

The Church Doctor® Report

We Help Churches... One Christian at a Time.



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PURPOSE: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information. This information is free to share as long as the source is respected: *The Church Doctor® Report*, www.churchdoctor.org.

GREAT MINISTRY IN A GREAT RECESSION

No one so far is calling it a Great Depression. But it is a Great Recession. It is a “great” recession for several reasons. It is great because it is huge. Most of us have not lived through such an economic downturn at this level. It is also great because it is packed with opportunities for the church to step up and be the church—helping those who are impacted the most, sharing the love of Christ in numerous ways. It is also great in another way. In recent history, Christians have never had a stronger opportunity to share the Gospel.

FOR MOST CHURCHES, FINANCIAL GIVING IS UP!

That’s right—and it’s an historical fact: during an economic downturn, giving goes up. Our random research, conducted by Church Doctor Ministries between October 2008 and January 2009 reflects that when the economy goes down, Christian giving goes up. In 90% of the fifty randomly selected churches we researched, per capita giving is up between 5% to 20% over the year before. Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research surveyed 1,000 protestant pastors in February and found similar results. Giving was up in 88% of the churches with 12% reporting a decline (Audrey Barrick, *ChristianPost.com*, March 31, 2009). This follows an historical pattern that has been demonstrated throughout modern history. In March 2009, Richard F. Jones, minister of the first parish of Bolton, Massachusetts reported that “financial support of the church is as strong—or stronger than it has been at any point in my fourteen years of ministry here.” This reflects the reports from most pastors.

If your church reports that giving is up, here are some characteristics you share with the

MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

- ▶ The *Church Doctor® Report* is provided at no cost. Forward it to those in your network of influence and add value to their lives!
- ▶ Forward it to staff and leaders in your church, denomination, network, or fellowship.

Kent Hunter is an author, consultant, and leader of Church Doctor Ministries (CDM). CDM equips and trains field consultants through a discipling process, a Church Doctor Residency, utilizing on-the-job training through the relationship with a mentor.



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other approximately 90% of the churches, and, are often lacking in the rest, where giving is down:

- Your pastor is a leader who frequently casts a vision (this is where we are going as a church) that most people have heard repeatedly and understand.
- Your church has a fairly large number (over 30%) of regular attendees who are personally involved in mission projects beyond the maintenance and fellowship activities of your own church. They take mission trips to third-world countries, help hurricane victims, serve at the homeless shelter, etc.
- The people of your church regularly receive teaching about biblical basics of giving: (1) we are blessed to be a blessing; (2) joyful giving; (3) generous giving; (4) giving from what God has given you, not to the budget (source-based giving); (5) proportionate giving; (6) first fruits giving; (7) faith promise giving. This teaching has developed a biblical worldview of giving among many in your church.
- Since October 2008 when the stock market first collapsed, the public teaching and preaching has regularly addressed the issues of need, but also what the Christian response should be. The preaching has discussed values and acknowledged the reality that this is a time of faith testing.
- Many of the attendees have re-ordered their values in these lean times and have financially given even more than they did before.
- Some of the fringe members who previously attended once or twice a month are now attending two to three times a month because they have now re-ordered their values. This has increased your financial giving also.
- Some, including those who are not yet believers, have started attending your church. They have been shaken by the economic downturn and are looking for hope. Their offerings, though not large, contribute added income to your church.

RECESSION: HARVEST TIME...OR NOT?

A media frenzy and blog firestorm began with a page 1 article in the *New York Times* on December 14, 2008. Writer Paul Vitello, in his article,

RECESSION MINISTRIES

1. Free Car Repairs—one church in Pasco, Washington operates Elliot's Pit Stop: 25 volunteers that meet every other Saturday to provide repairs for free.
2. Many churches provide financial assistance, on a temporary basis, for rent, utilities, and food bills.
3. Many churches operate food banks.
4. A job fair bulletin board by New Hope Christian Center in Waterloo, Indiana. Anyone can post any job, and those looking for a job can look at the bulletin board. This is for full-time, part-time, or one-time employment. Some churches post this on their Web site.
5. A monthly, free dinner for those who can no longer afford a night out at a restaurant. First Presbyterian Church in Akron, Ohio provides this weekly for those in the neighborhood.
6. Churches develop an unemployment fund to direct financial assistance to those who are out of work on a short-term basis.
7. Churches teach and practice three kinds of financial giving common to the New Testament Church, (1) the tithe, not a legalized rule, but a common expectation that minimum giving is 10% of what God has given you; (2) the offering—anything you give above the 10% as a special act of worship; and (3) alms—reflected today most frequently by a door offering for a special and immediate cause.
8. Pastors who provide sermon messages that focus on hope: Jesus Christ is the only sure and lasting source of hope.
9. Churches that provide worship services that inspire joy and provide comfort.
10. Congregations that provide financial counseling two or three nights a month led by knowledgeable, Christian business people available for one-on-one family counseling.
11. Financial, budgeting "school": classes on how to save, get out of debt, and manage finances.
12. A church hotline that indicates where to get help, to connect people with social services provided by local churches, community, and state government.
13. Plant a garden. St. Mark Lutheran Church in Worth, Illinois has a garden that is tended by church members as a service and the produce is available, free of charge, at the back of the church, for anyone who needs it. Linn Presbyterian Church in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin provides plots of land for do-it-yourself grown gardens.
14. Add a place on your Web site, like the Tennessee Baptist Convention has done, with a new link, www.tnbaptist.org, called Hope for Unsettled Times, providing information and assistance to help people with economic needs.
15. Train members to share with their network of relationships the "hope that is within them," the solid rock, Jesus Christ, and connect them with tangible help for their needs through your church.

