing carnal motives to corrupt our testimony for Christ and His kingdom (unholy view of human nature)? We are if we fail to say *no* to ever-present temptations of pride, arrogance, envy and deceit.

# Cyber-Enhanced Churches



The educational programs at colleges and universities were transformed at the advent of online-degree programs. Churches, likewise, are becoming quite savvy in learning similar approaches to their training.

Seacoast Church (Charleston, SC) puts a great emphasis on their powerful worship and strong teaching in its weekend worship services.

But it places equal priority on developing a broad network of laity-led small groups. "If you're not in a small group, you're really not in the church," senior pastor Greg Surratt and other leaders tell the congregation. Seacoast doesn't want its small-group leaders to fail, so it places a high value on training the leaders to be effective. But surprisingly, when the church offered special classes to meet the needs of small-group leaders, only a small percentage turned up for the in-person meetings. They experimented with different dates, different formats, different curriculum, and different means of publicizing the opportunity, but still gained only a small increase in response. Additionally, the issue of multiple campuses made it all the more challenging to create in-person meetings. After 2 years of extensive development, the church launched a website ([www.mynextsteps.org](http://www.mynextsteps.org)) to offer online small-group training. The response and participation sparked upward.

North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia uses the Internet exclusively for its teacher's meetings, doing away with face-to-face encounters except on Sunday mornings when they actually teach. One of the main reasons they arrived at Internet teacher training is that people didn't have time for an extra meeting during the week. Demands for attending training sessions or teachers' meetings actually prohibited--rather than helped--teacher recruitment. "Our classes wouldn't be nearly as effective without the Internet," said Kendra Fleming, Director of Children's Ministry at North Point.

The Ginghamburg Church's website, started in 1997, now has more than 4,000 pages. The church websites total ministry involves the following:

- *Care*: Lists of support groups and related information, helping hands bulletin board and job connections.
- *Devotionals*: Available both as e-mail subscriptions and as postings with group discussions. Tailored versions are available for adults, youth, and children.
- *Events*: online calendar, event descriptions, and registration.
- *Fellowship*: Many discussion forums, a page for sending encouragement e-cards, and a cell-group sign up form.
- *Guest Hospitality*: Offers virtual facility tours to potential church guests and newcomer FAQ's.
- *Memorials*: photos and videos of deceased church members and postings about loved ones.
- *Ministry Team Support*: private forums and e-mail lists with password-protected file sharing.

- *Missions*: information about missionaries and mission trips and photos and mission-trip blogs.
- *Resources*: online store for purchasing items to be mailed or downloaded; and a church business directory.
- *Sermons*: three versions: video, audio, printed; delivered via web pages, podcast, vodcast, and RSS.
- *Stewardship*: ability to make financial contributions.

Mark Batterson, pastor of National Community Church in D.C., likes to have fun when people ask him how many visited his church in the last month. In 2006 he was saying 12,771. Then he says, "Truth be told, they didn't really visit us. National Community Church visited them." The people he is describing didn't physically attend a worship service. Many of them live halfway around the world. Batterson says, "All of them invited our church into their iPods...in a sense, they invited me to go jogging with them, to commute to work with them, or to hang out with them." All they had to do was click on the church's podcast. National Community Church is impacting more people via their podcast than they are with their weekend services.

Religious believers want more "God on their iPod," and churches are rapidly finding that through podcasting, church members can take the Sunday sermon with them throughout the week. While only a few megachurches can afford to preach their message through TV and radio broadcasting, almost any church can have a podcast that goes around the world.

Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle preaches to 5,000 people a week but some 230,000 people download his MP3 messages each month, the second most frequent download on I-Tunes the week of this writing.

What can we learn from cyber-enhanced churches? If churches are to reach connected people, they need to be connected churches. For some reason, Christians have been slow to adopt the Internet as a means of communication. Some are still wondering if it will catch on, like indoor plumbing did. We believe churches can and should embrace the Internet in every way without losing the essence of the church.

*The Internet can be used to Connect*--Many churches have realized that the Internet need not be a tool of isolation but a tool of connection.

*The Internet can be used to Inform* -- the internet is basically information. People look to the internet for this purpose and we can use it as a tool to inform, educate, train, and equip God's people.

*The Internet can be used to Disciple* -- Discipleship best happens in community, but information can make discipleship more effective.

