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Book Review: Legacy Churches by Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond

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Boady: Book Review: Legacy Churches by Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond

Towards this goal of broader awareness, *Pressure Points* stands well in the “current missions issues” genre, akin to Fritz Kling’s 2010 book *The Meeting of the Waters*, Michael Pocock and Gailyn Van Rheenen’s 2005 contribution to the “Encountering Mission” series titled *The Changing Face of World Mission*, and reaching back even further, John Stott’s *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*. These volumes not only serve as meaningful introductions to the issues for those first engaging in global discipleship, but also can serve as paradigm ballast to keep the veteran from slipping into ministry myopia. The unique value *Pressure Points* brings to the body of literature in this vein is in being an accessible summary with clear gospel-centered reminders throughout.

In terms of solutions presented, the reader seeking any new ideas will walk away disappointed. This is by design. Payne’s exhortations are consistently to “return to a radically biblical approach” to the pressure points of the day (21). In that, there is freshness to the book, as it offers no new solution; rather, it offers the reminder we all need: “Apart from abiding in Him, all of our strategies, methods, desires, and interests are worthless for the sake of the kingdom. Greater is He who is in us than are the pressure points of the world” (172). Payne combines this passion for biblical fidelity with clear calls to innovation (xi–xiv) and concludes the book with a well-written chapter of suggestions for how to move forward.

As hard-hitting as it is brief, *Pressure Points* offers a needed look at the high-level issues that are defining today’s mission landscape. By presenting the crises of the day with clarity and speaking of them as God-wrought opportunities for the gospel of Jesus Christ to shine through a faithful church, Payne has put in our hands a welcome tool for kingdom advancement.

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Gray, Stephen and Franklin Dumond. *Legacy Churches*. St. Charles: ChurchSmart, 2009. 115 pp. \$12.00.

Reviewed by Duane H. Boady. Duane is the senior pastor of Valley Mission Church of the Nazarene in Bedford, Indiana, and a D.Min. student at Talbot School of Theology.

Two seasoned pastors and church consultants collaborated on *Legacy Churches*. Stephen Gray has been a leading consultant for New Church Specialties and currently serves as the director of church planting for the western region of the Free Methodist Church. After thirty years in pastoral ministry, Franklin Dumond currently serves as director of congregational ministries for the General Association of General Baptists. This tandem of ministry-minded church leaders

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share from their experiences. The journey the authors have taken prepared them to write about the potential legacy of local churches.

Pastor Kerry Shook, pastor of Woodlands Church in Houston, preached a sermon about legacy. In that sermon he asked, “Would it be possible for your influence to far outlast your life? Could your influence outlast your life by one thousand years?” *Legacy Churches* helps clergy and laity alike ask this question with regard to their current and future influence. Another source asked, “If your church ceased to exist, would it be missed?” While many churches adorn the landscape of the United States, not all would be missed. However, a long-lasting legacy could be achieved if resources were given to help fund a new work.

Regardless of how long a church has been in existence, “Leaving a legacy should be the hope of every church (37).” While all churches want to pass something on to the next generation, few realize the significance of intentionally thinking and planning for that moment. Gray and Dumond help the local church think intentionally about its legacy.

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The first step is to begin developing a strong biblical understanding of leading with the end in mind. Joshua’s rise to leadership after the death of Moses came at a very difficult time for God’s beloved nation. From the beginning of Joshua’s story to the end, God delivered timely directives to assist him during those tough times. The lessons on leadership that Joshua learned are important lessons for churches as they plan their legacy. Joshua learned not to look back (18), to remember that God’s plan is still in play (20), and to be strong and courageous (22).

After setting a biblical foundation, the authors try to create a sense of urgency for the church in America. After presenting real but dire statistics that prove the need for immediate planning and action, Gray and Dumond remind the reader that a choice exists. Declining churches can either panic or plan (32). If a church’s demise is looming, proper planning can ensure that the ministry continues long after the doors close.

Perhaps too often church leaders view the closing of a ministry or church as failure. Instead of lamenting over closed doors, church leaders should view death as part of the lifecycle of churches. Churches often celebrate the passing of a previous pastor or committed layperson. The celebration is usually memorable and jubilant. However, when a church leader presents information about a closed church or an upcoming closing, the mood is anything but triumphant. Developing a proper theology of death enables the church to view death as part of the inevitable process of life. Gray and Dumond write, “We have to be willing to accept that local churches were not intended to be eternal (34).” The writers go on to say, “Whether a church stays alive for a hundred years or whether it remains for

Boady: Book Review: Legacy Churches by Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond only a few months, God accomplishes his intended purposes (35).” When we become discouraged about the closing of a church, we should remember that God is in control. The dream that originated when the church began can continue by the church becoming a Legacy Church.

What can a church do when the inevitable is approaching? Are there any alternatives to closing the doors? *Legacy Churches* illustrate three possible but risky options. All three options are uncertain because the outcomes are rarely healthy. Church mergers, construction projects, and new pastors may help in the short term. However, these options rarely deal with the underlying reasons the church declined in the first place.

