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# Evangelicals

Magazine | Fall 2021 | Vol.7, No.2



## RECALIBRATING CHURCHES AND LEADERSHIP

Next Steps for Lasting Renewal

THOM RAINER



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*John 13:35*

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# Evangelicals

The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals

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### Calendar

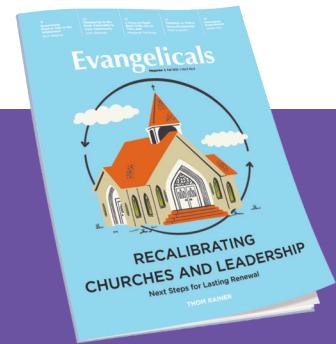
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### Vaccination Clinics Open Doors for Connection and Service

First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Calvario City Church and Northland Church are just a few of the evangelical churches that hosted COVID vaccination sites for their communities.



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**Evangelicals** Fall 2021 | Vol. 7 No. 2

Published three times a year by the National Association of Evangelicals for the benefit of its members, donors and friends.

For address changes, please send an email to [Magazine@NAE.org](mailto:Magazine@NAE.org) or call 202.479.0815.

The National Association of Evangelicals  
PO Box 23269, Washington, DC 20026

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With Support From **Brotherhood Mutual** and **Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**

The printed version of Evangelicals magazine Vol. 7 No. 1, page 19 incorrectly states "According to Pew Research Center, in the United States, 3 percent of 30-49 year-olds hold to some of these beliefs..." The correct stat is "43 percent of 30-49 year-olds."

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Influence for  
*Good.*



A recent Religion News Service headline read, “For Some Pastors, the Past Year Was a Sign From God It Was Time to Quit.” While we don’t yet know how many pastors or church staff have left (or will leave) the ministry due to the pressures of COVID-19 or political and social conflict, it is likely that there will be uptick. Earlier this year, the Barna Group found that 29 percent of the Protestant pastors they surveyed had given “real, serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year.”

Some may stay in ministry but decide to serve another church or organization where conflict will not be as directed at them. Other pastors may transition to bivocational ministry due to changes in church expectations, giving and priorities. Still, the vast majority of church leaders will continue in their current roles. Many will have a deeper understanding of the fissures in their community and a renewed commitment to move forward. In the cover article, Thom Rainer explores these recalibrations in church leadership (p. 14).

This season also reveals unique opportunities for reinvigorated leadership and church growth. Teams at churches and organizations have grown in their receptivity to change, and now may be the time to capitalize on this openness to reprioritize mission or start new initiatives. As

Rainer points out, churches will also quickly learn that they need to focus on evangelism for the long-term health of their churches.

Whether you are a pastor or another type of leader, this year has been full of challenges and decisions. Rich Stearns, past president of World Vision U.S., encourages leaders to take time to consider what God has taught them during this season to propel them in the next season of leadership (p. 18). And Margaret Feinberg focuses on practical ways leaders can choose joy, even as they embrace mourning (p. 23).

This is a defining moment in history and in the Church. It requires a kind of leadership that is wise, courageous, open to recalibration, and firmly rooted in the cause of Jesus Christ. With you, we long to see the next extraordinary evangelistic harvest. This could be just the moment. **E**



## Responding to the Border Crisis

**“** There is no solitary narrative, no single story, to capture all of these viewpoints and experiences. The border is only part of their stories — it is not the complete picture. As my friend Sami DiPasquale, founder and executive director of Abara Borderland Connections in El Paso, argued, ‘The crisis does not begin or end at the border.’ For most people, it began somewhere far away, and it will end in another location at some point which they hope and pray — like all of us do for our families — will be safe and will provide opportunities to thrive.”

**Eric Constanzo, lead pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church, in Newsweek**

**“** What you’re seeing is a border that reflects a broken system, and there need to be changes. There need to be changes in work visas, so people don’t have to sneak in to do work that needs to be done in America; there need to be changes in the asylum system to be able to adjudicate cases quickly. And what people have got to understand is that a broken system makes it harder to enforce the border. A reformed system will make it easier to enforce the border, and so that is what has to happen.”

**Former President George W. Bush in a FOX News article**

**“** Faith-based refugee resettlement and foster groups like World Relief and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have worked with the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement to provide short-term relief for the children who have crossed the border. However, there is much left to be done as shelters close when children find placement through a sponsor in the U.S. or are moved into long-term foster care.”

**Christine Sequenzia Titus, NAE policy director, and Brenda Kirk, National Immigration Forum mobilizer, in the Austin American-Statesman**

## Applying Faith to Foster Care

**“** We are delighted that faith-based agencies will be able to continue serving our nation’s most vulnerable children in a way that honors the faith convictions that motivate their efforts. We need an all-hands-on-deck response to the foster care crisis, not government mandates that eliminate an important segment of the population based on their religious beliefs.”

**Walter Kim, NAE president, in a Washington Times article about the Supreme Court’s decision in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia***



## Ideology Identity Over Faith

“ Every year another survey finds that fewer Americans are going to church for answers about the meaning of life. But sleeping in on Sundays doesn't satisfy those old spiritual cravings: a hunger for a sense of control over their destinies and reassurance that they're on the side of good against evil. ‘The aspiration to fullness can be met by building something into one's life, some pattern of higher action or some meaning, or it can be met by connecting one's life up with some greater reality or story,’ the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor wrote in ‘Sources of the Self.’ ‘It would be a mistake to think that this kind of formulation has disappeared even for unbelievers in our world.’”

**Molly Worthen, associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in The New York Times**



“ New fractures are forming within the American evangelical movement, fractures that do not run along the usual regional, denominational, ethnic, or political lines. Couples, families, friends, and congregations once united in their commitment to Christ are now dividing over seemingly irreconcilable views of the world. In fact, they are not merely dividing but becoming incomprehensible to one another.”

