

The Dilemma and the Data in the American Church

Churches across America are in a battle for survival.

Some churches are thriving, but most are only surviving. Some data indicates 3 out of 5 churches will close in the next five years.

George Barna has published a report called The Future of Missions.

Dr. Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board, wrote the preface. He begins by clearly stating some grim facts.

- Church attendance and the number of people who identify themselves as Christians are in sharp decline.
- Christians are not as involved in church as their parents were.
- Nearly half of young adults and young people are feeling increasingly uneasy about witnessing. Millennials ignore the command to go and make disciples.
- Christianity is being marginalized, while consumerism and self-fulfillment are today's top goals.

This data has the church on its heels. Twelve months ago, the church gurus focused on improving the livestream as the key to maintaining members and remaining strong.

But the most recent data shows that COVID-19 brought in a shift of lifestyle and a new perspective about how people viewed the church.

Pastor Mark Clark says, "We have to recognize that attitudes

toward the church have changed.

These days, many view the church as anti-gay, judgmental, too political, racist, and hypocritical.

Those are probably the top things that the outside, the post-Christian world, says about the church (and many within the church who choose to leave). The church has to be able to speak into these things.”

How can the church recover from such a bad reputation?

For a large percentage of society, the church was once the light of the community.

That is no longer true.

For months we heard that livestream is the new foyer. Once the churches reopened, the church experts were advising churches to up their game with digital content.

The livestream was the lifejacket for the church. Many pastors believed that livestream was the new church foyer. But hold on. The foyer moved again.

Swallow the Blue Pill

The blue pill is shining acts of kindness and reaching out to the community. I love it and agree. Serving others is a great idea.

Can serving others save the reputation of the local church? I’m not sure, but it’s a great place to start.

I love to say, “some can only be reached by being served.”

Who does not like being served? Who says no to random acts of kindness?

I came across this story a few months ago.

A Rector Who Repairs Bikes

Robbie Pruitt is an assistant rector at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Leesburg, Virginia. He is also the subject of a unique profile in *The Washington Post*.

Someone stole his mountain bike off the rack of his Honda Odyssey last September. He realized that the thief might have stolen the bike because they're in short supply during the pandemic.

So, Pruitt, who has been riding and repairing bikes since he was a child, announced that he would fix anyone's bicycle free of charge. He also said he was accepting unwanted bikes, which he would improve and donate to people in need.

By the end of the year, he had repaired more than 140 bicycles, donating 60% of them and returning the rest to their owners. He primarily focuses on supporting children and families who are struggling.

Pruitt says, "You're certainly providing a service, but it's not the bikes. It's the relationships in the community. It's the impact you can make with people."

Whose bike will you repair today?

Churches Step Up

In 2020, Elevation Church in North Carolina logged 110,000 volunteer hours with its city outreaches.

Churches in many cities are stepping up their game.

LifeBridge Christian Center in Longview, Texas, recently reached out to its community with multiple programs to serve others. The church branded its outreach "My City, My Responsibility."

LifeBridge cooked for first responders, delivered food,

cleaned city parks, visited skate parks, supplied food for kids at parks, cleaned flower beds at local schools and purchased items for foster kids.

This is nothing short of remarkable.

Churches all across America are doing fantastic work.

Is community outreach the answer for the struggling church? Maybe and maybe not.

One thing is for sure—where people serve, no one loses. {eo}

This post first appeared here.

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