

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Accelerating Change: The Maintenance Phase

## Episode 156

### *Part 1: How the Pandemic Is Accelerating Decline in Churches That Were Already on the Declining Side of the Typical Church Lifecycle*

Google “Covid Accelerating Change.” It’s happening everywhere—it’s rapidly changing the workplace, our habits, digitization, how we connect and much more. Over the past few years, the Church has experienced a significant amount of change. And, like the rest of the world, the pandemic is accelerating these changes— in-person attendance is falling, the increased use of online, fewer new people connecting to churches, etc. In this episode, Tony and Amy dive into pre- and post-pandemic data, the characteristics of the Maintenance phase and why these accelerating trends are a way to discern God’s direction for your ministry NOW.

### *Pre-Pandemic Numbers*

- According to Pew Research data, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12% over the past decade.
- Religious unaffiliated (atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular”) is at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.
- The Majority of US adults attend a church a few times a year or less (⅔ of people admit they never attend church).
- Break down of church attendance by generation:
  - Builders = 61% regular church attendance (at least once a month)
  - Boomers = 49%
  - GenX = 46%
  - Millennials = 35%
- This is BEFORE the pandemic. The pandemic is only accelerating these trends.

### *Post-Pandemic Numbers*

We hosted a survey with Blackbaud to learn more about how the pandemic is affecting churches. [You can download the full report here.](#) Here’s what we found:

- Churches reported very few new people connecting to their churches.

- With some exceptions, people are not returning to in-person services (*i.e. churches with a weekend attendance pre-pandemic of 1500 are down to 250*).
- Gallop reported last month that ⅓ of *practicing* Christians have stopped attending online churches.
- Of Millennials, only 30% of practicing Christians are still attending their church online; 8% have found another church and 50% have stopped attending.

## *Characteristics of Churches in the Maintenance Phase*

- **Insider Focused:** Everything (including online strategy) is geared towards those already connected to the church.
- **Driven by Programs and Events:** Churches have relied so heavily on events, they haven't done the harder work of connecting people relationally, which is why they're struggling to keep people connected today.
- **Overstaffed with Ministry Silos:** Churches hire a lot of "doers." They hired to do specific things, and now they're not wired to reevaluate, pivot, and initiate the changes needed.
- **Stale Vision:** Vision has to be refreshed. When we work with churches, we recommend refreshing it every few years. Check out our [Strategic Alignment Pyramid](#) for reference.
- **Financially Healthy:** For a lot of churches in maintenance, giving is steady, and sometimes even increases.

## *Best Practices for Renewing Your Church's Vision*

- Don't go at it alone.
- Don't try to develop a vision with the *entire* congregation having a voice.
- Once you have the building blocks of the vision in place, engage other leaders, both staff and lay leaders, in developing the action plan.
- Communicate the new vision with the key stakeholders first.
- Use the renewed vision as an opportunity to rally people with their prayers, their time, and their financial resources.
- Don't be surprised when a bold renewed vision causes some people to leave the church.

## *Prioritizing Reaching New People*

- Ask yourself: What are you willing to do to reach people outside the church and outside the faith?
- To reach more people (specifically young adults), consider this two-pronged plan:
  - **Adjust your Strategy**
    - It's vital to create a digital ministry strategy for our online audience. Weekend in-person services are no longer our front door—our digital strategy and online experience is.
  - **Create a Personal Strategy For Sharing Your Faith**

- We are ambassadors of Christ. It's part of our job to share the Good News. And it's our job as the Church to equip our congregation to live this out.
- Build the BLESS model into your discipleship path.

### *B.L.E.S.S MODEL*

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*courtesy of Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson*

- B.** Begin (with prayer) to discover your personal mission
- L.** Listen to others
- E.** Eat with others and build the relationship
- S.** Serve others
- S.** Share your story

### *Next Steps*

- **Where is YOUR church in the lifecycle today?**  
Do you know what areas of your ministry are healthy and which areas are stuck or declining? An honest, objective perspective of where your church is today is essential if you want to start building a strategy and plan for the future.  
  
[Take The Unstuck Church Assessment for Free](#) and it will help guide you as you take your next steps towards building a healthy church.
- **Does your church need to make significant shifts to thrive in the new reality?**  
We've been coaching 50+ churches in the past few months, and 400+ churches over the last ten years, helping them clarify vision, mission field, strategy, structure and implement successful action plans. We can help you assess your starting point (and do an honest reality check), make a plan to lead your church forward, structure your team to be successful, and put the plan into action. [Let's talk.](#)

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