

## Lesson Plan Outline – CRE Level II – Christian Education

### (Self-paced, Home Study Format)

**General Instructions:** The student is responsible for studying all assigned reading material. Responses to the assigned discussion topics must be submitted to the instructor in written form, either electronically (email) or typed hard copy for review. Topics assigned for collaborative dialogue should be discussed either with the CRE's assigned Mentor or home Pastor, with a written summary of the dialogue submitted to the instructor.

**Required Readings:** BOO G-1.0401; G-1.0402; G- 2.0402; G-3.0201. c; W2.3012; *To Set One's Heart*, Little (all); *Entering the World of the Small Church*, Pappas (p. 84-87); *Inside the Small Church*, Pappas (p.130-131, 162-170)

### **Topics for Discussion**

1. As a CRE in an on-going relationship with a congregation you will provide spiritual and administrative leadership ordinarily provided by a Teaching Elder. Based on your understanding of the Book of Order readings and personal experience list and discuss as many specific responsibilities as you can identify with regard to the "Christian education" which a CRE would need to fulfill in such a leadership role. Consider educational functions such as include education of parents about Baptism, education of candidates for Baptism, Education of all Baptized as to relationship of Baptism & Eucharist, essentials of the faith, elder training, Bible study.
2. Identify and discuss the insights from the reading *To Set One's Heart*, Little) which you found to be the most important/helpful.
3. Little provides descriptions of five educational formats on pages 40-41 of her book. Describe a setting for which each format might be appropriate and explain why.
4. The readings from the Pappas books suggests that often congregations down-play or depreciate the various gifts and talents which they do possess, caught up in concern for what they do not have. Discuss how you could as their spiritual leader and guide help them to identify, appreciate and employ their gifts.
5. Reflect upon your own experience with Christian education. Describe and discuss the best (most effective) instruction and the worst (least effective) instruction which you have encountered.

### **Collaborative Dialogue** (discuss the following either with your CRE Mentor or home Pastor)

6. What Christian education functions has the Pastor found to be particularly rewarding? What is that Pastor's personal approach to Christian education? What has worked well? What has not been effective? What resources to aid in Christian education are available from our presbytery and denomination?

## **CRE's Personal Plan for Evangelism in an On-going Relationship with a Congregation**

7. As a CRE in an on-going relationship with a congregation you will need to provide leadership in vital Christian education functions. They would include education of parents about Baptism, education of candidates for Baptism, Education of all Baptized as to relationship of Baptism & Eucharist, essentials of the faith, elder training, Bible study. Discuss how you would approach these duties of Christian education. What resources would you call upon? How would you engage members of the congregation?

courses of action, which would otherwise be resented, are made legitimate.

What could have independently moved the xenophobic Amish culture to befriend and convert an imprisoned murderer? I can conceive of no plan that could accomplish that. But it occurred. In fact, not only did it occur, but it was interpreted as a call from God back to their true selves!

What cannot be planned can be envisioned and orchestrated for God's Kingdom. I was tired of living and worshipping (our sanctuary and parsonage are in the same building) in a century old, drafty, uninsulated, code violating, rundown building. But we struggled to meet general expenses. How could we ever get the vision to repair and renovate our facility? As I mulled over these issues, I got the bill for the church's previous load of fuel oil. It had been one of the coldest years in recent memory. Now it was the last week of December. We were way over budget for heating oil already. It might break our backs to get socked with yet another bill. I could sit on it a week. Create the illusion of fiscal solvency by deferring the expense to the next year. What bad luck! Or...or I could look for the blessing in the bill—see it as an instrument of God. The extremely cold year—accidental or providential? I asked the Treasurer to pay the bill immediately. Two weeks later at our annual business meeting the people were shocked by our oil overage. I asked for a committee to investigate installing new windows and insulation. Motion passed without dissent. Six months of homework later the committee proposed a complete renovation and had \$23,000 pledged to start us off! It took five years of blood, sweat and tears, but our church building is now renovated and up to code! That one unplanned, oversize fuel bill moved us as no rational argument could have—an accident is always more motivational in a folk society than an argument!

How many accidents is God sending your way? Are you using them as God intends—a divine catalyst for faithfulness?

