



# Changes Congregations Face Leadership Study



Lewis Center  
for Church Leadership

© 2020 Lewis Center for Church Leadership. All proceeds support the ministry of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC.

## Table of Contents

How to Use this Resource	3
Introduction	4
1. Worship Attendance Patterns	5
2. Newcomers	9
3. Families	13
4. Faith Formation and Discipleship	16
5. Changing Demographics	19
6. Diversity	21
7. Mission	24
8. Moving Beyond Attractionalism	27
9. Finances	31
10. Lay Staffing	34
11. Pastoral Leadership	37

## How to Use this Resource

The Lewis Center for Church Leadership has assembled *Changes Congregations Face* to help church leaders understand some of the major trends impacting congregational life today. The material is assembled so that it can be used as a group study by leadership teams or adult classes. Each of the 11 sections includes questions for discussion and action planning so that groups can consider how the changes relate to their congregational context and what might be done in light of these changes.

## Introduction

In establishing the Lewis Center for Church Leadership in 2003, Wesley Theological Seminary had a vision rooted in the belief that effective leadership is essential to fruitful congregations. The bold vision was that the Center would become a trusted resource for church leadership ideas, research, resources, and training that would support greater congregational and denominational service, vitality, and growth.

The Lewis Center set out to earn such credibility through a perspective grounded in both vital faith and applied research. Our goal was to provide church leaders with “strategic actionable insights” they can use to enhance the service, vitality, and growth in their congregations.

As you examine changes taking place in your congregation, be sure to celebrate the faithful witness of those who have sustained your church and served through swirling changes in its history. Their legacy is not a static one. What is established practice today was once innovation. What is the “old way” today was once the “new way.” What feels comfortable now once brought discomfort. Those who served in an earlier time lived in the same tension we face today. While our mission and values may stay constant, the way each generation carries them out must change to meet new circumstances. None of our practices fell from heaven; they all emerged from faithful people trying to share God’s love in relevant ways for their times.

Thank you for spending time considering a few of the many changes of our times. I hope you will use these brief articles as conversation starters as you continue to ask, “What is God most calling you to do in the near future?” May God guide and bless you in these efforts.

Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

## Unit 1: Worship Attendance Patterns

As recently as 2000, worship attendance patterns showed little reason for concern. The 1990s was a strong decade for worship attendance in the United States. Even denominations that continued their membership losses, which had begun in the 1960s, showed strong and sometimes increasing numbers in worship. Things looked good. It appeared as if attendance had stabilized and that the pattern was continuing for a number of years.

### ► What has changed?

Then, following the surge in attendance for five Sundays after the 9/11 tragedy, attendance began a decline that has not stopped yet. Beginning in 2002, attendance across the U.S. has declined in every year. Not all congregations have shown attendance declines, but all are probably feeling the influence of some of the larger cultural changes behind the general decline. So churches that have grown in attendance since 2001 have done remarkably well, and those whose attendance has remained stable have accomplished a great deal, given the “worship attendance recession” underway.

No one seems to know the reasons for the strong and consistent downturn. Some reasons suggested:

**Disillusionment after 9/11.** Some feel those who came to church in the aftermath of 9/11 did not find what they expected or hoped to find and did not return.

**Aging constituencies.** Many churches have a disproportionate number of members age 65 and older.

This proportion will only grow more pronounced as 8,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day, a pattern that began in 2011. While there is research suggesting older people may worship more frequently as they approach retirement age, many older members may not attend as often for health or other reasons. And national death rates are projected to increase around 2021 due to the size of the baby boomer generation.

**Missing younger people.** The other side of this dilemma is the failure of churches to reach younger persons. This is particularly true for the smaller churches that constitute a large part of mainline denominations.

**Declining interest in religion.** Adding to the challenge of reaching others, especially younger people, is the increasingly secular nature of society in which greater numbers self-identify as adherents of “no religion,” particularly those between ages 25–34.

**Overscheduling.** This is the reason that most laity give, with the major time conflicts for them being school, sports, and work.

**Regular churchgoing redefined.** The one big reason may be that “regular” worshipers attend less often. While these and other factors may influence declining attendance, it

has become conventional wisdom that the definition of regular attendance has changed. Most church members who previously attended still do, just less often. It is probably true that most of the new worshipers following 9/11 have not continued, but there is no evidence that those who attended church in 2001 and prior have left the church. This impression receives some confirmation from the General Social Survey 2008 done by the National Opinion Center. It traced the percentage of the adult population who attend worship by frequency. While the percentage of people who report attending church more than once a week has stayed steady over the years, the percentage saying they attend once a week has steadily gone down.

Some pastors have observed that many of their members identify themselves as “regular churchgoers” even though they may attend only twice a month or less. In other eras, being a “regular churchgoer” meant coming to worship almost every Sunday. Some churches are discovering that they continue to reach the same number of different people during the month while the weekly attendance decreases.

### ► What can congregations do?

**Give more attention to worship planning.** Many churches are investing far more time in planning, implementing, and evaluating their worship services. No longer can worship leaders assume that people will attend just because services are held or because it is the right thing to do. Compelling worship services that connect people with God in vital ways are essential. Churches are also planning much further ahead than previously to be more creative in how seasons of the year are developed.

**Optimize both “high” and “low” times of the year.** Churches are making efforts to reach more people on traditional high attendance times such as Easter and Christmas Eve by adding services and enhancing offerings, rather than being content with the higher than usual attendance even without special efforts. Likewise, practices typically associated with low attendance times such as reducing the number of services and deemphasizing music are fading away as churches learn that people are available and not available at all times of the year. Instead, they plan to present worship at its best year-round.

**Develop worship options beyond Sundays.** One church recently discovered that 30 percent of workers in their county must work on Sundays all the time or some of the time. Saturday night services have been popular, but some churches are using other days, especially in places or seasons when many people go away on the weekends. Keep in mind that when Korea went to a five-day work week, many churchgoers began going to leisure areas on the weekends. Many of the larger churches established worship and prayer centers where the people were going.

**Pay more attention to who is attending and when.** In addition to tracking weekly attendance numbers, some churches are tracking the specific worshipers present during the month and monitoring those trends. To do this, churches must do more than count people; they must identify who is present and when. This is relatively simple in smaller

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

churches since a few knowledgeable church leaders can check off who was present following the service. Larger churches need to find ways to encourage people to record their attendance in a way in which virtually everyone participates. This information is only helpful if it is used to identify patterns and to follow up in positive and encouraging ways with people who are absent.

**Expand communication and engagement.** Because churches can no longer expect their members to be present at worship most of the time, finding ways to stay connected with them becomes more important. A weekly online newsletter and/or a pastor's weekly message sent by email are common means used. Churches are also finding that with less Sunday involvement, there need to be greater opportunities for people to engage with one another in study, service, and fellowship. The use of social media becomes even more important when fewer people are in worship. Churches are setting up ways people can give online or through other methods when not present.

**Stay positive.** Perhaps the greatest challenge for church leaders is to stay positive in everything they do despite feeling they are working harder for fewer results. It is very easy in this situation to become judgmental and negative. To stay positive, it helps to keep in mind the purpose of worship. It is not an obligation so much as an opportunity. The church is more than a venue filling seats. It is God's instrument of salvation for all people. Keeping the focus on God and those who seek God helps us escape our need for affirmation and success and be more cheerful in our work and more content and grateful for the opportunity to serve God and care for people.

