

Navigating Turbulent Times

Navigating these turbulent times

Chapel Hill 9/27/2015, 10/4/2015 10/11/2015)

**I am blessed to facilitate our discussion today.** I don't have all of the answers but I hope I can facilitate a conversation that will help us better understand and address the challenges of our times. The written notes, bibliography and audio from these presentations will be on our webpage when I have completed the sessions.

I am breaking our presentation into three parts.

The first section will summarize the storms we are facing.

The second will explore some strategies to navigate the turbulence and in our final section we will discuss what ever questions, insights or strategies you would like to address. It will be helpful for you to write down your questions as we go as we will be covering a lot of material and it will be easy to forget your questions.

**In 2000 George Clooney starred in a film called *The Perfect Storm* about a doomed fishing boat that was lost at sea.** The film was loosely based upon a true story. The Halloween Northeaster of 1991 crashed into Hurricane Grace creating an especially violent storm. A buoy off the coast of Nova Scotia recorded at least one 100 foot wave. 38,000 people lost power. The swordfish fishing boat Andrea Gail left Gloucester Massachusetts and ran into the storm. Facing 75 mile per hour winds and 30 -40 foot waves she never came home. This "perfect storm" did 200 million dollars damage and killed 13, including the 6 crewmen of the Andrea Gail. No one expected such a violent storm so late in the hurricane season.

Today the church faces its own perfect storm creating great confusion.

## **Section 1 What storms are we facing?**

### **1. Declining church attendance**

Gallop reported that 40% of Americans "say" they regularly attend church. Actual attendance statistics indicate that 17 to 18% of Americans attend Sunday worship.

Most denominations have been showing a thirty year plateau or decline in worship attendance. Even when church attendance remains stable we are not keeping pace with population growth. The population is growing on average 4 times faster than the church.

In a 2002 survey of 1,159 U.S. churches, Thom Rainer's research team found that only 6% of the churches were growing — he defines growth as

not only increasing in attendance, but also increasing at a pace faster than its community's population growth rate.

Hawaii is the only state where church attendance is growing faster than population growth.

Even committed Christ followers are attending less frequently than they did previously.

### **Carey Nieuwhof suggests 10 major reasons:**

1. Greater affluence means more options people's time and resources.
2. Increased focus upon kids activities (sports, music, drama, dance, karate etc.)
3. Many are traveling more.
4. Blended and single parent families result in every other weekend patterns.
5. On-line options are becoming more available.
6. Cultural disappearance of guilt about not attending church.
7. Many are opting for self-directed spirituality.
8. Many fail to see a direct benefit in attending church.
9. Churches that value attendance more than engaging participation are seeing diminished attendance.
10. There is a massive culture shift that is affecting religious life.

These trends are affecting virtually all churches regardless of size or denomination.

Churches over 40 years old are showing the greatest decline in attendance.

There is an increase in the "Done with Church" group. Tom Shultz describes how formerly active members are quitting church.

"The 'Dones' are fatigued with the Sunday routine of **plop, pray and pay**. They want to play. They want to participate and be energized and creative but they feel spurned at every turn.

### **2. Failing to keep our young adults**

Many of our churches are bleeding young adults aged 18-29.

I have read different statistics. David Kinamen author of *You lost me - Why young Christians are leaving the church* notes: Ages 18-29 are the black hole in church attendance. There is a 43% drop off between the teen and early adult years.

That is very troubling.

Why is this happening?

According to Kinnamen: The Christian faith is over protective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and not a safe place to express doubts. Youth grow up in the church with cultural identification but not deep faith. “We are failing to prepare the next generation to follow Christ in a rapidly changing culture.” Kinnamen

Many youth are connected mainly with their youth aged friends. When their friends graduate, go to college, get married or move on with their careers they have few connections with other adults in the church and just drop out. They have lost their social and spiritual connection.

There are three categories of young adults who are leaving the church.

**Prodigals**- Prodigals are those who leave their faith to enter a life of sin in the world. They follow the lust for greed, sex, money, fun, fame or power.

**Nomads** - walk away from church but still consider themselves Christians. They are not rejecting Christ so much as they are rejecting the church. Many nomads believe the church is too narrow, hypocritical and judgmental. They may view the church as boring, out of touch and irrelevant.

They are part of a mosaic generation that draws their faith understanding from many sources, the Bible, the internet, yoga, pop psychology, music and other cultural influences. They may practice eastern meditation or yoga. They have wandered as nomads from the church borrowing a bit from here and there but still viewing themselves as Christian.