## 5. Creating a Climate of the Possible

If you were to ask the people in your small church which is their favorite Biblical book, the answers would vary. Psalms, would say the poets and pray-ers. Romans, would say the believers. James, would say the doers. Acts, would say the activists. And Job, the beleaved and aggrieved. But I would venture to say that the one book that reflects most nearly the mood of the small church today is Lam-

entations. Listen to most any conversation among your people. The world isn't what it used to be. The country isn't what it used to be. Farming isn't what it used to be. Our town isn't what it used to be. The neighborhood isn't what it used to be. The church isn't what it used to be. The old gray mayor isn't what he used to be. Lament. Lament. Lament. There is a sadness and a grief in small churches today. It is true things aren't what they used to be. But they never were. I wish God had had enough sense to place me in an age when I could have been happy. . . . Well, ahem, I suppose God did. But happiness is not automatic. There is a very real sense in which we choose happiness. My wife is a wonderful companion for me. She is a great helpmate and fellow traveler along life's journey. Yet she has a couple of idiosyncracies. If I focus on them, the joy goes out of our relationship. I have two good, healthy, happy kids. But sometimes I make my family miserable harassing them for falling short of perfection. I have a wonderful, Christian community of faith. But on occasion I get down on these fine people—when I focus on their lacks instead of their strengths.

For some reason the empty half of the glass, rather than the full half, grabs our attention. And the litanies of lament begin. What would happen if we saw what's right instead of what's wrong. What if we took the Bible seriously: "Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice." "Count it all joy. . . ." How is it that in his epistles Paul, no matter how severe the difficulties he dealt with later on, could always find a number of sincere points of praise with which to begin his communication? Does our leadership start with the good and only then address the improvable? We pray "Thy Kingdom come," but do we rejoice in its little manifestations or lament its absences?

Lament is, I believe, the natural response of people who want to function in a folk society way but who actually find that modern society has moved out from underneath them. The dissonance between the way things are and the way we remember them generates lament. Lament is natural, but it is not healthy. It registers the problem, but it does not release a solution. It paralyzes when it should liberate.

The small church leader has two action options in the face of lament. One is to lead (Moses-like or Pied Piper-like?) the folk society into the modern society. This direction is frequently highly rewarded by one's denomination and held up as "successful." So the rural church becomes the regional church—now offering something for everyone. The single cell social nature of the folk society is replaced by a multi-cell structure. The past is radically denied and a new future is sought. Patterned behavior is jettisoned and rational ministry is enacted.

The second option deals with the dissonance and so the lament

by remembering that it has always been a struggle, that many of those qualities which made our memories so meaningful are still present with us, and that ultimately the folk society will triumph since it is the fundamental form of human life together and God's eternal promise! It recalls that the good in the good old days is as much a nostalgic creation as it was actually present.

Certainly there is good in most any situation, but our memory retains the good more than the bad and the difficult. The re-apprehension of the degree of blood, sweat, and tears in the good old days can liberate us and energize us for our struggles today. In the midst of our building remodelling drive which I mentioned earlier, after the first blush of progress, contributions plateaued and enthusiasm lagged. Why weren't we able to do what Dr. Roberts at the turn of the century could do when the church was really strong? "Huh," said ninety-five-year-old Gladys. "Sure, Dr. Roberts got a lot done. But it wasn't easy. Every year he'd have to go up and down the main street asking every proprietor for a donation. Some of them he never got a nickel out of, either. Some would give a wagon of coal. That's how the church stayed in the black!" Gladys chuckled warmly. But in those words I gained renewed resolve. Even in "the Golden Age" of our church it was touch and go. Even then it was a struggle. Somehow that brought my current struggle down to manageable proportions. What we struggle over may vary, but that we struggle is constant.

"Would you, too, leave me?" Jesus asked his disciples. "Where would we go? You have the words of life," Peter answered. Sometimes I get disgusted and discouraged by the forces at work in our community. Sometime I weary of the repetitious struggles of my little parish. At those times I direct myself to think very seriously about moving to some place better. I give it a lot of thought and I come up with the same conclusion that the Alcoholics Anonymous program does: there is no such thing as a geographic solution. The search for some place better helps me to focus on what I "have" currently: quality of life, ecological harmony, depth of personal relationships, a role to play in the community, job security, etc., etc. I have sunk my roots here. The winds of change make it harder to blossom and bear fruit, but the soil is still rich and the sun warm. If I give myself to those realities, there is still plenty of satisfaction to be gained. It is harder for folk society people to do things from conviction than it was maybe a generation or two ago to do the same thing "naturally." But if we live out our peoplehood, it will be satisfying. And time is on our side. Material wealth, abundance of energy, and technological progress allow humankind to remake the world in our image. This rational world, the world of our minds

and egos, is very powerful. People desire this world—it attracts like a magnet. But they can't actually live there. It is the personal world, the world of the small church, the folk society which is finally meaningful and satisfying. Someday we will run out of cheap fuels and humankind will have to learn to live simply, on a small scale and in harmony with nature again. Then it may well be the small churches who by their very life and nature will be salvific for society at large.