### ► Want to learn more?

*Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit* by Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems, Jr., Abingdon Press, 2013.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/books/overflow-increase-worship-attendance-bear-more-fruit/>

"No Shows," *The Christian Century*, October 5, 2010, 10-11.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2010-09/no-shows>

*Why Worship Attendance Matters and Clues for Improving It*, 10-minute video, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/videos/why-worship-attendance-matters-and-clues-for-improving-it/>

*50 Ways to Increase Worship Attendance*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-increase-worship-attendance/>

*Congregational Attendance Profile* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/congregational-attendance-profile-cap-download/>

"Why Attendance and Revenue Figures Don't Tell the Whole Story" by Rich Birch, *Leading Ideas*, February 13, 2019.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/why-attendance-revenue-figures-dont-tell-whole-story/>

“Building Attendance through Special Focus Sundays” by Lovett H. Weems, Jr. and Tom Berlin,” *Leading Ideas*, June 8, 2016.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/building-attendance-through-special-focus-sundays/>

▶ **Questions for discussion**

1. What have been your church’s attendance patterns since 2002? Do they reflect the national decline or present a different picture?
2. Do you know your “monthly reach” — the number of different people who attend worship in a given month? Is that number changing and, if so, how does it compare to weekly attendance changes?
3. Do you think members of your church think of “regular church attendance” differently now than ten or fifteen years ago?

▶ **Implications and action steps**

1. What are the most important implications of changing worship attendance patterns for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?



## Unit 2: Newcomers

### ► What has changed?

A paradigm shift has been taking place in the way people enter church communities. In the old paradigm, most were already believers. They entered a church because they moved, they had come of age, or they had married and started a family. They “visited” for a short period and then joined. After becoming members, they were expected to blend into the culture of the congregation and “plug in” where needed.

In the new paradigm, there is no one pattern for the way people enter, engage, and join congregations. The new paradigm is characterized by a series of shifts in who are most likely to be newcomers.

**Denomination means less.** In the past, a child born into a congregation would one day likely join that church or another church of the same denomination. Someone from your denomination moving near your church would likely attend your church. Today most new members will come from other denominations or, increasingly, with no church background. Denomination matters much less today, while a church’s vision, ministries, and relationships count for far more.

**People marry later and less often.** In the past, a key decision when a couple married was, “What church will we join?” According to Pew Research 53% of adults were married in 2018, down from 58% in 1995 and according to Census data, married couples make up less than half of U.S. households. The age of marriage continues to go up. The idea that young adults are married in their 20s and early 30s and return to church no longer holds. Married people are still more likely to attend church; but of young adults between 18 and 34, only 29% were married in 2018, down from 59% in 1978.

**A smaller percentage are married with children.** In the past, even those who left church as youth and young adults would return once they had children. That pattern still occurs, but the percentage of such households is lower today. Married couples with children under 18 living at home represented 50 percent of households in the 1950s. By 1970 such households still represented 40 percent. However, today only 20 percent of households are made up of a married couple with children under 18 living at home.

**Neighborhoods change.** In the past, newcomers were most likely to come from your church’s immediate neighborhood. Today, the distance people travel to church is growing greater. It is not unusual for persons to pass by several churches on the way to the place where they worship, and sometimes the churches passed by are of the same denomination as the one where they worship.

**Demographics change.** In the past, new people coming to your church were likely to reflect the demographic profile of the members already there. Today, new people are much more likely to be different in some way from church members. The demographics of those not attending church is different in numerous ways from current church attenders

in terms of age, race and ethnicity, finances, education, and marital status.

**Ways of finding a church are different.** Not only is there a shift in who the newcomers are; there are changes in how they enter congregations. In the past, people came to us. For many Protestant churches, the point of entry in the first half of the twentieth century was the Sunday school. In the second half of the century, the worship service became the first point of entry for most newcomers. The church's goal for newcomers was membership, with the hope that giving and serving would follow for most. This process often moved fairly quickly since most new people already had church experience, frequently in the same denomination. New people understood how churches work and shared their beliefs.

Today the sequence for many is the opposite, especially for the young. Serving may be their entry point, followed by a small group and then worship. Some will participate actively without joining, at least for a long while. Some may never join. They will probably not come based on thorough knowledge of our beliefs and values. That does not mean beliefs are unimportant, but rather that decisions about choosing a church are based far more on relationships and belonging.

### ► What can congregations do?

What does all this mean for churches as they seek to welcome newcomers? Here are some ways churches are responding to this new context.

**Provide multiple entry points.** I recently asked a group of clergy to think of someone who entered their congregation in the past year. Then I asked the pastors to name the first contact that person had with their congregation. Attending a worship service was a distinct minority. More common first contacts were the church's website, mission opportunities, small groups, and community involvement. The worship service itself will continue to be an entry point, of course, but churches that only wait for people to come will find fewer newcomers.

**Treat newcomers as “guests” and not “visitors.”** When newcomers are seen as guests, your focus is with them and not with you and your church. You try to look at everything from their perspective. Churches can no longer assume guests have a church or religious background, so it is important to monitor everything you do, say, and write from the perspective of guests there for the first time.

**Focus on discipleship.** The main goal is no longer membership but discipleship. Therefore, the beginning point is always the people and their gifts, needs, and passions. This approach means a movement away from church-focused language to discipleship-focused language. Instead of conversations that begin, “Let me tell you about our church,” they are more likely to start with, “Tell me about yourself and how your spiritual journey brought you here.” Membership is more about an opportunity; discipleship is the

goal. The question is not how the new people can fit in but how they can grow as disciples through your congregation. Churches that approach new people on behalf of their church instead of attending to the needs and passions of the people will find fewer interested.

**Always ask, “Who is missing?”** All of us like to think we know our communities well, but often we do not. We are more likely to know a part of the community. Look around. Whom do you see at the park or shopping in area stores? In what ways are these community members different from those attending your church? These are the people God has given us. No church is right for everyone but make very sure that there are not unnecessary barriers for some to begin or continue their discipleship journey through your congregation.

**Belonging is critical.** In all these efforts, churches that are reaching newcomers today understand the importance of quality relationships. People are more interested in what you believe once they feel they belong. Churches are moving away from the concept of “assimilation” to engagement and relationship. Assimilation suggests new people should simply “fit in.” Such an approach deprives a congregation of the rich diversity of gifts newer people bring. If churches remember that today belonging tends to come before believing, they will not only welcome newcomers but will treat them with the dignity they deserve as children of God seeking to take their next step of discipleship.

### ► Want to learn more?

*Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance & Bear More Fruit* by Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems, Jr., Abingdon Press, 2013.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/books/overflow-increase-worship-attendance-bear-more-fruit/>

“Top 10 Learnings about Welcoming Newcomers” by Keith Anderson, *Leading Ideas*, March 16, 2011.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/top-10-learnings-about-welcoming-newcomers/>

“An Open Letter to Churches Seeking New Members” by Lyda K. Hawes, *Leading Ideas*, April 25, 2012.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/an-open-letter-to-churches-seeking-new-members/>

“Welcoming Newcomers to Your Congregation” by Jessicah Krey Duckworth, *Leading Ideas*, July 31, 2013.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/welcoming-newcomers-to-your-congregation/>

*50 Ways to Welcome New People*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-welcome-new-people/>

*The New Welcome Video Tool Kit* and other “Reach New Disciples” Resources, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product-category/reach-new-disciples/>

“Create New Entry Points” by Doug Powe and Jasmine Smothers, *Leading Ideas*,

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

October 22, 2014.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/create-new-entry-points/>

### ▶ **Questions for discussion**

1. Think of people new to your congregation in the past year. What was their first connection with your church?
2. In what ways are those who have come in the past year similar or different from members who have been there for more than 20 years?
3. When you ask, “Who’s missing?”, who is on your list?

### ▶ **Implications and action steps**

1. What are the most important implications of these changes for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 3: Families

### ► What has changed?

Families have been the backbone of American congregational life for as long as any of us can remember. But several significant demographic shifts require that churches reach out beyond traditional families and minister to families in new ways.