**Timothy Dalrymple, president of Christianity Today, in his article, “The Splintering of the Evangelical Soul”**

“ The reality is that while many in the evangelical movement thought their bonds were primarily (or exclusively) theological or missional, many of those bonds were actually political, cultural and socioeconomic. These political, cultural and socioeconomic differences have always been there beneath the water line but what has occurred over the last 5-10 years has been the extent to which those values are expressed has been exposed. With the expression louder and the exposing more visible, these divergent values have rapidly created substantive wedges between various subgroups.”

**Michael Graham, executive pastor at Orlando Grace Church, at MereOrthodoxy.com**

“I had a great time talking with National Association of Evangelicals President Walter Kim. He and I first talked more than a decade ago, when I was thinking through how I might best serve the Lord going forward. I've always appreciated his leadership!”

**Rebecca McLaughlin @RebeccaMcLaugh**



“We @OUAdvocacy are thankful to the leaders of other faiths who stood to #ActAgainstAntisemitism including @CardinalDolan, @NAEvangelicals Walter Kim, @ChrisHarrisSr, Imam @aantepli and others.”

**Nathan Diament @NDiamant**

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# EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

OCTOBER 13, 2021

## Washington Briefing

**Washington, DC**

National Association of Evangelicals  
[NAE.org/washingtonbriefing](https://NAE.org/washingtonbriefing)

Top-level evangelical leaders gather in the nation's capital to interact directly with leaders in government, think tanks and advocacy organizations.



OCTOBER 19-21, 2021

## Digital Media Con

**Virtual**

Evangelical Press Association, National Religious Broadcasters & National Association of Evangelicals

[DigitalMediaCon.com](https://DigitalMediaCon.com)

The Digital Media Con is a three-day online conference focusing exclusively on digital media and marketing for Christian communicators.

OCTOBER 19-20, 2021

## Amplify Outreach

**Wheaton, IL**

Wheaton College  
[AmplifyOutreach.com](https://AmplifyOutreach.com)

Amplify Outreach gathers innovative pastors, world-class scholars and network leaders from throughout the country to deliver fresh content and interactive breakouts to help people discover authentic faith in Christ.



DECEMBER 1-2, 2021

## Denominational Executives Retreat

**Atlanta, GA**

National Association of Evangelicals  
[NAE.org](https://NAE.org)

NAE denominational executives will spend time together — learning from and encouraging one another in their unique positions of ministry.

JANUARY 24-28, 2022

## Christian Student Leadership Conference

**Washington, DC**

National Association of Evangelicals  
[NAE.org/cslc](https://NAE.org/cslc)

The Christian Student Leadership Conference is a place where college students who care deeply about today's pressing issues come to learn how to faithfully and effectively offer a Christian witness in public policy.

DECEMBER 10, 2021

## Beeson Divinity School Commencement

**Birmingham, AL**

Samford University  
[beesondivinity.com](https://beesondivinity.com)

NAE President Walter Kim will be the commencement speaker for Beeson's graduating class.



FEBRUARY 11-13, 2022

## International Forum

**Dallas, TX**

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities  
[cccu.org/2022-forum](https://cccu.org/2022-forum)

CCCU gathers campus representatives spanning all levels of leadership to tackle some of the most pressing trends and issues facing Christian higher education. NAE President Walter Kim is one of the plenary speakers.

OCTOBER 19-21, 2021

## One Accord

**Ridgecrest, NC**

Accord Network  
[AccordNetwork.org](https://AccordNetwork.org)

At the annual meeting of the Accord Network, representatives of relief and development organizations will help each other reach their full potential by operating in community — sharing knowledge, skills and support.



Find additional Evangelical Calendar opportunities online at [NAE.org/events](https://NAE.org/events).

### ✓ New World Relief President

In August, Myal Greene stepped into the role of president and CEO of World Relief, the humanitarian arm of the National Association of Evangelicals, succeeding retiring CEO Tim Breene and President Scott Arbeiter.

Greene began his work with World Relief in Rwanda in 2007, where he led the development of the Church Empowerment Zones (CEZ). Under his leadership, the CEZ model grew from a small pilot project with 150 churches in Rwanda to a global model that has reached over 5,000 churches across nine countries. He also served as World Relief Rwanda country director, Africa regional director, and Developing Countries unit director. Most recently, Greene served as World Relief's senior vice president of international programs, where he led the organization in scaling major grant-funded programs

and launching a significant gender equity initiative.

"Nearly 80 years ago, World Relief was founded in response to the world's greatest humanitarian crisis," Greene said. "Today, we face the most significant crisis of our lives. Much of the world is still facing rising



COVID-19 cases, and hundreds of millions of people have fallen deeper into poverty due to the pandemic. Domestically, our work to serve refugees and immigrants is more relevant than ever. World Relief, in partnership with churches across the globe, has a critical role to play in the lives of millions of people around the world."

### ✓ SCOTUS Upholds Religious Freedom Rights for Faith-Based Agencies

The *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* decision in June unanimously affirmed the right of faith-based agencies to continue serving America's children by providing foster placement and support without violating their mission or religious beliefs. The NAE filed an amicus brief in the case, co-authored by NAE Legal Counsel Carl Esbeck and Timothy Belz, both noted First Amendment experts.

"We are delighted that faith-based agencies will be able to continue serving our nation's most vulnerable children in a way that honors the faith convictions that motivate their efforts," said Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. "We need an all-hands-on-deck response to the foster care crisis, not government mandates that eliminate an important segment of the population based on their religious beliefs. As in the Fulton case, there are numerous foster agencies that specialize and work with various communities. This diversity allows all people to participate meaningfully in society."

The *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* case involved Catholic foster parents who have welcomed more than 45 foster kids into their homes through a partnership with Catholic Social Services. Catholic Social Services holds a longstanding belief that marriage is a partnership between one man and one woman. While not placing foster children in homes of same-sex or unmarried couples, Catholic Social Services would help these couples find another agency that could partner with them. But in March 2018, the city of Philadelphia stopped placing kids with parents that partnered with Catholic Social Services due to their beliefs. The decision in this case will allow faith-based agencies like Catholic Social Services to continue providing foster placement and support.

