

Christ Community Covenant Church
January 2, 2011 - Remodeling the Church

The State of the Church

The state of *our* church

[Video clip]

The remodeling volunteers and gifts

Finances

Giving Tree

Year end

The remodeling volunteers and gifts

The state of *the* catholic Church

1. 1,400 pastors in America leave the ministry monthly.
2. Only 15% of churches in the United States are growing and just less than 5% of those are growing by conversion growth.
3. 10,000 churches in America disappeared in a five-year period.
4. The number of people in America that do not attend church has doubled in the past 15 years.
5. No more than 38% of the population attends church at all and that's in the Bible belt.
The next highest is the Midwest at 25%, West 21% and the Northeast 17%.
6. The vast majority of churches have an attendance of less than 75.
7. In 70% of the churches in America, the pastor is the only full-time staff person.
8. 65% of Americans donate to a place of worship. Evangelicals however 85% donate to their church yet only 9% tithe.
9. There are almost 100 million unchurched Americans, 11-20% of them claim to be born-again. They have either left the church or never connected for some reason.
10. Leading church analysts Lyle Schaller, George Barna, and Mike Regele stress the alarming truth that over 80% of American Protestant churches are in plateau and/or decline.
11. As many as 90 percent of the boys who are being raised in church will abandon it by their 20th birthday. Many of these boys will never return.
12. 88% of children from Evangelical churches will leave the church after High School.

Here is a particularly sad statement:

“In a representative nationwide survey among born again adults, none of the individuals interviewed said that the single, most important goal in their life is to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ.”

1. The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans—especially young adults. As the two younger generations (Busters and Mosaics - Mosaics are the generation born between 1984 and 2002. Busters are the generation between 1965 and 1983) ascend to numerical and positional supremacy in churches across the nation, the data suggest that biblical literacy is likely to decline significantly . . . [creating] a theological free-for-all.

2. Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented.

Despite technological advances that make communications instant and far-reaching, Christians are becoming more spiritually isolated from non-Christians than was true a decade ago. For instance, less than one-third of born again Christians planned to invite anyone to join them at a church event during the Easter season; teenagers are less inclined to discuss Christianity with their friends than was true in the past.

3. Growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life.

When asked what matters most, teenagers prioritize education, career development, friendships, and travel. Faith is significant to them, but it takes a back seat to life accomplishments and is not necessarily perceived to affect their ability to achieve their dreams. Among adults the areas of growing importance are lifestyle comfort, success, and personal achievements.

4. Among Christians, interest in participating in community action is escalating.

Largely driven by the passion and energy of young adults, Christians are more open to and more involved in community service activities than has been true in the recent past. While we remain more self-indulgent than self-sacrificing, the expanded focus on justice and service has struck a chord with many.

5. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is winning over the Christian Church.

Our biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence has caused Americans to avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labeled judgmental. The result is a Church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviors and philosophies.

6. The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.

Christianity has arguably added more value to American culture than any other religion, philosophy, ideology or community.

Yet, contemporary Americans are hard pressed to identify any specific value added by the church but due in large part to the nature of today's media, they have no problem identifying the faults of the churches and Christian people.

It seems like there is a need for change. People have been trying. There are seeker churches and purpose driven churches, there are house churches and cell churches, Mega and meta churches and there are deconstructionalist models and foundationalist models. But the concerns remain. The people of the world aren't connecting with the church so much anymore. There is a need for change.

We know two undeniable truths about change. One is that God never changes. When God is spoken of as immutable, meaning He never changes:

Malachi 3:6

For I am the Lord, I do not change.

Hebrews 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The metaphors of God as our rock and our fortress and our stronghold dominate our view of God and his character. That is the one grounding truth about change – **that God doesn't!**

The other undeniable truth about change is that **everything else always changes.** Although we rarely get a sermon on change, really the scriptures are a document all about change. A proper understanding of theology necessarily means accepting the fact that God is always about the business of transformation. It is sometimes easier to see on a personal level, if a person is to become a part of the radically new Kingdom of God, they must first undergo a radical and irreversible change – they must be born again. We call it conversion.

