

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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PROJECT CHRISTMAS: OVERCOMING YOUR INNER CONSUMER

“What if instead of holding another Christmas Eve Service, we went into the community and did some Christmas Eve service? Instead of one more time to gather, what would happen if we went out into the community and served others?”

These are questions recently posed by a pastor friend. He has grown weary of Christmas expectations. He wants to go into the world and make a difference. But he’s expected to carry out the traditional “feel-good” Christmas activities, sermons, songs, and Scriptures. The Christmas/Advent Season has great potential for outreach. Unfortunately, outreach is detoured by a roadblock within the church—a worldview - a subconscious mindset by which we filter our choices and actions.

THE ROADBLOCK OF CONSUMERISM

Christmas has become a commercialized mess. Instead of coming “upon a midnight clear,” most believe that it came upon a credit card! However, commercialism is not the problem; it’s a symptom. The root cause is an underlying worldview of consumerism. Consumerism is alive and well in the church today and like it or not, it is more prevalent at Christmas than any other time of the year.

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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.

Christmas Expectations

The core of consumerism is the notion of expecting to get something. During Christmas there is a heightened sense of expectancy. Many people are looking for their “tidings of comfort and joy,” and they expect the church to deliver!

It's not so much the comfort and joy, as the source of comfort and joy. Is it the children's program? The sanctuary decorations? Church parties? Singing favorite Christmas carols? Hearing the traditional anthology of Luke Chapter 2? Comfort and joy are expected outcomes. Annual church traditions are the expected delivery system. Underneath it's often driven by the worldview of consumerism.

A Deeper Perspective

To breakdown the roadblock of consumerism, peel back the layers. What do we celebrate at Christmas? Jesus' birth, right? Not exactly. That's only part of the celebration. When we celebrate the arrival of Christ only, where is the missional context of His birth? Before Christ was *born*, he was *sent*! Two connected, yet vastly different events. The ramifications are huge! In this intersection the worldview of consumerism and missional velocity collide.

Enjoy the birthday party of our Savior—that's easy. Putting mission into action is not. Participating in annual church Christmas traditions feels good with little investment. Being missional requires sacrifice. It requires the subordination of our comfort to the mission of God: the polar opposite of consumerism. Philippians 2: 5-8 puts it all into perspective:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!

CHRISTMAS CONSUMERISM CONFLICT

Here's what Christmas consumerism looks like in the church:

Pastor Bob shared an e-mail sent by a member: “Pastor, you ruined my Christmas. You didn't read the Christmas story from Luke Chapter 2 at the Christmas Eve Service.” (He had read John 3:16 instead.)

Pastor Dennis heard from his board: “Pastor, you are focusing too much on people outside the church. Our church members don't want the burden of inviting unchurched people to the special Christmas activities; they just want church to be a place where they can escape the chaos of the holiday season.”

PROJECT CHRISTMAS DO'S AND DON'TS

1. Don't allow special programs, traditions, or services to be the source of your comfort and joy.
2. Don't place your holiday happiness on the shoulders of your pastor.
3. Don't hold outreach hostage in an effort to preserve the annual church Christmas activities.
4. Do view Christmas through the lens of Easter.
5. Do read and study Philippians 2: 5-9.
6. Do consider all Christ gave up in heaven to come to earth.
7. Do celebrate Christ being sent.
8. Do put “sentness” into action.
9. Do spend more time intentionally serving others.
10. Do practice some service on Christmas Eve.

When the mission of reaching people far from God becomes subordinated to the mission of keeping the annual Christmas traditions alive, consumerism is the problem.

OVERCOMING YOUR INNER CONSUMER

Without Easter, Christmas is just another birthday. When you factor in Jesus' death and resurrection, you celebrate *why* He was born. This ties back to Christ being sent. It changes our missional focus. Call the Christmas messages "*Happy Easter*." Preach Christmas through the lens of Easter and watch what happens.

Put "Sentness" Into Practice:

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus refers to himself as being sent.

"Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives the Father who **sent me**." (Matthew 10:40)

Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has **sent me** to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come. (Luke 4:18-19)

"My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who **sent me**, and from finishing his work. (John 4:34)

"Sentness" must be put into action. Remember my pastor friend at the beginning of this article? His church provides multiple Christmas Eve services. His plan is to continue the Christmas Eve service. However, in lieu of other the services, members are also encouraged to allow God to send them into the community to serve others.

By keeping the Christmas Eve services, and practicing service to the community, they achieve balance between proclaiming Christ's birth, and join Jesus in being sent. I can't wait to sit down with my friend after Christmas to hear how it went. I anticipate it will be an exciting time.

Redesign Church Christmas Traditions:

Most Christmas activities and traditions are fun. There is no reason most, if not all, can't continue. The key is to turn them into outreach engines for your church.

Does your church have an annual women's craft class or cookie exchange? Instead of hosting it at the church, try it in a park or at a mall. Or offer it at the local retirement home, making it open

CONSULTATION SERVICE

EMERGENT CHURCH CONSULTATION PROCESS

The world has drastically changed. Every 500 years, the Christian Movement has a rummage sale, offloading a large amount of cultural baggage. It is transformed dramatically and a great expansion of Christianity results. The last time this occurred was the Protestant Reformation. Five hundred years later is now!

Secular, postmodern, young adults are not attracted by the church of the 20th Century. New wine requires new wineskins. Most approaches to change the church today "blow up" the local church. This process focuses on change by the extension model.

Pastors and church leaders are the gatekeepers of their churches. You have about 3 years to prepare your church for the coming revival influenced by the Emergent Church Movement. You cannot do this alone. This process gently prepares your congregation for the coming revival. You don't want to miss it!

For information, talk, without obligation, to one of our consultants. (800-626-8515)

CHURCH DOCTOR[®] MINISTRIES
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JUNE 2010 EMERGENT EMERSION EXPERIENCE

June 3-10, 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

to the residents and their families. Utilize community buildings, apartment complex club houses, etc. Take the Christmas event to those outside the church.

For your children's Christmas program or adult choir special, send invitations to the community. Invite children and adults outside the church to participate in the programs. If your church has a preschool, or elementary school, invite every student family to participate!

Make the Traditional Christmas Texts Messages that Connect.

If you are a liturgical church, you may be locked into preaching an Advent series. Turn the theology of Advent into missional messages that connect. Help your congregation practice "sentness" by challenging them to bring unchurched friends with them to Advent services. (Not invite, but bring them). Preach with the mindset that there will be unchurched people in church and focus your delivery on reaching them. Connect the Advent texts with the daily lives, challenges, and struggles people face.

- Traveling to a place you would rather not be.
- Fighting large crowds of people.
- Standing in long lines.
- Spending money you don't have.
- Christ brought joy into chaos on the first Christmas.
- Christ brings joy into your chaos today.

WHAT IF

What if you celebrated the "sentness" of Christ this Christmas Season? What if you subordinated consumer comfort and put "sentness"

into practice? What if you practiced being sent all year, not just at Christmas? What would happen to your spiritual health? What would happen in your church? What would happen in your community?

Merry Christmas!

KEY RESOURCES

-  Church Doctor Ministries. Emergent Church Consultation Process.
-  Hanby-Robie, Sharon. *A Simple Christmas: A Faith-filled Guide to a Meaningful And Stress-free Christmas*. Harlan, IA: GuidepostBooks, 2006.
-  Huffman, Margaret Anne. *Advent: Worship and Activities for Families*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.
-  Hunter, Kent R. *Catalytic Efforts to Transform Churches Into Missions*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2001.
-  Hunter, Kent R. *Courageous Churches*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2001.
-  Hunter, Kent R. *Discover Your Windows: Lining up With God's Vision*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.
-  Hunter, Kent R., *Jesus Enterprise, The: Engaging Culture to Reach the Unchurched*. Nashville, TN: 2004.
-  Hunter, Kent R., *Your Church Has Doors: How to Open the Front and Close the Back*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 1982.
-  Matthew 10:40, Luke 4:18-19, John 4:34 (The New Living Translation)
-  Philippians 2: 5-8 (The New International Version)

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