

FOURTEEN

## Forty-four Trends\*

Church leaders have spotted some trends in American churches that we believe will continue. Some are further along than others, but within five years these changes probably will have occurred. Some are happening in mainline denominations, and most are emerging among independent congregations. Regardless, they are happening—now.

I'm listing these trends because congregations need to take action on them. We can't act on or react to anything we don't know about. As you read this chapter, my hope is that your thinking will become more flexible and you will consider ways to respond to these challenges.

To get this picture more clearly, let's try to imagine ourselves going to sleep in 1963 and waking up in 2003. We walk up to a church deacon and ask, "What has changed?"

\*I do not advocate, endorse, or encourage the trends discussed in this chapter. They will, however, serve as catalysts for futuring.

### Forty-four Trends in Churches Today

1. Denominations are not an issue.
2. The term *home church* has no relevance.
3. Cell churches (we used to call them home groups or neighborhood Bible studies) are changing.
4. People are involved in the church without attending each Sunday.
5. High spirituality and low organized religion mark futuring church congregations.
6. Worship service days and times vary.
7. Worship structures are changing.
8. Worship styles are changing.
9. Evangelism takes place in both seeker-sensitive as well as more blatant forms.
10. Revival comes in different forms.
11. The church develops rather than trains.
12. Education for the church is moving from teaching to learning.
13. Leadership teams replace single leaders.
14. Decisions are made by consensus.
15. Church governments are changing.
16. The church is being forced to rethink sexuality.
17. The demand for excellence increases.
18. Church leaders are being held to stricter requirements.
19. Immigrants seek a vision- and purpose-driven church.
20. Discipline in the church is expected and implemented.
21. Relevancy is in demand.
22. Immigrants stress effectiveness and measurable benchmarks.

“Everything has changed,” he answers.

“Yes, but specifically, what has changed?”

He tells us about advances in technology and transportation, changes in the family structure, how houses are now being built and where they’re located. He talks about cell phones, the commute structure, and the entertainment industry. The list becomes almost endless.

23. Family time is a premium consideration.
24. Pastoral care has higher demands.
25. Future churches recognize and respond to single-parent homes.
26. The number of younger retirees continues to grow.
27. America is getting grayer.
28. We have the mall motif—everything under one roof.
29. Multimedia will be an increasing reality.
30. Technology—e-mail, connecting people—will have major implications for how we do ministry, especially in global missions.
31. Consumerism has come to church.
32. Money is now plentiful.
33. Financial accountability is a must.
34. Urbanization or cross-cultural shifts are becoming the rule.
35. The concept of missions is changing.
36. Social action is receiving a strong emphasis—especially partnership with government programs.
37. Futuring churches are increasingly active in local politics.
38. Church and state issues change.
39. Shared church facilities will increase.
40. The doctrine of tolerance remains an immense challenge to the health of the church.
41. The church is suffering and will suffer persecution.
42. Cult activity and satanic powers continue to have a great influence on our world.
43. Both false prophets and true prophets are emerging.
44. Future churches live and flourish with contradictions.

Here's the tragedy in this scenario: Most of our churches went to sleep decades ago. Even though they appear to be awake, they're oblivious to changes that have taken place in the culture that affect the church. I can say that without hesitation because I've visited hundreds of congregations since the beginning of the new millennium that show no significant changes in their worship experiences over the past forty years.

The good news is that churches are waking up—and part of the reason for that awakening is that we’re being forced to shake ourselves and go through serious self-examination. The tendency, of course, is to want to return to the way things were before. If we open our eyes wide, like Rip Van Winkle did after he had slept for twenty years, and return to our village, we’re faced with a shocking reality: Nothing has remained the same. Like Van Winkle, we’re tempted to throw our energy into making time go backward, but it’s impossible.

That’s the tension we face today. We long for the simpler ways and the clear-cut choices between right and wrong. “In the good old days,” we had few questions about morals and the role of authority figures. Now we have to shift our thinking. Tensions increase as we examine the wide gap between what things used to be, what they have become, and what the gap will be in another decade.

It’s a shame that we haven’t been sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit so that we could become the change leaders in the world. In fact, it’s the reverse. Serious transformations in society are forcing the awakening church to reexamine itself. And we tend to scream, groan, and grumble the whole time.

The forty-four trends are listed in random order because I’m not sure of their importance. In various parts of the country, believers will see one issue as having higher priority than other areas—that’s another drastic shift from forty-plus years ago.

1. *Denominations are not an issue.* There was a time when, if Baptists moved to Seattle from Chicago and were in search of a new church, they considered *only* Baptist churches. That is no longer true. The same held true for Presbyterians, Methodists, and independents. This trend of putting less importance on denominations has been going on for at least twenty-five years, but it

is becoming important enough that denominational leaders are studying it seriously.

Many people prefer a *style* of worship, and the denominational tag means little. If we drive by newer church structures, we find an interesting phenomenon. Fifty years ago the denomination name stood out in large letters. Today some churches are putting their denominational affiliation on their signs in small letters or leaving it off all together. Immigrants may visit a church and not even realize they're in a Missouri Synod Lutheran or Pentecostal Holiness church.

When natives move, they still seek "our church." Immigrants, however, don't look for the closest Methodist church, although they're not averse to joining one. They're more caught up in pragmatic issues:

- How convenient is it to get there?
- How many miles is it from our house?
- What services do they offer?
- Do they have family programs and youth activities?

Perhaps unconsciously immigrants seek a particular leadership style. They may not be able to define it, but they recognize it when they find it. They seek interaction that will be available to them *at their choosing*. They may choose not to be heavily involved, and they don't want to attend a congregation where they're made to feel guilty for not subscribing to all the tenets of the church. They want to hold many options.

The basic beliefs, such as the statement of faith, may still be important, but the form of worship, style of ministry, and the warmth (or lack of it) among members take preeminence over theological issues.