A cyber-enhanced church might include elements such as the following (all of which exist today):

- People enter the church and sign in to receive their automatically generated nametags (or likewise as they drop off children)
- When they sign in, they do not use a printed pass-down-the-pew friendship pad; rather, they sign in electronically. Those who are absent will be noticed (based on not signing in) with notifications e-mailed to small group leaders and pastors.
- Small-group members share concerns, prayer requests and information in their online group community forum.



At First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, when children are finished with Sunday School, they climb into the mouth of Jonah's whale and slide down to the first story of the Children's building where their parents pick them up.

There are many strengths to this type of children's ministry. The first is its appeal to an experience-driven generation of children whose parents spend billions on interactive games, attend schools that are highly experiential, and learn from many computer-generated programs that are multi-sensory in their approach. Nickelodeon Sunday School will motivate the child to learn. Educational theorists discovered 30 years ago that children learn better if they are not faced forward in a sterile environment.

Perhaps its greatest advantage is its evangelistic appeal. Because salvation involves the intellect, emotions, and will of the convert, so the Nickelodeon Sunday School informs the child's mind with the gospel message, motivates the child's emotions to respond, and persuades his

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## Intentionally Multicultural Churches

Anderson in his book, *Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church's Unique*

*Rhythm*, says: "Evidence of this country's rich racial mix is all around us in our schools, our stores, our neighborhoods, our recreational facilities--everywhere except our churches. Heaven may include every culture, tongue, and tribe, but in the United States, Sunday morning remains one of the last bastions of ethnic separation. It's time to stop merely talking about multicultural worship and start living it."

American churches have become enamored in recent years with the idea of multicultural churches. Most that try do not succeed. Here are some things we need to remember:

*Multicultural churches are not the same as multi-racial churches.* Most of the churches identified as multicultural do not evidence multiple cultures, but rather a church attended by different races. In many megachurches -- Asians, Hispanics, African Americans, and Anglos in the area are all young professionals. They work together, listen to the same music, go to the same restaurants and are actually part of the same culture--regardless of their skin color. Being multicultural is harder. It involves engaging in styles of relationships, African American approaches to worship, Hispanic approaches to teaching, etc.

*Reaching the unchurched is harder in a multicultural context.* The gospel is transcultural but communication is not. It is not just reaching across the Christian / non-Christian cultural barrier, but there are no cultural barriers within the church as well.

*Multiculturalism is really about community.* Most cultures (especially outside the US) place a great value on community. Multicultural churches can be a powerful apologetic for the gospel as people see us loving one another across cultural barriers.

*Learning each other's culture takes time and effort.* Multicultural churches have to function as multicultural teams. In addition to learning and reaching the community, the team has to take the additional time to understand and relate to each other. That takes a commitment that most church's lack.

There are a number of challenges that come as a result of trying to be multicultural:

- Most Americans have very little cross-cultural awareness. Most Anglos do not go to an African American church because they don't relate well to African American culture or they prefer their own culture more.
- Cross-cultural conflicts are inevitable. And the solutions to those conflicts pan out differently. For instance, when dealing with conflict, the Anglos on the team may expect a clear expression of ideas and identification of the points of conflict, while the Asians may value the feelings and reputation of those involved, not wanting anyone to lose face.
- Leadership is a flashpoint. Culture determines how much and what style of leadership is practiced in each cultural setting. It is essential to find a leadership style that works well for all of the cultures involved.
- Multiculturalism is not fully achieved in worship. A church truly becomes multicultural when its people spend time together outside of the worship service. Many churches work hard for cultural tolerance but are not able to experience cultural camaraderie.

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# Decision-Journey Churches

Decision-journey churches seek to answer a nagging problem that has been perplexing many American church leaders: *Why are there so many church members who claim to be Christians and yet rarely attend church or get involved in ministry?* There is a small but growing number of church leaders who say that the American church's view of conversion is wrong or significantly imbalanced. They maintain that the church has emphasized salvation in an unhealthy way--as an isolated event in which once a person is saved, he or she is set for eternity and the race is over. This kind of methodology has produced many conversions but few disciples.

"Decision-journey" or "faith-journey" churches teach a different model of walking through the door of salvation to become a follower of Christ. Dave Ferguson, lead pastor of Community Christian Church in Chicago said, "We're not going to call anyone a *Christian* because of the abuses of that name in America." Rather, Ferguson prefers a term that conveys an ongoing process--*Christ-follower*.

