

Your Church's Expanded Outreach: No Longer An Option

Pastors and leaders seeking to advance the ministries of their churches are facing myriad problems, perhaps the most significant of which is the slow and gradual decline in attendance and participation in weekly worship services. This downturn impacts the church on many fronts—the budget, subsequent staffing cuts, the volunteer personnel available to carry out significant ministries and all-important morale and energy that helps drive a church forward in vision and impact.

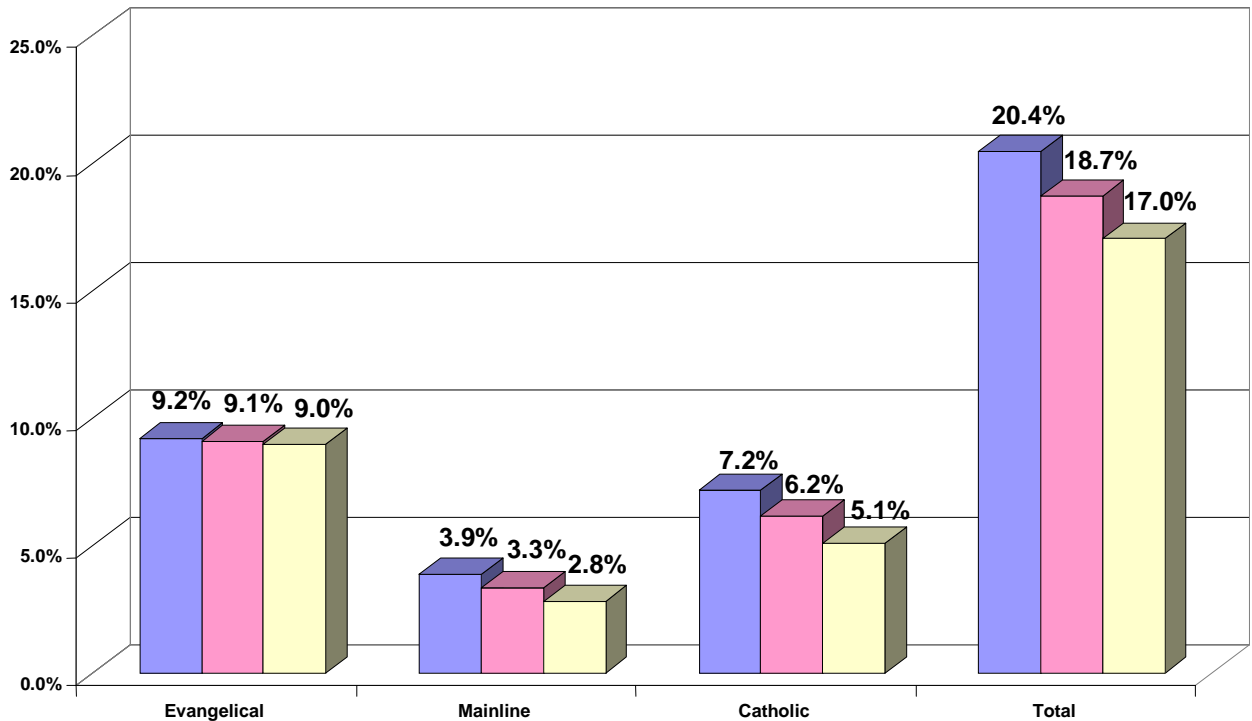
Pastors and lay leaders must seek new and innovative ways to reach out and make worship services available and accessible for all persons, whether they are able to be physically present in worship or not.

Documented Decline

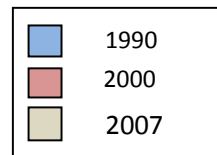
Speaking to members of the Baptist World Alliance in July, 2008, David Laubach of the BWA workgroup said, "Three-quarters of US churches report a membership plateau or decline." He cited this as one of the key problems faced by North American pastors today.

When it comes to church actual attendance figures, there is good news and bad news.

Percentage of the Population Attending Church



Graphic courtesy of TheAmericanChurch.com.



In terms of sheer numbers, weekend attendance at church has not significantly declined in the last 16 years. But, while the same number of people attended church every week since 1990, the population of our country grew by over 51 million!

According to Rev. Dave Olsen in *The American Church in Crisis* (Zondervan, 2008), pollsters' figures are skewed by self-reporting of well-intentioned church-goers who overestimate their church attendance when asked directly.

Olson researched church attendance based on actual reported head counts and found attendance rates to be less than half the 47% that is popularly reported by the Barna Group and others. He says, **"Numbers from actual counts of people in orthodox Christian congregations (Catholic, Evangelical, Mainline or Orthodox churches) show that 17% of the population attended a Christian church on any given weekend in 2007."** This figure, he reports, is down by 3% since 1990.

Olson says only the largest and smallest churches are gaining ground. **The great majority of churches are seeing a decline.**

Increased Demands Worshipers' Time

There are many reasons for this decline in attendance; an increase in events vying for precious discretionary, non-working hours on Sunday is one of them. Worshipers are torn between their commitment to their local congregation and other activities like children's sports and recreational activities.

Bill Hybels, Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church says it's an American Culture issue: "The number of scheduled activities has bled way over into Sunday. We have people at Willow Creek who 15 years ago would be in church 50 weeks a year, simply because their lives allowed that kind of schedule. Now, baseball and soccer games are on Sunday mornings, and a lot of student activities happen over weekends."