But in the meantime? It is not productive to sit around waiting for the judgment day. In the meantime we can recognize our strengths, realize that at least a glimmer of eternity is embodied in our life together, and praise God for who we are and what we do. If we take this posture, we are much more likely to be faithful to God's calling than if we preoccupy ourselves with our weaknesses. A little rejoicing is infinitely better than a lot of lamenting.

In I Corinthians Paul writes that God calls into beings those who were nothings. In the eyes of the world, even sometimes in the eyes of the denomination, the small church is a nothing. Small church people come to think of themselves similarly. Part of ministry, part of God's salvation, is to be called into being. Call your congregation into being. Acknowledge their strengths, emphasize what they have, not what they lack. After all, only those who first "are" are active and improving.

## 6. If All Else Fails, Pray!

Sometimes the best way to get something done is not to try to get anything done at all. This approach is, of course, nonsense to those who have bought into the values of corporate America. What good is someone who doesn't aim to get anything done? For these people, they are the actors and the world around them is acted upon. It is a little more intricate for the Christian, though. God is the Actor. The world evidences these actions. We are to discern God's activity and coordinate ourselves with it. It is even more intricate still in the folk society. Leadership activity is likely to be resisted, as Moses found out: "Who appointed you lord and master over us?"

I distinctly remember being burned by this latter dynamic. I was the spokesperson for a town appointed committee. We had done an incredible amount of homework, marshalled our data and arguments, and attempted to persuade our Town Fathers to budget monies for improved medical service in the upcoming fiscal year. I presented a case which was thoroughly convincing, at least to me.

## BUILDING ON THE CAPACITIES OF SMALL-MEMBERSHIP CHURCHES

*Clay Smith*

- About 40 percent of the people in rural communities are unchurched—a great opportunity for service and growth.
- Small-membership churches are located in almost every community—strategically located for mission and ministry. Many persons in our society prefer a small-membership, family-style church experience where they will be known by name.
- Most small-membership churches can grow in commitment, spiritual depth, program, giving, outreach, and numbers.

Small-membership churches are about relational ministry. We are like extended families. We can be known, we can accept and affirm others, we can be intergenerational. We can love people one person at a time. We can be family to those in our community who have no family.

Small-membership churches have a strong sense of history and shared experience. We have lots of stories to share. When the outsiders hear our story, and when we take time to hear their story, then the extended family can grow to include new people.

Small-membership churches know about the importance of place—a place to believe and to belong. Whenever I enter the chancel area of a small-membership church I often wonder about the sacred encounters that have occurred there: the professions of faith, baptisms, weddings, funerals. We even know what it means to have a special place to sit within this sacred space. Many persons in our communities, especially those who are unchurched, have no place in small-membership churches. We can learn to share our space and create a place for those who have none.

Small-membership churches often have influence and presence in their communities that is out of all proportion to their small size. Just look around when you attend the next civic group, PTA, school-board meeting, or community-planning group and count the number of church members. Small-membership churches possess great capacity, through our members, to work for good across the whole community.

Labeling the small-membership church as deficient diminishes its ability to be resourceful and responsive as members work together to build a healthier congregation and reach out to the surrounding community. Focusing on the capacities that are already there opens up many new possibilities for building a healthy, Christ-centered community of faith.

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The work of community-development researcher John McKnight—especially his ideas about capacity-building models versus deficiency models of people and communities—has been helpful for those working to rebuild rural and urban communities from the inside out. McKnight encourages us to focus on the capacities (people, groups, associations, and so forth) that are present and work for renewal based on these capacities. A deficiency model, by contrast, focuses on what is not present and designs delivery service systems to fill the gaps. McKnight believes that real community happens when folks share their capacities. Deficiency models, on the other hand, create clients and dependent relationships and undermine real community.

