

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.

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THE “EMERGENT” CHURCH: WHAT IS IT?

- “Emergent—I’m not comfortable with the word.”
- “I’ve read about a so-called ‘emergent’ church in a nearby city and, to me, it sounds a lot like a cult.”
- “I’m a 28-year-old pastor of an ‘emergent’ church. I believe God is working in a new way—a way that will revolutionize the missional effectiveness of the church in the 21st century.”
- “As a leader on the decision-making board of my church, I don’t have the time or energy to focus on this new fad of the ‘emerging church.’ Our church is struggling as it is.”

Several years ago, one of the key players and authors of emerging church books was asked what “emergent” was all about. He answered, “Emergent is a conversation.” That was a respectable answer for that stage of the movement—so new, so different, to our experience—that it looks, sounds, and feels fuzzy.

Fast forward to today. It has become clearer now, among those of us who spend our lives praying for “revival.” This article is an attempt to help you see opportunities during a threshold in history where the church stands today. If you agree, you’ll be greatly encouraged, and somewhat challenged.

A CHURCH HISTORIAN HELPS

Kent Hunter leads Church Doctor Ministries, a growing team of church consultants. He is the author of the Sheffield Report. Each June Kent guides pastors and church leaders on the annual emergent experience in northern England—an origin of the emerging world revival of Christianity.



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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.

Phyllis Tickle is an Episcopalian with a good grip on church history. Her book, *The Great Emergence: How the Church is Changing and Why* really helped me put the pieces together. For the last eight years, I have been immersed (no pun intended) in one of the sources of this movement—St. Thomas Church in Sheffield, England. Tickle says (page 121) that if you want to see what the movement will look like in North America in the next 20 years, look at England today. Long before I read Tickle’s 2008 book, I had become an advisor to this movement, originating from an Anglican church. England is one generation more secular than the U.S. It is a “classroom” with a window to America’s future. What is happening in the U.K. is spreading throughout the European continent, Australia, New Zealand, and—though still under the radar screen for most observers—in North America. It is my best estimate that it will be visible to most active church leaders by the year 2019.

Phyllis Tickle documents that the church has experienced a hinge point in history about every 500 years. The last one was the Protestant Reformation and, about 500 years later, here we are! She says that every 500 years the church has a rummage sale, where it casts off cultural baggage that worked before, but has become a hindrance to the Gospel reaching new generations. Every 500 years, the church reinvents itself. It is hard to see history when you are in the middle of it. But, for those who have “ears to hear” and “eyes to see,” and are eager to learn about new wineskins, keep reading.

GOD-EMPOWERED CHANGE?

Phyllis Tickle shows that when the church passes through this hinge point in history, there are three corollary results:

- 1) A new, vital form of Christianity emerges. You have probably heard that most unchurched people are spiritually interested, but consider the church to be irrelevant. This movement results in new methodologies, expressions of music, and uses of technology. You see, you have, perhaps, already put a toe in the river of the emerging church!
- 2) Secondly, the organized, presently dominant expression of Christianity is reconstituted to a more pure and less ossified expression of its former self. In the bigger picture, denominational structures will change into networks. In your church, your congregation’s form of government—the way you make decisions—will move from committees and Boards to a flat organization that resembles a priesthood of all believers equipped to do ministry. You’ll change from top-down decision-making to a team with players who have different gifts.
- 3) Perhaps most important: Tickle says the third result occurs when “the incrustations of an overly established Christianity has been broken open.” This results in the Christian faith being spread—to previous unbelievers, new culture groups, and new geographic areas. There is an exponential (explosion) growth of Christianity. You might call it a revival. Since this is carried primarily by new Christians in their 20s and 30s, the platform is a gen-

