



First Thoughts



Current statistics indicate the Church in the United States is experiencing only a slight growth in membership. In fact, the latest statistical report from the National Council of Churches found that only five of the twenty five largest Church groups reported any measurable statistical growth.

The largest body of adherents, the Roman Catholic Church, reported a 1.5% increase after having reported a decline in last year's report. The second largest group, Southern Baptists, reported a 0.2% decline in membership, marking the second year in a row the denomination has reported a loss. The biggest loser among the ten largest groups, with a 3.3% loss, was the Presbyterian Church USA.

In future issues of *CrossingCurrents* we are going to take a look at some of these trends and what they might mean for the Church. Certainly, the Church needs to take a long, hard look at how we will reach the next generation. In this issue, feature writer, Jeff Sutherland, addresses the topic of the methodologies and message of the Church today, in his article, "The Church of Funday".

Do we continue with the same methodologies used for decades, now? Will this generation respond, or do we need to look at utilizing new approaches, and if so, what will these look like?

These are just some of the important questions we need to be asking. To help get a better understanding of who we are trying to reach in the

younger demographics, don't overlook this issue's "Culture Tracks" feature which provides current statistical data regarding the 18-29 year-old demographic.

Though the Church might be somewhat in decline here, it is definitely growing in Thailand. And our own Dwight and Mary Kay Martin are right in the thick of it. I am pleased to announce that Crossties Asia is officially off the ground, or should I say, "on" the ground in Thailand. After being on furlough for a couple of months, Dwight and Mary Kay are not only on the ground, they have hit it running. Be sure and read the World Update section for a report on the growth of the Church and the work of Crossties in Thailand; as well as, the ongoing ministry of our team in Romania.

As you can see, our ministry teams have been actively engaging the culture in a variety of places, through a variety of ministry approaches. In the near future we will be launching another under the able direction of Don Malin. Watch for information on CrossSwords, a ministry to those who serve in our military.

Thank you to all of you who prayerfully and financially support our efforts. We recognize you are essential to any success we have. If you have not yet invested in Crosswinds, we would appreciate you considering us in your charitable giving.

Blessings,

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The Church of "Fun"day By Jeff Sutherland

The church bulletin the week before the Super Bowl read:

"Come join us for a great time of fun and fellowship, bring your unchurched friends."

That announcement, or one like it, showed up in many church bulletins; particularly, those within the media markets of New Orleans and Indianapolis. The idea was to provide a better environment for Super Bowl parties than those which people could have in their own home. Churches would cancel worship services, prayer services, and Bible study; offering in their place an evening of "fun and fellowship" meant to draw new people into the church, or to be exposed to the church.

Was this a great way to get people involved or a movement toward more worldly churches? Is this an appropriate methodology for the church to reach people? No matter which side you with on this issue,

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...compassion, from p. 1

the intent here is not to debate the merits of a church hosting a "Super Bowl Party"; rather, it is to, hopefully, cause us to consider whether we are being influencers of the world, or the world is influencing us.

Are our churches doing the job Christ intended for us; or, have we slowly given in and allowed the world to guide our hearts, minds, and activities? Put another way, who is having the greater influence on the other; the church on the culture, or the culture on the Church?

I was raised as part of the church during the '60s and 70's and I do not remember our church ever changing its schedule to accommodate anything the secular world was doing. We didn't cancel church services due to bowl games, "March Madness", final fours, the World Series, Olympics, or, even, NASCAR. In fact, canceling church for some such event would not even have been brought up for consideration.

That's just the way it was. It is not so today.

I should also point out that the culture of sports was not nearly as prevalent as it is today. In fact, some of those events weren't even televised. Unlike today, sports did not try to compete with the traditional Sunday morning worship time. For example, television coverage for the Daytona 500, the inaugural event of the NASCAR season, and considered racing's "Super Bowl", began in the afternoon. Today, one faces the dilemma of choosing between this event and the church services scheduled at the same time. (Thank you lord for DVR's, so I could catch this year's race which began during church services.)

Today, major sporting events and media do not even take church services into consideration when scheduling. As an aside, this has filtered down into our junior sports leagues where youth games are commonly scheduled against church services, forcing parents to increasingly choose between the two.

As a lay leader in a local Church, I was privy to a few of those 'decision making' meetings concerning Church services and sporting events. Unfortunately, it seemed the discussions often centered on whether or not one's team was still in the game. For example, a discussion about the NCAA men's basketball tournament might include:

"Should we hold church services Sunday night? March Madness is on and I want to make sure my brackets don't get busted."

"Missing church just one Sunday night a year is no big deal, besides, it's a family thing. We are going to grill hot dogs, make nacho dip, and have a wonderful family night together."

If their team failed to make the field of 64 then we heard:

"It's not right to cancel church just because of a meaningless game."