“Bad Times Draw Bigger Crowds to Churches” cites evidence from an assistant professor of economics at Texas State University who wrote a paper called “Praying for Recession: The Business Cycle and Protestant Religiosity in the United States” (2007). *ChristianityToday* jumped into the mix with a January 2009 web-only article by Tubin Grant, an associate professor of Political Science at Southern Illinois University. The arguments focus on research methodology that supposedly proves (or fails to provide evidence) that evangelical churches grow during a recession (Tobin Grant “Recession and Religiosity Redux: Do Evangelical Churches See More Members During a Recession?”). In my perception, none of these reflections get it because their point of view is flawed. The fact is that during this recession, some churches will grow, all biblically sound churches can grow, and most churches will not grow because they are not missional in their posture. The key to understanding what your church can do will not come from the world of economics, politics, or sociology. This is a theological and missiological issue that has historical precedent in early New Testament church history. Harvest time...or not? The answer is...yes!

Think of Jesus’ teaching about the harvest. You conduct a harvest when the crop is ripe. Any Sunday school child knows this teaching is not about agriculture, but about reaching people with the Good News about God’s love in Jesus Christ, the impact of the Kingdom of God and people who have become receptive—those who finally have “ears to hear.” Yet many church leaders don’t even watch for the harvest—don’t look much at the fields, don’t often wonder how the fields are changing, or when they are ripe. This recession is a harvest opportunity. To debate whether branches of Christianity will grow or not is the wrong question. The healthy, missional churches will grow at faster rates because they are already equipped and active in the harvest fields. However, the majority of the churches in the U.S. are not in this category and—unless they are reinvented to become more missional—will miss this window of opportunity all together. Make no mistake—the opportunity is there, perhaps at a greater degree than any time in our lives. Why?

DIAGNOSING THE HARVEST

Since the United States, in particular, (and most of the world) is based on capitalistic economics, the risk of materialism is an easy line to cross. It is a fine line, too. You can operate your life as a Christian and accumulate material objects to help you live, work, and relax: a house; car; a boat. The ever-present danger is when the *objects* become your defining component, your idol, your god: what you live for. That is when you put your faith, hope, and base for happiness in the creation (objects) rather than the Creator. Materialism can suddenly become your religion. Since the U.S. (and many other countries) is so “blessed” with wealth, we are exceptionally identified in connection to materialistic objects. When our focus crosses the line, we practice materialism.

In the environment of materialism, an economic free fall like we have experienced since the first

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collapse of the stock market in October 2008, is a force that ripens the harvest. Those who are not yet Christians, and many Buddhists, Muslims, etc., are most likely materialists. By the millions, these are people who have put their hope in their 401Ks, jobs, credit cards, cars, and second homes. Having these blessings is not anti-Christian, but putting your hope in them is a false religion. It is not money that is the root of all evil, but the “love of money.”

A recession like this has shattered the hope of millions of people who are not Christians. Consequently, this is an outreach opportunity. It is harvest time! It is a time when missional churches will preach and teach often about Christ as the solid rock of hope. It is a time when active Christians will hear messages about putting worry aside and letting God displace that worry with the power of Christ—a power that will get you through your economic challenges (Philippians 4:5-7). It is also time when pastors will provide messages about how Christians help other Christians who are economically down and out. The Macedonian Christians—even though they were economically stretched—did not want to miss out on the privilege of helping the other Christians in need (2 Corinthians 8:1-4). And yet, all of this just strengthens the local church. As important as that is, how do we reach the harvest represented by those who are outside the church?