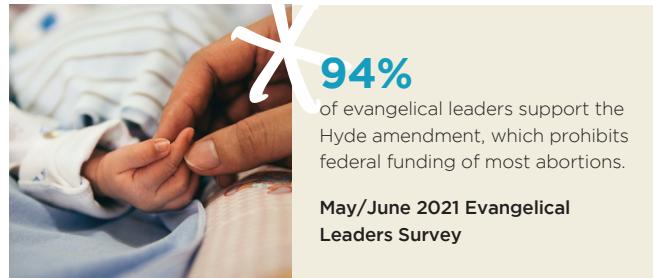


## ✓ Setbacks and Set Ups for Protecting the Sanctity of Life

Recent efforts to safeguard the sanctity of life and protect the unborn have faced both roadblocks and possible new opportunities. In March, President Biden signed into law a massive bill that includes some important pro-family provisions. However, the bill appropriates money that is not subject to the Hyde amendment prohibition on federal funding of abortion. President Biden's budget proposal also requests federal funds for abortions.

Pro-life legislation at the state level has faced a judicial buzz saw. The Supreme Court overturned laws restricting abortion in Texas and Louisiana, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected an Arkansas law that would have banned abortions conducted on a child with Down syndrome, and a Fifth Circuit decision invalidated a Mississippi law that would ban most abortions after 15 weeks.

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear an appeal in the Mississippi case that could lead to a landmark decision overturning or at least narrowing the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. The NAE worked with other pro-life groups on an amicus brief in the case, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*. Oral arguments will take place in the fall, and a decision is expected by June 2022.



## ✓ Bless Your Pastor Kick Off

Bless Your Pastor is a campaign of the National Association of Evangelicals that has helped churches show and share God's love for their pastor and church staff. Churches who participate share a provided list of creative ways congregants can bless the pastor. In addition to individual participation, the congregation takes up an appreciation offering, and celebrates their pastor by collecting notes, hosting an appreciation meal or in other unique ways. Churches that participate for the first time this year and complete all three steps of the Bless Your Pastor campaign will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card from the NAE to present to their pastor.

Over 2,000 churches have participated, raising \$1.25 million in appreciation offerings. The NAE has also sent \$500,000 in grant-funded gift cards to senior pastors at participating churches.



You see your pastor and church staff working tirelessly to bless you and others. Now it's time to bless them! Get started at [BlessYourPastor.org](http://BlessYourPastor.org).

## ✓ Renewed Efforts on Immigration and Refugees

Immigration reform has taken center stage as the situation at the U.S. southern border continues to garner attention. The National Association of Evangelicals is encouraged by the bipartisan group of senators working toward favorable solutions to many issues NAE has voiced concern on over the years, including: Dreamers and Temporary Protected Status recipients, farm-worker visas and border security solutions. While reforms have evaded congressional consensus for more than 20 years, efforts like these would make a lasting impact in the lives of many who face uncertainty and deserve an opportunity to thrive. At the same time, some states are making it harder for unaccompanied minors to find refuge.

At the urging of the NAE and many faith leaders, the administration increased the refugee resettlement cap to 62,500 for 2021 and set a goal of 125,000 arrivals for 2022, reflecting positive change for those fleeing violence and persecution around the world. In addition, strategies are also underway to protect as many as 70,000 Afghan allies, who have worked closely with U.S. military forces, as U.S. troops withdraw from the region.



**Heather Gonzales** is vice president and COO for the National Association of Evangelicals.

# Vaccination Clinics Open Doors for Connection and Service

## Evangelical Churches Help Thousands of People Get Vaccinated

In mid-March First Baptist Church of Glenarden opened their doors to serve their community as a vaccination clinic two days a week. The response was overwhelming, and the clinic was soon providing vaccinations five days a week, eight hours a day.

Located in Prince George's County, Maryland, First Baptist Church partnered with the University of Maryland Capitol Region Health Center and an army of volunteers to provide vaccinations. Over 1,000 volunteers signed up to facilitate the clinic, cycling through three daily shifts.

First Baptist's vaccine clinic is one of many hosted by churches around the country. As congregations navigated limits on their worship gatherings, they deftly shifted to using their church buildings and parking lots to serve the



A healthcare worker administers a COVID vaccination in a church facility.

community through vaccination clinics.

Since the pandemic began, Calvario City Church in Orlando, Florida, proactively provided COVID information to their predominantly Latino congregation. When vaccines became available, it was a natural next step for the congregation to host vaccination clinics. The church hosted three clinics, reaching their congregants and families from the broader community. For many in the Latino community, the church is a trusted messenger and a natural partner for matters of health and wholeness, said Omar Johnson, associate pastor of Calvario City Church.

At Northland Church in Longwood, Florida, over 2,800 people were vaccinated at clinics hosted by the church. Before vaccines were available, the church's parking lot served as a COVID testing site. Judy Head, the church's director of Community Safety, shared that for members of the community the clinics and testing site renewed a connection to the church, encouraging them to get involved.

Churches often couple their vaccination clinics with ongoing COVID conversations in their congregations. At Calvario City Church, Pastor Nino Gonzalez uses his regular weekday radio program to update his listeners on the effects of COVID and the benefits of vaccination. At First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Pastor John Jenkins Sr. invited a





*Church volunteers set up a vaccination site in a gym at the First Baptist Church of Glenarden.*

medical professional to an online Bible study to answer questions about the vaccine.

For the vaccine hesitant, church-based clinics provide a safe place for individuals to have their questions answered by medical professionals in a warm and welcoming environment. At First Baptist of Glenarden, visitors to the vaccination site were so impressed by the kindness of the volunteers and the quality of the clinic that they have returned for Sunday services, said Georgina Agyekum Manzano, the church's health center administrator.

Churches have long served their communities offering education, food, clothing, housing, counseling and other assistance in addition to spiritual direction and discipleship. Now, hosting vaccination clinics have opened doors for congregations to participate in diverse coalitions of public officials, medical providers and other local nonprofits. For many congregations these coalitions offer new and varied ongoing opportunities to serve their communities.

In much the same way, the National Association of Evangelicals has collaborated with diverse partners to ensure that evangelicals have access to accurate information about the COVID vaccines and to empower churches that would like to serve as vaccination sites.