Virtually unheard of a few years ago, today thousands of Christians will go to another denomination's church

I sat next to a godly Christian leader at a funeral. He has an outstanding ministry of helping congregations raise funds for new building projects. As we waited for the service to start, he leaned over and said, "You know, Sam, with my travel schedule, I'm rarely at church at my home church. I'm in a church every Sunday and often in midweek worship but rarely at my home church." He thought about it and said, "At most, I'm among my home congregation once a month, and I have no opportunities to serve. I feel I have so much to offer, because I'm around more churches and I know the issues they're facing and can see challenges that lie ahead.

"You know something sad?" he asked and sighed. "I can never become a leader in my own church. To move into any leadership role, we must attend every Sunday unless we're on vacation. How are people like me who have so much to offer plugged into the leadership of the church? My church has so much to gain from my experience, but I'm invisible there."

I wish I had been able to give him an answer.

that doesn't subscribe to all the tenets they have been used to. Check out any growing congregation and ask how many are natives to that denomination. It's amazing how few are. It's equally amazing how many have come from a variety of other backgrounds.

Immigrants know that life involves trade-offs. No one church can offer them everything they want. They know they'll never have all they are looking for. So if the church they visit has a good program for their children, they are willing to make trade-offs—and the theological differences seem less important than the care of their children.

2. *The term home church has no relevance.* Natives thought of exclusive and long-term membership in one congregation. Immigrants are shoppers for the faith, and they seek short-term relationships with several congregations.

There was a time when we'd meet other Christians and one of the first questions we would ask was, "What's your home church?" We could use that to label them—not in a negative sense. When we heard the answer, we knew how to respond and how to direct the conversation from there. It was a useful get-acquainted device.

Today that question is increasingly unlikely to provide answers. Because immigrants have become shoppers for the faith, they don't feel tied down with long-term relationships with a single congregation. Natives are aghast, but immigrants have not bought into the idea of church loyalty. In fact, many immigrants join with a congregation assuming they will experience a short-term relationship.

Typically, natives stress *duty*. They feel an obligation to stay in one church. They teach a Sunday school class year after year. Or they volunteer to help in the nursery, and fifteen years later, they're still there. Natives were raised in a society where *duty* and *obligation* were key culture words.

Today, duty is dead and obligation is unemployed. How does the futuring church get around this trend? The old method was for those in the pulpit to induce guilt. When natives considered leaving, leaders preached and taught to make them struggle with questions such as, "What will people think?" and "Will we be failing God if we stop ushering every Sunday?" Because of the short-term mind-set, guilt doesn't work anymore. Immigrants have multiple needs, and our culture encourages them to be service driven, getting what they can from different places. They might go to one church on Wednesday nights because that church has an excellent program for their teens. On Sunday morning they attend another church as a family because they like the outstanding choir or the powerful preaching. They also might enroll

in small groups and be with people they don't attend church with.

Years ago many churches developed the idea of cell groups or neighborhood gatherings to keep their members focused on the church. That's not the way it works today. Immigrants may become regular members of a cell group only because it meets a specific need they have.

What about Christian leaders whose responsibilities don't allow them to worship at their church regularly? Can they have a purpose and function in that church? In my own case, I'm certain to be at my home church on Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas but not on many other Sundays.

3. *Cell churches (we used to call them home groups or neighborhood Bible studies) are changing.* Because people in our society have become so disconnected from one another, there is an even greater inner need to be connected. That disconnection has highlighted the need for community. Immigrants want to be attached to small groups, so growing larger churches break their members down into smaller groups. The purpose of small groups isn't to grow a church, but to grow the person.

Previously, churches divided home groups by zip codes and neighborhoods because they focused on the convenience of driving or walking within the neighborhood. Geographic convenience no longer holds the appeal. Instead, the trend is to emphasize age and areas of interest, such as Bible study, music, golfing, fishing, shopping, and parenting.

The old cell groups used to be Bible-study based. The trend is now toward relationships. Is the Bible involved? Yes. Do they have Bible studies? Yes, they do—but they're different. If immigrants get together for two hours twice a month, they may spend fifteen or twenty minutes in structured Bible study. The rest of the time

is directional or applicational, and especially they seek guidance on ethical issues.

“What does the Bible say about nuclear war?”

“Our daughter wants her boyfriend to live with her in our house. What do I do?”

“How are we supposed to relate to our Muslim neighbors?” These are real-life struggles and challenges.

Today’s church members want to talk about their families, challenges they face in the workplace, events in their lives, and transitions they’re involved in.

“Is there somebody else out there who’s going through what I’m going through? If so, can we talk about it?” may be the approach.

Thus, the essence of the cell group has changed from church based and Bible study based, to relationship based and affinity group based.

4. *People are involved in the church without attending each Sunday.* Growing churches will have people who are serious about their level of spirituality but without a Sunday-go-to-meeting attitude. Their concern is “How do I live my faith during the week? How do I apply what I’m learning?”

The relationship between serving God and attending church every Sunday doesn’t mean the same to immigrants as it does for natives. Immigrants are strong about living out their spirituality, but they don’t think they have to be in church every week to do that.

Immigrants see their spiritual lives like this: One day they’re fully involved at Grace Assembly. They may not be sitting in church the next week, but it doesn’t mean they’re not serving the Lord. It simply means that the relationship between serving God and attending church every Sunday doesn’t hold the same meaning for immigrants that it does for natives.

For us natives, something was wrong if we didn’t attend church at least three out of four Sundays each

month. People just didn't consider us spiritual or committed to Christ.

5. *High spirituality and low organized religion mark futuring church congregations.* Natives were taught to live their spirituality through the opportunities for service within their own congregation. Modern spirituality is lived out Monday through Sunday and much of that outside the context of organized religion or through parachurch, faith-based community outreach.

If immigrants want to disinfect mattresses at a homeless shelter, they'll do it even if it's not on their church's to-do list. They might choose to become involved in programs sponsored by their local church, but they're not limited to them.

In the past, organized religion would say, "Come to church. Be involved in our programs. This is what we offer and what's going on." Spirituality was lived out through the worship experience or opportunities for service.

Spirituality is now being lived out at a different level. Immigrants consider it a higher level, because they live their faith Monday through Sunday and do most of it outside the context of organized religion or beyond the walls of a single church. Natives, however, have limited themselves to saying, "Our church does this. These are the programs we're involved in."

