

12 Reasons You Shouldn't Give Up on Local Church

I know. I have been a spokesman for gloom and doom of the local church. I've even written a book about church autopsies—not necessarily a topic of hope and joy.

There have, however, been reasons for my notes of caution and pessimism. First, we must face facts if we are to do something about them. We can't expect to move forward if we have our metaphorical heads in the sand.

Such is the reason I wrote a book on church deaths. Second, the negative situation I have described is a reality. It would not demonstrate integrity if I said something different.

But, in the midst of the gloomy facts, I remain an obnoxious optimist about local congregations. I do believe there is a very good possibility that we won't go the way of many other places that have seen the decline of churches to the point of irrelevance.

Allow me to share 12 reasons I remain hopeful.

1. Leaders in congregations are demonstrating a willingness to face reality. They are no longer playing games as if everything is OK. We must face the facts as we seek God's power to do something about them.

2. Prayer movements are developing in many churches. These movements are typically more spontaneous than planned. When God's people start praying, revival has already begun.

3. Both church planting and church revitalization are being emphasized. These two emphases have historically been viewed as competitive with one another. Today, more church leaders see them as complementary and vital. That is good.

4. There is a wedding of theology and practical ministry. In the 1970s and '80s, the church-growth movement advocated practical ministry often to the neglect of biblical and theological foundations. For the past 15 years, there has been a needed emphasis on good theology, but often to the neglect of practical issues. Today, there is a growing balance that realizes good theology should birth healthy practical ministry.

5. There is a growing emphasis on local church evangelism. Related to the issue in number four, more church leaders are now realizing they are in congregations bereft of evangelistic health. That is changing for the better.

6. Almost everywhere is a mission field. The bad news is that fewer people are Christians today, at least in America, than any point in known history. The good news is that our towns and neighborhoods are mission fields ready for workers.

7. The "multi-" movement is reaching into new areas. Church leaders no longer view a single church site or service as the limits of ministry. The growth of multi-service, multi-venue, multi-site and multi-campus has provided more opportunities to reach more people.

8. More church leaders are engaging culture rather than isolating themselves from culture. While the degradation of biblical values in our culture can be a temptation to withdraw from the world, more church leaders are moving into culture to be "salt and light." We don't have to compromise our biblical values, but we can be gracious ambassadors in this new and often strange world.

9. Church acquisitions and mergers are saving many congregations from death. In the recent past, there was little hope for congregations on a rapid downward spiral. Today, more and more of these congregations are willing to be acquired or to merge; thus the witness of the church in that community

remains alive.

10. Meaningful church membership is becoming a greater reality. It is heartening to see more congregations embrace a higher-expectation membership. As a consequence, local churches will soon become healthier and more impactful in their communities.

11. The worship wars are waning. Three decades of worship wars have taken their toll on our congregations. I wrote about this issue in a recent post. And, despite a few protestations to the contrary, I stand by my thesis. There will be more energy to focus on ministry rather than to fight one another.

12. Church members are doing greater ministry in the local communities. We can largely credit Christian millennials with this trend. Local church ministry is moving from “you come” to “we go.”

I am not suggesting that these developments are indicative of a quick turnaround of our congregations. Many are still in dire straits. But I am hopeful. Above all, my trust is in the one true God who is still working among His people. I am excited to see what He will do.

Let me hear from you. Tell me what you think about these 12 reasons. Tell me what you are seeing in your churches.

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