NAE President Walter Kim said, "For the evangelical

community, vaccination is an expression of our mission in the world to do good and love our neighbor. In hosting vaccination clinics, churches have the opportunity to be the leading edge of caring for our neighbors."

The NAE COVID Vaccine Resource Hub ([NAE.org/covid-vaccines](https://NAE.org/covid-vaccines)) is a rich source of videos, toolkits, FAQs and other COVID vaccine resources. Congregations that would like to host a vaccination clinic can learn more in the Onsite Vaccination Clinic toolkit: [wecandothis.hhs.gov/onsite-vaccination-clinic-toolkit](https://wecandothis.hhs.gov/onsite-vaccination-clinic-toolkit). **E**

 **CHRISTIANS**  **and the VACCINE**

At [ChristiansAndTheVaccine.com](https://ChristiansAndTheVaccine.com), you'll find a video series addressing the most common spiritual questions Christians have regarding the vaccine, as well as short video conversations with key Christian leaders providing their unique perspectives and guidance. There is also a Pastor's Toolkit on the Vaccine to help pastors shepherd congregants on this complex issue.

Christians and the Vaccine is a project of Redeeming Babel in partnership with the National Association of Evangelicals, COVID Collaborative, the Ad Council, Values Partnerships and Public Square Strategies.



# RECALIBRATING CHURCHES AND LEADERSHIP

Next Steps for Lasting Renewal

THOM RAINER



**Thom S. Rainer** is founder and CEO of Church Answers, past CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, and author or co-author of 34 books, including his most recent book, *The Post-Quarantine Church*.

It is cliché to say that the world has changed. Indeed, it is cliché to say churches have changed as a result of COVID. But the change is real, powerful and consequential.

**S**ome of the changes in churches are ephemeral. For example, we are already seeing how the streaming, digital worship service has been transitioned from critical to supplemental at best. Likewise, we have seen a significant decline in digital small groups as churches regather in-person.

Still, some changes are long-lasting. They will likely change the shape of congregations for years to come. The post-COVID era will be a time where the trajectory of churches changed dramatically from pre-pandemic days. Let's look at three of some the major categories of change that will likely be present for the years to come.

### **Ministry Staff Re-evaluation**

Our team at Church Answers dealt with more pastors and church staff dealing with fatigue, discouragement and depression in 2020 than any previous year. These challenges continue to manifest themselves well past 2020.

Some pastors and staff simply quit. Many of them were Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964). They accelerated a trend that was already in place. There are not sufficient numbers of younger pastors, specifically Millennials and

Gen Xers, to replace the retiring and withdrawing Boomer pastors. An immediate and longer-term consequence of this trend is a shortage of pastors and other ministry staff. We are already seeing longer interim periods between pastors, and we anticipate this period will lengthen in the months and years ahead.

One of the responses to pastor shortages is an increase in the number of pastors and staff who are not compensated full time. For those churches that simply cannot afford a full-time pastor, we categorize their pastors as bivocational. For those congregations where the churches and their pastors mutually agree that the pastor will not be full-time compensated even when funds are available, we call their pastors covocationals.

Both the bivocational pastors and the covocationals will increase in number as a consequence of COVID. We need to be answering pressing questions now: How will they be trained? What are the implications for church members and other church staff? How will these pastors be found and called?

In many ways, this post-COVID trend could be a blessing. Churches will be forced to equip the members to do the work of ministry. Pastors and other church staff must re-evaluate their priorities and focus on doing the essentials of ministry. Funds will be freed from personnel costs to ministry opportunities.

### **Increase in Change Receptivity**

Our team at Church Answers often refers to the post-COVID world as “the blank slate.” Think how many changes churches had to make during the pandemic. They could

During the pandemic, we estimate that well over 10,000 congregations in North America were on the precipice of closing.

no longer gather in person, so they began viewing services online. COVID prevented pastors and staff from personally visiting members, particularly those in hospitals. A number of churches were introduced to online giving for the first time since churches could not gather and pass the offering plates.

At least for a season, we have seen church members grow in their receptivity to change. For those church leaders who saw this time as a blank slate to introduce change, that receptivity could be long-lasting.

One clear example to a greater willingness to change is the newly-accelerated growth of multisite and multivenue churches. Many church members are much more open to this approach to ministry and evangelism than they were prior to the pandemic. In fact, in our tracking of churches that were growing prior to COVID, the majority of them had multiple sites. Stated simply, churches were more likely to grow horizontally through multisites than they were vertically through single sites.

During the pandemic, we estimate that well over 10,000 congregations in North America were on the precipice of closing. The remaining members of these churches often sought the help of other churches. The common consequence of this assistance was the adoption of the less healthy church by the healthier church. At the point the adoption was finalized, the healthier church added a site and thus became multisite.

Over the past two decades, the multisite movement was largely the domain of larger churches. But the post-COVID world is one where more smaller churches will become multisite. The acceleration of this trend would not have happened if church members had not been through the dramatic changes introduced by the pandemic.

Our team is working with more churches than ever where the theme is largely “the blank slate.” Church leaders at least intuitively see the opportunity to introduce positive change for a season. The change that is wrought among congregations for the next several months or a few years will change the landscape of congregational life for decades to come. Now





is the time for churches to cast vision for their congregations.

We will see more multisite churches. We will see more bivocational and covocation pastoralists. We will see facilities changed and reimagined to be more relevant and efficient. We will see the rise of networks as churches choose to work together across traditional boundaries.

We also anticipate a change that could prove to be an incredible gift from God. We believe churches will become more evangelistic.

### The Resurgence of Evangelistic Churches

Perhaps the most positive consequence that will transpire in the post-COVID world will be a powerful resurgence of evangelism in local congregations. Now, I wish we could say that this great movement is because church leaders and members were finally convicted that obedience to the Great Commission was a mandate they should follow. But the reality is that churches will become more evangelistic because there are few alternatives to congregational survival.

Though the movement will likely be more pragmatic than prayerful, God will still use these efforts to spread the gospel.

