

Why the Relevant Church Kills the Cool Church Every Time

Every decade leaves an indelible impression on the culture. In the last decade, one of the culturally related shifts is how society relates to the church.

America was once a nation founded on Christian principles. The “Christian” label has declined from the once Christian and family-centric cultural values.

While some hold to Christian values, people of faith engage in and attend church less than the former generations.

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).

Church attendance remains a declining trend in 2020. About one-third of Americans now say they worship weekly and two-thirds say they rarely or never attend a service.

Taylor Billings Russell—research specialist for the United Church of Christ’s Center for Analytics, Research and Data (CARD)—recently explored the origin of this widely quoted statistic. The “6,000 to 10,000 churches closing a week” statistic lacked credibility. Academic research into this topic suggests that in recent years, 1% to 2% of American churches close. Put differently, the best estimate among researchers is that 3,850 to 7,700 congregations closing a year which works out to around 75 to 150 congregations a week.

There are a variety of reasons why churches have experienced a decline in attendance. The primary reason is that many churches are irrelevant to the lives of everyday believers.

Additional reasons Americans have stopped going to church:

- Some choose to practice their faith in different ways.
- Some report feeling unwelcomed.
- Some cannot find a church they identify with.
- Some believe churches lack authenticity.

The church is not the only organization suffering declining statistics. Several organizations have seen a shift in how people engage their organizations.

For instance, online sales have strongly affected retail establishments. We have witnessed the downsizing and closures of many retailers.

These shifts are real, and retailers have altered the way they engage customers. Can we trace the trend to both secular and sacred organizations? Yes, absolutely.

The American church must find creative ways to stay relevant to the culture. The church is totally equipped to make a difference in the lives of the American family.

The practical aspects are in place. Most of the churches are culturally relevant, educationally adequate and the facilities are trendy and well-kept.

However, the actual services are boring and irrelevant.

People need empowerment in the everyday, practical aspects of life. Many churches have failed to learn the lessons from marketplace companies such as Kodak and Blockbuster.

There are countless other companies that have floundered, shrunk or grown obsolete.

That said, being relevant and making an impact must include more than being cool. "Cool church" is not enough. Being

relevant is more than sexy lights and haze machines. A great guitar solo no longer reaches the average churchgoer. There must be more.

The modern-day church cannot resemble something from the past. Cookie-cutter services fail to engage the human heart. As believers and leaders in the Christian faith, we must pay attention to our stale methods and take action to be relevant to the next generation.

God has given the church remarkable creative ideas to reach this generation. We must also seek new biblical methods without losing the relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The test for most churches is the willingness to set aside what is obsolete.

We must also discover practical tools and take new risks in reaching our cities.

The gospel message of Jesus Christ is the greatest impression to impart to every generation.

And that will never change. {eoa}