One shift is the changing nature of young adulthood for generations born in the wake of the baby boom. Perhaps the most notable aspect of this change is delayed marriage. The median age when adults first marry continues to rise. In 2016, it was age 29.5 for men and 27.4 for women, up from ages 23.7 and 20.5, respectively, in 1947. Churches assuming that young adults will return once they marry and have children may be waiting a long time — perhaps forever because many of these young adults will never come back.

Churches do just about as well in attracting young marrieds with children as they ever did. But this group has become a much smaller slice of the young adult population, explaining in part why young adults are so absent in many churches today. The percentage of singles exceeded the percentage of marrieds among American adults for the first time in 2014, suggesting the need to adapt ministry models that are explicitly or implicitly focused on those who are married with children.

The landscape of family life in the United States is also shifting.

- Between 1960 and 2016, the percentage of children living in families with two parents decreased from 88 to 69. And the percentage of children living with a single parent nearly tripled, from 9 to 27.
- The AARP reported in 2018 that an estimated 3 million older adults are raising their grandchildren.
- Approximately 50 percent of American children will witness the breakup of a parent's marriage. Of these, close to half will also see the breakup of a parent's second marriage.
- Forty percent of married couples with children in the United States are stepfamilies. There will soon be more stepfamilies than traditional families.

Underlying these trends is an “exodus from marriage” particularly among middle-class Americans, once the bastion of solid marriages and two-parent families. Increasingly, the relationship patterns of Middle America are characterized by cohabitation, serial partnerships, divorce, and single parenting, while stable, “traditional” family life tends to be a characteristic of those with higher incomes and education. Among the 60 percent in the U.S. who are high-school educated but not college-educated, the rate of out-of-wedlock births has skyrocketed.

While this diversity of lifestyle patterns proliferates in society, it is generally underrepresented in the church. Single and divorced parents often feel unwelcome in

church, citing fear and shame as the reason. Many congregations continue to operate with the tacit assumption that “married with children” is the normative pattern of family life — in part because it still is within their churches. Missing is a wide array of families who desperately need spiritual guidance and supportive relationships — a “dechurched” population that becomes more remote from the church with each new generation.

### ► What can congregations do?

**Families remain important.** Even with all these changes in the shape of family and households, people still share a strong commitment to family as a value. According to a Pew Research Center report, most adults (76%) consider their own family to be the most important and most satisfying element of their lives. More than 80% say the family they live in now is as close as, or closer than, the family in which they grew up. Family language and ministry can be fitting but must be appropriate to new realities.

- Do an analysis of the types of households in your church and compare with community data. Are you reaching all the types of households in your community?
- Create an atmosphere of welcome, acceptance, and support for all kinds of families in this era when rapidly evolving patterns of family life are the “new normal.” (Jacobs )
- Continue to talk about family but be careful not to imply you have in mind only one model. Affirm the importance of stable family relationships and marriage without condemning or judging other family arrangements. (Jacobs)
- Minister to modern families in ways that acknowledge the realities of their lives, their unique emotional burdens, and their daily challenges. (Jacobs)
- Recognize how much help parents (in one or two parent homes) need today and find ways to be partners with them in the nurture of their children.
- Given strong commitments of parishioners to family, understand that church sometimes can become a competitor for precious family time.
- Keep in mind the vast number of persons in your congregation who live alone by choice and still feel very connected to family.
- If you have a “singles ministry” consider whether it is relevant to the increasing percentage of adults who are unmarried.
- Engage young singles in leadership just as you may already do with marrieds of the same age.
- Like many others in their generation, young pastors tend to be very family centric. It is important to set expectations that honor their commitment to family, just as with other pastors.

The Pew survey found that there is both much openness to changes in families and some unease with so much change. The unease may be even higher in some congregations. But congregations will do well to remember the power of grace as they seek to understand and serve people where they are.

### ► Sources

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

*Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* by Robert D. Putnam, Simon and Schuster, 2015.

*Attract Families to Your Church and Keep Them Coming Back* by Linda Ransom Jacobs, Abingdon Press, 2014.

“The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” Pew Research Center, November 18, 2010.

“U.S. Census Bureau Reports Men and Women Wait Longer to Marry,” November 10, 2010.

### ► Want to learn more?

*50 Ways to Strengthen Ministry with Children*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-strengthen-ministry-with-children/>

“Families Remain Important as Their Makeup Changes” by Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Leading Ideas*, March 9, 2011

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/families-remain-important-as-their-makeup-changes/>

“Are Young Singles Invisible in Church?” by James Lemler, *Leading Ideas*, October 23, 2013

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/are-young-singles-invisible-in-church/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. If young children are part of your congregation, think for a moment about their family situations. Are most from “traditional” two-parent homes? Are there children in your congregation who live with single parents or grandparents?
2. What would make an unmarried young adult feel they belonged in your church? What might make them feel they did not belong?
3. What definition of “family” is assumed when the word is used in your congregation?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of changing patterns of family life for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 4. Faith Formation and Discipleship

How are people being brought up in faith today? How do they begin their discipleship journey? How do they continue their lifelong pilgrimage with God to grow in grace? How do they become fully committed disciples of Jesus Christ?

### ► What has changed?

Many assumptions about people how people come to faith no longer fit. Fewer are taught faith lessons at home. The Sunday School movement is waning. Preaching isn't as significant a factor if people attend worship more erratically. And membership classes don't help those who are active but don't seek church membership.

Churches for decades followed a common route in engaging new persons. There was follow up with visitors. When the visitors returned on multiple occasions, they were invited to participate in other activities. Soon they were approached about joining the church, perhaps including participation in a membership class. They were asked to serve on a committee. The hope was that their past faith preparation and their involvement in study and service programs of the church would cause them to become better disciples. Rarely would these people ever again receive the attention and care they experienced in those early months of attendance. Those who gave that attention now were working with other newcomers.

That system may still work for some people in some places but today the dynamics are much more complex. There are not as many people who move to a community and, as a matter of course, begin attending a church with the plan to choose a new church and join. Those that come may or may not have a church background. If they grew up in church, often they have been out of church for a few or many years. Any church background they have is likely to be different from that of your church. They may not be particularly interested in membership, at least not for quite a while. Membership to them may appear to be more of a goal of the church than a personal need. Yet there is some reason they came to your church. They are seeking something even if it is not what churches have traditionally offered – membership, programs, and church services.

### ► What can congregations do?

Congregations attentive to these trends are seeing their goal for newcomers and longtime members as faith formation and discipleship instead of membership. This doesn't mean that membership is not important. It is, but when it helps someone take their next faithful step on their pilgrimage of faith. Their faith journey is the schedule that matters. In the meantime, the focus for these congregations moves to developing more intentional discipleship systems, emphasizing organic approaches to faith formation such as relational mentoring, and exploring how spiritual development can be fostered through mission engagement. Here are some suggestions from Lewis Center Director F. Douglas Powe, Jr.



**Designate a discipleship coordinator.** Who is accountable for discipleship in your congregation? Is it the pastor? The Christian education leader? Some other person? In many congregations, all these individuals share some of the responsibility along with others. But often with so many people sharing responsibility, no one is accountable for discipleship. Discipleship cannot and should not be one person's job. But having a coordinator of discipleship efforts is important to create accountability, just as there is usually one identifiable person in a congregation, a treasurer or financial secretary, who is accountable for finances.

This person can be a resource for discipleship related questions. A discipleship coordinator can create accountability by holding others responsible and making sure the discipleship process is being followed. It is important for the discipleship coordinator to be involved in developing and maintaining the discipleship process.

It is important to have someone responsible for discipleship and not leave it to chance. Leaving it to chance typically means no one is keeping an eye on it. Having a coordinator who can help the congregation clearly define what discipleship means to them and then include everyone — even the children and youth — in discipleship efforts can make a difference for your church.

