

Why So Many Christians Are Just Done With Church

A recent Pew Research Center survey showing a significant drop in the Christian population in America left unanswered why the exodus from the church is underway.

A study just released by sociologists Dr. Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope answers that question.

In their new book, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE With Church but Not Their Faith*, the authors reveal why church members are deciding to be done with organized religion—and who these “Dones” really are.

Comparing those who leave the church to political refugees, the authors write, “Refugees are people who’ve been forced from their homes—for fear of persecution. That describes the dechurched. If they stayed they would risk further estrangement from their spiritual selves, from God, and from a religion they still believe in.”

That many leaving the church remain passionate about their faith surprises many church-trend watchers—but it’s not the only unexpected finding in the study.

Packard and Hope’s research also confirms it’s not simply marginal Christians or new converts who are leaving the church. Rather, Dones are frequently among an established church’s most active members, generous donors and spiritually mature believers.

Among four recurring reasons Dones give for finally exiting the church is the desire to find a community that demonstrates “a shared understanding that we’re all broken and in need of grace.”

Rather than experiencing that sort of participatory, grace-filled community within the church, Dones describe church leaders and members “making lifestyle declarations and judgments without owning up to their own shortcomings.”

Some leaders within the church take exception with the study’s findings.

In a comment posted on Holy Soup, a blog describing the newly released book, one pastor cautioned readers to “accept the vision and direction God gives your church through the pastor. There’s a reason God gave you that pastor, and there’s a reason you are not the pastor.”