When asked if, biblically speaking, a specific point in time exists when a person makes a decision to receive Christ, Ferguson answers, "There is a point in time, but people are not always aware of it." Ferguson tells his leaders "treat everyone like they are a Christian until they realize they are not." He wants new attendees to belong so that they'll believe. He wants small-group leaders to incorporate people into a group, treat them as one of the group, and get them into the Word of God so that they find their true spiritual condition and become a Christ-follower.

Throughout the years since the Protestant Reformation, there have certainly been abuses to the whole idea of "instantaneous conversion." Pastor Dallas Billington of Akron Baptist Temple in Ohio coined the phrase, "never pick green fruit." He noted that many pastors force people to make a prayer too soon, "Come into my heart, Lord Jesus" when they didn't understand who Jesus was, or they didn't understand the impact of sin, or didn't even realize they were lost. Billington said that when people are forced to make a salvation prayer too soon, they only repeat empty words and therefore not truly born again.

Interestingly, a study by NAMB of the Southern Baptist Convention showed that 40% of those being baptized today are actually making a rededication from an earlier decision.

To make a counterpoint, it is true that the Philippian jailer was converted right on the spot. God obviously does work that way. Many people can hear just one presentation of the gospel--their hearts have already been prepared by the Holy Spirit, they respond immediately and they are saved.

Yet our culture is having an effect on our souls. Today, we are seeing more and more people like "doubting" Thomas in the New Testament. Thomas believed and then wavered. When told that Jesus had come back from the dead, Thomas even refused to believe unless he could

see and touch some tangible evidence. Would he prefer to call his experience with God a "journey" that led him to salvation?

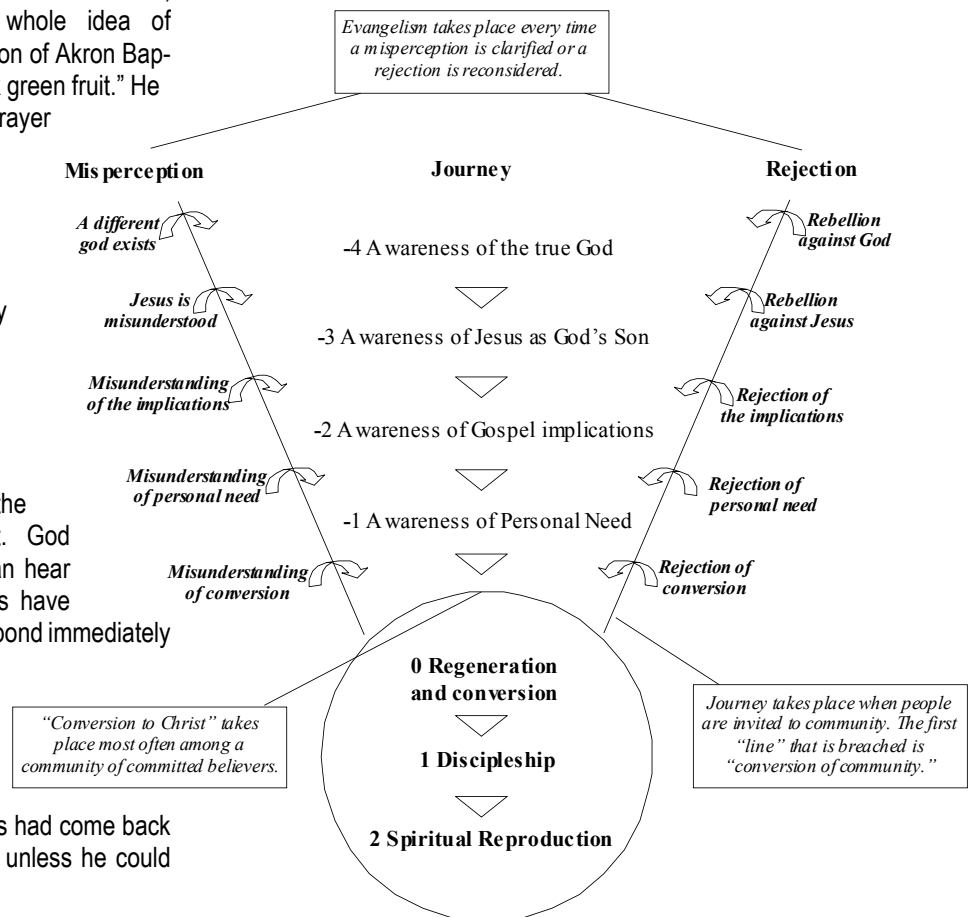
Decision-journey churches recognize that most people in America are followers of another "religion"--the religion of American spirituality. They therefore believe that there is a God, that he or she loves everyone, that all people go to heaven unless they are bad like Hitler, and that spiritual life is important for personal peace. Then when they hear about Jesus, the gospel and turning away from sin, they filter it through their existing religion--unless they are given time in community to understand the real meaning of the gospel.