**Define discipleship clearly.** Another challenge is that despite common language of discipleship across Christianity, we struggle with the concrete meaning of discipleship within our congregations. Discipleship ends up being equated with attending a study or doing a particular ministry. These things may be important and even necessary, but they only capture a part of discipleship. To exacerbate the challenge, different ministry areas are probably led by different people who may define discipleship in separate ways.

One of the first steps for a discipleship coordinator is to help the congregation define discipleship. The goal is for all the studies, ministries, stewardship, etc., to line up with how the congregation understands discipleship. For example, if discipleship is, "Helping individuals live out the teachings and example of Jesus," congregational studies should help people do this in some way. The ministries of the church should help them do this in some way. The way we think about stewardship should help them live out the teachings and example of Jesus. The goal is to help individuals start integrating all aspects of church life into what it means to be a disciple.

**Include young people.** It is important to remember children and youth when we think about discipleship. At times we do not set religious education expectations for our children and youth because we figure they will get it later. Fewer young people in their 20s and 30s are claiming a religious affiliation. This means we cannot ignore children and youth when developing discipleship processes. It is important to get the youth involved in the process and not just dictate something to them. The youth will have ideas of how to best integrate what the church is trying to do. We need to take these ideas seriously. The earlier we can help form individuals who understand the importance of discipleship the more likely it is to stick.

**Stress that discipleship is an ongoing process.** We must also avoid the trap of developing a discipleship program and thinking we are done. Discipleship is an ongoing process. Jesus was constantly having to work with the disciples in creative ways to help them see the world differently. We will need to do the same in our congregations to help individuals truly live different lives. Having someone who keeps an eye on discipleship helps to facilitate the necessary accountability for the entire system. The goal is not to dictate what needs to be done or changed. The goal is to engage in helpful dialogue about how we are living into the vision we set.

### ► Want to learn more?

“Developing an Intentional Discipleship System” by Junius B. Dotson, *Leading Ideas*, February 21, 2018.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/developing-an-intentional-discipleship-system/>

“16 Signs Your Church May Need a Renewed Focus on Disciple Making” by Mike Schreiner and Ken Willard, *Leading Ideas*, February 21, 2018.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/does-your-church-need-a-renewed-focus-on-disciple-making/>

“What is Your Faith Development Process?” by Bob Farr and Kay Kotan, *Leading Ideas*, June 17, 2015.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/what-is-your-faith-development-process/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. Can you articulate the working definition of discipleship that implicitly or explicitly shapes how people are formed for faith in your congregation?
2. What resources or opportunities are available in your congregation to help someone deepen their discipleship?
3. What steps might your congregation take to create a more explicit discipleship pathway and more accountability for discipleship growth?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of the changing paradigm of faith formation for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 5. Changing Demographics

### ► What has changed?

Non-whites are predicted to be the majority population in the United States sometime around 2045. And the United States is expected to become more diverse by other measures, as well. Whether it is race, age, or some other form of diversity, many of us recognize that the neighborhoods around us will probably shift soon. What does this shift really mean for our congregations? Do we simply stop doing worship and ministry in the current fashion so that we can be prepared for the future?

The truth is congregations, particularly mainline congregations, have not done well at adapting as the culture has changed. Therefore, many congregations look up one day and realize they no longer resemble their neighborhoods. Most of the people in the congregation drive into the church and have no connection to those in the neighborhood. A shift occurred and the congregation was not prepared for it. Whether it is 2020, 2025, or some other time in the future, many more congregations will experience a similar shift in their neighborhoods.

### ► What can congregations do?

**Start conversations with new neighbors.** Churches cannot be afraid to engage those who are different from them even when there is a language barrier. In fact, the barrier can be an opportunity to find ways to dialogue and learn from one another. Too often, churches assume individuals moving into their neighborhood are different from them. They assume they will not want to connect. This assumption may be true. Or it may be false. And if churches do not actually seek to be in conversation with new neighbors, they will never know. The beauty is starting a conversation does not require a congregation to stop what it is currently doing.

**Take risks.** The fear of failure continually haunts congregations. Whenever a new idea comes up, there is always that one person who reminds everyone, “We tried it before, and it did not work.” This does not mean we do not learn from our past efforts. It also does not mean we do not seek to try something again or do something new.

Starting a new ministry with the new individuals in the neighborhood is a risk, but it is a risk worth taking. The key is starting a ministry with people and not for people. When we start a ministry with those in the community, they actively participate in forming it. While this may alter what we currently do, it does not do so in a way that negates who we are as a congregation.

**Make space for new voices.** This can be the most challenging for congregations. It is one thing to talk with individuals and do ministry outside of the congregation, but to make space for those individuals inside the congregation seems like a huge sacrifice. One of the ways in which we live out our Christian calling is by making room for others to take the journey with us. This does not mean we give up everything that has made our journey

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

meaningful, but it does mean we are willing to make room at the table for others who may expand the way we see and do things. Certainly, of all the suggestions this one may alter what we have done and how we have done it.

We do not know if the pundits are right about the rate at which our culture is shifting. We do know that congregations have typically not fared well at dealing with shifts. Shifts will continue to happen in many of our neighborhoods. We have an opportunity to start conversations, take risks, and make space for others so that our congregations can find a balance between continuing practices that have been formative and connecting with others. Shifts do not have to impact us negatively if we are preparing for them.

### ► Want to learn more?

“Preparing for the Shift” by Doug Powe, *Leading Ideas*, June 28, 2017.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/preparing-for-the-shift/>

“Reaching More Diverse People in Suburbs” by Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Leading Ideas*, March 13, 2018.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/uncategorized/reaching-more-diverse-people-in-suburbs/>

“Episode 29: A More Engaging Hospitality” by Juan Francisco Martínez and Doug Powe, *Leading Ideas Talks*, March 20, 2019.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/podcast/episode-29-a-more-engaging-hospitality-featuring-dr-juan-francisco-martinez/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. How closely does the composition of your congregation resemble the surrounding neighborhood? To what extent has this changed over the years? And to what extent do you expect it to change in the future?
2. In what ways is your congregation open to new people and perspectives? In what ways is your congregation challenged by new people and perspectives?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of shifting demographics for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 6: Diversity

### ► What has changed?

Protestant churches in the United States have traditionally been homogeneous groups. Until recent times, it was common for most churches in a community to be composed of persons from only one race.

Many factors have led to this situation. One well-documented tendency is the proclivity of people to associate with other people like themselves, when given a choice. The more choice available, the more likely it is that people will find themselves in homogeneous groupings. But the long and painful history of racism and prejudice cannot be ignored as a dominant reason for the current situation. When any group is excluded it keeps that group out of majority-race institutions. And it almost inevitably requires the establishment of other one-race institutions, including congregations. Another related reason is that housing patterns have traditionally clustered persons by racial groups, even in regions where legal segregation was never dominant.

Even though progress is slow and should not be overstated, there are some positive indications that patterns are changing in the direction of greater diversity. The Lewis Center's monitoring of membership reports for the United Methodist Church may be representative of what is happening across some mainline denominations.

Every year there are fewer congregations made up of people from only one race. What was once common is less so each year. The second category is those congregations that have more than one race but without enough diversity to meet the common definition of "multiracial" congregation. Each year the number of such congregations is increasing.

A multiracial congregation is often defined as one in which no one racial group makes up 80 percent or more of the membership. Such congregations continue to be the exception in the United States. The percentage is normally between five and seven percent and many are Roman Catholic. The percentage of multiracial Protestant churches is much smaller. The United Methodist figures confirm the low national figures. Yet, there is modest growth in such multiracial churches, though the percentage is still well below the national average for all churches.