So, if not obedience, why will churches turn to evangelism in a post-COVID world? Frankly speaking, nonbelievers are about the only group left to reach. Cultural Christians, those who profess Christ in name only, are diminishing in number. One no longer has to claim to be a Christian or church member in North America to be culturally accepted.

Additionally, the birthrate is plummeting in the

United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a provisional report that the year 2020 marked the lowest birth rate on record, both a continuing and accelerating trend.

So, church leaders faced with the reality that increases will not come from cultural Christians and biological growth will turn to evangelism out of necessity. For certain, there will be some churches and leaders who will make this move out of biblical obedience. Either way, the gospel will be carried forth, and men and women who hear the good news will become followers of Christ in greater numbers.

Though it is premature to claim with certainty how extensive this evangelistic movement will be, we can predict with a high level of confidence that more people will be evangelized in North America than in any period since the 1970s.

### The Shape of Faith to Come

There is no doubt the COVID-19 pandemic has been tragic. Illness has been rampant. Many lives have been lost. Economies have been devastated.

And there is no doubt that churches and their leaders have suffered greatly as well. The pandemic has been a trying time for church leaders and church members.

But there are at least preliminary signs that some of the changes may prove to be good, even great. Perhaps if we add a movement of prayer to a movement of evangelistic intentionality, we can truly see some great days ahead for our churches.

It likely won't be easy. And it likely won't be quick. But, in God's power, we could see the changes resulting in an unprecedented evangelistic harvest. Then we will know a pandemic meant to harm and kill was used by God for greater things than we ever imagined. ■



**Rich Stearns** is president emeritus of World Vision U.S. and author of *Lead Like It Matters to God*.



# Recovering From a Year in the Wilderness

This past season has been exhausting and overwhelming for anyone in a position of leadership. Virtually every leader of every organization in the world was simultaneously confronted with extraordinary challenges and agonizing decisions. No one was exempt.

**A**s a ministry leader, after all you have been through, if you feel drained, if you feel numb, even if you feel like a failure — it's OK. That's actually a very normal and human reaction to the kinds of pressures and stresses you've had to weather over the past year. And undoubtedly, the pressures of navigating your ministry through COVID have revealed some other "Leaks in the Boat" that were lying below the surface before the crisis: staffing issues, budget pressures, factions and perhaps political and racial divisions in your church, ministry or community.

## What Did God Teach You in the Darkness?

A recent Barna survey revealed that 29 percent of pastors had

given "real, serious consideration to quitting full time ministry within the last year." That is an alarming figure. There's a well-known quote from the late V. Raymond Edmond that goes like this: "Never doubt in the dark what God told you in the light." If you're one of those discouraged pastors or leaders, it's important to remember the things you knew to be true about your ministry before COVID: God called you for a purpose, and he is using you and your team to make a difference for his kingdom.

But there's also a corollary to Edmond's statement: "Remember in the light what God taught you in the darkness." God will often use challenges, hardships and conflict to take us deeper in our relationship with him. What

have you learned about yourself over the past year? What has God revealed to you about the health of your ministry, your priorities and how they should change?

### **Good News: It Doesn't Depend on You**

Discouragement and burnout are things that every leader experiences periodically in the course of their ministry and career. Sustaining your leadership over years and even decades requires grit, perseverance and an abiding belief that God is using you to accomplish his purposes — even when you can't see or feel the tangible fruit. But there is a simple and critical truth that is crucial to sustaining you during these inevitable periods of doubt and discouragement, a truth that Christian leaders should inscribe on their office walls: What God is doing through you involves you but does not depend on you. Let that truth wash over you for a moment. Yes, God is using you in specific ways to accomplish his purposes, but the outcomes do not depend on your abilities, your programs or, for that matter, your feelings. In many cases, you may not even be able to see the true impact of your service.

Put yourself in the shoes of Peter in the late first century. As the leader of the fledgling church in the Roman Empire, not only was Peter 'out of his depth,' he was facing brutal

On the surface, Peter and the early church looked like total failures. And yet, in spite of all this, God was at work.

oppression and opposition both from Rome and from the Jewish leadership. Imagine how overwhelmed and inadequate he must have felt. By the end of that century, 11 of the 12 original disciples had been murdered as martyrs, including Peter himself.

On the surface, Peter and the early church looked like total failures. And yet, in spite of all this, God was at work. What God was doing through Peter involved him but did not depend on him. Peter was simply asked to be faithful, to persevere, to do his best — trusting God for the outcome.

Peter couldn't see that the movement he led would become the largest religious movement in human history,

numbering more than 2 billion followers of Christ today. You can look at dozens of other leaders in Scripture — Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah, etc. They all faced tremendous opposition and controversy. None of them were perfect leaders; many were deeply flawed. But God used them to accomplish his purposes anyway. God simply asked them to be obedient and to do their best.

### **You're Called to Be Faithful Not Successful**

I spent 20 years as the president of World Vision U.S. My job description literally involved tackling the most difficult problems facing the human race: poverty, pandemic diseases, refugee migrations, civil wars, famines, natural disasters, human trafficking and even genocide. No matter how hard we worked or how much money we raised, it often felt like we were trying to empty the ocean with a thimble. To make it worse, every mistake I made as a leader (and I made lots of them), sometimes cost lives — children and families we couldn't help due to my inadequacies.

One of the things that kept me going for two decades was a story I had heard about Mother Teresa. She became world famous for her small ministry caring for the sick and the poor in Calcutta. Her tiny group of nuns situated in a veritable ocean of poverty and human suffering faced overwhelming odds. When she was once asked by a U.S. senator if she sometimes felt like a failure, since poverty in Calcutta was even worse than when she had begun her ministry decades earlier, Mother Teresa's reply redefined our naive notions of success: "My dear senator," she said, "God did not call me to be successful, he called me to be faithful." Faithful, not successful.