6. *Worship service days and times vary.* The two fastest-growing types of churches in America are those that have church services that begin no later than 8:30 Sunday morning (some as early as 7:30) and those that offer worship on Friday or Saturday evening.

In fact, Friday or Saturday evening services attract more of the unreached. Christians can invite others much more easily. "Let's go to church tonight. It'll start at 6:30, and we'll be out by 8:00. Why don't our families get together for dinner after that?" This fits the immigrant lifestyle, because they don't want to tie up their

entire weekend for a church service. This way they can go in, worship, and have the rest of the weekend free.

7. *Worship structures are changing.* In the past, most churches operated about the same way, with a call to worship, three hymns, the offering, Bible reading, and a sermon. The challenge—and demand—is for non-traditional formats. Ministers over forty were trained in biblical competence and theological scholarship, but not in storytelling and listening—the demands of immigrants.

My wife, Brenda, spent a week at a retreat center where they taught storytelling. That's what's going on today. Unfortunately, too many seminaries still turn out preachers who read the Bible, exegete the passage, and close with showing how it applies to today's needs.

We're learning that telling and retelling stories—including biblical stories—can be very powerful.

### A Bible Story

When we unpack the events and bring out the characters' feelings and tensions, our listeners identify with the story and grasp spiritual truths.

I want to tell the story of Jochebed, the mother of Moses, who decided to float her baby down the river. The story is told in a single verse: "But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile" (Exod. 2:3).

I like to think of this as more than the physical hiding of a baby. It also involved the relationship of a mother and her infant son. Think about the emotional stress of trying to hide a baby every day in a tent while Egyptian soldiers wander through the camp. Whenever they choose to walk through, the mother has to keep the baby quiet, and he can't cry as a normal infant does. This

must have caused untold stress for Miriam and Aaron, the older siblings, as well as for the father.

The preservation of that child's life had to be the total focus of Jochebed's life. "But when she could hide him no longer" had to be the day she broke down physically and emotionally. After days and nights of sleepless torment, it had to have been the moment she felt she had failed and cried out, "I can't keep him any longer." She must have walked back and forth, praying, crying, mourning, and trying to figure out what to do.

Then she made her decision by putting him in a waterproof basket and placing the tiny bassinet among the reeds along the banks of the Nile.

All of the anguish and despair is wrapped up in one verse. I find this story so easily imagined. I think of the suffering and hardship, of Jochebed constructing the basket.

"What are you going to do?" I can hear Moses' big sister, Miriam, ask.

"I'm building a little boat."

"What are you going to do with that little boat?"

"I'm going to put your baby brother into it."

The wide-eyed girl asks, "And what's going to happen? There are crocodiles in that river. It's not safe. What happens if—?"

I can imagine Jochebed as she continues to weave that basket and tears flow down her face. Even in those hours of preparation, she remains vigilant. She glances furtively at the little baby.

Finally, she puts him in the basket, and the Bible says, "His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him" (v. 4).

When we start telling Bible stories, we don't want to gloss over any like this one simply because it's contained in one verse. We need to pause and consider the toll it takes on the family and what an emotional decision it took to give up the baby. Can we imagine the conversations that went on among the family members? Surely it wasn't an independent decision.

When we unpack stories like that for our listeners, they understand. It's not just the event, but the process that hurts so much.

Once we point to the pain of process, listeners can learn to apply it to their own situations. It is not just coming clean with my husband or my wife, it is not just confessing to my boss what I stole. We see this as the issue of getting from Point A to Point B. Point B is the arrival, but the journey is the story. Once we help people understand about Bible stories and their dynamics, we can show them how all of life is a process. We help them realize what it feels like to give up something we love dearly and the transitions we must go through.

Most people know the rest of the story—that the king's daughter rescued the baby, adopted him as her own, and even hired Jochebed to be Moses' wet nurse. We know the rest of the story, but Jochebed didn't know—and that's what makes storytelling powerful.

Short attention spans are evident in our church pews, so the service has to be done in what I call snippets. That is, worship elements need to be continually changing. Music, drama, and multimedia presentations are interspersed with preaching. Television has conditioned us to expect to receive information in sound bites. That means the church service has to keep moving with no dead moments.

For instance, wise medical people know that. If we visit a savvy doctor, we'll sit in the outside waiting room for a maximum of ten minutes before a receptionist calls our name and ushers us into the inside waiting room. We'll have perhaps another five-minute wait before a nurse comes in and talks to us or takes our blood pressure—some small thing—and then she leaves. This is the pattern. We may have to wait a total of forty-five minutes to an hour, but we have enough happening every few minutes that it doesn't seem as if it's that long.

It also seems as if several people are involved in our case and they keep us moving.

8. *Worship styles are changing.* Worship style will define the congregation. Singing *about* God has shifted to singing *to* God. Many new choruses and praise hymns may not be theologically correct, but they have the style and tempo people want to sing. Futuring churches are trying to incorporate the span of music from pipe organ to rap—all in one service.

The worship team/choir/music department provides a great challenge for any pastor. I've heard some people joke that when the first choir director, Lucifer, fell, he fell right into the choir loft. And there hasn't been any peace since then.

The biggest challenge is for families. Teenagers like one kind of music and their parents like something else, but parents tend to defer to the children because they're willing to do a trade-off. As a parent, I'd rather go to church with my children and have them enjoy it than expect them to put up with music they hate.

People's Baptist Church in Boston, where Dr. Wesley Roberts is pastor, is the oldest African-American church in New England, with huge cathedral ceilings and beautiful crystal glass windows. I was there one Sunday in February—which is Black History Month—to preach at both Sunday morning services.

The service began with pipe organs. Then an immense male chorus sang two spirituals a cappella. Everyone in that group was at least seventy years old, but their voices didn't sound old. One song had to do with traveling on a train, and some of the men sounded like the train and the whistle while the others were singing on the train. It was an emotional time.

After that, they took the offering and made announcements. Then the youth group sang. They sang contemporary music that teens identified with. The service also

included traditional singing and well-known hymns as well as a regular choir.