What may be different today is that many churches seem to place more priority on seeking to represent the diversity of their communities than in the past. While people in another era might have been looking for a church of people like them, new people coming to churches, and especially younger people, increasingly expect the church to model diversity. The value of a more inclusive congregation is affirmed, even as congregations struggle to make this a reality.

### ► What can congregations do?

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

Many factors seem to determine how successful churches are in embracing diversity. First, it is important for churches to see diversity as a part of their basic mission to serve all the people in their communities. Some congregations approach expanding diversity more from a sense of necessity than from mission — a way to keep afloat a church that finds itself in a changing community. Seeing diversity as a missional imperative gives a positive motivation for change. But even churches that sincerely desire diversity face obstacles if they are unwilling to make changes in worship and leadership practices that make such diversity more likely.

Lewis Center Director F. Douglas Powe Jr. believes that sharing the gospel in a pluralistic culture requires that we contextualize the gospel in ways that honor those we are trying to reach. One way he suggests is through deep conversations. If we claim to be invested in others, then we should welcome dialogue that can move us toward deeper communion with one another. There is no magic solution for starting conversations that lead to deeper engagement with one another, but these three steps may help get started.

1. Be willing to take a risk. If you don't find secular conversations on race and diversity helpful, then develop something that work for you and your church. Faith communities must be willing to take some risks.
2. Partner with another congregation for a year of conversations. Ask people to commit to converse at least monthly for the year. Such a commitment can change the participants and a congregation.
3. Partner with that congregation around a mission focus. This is not where one congregation helps the other but where the strengths of each church are mobilized toward a common cause that serves the larger community. Not only are you showing cross-cultural cooperation, you are also demonstrating that churches can work together on behalf of the community. These are not the values that churches often communicate to their communities.

All churches have gaps between the makeup of their churches and their communities, whether it is race, age, gender, education, economic status, plus a range of other differences. Diversity is clearly an issue for all churches. But in an increasingly polarized society, churches can model to others what we should do best — love God, love one another, and love our communities.

### ► Want to learn more?

“4 Goals that Promote Healthy Multicultural Ministry” by Albert Shuler, *Leading Ideas*, January 16, 2019.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/4-goals-that-promote-healthy-multicultural-ministry/>

“7 Key Characteristics of Diversity-Oriented Churches” by Brian Leander, *Leading Ideas*, June 14, 2017.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/7-key-characteristics-diversity-oriented-churches/>

### ► Questions for discussion

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

1. Reflect on the most diverse institutional setting you have experienced, be it in education, the workplace, the military, etc. What do you think accounted for the diversity? What did you find to be positive about the diversity? What did you find to be challenging?
2. Is inclusivity a stated value of your congregation? If so, how is it manifest? What inhibits the realization of that value?
3. If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing about your congregation to make it more diverse, what would you change?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of trends related to congregational diversity for your church?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 7: Mission

### ► What has changed?

“Mission” has been a mainstay of church language for a very long time, and it continues to carry power today. For example, when we ask clergy and laity the open-ended question — “Where is God most alive and working in your congregation today?” — the most common response by far is a variation on mission engagement.

Yet the way mission is carried forward within the body of Christ is changing. For many years, mission was more likely to be talked about as “missions” and was done somewhere by others and paid for by congregations. That is not the understanding of mission people are referencing when they describe where God’s power is most present in the churches today.

### ► What can congregations do?

**Place greater emphasis on local engagement.** Churches once talked of “foreign missions” and “home missions” as ways of describing international efforts and national ones. Today, churches with strong mission outreach still have a significant global and national component, but the scope of local mission engagement is far more developed and vital.

**Add more hands-on involvement.** Churches today are more likely to have a personal connection to much of their mission. Churches that once prided themselves on contributing to the long list of causes now measure much of their fruitfulness in the number of mission projects to which members give both time and money. This change is true not only for local mission, but also for national and global projects. The popularity of mission trips and other forms of volunteer mission engagement is part of this trend.

**Appreciate mission as mutual and relational.** Increasingly, mission is seen not as what you do for the community but what you do with the community. There is less and less “us” and “them” as churches come to see themselves as part of the community and often a reflection of the community for good and ill. There is mutuality of giving and receiving required for community service that has integrity. The goal of mission is an enhanced community where all have the chance to experience the abundant life God desires. And this goal is achieved when missional efforts emphasize the importance of building relationships, not just performing tasks or writing checks.

**Stress the importance of partnerships and networks.** Beyond denominational mission involvement, churches in the past were likely to engage in projects by themselves. Today various networks often develop among churches with a shared passion for a particular issue or place. Many churches today are partnering not only with churches of other traditions but also with other organizations within the community to serve their neighbors better. Churches sometimes want more credit and control than is possible in genuine partnerships. But we are all learning new ways to behave together. There is not much room for triumphalism in our day.



**Give directly to missions beyond denominational channels.** One of the major changes in the past ten years is the percentage of congregational mission giving that goes directly to the mission itself. It may be channeled through a denominational agency for accountability, but this giving is beyond what the churches pay in support of the overall denominational mission program.

**View stewardship of church property with a missional perspective.** Many churches have come to see their buildings as a ministry asset and seek creative ways of using their space to serve their communities. Other churches are questioning the need for additional “bricks and mortar” investments in order to devote more resources to missional priorities. This is rarely a question of “mission” or “building,” for both are important, but rather an awareness of the missional implications of decisions regarding the acquisition and use of church property.

**Recognize the intergenerational appeal of mission work.** While most new people come into the life of a church through the portal of worship, there is growing evidence to suggest that younger adults are often first attracted to a church’s mission activities. In this and many other ways, vitality in mission can contribute to congregational growth. Mission brings people together across generational, denominational, racial, social, and political groups.

While the language of mission may sound like that of previous generations, the way it manifests itself within the body of Christ is changing. God is indeed doing a new thing!

### ► Want to learn more?

*Doing Good Well* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/doing-good-well-download/>

“Best Practices for Short-Term Mission Trips” by Laurie A. Occhipinti, *Leading Ideas*, February 11, 2015.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/best-practices-for-short-term-mission-trips/>

“Key Competencies for a Missional Congregation” by Tom Berlin, *Leading Ideas*, September 28, 2011.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/key-competencies-for-a-missional-congregation/>

“Identify Community Ministry Needs by Listening” by Joy F. Skjeggstad, *Leading Ideas*, March 12, 2014.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/identify-community-ministry-needs-by-listening/>

“Doing Community Ministry in the Small Church” by Joy F. Skjeggstad, *Leading Ideas*, February 12, 2014.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/doing-community-ministry-in-the-small-church/>

*50 Ways to Engage Local Schools* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-engage-local-schools/>

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

*Engaging Local Schools* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/engaging-local-schools-download/?id=promo50-20190212>

### ▶ **Questions for discussion**

1. How has your church's mission engagement changed in the last 10 to 15 years?
2. Is mission an entry point for new people in your church?
3. What opportunities do you have for younger people, especially, to participate in hands-on mission service?

### ▶ **Implications and action steps**

1. What are the most important implications of evolving patterns of mission engagement for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 8. Moving Beyond Attractionalism

### ► What has changed?

A growing segment of the population is religiously unaffiliated and disconnected from the institutional church. Pew Research has identified a growing cohort of people they call the “nones” — those who do not identify with any religious tradition and state their religious preference as “none.” Forty percent of Millennials falls in this category. Then there are those sometimes called the “dones” who were once involved in church, some very actively, but now have no church involvement. The church often has dismissive attitudes toward the people we call “unchurched.” We imagine them as irreligious or spiritually apathetic. But people outside our churches are often more spiritually minded than we think. Pew Research found that two-thirds of the “nones” believe in God, more than a third say they are “spiritual,” and one-in-five say they pray every day. Yet most will never step into a church building. Some say they feel unwelcome. Others have been hurt by the church or are afraid of commitment. So how can we relate to them and our entire communities in ways that truly represent our church as seeking God’s best for everyone and not merely recruiting members for our church?