PREPARE YOUR CHURCH FOR THE FUTURE REVIVAL

1. Don’t try to transition your church. I know this goes against books like *Transitioning* by Dan Southerland and several denominational programs and ministries. I love and appreciate many of these leaders, but I have seen too many disruptions brought about by superimposing a new culture on your church’s present culture. Read Acts 15—the Apostles already decided it is a bad idea to impose a new culture on another.
2. Don’t disregard the emergent church movement or make generalizations based on some goofy expressions found in a few churches that call themselves “emergent.” An emerging movement always has fringe experiments that come and go. Some of these are likely to fall outside of your definition of orthodox Christianity. That is just part of the young phase of a movement.
3. Read what you can. Remember, the movement is still at an early, immature stage. In the next five-to-seven years, the literature will greatly improve. But don’t wait, if you want your church to be ready.
4. Use an interventionist to help your church. A professional expert can save you from making mistakes that will harm your church for a decade. A consultant can direct you and your church concerning issues you haven’t learned yet—it’s your best investment of the 21st Century (see the sidebar “Emergent Church Consultation Process” on page 3 of this newsletter). I am not saying this because I happen to be a consultant, I say this because it happens to be reality.
5. Remember that a movement, like Christianity, and this new expression of the movement—is more caught than taught. Get exposed to the movement. (1) Visit some “emergent” churches (remembering that some of them are experiments that won’t last another ten years. (2) Attend conferences about the emergent church—rub shoulders with those who have been living it longer than you have. (3) Apply to be a part of Church Doctor Ministries annual emergence exposure in Sheffield, England for next June.

eration with the DNA of technology, a world-wide group of people who are part of an increasingly global network. This is a platform for world-wide revival of the Christian faith that may be unprecedented in history.

Is Your Church Ready?

One of your top priorities ought to be preparing your church for the coming revival (renewal, emerging movement, revitalization of the faith, hinge point in history—call it whatever you want). As a measurement of readiness for new wineskins, on a scale of 1 to 10, most churches are at a -3. This is not to discourage you, but to be honest: there are things we must undo, things we must unlearn, even before we get to square one. But, you can be encouraged—this has happened before and, I promise, God will get this done. Consider the Protestant Reformation. It worked! It even had impact on reform of the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the key elements for this level of change is to think way beyond the program mentality. This approach must respect the corporate culture that already exists in your church. This includes helping people recapture some biblical world-views (see my book, *Discover Your Windows: Lining Up with God's Vision*).

Here are some potential approach ideas:

- 1) Whatever you call this, it is a movement, not a program. Implications? Programs are measured in weeks and months while movements are measured in years, and decades. The way you and those in your church *think* about it is a priority—before you *do* anything.
- 2) Movements are caught more than taught. This would explain at least one reason Jesus didn't start an institution of higher learning. Instead, he modeled, demonstrated, developed, disciplined.
- 3) This implies, that if you are a leader, you must overcome your bias to start big. It means you are to gather a few—very few—people who seem to “get it” or who are very open. You gather them and mentor them—for a long time. You build a culture among them.
- 4) You will have to discipline yourself away from your inherent academic bias. You want to provide a class—or preach a sermon. However, in a movement, you want to pour your life in a few through one-on-one relationships. A new wineskin is caught—not like a ball; like the flu—through personal contact.
- 5) You will rearrange your propensity to get ministry done. You will spend more time and energy in building the corporate culture among the people of your church. You will foster an ethos—values that reinvent selfish Christians who want to continue life in the church as they know it and like it. You will gently coach them to be motivated to reach lost people at a level that subordinates their own comfort and preferences.
- 6) You will operate out of a worldview that understands that only some of the people in your church will respond. You will look for these signs of receptivity. You will focus on them, while showing love and respect to the rest.

CONSULTATION SERVICE

EMERGENT CHURCH CONSULTATION PROCESS

A 20-month process to prepare your congregation for the inevitable arrival of the world-wide revival. A consultant works with your church to develop a plan unique to your congregation, engineering a gentle plan of increased missional renewal. A coach partners with your consultant to help you progress, through monthly phone calls by appointment. An analytical partner will help you measure and celebrate progress. This is not the popular “transition” model that causes so much turmoil in churches. This approach honors the “movement” dimension of a revival and is sensitive to the unique culture of your church. Rather than the transition model, this approach focuses on extension and organic strategies that do not disrupt present church members or ministries.

CHURCH DOCTOR[®] MINISTRIES

JUNE 2010 EMERGENT EMERSION EXPERIENCE

In June 2010, Church Doctor Ministries will lead a group of pastors and church leaders to the church that, for twenty-five years, has been the source of a spreading world revival. A movement is more caught than taught. This trip may be eligible for advanced degree credit at some seminaries, Bible colleges, or Christian universities.

