

# Things change...

## now what?

### Making sense of how the church is transforming

BY LEW SHELTON

Remember Sunday mornings in the church where you grew up? You probably sang several classic hymns (and perhaps a more contemporary song, such as "He Touched Me") out of *Hymns of Glorious Praise*. Maybe you listened to a sermon that quoted from the King James Version almost exclusively. Announcements dealing with the next C.A. meeting or Wednesday night prayer service sounded pretty much the same week to week.

Over the years as you moved on to college and into your own career life, you probably discovered it didn't matter too much whether your church was in Kansas or Pennsylvania or Oregon — the schedule of weekly services didn't vary drastically from town to town or season to season. You marked your life's routines with the punctuation of those regular gatherings.

Society at large seemed to march to a pretty consistent cadence during

that period as well. *The Andy Griffith Show* whistled its way across your trusty black and white, the gas station attendant asked if you wanted your oil checked when he filled your tank, Walter Cronkite assured you "that's the way it is," and your day was never interrupted by a cell phone, pager or instant message.

What's happened?

#### Changing churches

You don't have to look far to discover a lot of change in our day-to-day lives, in society at large and even in the church. Any kind of change requires adjustment and flexibility. But when change occurs in church, we have to make adjustments at the core of our spiritual personality.

Consequently, some folks in our pews tend to resist even the suggestion of a different approach or a move away from what has become the norm. They find the prospect of change in this deeply treasured part of their lives too jarring.

Societal change has been accelerating since the close of World War II. Early

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WHAT DO YOU DO  
WHEN THE WHEELS  
FALL OFF  
YOUR COUNTRY?



Eastern Congo has been ravaged by civil war, famine and disease for the past decade. Much like this old Speed the Light car, the wheels have fallen off the country.

Africa's Hope is helping Bible schools in Eastern Congo get back to full speed after not even having funds for professors' salaries during the past 10 years. Because of the economic situation, only two students paid any tuition last year, and they could only pay \$2 each.

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War survivor and church leader, Ruben Nongoyo, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God of Eastern Congo

Yes!

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Africa's Hope is a ministry of Assemblies of God World Missions.

# ABCs

## OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

### A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

### Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13

### B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

### Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

### C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:



1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

on, this seemed to have little impact on the church. Slight changes, like singing "Scripture choruses," made inroads. Parachurch ministries began to crop up and people began to view the church as something more than a physical complex.

The Jesus Movement of the '70s introduced a new brand of music and church attire that was embraced by the young. Soon, churches were singing new songs projected on the wall and pastors were reading their texts from new translations.

Did this hurt us? No. We needed to change. The way we worshipped in the '40s was not going to garner many new attendees in the '70s. The threat of losing the interest of our own children forced the issue, slowly bringing further transformation. The layer upon layer of change means that today "church" looks very different from its image of previous decades.

Christ's commission to His followers was to reach, teach, solidify and send. He did not limit us to specific methodologies. Obviously, the Word of God serves as our guide, but we should never allow tradition to be considered as authoritative as Holy Writ.

Yesterday's practices do not have to dictate today's presentations. We cannot become so attached to the past that our only view of the future is through a rearview mirror.

### Unchanging ministry

In some regards, the church must change. It must change the way it does business — the same way that 3M, PepsiCo and Hewlett-Packard find themselves dealing with the necessity of innovation, reconfiguration and transformation on a regular basis. But how do we handle it?

May I suggest a renewed focus on the needs and problems within our communities and the people

who don't attend our churches? This is the *unchanging* calling of Christ. He lived out the Father's compassion and love among the hurting people of His day.

Yes, changes in the way we are used to experiencing church can be difficult to accept. But instead of focusing on our own desires, sense of comfort and convenience, let's support every attempt to reach the lost, attract new parishioners and minister to the hurting in our communities. Let us faithfully hold up our churches and pastoral leadership in prayer. Let us make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit for a fresh infusion of His direction and anointing so that we are marching to His drum and following His lead.

The changes that do occur in our churches should never be simply for the sake of change. There are core truths that are not subject to change if we are to survive. Plunging attendance in liberal churches that changed their doctrine, ministerial requirements and focus on traditional family values clearly bears out this truth.

Change is necessary, that's a given. But it must always be led by God's Spirit.

### Living like Jesus

I understand the proposals for redesigning the church in this postmodern age. But any such change must be Spirit-led rather than man-imposed. And the Spirit will lead in the direction that best helps us represent Jesus Christ. The call has been given for the church to become a little more "incarnate" for the sake of being relevant and believable.

We need to lay aside some of our traditions and prejudices so that we can effectively minister to those among whom we live and help them truly encounter Jesus. I lend a hearty amen to that proposal.

However, I would remind those

in the change mode to consider the following observation: Jesus became one of us, but He did not become *just like* us. If He had become *just like* us, we would have no one to become like.

In reality, our Fellowship is a result of change. We must not forget that. We are a Pentecostal fellowship, birthed out of the revival fires visited upon a generation of believers who were hungry for reality and relationship with God. Our founders were not satisfied with church as usual; they wanted to meet God, hear from God, experience God, and reach the world with the good news of His availability and love.

I pray we will continue to be a people who will not be satisfied with church as usual, but that we will be about the Father's

business, ardent in prayer, praise and practice. I pray we will be flexible, teachable and accessible.

But I also pray we will learn the simple principle of *balance*, that we will not simply ride the pendulum from one extreme to another. May we be committed to find the strategy of the Spirit and give ourselves wholeheartedly to the dictates and desires of the Father, rather than the directives and designs of those we are trying to reach.

Change will come, but may it come as the result of prayer and conviction rather than panic or merely an attempt to be contemporary.

Lost souls are at stake. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

# experience...



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