**Exiles** - Still invested in faith but feel lost between culture and the church. (Christian Rap or Rockers). They love Christ and may follow the Bible but they just don't fit into the church. Maybe they are Christian Rappers or Rockers. Often they are creative musicians, visual and performance artists, filmmakers, poets, surfers, story tellers, writers and musicians. They have much to contribute but don't feel welcome in the traditional church. They love Christ but they are out of touch with the culture of the church.

Many exiles would say “**They are leaving the church to protect their faith.**”

### **3. We are in the midst of a major worldview shift.**

This shift is being manifest in rising religious pluralism.

The United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. (Emerging church 71)

We are increasingly morally relativistic.

We are increasingly anti-institutional. All of our institutions are under attack: government, churches, schools, unions, businesses. Even marriage is under attack. Increasing numbers of persons of persons are choosing not

to marry. And the movement toward accepting gay marriage is rolling like a freight train. The reaction against radical Islamic terrorism is also contributing to a backlash against all Muslims and organized religion in general. Ironically, according to Gallop those who describe themselves as spiritual is the highest it has been in 50 years but allegiance toward organized religion is in decline.

We are in the midst of a seismic change in worldview.

This is the third major worldview shift since 500 AD. Utilizing the work of Brian McLaren, the Leadership Network created this summary of major worldview shifts.

We are looking at Four major periods of world history.

The Ancient world lasted from roughly 2500 BC to 500 AD.

The Medieval world lasted roughly from 500 AD to 1500 AD.

The Modern world lasted roughly from 1500 AD to 2000 AD.

The Post-modern world has been emerging for several decades and has been accelerating since 2000.

To understand what we mean by a major worldview shift we will quickly summarize changes in 5 areas:

Epistemology

Understanding of power and faith

Communication

Authority

Theme

### **Epistemology: the nature of knowledge.**

In the ancient world knowledge was regional, and deities and gods were regional and territorial.

In the medieval world knowledge was God centered.

In the modern world, as a result of the enlightenment, knowledge became human centered trusting in reason and science to discover truth.

In the post-modern world, knowledge is self-determined with a pluralistic view of culture and religion. Conflicting truths and beliefs are accepted.

### **Understanding of Power and Faith:**

In the ancient world power and faith were vested in the kings, empires and local deities.

In the medieval world power and faith were vested in the church.

In the modern world power and faith were vested in human reasoning, science, and logic, which helped to explain and interpret God.

In the postmodern world power and faith are vested in personal experience.

### **Communication:**

In the ancient world communication was oral with limited historical records.

In the medieval world communication was oral and through manuscripts.

In the modern world the printing press transformed communications.

In the postmodern world the internet and media have created instant global communication.

### **Authority:**

In the ancient world authority was in the revelation given to oracles, poets, kings and prophets.

In the medieval world authority was in the Bible as it was understood and taught by the church.

In the modern world authority was in reason, science and logic. For protestant Christians it was in reasonable interpretation of the Bible.

In the postmodern world there is suspicion of authority. The Bible is open to many interpretations and is only one of many religious writings.

Think about this. The younger generation today is the first generation in the history of humanity that can access all the knowledge there is without having to receive it from any authority figure. No parent, pastor, priest, or teacher is necessary. They point and click wherever they want and, right or wrong, build their own worldviews and understandings.

### **Themes:**

A theme in the ancient world was “What is man that you are mindful of him? (psalm 8:4)

A theme in the medieval world was “I believe in order that I may understand.” Anselm 1033-1099

A theme in the modern world is: “Knowledge is power.” Francis Bacon  
“I think, therefore I am.” Descartes 1596-1650

A theme from the postmodern world “If it makes you happy, it can’t be that bad.” Sheryl Crow

“Every viewpoint is a view from a viewpoint.”

*(World View shifts Emerging Church 44 Brian McClaren)*

This results in overarching moral relativism.

Reggie McNeal adds a theme. For moderns “You are nothing unless you have everything.”

For post-moderns “You can have everything and still have nothing.”

**Leonard Sweet describes Postmodernism with the word EPIC.**

EPIC

Experiential

Participatory

Image driven

Connected

The movement from modernism to postmodernism is a movement:

From rational to Experiential

From representative to Participatory

From word based to Image based

From neither individual nor communal to Connective

What are the implications for the church?

Postmodern persons don’t want to just know about God. They don’t want to just study the Bible and learn doctrine. They want to experience God. It is not knowledge. It is experience. We typically preach, teach and have classes in the modern way. Postmodern persons view that as irrelevant because they actually want to experience God. Our worship, groups and programs must lead them into an authentic experience of God.