### ► What can congregations do?

The idea that a church can simply fling open its doors and welcome those who come rests on the outdated cultural assumption that people wake up on Sunday morning motivated to find their way to a church. Successful congregations need to become “go to” churches rather than “come here” churches by extending their spiritual presence into the day-to-day places where people live and gather. New research on religion in everyday life provides hope to congregations that seek to connect with the spiritual impulses and religious memories of those not claiming religious affiliation or no longer active in church.

Today this distinction is framed in the difference between an “attractional” church model and a “missional” church model. With the attractional model most common in recent times, the focus is on making your church so appealing that people seeking a church will choose your church over other available choices. This has to do with everything from the appearance of facilities to children’s ministry to music and beyond. However, the great flaw in the attractional model is that it assumes a continuing pool of people who are looking for churches or at least have an interest in what churches offer. In many communities, this is much less the case today than in the past.

A more missional orientation is needed to reach those either disillusioned with the church or with little interest in spiritual matters. Of course, most churches already see themselves as “missional” since the word is used to mean all sorts of things. Sometimes it means being a vital congregation. At other times it refers to a church’s ministries to help others, permitting service groups to use their facilities, and engaging members in hands-on acts of service. All these efforts are good and important, but to be truly missional a church must embrace a totally new orientation to being Christ’s presence in the world.

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

Being missional requires participation in God's work of transformation in a manner that alters the typical DNA of a congregation. The beginning point for the missional church is not the church building, membership, and programs. Rather the beginning point is the community and joining the work God is already doing to redeem that community. It is a move from being friendly and inviting to discerning God's call and joining God's work of healing and hope among the people of the community that God has given us.

What are some ways to get started in a more outwardly focused missional journey?

**Disrupt the tendency to focus inwardly.** There obviously needs to be a balance between ministries aimed at serving those already within a congregation and efforts aimed at serving those outside the congregation. The purpose always is to make a difference in the lives of others, under God's leading. We serve without the expectation that increased church membership will be the outcome of our efforts. Missional congregations trust that if they are following God's lead, then God will inspire some to join with them in making a difference. The goal is to share why a relationship with God is central, not to make one's congregation the centerpiece.

**Take church to the community.** How can everyday places in your neighborhood become sanctuaries where people receive blessing? Increasingly, churches find they can extend their spiritual presence beyond their own walls by taking worship, teaching, prayer, and blessings into their communities in novel and creative ways. Rather than waiting for people to come to church, many congregations are finding ways to take church to them through offsite worship opportunities. One church in Missouri holds its Ash Wednesday services in a local coffee house. Another in Texas does its Palm Sunday services in a local park. And a church in Tennessee leads off-site Christmas Eve services in nursing homes, hospitals, restaurants, bars, and sports facilities. Some churches orchestrate special liturgical events beyond their walls, like a live nativity display with choirs singing Christmas hymns at the local shopping mall or a Blessing of the Animals at the local dog park or pet store. Others hold vacation Bible schools in community parks or Bible studies at Starbucks.

The idea is simple. Go to the places where people already are, rather than expecting them to come to you — places that are known to them, where they feel comfortable. But whatever you do must be done well and with enthusiasm. And your motivation must go beyond the hope that people might be drawn into your church. It must start with a sincere desire to build relationships with neighbors and bless them in ways that are welcoming and comfortable to them.

**Reach out to the community at times of greatest spiritual receptivity.** There are times of the year when those not religiously engaged are more spiritually receptive than other times, usually around certain holidays. At Christmas, Easter, and other special days, many feel the tug of deeply engrained religious memories. Even those generations removed from the church somehow long to be connected to the traditions of the faith. These holidays are times to plan wonderful worship opportunities and promote them extensively with those more distant from the church. What would it mean to think of these

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

seasons not just as ways to attract more people to church but to be more present where they are?

**Provide a glimpse of heaven to your community.** In Matthew's version of the Lord's prayer we say, "your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Missional congregations give others a glimpse of heaven. The way in which a missional congregation lives out what it means to be disciples of Jesus helps individuals to understand better what it truly means to exist in God's presence.

This is no easy task. Missional congregations focus on helping others to experience and abide in God's love. This takes place among our members but also among those in the larger community. When children sing hymns to those in nursing homes, the residents know they still matter to God and your church. When your church provides music to an elementary school with no music program, those children get a glimpse of heaven. The key is sharing a glimpse of heaven with others so that they can truly experience God. It is a sharing that demonstrates and articulates God's love for another.

### ► Sources

"Religion and the Unaffiliated," A report by the Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life, October 9, 2012.

<https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/>

"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," A report by the Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life, October 17, 2019.

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

### ► Want to learn more?

*Taking Church to the Community* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/taking-church-to-the-community-download/>

"Moving Beyond Church in A Box" by Carey Nieuwhof, *Leading Ideas*, March 14, 2018.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/moving-beyond-church-in-a-box/>

"Putting Ourselves in the Places Where Life Happens" by Keith Anderson, *Leading Ideas*, October 28, 2015.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/putting-ourselves-in-the-places-where-life-happens/>

*50 Ways to Take Church to the Community*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/50-ways/50-ways-to-take-church-to-the-community/>

▶ **Questions for discussion**

1. In what ways does your church try to connect with people before they ever come into your church building?
2. Can you think of any promising new possibilities for connecting with people beyond your church in creative ways?
3. What attitudes or barriers get in the way of a more outwardly focused posture?

▶ **Implications and action steps**

1. What are the most important implications for your congregation of the need to move beyond attractional models of outreach?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 9: Finances

The question of how to adequately fund ministry is a ubiquitous concern among congregational leaders and leaders of other church-related institutions today. Their concern is fueled by a number of trends — lower church attendance, an aging donor base, the expense of maintaining older facilities, changes in tax laws, and a culture of skepticism regarding institutions. And increasingly, churches are turning to new ways of supporting themselves, from creative online fundraising to more aggressive pursuit of major gifts and leveraging the value of their buildings and property.

**Diversify income sources.** Many churches have depended on gifts made through the worship offerings for virtually all their operating budget income. While that continues to be the source for the overwhelming portion of operating expenses, as it should be, churches are realizing they need additional income streams to fund their ministry adequately. Some are looking at their facilities as a source of generating income for ministry when the space is not needed for church purposes. Others are encouraging members to remember the church in their wills and estate plans as a source of future funds not for operations but for things more lasting such as an endowment or capital expenditures. Some churches are finding that is appropriate to charge fees for some services or uses of the building for which they may not have charged in the past.

**Develop more ways for people to give.** With average weekly attendance on the decline (often from the same people worshipping less frequently), the need to offer ways of giving beyond the worship offering time is essential. Furthermore, the financial practices are changing today as radically as when checks were introduced. Speaking of checks, the high point of check writing came in 1995. Today, a minority of financial transactions involve cash and checks. Yet many churches still report that at least 90 percent of their giving comes through cash and checks. Churches are finding that they need to give people the options they typically use to conduct their financial transactions. For some, the check they write for church is the only check they write all week.

**Be aware of financial dependence on older members.** What percentage of giving is from older members? It's not unusual for middle-aged and older givers to be more generous to the church. People tend to have more assets after the age of 50 than at any other time in their lives as many in this age range have completed educating their children and paying off their homes. However, the generosity of older members can create a false sense of economic security in a church, obscuring the need to expand the circle of givers. One way to assess your church's vulnerability to an aging donor base is to monitor the percentage of giving that comes from those age 70 or older. There is no right percentage. However, if this percentage is rising, it may represent a point of vulnerability.