Limit: 20 pastors and church leaders.

For an application form:
e-mail jasonatkinson@churchdoctor.org

TANGIBLE REDIRECTIONS OF THE EMERGENT MOVEMENT

Here are some basic changes that will refresh the church in this coming revival:

- 1) In outreach to people who are not yet believers, the authority rests, not in the Bible, but in personal experiences of authentic Christians. For second and third generation secular people, the meaningful point of interest is when Christians share eye-witness reports of what God is doing in their lives. Unchurched people have no history with the authority of The Book. They will, in their journey, come to know the authority of the Word of God. It is just not the entry point. Billy Graham was very effective saying, "The Bible says...." Secularization has changed that as an evangelistic approach.
- 2) The focus will shift from a "you all come" approach to a "go where people are" strategy. Most churches encourage members to bring a friend to worship. A stronger emphasis will include training members to share their faith where they work, live, play, and interact in their networks.
- 3) The focus will move away from the church building. The emphasis for mission and ministry will shift from the institution to relationships.
- 4) The recruitment of workers will move from organizational volunteerism to personal and relational discipling.
- 5) Pastors and church leaders will focus most of their time on developing leaders who develop others, and away from getting ministry activities accomplished.
- 6) The way churches make decisions will change from high control/low accountability to low control/high accountability. Presently, most churches have a political system that approves or denies ministry (high control). Yet in the culture of the congregation, very little personal accountability is practiced. This will be reversed.
- 7) Church staff will move from "doing" ministry to "equipping" for ministry. This will be done through on-the-job training. Future staff, including pastors, will train at their own church, using institutions only for supplemental educational support, as they choose it.
- 8) The church office will relocate from the church building ("corporate central") to Starbucks (in the marketplace).

KEY RESOURCES

-  Anderson, Ray. *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*. Downers Grove, IL :InterVarsity Press, 2006
-  Church Doctor Ministries. *Emergent Church Consultation Process*
-  Cole, Neil. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
-  DeYoung, Kevin, and Ted Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008.
-  Emergent Village. <http://www.emergentvillage.com/>
-  Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.
-  Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan Bolger. *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity Press, 2005.
-  Hunter, Kent R. *The Sheffield Report*. Corunna, Indiana: Church Doctor Ministries, 2007.
-  Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
-  Oakland, Roger. *Faith Undone: The Emerging church - A New Reformation or an End-Time Deception*. Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007.
-  Pagitt, Doug and Tony Jones. *Emergent Manifesto of Hope, An* Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2008.
-  Sweet, Leonard; Andy Crouch; Brian D. McLaren; Erwin McManus; and Michael Horton. *Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
-  Tickle, Phyllis. *Great Emergence, The: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker-Books, 2008.
-  Whitesel, Bob. *Inside the Organic Church: Learning from 12 Emerging Congregations*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.

- 9) Pastoral care ministries will become body life ministries. Christians will be equipped to care for spiritual needs as the expectations among the members diminish that the pastor does it all.
- 10) The primary entry point to church will move from invitations to attend church worship to mid-sized fellowship groups (clusters) that are organized as missions and formed around established relationships. Members of a church will seek out a mid-sized group that is targeting a certain group (like young families, homeless people, etc.). The groups they join will reflect their passion for reaching that target audience. They will reach out by cultivating networks where relationships are established.
- 11) Worship will not be confined to one special place (a sanctuary). Mid-sized groups will worship in numerous public venues: homes, bars, rented school rooms, parks, restaurants, etc. On any given day of worship, perhaps only 20% of the whole congregation will worship at the central sanctuary. Most people will worship there about once or twice a month.
- 12) Outreach will be redeveloped: from an evangelism committee or team to the DNA of every believer seeking the “person of peace” in their five networks of primary relationships: friends, relatives, neighbors, coworkers, or people with whom they go to school.

MOST IMPORTANT: CHOOSE YOUR STRATEGY CAREFULLY!

When God is working a revival movement, where does your church start, and what does it do? Since most pastors and church leaders are not trained on how to introduce a new wineskin, the wisest thing to do is to partner the help of an expert. It is no different than fixing the air conditioning unit or the furnace at your church. You should know when it is smarter, healthier, more productive, and—in the long run—less expensive to invest in expert help.