Postmodern persons don’t want a pastor or priest or worship team to represent them or put on a show. They want to participate with God themselves. They want to be involved. They want an active faith. They disconnect from worship when they just sit as observers. They need input and involvement. They want to serve and make a difference. Think about it. This is the generation of the remote. It’s all about participation. Post moderns click on the links they want to see. They change the channel whenever they feel like it. They demand movies and music instantly on demand via their devices. They don’t want to be fed from one menu. They want to participate in their own choices. One size does not fit all.

Postmodern persons do not think in words, propositions and arguments. They think in images. We are moving from reasoning rooted in print, to

reasoning rooted in images. The Lincoln/ Douglas debates in the 1860 election took hours. Today people decide elections based upon imaging and sound bites. Well- reasoned expository sermons leave most postmodern persons cold. They need images in story and on the screen to connect. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Postmodern persons do not relate simply as individuals nor in a communal way. They are connected via the world wide web, texting, facebook, snap chat twitter, email and electronically. We have seen teens in the same room with others not relating with the persons in their own space but instead being absorbed in their smart phones and tablets. The internet began with the department of defense in 1968 now we are connected globally. This has far reaching implications. Our ministry needs to be connecting us electronically with the people we want to reach.

As our culture is moving rapidly postmodern, many, especially the young, view us as irrelevant and out of step. Many spiritually attuned persons would never turn to a church rooted in modernity to find God. The church for them is like an exclusive club or cult.

Reggie McNeal wrote: "People outside the church think that church is for church people, not for them."

Well there's a quick look at our turbulent times.

Declining Church Attendance

Failing to Keep our young adults

Religious pluralism

Moral relativism

Anti-institutionalism

Anti-organized religion

And the great tsunami of postmodernism

## **Section 2 How do we navigate through the turbulence?**

**1. Don't despair. These are not the first turbulent times the church has faced.**

Every age has brought substantial challenges to the church.

The early church had to navigate turbulent times too.

1. Shift from being centered in Jerusalem to Antioch
2. Shift from Jewish to Gentile
3. Dealing with persecution from Jews

4. Dealing with persecution from Rome
5. Dealing with the death of the apostles
6. Dealing with false teachers
7. Expanding into multiple cultural situations and religious pluralism
8. Developing doctrines and practices
9. Transitioning from Sabbath worship in the temple to Sunday worship in homes
10. Absorbing massive numbers of new converts

Medieval times found spirituality being vested in the church hierarchy. The church had political authority. It was difficult for common persons to cultivate authentic spirituality. The church had absolute control over doctrine and practices. Corruption was great.

The church took a beating in the modern world. The church found itself constantly debating science and philosophy on matters of reason and science. The thinking world caused great reactions in the church, including liberalism and fundamentalism.

Post-modernism brings many new challenges. How do we navigate these post-modern times?

Reggie McNeal says: “ We don’t need a Post-modern church. We need a church for post-modern people. 141

That is worth repeating. “ We don’t need a Post-modern church. We need a church for post-modern people.

Some think the answer is for the church to adopt post-modernism. We must understand post-modernism but we do not have to become post-modern to reach post moderns.

**2. Pray for God’s wisdom and power. Seek the Lord for courage.**

**3. Do an honest evaluation of how well our congregation is advancing the cause of Christ.**

What difference is our congregation making in our community?

Are we engaging and reaching lost persons?

Are we keeping our young people?

Is our congregation vital, alive and healthy?

How are we measuring health and vitality? (NCD)

Is our congregation growing relative to population growth?

Is our congregation embracing healthy change?

Win Arn says churches that effectively reach secular people...

1. know that people who are not disciples are lost.

2. know that lost people matter to God.
3. see their church primarily as a mission to lost people: rather than a colony of the faithful.
4. have high expectations of their members.
5. know what to change and what to preserve.
6. understand secular people.
7. accept un-churched people.
8. use music secular people understand
9. start new congregations
- 10 are involved in world mission

( Leith Anderson A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century 198)

Don't despair or give into a sense of gloom and failure.

Henry Ford defined failure as "the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently."

