

5 Ways to Stop the Steep Church Decline and Ignite a Revolution

Is the sun setting on the church in America?

Some people say that Christianity is declining, but the numbers are encouraging others. Some say only nominal Christians are fading away and this is increasing the more serious, robust faith among believers.

Several church experts are saying: What's going away is a nominalism, but the percentage of people who are devout Christians isn't shifting, which means there's still so much opportunity for the mission force to continue engaging the mission field.

The church is catching lots of flack.

That is not a surprise, because everyone who stands up for conservative causes grabs a liberal amount of criticism. Get the pun?

So, is the church fading away or becoming stronger? There is a measure of truth in all views. Others are highlighting statistics of decline in attendance and financial support.

As recently as 30 years ago, 67% of Americans attended and supported a local church. The most recent (2013) poll by the Pew Research Center reported that just 37% of Americans attended church weekly (Gallup's estimate came in at 39% in 2013). This reduction in attendance stayed on the trend with declining attendance reported at religious services from 2007 to 2014; about one-third of Americans now say they worship weekly and two-thirds say they rarely or never attend a service.

The decline in attendance is real. The northern states are seeing much more decline than southern states. According to Barna, the South leads the way in the 20 most-churched cities in America.

Barna's latest report ranks the nation's largest cities according to three different metrics related to church attendance: churchd (very active), unchurchd and dechurchd. Those classified as churchd (very active) have attended a church service in the past seven days, not including a special event such as a wedding or a funeral. Those classified as unchurchd have not attended a church service in the past six months, not including a special event such as a wedding or a funeral. And finally, those classified as dechurchd were formerly either very, somewhat or minimally active churchgoers, but have not attended a church service in the past six months, excluding a special event such as a wedding or a funeral. Based on Barna's most recent data, almost 4 in 10 (38%) Americans are active churchgoers, slightly more (43%) are unchurchd and around one-third (34%) are dechurchd.

So in the conundrum, what is the outcome?

And with the negative press in searching for a church family, what do you look for?

1. **Find a church that shares your values.** What do you value in a church family? What are your priorities? If you have children, then family must be a big part of the decision.

Your values are established by your most urgent family needs. Certain values are very important. Some are essential, while others are non-essential though important.

Be sure and focus on the essentials and skip the non-essentials.

2. **Find a church with pastors who care.** Shepherds smell

like the sheep. That means they are hands-on with families and involved in the care and well-being of the flock. Pastors give their lives for the congregation. No one needs a lazy pastor or a prima donna.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. But he who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and runs away. So the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them" (John 10:10-12).

Pastors are not hirelings; they are servants called to serve others. They follow Christ and care for God's people. And they lay their lives down for them.

This is our modern-day church struggle. Pastors are more served than servants. This causes people to become disillusioned with the church.

Our family loves and supports pastors. We honor our leaders and our leaders love their flock. The church should reciprocate the love and care for the leaders, especially those who love and care for their flock.

Pastors should do their work with fervor and honor and enjoy blessings.

3. Find a church that will challenge you. The church is not your friend first. The church family should challenge you to live for Christ, to serve His kingdom, and to live godly in this age.

The church is too politically correct and too publicly correct to be effective.

Todd Henry says: You can be both liked and effective, but you can't chase both at the same time.

So we must desire challenge and accept strong challenges from the Word of God. The best churches are the ones that bring out

the best in you. And they can only do that through challenging you and not ensuring that you stay comfortable.

4. **Find a church that brings out the best in you.** The best church is not an environment where you always feel good. No. The best church causes you to reach your fullest potential.

The best churches have teachers who tell you what you need to hear and not what you prefer to hear.

Suck it up, buttercup—you have a great life to live.

5. **Find a church that believes in you.** Leaders who believe in themselves believe in others. Never sit under a minister or leaders who are self-consumed. There is an exception.

You can stay in a place where you are called to change and where you have the access to accomplish that purpose.

There are exceptions to every thought. But to move on, we must develop the ability to believe the best in others. This is so paramount to experiencing a healthy church.

Everyone possesses gifts and everyone is equipped.

That is “why” the church exists.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sound judgment, according to the measure of faith God has distributed to every man. For just as we have many parts in one body, and not all parts have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and all are parts of one another” (Rom. 12:3-6).

Notice the Scripture: We are all parts of one another.

Some of you are MIA (missing in attendance).

Don't let the sun set on you. A sunrise follows every sunset.

Maybe you can raise the sun in somebody's church.

Show up and let your light shine. {eoa}

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