**Fund capital needs.** One common way for congregations to balance budgets in challenging times is to defer maintenance. Given that most church facilities were built decades ago, many churches are now having to reckon with a full agenda of deferred maintenance needs. One solution is to direct funds from multiple sources into a capital fund (sometimes called building fund.). Some churches start with a modest percentage of

the operating budget designated for transfer to the capital fund each month. This provides the financial foundation. If the church rents its facilities, a major portion of that income should go to the capital fund since rentals add wear and tear to the facilities. Perhaps some members have a special interest in making extra gifts for capital needs. In some churches, deferred maintenance needs may require a major facility renewal and a capital campaign. But for many churches, the task is simply to begin somewhere and keep addressing these needs.

**Invest for the future.** Some churches have permanent funds or endowments in which the principal is maintained and expenditures for ministry come from the total return of the funds (interest, dividends, and capital appreciation). When budgets are tight, some churches abandon a logical spending rate and overspend from endowment funds. Remember that these funds can be invested for growth because the principal will not be spent. With an appropriate mix of equities and bonds, it should be possible for the funds to achieve a total return over any five-to-seven-year period that permits the church to withdraw and spend a reasonable spending rate and at the same time earn enough extra to replenish the fund to account for inflation. So, if for example, you believed your investment would earn a total average annual return of 6 percent, with an assumed inflation rate of 2 percent, then you could safely plan to use 4 percent for ministry spending each year. To spend more would mean reducing the value of the gifts that were intended for lifetime use for one year's needs.

**Distinguish between nonrecurring and recurring funds in budgeting.** Ideally, a church's ongoing operating expenses should be covered by recurring and predictable sources of income, such as pledges and offerings, program and facility fees, fundraisers, and the percentage of rental income not directed to support your capital budget. If your church relies too much on nonrecurring or unpredictable sources of income, such as large, one-time gifts or bequests, to cover routine, ongoing expenses, it's cause for concern because you are funding recurring expenses with nonrecurring income. There is a place for reserve funds, but they are not intended to cover chronic deficits or mask imprecise budgeting. Any undesignated bequests that come should go to the capital fund or endowment so you are not tempted to skew your operating fund with this unpredictable and nonrecurring source of income. People are more likely to leave money to the church if they see it is used for things of a more lasting nature.

**Safeguard financial integrity.** This is an uncomfortable subject for churches since we want to assume the best of all members and staff. Yet we continue to see an increase in cases where church funds are misappropriated. Every church needs some basic financial integrity practices and procedures. They will look different based on the size of the church, but some simple steps can add trust and credibility to church finances and also not open the door of temptation to someone perhaps struggling in their personal financial lives. The people who handle money should welcome these accountability mechanisms so that there is never a reason for anyone to question whether the funds are handled in an appropriate manner.

### ► Want to learn more?



## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

*Protect, Sustain, Grow: Best Practices For Handling Your Church's Money* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/protect-sustain-grow-best-practices-for-handling-your-churchs-money/>

*Building and Funding Your Annual Financial Campaign* Video Tool Kit, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/product/building-funding-capital-budget-download/>

“7 Policies Every Church Needs for Trust and Transparency” by Bonnie Ives Marden, *Leading Ideas*, February 27, 2019.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/7-policies-every-church-needs-for-trust-and-transparency/>

“9 Questions to Assess Your Church's Financial Health” by Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Leading Ideas*, August 15, 2018.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/9-questions-to-assess-your-churchs-financial-health/>

*50 Ways to Encourage Faithful Giving*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/category/50-ways/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. Has your church's overall financial position strengthened or weakened in recent years? What accounts for the change?
2. Make a list of the sources of revenue available to your church on an ongoing basis. What additional sources might be explored?
3. Thinking ahead 10 years, what new challenges may arise?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of these changes for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 10: Lay Staffing

### ► What has changed?

Over the past several decades, the ministry of lay staff has become increasingly vital to many congregations. The research of Dr. Ann A. Michel, associate director of the Lewis Center, documents both the increasing numbers of lay staff employed by churches and also the increasing percentage of church budgets dedicated to staffing in addition to pastors.

She found in her study that the primary reasons for this growth in lay staffing included:

- the increase and influence of very large churches
- a changing culture of volunteerism
- the need for specialized programmatic ministries
- a shift away from clergy generalists in favor of lay specialists, many of whom are part-time
- lower salaries and greater influence and flexibility by churches when hiring laity

While large churches employ many lay staff, particularly full-time staff, churches of various sizes have added staff in recent years. Michel found that about 60 percent of staff were members of the congregation where they work before being hired, and more are currently members there. As with clergy, lay staff tend to see their work as a calling to serve God.

While lay staff are not limited to the largest churches and all churches are more likely today to have more paid staff than ten years ago, the greatest growth of lay staff in the past decade came from large churches. Using expenditures on lay staff in United Methodist churches as a sample, between 2002 and 2012 the number of churches spending \$100,000 or more on lay staff increased by 32 percent or 761 churches. Churches spending between \$10,000 and \$99,000 (about one quarter of churches) stayed the same. The number spending less than \$10,000 on lay staff decreased. A full one-third of churches spend no funds on staffing beyond the pastor.

Changes are also evident in the types of work performed by paid staff. In previous eras, most church staffers worked in administrative or support roles while the clergy engaged in “ministry.” Today, according to Michel’s research, the balance has tipped toward those who work in program areas such as children’s ministry, youth, and music. A recent article by John Wimberly describes some of the ways staff design is evolving in light of broader workplace trends and changing patterns of ministry. He reports that congregations increasingly look for staff with specific skills in communication, marketing, fundraising, and other needed specialties. The traditional role of church secretary is being reshaped, or in some cases replaced, as a result of advances in software and electronic communication. And newer approaches to religious education and Christian formation are less likely to rely on a full-time Christian educator, whether clergy or lay.

## ► What can congregations do?

What churches are doing depends on the size of the church. Churches of a couple of hundred attendees or more may still be adding staff. Those smaller but with attendance of 75 or more are probably holding fairly steady. Smaller churches either do not have staff or may be reducing staff. But changes in how churches with lay staff think about both staff and lay volunteers may offer some lessons for all churches.

**Rethink the roles of paid staff and lay volunteers.** There are times when staff are hired simply to do the work previously done by volunteers. While this may be appropriate for some tasks, the church's ministry always belongs to the entire congregation and cannot be subcontracted to others, including staff. There was a time when churches saw themselves making progress when they could afford to pay people to do ministry on behalf of the congregation. Today that more narrow view of paid staff is receding. The role of staff additions today tends to be seen in many ways like that of pastors — to equip the saints for ministry. No church will ever have enough money to pay people to accomplish all that God is calling them to do; and it would be a tragedy if they believed a church should do its ministry in that way.

**Rethink all service as ministry.** While it is easy to distinguish paid staff from lay volunteers because one receives income from the church and the other does not, the difference in the two groups is not as bold as it may seem. On one hand, those who “work” for the church tend to be people who not only see their work as a ministry but who probably could make more money elsewhere for the same level of work. On the other hand, the “volunteers” are offering service at a level that would be hard for the church to provide if it had to pay for it. In many congregations, highly committed volunteers function as “unpaid staff.” While the reward for volunteers may not come in a paycheck, they are “earning” whatever intrinsic rewards they receive.

**Show appreciation for volunteers.** Churches without paid staff function as churches have for centuries with the volunteer service of many people. But churches are learning that volunteer time is scarce for many people today and members have many options for using discretionary time. The spirit of service is alive but not limited to the church. Communities offer a range of ways for persons to serve God and others. If churches think of volunteers as unpaid staff, they are more likely to provide things that mean much to volunteers but are often neglected, such as position descriptions, recognition, supplies and equipment, and opportunities to grow.