#### **4. Seek to understand why many don't want to attend church and address those issues.**

Thom Shultz from Group publishing lists 4 primary reasons people don't want to attend church. They say:

1. I feel judged
2. I don't want to be lectured
3. Christians are a bunch of hypocrites
4. Your God is irrelevant to my life

Schultz suggests 4 Acts of love to address these issues:

1. Radical hospitality (We can accept persons without endorsing their sin. We can seek to be understanding and welcoming.
2. Fearless conversation ( Shultz thinks of conversation as listening, responding with non-judgmental responses, asking questions, seeking to understand
3. Genuine Humility (Humility is essential in relating to post moderns. Our approach needs to be relational. We must be willing to learn from others, and to admit our mistakes)
4. Divine anticipation (expect God to show up, allow God to work in His own way., realize God is at work, share how God is working)

Basically, we must crucify hypocrisy and arrogance and be honest. We must build authentic relationships.

David Kinamen says: "Disciples are hand-made one relationship at a time."

Our ministries will be more person centered than curriculum or program centered.

### **5. Seek a fresh vision of what God wants to do through our congregation.**

We need to ask the right questions:

Don't ask, "How can we survive?"

Ask, "How can we impact our culture?"

Don't ask, "How can we grow this church?"

Ask, "How can this church transform our community?"

Don't ask, "How can we keep the saints happy?"

Ask, "How we can help those inside and outside the church truly become saints?"

Don't ask, "How can we keep our young people?"

Ask, "How we can live and share our faith in a way that excites and empowers young people to become world transforming disciples of Jesus Christ?"

Every congregation is unique and every community is unique. What does God want our congregation to uniquely do to impact our community?

Leith Anderson writes: "We must understand our culture and relate to it." (157)

What will be our focus?

Our focus could be missional: seeking to be a shining light to this dark world. We could do special projects like giving blankets to the homeless, or formula to young moms. We could reach out to the unemployed, the disabled, the depressed, those from broken homes, or tutor students etc.

Our focus could be healing: seeking to help others find physical, emotional, relational and spiritual wholeness. We could be a healing center.

Our focus could be evangelistic: seeking to save and disciple lost persons by building authentic and caring relationships in our community.

Our focus could be spiritual formation and spiritual piety: helping others to explore spirituality and go deeper with God.

Our focus could be helping persons to recover from addictions.

Our focus could be social justice seeking to right wrongs in our community.

Our focus could be relational by utilizing groups.

Seek to minister to what Gallop describes as the 7 needs of Americans (Anderson A church for the 21<sup>st</sup> century- 214)

1. Shelter and Food

2. The need to believe life is meaningful and has a purpose.

3. The need for community and deeper relationships
4. The need to be appreciated and respected.
5. The need to be listened to and heard.
6. The need to feel one is growing in faith.
7. The need for practical help in developing a mature faith.

Prayerfully consider what God is calling and equipping our congregation to do.

Reggie McNeal reminds us: “They are not coming to us. We’ve got to go to them.” (42)

Get out of the 4 walls and do it.

**6. Study what others are doing and adapt what you can to our own setting.**

We do not have to completely reinvent the wheel.

Some congregations are effectively reaching the lost and engaging the post-modern world. They are doing creative ministries.

Every congregation and community is different but are there any resources, processes, programs or ministries that might work in our setting.

Simple Ways to be missional from VergeNetwork.org is one easy to access resource.

Effective congregations are operating from a new paradigm.

Leith Anderson summarizes Win Arn’s description of Old and New Paradigms of ministry (Anderson 150-51) Here are some selected insights:

Effective Evangelism

<u>OLD</u>	<u>NEW</u>
Confrontational	Relational
Mass	Personal
General population	Specific people groups
Single presentation	Multiple exposures
Single method	Multiple methods
Goal: a decision	Goal: a disciple
America: Christian Nation	America:secular mission field
Church membership	Churchdiscipleship
Motive: guilt	Motive: value and love

Christian Education

<u>OLD</u>	<u>NEW</u>
Sunday School	Small groups

Age graded                      Life-style graded  
One meeting place/time  
   Numerous meeting  
   places/times  
Verbal oriented              Visual oriented

—

—

Worship

OLD

NEW

Presentation

Participation

Intellectual

Experiential

Focus on Christians

Focus also on  
non- Christians

### **7. Faithfully, and effectively lead our congregation through change.**

Dwight Eisenhower said: “Neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him.”

Healthy congregations are constantly changing to impact a rapidly changing culture.

We cannot impact the culture unless we change our methods to better minister.

Our congregation understand the times.

Many are stuck in wishful thinking. “Our young people will come back to the old ways.” “This worked for us 40 years ago. We just need to pray harder and be more committed.” Truthfully we must adapt or we will die. If we seek to preserve the church as it was we will be ineffective in leading the church to become what it should be.

