

## Lancaster Theological Seminary

### Symposium

Monday, April 1, 2019

## Gone Fishing: Marketing Faith to Millennials In The Postmodern Era

Gary W. Filson

In the Great Commission, Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”<sup>1</sup>

Is the contemporary mainline American Church, in general, effective or even intentional about outreach into the world around it? The answer is “no, not really”.

### Some Statistics

There is an observable decline in attendance in many Church. Richard J. Krejcir reports that “The United States Census Bureau gives some startling statistics” among which are: 1.) “Every year, 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity”; 2.) “From 1990 to 2000, the combined membership of all Protestant denominations in the USA declined by almost 5 million members (9.5 percent) while the US population increased by 24 million (11 percent)”; and 3.) “Half of all churches in the US did not add any new members to their ranks in the last two years.”<sup>2</sup> According to Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, 3,500 to 4,000 Churches close each year and 70 to 80 percent of North American Churches are stagnant or in decline.<sup>3</sup> This seems to translate into a growing disconnect between the secular culture and religion in general. An increasing number of the population no longer describes itself as actively participating in the life of a Christian faith community, commonly called the Church. David Stark quotes Kinnaman when he says, “Eighty-five percent of young outsiders (Millennials) have had sufficient exposure to Christians and churches that they conclude present-day Christianity is hypocritical.”<sup>4</sup> Many Churches seem to be in decline with a now mostly aging membership.

### From the Surveys

#### Belief in God

Description :	yes	Unsure	questioning	no	TOTALS
Religious	36%		2%		38%
Spiritual	17%	4%	2%	4%	26%
Non-religious	6%	9%	6%	6%	26%
Other	6%	2%	2%		9%
TOTALS	64%	15%	11%	9%	100%

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Richard J. Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline”, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, (Nashville, TN, B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 19.

<sup>4</sup> David Stark, *Reaching Millennials: Proven Methods for Engaging A Younger Generation*, (Minneapolis, MN, Bethany House of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 18.

## Opinion about Christianity

Opinion about the Church	Very Unfavorable	Unfavorable	No Opinion	Favorable	Very Favorable
Very Unfavorable	(4%)	(4%)			
Unfavorable		(13%)	(6%)	(6%)	
No Opinion		(2%)	(7%)	(4%)	(2%)
Favorable		(4%)	(6%)	(22%)	(11%)
Very Favorable					(9%)

### A Step by Step Plan for an Inreach Program

- 1.) The members of the Church need to **stand on the balcony**. The congregation needs to know who they are and what they are. The congregation needs to know their ecclesial model and their paradigm. They need to know their SWOT.<sup>5</sup> They need to know their purpose and direction. Everyone needs to know the problem. If the problem is declining membership and a neglect of the Great Commission, the problem needs to be clearly articulated. There can be no assumptions that people know, because, well, how could they not know when they see empty pews every Sunday?
- 2.) There needs to be a **case for change** with a vision for the future. Members need to be moved from complacency to urgency. They need to acknowledge there is a problem that they can address. Members need to believe that the consequences of the problem are worse than any discomfort experienced from the solution (Heifetz' Productive Zone of Disequilibrium<sup>6</sup>). This step can be accomplished, in part, through sermons, Bible studies (especially about the Great Commission), pastoral letters and letters from the leaders.
- 3.) There needs to be a **recruitment** of members to participate in the Inreach Process. Only persons who are invested in being part of the solution should be recruited. To reduce potential resistance to change, members need to be and see themselves part of the "team". A positive attitude about change and the future needs to be pervasive. These persons will participate in the demographic study, help to decide the target group, help in social media advertising, and participate in the evaluation of the Inreach Program.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Kaufman, Hugh Oakley Brown, Ryan Watkins, Doug Leigh, Strategic Planning for Success. (Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco, CA, 2003), 259.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, Marty Linsky, The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, (Harvard Business Press, Boston Mass., 2009), 31.

- 4.) Informed by a demographic study of the community, the leaders need to **create a plan on paper** for an outreach to a targeted group they want to market. They need to create a marketing strategy, an Intentional Outreach Program, to sell their product. A demographic study and other gathered data, like an Interest-Identification Audience Analysis (IIAA)<sup>7</sup> using Facebook, can point leaders to a group in the community that could be and should be marketed. Leaders need to lead in developing a marketing strategy.
- 5.) In **implementing the plan**, members will need training so that they know their role in the Intentional Outreach Program (IOP). Members need to know their value proposition, their marketing message and the product (see Chapter 4) and how to talk about the product to the targeted group. Advertising needs to include as much social media as possible. Leaders for the IOP must be clearly identified to the membership and funding needs to be designated for this program.
- 6.) As the Inreach Process progresses, there needs to be **follow up** to evaluate the effectiveness of the Inreach Program. Has the case for change been made so that there is a movement from complacency to urgency? Is there effective leadership development for the Intentional Outreach Program? Is social media being used effectively to advertise the Church?
- 7.) **Removing barriers** may include addressing any obstacles like inadequate training, lack of resources, or resistance from members that impedes change. Barriers might include the community's perception, or the targeted group's perception of the Church.
- 8.) **Celebrate** success. There should be a recognition of contributions by the membership for movement toward achieving success. Celebrations acknowledge goal accomplishment and encourage the membership to continue. Obviously, then, there should be measurable goals set for the Inreach Program so that when they are achieved success can be celebrated.

