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Lost in America: Helping Your Friends Find Their Way Home

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**Lost in America:
Helping Your Friends Find Their Way Home**

Tom Clegg and Warren Bird

QUESTION: What line is 50,000 miles long, reaches around the world 2 times, and grows one-half mile longer each day?

ANSWER: The line of people in the United States who are currently untouched by your church and mine.

Think about This As You Go to Sleep Tonight . . .

Before you wake up tomorrow, thousands of lives will be changed forever. In a typical 24-hour day here in the United States:

- 10,799 babies will be born¹ and 6,403 people will die.²
- 3,245 women will have an abortion (with 652 of them being younger than age 19)³ and 3,445 unmarried women will give birth to a child.⁴
- 6,148 people will get married⁵ and 3,110 will be divorced.⁶
- 28,206 people will be arrested,⁷ with 4,274 of them for drug abuse violations.⁸
- 2,743 will contract a sexually transmitted disease,⁹ 84 will commit suicide (America's 8th ranking cause of death),¹⁰ 45 people with the AIDS virus will die,¹¹ and 43 people will die from alcohol-related traffic fatalities.¹²
- 19,792 teens below age 19 will have sexual inter-

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course for the first time,¹³ 1,312 teenagers will drop out of school,¹⁴ and more than 6,000 persons under the age of 18 years will try their first cigarette.¹⁵

- 3,396 households will declare bankruptcy¹⁶ and 63,288 will receive food stamps.¹⁷
- In that same 24-hour period, thousands of people will reach spiritual turning points:
- 411 Americans will convert to the Muslim faith,¹⁸ 872 will become Mormons,¹⁹ and more than 5,000 Americans will either join a church or receive Christian baptism.²⁰
- 8 churches in the United States will close their doors for the last time,²¹ and 6 new churches will be started.²²

Most important, before another 24 hours end, by our best estimates several thousand people in the United States will die without knowing Jesus Christ as their forgiver and leader, and will spend an eternity separate from Him as a result.

What will you do to give eternal hope to someone before another 24 hours goes by? It can begin as soon as you take the prayerful initiative to talk with a friend about your relationship with God.

North America – Leader of Christianity?

Answer the following questions:

1. In what country do you think the world's largest-attendance Christian church is located?
2. What is the dominant religion in that country?
3. How about the location of the world's second-largest Christian church?
4. What is the dominant religion there?
5. In what country do you think the world's largest Buddhist temple is located?
6. Where is the world's largest Muslim training center?
7. Which major country has the world's largest Jewish population?
8. Which major country has the world's sixth largest Hindu population?
9. Where is the world's largest training center for Transcendental Meditation?

10. In North America, what ethnic group is most responsive to the gospel?

Answers:

1. Korea
2. Buddhism
3. Lagos, Nigeria
4. Islam (although Christianity is in close second)
5. USA (Boulder, Colo.)
6. USA (New York City)
7. USA²³
8. USA The rankings are as follows: India 815 million Hindus, Nepal 21 million, Bangladesh 15 million, Indonesia 4 million, Sri Lanka 2.7 million, Pakistan 2.1 million, Malaysia 1 million, and U.S. 0.8 million. This means the U.S. has the 8th largest Hindu population.²⁴
9. USA (Fairfield, Iowa)
10. Asian-Americans. While 5 percent of U.S. Asians were believers in 1991, 27 percent are currently—a 440 percent increase in the likelihood of accepting Christ as Savior, according to George Barna.²⁵

Futurist Trends Are Different

Eye-opening reasons to challenge patterns of business as usual in your church and mine.

According to the story line of *Back to the Future*, Dr. Emmett Brown, a wild-haired, bug-eyed scientist, was in trouble. Perched on a crumbling ledge fifty feet above the ground, he was desperately trying to join two cords together. If it didn't happen in the next few seconds, his friend Marty McFly would be stuck in 1955.

One cord Doc Brown was trying to link was attached to a lightning rod where, at precisely 10:04 P.M., a lightning bolt would strike. The other ran to an exposed wire stretched ten feet above the adjoining street.

Everything hung on Doc Brown's ability to connect the two cords in time. With the supercharge from the skies, the converted DeLorean and its driver Marty McFly could get back to the future where they belonged.

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Doc Brown faced a host of obstacles, from crumbling concrete to falling trees to balky starter motors. All tried to thwart his attempt to connect Marty with the future.

A similar drama is at work every time a pastor steps behind a pulpit or a neighbor talks about spiritual matters with a spiritually seeking friend. David Henderson's book *Culture Shift* well describes the moment: "God has spoken. Words of life-inventing grace and world-transforming power spill out into human history like a bolt from heaven."²⁶

The vitally needed bridge between worlds contains life-changing potential. Yet too often the world—distracted, bored, and restless—yawns as it streaks by, much as the police officers in *Back to the Future* totally missed the significance of what was happening in front of their eyes.

The Seven Deadly Statistics

The Western world is the only major segment of the entire world in which Christianity is not growing.²⁷ The following sobering information shows why your church must become a lighthouse of hope to people around you who need Christ.

Fact #1: The population is increasing and church membership is decreasing.