That's an example of a futuring church that can run the gamut from pipe organ to rap all in one service. As I sat on that platform, I smiled and thought, *Here is a church for the whole family. Everybody has an opportunity to get offended, but everyone also has an opportunity to fit in.*

Increasingly, churches will adapt in a number of different ways. It's now common to have different types of services. Friday night could be a contemporary casual format. Early Sunday morning could be traditional and liturgical.

I preached one Sunday at Evangel Church in Chicago. Their first service, which they called the "Get Up Service," was fairly traditional. They called the second one the "Get Down Service." In that service, one choir number lasted a half hour (I timed it), but it had a lot of variation and included congregational participation.

This says that futuring leaders are offering different experiences, and people are attending the services in which the worship style and format fit most of their preferences.

9. *Evangelism takes place in both seeker-sensitive as well as more blatant forms.* Bill Hybels popularized seeker-sensitive evangelism at Willow Creek, but it's not the only format. Direct, in-your-face evangelism is still being used by growing churches as well.

The most in-your-face evangelism I've seen wasn't done by a loud street evangelist who screamed and pushed tracts into everyone's hands. I was in Brazil in the middle of 2000 at a church with a Sunday night attendance of eight hundred to a thousand people. The pastor said, "All of you who are visiting the church tonight and are already believers, will you please stand?" They did, and he thanked them and told them to be

seated. Then he said, “Those of you who are visiting here tonight but are not believers—you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior—will you please stand up?” Maybe a couple dozen people stood.

As I sat there preparing myself to speak, I thought, *I’ve never seen this before.*

The pastor had already told me, “Sunday night service is get-them-saved night.” Consequently, I preached a simple message that Jesus saves. After I finished and the music was playing, I said, “All of you who want to give your life to the Lord, come to the altar.” What I didn’t realize was that earlier in the service, when these people stood up, they were marked. When I gave the invitation, the “soul winners” who had been assigned to various pews went to those areas. Immediately they were next to those who had stood up. Each carried a Bible, and each spent perhaps ninety seconds explaining salvation before bringing them down to the front. How much more blatant can evangelism get? Yet it worked!

It was totally different from the style I grew up with, where the choir sang fifty stanzas of “Just As I Am” and the pastor intoned, “While every head is bowed and every eye is closed . . .,” and then invited the people to come forward, fill out a card, or talk to someone.

We don’t need to take sides on how to do evangelism. Various styles work depending on the cultural context. I do know this: Immigrants don’t want us to play around. “Tell us what you need or what you want to do. Then I’ll tell you whether I’m going to respond.” They seem to have no problem saying, “No, I don’t think I want to do that right now.”

10. *Revival comes in different forms.* Revival itself is being redefined. It used to be the term for a church holding protracted or evangelistic services. Revival now simply means that people who are a part of the community

of believers are empowered to live out the life of Christ in their daily living. One evidence was the WWJD (“What Would Jesus Do?”) wristband that was so popular around the year 2000.

The crashing of the planes on September 11, 2001, into the World Trade Center made many people think seriously about God—people who hadn’t been inside a church in a decade. Almost all the pastors I spoke with told me that new people came into their churches; others spoke of members making stronger commitments and showing heavier involvement.

Revivals don’t always take place inside the church building; they can happen where people live, work, and play as well. They ask, “How can I live out my faith each day?” Immigrants also understand that corporate revival can only happen if individual revival is in place.

When a native prays, “Send us a revival, Lord; send us a revival,” he or she is referring to the Lord working in church services. An important evangelist is going to come in and preach, and “People are going to get saved, the church is going to grow and be alive, and we’re going to have a great time.” After the evangelist leaves, the revival is over.

For the immigrant, revival means, “So now I can learn how to live the faith I have. I’ll learn how to transmit my faith to my neighbor.”

11. *The church develops rather than trains.* Training is task oriented—a short-term focus on a job that needs to be done. Development focuses more on the person rather than the task, is long term, and is process driven rather than event driven.

Churches that used to do training assumed that if they taught someone how to be an usher, that’s all that person did. Those people were good, well-trained ushers. Today these churches develop person-centered abilities and teach people conflict resolution and trouble-shoot-

ing skills. In their systemic thinking, they develop them as individuals who have multiple skills, and those same skills can be used in many different places instead of just one defined area.

12. *Education for the church is moving from teaching to learning.* Teaching focuses on the teacher, but learning focuses on the students. When a church looks at its Christian education department, it needs to ask, “What are people learning?” That is, they begin from the end, and their goals drive them.

With approval of the voucher system, home schools will increase along with Christian schools. Future-oriented churches are asking, “How do we hook up with the home school?”

They answer, “Provide a gym, a library, and a music program. Home schoolers need places for social interaction, and their parents need support groups.” Future churches are figuring out how to reach out to home schoolers—even those without religious affiliation—and offer assistance with no strings attached. They hook into home school associations in their neighborhood and open church facilities to them, especially the gym. Parents can hold meetings at the church and can establish a good library. The only expense for the church is utilities. Imagine the outreach to the community because home schoolers have a place they can call theirs with no strings attached.

Christian education in futuring churches emphasizes interactive, integrated, and individualized learning. Interactive means there must be a connection between what is being taught and the real world. The stress on individualized instruction demands smaller classrooms, more one-on-one instruction, more parental involvement, and more volunteerism.

The criteria used to be that students studied their Sunday school quarterlies and learned the weekly memory

verses. Now the emphasis is “What have you learned that is changing your life? In what ways are you now different because of the lessons?”

The Christian school movement is continuing to grow but in a different way. Previously only large churches had Christian schools; now smaller churches are beginning Christian schools as well. They are more objective or criteria driven, which means teachers will need to know clearly what they are trying to achieve each term or semester. They also need to show how this new knowledge integrates with real life.

No longer is it enough to teach arithmetic just as problems for students to work through. Teachers are now posing real-life issues. “If you go to Kroger with  $x$  amount of money and shop . . .” Or “You open a savings account at a local bank and . . .”

