

Reaching the “Church Detached”

By Leonard C. Albert

Do you remember when a church could draw a crowd simply by hanging out a sign reading “Revival Here”? No so today!

Remember when the music director would call the believers out of the pews to the choir to sing? In our early days, they did this for two reasons. First, because there were so many unsaved people in the audience who did not know the words to the songs (we didn’t sing “off the wall” back then), the Christians came to the choir to sing to them. Second, there were so many visitors in our churches, a full choir would make more room for them. No need for that to happen today!

Remember when most evangelical churches had an evangelistic service on Sunday evening? Better yet, remember when most churches *had* a Sunday evening service? Pastors preached evangelistic sermons since so many sinners showed up on Sunday. Not happening today!

The Situation Now

Today we are up against slumping churches, loss of respect for pastors, and untrained laity.

Our churches are in a slump. Andy McAdams, in a study titled *The Condition of the Church in America*, reported:

- In America, 3,500 to 4,000 churches close their doors each year.
- Half of all churches last year did not add one new member through conversion growth.
- Churches lose an estimated 2,765,000 people each year to nominalism and secularism.

Approximately 85 percent of churches in America have less than 200 people. Sixty percent of churches are under 100 people. The average U.S. congregation has 89 members, according to The Barna Group. In the Church of God, we have 4,200 American churches with less than 100 people in morning worship.

Our pastors are under stress. Peter Drucker, the late leadership guru, said the four hardest jobs in America (and not necessarily in order, he added) are these:

- The President of the United States
- A university president
- A CEO of a hospital
- A pastor

Why would he include the pastor in such a small list? It's because leading a church is a tough job, and many pastors can take it only so long before they suffer burnout. Howard Ball of *Churches Alive* says about 25,000 pastors quit the ministry each year. That's 2,000 a month!

Why do so many pastors quit? The research points to two major reasons: disillusionment and frustration. Somehow the job is not what they thought it would be, and the people in the church just won't cooperate. In fact, 85 percent of pastors today say that the greatest problem they face is uncooperative people.

Our people are not trained. According to a Gallup Survey, only 10 percent of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry. Fifty percent have no interest in serving, while 40 have an interest in serving but are not involved because either they have never been asked or they do not know how.

I read a quote somewhere (I wish I could have thought it up!) that says, "In an ocean of need, Christian have become islands of piety."

Let that soak in. We *reside* in communities full of unsaved, un-churched, and hurting individuals, but we *work* mostly only in our churches. If are involved in ministry, it probably takes place inside the four walls of the church. We've got to change this.

Equip, Heal, and Plan

Remember that 40 percent of believers are ready to do more for the Lord if they would be asked and trained.

Let's equip our laity. We've been sending people out "unarmed"! Let's make our churches places where we equip people for ministry and then send them into the community and world for mission and ministry. Let's give people hands-on training for ministry and skill-building events that prepare them for ministry to a hurting world.

Let's make our churches "saving stations." Our churches must be a place where love abides and all people can find salvation, healing, holiness, and safety. The church as a saving station must offer Christ as Savior to God's people, the community, and the world. The church must be a station of fellowship where all people feel included, loved, and valued—a place where people know you by name, not just as an identity. The "saving station" church will have ministries of healing for men and women, the young and old, married couples and singles, the churched and the un-churched—any that are hurting.

Let's get a plan. I have just finished a new book on personal evangelism titled *Share the Gospel in Three Stories*. It trains you, the believer, to (1) listen to *their* story, (2) *share* your story, and (3) *tell* His story. We offer a simple plan of evangelism that works in churches of any size. We call it "Take Five." It is a plan for the local church to merge small home-based groups with personal-evangelism training. At its core it is a Bible study prepares and equips believers to reach unbelievers.

The strategy consists of five couples and/or singles who meet in respective homes for about three hours once a month for five months. Each couple focuses on five unsaved or un-churched couples or singles (we call them the "church-detached") with the goal of reaching out to them with kindness and care in order to eventually help them know Christ and find a church home.

This monthly Bible study includes a fellowship meal, followed by a 20-minute video teaching followed by about 30 minutes of discussion. The evening concludes with a time of prayer and intercession for any special requests of the group and especially the needs of the focus couples.

Take Five allows for three vital elements:

- *Supper*—breaking bread together in homes
- *Soul winning*—cutting edge teaching and small group interaction on up-to-date methods of reaching the lost
- *Supplication*—sincere prayer for the unbelievers

Our friend Steve Sjogren in his book titled *Conspiracy of Kindness* has a way of saying this in a most unforgettable analogy. He says, “For most Christians, doing evangelism is a lot like going to the dentist: no one really enjoys doing it, but it has to be done every once in a while.” I passionately believe that it doesn’t have to be this way. We can win many to Christ through relational evangelism. Case in point, a young man that I know was won by his secretary while working on the job. He probably would never just “show up” at a church or in any way be associated with Christianity. But his secretary lived such a powerful life before him that he was intrigued and sought after the reason for her joy. For months she carefully listened to his story, then shared her story and finally shared the Gospel. All of this had a powerful impact on this young man. He came to Christ, fell in love with the Church of God and joined the local assembly and then fell in love with his secretary! How do I know all these details—that young man was me! Today, 44 years later Pat (my secretary) and I are still reaching the lost and teaching other believers to do so as well.

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