### **An Outline for An Intentional Outreach Program (IOP)**

- 1.) **Do an Inreach Program.** Outreach will not succeed unless people are prepared for the results of a successful outreach program. People need to stand on the balcony and know their SWOT. They must believe their mission is the Great Commission. Change is always inevitable, and people need to embrace change and manage it. There must be a plan and an understanding of the brand.
- 2.) **Complete the demographic study** of the community and target a group. (This is part of Step 4 in the Inreach Process.) The study now moves us from preference to purpose (reality). While we might prefer to target Millennials in our community, if there are no Millennials, the marketing strategy will fail. We need to work with the people with whom we have access. We need to know the facts.
- 3.) **Learn the needs of the targeted group.** (The step is a part of developing a marketing strategy.) Determine what the Church has to offer now, or could offer, that will satisfy those needs. Is it an alternative worship service? Is it an educational program or some sort of fellowship experience? Is it a course on spirituality or an open microphone night? And, can the offering be turned into an experience? Answer the questions: 1.) How will the proposed service or program make life better for the participants? (How is our value proposition promoted?) 2.) To what emotion(s) does the offered service or program appeal?
- 4.) **Survey people in the targeted group** to see if there is any interest in the intended program or service

---

<sup>7</sup> Corey Padveen, Marketing to Millennials for Dummies, (John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Hoboken, NJ, 2017), 43.

- 5.) offering. Surveys should inquire about feasibility of the intended day and time. Surveys could be done by email, through the website, by text messages, on Facebook and Twitter and through personal contacts with people from the targeted group. If there is no interest, go back to step 3 and start again.
- 6.) **Recruit necessary staff** and procure necessary resources, after selecting a targeted group and choosing the right service or program to offer, and the right time and place. Train staff who will be available for nurturing/ mentoring new people, prospective members. Prepare answers for anticipated questions.
- 7.) **Decide on the sales message** (marketing message) to use in advertising the service or program. Will it be “faith, hope and love” or something else? What messaging is most critical to getting attention? Can FOMO be created for the advertising? How can the message appeal to and build on emotions to get the target group members excited?
- 8.) **Select a launch date and then advertise**, using every possible media available like email, the website, text messages, Facebook and Twitter and through personal contacts with people from the targeted group. Send personal invitations to identified people in the group when possible. Use photographs of the meeting/gathering space and of the leaders, in the advertising materials.
- 9.) **Create forms for contact information** from participants. Be prepared to start an email data base. There is a need to have congregants, or helpers, present to assist in gathering information. The Leader of the program cannot do everything.
- 10.) **Be clear about achieving goals.** It is important that the offered service or program matters to the target audience. Evaluate the service or program offering after the first presentation. Did the presentation surprise the participants by exceeding their expectations? Survey the attendees. What can be done to improve the overall experience?

### **Purpose or Preference Driven**

Preference driven Churches are “more committed to the forms and programs of ministry” and “it no longer sees the purpose for which the Church was created, nor what the Church is striving to produce.”<sup>8</sup> Preference driven Churches can have a higher regard for the process of decision-making than for the decision itself. They do everything decently and in order in business meetings, but they can lack a passion for the Church’s mission.<sup>9</sup> The preference driven Church may prefer a certain type of person who is eligible for membership in their Church and have in mind a type of person who is not eligible. This may be a racial, gender, age, marital status, or sexual preference identity for inclusion or exclusion. Certain categories of people need not apply, despite Jesus’ ministry of inclusion.

In a purpose driven Church, the Church’s “primary concern is making people full of God” and these churches will have pews full of people, according to Hadaway and Roozen.<sup>10</sup> These Churches will do the work to determine, as best they can, what type of programs are likely to meet the spiritual needs of people in the community. The purpose driven Church is never content with decline or stagnation, but rather does all it can do to move forward toward the exciting future to which God is calling it. The purpose driven Church knows that good ministry is worth “everything”.

---

<sup>8</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995), 19.

<sup>9</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995), 21.

<sup>10</sup> C. Kirk Hadaway and David A. Roozen, Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1995), 131.