Instead of teaching only addition and subtraction, we’ve seen the need to teach people how to balance their checkbooks. We know two things about Americans and their checking accounts. First, most Americans accept the figures on their bank statements without verifying them. Second, many of them don’t know how to reconcile their bank statements with their checkbooks. Teaching people how to balance their checkbooks is important, because, as stewardship institutes have taught us, people who regularly balance their checkbooks are better givers.

I visited one large academy for grades pre-K through six. Every classroom has three computers, and they have an Internet-active computer lab. Charles Schwab, the investing company, has partnered with the school and set up every classroom with a business that seeded the class a small amount of money, about one hundred dollars. Each class has had to devise a business plan and sell a product. Money earned is divided among the stockholders of the company—the students. If they want to

spin off another company, the stockholders can decide not to take the money but to invest it. That's integrated learning in the real world.

I also see in the future smaller, more individualized classrooms with higher levels of parent involvement and more volunteerism.

13. *Leadership teams replace single leaders.* "None of us is as good as all of us." In the past, one person led everything, but immigrants want to be part of the leadership team.

As I've mentioned elsewhere, there was a time when the pastor stood behind the pulpit and said, "Thus saith the Lord," and most of the church members went along without question. Today's immigrants want to be part of a winning team. Therefore, they are willing to take orders from a coach and change their style of playing to win the game. They are not, however, willing to submit to autocratic control. That means that in futuring churches, dialogue comes before decision. The process is more important than the destination.

14. *Decisions are made by consensus.* Futuring churches hand down fewer executive decisions and try to operate by consensus instead. Leaders aren't trying to get people to announce whether they're for or against anything. Rather, they work until there is general agreement. They're trying to get everyone to see the larger picture. Once that happens, wisdom emerges for the greater good.

15. *Church governments are changing.* Church boards and committees are being replaced by teams, and within the teams are subgroups or task forces: Task forces have the ability to make faster short- and long-term decisions, because they have one task to do and that's the end of their responsibility. Churches that are going to reach and hold the dot.com crowd can't wait two years to make a decision. They're risk takers, and they want change

now. The essence of their thinking is that if they wait one more day, they are that much farther behind.

16. *The church is being forced to rethink sexuality.* The three major issues are women in ministry, homosexuality, and abortion. Other issues include cohabitation outside of marriage and women choosing to have a family without having relations with a man. Churches need to define their stand on such issues, and the best time to do so is when they are not involved with one of these problems. The best time to talk about something is when there's nothing to talk about. No church is going to be exempt from all of these issues, no matter how biblical the church might view itself to be.

17. *The demand for excellence increases.* In preaching, the demand for excellence isn't on the knowledge of biblical languages and polished illustrations. Immigrants seek authenticity and integrity. In teaching, they demand substance and not the lightweight material we have used in recent years. The third demand is for relevance—preaching with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Although my friend Allen Skelton was a successful pastor, he had to file for personal bankruptcy. In the midst of that ordeal he preached one of the most memorable sermons I've ever heard. He told us the mistakes he had made and was totally vulnerable. He explained how he paid off American Express with Visa and Visa with MasterCard and MasterCard with Discover. He talked about the whole thing: about spending and income and mismanagement and lack of planning. In the midst of all that, he connected with us.

One of the reasons T. D. Jakes is a phenomenal communicator is that he goes to the point of need and relates back to when he was in need. He identifies with people and gives them points of connection. That's what immigrants want.

18. *Church leaders are being held to stricter requirements.* It's still relatively easy to join a congregation, but those who aspire to leadership will face heavier demands. The church I attend has a weekly attendance of 180 to 190 every Sunday. Even though small, we have leadership development meetings for everyone in any type of leadership. It's done in phases, and those who haven't completed phase one may not go on to phase two. No one can serve in leadership before completing phase two. Five years ago, going through such a program was voluntary; it is now required.

New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, has a membership of twenty-six thousand. Before anyone can take on a leadership role in that church, they must have completed thirty-three hours of a Minister in Training course at Beulah Heights.

A supervisor may call us at any time and say, "Wanda Jones has applied for \_\_\_\_\_ position. Where is she on the program?"

"Out of thirty-three hours, she has completed seventeen."

The supervisor will then make a decision about whether that's enough credits to apply for the position. The supervisor may say to Wanda, "You need to complete at least eight more hours before we'll consider you for this leadership role."

I've also observed that many futuring churches make covenants built around what I call the "what-ifs." Such a covenant will spell out requirements for being a leader and consequences for failing to meet those requirements. For example, if a leader fails to tithe, such and such will happen.

When immigrants are being serviced, they want to know that those who serve them are competent. They know that competency means continuous learning. Why, for example, would a church let me teach Sunday

school if I had never been through all the necessary training? If I'm in computers, I have to keep going to school all the time. If I'm a dentist or a heart surgeon, I have to keep up with new technology. So in the mind of immigrants, it makes sense for leaders to be on the cutting edge.

Because many immigrants are unwilling to join (they don't want to obligate themselves), some churches are willing to use nonmembers—as long as they have been through the required training process.

19. *Immigrants seek a vision- and purpose-driven church.* They ask church leaders, "What is your purpose? Why are you here?" They want to devote their time, energy, and resources to worthwhile projects. When immigrants consider giving to the Lord, the local church isn't usually their first thought, which runs contrary to the thinking of natives. Immigrants take their resources to where they see people of vision and purpose wisely using them.

20. *Discipline in the church is expected and implemented.* In the working world, there are consequences for failing to do quality work. The church also expects competence. Formerly in the church, *discipline* was a bad word, but that's changing. Churches generally have a set of guidelines for leaders. If they don't meet those standards of competence, they do not stay in leadership. Sunday school teachers, for example, are required to attend quarterly teacher training classes. If they don't, they are removed. The word then gets out that the church has high standards. They want their teachers to be well qualified for what they are doing. And they want parents to feel that they can entrust their children to those teachers.

Consider this: If I was a public school student and did not show up for football practice, I would not be able to play in the next game. In the church, though, if I miss choir practice, I can still robe up and walk into the choir loft.

But that's changing. The choir director may say, "Sam, if you don't practice with us, you can't sing with us."