You see, when we turn over control of our ministries to God and trust him for the outcomes, he is the one who sustains us and leads us through our dry spells. Whatever you may be facing in your ministry and regardless of the mistakes you may have made, you, too, can find comfort in this profound truth: What God is doing through you involves you, but does not depend on you. Your job is simply to be faithful. **E**



**John Ashmen** is president and CEO of Citygate Network.

# Rescue Missions Pursue a New Normal

For most of 2021, Americans have been hearing and using the phrase “coming out of COVID.” It seems to be synonymous with the phrase “getting back to normal.” (We’re using such language, even though the virus is continuing to spread around the world.)

For many ministry organizations, dealing with the new normal COVID left behind is proving to be every bit as difficult as coming to terms with its initial arrival and vexing ramifications. How do we bring congregations back together for face-to-face fellowship now that we’ve shown they can have a great church experience in their easy chairs? How do we prove to students that classroom instruction is more enriching than distance learning? How do we convince parents that close-quarters accommodations and high-touch activities for campers are safe? Every ministry genre has its own post-COVID challenges.

## Increased Demand for Services

Rescue missions and kindred ministries didn’t see the disappearance of people during the pandemic. They had the opposite problem. Already high numbers of poor people seeking services were swelled by released prisoners with nowhere to go, by families looking for food when the paychecks stopped, by the dispossessed who preferred supervised congregant accommodations over ungoverned underpass encampments or rowdy hotel floors.

At the same time, safe-distancing guidelines reduced bed and table capacities. Then the ranks of staff and volunteers were drastically cut when those deemed high-risk had to

disappear. Skeleton crews worked tirelessly for months on end to serve hungry, homeless, abused or addicted guests and clients.

## A Spiritual Harvest

Through all of this, collaboration was catapulted to new heights. Previously siloed ministries worked across denominational lines and philosophical divides. They partnered with competing ministries, government-funded agencies and health departments to save lives and protect their local hospital systems. Astonishingly, at the end of 2020, instead of there being upwards of 10,000 deaths in the homeless community as projected by some prominent political figures, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness put the fatality number at less than 300. That includes both sheltered and unsheltered.

Something else occurred at rescue missions and similar ministries during COVID: There was a burgeoning spiritual harvest. This ostensibly was the result of an atmosphere of fear about the future and the necessity of having closed campuses. Twenty-four-hour residency afforded more time for conversation and counseling. The gospel was presented and received on a much larger scale. City missions took another giant step away from being disaster-relief establishments, in



the direction of being life-transformation organizations.

### **Collaboration With Churches**

But now what? What does “getting back to normal” look like for a typical city mission? In a lot of places, the crowds are just now starting to come back and capacities are beginning to increase. But many Citygate Network member organizations

The need for churches and life-transformation organizations to work together has never been greater.

have already determined that they will not go back to serving the same volume of people they have in the past. They see wisdom in reducing shelter beds and increasing “program beds.” This is one more reason we cannot retreat from collaboration. The need for churches and life-transformation organizations to work together has never been greater.

That has not been an easy sell in the past because far too many churches take pride in being a self-contained, one-stop shop. But rarely do you find a suburban church that has staff who know how to work with someone who’s been a drug addict for 14 years, or how to help a trafficking victim who is afraid she will be forced back into that life. That’s where

collaboration comes in.

Going forward, rescue missions and parallel agencies need to concentrate their efforts on physical and mental health treatment, addiction recovery, education, career development, housing procurement and the like. Churches can support such initiatives with volunteers. They can also pick up the slack by providing referrals, clothing and, of course, food. However, this must be done in a way that makes it clear that the recipients are not on another merry-go-round of dependency. Every feeding program needs an exit strategy for those being fed.

But partnerships cannot be pondered indefinitely. Statistics from numerous sources point to an impending landslide of newly addicted people who started their dependencies when COVID anxiety was reaching its apex. Furthermore, as pandemic eviction moratoriums end, we’ll certainly see more homelessness — particularly involving families with children.

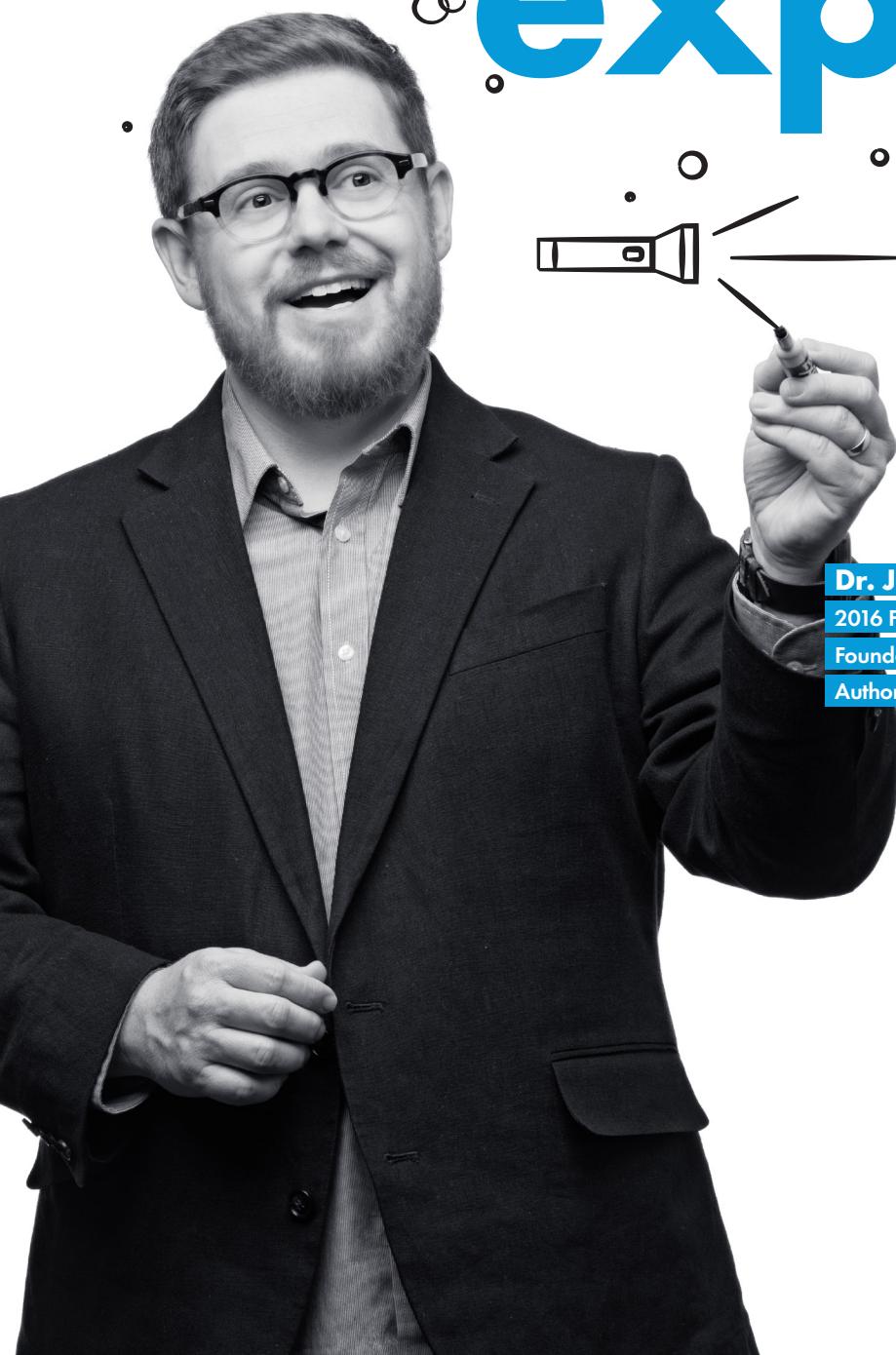
Why does this matter? As Jesus journeyed through Palestine, he made it clear that poor and powerless people were his priority. They still are. And therefore, our new normal — for all evangelicals — should be a broadly concerted effort to support communities of intensive care where we can move as many people as possible from human suffering to human flourishing through savvy assistance and the power of the gospel. **E**