U.S. churches are growing,²⁸ but not enough to keep pace with the population. Of the nearly 280 million people in the United States today,²⁹ 40 percent of the adults said they went to church last week. That's down from 42 percent in 1995 and quite a slide from 49 percent in 1991.³⁰ Other researchers have shown that not nearly as many people *actually* go to church as who *say* they do.³¹

According to researcher George Barna, the number of unchurched adults is on the rise. Almost one in three U.S. adults (33 percent) are unchurched. That translates to between 65 and 70 million people. (For his survey people were classified as "unchurched" if they had not attended a Christian church service during the past six months other than a special event such as a wedding, funeral or holiday service.)³²

One in three U.S. adults is unchurched.
That's between 65 and 70 million people.

By contrast, the church in China (both organized and underground) is growing far faster than the overall population. Same with South Korea. Same with many African countries from Mozambique to Nigeria. Same with many countries south of our border, from Guatemala to Brazil.

According to *Mission Frontiers* magazine:³³

- 3,000 new churches are opening every week around the world.
- Worldwide, Christianity is growing at the rate of 90,000 new believers every day.
- In 1900, Korea had no Protestant church; it was deemed impossible to penetrate. Today Korea is 35 percent Christian with 7,000 churches in the city of Seoul alone.
- Churches in Africa are increasing by 20,000 people per day.
- More Muslims in Iran have come to Christ since 1980 than in the previous thousand years.
- In Islamic (Muslim) Indonesia, the percentage of Christians is so high the government won't print the statistic—but it's estimated to be nearing 15 percent of the population.
- After 70 years of oppression in Russia, people who are officially Christians number about 85 million—56 percent of the population.
- Every day in India 15,000 people become Christians.³⁴

North America may have been the perceived leader of Christianity in past decades, but no one can even make a case for this today.

In Canada, the Picture Is Just as Bleak – Or Worse

Dr. Reginald Bibby, Sociologist of Religion at the University of Lethbridge, in Alberta, Canada, condensed his twenty-five years of research into these ten most important findings for religious leaders:

1. Church participation is sharply down since the late 1940s. As service attendance has declined, so has personal religious commitment.
2. Few people are actually leaving. Canadians may not be

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- showing up to church, but they still define themselves as being Catholic, Anglican, Mennonite, etc.
3. Religion a la carte is rampant. External authority is out; personal authority is in.
 4. Religion continues to be relational. The transmission lines of faith are led by the family, especially from parent to child.
 5. Religious memory is everywhere. When Canadians do go to church, they head in the direction of what is religiously familiar – typically a religious tradition similar to what they knew as a child.
 6. Receptivity to spirituality is extensive. Organized religion may be in trouble, but large numbers of Canadians who are not highly involved in a church show a remarkable openness to the supernatural and to spirituality.
 7. The majority of Canadians are not looking for churches. Nor are they in the market for religion. But they do express spiritual, personal, and social needs.
 8. Most churches are not looking for people. One of the main reasons Canada's churches are not ministering to a larger number of people is because they typically wait for people to come to them. Many Canadians are not associating their needs with churches and many churches are not associating what they have with what Canadians need.
 9. Part of the problem is culture. Cultural developments, including the proliferation of choices, the increase in exposure to higher education, and the rise to prominence of electronic media as the major source of reality creation, have all had a dramatic impact on religion's role and influence.
 10. The heart of the problem is churches. Churches today are collectively failing. They are well positioned to respond to the central God-self-society requirements of Canadians if they will choose to do so.³⁵

Fact #2: Roughly half of all churches last year did not add one new person through conversion growth.

According to denominational statistics, virtually half the churches across the United States did not record the conversion of one person last year.³⁶ Do these sobering figures suggest that

we're not even able to keep our own children in our faith? Do they mean that the majority of newcomers to your church are simply what one researcher called "the reshuffling of the saints"³⁷ rather than men, women, and children who are trying to find God?

To make matters worse, other Northern Hemisphere countries are faring the same. University of Chicago sociologist Martin Marty translates the trend into what happened between yesterday and today. In the part of the world that stretches west from Poland across Western Europe, crossing the northern United States and Canada, and includes Japan, there are 3,000 fewer Christians now than twenty-four hours ago. By contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa, there are 16,000 more Christians than twenty-four hours ago.³⁸

This doesn't mean that the world missionary enterprise has decreased. Gerald H. Anderson, recently retired director of Overseas Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, notes that a common mistaken impression is that Christian missionary activity has diminished in the 20th century.

"In fact, there are more missionaries at work today than ever before in history," he says, adding that there were upward of 400,000 in the world, Protestant and Roman Catholic—a more than six-fold increase since 1900.

"What has changed," he says, "is at least 100,000 of these missionaries are being sent out by Protestant churches in non-Western countries." Case in point: "There are now an estimated 8,000 Protestant Korean missionaries serving outside Korea," he says.³⁹ America's lack of missionary concern has reduced our fruitfulness from Times Square to Taiwan, from Iowa to Irian Jaya, from downtown to Denmark, from suburbia to the Serengeti. We're not sending many missionaries overseas any more, much less next door.

We're not sending many missionaries overseas
any more, much less next door.

Why? Not because we're busy preparing for a great spiritual awakening just around the corner. "If spiritual revival were occurring, you'd expect to see increasing levels of interest in a relationship with God, in church involvement, and in commitment to the Christian faith," George Barna notes. According to his re-

search, "None of those are evident."⁴⁰

Local Evangelism Includes America's First Citizens

Evangelist Billy Graham has stated, "The Native American has been like a sleeping giant. He is awakening. The original Americans could become the evangelists who will help win America for Christ."