Others may have stopped attending because they are overwhelmed; illness may impact them personally, or they may be in demand to care for aging parents, handicapped children or loved ones who are geographically distant. Additionally, parishioners may be dealing with illness themselves, recovering in a hospital or care facility, not well enough to attend worship.

Other Distractions

Other distractions are also causing the Church to compete for the valuable time of worshipers. From increased television offerings to extended shopping hours at the mall, families and individuals are faced with a great many more choices about how they will spend their time on the weekend.

Clearly this is a great concern to those who pastor, lead or are involved in churches today. With declining attendance figures, leaders are scrambling keep the pews filled at the very least, and to support existing parishioners and see stable growth, at best.

Only those churches that reach out with innovation and new ways of serving people's varied and changing needs will survive.

The Need to Connect

Any variety of issues, circumstances and concerns can cause parishioners to pull away from regular participation in worship. Some parishioners simply lose interest; others are drawn away by the belief that worship is no longer relevant, or that they do not matter to their church.

Pastors and lay leaders must minister in the face of these concerns, providing care and support for every part of their congregation. It's challenging business; a clergy person can be very aware of the needs, but helping parishioners stay connected and feel cared for is big work.

Further, when illness, disability, travel or relocation come into play, pastors are at greater risk of losing touch on the very people who need the church and its love and support the most.

Overcome Limitations

While some members will intuitively seek to stay connected via the Internet, a significant group will not. Either they lack a computer, access to the Internet, or they don't have the knowledge or ability to stay tied in to the church online. Of those who do use the Internet, a significant group will lose interest and eventually give up for a variety of reasons including: slow and unreliable connection speeds, dropped connections, being tied to a computer for the duration of the service to name a few. At their time of greatest need, members risk feeling disconnected, out of touch and un-cared for. In the worst case, pastors or lay leaders may not even be aware of their need!

In every church, there are those who are limited in their ability to attend worship due to illness, travel or other issues. They want to stay connected to weekly worship services but they aren't able to. When you enable them to connect with regular worship and other special events in the life of your church, you give the gift of support, fellowship, encouragement, hope and spiritual sustenance.

Many congregations reach out to using creative applications on their websites; however recent research reveals that only 35% of Americans over age 65 are on the Internet. So, chances are that senior citizens will be unable to maintain their connection to their church online. They need another way to connect with weekly worship services—one that uses the simplest technology and that is readily accessible. The same is true for parishioners traveling, deployed troops or students away at college. Each is primed to keep the vital connection they've enjoyed with their local church, but they will need the simplest technology and the most affordable, use-able format.

Innovative Solution

It was precisely this problem that FaithOnCall's founders, Maria, Phillip and Dino, wanted to solve when their grandfather, Phillip Demetriou, became too ill to attend worship services at his beloved, lifelong

church. Phillip was fighting illness and unable to get to church—already a difficult challenge—and he sorely missed the strength and hope he drew from those weekly services.

Dino sought a technological solution that proved very effective for Grandfather Phillip. Through this experience, he realized that his solution would be simple enough that any church, large or small, could take advantage of it. With further research and development, Dino created a proprietary, easy-to-use, fault-free system that relied on the simple act of placing a call on any telephone—something almost any person can do.

This system is innovative and easy to use. It's affordable and easily accessible. Telephone conferencing is the creative solution churches need to keep members of their congregation connected to the life of the church.

Simple Telephone Conferencing

Using simple telephone conferencing, each sermon or worship service is available live, via a call-in number. Users simply dial a number, enter a PIN and are listening, live, to worship.

Additionally, each call (sometimes referred to as a “broadcast”) is recorded. It is then available to parishioners as a .wav file, a mp3 file, as a podcast or as a RSS feed. These files can be distributed in a variety of ways, including email subscription.

Though it uses cutting edge technology and state-of-the-art equipment, FaithOnCall remains simple in its format and usage.

FaithOnCall can provide the following advantages for pastors seeking to keep members of their congregation connected, their shut-ins well served and their deployed troops or college students involved in the life of their church:

- Simple to use—telephone connection requires no technical knowledge
- Easily publicized—call in numbers can be posted in bulletin for easy access by anyone
- Independence—no assistance needed to simply dial in
- Connection—users are up-to-speed with what's happening with their church family
- Hope Returns—users regain encouragement and hope derived from regular worship
- Inclusion—users feel included in the fellowship and life of their church
- Appreciation—users deeply appreciate the effort their church makes to provide for them
- Giving—users remember to be faithful in their tithes and offerings
- Fellowship Strengthened—entire congregation feels good, knowing shut-ins and others are connected
- Prayer Support—users can intelligently pray for their church as they listen to services
- Awareness of Others' Needs—as they hear of prayer concerns of others while participating in morning worship, they, in turn, are able to reach others with cards, calls and prayer

- Fight Isolation—the worst thing that can happen to any follower is to feel completely alone
- Affordable—a few hundred dollars up front and low ongoing costs

As a pastor or other clergy, you strive to provide the very best support and care for those in your church body. Enabling them to take part in weekly worship services through the simple technology employed by FaithOnCall will strengthen your ministry and encourage your parishioners in the most innovative and dynamic ways. Visit us online or call us to explore how we can help your church.

Visit Us Online: www.faithoncall.com

Call Us Toll Free: 866-353-0030