

FIRST AND CENTER

Pastor's Blog

October 10, 2018



Depending on which church research organization you consult, you find statistics that between 100 and 200 churches will close every week in the U.S. We know how the Roman Catholic Church is consolidating parishes and closing schools. It is also true of the UCC and even those mega-churches that grew so quickly in the 90s and early 2000s. The generation whose parents had already left church, and therefore, were not raised in the church, now reaches adulthood. Those old dependables that used to bring folk back to church, like marriage and baptism, are no longer seen as necessary. Many weddings happen in venues outside churches or with people who want to use the pretty sanctuary as a venue, but don't want anything to do with the church. Baptism is not seen as part of the life cycle for vast numbers of Americans.

Now, we can lament this. We can complain about those young people who sleep in or about youth sports on Sundays, but that is trying to move responsibility onto those who have left, instead of on the church which stopped caring how they needed to connect with God, with meaning in their lives, with meaningful service work, and refused to entertain serious change. Believe me, youth sports would not be on Sundays if parents had not already decided church was optional in their lives; they simply would not have brought their kids and sports programs would have gone back to Saturday. Sports on Sundays is not a cause -- it is the natural outcome of so many having already left organized religion.

So, is the church across the board dying after over 2000 years? Not at all. Many of those folks who have left the church over a couple of generations now actually do seek meaning, seek connections with the divine, pray, and work hard to serve people in need all around them, through their work or their volunteer lives. God is still up to something in this world, connecting with people in amazing ways and keeping the hope of the Kingdom alive. But, will we be part of that?

Instead of wondering why they don't connect with us, perhaps we need to be working harder to figure out how we can connect with them in their faith journeys? Perhaps we need to do something a bit bolder, a bit more risky, a bit more, literally, "out there." All those who work on the concept of "innovation" talk about big moves that risk failure, but open up possibility.

Center Church is vibrant and alive, if considerably smaller in every way except real estate than it was in the 1950s, an anomalous decade for church membership and attendance, and NOT the norm for American history. Our new structure includes both a Visionary Team and a Community Relations Team. What bodacious thing might they, with you joining them perhaps, imagine into being for us at Center Church now? Imagine big, then tell us about what you imagine!! Even better, get out there and ask people who are NOT involved in organized religion how their spiritual needs are being met. Maybe we have something to learn from them!

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse
Transitional Minister