Huron Claus, a Mohawk Indian and fifth-generation follower of Jesus Christ, says, "I am greatly challenged, as a Native Christian, to understand why after 500 years of evangelism among our Native American people less than five percent of the total population have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior," he says. "I believe the most effective way to reach Native Americans for Christ is when they see the examples of their own people living a life that gives God the highest praise and glory." Claus is chief executive officer of Christian Hope Indian Eskimo Fellowship (CHIEF), a Phoenix-based organization that his father Tom Claus founded in 1975.

The Native American's plight today, largely triggered by terrible abuses during the conquest of America, is often as bad as found in any developing country. "One-third of the Native American population lives in poverty," says Huron Claus. "Unemployment on reservations varies from 40 percent to 70 percent. Adolescent suicide is approximately three times higher than national average in the age group 15 to 24 years old. Alcoholism is 5.6 times higher among Native Americans than the rest of the population of the U.S." Some 63 percent of the total U.S. Native population of 2.7 million live in the urban city areas, while most of the rest of the approximately 550 federally recognized tribes live in some 320 Indian reservations in the U.S. and 250 Alaska native villages.

CHIEF sees one of its main roles as to evangelize, disciple, mentor, and train native leaders in a culturally relevant context. "Since 1975 at the beginning of the formation of CHIEF the emphasis has always been to encourage and empower Native Christian leadership," Claus says. CHIEF has provided discipleship training, evangelism outreach, and a helps ministry for approximately 400 tribes in the Americas.⁴¹

Fact #3: No matter how you do the math, current conversion rates still point to one horrible conclusion: lost people lose.

In America, it takes the combined efforts of eighty-five Christians working over an entire year to produce one convert.⁴² At that rate, a huge percentage of people will never have the opportunity, even once, to hear the gospel in a way they can understand it from a friend they trust.

That's not even running on fumes; it's running on empty.

If I understand my Bible correctly, the church is the only organization in society that exists for the benefit of those outside its membership. Imagine that you've been asked to consult with a group that offers the following report: "Our church has eighty-five Christians. We worked as hard as we could, employing one-tenth of our material assets, praying diligently, and at the end of one year, we successfully developed one new convert." While you would praise God for the one, you would tell them that something is badly broken, horribly misaligned, and unmistakably out of order.

That eighty-five people accept this as okay is even more problematic. Perhaps our indifference to the central message of our faith and the Great Commandments to love (see Matthew 22:36-39) have led many people outside the church to view us as ultimately uncaring and unreliable.

Fact #4: Far more churches are closing than opening every year.

Three times as many churches in America are closing (3,750 per year) as are opening (1,350 per year).⁴³ Granted many of the churches that close each year need to be closed. However, the fact remains: there are fewer opportunities for communities to encounter Christ than before.

Further the church-to-population ratio has shrunk in the last 100 years. In 1900 the United States had 27 churches for every 10,000 people. In 1950 there were 17 churches for every 10,000 people. In 2000 we were down to 12 churches per 10,000 people.⁴⁴ Yes, church congregations are in general bigger today, but if a great movement of God occurred, and everybody tried to go to church, we'd have nowhere to put them, even if every church ran multiple services.

Fact #5: This decline in Christianity has been building for nearly fifty years.

The explosion of megachurches and other fast-growing congregations has masked the impact of an overall discouraging and negative trend: In the past fifty years, U.S. churches have failed to gain an additional 2 percent of the American population.⁴⁵ Regular church attendance once characterized the dominant half of the population, but today more North Americans are outside the church than inside it, in terms of regular attendance. The U.S. figure, which many researchers think is optimistic,⁴⁶ is 43 percent on any given month.⁴⁷

Today more North Americans are outside the church than inside it.

Fact #6: Conversions to other religions and dropouts from Christianity are escalating.

In North America, Christianity's two biggest competitors are not religious at all. Nonreligious people number 26 million today. Even more startling, atheists have grown from 2,000 in 1900 to 1.4 million today. Neither one of these groups show any sign of slacking off in the near future.⁴⁸

In addition, U.S. churches are losing at least three million people a year to secularism, consumerism, materialism, and nominalism. These "ism" words evidence themselves as people view "God as hobby" (chapter title from a Yale professor's book)⁴⁹ and replace church involvement with such other priorities as sports, shopping at the mall, and fixing up the house. Or they call themselves Christians simply because their culture says they are, but not because the Word of God has grown in them (see Acts 12:24, 19:20).

In terms of faith groups here on American soil, every other religion is gaining converts while Christianity is losing them. Islam, sometimes called "the most serious threat to the church in America,"⁵⁰ is growing so fast in the United States that it has either superseded Judaism as the second-largest religion, or it's clearly in the passing lane. Between 1989 and 1998 the Muslim population in the United States grew by 25 percent, to an estimated 4 to 6 million.⁵¹ No major American city, including those

in the Bible belt states, is without an Islamic teaching center.⁵²

Here on American soil, every other religion is gaining converts while Christianity is losing them.