Here are some lessons we can learn:

- It is natural, biblical and appropriate for people to consider the cost of committing to Christ. Too many Christians have reduced the gospel to a certain prayer to pray and a card to fill out.
- There must be a safe place in Christian community for unbelievers to consider the cost.
- Becoming a Christ-follower takes time (and it seems to take even longer today).

We do need to consider, however, that decision-journey churches invite people into Christian community before they are Christians, and that has some challenges. Over the course of time, the church well soon find that those they welcomed also want to be affirmed--and that can be theologically tricky!

## Ed Stetzer Evangelism Journey



# Attractional Churches

The gospels are packed with stories of people who pointed others to Jesus. The Samaritan woman at the well said, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! Could He be the Messiah?" (John 4). Even in Jesus' parables, He affirms the idea of finding friends and family and bringing them to Himself. Jesus said, "go out along the back roads and fence rows and compel people to come in, so that my house will be full." (Luke 14:23). In the early church, when Jesus ascended, since the disciples couldn't bring people to a literal Jesus--they brought inquirers to the church. On Pentecost, "a crowd gathered" to discover what was happening.

Is it wrong to do what attractional churches do in meeting the felt needs of people? Not necessarily. The woman at the well was literally thirsty and Jesus met her felt need and used the experience as a bridge to address her spiritual need. Peter was interested in fishing, so Jesus said, "I will teach you to bring in people instead of fish." Dan Huckins said, "The degree to which you find out how to plug into the brokenness of your community--that will take the limits off of your growth."

Attractional churches employ *Friend Day* campaigns and emphases in order to grow their church. Similar to Home Depot's slogan, "You can do it, we can help!" -- some churches empower the members to bring their loved ones to faith in Christ and His church. An attractional church is one that is build around the concept of "come and see."

For many people, attractional churches are losing their luster. Why? Because it assumes a level of interest that only a church culture cares about. Yet at the same time, people bring their friends when they are excited about the church--they find it attractive and are convinced that others will as well. Simply put, churches often grow by attraction. That may bother some people but it doesn't make it any less true. In fact, all churches are attractional to some extent--the issue is how much and with how much discernment.

We must understand that how we appeal to someone--churched or unchurched--will ultimately affect how we retain them. The authors say, "For decades we've focused heavily on 'fixing up the barn' so that the wheat will harvest itself. We have big, clean, and appealing barns now, but the culture is less impacted by the gospel than it was before we spruced up the buildings and spiced up all the churches in the '80's."

There are a couple of things we can learn from this model:

- Jesus attracted people at times. People saw needs being met and they responded accordingly. Then Jesus challenged them to become true followers.
- Churches do grow when they do things with excellence. It's a fact that churches more frequently grow when they have emphasized quality, excellence, and other factors that attract people. It's not good or bad--it's just true.

There are, however, some things we need to consider. Like any innovation, there are concerns:

- Attractional churches need to work hard to get their people into the community. Ultimately, only the leaders of a church can develop and maintain an outward-focused environment and ministry. If attractional churches do not get their people on mission, their future is in doubt.



- Attractional churches may fight over attendees. It is quite possible for another attractional church to spring up, siphoning off the consumers into a new and better church experience. Attractional works only until someone else does it better. When that occurs, you need to be sure that you do not get angry at the people who leave--you taught them to think that way when you attracted them in the first place.
- Attractional churches can trivialize the gospel. Trivialization is probably in the eye of the beholder, but the gospel cannot be reduced to Christian pop culture of a gimmick.
- Attractional churches can segregate God's people by preference. Like-minded people are attracted to the same thing. There is a danger that such churches can promote division in the Body (i.e. "We have a better [fill in the blank] than you do.")

Attractional churches are probably the most common of the growing churches today--they are also the most criticized. Attractional churches needs to remember two things: 1.) Who they are often produces a level of commitment they may not want, and 2.) how they grew often produces a view of outreach they shouldn't solely rely on.