There are three basic strategies. From my extensive study and observation, the first is very costly and dangerous. The second is much safer and more productive. The third is ideal, but can only take place after the movement is well established.

- 1) The Transition Model. This is the most popular model practiced during the last decade. “Transitioning your church to a missional church” is normally the way it is presented. In the process, you teach and preach change to the typical maintenance-oriented church in order to turn them into a mission-directed congregation.

The challenge with this model is that, if you understand revival as a new wineskin, it represents more than programs, resources, decisions, and strategies. It is a culture that rearranges priorities. Superimposing one culture on another is a volatile approach. People rebel. Tensions mount. Pastors lose their jobs. Members leave the church. It *can* be accomplished. In fact, some church leaders and some authors of books spend time teaching about how you can show stubborn members the door. “Go find a church that suits you,” they say. The challenge to this is that that young Christians (regardless of their ages) and the weak in faith don’t always find another church. They spend the rest of their lives mourning the church that rejected them, the God that didn’t want them. Sure, it’s a misinterpretation, but it is the way they feel. The question you have to ask about the transitioning model is this: do you, as a leader, have the right to risk the eternal salvation of Christians, even though they may have no missional value at this point in their lives?

- 2) The Extension Strategy. In this model, you begin to offer unique opportunities among the members of your church. These begin as information-only sessions. You cast the vision of another way of doing church, out of the concern for those who the church is presently not reaching. You identify to whom God has already given the vision and the entrepreneurial spirit to extend your church in a ministry beyond the present life of your church. This is not a church plant, but a second campus, a second ministry.

Think of it this way: remember the so-called “worship wars” of the 1990s? Established churches increasingly saw an opportunity to reach new people through contemporary worship styles. Some churches abruptly changed from traditional to contemporary worship. Others blended the styles and upset everyone. People left the church and, in some cases, the pastors were worn out with stress or moved out by vote. That is the transitional strategy.

Other churches, during the 1990s decided to add a second worship service and some of them did so in a different venue on the same campus. Others provided a second worship service off campus. Those leaders who communicated well and processed respectfully kept the present members and reached new ones. This is the extension model approach.

We have coached several church leaders and churches through extension emergent church efforts. With the tacit approval of the majority of the congregation, a small group of emergent thinking members started new work, doing ministry in a very different way. The casualties? Almost no one. As long as life is not disrupted for the original group, they willingly “tolerate”—even financially support—the new “mission effort.” In time, even more of the members catch the vision and become part of the new work. This model, at this time in history is the best approach for most churches that want to prepare for the coming revival. This is the best way to step into the emergent church movement, at this time.

- 3) The Organic Approach. When this approach is possible, the Kingdom of God grows at lightspeed. Neil Cole, in this book, *Organic Church* tells of a movement that is spontaneously regenerating new units of believers in North America and in several other countries. The Organic Model, the way I use the term, is when people of the emergent culture form another emergent church. These are people who already “get it.” They become the core, critical mass. Anyone who is exposed to the ministry—even if they are a Christian from an old wineskin—is overwhelmed (in the good sense) and incorporated into the new missional culture of the organic church. This is the easiest and fastest way the Kingdom grows. In my perception, it will be seven to ten years before this is a noticeable approach in the U.S. and most of it will come from extension ministries who have the emergent DNA and have contextualized this form of ministry to effectively reach new target groups.

My son, Jonathan, has studied for a year at St. Thomas Church in Sheffield, England. Soon, he will return as a staff member, planting a church among university students in Sheffield. He will take thirty students who have been attending St. Thomas during this past year. They have the imprint of the “Sheffield DNA.” They will meet in the Varsity Bar—across the street from the university. As students are reached on the campus by this core group, and brought to worship at the Varsity Bar, they will enter an organic church.

FOUR CHOICES

Every pastor and church leader has four choices: (1) Ignore the emergent church, the coming revival, and watch your church maintain, until the last person dies; (2) transition your church and hang on for a wild ride, with a lot of casualties; (3) extend your church, providing another wineskin to reach post-modern, secular people, as part of this coming revival movement; or (4) if you are blessed to have a congregation that is organically unified for mission, divide it and multiply—and watch the Kingdom expand with explosive growth.

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