Christian outreach to your Muslim neighbor is almost non-existent. There are 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide and the ratio of missionaries to Muslims is about 1 to 1 *million* globally, and it's even worse in North America.⁵³ Yet from a global perspective, Muslims, Hindus, and non-religious people together make up almost half the world's population.⁵⁴

Buddhism is also growing rapidly in North America. The December 1999/January 2000 cover article in *Civilization* magazine is called "Buddha Boom."⁵⁵ With more than 3 million adherents in North America, Buddhism is growing nearly three times as fast as Christianity.⁵⁶

Hindu beliefs are likewise making strong inroads in North America. Best-selling author Deepak Chopra, along with others, has made Eastern views of reality acceptable to the masses. But for more than a century, Eastern thought has been flowing to the West. As early as 1893 at the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, Swami Vivekananda began introducing the teachings of his own Indian guru. D. T. Suzuki from Japan poured Zen into Western publications. Alan Watts from the West imbibed Zen Buddhism and returned to teach his fellow Westerners. By the 1960s, Eastern studies had filtered down to the undergraduate level.⁵⁷

The million-plus Hindus form the second-fastest growing religion in North America, largely due to changes in immigration laws that welcome more people from Hindu-dominated sections of the world.⁵⁸ Historically, most immigrants to the United States came from Europe. In 1890, for example, 86 percent were from Europe. And in 1960, Europe still accounted for 75 percent with only 9 percent from Latin America and 5 percent from Asia. But by 1999, there had been a dramatic shift in the countries of origin of immigrants living in the United States, according to the Population Reference Bureau's Web site. In 1999 more than half—51 percent—came from Latin America and 27 percent from Asia, while only 16 percent came from Europe. This shift has brought more racial and ethnic diversity among immigrants. In 1890, on-

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ly 1.4 percent of immigrants living in the United States were nonwhite. But by 1999, 75 percent were nonwhite, according to the Population Reference Bureau.⁵⁹

Christian cults that deny such basic teachings as Jesus' deity are also growing significantly, especially Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons (Latter-Day Saints). Their commitment to aggressive evangelism, short-term missionary service, and radical discipleship puts most Christian denominations to shame.

People simply aren't sitting around waiting for churches to tell them how to "become a child of God" by receiving Jesus Christ (see John 1:12). Instead they are actively seeking out many world religions and other idea vendors like the New Age Movement of spirituality. Once they find "meaning" in these religions, our job of introducing them to Jesus becomes more difficult. The Holy Spirit may continue to prepare and soften their hearts, but our inaction now certainly does nothing to help soften the soil.

People may not be moving toward the Christian's God, but they are becoming more spiritual. Seven out of ten adults now say they're spiritual. That includes nine out of ten Christians, half the adults who don't consider themselves to be Christian, and even three out of ten atheists. Yes, one-third of atheists say they are spiritual people. "Perceiving oneself to be spiritual is one of the legacies of the 90s," says *REV* magazine.⁶⁰

<p>One-third of atheists say they are spiritual people.</p>

The Most Welcome Figure on the Stage of World Religion

To his followers, the Dalai Lama is a Buddha. After he won the Nobel Peace Prize, Tenzin Gyatso has become unofficial lama to the world. His is the face Buddhism wears, especially in the West. His encompassing smile, engaging humility, and non-judgmental manner have made the Dalai Lama the most welcome figure on the stage of world religion. He has taught Buddhist meditation to sold-out crowds in New York City and given a free lecture in Central Park. One of his books, *The Art of Happiness*, was on *The New York Times* best-seller list for twenty-nine weeks.

He has promoted ecumenical understanding. He also has of-

ferred a Buddhist commentary on the gospel to Catholic monks and urged his own monks to emulate “my Christian brothers and sisters” in transforming Buddhist compassion into acts of service.

In the Dalai Lama, Buddhism couldn’t find a more persuasive face for that worldview.⁶¹

Paganism, Ivy League-style

Pagan groups are growing in popularity on college campuses. In Massachusetts, according to *The Boston Globe*, there are more than seven student pagan groups at schools like Amherst, Wellesley, Smith, Boston University, Northeastern, Emerson and Berklee. Pagans at MIT recently celebrated a Halloween ritual in the chapel where they knelt before an altar somberly chanting, “Dark mother take us in. ... Let us be reborn.” Then they walked under a dark veil representing the underworld, ate pomegranate seeds and danced barefoot in a circle. “It’s natural for college students to be attracted to things they haven’t thought or experienced before,” said Christine Thomas, a religion professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. “But this movement is a reflection of a lot of things: fascination with the occult, the lack of one religion’s hegemony, and the explosion of information and networking opportunities available on the Internet.”⁶²

American religion is weakening, according to social researcher Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. He documents that church membership and attendance have declined by as much as ten percent since the 1960s. He goes on to explain that the breakdown of community is not just a hunch of social commentators, but a sociological fact with severe consequences.⁶³

While it’s true that overall U.S. church *membership* has steadily increased over the last two centuries, and taken a dip in the last decade,⁶⁴ membership means nothing if you don’t show up. That’s like trying to win an athletic event by remaining seated in the stands. It’s like joining a health club and expecting to get in shape without ever getting off the couch.

<p>Membership means nothing if you don’t show up. That’s like expecting to get in shape without ever getting off the couch.</p>

Fact #7: Too many churched people believe and behave identically to their secular counterparts.

The belief system of a huge number of churchgoers is dangerously at odds with the faith of the first church led by Jesus' apostles and recorded in the New Testament. For example: What would you call a person who believes in astrology, reincarnation, and the possibility of communicating with the dead? If your first thought is "New Ager," you missed an important group: according to a Gallup survey, these are just some of the beliefs held by people who call themselves Christian.

The belief system of a huge number of churchgoers is dangerously at odds with the faith of the first church led by Jesus' apostles.

Gallup's survey reveals a shocking fact: an awful lot of people who call themselves Christians haven't a clue what Christianity is all about. They've adopted what University of California scholar Wade Clark Roof calls a "salad bar" approach to their faith: just pick and choose the spiritual beliefs you like, add a dash of God, and consider yourself a Christian. That's the American Christian of the new millennium.⁶⁵

Pick and choose the spiritual beliefs you like, add a dash of God, and consider yourself a Christian.