These concepts can be very helpful for those of us who work with small-membership congregations. We often struggle with a denominational system (and with value systems within our culture) that looks at the small-membership church and sees only its deficiencies. We know them well: “We don’t have enough—people, children, youth, young adults, young families, program, money, facilities, vision, Sunday School teachers, commitment, and so forth.” The list can go on and on. The small-membership church thus becomes more defined by what it lacks.

Part of our task as leaders with small-membership churches is to move beyond the stereotypes of deficiency to claim the capacities for ministry that we find over and over again within these congregations. The staff at Hinton Rural Life Center works individually with about 40 such congregations every year. What we find is this:

- Small-membership churches have many gifted and committed leaders who have a deep desire for their church to do well.

## EVANGELISM AND TOMORROW'S SMALL CHURCH

Anthony G. Pappas

**M**y perspective on the church scene in North America is admittedly limited, but I believe it represents reality. What I see doesn't excite me very much. Like the children of Israel on the banks of the Red Sea, the only way forward would appear to be via miraculous intervention. Well, maybe that is where the church should be.

Evangelism is the sharing of good news, or, as attributed to D. T. Niles, one beggar telling another where the bread is. If God fills our souls, as bread fills a beggar's tummy, we ought not have too much trouble at least making good news noises. However, we have fine-tuned a form of evangelism that is not particularly good news and is clearly not effective any longer. There are at least seven strategies for evangelism that, though they no longer work well or at all, we insist upon using.

### WHAT DOESN'T BRING PEOPLE TO CHRIST OR CHRIST'S BODY

1. Duty. One ought to go to church. Maybe so, but as an effective motivator this one went out with hula-hoops. Duty, loyalty, self-sacrifice for the good of the whole, honor, institutional maintenance—not only do these not motivate, they are perceived to be psychologically harmful!
2. Guilt. The majority of the population today possess one of two kinds of consciences. Some are nonfunctioning, so there is no point in trying to make these people feel bad about not being a Christian. (Pardon a theological intrusion here, but this is a humdinger of a strategy—evangelizing so that bad news may abound!) Then there are those with over-sensitive consciences—these folks are already in church (but they can't evangelize

because they don't live the good news) or they are already in therapy and aren't about to risk their multithousand-dollar investment to this appeal!

3. Open Doors. "If you build it, they will come" is the catchphrase of the movie *Field of Dreams*. It is also the evangelism strategy of a whole generation. Build a big new building and society will just pour people in. Amazingly, this worked for a decade or two, but no longer. Just being there will no longer do it. Alban Institute founder Loren Mead has noted correctly: the church is not even a blip on the current generation's radar screen!

4. Family Tradition or Expectations. The 20-somethings do almost nothing the way their parents do: music, food, lifestyle, marriage, work, and so forth. So it shouldn't be surprising that they don't do church either. The graying of mainline North American churches gives mute testimony to this fact.

5. Fear of Hell or (for that matter) Hope of Heaven. The majority of the population feel that heaven and hell are here-and-now realities. The "good news" that through faith in Jesus they can avoid a toasty afterlife is not motivating. The promise of a future heaven or hell just does not carry the same psychological power that it did even a generation ago. We are so used to beating this horse, we failed to note that it has died!

6. Coercion. High-pressure tactics, buttonholing, intimidation, and bullying is ineffective. Zeal is no substitute for love. Thanks be to God that this strategy no longer has the impact it once did. All (except, unfortunately, those with significant pathologies) just walk away.

7. Formalism/Traditionalism. For some amazing reason, people will endure mindless, heartless rituals, if they are *their* rituals. I know few people who care to sit through an hour of boring nonsense that belongs to somebody else (by the way, to whom do our worship forms belong anyhow? Grandpa? Great-great-great-grandpa?) For 20 years as a small-church pastor I vowed that everyone who gave the hour of our church worship service would leave uplifted. To whatever measure the Holy Spirit granted success, we poured some new wine into those old wineskins. Now I wonder if it wasn't a wrong-headed enterprise to begin with. In my position as an area minister I visit a different church every week. Often I leave asking, Would a visitor ever come back? The service is entirely passive; the music

antique; the liturgy disconnected from life. And even if, in my view, the content of the sermon redeems the hour, nevertheless the form is antiquated, monological, and slow in a fast-paced, interactive world. I have no doubt that God can save the world, but I wonder if even God can save us from ourselves.