**researcher**

**psychologist**

# **disaster expert**



**Dr. Jamie Aten**

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**Margaret Feinberg** is a popular speaker and author of more than two dozen books and Bible studies, including *Fight Back With Joy: Celebrate More. Regret Less. Stare Down Your Greatest Fears.*

# 3 Ways to Fight Back With Joy

Leaders found entry into the pandemic was difficult. Now many are finding the transition out of COVID restrictions much more challenging. Increased burnout, staff transitions and continued uncertainty are taking a toll on leaders everywhere, leaving some of us feeling weary in the marrow of our bones.

Long before the pandemic, I faced a brutal battle with cancer. Tortured alive by more than a year of treatment, joy felt out of reach. But somewhere along the way, I discovered that more than whimsy, joy is a weapon we use to fight life's battles. Here are three ways you can begin to fight back with joy as a leader, and encourage others to do the same.

## 1. Sidle Up to The Lighthearted

With all the responsibilities of work, it's easy to give into a getter-done, check-it-off-the-list mindset. That's why it's so important as leaders to carve out time with people who remind you not to take life, ministry or yourself too seriously. Who tells the best jokes, makes you laugh the hardest and lives as a bundle of joy? Make a list of names. Schedule some time to get together and allow their lightheartedness to rub off on you. Let the happy-go-lucky of life breathe delight into your soul.

## 2. Create a Portal of Praise

In Philippians 4:4, Paul instructs, "Rejoice in the Lord always." When the situations we're facing take our joy, we can still find the refuge of divine delight by reflecting on the faithfulness of God. Where is the place you're most frustrated and beat down as a leader? Perhaps it's a room in your church. Your desk. The pulpit. Those empty rows of seats. Go to

that place and begin offering up words of worship. Like the prophet Habakkuk: Worship God anyway. Create a portal of praise. You may discover an ever so faint surge of joy.

## 3. Embrace Mourning as a Discipline

Our culture gives us endless lists of how to accomplish more and celebrate the wins of life. Rarely does anyone speak or make space for mourning the losses. No matter how many wins you've managed to string together in a row, losses compounded during the pandemic, too. Unless you allow yourself to enter the cloudy depths of grief and mourning, your emotional bandwidth will contract.

As a leader, you have losses that need mourning. Take a moment. Pull out a sheet of paper. Ask the Holy Spirit what losses you've experienced over the last year. What you record might surprise you. Talk to God about each one. Perhaps confide in a spouse or friend or counselor. Allow yourself to rest, reflect and process the pain. Consider writing a lament or a letter to God. Ask for wisdom on how God wants to bring healing. **E**



Listen to Margaret Feinberg talk about Food, Faith and Writing at [NAE.org/feinbergpodcast](https://NAE.org/feinbergpodcast).



# Cladding vs. Heavy Stone Discipleship

I've learned a lot about stonemasonry from my son-in-law, Brett. He took up the trade — one of the oldest in history — five years ago as an apprentice under a master mason and only recently moved on to his second level of training, that of a journeyman. He will remain a journeyman for seven or more years until he matures into a master stonemason. His entire training process could easily take 10 to 15 years!

**G**iven the slow and costly process required to progress from apprentice to journeyman to master mason, it's no surprise that there are relatively few master masons. But when a master mason builds something, that structure can last thousands of years, even in severe weather conditions. We see this in the pyramids of Egypt, in medieval castles, and in well-made stone farmhouses in our day.

Because of the expense and time associated with mining, cutting and transporting stone, and then hiring a master mason, the construction industry has developed cheaper alternatives over the years. To give people the look of real stone, builders often use a veneer called "cladding."

Cladding falls into two general categories — natural and synthetic. Natural cladding is made by cutting large stones into light, one-to five-inch-thick slabs that are then placed over the exterior walls of a home or building. Geri and I recently installed stone cladding for a small area around our front door. It looks and feels like real, heavy stones that provide structural support for the house. People are impressed. But it is simply thin stone cladding attached as siding by workers without any masonry experience.

