

**2023 SPECIAL ISSUE #3**

**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.**

(To sign up: email [johnwargowsky@churchdoctor.org](mailto:johnwargowsky@churchdoctor.org))

## **The Mission of Church Doctor Ministries**

A good part of my professional life has been dedicated to helping local churches become more effective in reaching lost people. Call it “church growth,” “the Great Commission,” or simply “effective outreach”—the focus has always remained the same. This is my calling. It started when I became a pastor of an inner-city church on the east side of Detroit. It was my first ministry assignment.

The “backstory” is that I wasn’t much of a Christian in my early years—no fault of my parents, church, or pastor. I just wasn’t interested in “religion.” I got the call to ministry in my senior year of high school. (1) My parents were shocked; (2) my friends couldn’t believe it; and (3) my pastor called it a “miracle.” In reflection, my backward journey had a benefit. I personally knew what it was like to ignore Jesus and consider church “boring.” From that journey, I learned to appreciate faith from the perspective of a semi-churched person.

It should be no surprise that, once I got “the call,” I expected mission training in college. Instead, I got loaded down with Greek, German, sociology, chemistry, and

Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries, now led by Dr. Tracee J. Swank.



Kent’s calling is to help Christians and congregations become more effective in reaching those who do not yet believe in Jesus. He believes that every Christian can be equipped to be a “missionary” to those in their social network who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

[www.churchdoctor.org](http://www.churchdoctor.org)

Email Kent: [kenthunter@churchdoctor.org](mailto:kenthunter@churchdoctor.org)

Hebrew. It felt like a “test” to see if I was serious: that I would do whatever it takes. After four years, I moved on to seminary. I couldn't survive without doing some outreach. So, I founded an extracurricular movement called Christ for Youth Today. It was a volunteer effort to reach young people for Jesus. Several of my fellow students joined the movement.

In three years of seminary, I learned how to lead traditional, liturgical worship, church history, more sociology, psychology, and church administration—but nothing about effective outreach. I incorporated Christ for Youth Today as a nonprofit in that state—where the seminary was located—and several outreach-interested seminary students joined me in that movement as well.

My year of internship was in Florida. I got a lot of “hands-on experience,” yet no training in effective outreach. When seminary graduation occurred, most of my fellow students went on to ministry in churches. I applied for graduate school. It wasn't that I was driven to get a PhD. It was because I really believed that I would finally get training in outreach. The further education was great, but I still didn't receive much training in what is called “mission” or “missiology.”

I exhausted all the seminary could offer, so I had no choice. I became eligible to be placed in a church. My first assignment was to be the pastor of an inner-city church in Detroit. The church had the largest Sunday school and Vacation Bible School in the denomination of 6,000 congregations—25 years *before* I arrived (back when I was about 2 years old). However, when I arrived, the neighborhood had racially changed from mostly white to predominantly African American.

In the previous 10 years, the membership had declined by 67 percent. The majority of those who attended worship were senior citizens. Those in membership and attendance were 100% Anglo. Unchurched African American families lived all around the church. I had never lived in a racially mixed area in my life.

After a year of unsuccessful outreach to our neighbors, I became frustrated and discouraged. I refused to believe that our church could not effectively reach many of the unchurched African Americans all around us. I called the state office of our denomination and asked to speak with the “mission executive,” humbly explaining that I didn't know how to effectively reach our unchurched neighbors. I was told, “We don't know how to do that effectively. We have already closed several churches like yours in the Detroit area.”

I asked, “Tell me about any church—of any denomination—that is doing effective cross-cultural ministry.” I was told, “We don't talk to them.”

I refused to believe that our church couldn't reach out cross-culturally. So, I called the mission department of the denomination. The response was the same: “We aren't good at that. I don't know of a church that does that well—not anywhere in the country.” I asked about churches in other denominations: “Are we learning from any of them?” I got the same answer: “We really don't associate with them.”

## Lessons to Learn

There is a lesson in this true story, and it likely applies—to some degree—to you and your church. Sometimes God allows us to go through hardships and discouragement to prepare us to learn something new. Think about that as I continue the rest of my journey.

I have to admit, I was depressed and discouraged. Yet, I refused to believe that God didn't want everyone to know Jesus and receive eternal life. However, I didn't know what to do next. How can a guy with four years of college, three years of seminary, one year of internship, and three years of graduate school—with a PhD in theology—be ignorant about how to effectively reach those who are unbelievers—people who need Jesus?

