

Youth Leave Church, Uncaring Congregations

A report featuring young people ages 18-22, who have the highest church dropout rate of any other age group, found that 51 percent described their church as “judgmental.”



[] A recently released report by Rainer Research conducted on 18- to 22-year-olds showed that only 39 percent of those who dropped out of church saw their churches as “caring,” while 51 percent described them as “judgmental.”

Other unfavorable views came to light as well. Forty-one percent said their churches were “insincere.”

Only 20 percent described their churches as “inspirational”; 30 percent said their churches were “authentic”; and a surprisingly low 36 percent called their churches “welcoming.”

For Sam S. Rainer III, who heads Rainer Research, these insider perceptions are troubling. “Yes, we need to be greatly concerned about outside perceptions,” Rainer said. “But perhaps more frightening are what our own students are saying about our churches.”

Study: Americans Describe Their Top Concerns

The Barna Group’s latest study found that Americans are most concerned about poverty, personal debt and HIV/AIDS. Evangelicals have these same concerns but differ on other

points.



[] The Barna Group's latest study of more than 1,000 adults, found three issues considered to be "major" problems in this country: poverty (78 percent), personal debt (78 percent) and HIV/AIDS (76 percent).

Four other issues emerged as moderate concerns, including illegal immigration (60 percent), global warming (57percent), abortion (50 percent) and TV content (45 percent) according to Barna.

The study also looked at two Christian groups: "born again" Christians and a small, more socially conservative subset pegged as "evangelical voters."

The born-again group essentially mirrored the larger population on personal debt, poverty and HIV/AIDS. But they diverged on other issues: illegal immigration (68 percent), abortion (67 percent), TV content (60 percent), homosexuality (51 percent) and homosexual activists (49 percent).

The subset of evangelical voters saw abortion as the most important issue (94 percent), followed by personal debt (81 percent), TV content (79 percent), homosexual activists (75 percent), and gay and lesbian lifestyles (75 percent).

They were also less concerned about global warming and HIV/AIDS than the rest of the population the research group finds.

Church Gives Away Shot

Glasses to Evangelize

Staffers at a Charlotte, N.C. church recently visited bars in the area and gave shot glasses to bar patrons in hopes of drawing people to its new campus, which opens in February.



[] Staffers of Next Level Church in Charlotte, N.C., recently went through bars in the city's Ballantyne area handing out shot glasses to bar patrons reports .

The mugs ask people to "give us a shot" and bear the church's slogan, "Real church for real people." The church hopes to draw people to its Ballantyne campus, which opens in February.

Next Level pastor Robbie McLaughlin admits the idea is controversial, but adds that the goal is to get the attention of non-churchgoers, not those already attending one.

"For so long, the church has been really guilty of making people come to it," McLaughlin told . "If we're going to connect to people, we've got to go where they are."

Meanwhile, in Mariposa, Calif., youth leader Jeff Tomerlin of New Life Christian Fellowship is facing some heat for means of outreach: Paintball for Jesus (or PBJ).

After hosting several events that combined testimonies with paint pellets, Tomerlin's group faced some resistance after asking to use publicly owned county property reports .

Critics questioned the pray-and-shoot blend of "religion and violence," while the church contends it provides youth an opportunity "where they could see godly adults acting as mentors."

Group Urges Pastors to Talk Politics

Mathew Staver, the head of a Christian legal advocacy group, recently called on pastors to stop fearing they may lose their tax-exempt status and start speaking up politically.



[] The head of a Florida-based Christian legal advocacy group recently called on pastors and churches to stop fearing they might lose their tax-exempt status during this year's election cycle and to start speaking up for the issues that affect their congregations.

"Pastors should throw away the muzzles that some wish to impose on them and replace them with megaphones," said Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and dean of Liberty University's School of Law. "It is far more likely to be struck by lightning twice than for churches to lose their tax-exempt status over political issues."

Meanwhile, as Staver and others promoted the involvement of pastors in politics, the fledgling Christian Churches Together (CCT), one of the largest ecumenical groups in the U.S., decided it would sit out the upcoming presidential race in order to focus its efforts on combating domestic poverty, reported Religion News Service.

Islamic Extremism Flourishing in England

A prominent bishop in the Church of England came under fire recently for alleging that England's emphasis on "multiculturalism" and religious pluralism has sidelined

Christianity.



[] A prominent bishop in the Church of England came under fire recently for alleging that England's emphasis on "multiculturalism" and religious pluralism, coupled with a worldwide surge in interest in Islamic extremism, have helped to isolate Muslim communities.

As a result, he said, Christianity had been sidelined, youth were feeling alienated from the nation they grew up in and some communities had turned into "no-go" areas for non-Muslims.

The ominous letter written by the Rev. Michael Nazir-Ali, the Church of England's Bishop of Rochester, and published in the *Sunday Telegraph* on Jan. 6 drew a backlash of protest from England's Islamic community, which called for his resignation.

But senior figures from the Church of England backed the high-ranking, Pakistan-born bishop's remarks, pointing out that Christians living in predominantly Muslim areas in England feel nervous about expressing their faith.

The Rev. John Goddard, the bishop of Burnley, later told London's *Daily Telegraph* he endorsed his colleague's position.

It's the "start of a debate that has serious connotations," Goddard said. "The seriousness is, how do you enable people of different cultures, races and faiths to live together as one nation? That seems to be at the back of what he is saying."

House - Church

Leader

Imprisoned in China

Chinese police arrested a highly prominent house-church leader, along with his colleague and a co-worker, recently while the three were conducting church services.