Team loyalty certainly may play a part in these decisions; but, should it?

From such discussions arose a seemingly logical alternative, "We can do both". Don't cancel the Sunday evening church meeting but change it to a Super Bowl party and invite all our non-church friends - make it an "outreach" effort. "It can be a chance to evangelize", they rationalize, "And to show our friends that it is okay to have fun." In other words, we can have our cake - literally - and eat it too.

“Are we simply posing as the world under the pretense of trying to reach the world, but without effect? Or, are we so wrapped in the traditions of the past and/or our own "self-holiness" that we have ceased to be relevant in the culture?”

As the big day arrives, everyone gathers around the newly purchased big screen, high definition, Dolby surround sound, flat screen TV. Drinks are poured-cokes and iced tea of course-the dip and dogs are passed around, and talk centers on the \$3 million ads placed by companies that are confident their dollars are well spent because they realize what a wonderfully persuasive medium television can be.

As the friendly chatter continues, a commercial by a website domain provider airs and offers viewers an opportunity to buy their own website domain like, "Smokinhotgirls.com". Intended to target the young male demographic, it naturally stars "smoking hot girls" as it pitch persons. Then comes the you-need-a-new-job, "casual Friday" advertisement with the obligatory, scantily attired men and women showing

how much "fun" their jobs are..

And let's not forget the beer ads. As usual, they are observed to be, "Really good this year". They offer funny story lines, cute animals, and a sense of belonging to all who have a "cold one" in their hand, while implying viewers should go ahead and "live it up". After all, you only go around once in life.

You get the picture. In fact, you probably saw them yourself. Are such messages consistent with that of the church? Isn't it odd that the ad creating the most controversy was one that celebrated the value of life?

In the ad, former Heisman Trophy winner, and outspoken Christian athlete, Tim Tebow and his mom shared her decision to carry him to full term even though doctors had warned her that doing so could cost her life. The tough call she made, in choosing to give life to her son, may one day lead to our seeing him in the Super Bowl; if not, following his parents as a Christian missionary. Is there any doubt the decision she made has had a positive impacted on many, many, lives?

Putting the commercials aside, the game was extremely exciting to watch. (Yes, I watched it; how can you pull against a team called "the Saints", with the slogan, "Who dat!" - short for, "Who dat gonna beat dem Saints!?!") Even the most casual of fans would have to admit this was a great game. However, as exciting as it was, my fear is many of the unchurched participating in church Super Bowl parties left thinking, "What's the difference, less beer?"

Perhaps as they left their thoughts were more along the lines of the song-title, "Won't Get Fooled Again", sung during the halftime show by, much-celebrated, 1960s-80s British rock group, "The Who". Yes, as has been duly noted, the band looked quite old singing their hits such as "Teenage Wastelands" and "Pinball Wizard". However, one song, "Who Are You", raises a poignant life-question to consider.

It is a question for the Church concerning itself - Who are you, church? It is a question for every individual follower of Christ - Who are you?

Are we simply posing as the world under the pretense of trying to reach the world, but without effect? Or, are we so wrapped in the traditions of the past and/or our own "self-holiness" that we have ceased to be relevant in the culture?

Without question, it is crucial that we rethink our strategies and methodologies of reaching out to make a difference in our



our communities. Doing church the way it was done in 1950 may indeed not work; but, as we try new approaches, we must be careful that we do not also compromise the message. The message must not change. The way it is delivered must continue to evolve.

If a big screen TV, exciting kids programs, and the right kind of music brings people into churches and keeps them interested do we classify this as a success? I guess that really depends on how we define success.

Bigger TV's, better programs, and more fun probably will keep them coming back. However, if they are not being confronted with their need for Christ - if there is no consistent presentation of the gospel and mentoring through the programming we utilize, can we truly say that we are being faithful to our calling as the Church?

If the presentation of the gospel and sound teaching are missing what type of people will we have? Most likely, such a church will be devoid of the real growth and maturity needed to impact our society, rather than the other way around.

At this point, the argument might be made that without good programs people will not come back to church. That may very well be true, but programming must

not become a substitute for sound biblical teaching, and more importantly, the presentation of Christ and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, we need to look afresh at what brings people to Christ.

Please do not misunderstand me. I realize that three hymns sung without musical accompaniment along with a two hour sermon spoken in monotone could push people away from the church today. However, such has not always been the case. In fact, that approach worked quite well in America 250 years ago. Research Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening and read his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" and you will see just how far we have moved from our founding father's intentions of putting God first, not first, and ten.

So, while our approach may need to look vastly different from that of Jonathan Edwards, the gospel, the biblical truth we are to offer is the same. Sure, we can package it in "fun". However, if Sunday has simply become "Fun"-day, then we have missed the mark.