"Well," you are thinking, "you acid-tongued cynic, just what would you propose?" I wish I had an ironclad program to revitalize our churches and share good news. I don't. We must all wait on the Holy Spirit. Maybe an international day of repentance, fasting, and prayer would help. In the meantime, simply to stimulate our thinking, I offer some goals and strategies.

### WHAT MIGHT ATTRACT PEOPLE TO CHRIST AND CHRIST'S BODY?

1. Life, Energy, Dynamism. Once my family and I were leaving a worship service where we had been visitors. I had my own reactions, but I slapped a smile on my face and, with a jolly lilt to my voice, asked my teenagers how they liked the service. "In a word, Dad, BORING." My kids have also considered carnivals and history-changing battlefields boring, so their response didn't trouble me. What bothered me was that I couldn't, on the basis of the hour we had just experienced, argue against their conclusion. They were right. Christians should leave worship energized, excited, enthusiastic for having touched the living God. What are we doing wrong? For starters we have a poor theology (and practice) of the Spirit. We consider the Holy Spirit to be given to the individual upon his or her faith response. We have forgotten to operate on the truth that the Spirit is given to the church; it is the Spirit that quickens the Body of Christ. Spiritual energy can flow when many people share their insights, experiences, and emotions and the Holy Spirit builds upon those gifts, it is not entertainment that is the antidote for boredom; it is involvement in the substance of spiritual life.

2. Points of Salvation. Protestant history, especially in North America, includes much in the way of revivals and revivalism—salvation seen as a total and emotional experience. Once having "got religion," folk subsequently "got respectable." Then salvation became a rigid adherence to a righteous lifestyle defined by the moralism of the day. Somehow we need to get beyond these two inadequate conceptualizations of salvation and reclaim

the divine power to save us. So I offer a goal of evangelism under the rubric, points of salvation. This simply means that an enterprise of evangelism is to discern a point at which our neighbor is hurting and then to channel God's healing touch. This might lead us to be active in building such points of salvation as 12-step groups, anger workshops, retirement planning seminars, first-time mother classes, budgeting basics, and so forth. Of course, none of these—or even all of these together—are the whole gospel. They are only points of salvation, but I wonder if this approach might not get us a whole lot further than our current practice of salvation without a point.

3. Spirituality. "Bible-baseball darts?" I echoed incredulously. "Yes sir," the successful pastor of my father's generation affirmed. "Every church I went to started a vibrant men's group playing Bible-baseball darts!" Darts, painting the sanctuary, sitting on a committee—I don't believe these will do it anymore. People are looking for spiritual nourishment. There is a craving for inner strengthening, relational health, and meaning in work and leisure activities. Every shrinking church I visit laments the secularization and spiritual disinterest of society. At the very same time books such as Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled* and Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul* have become best-sellers and remain so for months on end. People are spiritually hungry, starving even. The difference is they are no longer willing to collude with the church in an avoidance of inner work and inner issues. They no longer see the point in maintaining a form of godliness that denies the power of that God. Society's rejection of traditional "churchianity" is God's call to reclaim the spirituality of our faith. I am still convinced that if we offer spiritual resources, if we live into spiritual realities, they will come. People will always need what the Holy Spirit has to offer, but they won't settle for the wrapping paper anymore.

4. Benefit. People will respond to those things that bring them a blessing. Jesus "for the joy set before Him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Most churches are very quick to load crosses on the backs of their current or prospective members, but very slow in delivering any joy. Churches that call people who seek to be blessed "unspiritual" are trading the joy of God's presence for the self-defeating satisfactions of judgmentalism. Society has many dynamics in operation that suck the spiritual life out of people: the demands of jobs, rigorous and unrelenting schedules, the nagging of un- or under-fulfilled commitments. There is no one who needs yet another place

to be sucked dry. If the church cannot not be a place of refreshment, blessing, and benefit, then we ought to sell all that we have and give the money to the poor. We need to organize our congregational life so that people can say, deeply and sincerely, "It has been good to be in the house of the Lord!"

5. A Sense of Purpose. "Why am I here?" is the question each human being asks and answers with their life. The church has the blessed opportunity to offer God's answer, the one, true, and eternal answer, to those who are asking. The church of Jesus Christ is on a crusade for eternity. But keeping these church doors open because my great-grandma is buried out in the yard isn't a good strategy to keep the church alive. If we were following Christ's command to feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, heal the sick, and give sight to the blind, people would join us and find meaning in their involvement.