Sociologist Robert Bellah predicted this development twenty years ago in his bestseller *Habits of the Heart*. He identified the visible tendency in many Christian circles "to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as the friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment."⁶⁶

This "religion of me and thee," as George Gallup calls it⁶⁷ along with a hunger for experience over knowledge, has contributed to a tremendous diversity of beliefs, many of which are antithetical to biblical principles. These unhealthy attitudes have crept into the church, as evidenced by the following sampling of congregational lay leaders of churches by researcher George Barna:

- 53 percent do not believe that there are moral truths that are absolute.

- 43 percent believe there is no such thing as the Holy Spirit.
- 33 percent assert that Jesus never had a physical resurrection.
- 19 percent believe Jesus sinned while on earth.⁶⁸

Not only are the beliefs of Christians often at odds with the teaching of their churches, but also behavioral differences are often non-existent between the church and the unchurched. This comparison suggests that whatever is happening inside the church is having zero effect on behavior in day-to-day living.

Sometimes behavior by those who profess Christ is actually worse than those who don't. For example, despite increased concern about national morality, Christians continue to have a higher likelihood of getting divorced than do non-Christians. Even atheists are less likely to become divorced than are Christians.⁶⁹

Atheists are less likely to become divorced than are Christians.

Despite its incredible Christian heritage, the United States leads every other nation in the industrialized world in the percentage of single-parent families (at 23 percent),⁷⁰ abortion (at 22.9 per 1,000 women aged 15-44),⁷¹ sexually transmitted diseases (syphilis rate is 6.3 per 100,000 and gonorrhea rate is 149.5 per 100,000),⁷² teenage birth rates (42 per 1,000 girls, aged 15 to 19 years old),⁷³ use of illegal drugs by students (44.9 percent using in 1998),⁷⁴ and percentage of incarcerated population.⁷⁵ Our rate of child poverty (20 percent) is likewise abysmal.⁷⁶

The next generation faces a situation that is no better. Among today's twenty-somethings, the fear of divorce and the elusiveness of a good marriage is resulting in a sharp culture shift: young adults who want sex without strings. For young adults today, "sex is commonplace . . . an ordinary part of the mating culture," says researcher Barbara Dafoe-Whitehead. "They want to be married, they'll take sex with or without marriage, but love is hard to find."⁷⁷ Where is the church's positive impact on individuals and society? At stake is the deadly assumption that business-as-usual is just fine. It's even more deadly when churches aren't even aware that they've made such an assumption. We impact one life here and another one there, and

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we wrongly assume that as other churches do likewise, we're together making forward progress.

We impact one life here and another one there, and we wrongly assume that as other churches do likewise, we're together making forward progress.

The exact opposite is true. Churches are going out of business. Why? Because they refuse to change. They're like the proverbial frog placed in a slowly warming pot of water. It gets cooked because it doesn't respond to the changes around it.

Any church that doesn't shift from "ministry as status quo" to "ministry as mission field" will die or it becomes hopelessly irrelevant to the people its charter document—the Bible—calls it to love, serve, reach, and even die for.

What Does It Mean?

The problem of inbred, unchanging, and increasingly irrelevant churches isn't a financial one. Although people who claim the name of Christ constitute 32 percent of the world's population, they receive 62 percent of the world's yearly income and spend 97 percent of their resources on themselves.⁷⁸ In dollar terms, North American Christians have spent more than a half trillion dollars in the past decade through their churches and parachurch ministries, according to researcher George Barna.⁷⁹ That compares to spending roughly twice as much money on entertainment as they donate to their church.⁸⁰

Nor is the problem due to a lack of education. Literacy and educational levels among North American Christians are at an all-time high.

Nor is the problem due to lack of good information. More than 10 million religious books were purchased in the U.S. in 1998, accounting for 10 percent of all adult books purchased, according to "The 1998 Consumer Research Study on Book Purchasing."⁸¹

By contrast, half the world is waiting for its first Bible. "More than 3 billion people have yet to own a Bible," claims an ad for the American Bible Society.⁸²

Nor is the problem due to the government barring the Bible from public schools and banning student-led prayer from the athletic fields. Unlike such countries as Totalitarian Iraq, Marxist

Cuba, or Communist China, churches in the United States are not told what we can or cannot teach our people. We may have to pay taxes to buy our Bibles and training materials, but we are free to change how we do church—whenever we want to.

The inescapable conclusion is that we must throw out any notion of God truly being at the epicenter of the North American church's heart. Maybe we're more blessed with bigger incomes, but by every other standard most Christians around the world outshine us. (They out-tithe us as well, with the average American churchgoer giving 2.58 percent of their 1996 income, a 17 percent decrease from 1968.)⁸³

We must throw out any notion of God truly being at the epicenter of the North American church's heart.

Instead, the church of tomorrow must not look like the church of today. To be what God has called us to be, tomorrow's church needs to look and behave more like the first-century church than the twentieth-century church, as Bill Easum often says.

The church of tomorrow needs to look and behave more like the first-century church than the twentieth-century church.

What Part of "Go" Don't We Understand?

The end of the Bible affirms that God's people are on the winning side. The Bible affirms that Christians are to go into all the world beginning in their own communities. In what is known as the Great Commission—Jesus' last known instructions to his followers—Jesus gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20, *The Message*).