THE GREAT COMMISSION AND THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Those churches that God uses to make the most of this harvest time will have several fundamental characteristics: (1) They will be churches that practice Ephesians 4, demonstrating that leaders lead and the ministry is conducted by the masses—sometimes called the priesthood of all believers. The leaders don’t just do ministry, they equip God’s people for the work of ministry. These churches practiced this before the recession and they will be practicing it after the recession is over. (2) These missional churches have trained their attendees to share their story of faith. They are churches that have long ago abandoned the idea of an evangelism committee. They have empowered a witnessing army—many, if not most, of those who attend worship can tell someone about the

KEY RESOURCES

-  Barrick, Audrey. *Churches Adjust to Challenging Times; Do More Good.* www.christianpost.com
-  Beckworth, David. *Praying for a Recession: The Business Cycle and Protestant Religiosity in the United States.* uweb.txstate.edu/~db52/praying_for_a_recession.pdf.
-  Church Doctor Ministries . Ministry Snapshot Analysis Consultation www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries. Reaching Financial Empowerment Consultation www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries. *Sacrifice and Service: Finding Balance.* Audio Resource. www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries Surviving and Thriving in a Challenging Economy Consultation www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries. *Self-Esteem: What You Do or Who You Are?* Audio Resource. www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries. *Vision: Discovering God's Version of Your Destiny.* Audio Resource. www.churchdoctor.org
-  Church Doctor Ministries. *Your Search For Eternal Significance.* Audio Resource. www.churchdoctor.org
-  Eidlitz, Liz. “Churches Remain Solvent Despite Tough Economy.” *Bolton Common, Bolton, MA.* www.wickedlocal.com/bolton/archive/x67541483/Churches-remain-solvent-despite-tough-economy
-  Financial Peace University. Dave Ramsey. www.daveramsey.com/fpu/home/
-  Good \$ense. Willow Creek Association. www.goodsenseministry.com
-  Grant, Tobin. “Recession and Religiosity Redux.” *Christianity Today.* www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/januaryweb-only/153-51.o.html
-  “How Do We Survive the Recession?” *Christianity Today.* www.christianitytoday.com/le/thepastor/pastorsrole/howdowesurviverecession.html.
-  Trompeter, Kyle. *Local Churches Helping People Through Recession,* KEPR 19, Pasco, WA (www.keprtv.com/news/local/41864987.html)
-  Vitello, “Bad Times Draw Bigger Crowds to Churches.” *The New York Times.* www.nytimes.com

hope that is within them. (3) These churches have long ago abandoned the 1950s fad of running a church like a corporation and have developed a culture in which Christianity is all about relationships: with Jesus, among other Christians, and, among those who are pre-Christians—those who are a part of everyone’s network: friends, relatives, neighbors, people with whom they work and go to school. (4) These churches have developed a culture where people place the highest value on the goal of the Great Commission. They want to grow their church, but they operate not from an empire building perspective. Rather, they operate from the worldview of bringing the Kingdom—as a top priority. (5) These churches have a working vocabulary and a collective consciousness among the attendees—a skill set that allows them to identify that “person of peace.” In other words, they know when someone in their everyday network is showing signs of receptivity. They have been equipped to know when the harvest—a precious person for whom Jesus died—is ripe and ready. They do not share their faith story before, they do not procrastinate until receptivity has passed. With learned sensitivity, they share when the person of peace gives their permission—a receptive platform in the environment of a personal relationship. The harvest is ripe!

Missional churches are Great Commission communities, but it is not all about scouts, butts in the seats, or trophies on the shelf. It is all about people who have needs...and Christians who authentically want to help—because it is the Jesus thing to do. It is, in these churches, the inseparable ministry of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. It is these churches that will grow, will reap a harvest for the Kingdom during this recession. Why? Because there are so many needs—and so many ways a church can help. These are churches that were attentive to the needs of people in their community before the recession. They will be attentive to the needs after the recession. For now, the recession provides great opportunities to meet needs, share the hope of Christ, and to be used by God for a Kingdom harvest.

BOOK REVIEWS



This book is excellent, thorough, interesting, detailed, extremely practical, and useable in any church.

Key issues covered include:

- How to “guesterize” your church.
- The importance of starting new ministries to connect new people.
- The pros and cons of print and media advertising.
- How to go beyond being “friendly” to actually helping people make “friends” with your church members.
- Identifying the friends and family of your members who could be invited to attend your church, and why we don’t invite them.
- Four most effective steps to take for follow up on guests.
- How your church can design a strategy to welcome, connect and involve newcomers so it will grow as a healthy community of faith.

This book explains the best overall, systematic approach to connect new people. McIntosh develops eleven Moments of Truth experienced as the new person becomes connected to your church.

Dr. David Hyatt leads Effective Ministries Coaching and serves as a ministry coach for Church Doctor Ministries.

Church Is a Team Sport is based upon the ministry experience of Jim Putnam and his staff at Real Life Ministries in Post Falls, Idaho. Real Life functions from life lessons that Putnam learned as a championship wrestler and a coach. Jim Putnam applies successful coaching strategies to develop disciples of Jesus Christ, who are equipped to develop others.



Putnam defines winning as “making disciples—converts who are discipled onto God’s team and taught to take part in Christ’s mission.” The church must utilize (practice) strategies that support that game plan (goal) so that the church will naturally win, despite her current context.

The proof is in the reproducible model of Real Life Ministries. They are one of the fastest growing churches in North America. 80% are involved in small groups, and Real Life has already planted several churches.

Pat L. Hartson is a Church Planter with the Northeastern Ohio Association of Helpers, and serves as an associate consultant (in training) with Church Doctor® Ministries.

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