During the final decade of the twentieth century, “nine churches closed every day” (34). Reading that may bring on the same feelings as getting punched in the gut. What caused the decline in nearly thirty-two thousand churches in one decade? *Legacy Churches* cites both external and internal factors that affect the lifecycle of declining churches. Some of the external factors include a shift in the demographics, rapid pace of change, and the Triple Elder Effect (56). Most of these externals are easy to see. The Triple Elder Effect occurs when the church is older, the members are older, and the pastor is older. Some of the internal factors include resistance to change, long service by the same volunteers, mismanaged conflict, relational dysfunction, and debt (58–69). For those who manage church debt, both the absence of and the amount of debt can be problematic. While Dave Ramsey would be against all sorts of church debt, the lack of the right debt may indicate a declining future. However, too much debt can cripple a church.

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An important value of *Legacy Churches* comes when asking the following question: “How do you know when it may be time to close?” Six indicators that deal with declining nickels and noses answer this question. The most telling indicator of a looming decision to close is when survival replaces the main mission to reach the lost. Before the writers conclude this chapter with a diagnostic self-test, three questions are proposed:

- 1) When did our church last experience growth by conversion?
- 2) How much of our spending is devoted to keeping the doors open vs. being invested in missions and evangelism?
- 3) What effective ministry do we offer to our community (79)?

The answers to these important questions may very well indicate that it is time to become a Legacy Church.

Once a church determines that its lifecycle is nearing an end, how does a church close? Many possible answers are included in *Legacy Churches*. The authors make suggestions for assisting the calling of the final meeting, distributing assets,

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 5, Iss. 2 [2014], Art. 14 properly dealing with the official records, contacting local and federal revenue agencies, and more. The information provided would help a local church handle the closing in a professional manner.

Legacy Churches includes “The Final Chapter.” Included here are tips on how to schedule and proceed with the final worship service. Information is offered on who should be notified, what should happen during the worship service, and the celebrative atmosphere that should be nurtured. The writers conclude the body of the book by including a suggested liturgy. While there are many liturgies available for the beginning or continuation of a ministry, a limited selection is available on closing a church. The worship service was designed to be meaningful and practical. Following the leading of *Legacy Churches* enables a church to close the doors with dignity while passing on a spiritual legacy that will far outlast brick and mortar.

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The purpose of *Legacy Churches* is “to pave the way for a legacy to be created so that the spirit and purpose of a faithful church might be carried on even if the worshipping congregation cannot be sustained” (65). From cover to cover, *Legacy Churches* presents a strong argument for preparing for a legacy. Even within the expressed statement of purpose, the book intentionally mentions the faithful church instead of the failing church. While a rose by any other name is still a rose, the authors are careful in how they present their case for faithful churches to become legacy churches. The case is presented by illustrating the current reality of churches in America today. That illustration leads to careful planning for churches if they are going to live beyond future closed doors. Careful attention has been given to why a church should become a legacy church and how a church can plan to pass something on to future generations.

Both Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond have real-time experience viewing the lifecycles of churches. Their experience and the research invested in creating *Legacy Churches* give the authors near-expert status on the subject matter. Anyone who is involved in church ministry would benefit from *Legacy Churches*. Regardless of current size or health, every church will one day face the decision of becoming a legacy church. The question is not if a church will one day die. The real question to which *Legacy Churches* raises awareness is when a church will die. According to the book, churches need to begin that process before people can hear the death rattle.

The reader can find another value of *Legacy Churches* in the questions the authors raise to help him honestly assess his church’s current reality. Chapter five ends with a lifecycle checklist. The writers design chapter six, the real gem of the book, to help the reader know when it is time to close. A self-test is included at the

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close of the chapter helping readers to further define the current realities of their churches.

The authors do offer other options to closing a church. However, they never speak of the possibility of turning the church around. Perhaps they are speaking specifically to churches that have lost their ability to turn around. While that may be the case, even turnaround churches can be Legacy Churches in the making. While the book seems limited to a specific audience, it does address the issue of failing churches and what to do with them. Perhaps the book best addresses churches that have lost their hope for survival and are in the final stages of life. With the decline of churches in America, *Legacy Churches* is a strong resource that can help a church develop an intentional plan for furthering its ministry long after the doors close.

After growing up as a Nazarene pastor's kid, I know firsthand the value of Legacy Churches. Nearly half of the churches I grew up in are now closed. To my knowledge, while I am part of that legacy, no intentional plan was in place to pass on a purposeful legacy. The question with which all churches must wrestle is not if they will cease to exist, but what will happen when the lifecycles of their churches end. By then they should have intentional plans to last long after their brick and mortar fail.

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White, Thomas and John M. Yeats. *Franchising McChurch: Feeding Our Obsession with Easy Christianity*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2009. 238 pp. \$9.99.

Reviewed by Brandon Kiesling, Administrative Assistant, Office of Doctoral Programs, Fish School of Evangelism and Missions at Southwestern Baptist Seminary; M.Div. in Evangelism and currently pursuing Ph.D. in Evangelism at SWBTS.

Consumerism drives today's American free-market system. Widespread selection of products offered at the lowest price characterizes this movement. From grocery stores to gas stations, one does not have to look far to see the effects of a consumerism mentality. While consumerism allows many American businesses to thrive, Thomas White and John M. Yeats believe consumerism can cause decay in local church settings. What effects does consumerism have on the local church? Should ministers seek to adopt this seemingly successful business model for the church? *Franchising McChurch* seeks to answer some of the questions surrounding this movement and gives much insight into these difficult issues.

Though both professors taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary during the writing of this book, Thomas White now serves as President of