We contend that we're losing the battle and don't even realize it. The only realistic solution is for the church to reposition itself to reach this continent again. The time of small thinking

and small vision needs to be over.

We contend that we are losing the battle and don't even realize it.

We can no longer afford to sit still, waiting for people to come to us. We must go into the world and be the Christians who reproduce Christians and the churches that reproduce churches. The apostle Paul told a friend, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ" (Philemon 1:6 NIV).

Christians must reproduce Christians, and churches must reproduce churches.

The starting point for building the kind of intentional relationships that enable you to make a difference is to realize that you and your church must change—that most congregations and denominations have lost their sense of purpose, their focus, and their primary calling. Even if our words affirm that lost people really matter to God, our behavior too often denies that life-changing truth.

That's not the way things have to be. During the Apollo 13 Mission, NASA's Houston team refused to fail, and instead aimed at its finest hour ever. Over the last couple of years I have met and talked with a huge number of Christians who are discouraged because their church isn't going anywhere. They are quick to acknowledge that things are not right, but they are too discouraged to try to think of alternatives. They don't believe that the near future can be their finest hour. Their discouragement is like a sickness. People in those churches hear so much negative information about the world, but receive so little hope or encouragement accompanied with concrete ways to break the apathy.

You must pray if you want to cooperate with what God wants to do, as if your friends lives depended on it.

The starting point was, is, and always will be prayer.

For the majority of us, a lost person is just someone, some-

where else that somebody ought to do something about. In your mind right now, imagine a line of people winding their way down your street, around your corner, down your freeway, across your state, crossing the entire country, circling your world at least twice (more times, the farther away you are from the Equator).

The need is so huge that we can begin to understand that Jesus' first command is not that we pray for the harvest of people who need to know God's love, but for more laborers to go out, each of whom can pull a few people from the line.

What are you going to do? Just stand there? No! Pray. And then go!

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NOTES

Chapter 1

1. BIRTHS are based on 1998 figures of 3,941,553/year. See www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004929.html says 9/25/00 or www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec02.pdf, page 75.

2. DEATHS are based on 1998 figures of 2,337,256/year. See www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004929.html says 9/25/00 or

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www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec02.pdf, page 75. See also www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh/statab/pubd/47_9st1h.htm. The ten leading causes of death in the United States (1998 figures), in descending order, are: #1–heart disease, 724,859; #2–cancer, 541,532; #3–stroke, 158,448; #4–chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, 112,584; #5–accident, 97,835; #6–pneumonia/influenza, 91,871; #7–diabetes, 64,751; #8–suicide, 30,575; #9–nephritis, nephritic syndrome, and nephrosis, 26,182; #10–chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, 25,192. Source: Murphy, Sherry L. “Deaths: Final Data for 1998.” National Vital Statistics Reports. Vol 48, no 11. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. See www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/lcod.htm and www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvs48_11.pdf.

3. ABORTIONS: InfoPlease.com. “Abortion Statistics, 1972-1997.” www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0764203.html (September 25, 2000). This is based on 1997 data (latest available). Their source was : U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Abortion Surveillance: Preliminary Analysis-United States, 1997. Jan. 7, 2000.) We divided the annual number of 1,184,758 by 365. For the under age 19, we took the 1,184,756 and multiplied by the 20.1% they gave to get 238,136. We then divided that by 365.

4. OUT OF WEDLOCK BIRTHS are based on 1997 data of 1,257,444/year. See www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/t1x1797.pdf. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 7/14/00, the teen pregnancy rate in the U.S. fell 8% from 1995 to 1997, extending a trend that began in the early 1990s. Despite the decline, the CDC said the U.S. still has the highest adolescent rate of pregnancy among developed countries.

5. MARRIAGES are based on 1998 figures of 2,244,000/year. See www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004929.html says 9/25/00 or www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec02.pdf, page 75.

6. DIVORCES are based on 1998 figures of 1,135,000/year. See www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004929.html says 9/25/00 or www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec02.pdf, page 75.

7. ARRESTS are based on 1998 figures of 10,295,129/year. “Profile of the United States: Crime.” InfoPlease.com. Available: www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0004944.html (October 5, 2000). We divided 10,295,129 by 365 to get 28, 206.

8. DRUG ABUSE VIOLATIONS are based on 1998 figures of 1.56 million/year. See www.whitehouse.gov/fsbr/crime.html.

9. STD's are based on 1998 figures of 37,977 cases of syphilis, 607,602 cases of chlamydia, and 355,642 cases of gonorrhea. Source is www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/stds.htm.

10. SUICIDES are based on 1997 figures of 30,535 completions a year (and 765,000 attempts/year). Murphy S.L. Final Data for 1998. National Vital Statistics Reports. Vol. 48 no. 11. Hyattsville, MD: Na-

tional Center for Health Statistics, 2000, 26.

www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvs48_11.pdf (September 26, 2000). See also www.suicidology.org/suicide_statistics97.htm. We got to this daily number by taking 1998 statistics which are the current just released of 30,575 and divided by 365.

11. AIDS deaths are based on 1998 figures of 16,432/year. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 1999. Vol. 11 no. 2. Atlanta, GA: The Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention - Surveillance and Epidemiology, National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2000. Available: www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats/hasr1102/table21.htm (September 26, 2000). We used the total of actual deaths in persons with AIDS (not the one estimated to correct for slow reporting and underreporting). The total was 16,432 which we divided by 365.

