

The Issachar Factor

Where is it written?

These are the numbers of the men armed for battle who came to David at Hebron to turn Saul's kingdom over to him, as the LORD had said...

men of Issachar, ***who understood the times and knew what Israel should do*** – 200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command.

1 Chronicles 12:23, 32

What year is it here?

The problem we often face in the U.S. is that we do not understand church ministry in a culture that is essentially pagan, post-Christian and post-modern. We live in a time when presuppositions about even Judeo-Christian ethics have long since vaporized.

What year is it here?

We have churches however who carry on business as though Christian presuppositions are still intact. We attempt to do church life and ministry as if we lived in a church friendly world. We do not live in a church friendly world, but in a church hostile world.

Doug Murrin

Death of Christendom

Society deposited people on the doorsteps of our churches in the 1950's. But that marked the end of an era of privilege for Christianity in North America. It is the cultural disestablishment of Christianity by secular, political and alternative religious forces.

Death of Christendom

Some see this as bad news to be fixed, but I would encourage you to see it as an opportunity to clarify your congregation's identity, purpose and outreach.

Alice Mann

Ten Challenges Facing the Church Today

Adapted from Dave Olson,
The American Church in Crisis

The Population Challenge

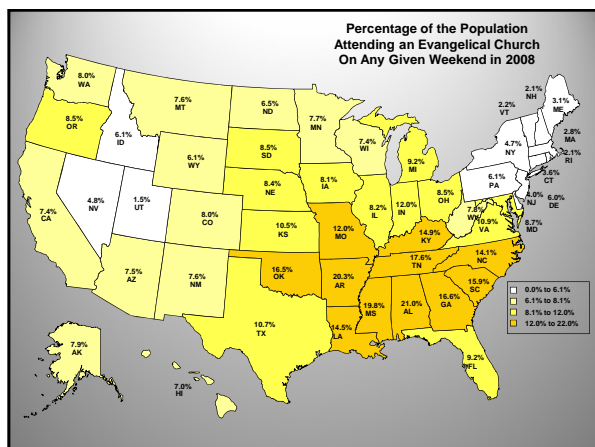
While most first-world countries are stagnant or declining in population, the United States will see robust numeric growth for the foreseeable future.

The Population Challenge

The number of Americans attending church will decline only slightly, but the Church will not come close to keeping up with population growth, so it will decline in attendance percentage every year.

The Cultural Challenge

Over half of Evangelical attendance is from the South Region. That creates a national perception regarding Evangelicalism, one that combines conservative culture and politics with the Gospel.



Cultural Connection Countercultural Message

At its best, Christianity has the adaptive ability to connect with an enormous diversity of cultures around the world.

At its worst, Christianity has the lamentable propensity to become completely intertwined with its host culture. When this happens, it is difficult to distinguish where the culture stops and the church begins.

Cultural Connection Countercultural Message

While it is imperative that Christians communicate and live out the gospel so people within the culture will connect with the message, at the same time the church is to be, by its nature, countercultural. The message of Jesus challenges all social, religious, and political powers.

Cultural Connection Countercultural Message

The church must dance between these two polarities. If the church's message is too aggressively countercultural, few people will hear its words. If the church over-identifies with the culture, the gospel becomes tame and loses its power to transform lives.

Dave Olson

The Post-Christian Challenge

The audience for the Christian message has changed. A post-Christian world means we can no longer assume that people know anything substantive about Jesus, his message, his mission, the Scriptures, or the church.

The church in the post-Christian world must operate in a way that recognizes the spiritual and cultural situation of those to whom it wishes to minister.

The Vitality Challenge

Once churches enter their fifth decade of life (40+ years old), on average they consistently decline by two percent each year.

In any given year, 60% of established Evangelical churches are declining, primarily because of a lack of energy and vitality.