Thomas Aquinas claimed, “If the primary aim of a captain were to preserve his ship, he would keep it in port forever.” (Anderson 187)

One of the most difficult things I have done as a pastor is to try to initiate change. Change brings anxiety. Every change, is perceived by someone as loss. As pastors and leaders who are attempting to help our congregations navigate these turbulent times we need to be effective change agents.

One of the most helpful books I have read on this subject is *Leading Change* by John Kotter. It is a secular book published by Harvard Business

School Press. Kotter puts forth an 8 stage process of creating major change.

It is worth your study. Walking a congregation through change is one of the greatest challenges of leadership.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the Change vision
5. Empowering broad based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Also, for an in depth “systems” understanding of the dynamics of change, Look at Edwin Friedman’s book *A failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*.

**8. Help our congregation to engage our rapidly changing, pluralistic and diverse culture while maintaining our core identity and doctrine.**

We must be highly discerning about those things that can be changed and those things which must not be changed.

"Church people worry that the world might change the church; kingdom people work to see the church change the world." -Howard Snyder

McNeal notes: “The point is not to adopt the culture and lose the message; the point is to understand the culture so we can build bridges to it for the sake of gaining a hearing for the gospel of Jesus. (McNeal 51)

The challenge is clinging faithfully to what is vital while also adapting our methods to reach people where they are. We need the Lord’s wisdom.

The Bible will always be our rule of faith but we must change our methods to help persons better experience scriptural truth. We might use more video, drama or dance. Maybe we will utilize smart phones and tablets. We will listen more as we teach and focus more upon helpful applications. We will seek for people to have an authentic life transforming experience of Christ, rather just getting more Bible knowledge.

I am a pastor struggling to chart a good course through the turbulence of our times. I am still not on top of it all but I am encouraged that God is God. God still commissions us to make disciples of all nations. God still calls us to be transformative agents.

The good news, as Reggie McNeal notes is that:

“Room for God is growing in the Post-modern world.” (Reggie McNeal 57)  
Opportunities abound for us to be salt and light in this emerging post modern age.

May God help us to navigate these turbulent times and to impact our communities and our world for Jesus Christ.

### Section 3 Feedback and Interaction

As I said earlier, This presentation will be on our webpage in both aural and written forms. I have also included a bibliography of books and resources that might stimulate your thinking.

What are your questions, observations and comments?

What are you thinking about?

What is our congregation doing right?

What directions do we need to be moving?

What changes do we need to make to be more effective?

How can we retain and attract young families?

How can we reach post-modern persons without becoming post-modern?

What people groups could we strategically target for ministry?

What steps might we take to better navigate these turbulent times?

PRAYER

### **Selected Resources:**

Anderson, Leith. *A Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992.

Bass, Diana Butler, *Christianity After Religion*, Harper Collins, New York, 2013.

Barna, George. *Revolution*, Carol Stream, Il: Tyndale House, 2005.

Chester, Tim and Reeves, Josh and Dodson, Jonathan. *Simple Ways to be Missional*. Verge Network, [www.VergeNetwork.org](http://www.VergeNetwork.org)

DeVine, Mark and Patrick, Darrin, *Replant: How a dying church can grow again*, Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2014.

Douthat, Ross. *Bad Religion: How we Became a Nation of Heretics*. Simon and Shuster, New York, 2012.

Ford, Kevin G. *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great*, Carol Stream, Il. ,Tyndale House, 2007,

Friedman, Edwin H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*, New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2007.

Hendricks, William. *Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People are Leaving Your Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1993.

Hybels, Bill. *Courageous Leadership*, Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2002.

Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2003.

Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books, 2011.

Kotter, John P. *Leading Change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996.

*Leadership Journal*. [www.christianitytoday.com/le](http://www.christianitytoday.com/le)

McNeal, Reggie: *The Present Future*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2003.

Miller, John Miller. *Outgrowing the Ingrown Church*, Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 1986.

Murrow, David. *Why Men Hate Going to Church*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.

O'Dell, Shannon: *Transforming Church in Rural America*. Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2010.

Pollock, Doug. *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*. Loveland, Colorado: Group, 2009.

Sweet, Leonard. *Carpe Manana*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2001.

*Thriving Pastor*. [www.thrivingpastor.org](http://www.thrivingpastor.org)

Wood, Gene. *Leading Turnaround Churches*. St. Charles, Il. Church Smart, 2001.

*World Magazine*. [www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com)