12. ALCOHOL-RELATED traffic deaths are based on 1999 figures of 15,786/year as the total alcohol-related fatalities (total traffic fatalities for that year are 41,611). Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Note also that 38 percent of total traffic crashes that are alcohol-related. www.madd.org/stats/gen99.shtml, www.madd.org/stats/gen98js.shtml, www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alcohol.htm and www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/abus/tables/2000/00hus062.pdf.

13. TEENAGE SEX figures are based on 1995 data which can be found at www.cdc.gov/nchs/dataawh/statab/pubd/2319_19.htm.

14. TEENAGE DROPOUTS are based on 1999 figures of 479,000/year for tenth through twelfth grade students. Martinez, Gladys M. and Andrea E. Curry. School Enrollment--Social and Economic Characteristics of Students (Update). Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau, September 1999. Available: www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/p20-521.pdf (October 5, 2000). We got this by using 479,000 10th thru 12th grade students dropped out of high school in 1998. We divided 479,000 by 365 days to get 1,312.

15. TEENAGE SMOKING estimates last updated 10/5/2000. "Incidence of Initiation of Cigarette Smoking Among U.S. Teens Fact Sheet." CDC's Tobacco Information and Prevention Source. Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Available: www.cdc.gov/tobacco/initfact.htm (October 5, 2000). Note also that 400,000 victims a year from smoking cigarettes "Smoking is the largest preventable cause of death in the United States" "Building a Better Butt," by Nancy Shute, *U.S. News and World Report*, 9/18/2000, 66.

16. BANKRUPTCY figures are based on 1999 (last half) and 2000 (first half) data that total 1,239,493 non-business filings. See American Bankruptcy Institute (www.abiworld.org/) and www.statistics.com/cgi-bin/search/hyperseek.cgi?ID=968271050.

1st qtr 2000, non-business filings, 302,829

2nd qtr 2000, non-business filings, 312,486

4th qtr 1999, non-business filings, 309,614

3rd qtr 1999, non-business filings, 314,564

17. FOODSTAMPS are based on 1997 figures of 23.1 million people who received food stamps, according to "Change in Welfare Case-loads," April 1999, Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food, and Nutrition Service, as reported in www.publicagenda.org/issues/factfiles_detail.cfm?issue_type=welfare&list=15.

18. MUSLIM conversion data was supplied in a personal conversation with Carl F. Ellis, Jr., President of Project Joseph, Chattanooga, Tennessee, a ministry involved in equipping the church to meet the Islamic challenge; Adjunct Faculty at The Center for Urban Theological Studies, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Columbia International University, Columbia, South Carolina; and author of *Free At Last* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) and co-author of *The Changing Face of Islam in America* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 2000). His statement takes into account the fact that "25,000-35,000 Muslims have entered the United States annually, coming from more than 60 countries," [Eileen Lindner, editor, *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, op cit., page 408] settling both in urban centers across the country. "The Midwest (to the surprise of some) contains the nation's largest regional Muslim population. Indeed, America's oldest standing mosque is in Cedar Rapids, Iowa." [*ibid.*]

19. MORMON conversion data comes from Mortimer, Wm James, ed., *Deserete News 1999-2000 Church Almanac*. (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1998) 111. 1997 statistics for baptisms is 393,012. 19% were children of record. That leaves 81% as converts. We took the 393,012 total and multiplied it by .81 to get 318,340 converts a year. Then we divided that by 365 days to get 812.

20. BAPTISMS and MEMBERSHIP, representing Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox branches of Christendom, come from examining the annual reports of many denominations and from the database of 349,506 U.S. churches (all branches of Christendom) reported in the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 2000*, op. cit. with specific data provided online at www.nccusa.org/yearbook/index.html or <http://www.electronicchurch.org/>.

21. CHURCH CLOSURE information comes from Lyle Schaller, *Tattered Trust* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 26.

22. NEW CHURCH information is our best estimate, based on personal interviews with leading authorities on church planting as well as numerous denominational officials. We believe between 2,000 and 2,300 new churches will be launched in 2001 across the United States.

23. Russell Ash, *The Top 100 of Everything* (New York, NY: DK Pub-

lishing, 2000), 78.

24. Ash, Russell, *The Top 10 of Everything* (New York, NY: DK Publishing, 2000), 78.

25. "The Changing Demographics of Born Again Christians," *The Barna Update*, a bi-weekly e-mail from George Barna entitled "Asians and the Affluent Are Increasingly Likely to Be Born Again" (May 30, 2000) barnaresearch@barna.org

Chapter 2

26. David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 20-21. Note: *The Back to the Future* analogy also comes from these same pages.

27. Verified by personal email 7/10/00 from Eddie Gibbs, Donald McGavran chair of church growth, School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary.

28. *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 10-12.

29. "Resident Population Estimates of the United States by Age and Sex," U.S. Census Bureau (November 29, 2000),

<http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/intfile2-1.txt>.

30. "The State of the Church in America," *Barna Research Online* (March 21, 2000),

<http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/pagepressrelease.asp?pressreleaseid=49>

31. Thomas C. Reeves, *The Empty Church* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 62-63. For a report of a specific major research project showing actual attendance as only half of claimed attendance, see C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny Long Marier, and Mark Chaves, "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance," *American Sociological Review*, vol 58, no 6, Dec. 1993, 741-752.