When a person becomes a disciple of Christ she or he is not simply added to or remodeled. They are not accepting a different world view or taking on a new lifestyle. That is what happens in college and with diets. We are changed completely.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

When Ezekiel in chapter 36 unwraps God's concept of a new covenant God says he will not fix our old heart, but will instead take it out and replace it with a new heart, a heart that beats for God. The promise of the gospel is promise of change – of "transformation." If you don't like change you better not become a Christian. That is the whole Christian experience, a lifetime of putting off the old and putting on the new - an experience of no longer being conformed to the world but being transformed by the renewing of the mind in Christ by the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to personal change we get it I think. New Year's Day is a perfect example with the habit of establishing 'resolutions' for change for the better. But when it comes to the arena of the church we seem to lose our perspective on this. We tend to think that only the outside needs to change; our community needs to change, our politics need to change, our schools need to change, our world needs to change. Everything needs to change but our church. The church is just fine the way it is. The church is the last bastion of protection against change! The church is a reminder of the way the world looked before it changed. The church is all too often in my opinion, a preserver of tradition and ritual, rather than the catalyst for change and the advancer of God's Kingdom.

So if the church is to survive, are we to 'buy' in hoping to simply maintain our current status or are we to stand firm believing that God wants us to remain as we are?

You might be surprised by my answer. Not this first part probably - there is no part of me that wants to buy into a dying culture's bad habits and a relativistic world view in hopes of building the numbers here at 4Cs. We can build a crowd by putting on a show or by telling only the nice stories about Jesus and not the troubling demanding stories. We can pass out money - that will draw a crowd. It did for Jesus when he passed out food. But we know just like Jesus knew - it is not about drawing a crowd.

But just as fiercely, I do not believe that we can remain the same as the church of the 90's and double zeros much less the church of the 60's and 70's. It is 2011 for goodness sake!

There is no question in my mind that we have to respond to the world around us. It is a high tech world that loves to be in touch (texting, Facebook and twitter). But sociologists tell us that we are lonelier than at any time in history. We believe in a pluralism of ideas, but we can't really say why. We long to be free but don't want the responsibility that freedom represents. And the church is called to be salt and light into this changing world of super information without wisdom, alienation and selfish indifference.

So I have a question for you. I know our church is going through a remodeling, but really my question is, "What does God want to do with us?" "What is the church that God is asking us to become?" "In that are we to be 'made new' or are we to be 'remodeled'?"

This powerful passage I referred to earlier says so much to the church.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our titles have changed, we are now to be called “Ambassadors.” Our task is now changed – now we are Ministers of Reconciliation. And our testimony has changed too – now we speak of Him who knew no sin who was made sin for our sake. Everything changes when we come under the Kingdom authority of Jesus Christ.

The challenge to persevere . . .

God want us to endure and persevere in the face of all this difficult change. Sometimes I think that just to hold place is a bit of a victory. And it is sometimes, don't get me wrong. Jesus himself told of the great challenge that is before us as the days draw short for his return:

Matthew 24:9-14

⁹“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. ¹⁰And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

We know from these words of Christ that it will be hard. But we also have a promise when it comes to hardship that there will be hope in it all and victory too for those who endure.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Simply persevering is not ultimately enough. Holding our own is a defeat. Staying open for the sake of our comfort was never an option. The church used to think of it in more military terms – each has its own strategic place when it comes to advancing the kingdom:

Holding territory - waiting for reinforcements

Strategic retreat – falling back in the face of fierce opposition so that we can advance later

Strategic advance – Taking enemy territory for the Glory of God

Matthew 16:15-18

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

“We press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!”

You see remodeling the church is a bit of a misconception. God builds His church. He forms her and draws her to himself. But we are the church a collection of individual souls. If we seek to reform the church, we are tempted to participate in social engineering and that has a bad history. But when each soul in the church yields to the personal call of the Holy Spirit, transformation happens. Then as iron sharpens iron, the church matures.

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

It has been said that as Christians we are “to retain the memories but leave behind the memorabilia.” That makes sense to me. Over the next four weeks we will be looking at what it means to press on in ministry. How we will change to make an even more powerful impact on our world for Christ.

What does that mean to 4Cs?

- 1. We will follow God first and not the fads and fashions of our culture; Christian or otherwise. Following the will and earning the approval of God means everything.**
- 2. We will hold fast to our core values and the distinctives that have made us us**
- 3. We will use this opportunity that God has given us to improve and advance . . .
 . . . by going deeper in Christ and further in Mission**
- 4. Staff, Council and Leaders promise to prayerfully seek and courageously follow the will of God as our church is made new!**

Communion