## STRATEGIES FOR SMALL-CHURCH EVANGELISM

1. Starting New Small Churches through Marketing Techniques. Many denominations are active in starting new churches. One, I understand, will fund only those new church starts that can be projected to have 500 members within five years. Their life as a small church is intended to be brief. Locations for these churches will be small in number and high in selectivity. Another denomination is projecting 500 new churches in a decade, the vast majority of which are anticipated to have bivocational leadership. These will start small and stay smallish. This denomination is trying to gear up their bivocational training programs. A third denomination utilizes a mass-marketing telephone campaign. They bring in a bank of telephones and telephoners and blitz the population with information about a new church. From this effort they expect a 1 percent response rate. With 20,000 calls, they will have enough to start a new church! Another denomination trains church planting pastors to make 10,000 house calls in one year. They expect a 2 percent response rate, which is low but enough to launch a new congregation. Two thoughts come to mind: First, these strategies are obviously limited to regions of at least 50,000 people. Second, who responds to such an appeal and how is the body of Christ built from such atomized beginnings? Maybe with time and experience we can learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of this strategy.

2. Relational Networking. We sat around the table in the church's Sunday School room. The Anglos present listened politely as the Hispanics went on and on about how the Lord was blessing them. They had started a couple of years earlier with little more than a roof over their heads, some concerned families from that city, and some families borrowed from a Hispanic church an hour away. From that handful, the congregation had grown to nearly 60 regular worshipers and 125 people at the last Family Sunday. "What's a Family Sunday?" I asked. This small, financially struggling, ethnic congregation so designates one Sunday a quarter. They prepare a potluck supper and invite all the members of their extended families, their friends and neighbors, and anybody else whom they bump into, to this special service. It is a service designed to make guests feel especially welcome as they present Christ's love to them in word and deed. Fellowship, family feeling, relational network recruiting, do-able schedule . . . hmmm, it seems there is a lesson here somewhere. Carl Dudley has said that a small church grows in the same way a family grows, by birth and by adoption (see chapter 18). Small-church evangelism is a relational enterprise. Small churches bring people to Christ by bringing them into the family of faith. It is not mass evangelism, but it is very effective evangelism when it is actually done and when the congregation is healthy. My colleague Duncan McIntosh has developed diagnostic tools by which he feels he can predict the future of evangelistic efforts in a congregation by likening their dynamics to three types of families. The first congregation he calls constricted; they have collapsed on themselves and are often dysfunctional. This congregation has a net evangelistic effort that is negative; that is, they will be smaller in the days ahead. The second type of congregation he likens to a *nuclear family*, a family of siblings. This congregation will hold its own, more or less, gaining members in the range of its losses. The third type he likens to an *extended family*, a family of cousins, a family with plenty of "holes," spaces for new people to enter. This congregation will experience net positive evangelism in the days ahead. This model of small-church evangelism operates through the relationships of the congregation, welcoming others to Christ through their love. They develop significant transformative relationships, but in a social fabric that can "breathe."

3. Community Center. A small church in the town next to ours is proud, and well they should be. A few years ago they hovered on the brink of extinction. Their new pastor helped them channel their loving inclinations into specific community ministries. Now they house a senior daycare, numerous

12-step groups, food distributions, and so forth. Their pastor reports that one out of every two hours each day, day in and day out, their church building is in use serving the community's needs. This is a form of incarnational evangelism. So when a proclamational evangelism is added to it, the credibility is already earned for a true hearing. As long as our governments continue to distance themselves from the needy, opportunities for the church to serve can only grow. Will churches choose to incarnate evangelism? And can we learn to speak the redeeming word to these new people within our own walls?

4. Structural Changes My position as an area minister sometimes takes me to two dozen churches in just two months' time. With some exceptions, I have come to see a pattern: Small churches are getting smaller, and what they are used to doing to remedy that situation is not working. I once listened for an hour as an elderly congregation recounted for me their efforts to attract new members. Valiant efforts they were, but unavailing. The fact is that people aren't buying what we are selling. (Some nostalgia buffs are, but not in sufficient quantities to re-people our empty pews.) And what we are selling is something less than the full gospel. It is our cultural version of the gospel, and though not invalid for us, it is ineffectual for most others. What is needed, of course, is a different culture or medium of expressing the Good News.