32. www.barna.org, press release dated May 24, 1999, www.barna.org/cgi-bin/pagecategory.asp?categoryid=38. According to a March 28, 2000 press release by the Gallup News Service entitled "Unchurched America Has Changed Little in 20 Years" by Michael Lindsay, 44 percent of all Americans are unchurched, a figure that has remained somewhat steady. People are considered unchurched if they answer "no" to both of the following questions: "Are you, yourself, a member of a church or synagogue?" and "Apart from weddings, funerals, or special holidays such as Christmas, Easter, or Yom Kippur, have you attended the church or synagogue of your choice in the past six months, or not?"

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr000328b.asp>.

33. "Catch The Vision!" *Mission Frontiers* (November-December 1996), <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/nd966.htm>.

34. "15,000 Become Christians Every Day in India" *Religion Today* (April 15, 1999),

<http://www.religiontoday.com/Archive/FeatureStory/view.cgi?file=1>

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9990415.s1.html.

35. Reginald Bibby, "The Ten Key Findings," *Transforming Our Nation: Empowering the Canadian Church for a Greater Harvest*, edited by Murray Moerman, (Richmond, BC: Outreach Canada Ministries, 1998) 269-332.

36. Charles Arn, "A Response to Dr. Rainer," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* (1995), 74. Warren Bird also reviewed the 1999 yearbooks from a number of denominations in order to confirm the ongoing validity of this claim.

37. Reginald Bibby and Merlin Brinkerhoff, "Circulation of the Saints Revisited: A Longitudinal Look at Conservative Church Growth," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (1983), 22:253.

38. Martin E. Marty, writing as director of the public religion project and quoted in Jane Lampman, "New Thirst for Spirituality Being Felt Worldwide," *The Christian Science Monitor* (November 25, 1998), 7.

39. Gerald H. Anderson quoted in Gustav Niebuhr, "Perceived Shift in Ecclesiastical Center of Gravity," *New York Times*, (May 27, 2000), www.nytimes.com.

40. Andy Butcher, "No Evidence' of Spiritual Revival, Says Report Tracking Goals and Values," *Charisma News Service Online* (April 27, 2000), <http://www.charismanews.com/news.cgi?t=archive4.html>.

41. All quotes and data are from Dan Wooding, chief correspondent for ASSIST COMMUNICATIONS assist@compuserve.com, "Awakening the Sleeping Giant," email feature (Wednesday, January 27, 1999). For more information on CHIEF, contact: CHIEF Inc., 1644 E Campo Bello Drive, Phoenix, Arizona, USA 85022-2108, Phone: (602) 482-0828. Fax: (602) 482-0860. Email: CHIEFINC@aol.com. Website: <http://www.CHIEF.org>.

42. Personal communication from Thom S. Rainer. From data to be published in *The Formerly Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001).

43. Charles Arn, "A Response to Dr. Rainer," *Journal of the American Society for Church Growth* (1995), 74. Lyle Schaller, in his book *Tattered Trust* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 26, predicts that 100,000 to 150,000 congregations will dissolve in the first five decades of the twenty-first century. That averages five to eight a day.

44. Lyle E. Schaller, *The Very Large Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 29. He cites examples from various denominations to show that for many the (mean) average size has tripled in the last 100 years.

45. See the appendix "Membership Trends: 1950-1990" in C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen, *Church and Denominational Growth: What Does and Does Not Cause Growth or Decline* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 393-395.

46. See endnote 34.

47. See www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr000328b.asp
48. Justin D. Long, "North America: Decline and Fall of World Religions, 1900-2025," from the Global Evangelization Movement's Monday Morning Reality Check (no. 5, 1998) at www.gem-werc.org or www.gem-werc.org/mmrc/mmrc9805.htm. Long uses the definition of North America that covers primarily the United States, Canada, and Greenland, excluding Latin American countries.
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50. "David Neff, "Answering Islam's Questions," *Christianity Today* (April 3, 2000), 7.
51. Wendy Murray Zoba "Islam, USA," *Christianity Today* (April 3, 2000), 40.
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53. Personal communication from Carl Ellis, president of Project Joseph. Ellis is also an adjunct faculty member at The Center for Urban Theological Studies, Philadelphia, Pa., and Columbia International University Seminary, Columbia, S.C.
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60. "Church Growth: Fact or Fiction? When They're Not at Church," *RevMagazine* (July-August 1999), 19, citing Barna Research Group.
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62. Jody Veenker, "Paganism, Ivy League-style" *Christianity Today* Weblog (November 8, 2000), <http://christianitytoday.aol.com/ct/2000/145/32.0.html>.
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Year	% Who Claim Membership
1776	17%
1860	37%
1890	45%
1926	58%
1980	62%
1990	60%.

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68. "Church Lay Leaders Are Different From Followers," *Barna Research Online* (June 26, 2000), <http://216.87.179.136/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=65>

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70. Urie Bronfenbrenner, et al., *The State of Americans* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996) as quoted in William J. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: American Society at the End of the 20th Century* (Broadway, NY, Broadway Books, 1999), 217-218.

71. William J., Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: American Society at the End of the 20th Century* (Broadway, NY: Broadway Books, 1999), 220.

72. Thomas R. Eng and William T. Butler, eds., *The Hidden Epidemic*

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76. Luxembourg Income Study while the updated U.S. child-poverty rate comes from the *Statistical Abstract*. Similar updates were not available for other nations. As quoted in William J., Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: American Society at the End of the 20th Century* (Broadway, NY: Broadway Books, 1999), 225-226.

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<http://www.emptytomb.org/Table2.html>.