[] Chinese police arrested a highly prominent house-church leader, along with his colleague and a co-worker, recently while the three were conducting church services near Jiuquan City in the Christian hotbed of Henan Province, China Aid Association (CAA) reported.

Fifteen days later the co-worker, Wang Hongliang, was released while the two renowned and aging house church leaders—Su Dean and Tian Min-ge, also known as Tian Jin—had their charges elevated to criminal detention in earlier this month.

Tian, whom believers affectionately call “Uncle Jin,” is known for his decades of work in uniting underground believers. He worked with the famed Zhang Rongliang (currently imprisoned as well), onetime leader of the large Fangcheng Mother Church network, during the late 1990s, when many underground networks of house-church leaders began to assemble a counsel and centralize church activities and doctrines.

Su Dean is a longtime friend and co-worker of Tian’s. The 71-year-old Tian has been arrested many times for his Christian activities, including in 1994 while hosting Hong Kong-based pastor Dennis Balcombe.

At the time this article was posted, the two men had been transferred from Jiuquan Detention Center to Fangcheng County Public Security Bureau of Henan.

Conference Features Secular, Christian Leaders

This past weekend the “Rethink Conference,” which was held at Robert Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral, was “a rare opportunity to get inside the minds of some of today’s top thinkers”.



[01-22-08] Both Christian and global leaders met in Southern California this past weekend for a unique, and unprecedented conference aimed at pointing church and ministry leaders in a more progressive, culturally relevant direction.

Dubbed the “Rethink Conference” and held at Robert Schuller’s Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, the list of more than two dozen prominent speakers included former President George H.W. Bush, Larry King, Chuck Colson, Erwin McManus, George Barna, Henry Cloud, John Townsend, Rupert Murdoch and Lee.

The event, which organizers called “a rare opportunity to get inside the minds of some of today’s top thinkers and innovators,” was simulcast live via satellite to host sites in 44 major U.S. cities.

Grassley to Send Another Round of Letters

Iowa Sen. Charles Grassley is set to send out another round of letters to the six prominent charismatic television ministries he began investigating in November.



[01-21-07] Amid criticism and support, Iowa Sen. Charles

Grassley, the ranking Republican on the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, is set to send out another round of letters to the six prominent charismatic television ministries he began investigating in November the Associated Press (AP) reported.

The follow-up documents, which will go out in the next few weeks, will further inquire about many of the unanswered questions surrounding such issues as salaries, private jets, mansions and luxury vehicles.

Among those asked for financial records, only Joyce Meyer's and Kenneth Copeland's ministries have turned over documents.

Though the ministries led by Benny Hinn and Randy and Paula White have been in touch with Grassley's office, they have not indicated whether they plan to cooperate.

According to the AP both Creflo Dollar and Eddie Long have been adamant in their refusal to disclose information, claiming Grassley has no right to lead such an investigation.

"It's been extremely rare for tax-exempt groups to decline to cooperate with his requests for information," said Finance Committee spokeswoman Jill Gerber. "Tax-exempt groups usually work to answer questions from a leader of the Senate committee that sets tax policy. Sen. Grassley hopes that these groups will be similarly cooperative with this inquiry."

Earl Paulk: Guilty of Felony Perjury

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Recently Earl Paulk turned himself into Atlanta-area authorities, the day after the Georgia Bureau of Investigation had issued a warrant for his arrest and gave him 48 hours to surrender to one felony count of perjury, reported the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (AJC).

The 80-year-old founder of the once-thriving Cathedral of the Holy Spirit pleaded guilty the next day to lying and was sentenced to 10 years probation and also fined \$1000.

The *AJC* reported that the conviction came after new evidence challenged a deposition Paulk gave last year in a sexual misconduct lawsuit in which he claimed he had only one other sexual partner—former church member Mona Brewer—outside of his marriage.

Recent DNA evidence showing he fathered a child with his sister-in-law contradicted the sworn statement.

'Facing the Giants' Creators Complete New Film

The makers of 'Facing the Giants', the church-made movie that took in \$10 million in theaters, recently finished filming their latest Christian drama.



[01-18-08] The makers of *Facing the Giants*, the church-made movie that took in \$10 million in theaters and remains a top-selling DVD, recently finished filming their latest Christian drama about saving a failing marriage.

Stephen Kendrick, co-writer and director for the newest movie

from Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., along with his brother Alex, wrapped up five weeks of shooting last month for *Fireproof*-which stars Kirk Cameron as a firefighter whose seven-year marriage is on the rocks, Baptist Press (BP) reported.

Scheduled to hit theaters in August, *Fireproof*?like *Facing the Giants*?will be distributed through Provident Films, a subsidiary of Sony Pictures.

Best known for the 1980s television series *Growing Pains*, Cameron said he got involved in the movie after bumping into Alex Kendrick and Sherwood pastor Michael Catt in an airport last year. Cameron, who attended the Hollywood screening of *Facing the Giants*, auditioned "just like anyone else," BP reported.

Alex Kendrick said the movie is timely because "the foundation of marriage has been attacked, devalued and redefined by many in our culture," BP reported.

"Our hope would be that after viewing the film, couples and singles hoping to marry would be challenged and exhorted to pursue God-honoring relationships that reinforce the foundations of marriage in light of a relationship with Jesus Christ," he said. "We want people to realize that 'fireproof' does not mean the absence of fire, but the ability to withstand it."

As with *Facing the Giants* and the church's first film, *Flywheel*, production for *Fireproof* was driven by church volunteers, BP reported.