

Can Church Channel Replace Local Church?

What if there were a special television channel that carried the most popular church services and ministry programs featuring America's favorite Christian leaders—24 hours every day of the week?

That was the question Dr. Paul Crouch, founder of the religious broadcasting giant Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), began asking himself several years ago as he and the team at TBN looked for ways to expand the influence of faith-and-family TV to new audiences.

"We were seeing an increase in the number of specialty—or niche—networks on cable and satellite television, channels that were geared for a particular group of viewers," Crouch recalls. "At the same time our research was showing that churches services were among the most watched religious programs on television."

In addition, Crouch notes, cultural shifts were beginning to dramatically impact the worship habits of millions of Americans—a shift that continues to this day. Researcher George Barna, one of the leading authorities on the changing face of religion in America, has noted that while a majority of Americans retain a strong belief in God and many express a desire to maintain a connection to church and organized worship, fully one-third of Americans do not attend church on a regular basis. In fact, over the past few years the number of "unchurched" Americans has grown by nearly a million individuals annually.

"But Barna's research was telling us that these millions of folks who weren't going to church were still looking for spiritual input in their lives," says Crouch, "and many were

relying on Christian media as that spiritual touchpoint.”

In 2002 TBN launched the Church Channel, the only network dedicated to broadcasting church services and ministry programs 24 hours a day. Since its beginnings the Church Channel has drawn some of the most influential and popular Christian leaders in the nation, from a broad range of denominations and traditions.

Bob Higley, TBN’s vice president for cable and satellite relations, notes that the Church Channel stands out among the scores of niche networks vying for attention in the world of cable and satellite.

“Among current cable subscribers, we found that a healthy 31 percent were interested in receiving the Church Channel,” Higley says. “That interest goes to the heart of our philosophy behind all of TBN’s networks. From the very beginning our focus has been to respond to that need every individual has to be uplifted and inspired in their daily life. We think the Church Channel, like all our networks, does that pretty well.”

What about you? Do you watch the Church Channel? Can TV replace a local church?