21. *Relevancy is in demand.* Immigrants ask, "Why?" Church leaders can no longer say, "Everyone knows that. . . ." We have to explain things to immigrants, because they may question what natives took for granted. And native leaders need to understand that immigrants' questions aren't signs of disagreement; they simply show their need for clarification.

"I'm not questioning authority," an immigrant says, "but why do I have to attend three out of four meetings? I'm already a public school teacher with ten years of experience. I also have a Bible college diploma. So why do I have to come?"

If native leaders get offended, they've missed the point. A response that will make sense to immigrants is: "We have requirements that every person—without exception—must meet so that *we* know they're qualified. We want no one to slip in just because of their background."

22. *Immigrants stress effectiveness and measurable benchmarks.* Natives may state their goals as "We want to reach our world for Jesus." Immigrants are more specific. They say, "We will try to reach people within a one-mile radius of our church. Our goal is to see one hundred people receive the Lord as their Savior. We want to see thirty-five people go through our discipleship program." They have definite benchmarks so that at the end of the year or planning cycle they can check their progress. Either they made their goals or they didn't.

They won't be able to say, as natives have in the past, "We haven't gained any, but we haven't lost any either. We're still holding the fort; we're faithful. God is blessing our faithfulness." If the native church loses members, their ready answer is, "God is purifying and culling us. He's getting us ready for something new." Those aren't satisfactory responses to immigrants.

23. *Family time is a premium consideration.* Natives stopped work on Friday and had the weekend to themselves. This is no longer true, and immigrants are tied up on Saturday with a variety of activities. They seek ways to get their spirituality—but not at the expense of further dividing family time. Native leaders bragged about the activity level at the church. Immigrants are asking, “How can we coordinate all these activities?”

In native thinking, a church was successful if the pastor could brag, “We have something going on all the time. On Monday night we have men’s Bible study, Tuesday night we have women’s Bible study, Wednesday night we have family Bible study, Thursday we have youth group, Friday we have evangelism,” and their list went on.

No more. Family needs are now making parents ask, “How can we coordinate things? If we want to go to midweek activities, can we all go Friday night? The kids can go to their place, my wife can go to the ladies’ place, I can go to the men’s place, and then we can get back together for twenty minutes of celebration and be on our way.”

24. *Pastoral care has higher demands.* The needs of dysfunctional people and families will cause congregations to “out-source” pastoral care. They will have to bring in chaplains who do nothing but hospital care or counseling. Churches may choose to do out-sourcing not necessarily with someone who has no connection with the church, but with someone from whom they can cut away and say, “That is them; this is us.”

In November 2001 the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that the percentage of married metro-Atlanta residents has fallen from 57 to 54 percent since the 1990 census.

Similar patterns and figures are true for other large cities.

25. *Future churches recognize and respond to single-parent homes.* At least ten million single mothers live in America. Churches need to minister to them as well as to those who have never married and those who are widowed or divorced. Churches are rethinking traditional couples' dinners and Valentine's dates. What used to be the fifth wheel will become the majority in some churches.

### The New American Family

- If you don't have a child at home, you're in the majority. Today only 34 percent of U.S. households have children under the roof.
- Fewer couples are getting married.
- More than 50 percent of those who marry for the first time were previously living together.
- Single motherhood is a growing option. Unmarried mothers now account for 33 percent of all births in the United States.
- The changing patterns of the new American family will influence decisions on parental leave, day care, and other major social issues.\*

\*Rutgers University National Merit Project

26. *The number of younger retirees continues to grow.* People are retiring at an earlier age, and they have extra time and talent for involvement, not just in the church, but also in the community.

27. *America is getting grayer.* If the American Association of Retired Persons became a nation, it would be the thirtieth largest nation in the world, slightly smaller in population than Argentina.

- By 2025 more than 35 percent of Americans will be over age 50. (Currently the figure is 27 percent.)
- By 2020 more than 105 million people in the United States will be over age 55.

- These figures will involve all of us in issues of health care and pastoral care.
- By 2025, for the first time in history, seven generations will live side by side. The church will have to struggle with different worship forms and styles to meet those different generations.
- Assisted living care hit the \$86 billion mark in 1986. It is expected to grow to \$490 billion in 2030.
- Roughly 23 percent of Americans are over 50, and one in five is over 65.
- 13 million Americans care for their parents in their homes.
- When we include those who are caregivers of parents but don't live with them, the number doubles.
- Most seniors live below the poverty line.
- The average life expectancy of Americans is 76 years.
- In 2001, 54.7 percent of people age 65 and older lived with their spouses, 12.8 percent lived with other relatives, and only 2.2 percent lived with nonrelatives.
- The 30.3 percent who lived alone were in communities with other seniors.

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**The National Hospice Foundation found that half of Americans want their families to carry out their final wishes, but 75 percent haven't explained what their wishes are. Seventy thousand Americans are one hundred years old or older.**

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The churches in the North are losing older members, so what do you do without them? They are the ones who kept the doors open. On the other hand, the influx of people in Florida and Arizona and places in the Sunbelt makes church leaders there ask, "What do we do with them?"

Churches are struggling with how to tap into the volunteer base among the elderly who are financially stable. Many of them are healthy, and they have accumulated wisdom and have more free time than any other group. Most of all, seniors want to make the last years count.

In times of change,  
it is the learners  
who will inherit  
the earth, while  
the learned will  
find themselves  
beautifully equipped  
for a world that  
no longer exists.

Author unknown

I know of at least ten growing churches that are building senior citizen apartments right on the church complexes. Those leaders see the future and are preparing for it now—right on the church property.

28. *We have the mall motif—everything under one roof.* Fast-growing mega-churches have their own bookstores, gyms, weight rooms, cafeterias, and childcare facilities. This means that futuring churches are becoming more entrepreneurial. The bookstore may be run by someone outside the church. The church is following the mall concept. The big anchor stores such as Sears and J. C. Penney don't own their buildings; they lease them from the mall developer. This is increasingly the mind-set of growing churches.

I've been in churches that have so many international members that they sell products from the countries represented—headgear, handbags, shirts, dresses, and novelty items. Why not sell them? The church benefits, and individuals do too.