Entropy

Churches tend to lose vitality rather than gain it as time passes. They also tend to give greater attention to what they “were” rather than what they are “becoming”. It is easier to look back into the past and smile on yesterday’s accomplishments than it is to look ahead into the future and think about tomorrow’s possibilities.

Chuck Swindoll

The Mid-Sized Challenge

- The largest and smallest churches are growing, while the midsized churches are declining.
- Middle sized churches, 100 to 500 in attendance, are experiencing extreme pressure. They are too large for intimacy and too small for excellence.
- These churches make up 2/3rds of all Evangelical churches.

The Multi-Ethnic Challenge

In the mono-ethnic world, Christians, pastors, and churches only had to understand their own culture. Ministering in a homogenous culture is easier, but mono-ethnic Christianity can gradually become culture-bound. The worldview and values of a particular culture can be transferred to Christianity.

The Multi-Ethnic Challenge

Where I live in Minnesota, Jesus can easily become a Scandinavian, with fair skin and blue eyes, instead of a Middle Eastern Jew. The culturally acceptable part of Christianity is embraced, but the culturally unacceptable part is ignored.

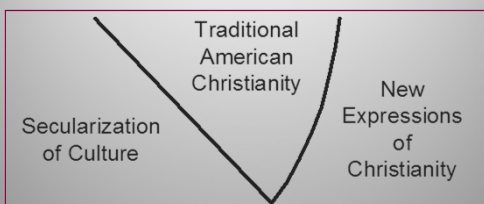
Mono-ethnicity can warp the gospel. This seduction of being overly identified with a specific culture confronts a growing number of affluent, well-educated, suburban churches and impairs the church's ability to engage outsiders or even see the heart of the Christian message.

Dave Olson

The Multi-Class Challenge

- There are predominantly blue collar churches and white collar churches.
- In the multi-class church, the white collar people tend to initiate change and the blue collar people tend to resist change.
- Multi-class churches are often more complex than multi-ethnic churches.

The Generational Challenge



Half of each new generation has the potential to connect with established churches. For the other half to connect, they need to see a new expression of authentic Christianity, led by their peers.

What Post-Modern Christians Say to Modern Christians

- Your Christianity is too pragmatic. Develop a deeper sense of mystery.
- Your Christianity is too individualistic. Develop a deeper sense of community.
- Your Christianity is too narcissistic. Develop a deeper sense of generosity.
- Your Christianity is too plastic. Develop a deeper level of authenticity and transparency.

The Post-Secular Challenge

We live in a very spiritual culture. We now know that science can not answer the deepest questions of life.

The Post-Secular Challenge

Nine out of ten people say they are spiritual, but not religious, and that they pray once a day. People may not want to be connected to a church, but they do have an interest in God.

The Post-Secular Challenge

Syncretism:

- a little dose of Christianity
- a little dose of Buddhism
- a little dose of New Age
- a little dose of this...

And presto, everyone has their own personal religion which is just as good as anyone else's.

Questions

Are we willing to let this happen “On our watch?”

Is the church prepared to meet these current challenges?

Nine Challenges Facing the Church

1. The Population challenge.
2. The Cultural challenge.
3. The Post-Christian challenge.
4. The Vitality challenge.
5. The Mid-sized challenge.
6. The Multi-ethnic challenge.
7. The Multi-class challenge.
8. The Generational challenge.
9. The Post-secular challenge.

The Issachar Factor

- Of these nine challenges, which ones are especially relevant to your context?
- How do you understand these challenges? Or do you see them as opportunities?
- What are you going to do?

Christian leaders must know how to navigate congregations in this new world.

Celtic Daily Prayer

*Teach us again the greatest story ever told.
In time, the Carpenter began to travel
In every village challenging the people
To leave behind their selfish ways,
Be washed in living water,
And let God be their King.*

*You plundered death,
And made its jailhouse shudder –
Strade into life
To meet your startled friends.*

*I have a dream,
That all the world will meet you,
And know you, Jesus, in your living power.
That someday soon all people will hear your story
And hear it in a way they understand.*