Why do people come to your church? What types of people are there? Why are they there? Is their desire to learn and grow? Are they eager to study the Word? Or, is it just another place to be seen; an

opportunity to check off the "spirituality" box of one's life - "Attended church this week"?

Let's get real personal, what or who is the driving force behind your church? The answer to that question will give us keen insight as to our motivations in service. For, it is not only our methodologies that should be examined but our motivations for implementing those particular methods.

The test for ministry is not, necessarily, how many trees we can get in the field; but how much fruit are we actually gathering. The imperative is not so much about how to attract the fruit to harvest it? Jesus actually answered that question when he said "...Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest." (John 4:35b) Therein is our mission. In it we should find our motivation.

So, who or what motivates you? Dare I ask it, "Who Dat?"



Jeff Sutherland has been a religion editor, Christian worldview columnist, and writer for a news website, where he began formulating ideas blending current events and his Christian faith. He has also served the local church in a number of capacities, including serving on staff of Rock Mountain Lakes Baptist Church as a Biblical Counselor. Jeff is the author of *Pet Seminary*.

Culture Tracks

Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.

Statistical Data regarding Millennials - adults ages 18-29

- 25% are unaffiliated with any religion (this is the largest % of any generation ever recorded)
- Only 15% list living a very religious life as a priority.
- Only 60% were raised by both parents -- a smaller share than was the case with previous generations.
- Only 21% are married (this compares with over 40% of their parents' generation at the same stage of life)
- 34% are parents (Pew estimates that in 2006, more than a third of the women in this group who gave birth were unmarried.)
- 39.6% were enrolled in college as of 2008
- 67% indicate they are more wary of people, saying "you can't be too careful" when dealing with people.
- Politically, 66% were among Barack Obama's strongest supporters in 2008
- 12%, of 22 and older, have "boomeranged" back to a parent's home because of the recession.
- 39% are minorities, the largest, Hispanics, 19% (30% of adults ages 30 and older are minorities, with Hispanics at 11%)
- 75% have created a profile on a social networking site. (only 30% of boomers have done this)
- 20% have posted a video of themselves online.
- Some 40% have a tattoo (50% of these, have 2-5 and 18% have six or more)
- 25% have a piercing in some place other than an earlobe (6 times more than those over 30)

(From Pew Research Report)



CrossTies Asia

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation



Dwight and Mary Kay Martin

We have exciting news of God working in Thailand we want to share regarding the "My Hope for Thailand" program (sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association). Our office has been helping the BGEA with this project for the past four months. The main event took place on December 19, 2009.

On this day about 50% of Thai churches participated and more than 41,000 of their members were involved in reaching out to over 200,000 of their friends and neighbors to tell them about Jesus.

We now we have the responsibility of calling the church leaders to find out what God did during this time. The news is exciting! We have recorded over 11,950 decisions of people who have decided to become Christ followers, from all corners of the country. This is an amazing work of God in a land where only half a percent of Thailand's 65 million people are Christians.

This is the first time there has been a national harvest of this size in this country. Over 43% of the churches in Thailand participated, with 47% of them reporting salvations occurring. The average number of salvations reported per church was 12. Interestingly, though the smallest churches (fewer than 28 members) were less likely to participate in the campaign, those that did reported a higher percentage of salvations compared to the number of members.

As we are calling, our staff has also had the privilege of documenting miraculous works of God that happened during these meetings. Each of our staff members has recorded dozens of reports of healings, people freed from demon possession, people being freed from addictions, and families being reconciled.

I am confident that the angels in heaven are celebrating over this glorious work God has done, as are we. Please pray for these new believers that they won't fall away and for the church members to be faithful in following up with them and continue to mentor and disciple them over the coming days and months.

Crosswinds Romania

A Ministry of Crosswinds Foundation

In the opening months of 2010, Nelu Filip reports that he has been involved in a marathon of preaching. He has conducted meetings practically every night in churches throughout Romania. Demand was so high that he had to cancel his teaching in the Bible College.



Nelu Filip

His efforts were rewarded as many new decisions for the Lord were reported with many people surrendering their life to Jesus. More may yet come as this "marathon" is not quite over with several more meetings scheduled for March.

Ieremia Rusu has also been busy with his work on behalf of his Church and Crosswinds. In addition to his regular teaching and preaching activities in Bucuresti and Ploiesti he has been working on two different television programs on Christian Education. The first deals with the place of the Bible and tradition in guiding the Church, and the other addresses, to whom we should direct our worship.



Ieremia Rusu

Ieremia is also quite a prolific writer and has recently finished a 52 page theological study analyzing the points of debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. Now if we can just learn to read Romanian we can find out who wins the debate. I guess we'll have to let the people of Romania make that call.

If you have a question about Romania, or the ministry of Ieremia and Nelu, they would welcome your email. They can be reached at

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Visit our new website in the Romanian language:

www.crosswindsfoundation.org/romania.html



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