29. *Multimedia will be an increasing reality.* Because immigrants are visual learners, future church leaders increasingly use visual forms of communication. At our church when the pastor preaches, his main points are scrolling on a screen right above him.

30. *Technology—e-mail, connecting people—will have major implications for how we do ministry, especially*

*in global missions.* Mail used to take weeks to get to other countries, but with e-mail we can communicate in real time and take immediate actions. Services such as UPS, FedEx, and DHL have speeded up the world. They specialize in overseas mail and guarantee that any size package will reach its destination within three days.

31. *Consumerism has come to church.* Future-oriented churches are providing leadership, education, diet, exercise, and a lot of other things. People can buy Christian exercise videos, books or tapes of Christian business principles, and self-help books. Congregations will learn to do packaging to reach out to consumers and to resource them. For instance, the pastor of a growing church will have tapes and books and resources available for the people.

32. *Money is now plentiful.* There's an unprecedented transfer of wealth. The bottom line is this: Trillions of dollars are going to be flowing from one generation down to the next, and that generation is fairly well set themselves. The giving generation is now saying, "I want to leave my estate in a legacy that will be worthwhile rather than fund somebody's lifestyle."

Philanthropy has taken on huge roles. How success is measured has changed. A growing number of Christian philanthropists measure success by the amount of money given away.

Don Chapman is one example. Don can't help but start new businesses, and he's a multimillionaire. He sold his

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The number of tax-exempt charitable, religious, educational, scientific, and literary organizations in the United States grew by 74 percent between 1991 and 2001.

*Atlanta Journal-Constitution,*  
July 21, 2001,  
quoting an Independent Sector report

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company, S & S Tug—the company that builds tractors that push planes out of their gates—on Friday, and on Monday he started a new company called Legacy Ventures. His new company raises venture capital, and his immediate goal was to raise \$150 million for venture capital in two months.

He said to me one morning over breakfast, “You know, I’m at a place in my life where I really don’t have to do all of this. I want to give my life to something. I haven’t discovered just what it is.” He was still searching, but he knew one important thing—philanthropy isn’t just writing a check—it’s becoming part of the action.

33. *Financial accountability is a must.* Immigrants are not interested in micromanaging, but they want to see the larger picture. Future churches regularly publish one-page financial statements or broad categories of income and expenses that provide the information immigrants want to know.

34. *Urbanization or cross-cultural shifts are becoming the rule.* By the year 2025, more than 38 percent of Americans will be ethnic minorities, and Hispanics will be the largest minority. Urbanization means that the trend of moving to the suburbs will shift as people move back into the cities. This movement will throw people into a cross-cultural world, so church leaders need to understand the variety of cultures that will become the mainstay of churches and businesses.

35. *The concept of missions is changing.* No longer is the church thinking of missions only as work in foreign lands; now they’re including urban areas and inner cities. International missionaries are focusing on the United States.

Furthermore, the church is moving toward short-term rather than long-term missions. In the old days, missionaries served four years with a fifth year of furlough. For example, in 1995 BHBC began Missions Overseas

Short Term (M.O.S.T.). Since then up to eighty people have received cross-cultural training and gone to another country to serve. They receive college credit because it's part of their core curriculum.

Another change is that instead of being *sending* agencies, churches are becoming *going* agencies. More and more churches are going churches rather than sending churches. For example, Atlanta's Mount Paran Church of God, under Dr. David Cooper's leadership, has missionaries in thirty-eight countries. Almost all of them are former members of Mount Paran. I spoke at their missions conference, and during that one week, they raised \$1.5 million. That means that people within a local church are raising substantial support for missionaries, which fosters the idea, "We are part of this. We are going with them."

Even if missionaries stay in a foreign country for a year, they're not out of contact with the home church. When they return, they don't have to spend a year doing what we used to refer to as deputation work, raising funds to return. Those with denominational support haven't always had that pressure, of course. Even so, the trend is still to raise total support for a family or individual within the congregation.

Inner-city missions is an area Beulah Heights Bible College is emphasizing and training people for. We used to spend a lot of money going across the ocean yet did little here at home. Now we're refocusing and seeing how much we need to do right here in the United States. We're growing new churches—often sponsored by larger congregations—and we're calling that missions.

36. *Social action is receiving a strong emphasis—especially partnership with government programs.* Because of collaborative government funding, there is an explosion of nonprofit organizations. The federal government won't give money to a church, but they will give to other

types of nonprofit groups, so some churches are incorporating as nonprofit under a different name with a separate board. Corporations are also more open to funding such nonprofit groups.

Social action is done in partnership with government programs. The 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations are exploding around us because there is more collaborative government money available through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Education, and especially through the rehab sections of our city governments. The issue of separation of church and state doesn't even come into play when HUD gives money to a nonprofit group because they're serving the homeless. It's the same ministry your church would have been doing, but now the government is funding it.

37. *Futuring churches are increasingly active in local politics.* Churches can't endorse candidates; however, people from within the church are being encouraged to run for school boards and county commissions with the unofficial support of their church.

For example, in early 2000, Hooters, a restaurant with scantily clad waitresses, wanted to open a franchise in Fayetteville, Georgia, but the community packed the hearing room for the zoning and defeated the petition. They also let politicians know that they were facing an increasingly vocal constituency.

Christians involved in politics hold their meetings off church property. Increasingly, futuring congregations are saying, "We will not take a backseat and leave the driving up to others. We will help put our own people in the driver's seat."

For immigrants, *politics* has been redefined as a process through which community values are implemented. *Politics* used to be a bad word. Pastors would say, "We don't have politics in our church." What they

didn't recognize is that we have politics in our churches, our homes, and our workplaces—wherever people are involved. Immigrants are saying, "Because this is the case, let's see how this works, get into the process, and make a positive contribution."

38. *Church and state issues change.* In 1998 former Senator John Ashcroft sponsored a bill called Charitable Choice that gave corporations permission to donate money to faith-based institutions and receive tax deductions on those gifts. The White House, under the direction of George W. Bush, set up a division called Faith-Based Community Initiatives. Now future-facing churches can compete for and receive money for faith-based child-care centers, rehab centers, hospice centers, subsidized housing, and other projects.