Two ways that this is occurring, though exceptional, are starting to emerge. The first is through congregational death and resurrection. Over a decade ago my denomination made a big push for new church starts, but leadership in the more highly church-ed areas created a category called "restart." These were attempts to pour new life into an older congregation that had begun to teeter on the brink. Findings showed that restarts seldom worked. The remnant congregation wanted new resources to chase their old dream. Much energy was expended demonstrating the passé nature of their style of Christianity. Fortunately, we wised up and now restarts are sanctioned after a congregation votes itself legally dead. A new group which is not seeking to replicate a specific past then attempts to envision a new ministry in that place.

The second structure involves starting a new congregation out of the old one (or, at least, a second worship service of a different culture). Small churches tend to have major problems with this concept, not only because it is so different, but also because of the need for social unity. The pastor of a church not many miles hence got a vision to start a Saturday

evening worship service in a contemporary style, followed by a covered-dish supper, to complement the traditional Sunday morning service of worship. One year into the experiment 60 folk are regular attendees on Saturday afternoon, and the pastor is both energized and exhausted. The 40 Sunday morning worshipers are experiencing a range of emotions from joy to defensiveness! I am convinced that unless small congregations renounce themselves and start to bear the cross of an alternative service they will severely limit their ability to follow Christ and proclaim good news into the future. The exact nature of the new culture embodied in the second service will vary according to the social environment, the vision of the church, and the gifts God has given them to use.

5. Being Church for the 21st Century. New ways of incarnating the Good News, of being Christ's body are starting to become discernible as we peer into the mists of the future. These include catalysts, covenants, clusters, and coalitions. Catalyst churches have a different self-image than most churches currently have. They do not see themselves as the unique locus of God's activity, but rather as the connective tissue in the incarnation of a particular aspect of God's kingdom in their setting. Currently a mid- to large-sized church may decide to program to meet the parenting needs of some of its members. A small church might note the same needs but would likely despair of a positive response. A catalytic church, even a quite small one, would be energized by this window of opportunity. It might broker a local counseling agency, an amenable daycare center, and some funding from a service organization to host an eight-week parenting seminar. It would honor and be fair to the other sponsoring organizations, but would find positive ways to share its motivation: the experience of God's love embodied in addressing immediate needs. The catalytic church would likely remain small, lean and responsive, but have an impact disproportionately large. It would attract those who feel at home at the intersection of meaning and mission.

Covenant churches are groups of churches that commit themselves to mutual accountability and ministry. I know of a group of 12 such churches in a poor county in a rural state. Together they have conducted evangelism ministries, children's missions, an affordable housing program, an employment project, and food assistance. They have become a beacon of righteousness and hope in a sea of squalor and despair.

Clusters refers to a way of organizing a smaller group of churches so that they can offer the ministries of a trained, diverse staff, and exhibit high

lay ownership in the local church. In a cluster, churches are each responsible for their own building, local budget, Sunday School, and so forth. Each then purchases pastoral services from a pool created by the cluster. So, for instance, five congregations, none of which could afford a full-time pastor, might together employ two full-time pastors, and part-time ministers of counseling, youth work, and music.

Cooperative churches, as the term is used here, is based on the richness of the divine nature and the pluralism of modern society. Instead of seeing the former as impractical theology and the latter as an evil to be opposed, cooperative churches attempt to organize on this basis. In one county six churches might elect to cooperate. One might be fundamentalistic in orientation, another traditional, another committed to spiritual direction as its form of faithfulness, another to one or more social ministries, another to finding contemporary expressions of the gospel, another to charismatic forms. Each would maintain their own pastor, meeting place, program, and internal life. Together they might share ministry in the areas of youth work, Vacation Bible School, choir(s), lay training, rallies, hands-on mission, camping, and so forth. Their uniqueness would lie in their commitment to evangelism. Each congregation would see itself as a feeder for all six congregations! Instead of competing with one another, cooperative churches would seek to find the right congregational home for each visitor who musters up the courage to cross a church threshold! Toothpaste manufacturers and restaurant chains are getting rich using such a strategy, it is inherent in Christ's gospel, but structurally churches continue to follow Adam Smith and Charles Darwin instead of Jesus Christ. It would take a whole new consciousness and level of team work among pastors, but greater miracles have happened.

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We have explored some of the whys, why nots, and hows of evangelism today and into tomorrow. We need a whole new bunch of structures to implement tomorrow's evangelism. Mostly what we need are Christians whose faith fires their souls. *Lord we believe. Help thou our unbelief.* Amen.

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## Part Four THE SMALL CHURCH IN MISSION