One day, I got a postcard in the mail. It was sent to pastors all over America. A seminary in California had hired a whole staff of career missionaries to train American pastors in the discipline of *missiology*. It was a three-year process, two weeks at a time, three times each year. Numerous books were assigned for reading before each two-week session. After each session, I had to write a paper about what I had learned and how I would apply it in my church.

I asked my wife if I could do it. Her response? “Are you going to go to school the rest of your life?” My response: “I'll go once. If it's not helpful, I won't go back.” My church council recognized the desperate condition of our declining congregation. They allowed me to go, but I'd have to pay for the tuition, travel, lodging, and books by myself. I told them, “I'll try the first two weeks and let you know. But if I learn how God can turn this church around, I'm going to teach you—and others in our church—to help.”

Fast-forward, and our church grew with both white and black families who were previously unchurched. Many of our people learned mission principles. The denomination took notice. Pastors and church leaders around the country wanted to know how they could more effectively reach people—of all kinds and backgrounds—for Jesus Christ and grow their churches.

Today, that church in Detroit is a vibrant, healthy African American church. I know—I visited for worship. I was the only white guy in a packed-out sanctuary. The pastor asked me if I would like to address the congregation. With tears in my eyes, I told them that words could not express my joy and praise to God for such a vibrant, dynamic church. And I told them, “As I approached the church before the service, there were three men and three women who were greeters outside the door. Every one of them hugged me and welcomed me—the only white guy among 350 worshippers!” (Later, I wondered if a black person visiting an all-white church would get hugs at the door!)

## Church Doctor Ministries

I went on to launch Church Doctor Ministries, and the rest is history. We have helped hundreds of churches from 78 denominations, networks, and independent congregations

in the US alone. We have trained pastors all over the world. We have provided 35 published books that help pastors and church leaders. Under the leadership of our next-generation leader, Dr. Tracee Swank, the ministry continues to be used by God to help churches. Even though Church Doctor Ministries is a nonprofit ministry, the help we provide churches is not free. Yet, it is a process that God blesses. It works for congregations that are really serious about effectively reaching lost people for Jesus Christ.

## **What I've Learned/What You Should Know**

Somewhere along the journey of church history in North America (and elsewhere), we have been subtly led to believe that we live in a “Christian nation.” Many institutions train pastors and leaders in how to *maintain* or *administrate* churches. They learn good theology, church administration, and how to *manage* a church.

But they don't learn *missiology*. Church Doctor Ministries is not a graduate course in missions. As the “Church Doctor” name implies, we use skills similar to those of medical doctors, who are trained to treat the physical body. For each body of Christ, each local church, we perform diagnosis, prognosis, and prescription. We make recommendations.

In recent years, we have developed online training for church staff, leaders, and members of your congregation. We teach the basics of missiology: how to reach and effectively make disciples of those who are not yet followers of Jesus.

Most churches are great at maintenance. Yet, they are declining and aging—the median age is rising. If that is your church, you need to act now. You'll never get everyone trained in mission principles. It's all right to start with a few. Outreach is not simply a program. It's a movement. Jesus started with 12.

We continue to develop resources that uniquely equip those who “get the mission” dimension of every church. Some are online, and others are provided in published books. Our website reflects all the services and resources offered by Church Doctor Ministries.

In the area of books, we are excited about the upcoming release of three books. One with the title of *A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time* is a completely revised edition of an earlier book that speaks to the dramatic need for civilized respect—a key element for society to survive.

Another essential resource—soon to be released—has the title *Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making*. Think about it: Jesus never took a vote. God used the Apostle Paul to start numerous healthy congregations without the politics of boards and Robert's Rules of Order. We've helped numerous congregations adapt to a biblical form of decision-making. They are liberated for effective ministry.

A third upcoming release is the book *The Amazing Power of God Stories: Share What God Has Done in Your Life*. While most Christians are petrified by the thought of *evangelism*, this approach has proven to be effective and simplified. Every believer can learn to share their “God stories.” We are excited that this relatively simple process works

to launch an outreach movement for Christians. You will learn to share what God has done in your life as you engage those in your social network who are not yet active followers of Jesus.

## **Privilege**

It is an exciting, fulfilling privilege to be a nonprofit ministry that empowers Christians and whole churches to grow spiritually. It empowers God's people to increase productive outreach and expand the Kingdom of God. We are grateful for our prayer and support partners. Our nation and our world need Jesus! One thing should be clear: Our nation and world are in desperate need of spiritual renewal. We are grateful to be a small part of God's solution for life and eternity.