39. *Shared church facilities will increase.* More churches are constructing multipurpose buildings in which they set up chairs on Sunday for worship and play volleyball and basketball on Monday and Wednesday. Other churches with traditional buildings are sharing the facilities with Christian groups. I foresee that two or more congregations will jointly own facilities.

Churches are also building auditoriums separate from the church and renting the space for such things as banquets and weddings. As long as they report it as unrelated income, the IRS allows it.

40. *The doctrine of tolerance remains an immense challenge to the health of the church.* Christians want to be inclusive and not hurt others, but unless we're especially cautious, the lines will continue to blur and the Christian edges will become soft.

I see this as the greatest challenge to the health of the church. How do we become so inclusive that we don't hurt anyone and yet draw the line on behavior and practices that are contrary to our beliefs? For instance, how do we continue to stress the love of God for everyone,

accept Muslims and Hindus as people loved by God, and yet draw the line?

Some churches have become so tolerant that they are saying, in effect, it doesn't matter what people believe. This is the great danger we face, because we're then apt to believe anything. As Christians, at some point we have to say, "This is what we believe. This is the core of our faith. You don't have to believe as we do, but don't try to make us embrace your faith."

In 1998 I faced the issue of exclusivity. I had arranged a meeting for twenty influential Christian leaders in the area. We met in our college atrium around a table of refreshments. Within five minutes after our meeting began, one of the leaders sat down across from me and stared right at me. He represented an organization that stresses inclusivity and especially embraces the homosexual community. "Dr. Chand, what would be your feelings toward diversity and inclusivity?" he asked.

I knew where he was going with it, but I said, "I think you'll have to further define that a little bit for me."

"All right. To whom would you not give a cup of cold water?"

"Nobody comes to my mind. We'll give a cup of cold water to anybody."

"So tell me then, who all can sit around this table?"

All the others sitting at the table had stopped talking and were listening intently. "Let me just cut to the chase. We will give a cup of cold water to homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals—that does not matter to us. We will serve any- and everybody without prejudice. *However*, the core group—the team—that facilitates this process will not be those of that persuasion."

"You mean to tell me that lesbians and gays will not be welcome to be part of the decision-making process?"

"That is exactly what I'm saying to you."

“Well, I don’t think we can work together.” He picked up his folder and stood up.

“I appreciate your time,” I said. “You have been thoughtful to come today.”

I did nothing to hold him back or placate him. And no one else at the table said anything to encourage him to stay. I must admit that as he walked away I was thinking, *There goes the support of almost two thousand churches.*

As much as I hated to see that pastor leave, I also knew that tolerance could go only so far. It must have a stopping point—and it does with all of us, perhaps at different places. If we have no unbreachable line, we will soon become corrupt at our core and become so soft that we lose our identity.

That is exactly what happened with God’s people in the Old Testament. After they moved into the Promised Land, they slowly absorbed the culture and religious beliefs of their neighbors. In time, “everyone did as he saw fit” (Judg. 21:25).

41. *The church is suffering and will suffer persecution.* More people were martyred in the twentieth century than in the rest of the centuries combined, especially in countries such as the Sudan, China, Pakistan, and India. The church has always thrived under persecution, and that’s when purification takes place.

Persecution in the United States will be more subtle. Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union blatantly oppose the church, but we will see more subtle forms in the workplace and with individuals, especially because we believe Jesus provides the only way to God. An accusation of intolerance may well be the most powerful weapon raised against Christians.

42. *Cult activity and satanic powers continue to have a great influence on our world.* Multiculturalism also brings pluralism, and that opens the doors to every religion.

Futuring leaders are flexible and are already considering ways to respond to new challenges.

Twenty years ago, who would have believed that a city in the Deep South would have Hindu temples and Muslim mosques?

Other gods are coming to America via people from a higher economic level than the average factory worker. More than half of the 35,000 East Indians who live in Atlanta are professionals who have power, organization, and money.

The church has two ways to approach this situation. The first is to become an apologetic congregation—in the true sense of the word. That doesn't mean we need to apologize for our stance, but that we know what we believe and defend or speak up for it. The second approach is to educate Christians to know the reality of the faith, to teach them so that they are fully grounded in the faith. They may not know how to answer every argument raised by Muslims, but they can become so familiar with the real that the counterfeit will not feel right. When the kind and highly educated neighbor who lives in a beautiful house and drives a Mercedes Benz tries to introduce them to a new way of thinking, they will be able to discern that it is wrong.

Perhaps an illustration will help. In the old days, when banks trained tellers to deal with cash, one of the final areas of their training was the vault. For hours they did nothing but feel money. The idea was that their fingers would become so sensitive that they would know a counterfeit when they touched it.

Likewise, futuring churches have to train their members to detect counterfeit religions. We have to be more biblically-based in teaching the fundamentals of the truth so that our members can easily detect the counterfeit.

*43. Both false prophets and true prophets are emerging.* Anybody who has money can buy airtime, so we'll see

a mixture of false and true prophets on TV. Web sites also are leading people down strange paths.

Cec Murphey went to the Internet to look up *Light and Life* magazine, put out by the Free Methodist Church, after one of their editors asked him to write an article. He discovered that a New Age group had bought that domain name.

The worst false prophets will be those who are close to the truth and say enough of the right words so that they are seductive and lead many astray.

44. *Future churches live and flourish with contradictions.* Traditions of the past are now being pushed aside, and there is no longer just one right way to do things. This touches everything from music to social activities. Living with contradictions will increasingly become a part of who we are and what we do. Futuring leaders and their congregations are willing to embrace contradictions and live at peace.

I present these forty-four trends as catalysts to challenge future thinking.

My biggest concern is that natives continue to broadcast on AM and immigrants have tuned in to FM. Nothing is wrong with either of their receivers. But no matter how good the receiver, we don't get both frequencies at the same time. The AM stations are crying out, "If only people were more committed," while the FM stations are saying, "How will this bring meaning to me?"

In this chapter I've tried to point out the issues that futuring leaders and all Christian congregations are facing or will face in the near future. Now let's look at the kind of leadership we need to go boldly into that looming future.