In contrast, synthetic cladding is made out of manufactured materials such as cement. It looks and feels like expensive natural stones, but without the higher cost of natural stone cladding (let alone the heavy stone used by master masons). Installation is fast and easy. Some brands even label their products as "do-it-yourself." Simply watch a brief YouTube tutorial and you're good to go.

At this point, you may be wondering why I'm waxing poetic about masonry and cladding. The answer is simple: Much of discipleship in the church today is the spiritual equivalent of cladding.

On the surface, everything looks like the real thing. Our people are upbeat and optimistic, filled with faith that Jesus will get them through crises and valleys. They are uplifted spiritually through moving worship experiences and dazzling messages. We highlight infectious testimonies. We see to it that our small groups and weekend gatherings are warm and welcoming and that there is a sense we are growing into the new things God wants to do in our midst.

The problem is that none of this is the heavy, load-bearing stone of Jesus's way of discipleship. It appears to be the real

thing that will endure severe storms and the test of time, but it is not. Yes, our people participate in worship, listen attentively to sermons, and attend small groups. They often serve faithfully in various ministries and give financially. And yet, their transformation in Christ remains at the level of cladding, a thin veneer on a life that has yet to be touched beneath the surface.

Cladding discipleship surely describes the first 17 years of my life as a Jesus-follower. Sadly, even though I looked good enough on the surface, I had large gaps in my discipleship and leadership. That was fine for a while because my gifts and zeal covered over a lot of what was missing beneath the surface. But before long, the thin veneer of my discipleship, along with that of our church, would be exposed for what it was.

## Emotionally Healthy Discipleship is an invitation to radically shift toward the real thing, a discipleship that is heavy, load-bearing stone.

### The Heavy Stone of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

Emotionally Healthy Discipleship is an invitation to radically shift toward the real thing, a discipleship that is heavy, load-bearing stone.

Yes, the process is raw, messy, and weighty. But, like true stonemasonry, it endures.

At its core, Emotionally Healthy Discipleship (EHD) is a biblical theology that, when fully implemented, informs every area of a church, ministry or organization. It is a discipleship structure built with load-bearing stones so that people flourish even in the midst of cries and upheavals happening around them. More specifically, Emotionally Healthy Discipleship:

- Slows down our lives to cultivate a deep, personal relationship with Jesus amidst the hurry and distractions that routinely overload us.
- Offers guidelines to determine how much the values and goals of Western culture have compromised, or even negated, the radical call of Jesus to deny ourselves,

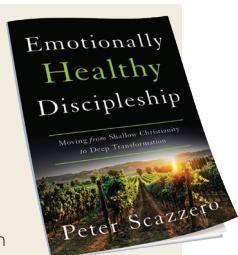
take up our cross, and follow him.

- Makes provision for surrendering to, rather than fighting against, the gift of God's limits in our lives.
- Integrates sadness and loss into our following of Jesus. As a result, we no longer miss out on the treasures God has buried within them.
- Provides clear criteria to measure spiritual maturity by how we are growing in our ability to love others.
- Connects how our family of origin and personal history influence our discipleship in the present. We no longer treat deep patterns and traumas from the past with a quick fix.
- Embraces weakness and vulnerability as core to accessing God's power and offering his love to the world.

Before I understood this, I, like most church leaders, simply worked harder and added new initiatives when people got stuck in their discipleship. I did not realize that the problem was in the way we made disciples and the quality of the materials we used. It was limited in its ability to get people unstuck in a number of areas in their lives. As a result, redoubling my efforts and doing the same things over and over but with more intensity, only led to greater confusion about why more effort bore so little long-term fruit.

It wasn't until I experienced a building-wide failure — personally and in our ministry — that I finally realized the problem was the materials themselves. What we needed was a whole new way of doing discipleship that worked beneath the surface of people's lives so they might experience a deep transformation and have a sustainable, long-term impact in the world as a result. We needed a model that was transformative. **E**

Pastors and church leaders want to see lives changed by the gospel. Sadly, much of their efforts do not result in deeply changed disciples. Pete Scazzero lays out how to create an emotionally healthy culture and multiply deeply-changed people in every aspect of church life. This excerpt from "Emotionally Healthy Discipleship: Moving from Shallow Christianity to Deep Transformation" © 2021 by Pete Scazzero is used with permission of Zondervan. Order at [Zondervan.com](https://Zondervan.com).



## POSTSCRIPT



# Interrupted Expectations

Celebrations evoke certain expectations. We go to birthday parties to give gifts, sing “Happy Birthday” and have cake. Religious celebrations are the same. Woe to anyone who would dare change, much less challenge, the way we do Christmas or Easter!

If you went to the Festival of Tabernacles in the time of Jesus, what would you have expected? You would have expected an amazing time. Each morning for seven days, the priest drew water from a well and marched through Jerusalem to the Temple. Crowds celebrated with music, waving palm branches and dancing in a sacred procession. At the Temple, the trumpet would blast three times as the priest circled the altar to pour the water and proclaim Isaiah 12:3, “With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation!”

Then, on the final day the priests circled seven times. So astounding was this celebration, that according to ancient rabbis: “He who has not seen the joy of the water-drawing has not seen joy in his whole lifetime.”

The Scriptures tell us that at this climactic moment of expectation, “Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink! Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them’” (John 7:37). Imagine the stunned silence of the crowds who were ready to bring the Festival to a rousing conclusion, only to hear Jesus’ proclamation. It is as if you’re at wedding, the bride and groom have exchanged vows, the minister is about to declare them husband and wife and everyone is straining forward with rapt attention. Then,

someone shockingly stands up and declares: “Wait a moment, I have something to announce!”

Jesus has a way of interrupting our moments with important announcements.

Jesus has a way of interrupting our moments with important announcements. We began 2020 with all sorts of expectations. Many of them had to be tossed. Whether out of exhaustion or eagerness, we now deeply sense our thirst for renewal and for a fresh encounter with Jesus. But before we rush into a new set of expectations, we should pause to reflect and recalibrate. The streams of living water are ready to flow, but they may not flow in the direction or the ways we anticipated. May interruptions of Jesus become an invitation to him, so that we may draw deeply from the well of salvation. **E**



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