**More volunteers may require more staff.** It is not uncommon for churches with the largest numbers of paid staff to have the largest numbers of volunteers. Just as staff should not be seen as merely those who do what volunteers used to do; neither should volunteers be seen as persons who replace a paid person. Many churches see their paid staff as the catalysts for greater lay involvement.

Whether a church can afford paid staff beyond a pastor or not, the challenge for a congregation remains the same. All who constitute a church share the call to love God and serve Christ with all their ability to fulfill the mission God has for your congregation.

## ► Want to learn more?

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

*When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations* by Gil Rendle and Susan Beaumont, Alban, 2007.

*Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* by George Cladis, Leadership Network, 1999.

*How to Thrive in Associate Staff Ministry* by Kevin E. Lawson, Alban, 2000.

*Lay Staff Ministry in the United Methodist Church* by Ann A. Michel, Lewis Center for Church Leadership Report, 2011.

[https://www.churchleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/LayStaff\\_2011Report.pdf](https://www.churchleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/LayStaff_2011Report.pdf)

“Strengthening the Ministry of Lay Staff” by Ann A. Michel, *Leading Ideas*, June 8, 2011.

<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/strengthening-the-ministry-of-lay-staff/>

“Staff Designs in the 21st Century” by John Wimberly, Congregational Consulting Group, September 17, 2018.

<http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/staff-designs-in-the-21st-century/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. What issues should be evaluated when a church is considering whether it makes sense to hire staff to take on a particular responsibility?
2. Within the context of your congregation and tradition, in what ways do you understand the roles and responsibility of clergy and lay ministry staff to be the same? In what ways are they different?
3. What could your congregation do to support lay staff in their calling and develop their knowledge, skills, and faith?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of changes in staffing patterns for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?

## Unit 11: Pastoral Leadership

In addition to the changes in paid lay staffing examined in the previous unit, the nature of clergy leadership in congregations is also changing.

While virtually all congregations in the U.S. have pastors, from time to time the background, characteristics, and roles of these clergy change. E. Brooks Holifield has noted many of these changes in his comprehensive and richly documented history of clergy in the United States, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Eerdmans, 2007). He illustrates how clerical authority has assumed multiple forms over the years and has undergone continual evolution, greatly shaped by distinctive social and cultural factors.

### ► The changing face of pastoral ministry

**Full-time and part-time pastors.** Far more churches are served today by part-time pastors than ten years ago, and many of these are bi-vocational. Protestant congregations in the U.S. tend to be relatively small since the more historic denominations grew rapidly when the country was overwhelmingly rural. The population has shifted from being primarily rural during the early twentieth century to a predominantly non-rural population today. As a result, the size of many of these churches has declined.

The median worship attendance (half more, half fewer) continues to decrease across mainline denominations. Therefore, the number of churches that can afford a full-time pastor is decreasing. With many judicatories of mainline denominations having minimum salary requirements for churches with full-time clergy, increasingly fewer churches can afford such clergy.

For a time, the goal of every church was to have a full-time pastor with a seminary degree. However, this has never been the actual staffing pattern for many congregations. Economics, history, and tradition have meant that many churches have met their staffing needs in a variety of ways, including the use of part-time clergy, bi-vocational or itinerant preachers, and lay leaders and volunteers.

Increasingly many smaller congregations cannot afford full-time professional staff. One example of this is the emergence of what may be thought of as para-professionals, or new forms of professional ministry, that supplement or even replace clergy holding traditional seminary degrees. Some denominations have created alternative paths to earning parish ministry credentials to address both the changing needs of congregations and the diverse backgrounds of those called into service of the church.

The impetus for many of the changes seems to be primarily economic. The declining size of congregations is intertwined with declining religious involvement overall, which means fewer members to provide financial support to congregational work and fewer resources for denominations to sustain congregations.

**Age.** Churches are far more likely to have a pastor aged 55 or older today than ten years

ago. The percentage of pastors in mainline denominations of this age increased from 50 percent to 56 percent since 2010. Churches are much less likely to have a pastor between the ages of 35 and 54. This group of pastors fell from 45 percent to 37 percent of pastors during in the same period. And churches are about as likely today to have a pastor under 35 as in 2010 since there was only a modest increase in the percentage of younger clergy (from 5 to 7 percent).

**Gender and race.** It is somewhat more likely that a church's pastor is a woman now than ten years ago as women continue to represent a larger percentage of all clergy. Likewise, seminary enrollments are much more diverse racially than the current demographics of clergy so one can expect a more diverse pool of clergy possibilities in the future.

### ► What might this mean for congregations and pastors?

**The congregation must shift the financial model.** Most congregations rely on pledges or some form of parishioner giving to sustain their finances. But shrinking memberships and a less religiously inclined culture make this financial model less sustainable. Congregations will need to think about ways of sustaining ministry that move beyond the standard model of parishioner support. This implies that pastors may need a different type of training that equips them to think more creatively about stewardship and economic sustainability. Another implication is the need to leverage physical assets and pay attention to property issues including upkeep, underusage, repurposing space, and using some physical assets as sources of income.

**The pastor must equip the congregation.** For several reasons, both theological and practical, clergy are far more likely today to see their role more closely connected to the biblical concept of "equiper of the saints" than as the one who does ministry for a congregation. The roles of worship leadership, preaching, and pastoral care still occupy much of a pastor's time, but the roles of visionary, teacher, and developer have grown more important. Rather than serving on behalf of the congregation, pastors are more likely to see all members as ministers, help them discover those ministries, and thus strengthen them to be motivated and equipped to serve. When this model works well, the impact of the congregation's total ministry grows exponentially.

**The pastor must lead and guide the congregation into the future.** When pastors arrive at a congregation, they are seen as a spiritual leader for the congregation. No matter how young the pastor, how small the congregation, or whether they are full-time or part-time, this continues to be true. However, the best pastors continue to wear the mantle of leadership lightly. The truly effective pastors know that they are also guides on a journey toward God's next faithful step for the congregation, a journey that began before their time of leadership and will continue beyond it.

**The pastor must be servant and professional.** Clergy were among the original professionals in the United States. In many ways, pastors share characteristics with other professionals. The presence of specialized training, standards, codes of conduct, peer review, and other such marks of professionalism serve clergy and congregations well.

## Changes Congregations Face: Leadership Study

But, as Holifield points out, clergy historically and today continue to live in a tension between being a professional and being a servant of God's vision. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course, but the tension remains for most clergy today. Clergy know that "professional" only partially describes who they are since they see their ministry primarily as a sacred calling from God. The less secure place clergy have today in a less culturally religious environment only heightens the difference with other professionals.

Note: The Lewis Center for Church Leadership is conducting a major research initiative to study the changing religious workforce in the United States. Funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the grant began in late 2019 and will issue reports and updates as the research unfolds.

### ► Want to learn more?

*Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/clergyage/>

*Suggestions for Churches with a Young Pastor*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership.  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/to-the-point/to-the-point-suggestions-for-churches-with-a-young-pastor/>

"The Changing Face of Ministry" by Doug Powe, *Leading Ideas*, April 24, 2019.  
<https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/the-changing-face-of-ministry/>

### ► Questions for discussion

1. How and in what ways has your pastor's role changed in the last 10 to 20 years? Are expectations different now?
2. Has the makeup of pastoral leadership changed in the last ten years? Full-time pastor to part-time pastor? One pastor to multiple pastors?
3. What changes in pastoral leadership are most likely to affect your congregation in the next 10 years?

### ► Implications and action steps

1. What are the most important implications of changes related to pastoral ministry for your congregation?
2. What steps could your church take?