



GUTENBERG, AMAZON, AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE MODERN CHURCH

written by **NATHAN ARTT**

“

As Nathan Artt rightfully notes, the question isn't "What should people do?" it's "What will people do?" as we seek to decipher what ministry will look like in a post-COVID-19 world. His thoughts and insights will help you and your leadership team navigate the choppy and disruptive waters ahead.

”

Larry Osborne

Pastor | North Coast Church

“As the Co-Founder of the Ritz-Carlton, I am no stranger to leading an organization through a crisis. We are living in uncertain times and I believe Nathan’s insights in this resource could not be more timely. This resource will guide you in how to create the best experience for your congregation coming out of a crisis, align your staff with the right priorities, and help you maximize your Kingdom impact while leading through change.”

Horst Schulze

Co-Founder, Ritz-Carlton

“Nathan Artt has a unique gift to see opportunity where others see challenge. He’s a brilliant thinker with a deep passion to serve the church. His insights in this book will challenge and encourage you to take a critical look at the changes the church is facing in the days ahead. With helpful historical perspective and compelling vision, he will equip you with the courage to embrace change with confidence.”

Jenni Catron

Author, Speaker, and Founder of The 4Sight Group

“In an instant Church leaders were faced with a question—what is the Church? For decades, perhaps longer, the Church and her gathering were synonymous, and in one weekend gatherings were no more... for the moment. Faced with this new reality, Church leaders had to decide, innovation or death. Is Church a people or a place? What will the future hold? With keen insight and powerful illustrations, Nathan Artt puts before us a challenging and helpful approach to answering our initial questions, and more.”

Léonce B. Crump Jr.

Author, Renovate: Changing Who You Are By Loving Where You Are | Founder, Renovation Church

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Johannes Gutenberg is one of the most celebrated inventors in history despite the fact that the invention he was credited with, the printing press, was invented by the Chinese centuries earlier around AD 600. However, there was little relevance to the invention or ease of use for the Chinese because the Mandarin language has over 20,000 characters. When Gutenberg developed the printing press in Germany with 26 characters, it changed the world.

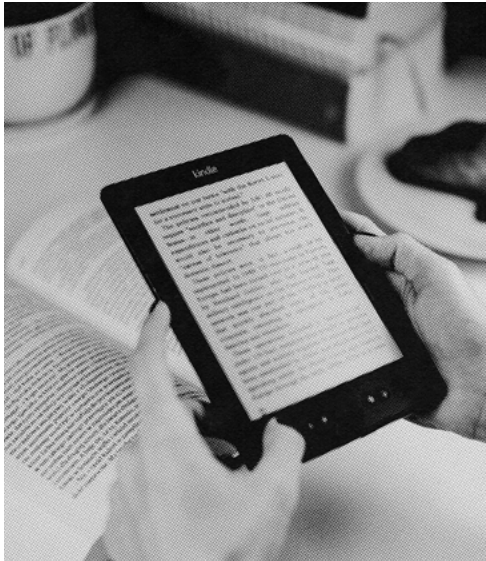
Christianity was heavily impacted. The Catholic Church required people to go to priests in order to hear the Word, and the Word was delivered within the context of each individual's political or personal biases. The printing press was even important to Martin Luther who nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the church with multiple copies made from the printing press of Gutenberg.



The printing press was significant to Christianity because it gave people access to the Bible and curbed religious abuses perpetrated by the highly political Christian structure of that time. It evened the playing field by putting the Word of God in the hands of everyday people far and wide. This new access paved the way for individuals to learn about God and form their own opinions and relationships apart from the Catholic church or a priest.

Because the printing press delivered over 500,000 copies of books in the first thirty years of its existence in Germany, it was also one of the major factors in creating the first Information Age: The Renaissance. Fast forward several hundred years and the internet, the new version of the printing press, has further accelerated access to information.

Amazon was one of the first major implementers of the internet by using it to globally re-shape consumer behavior. The idea of an online marketplace allowed consumers from all over the world access to goods without having to step foot in a car. They are, now, the largest retailer in the world. As a result, they have forced every other major player in the retail space to change the way they do business because in e-commerce, borders don't exist.



Amazon's development of the Kindle app allows people to download books instantaneously on a device, further accelerating the influence of the original e-reader, the Gutenberg press. The idea of instant access to content has also shaped video, education, audible book, and podcast platforms as well as similar products and service lines to consumers.

What do the Gutenberg press and Amazon have to do with the church? If you think about it, higher education and the church are two of the only institutions in America that still tell people where to be and when to be there in order to participate in the services offered by each institution. On weekends packed with kids' activities, traveling sports teams, watching college and NFL football, beach trips, etc., the church still asks people to change the way that they do life in order to accommodate each institution versus meeting people where they are: busy, distracted, and accustomed to content coming to them.

Enter COVID-19. Our strong opinion is that COVID did not change consumer behavior; it simply accelerated a change that was already happening. Churches have been forced into a digital platform as a primary means of reaching their people. The result? Most churches we know who had a digital platform prior to COVID have grown their average weekly attendance by four to five times. Giving and engagement are up, and we're still building the airplane in the air.

We call this the Amazon Effect. Since March, when COVID shut down the physical economy, some of the largest retailers in the country (JCPenney, JCrew, Payless, True Religion, CMX Cinemas, Gold's Gym, Neiman Marcus, Pier 1, Hertz, etc.) have filed bankruptcy. There will be more as brick and mortar retail continues to get pummeled.

**“ Our strong opinion is that
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However, in that same time frame, Amazon stock rose from \$1,667 per share on March 12th, 2020 to \$2,483 per share on June 5th, 2020, which is a 49% increase in value in only a few months. Amazon's value has increased by almost 50% while brick and mortar retail is quickly becoming obsolete. Why? While many companies continued to try to get customers to adapt to them, Amazon studied the trends and was open to adapting to customers.

We specialize in helping churches, especially larger, multisite churches, develop their real estate and financial strategies for growth. Both proximity (how far someone has to drive) and room capacity (how many people fit into a room), the same two factors that affect retail, determine what drives attendance in your buildings. COVID has done two things. First, it has forced people to figure out assembly without having the ability to assemble.

Second, it has completely changed consumer behavior towards church. Proximity to a “local” church is, now, as close as someone is to a computer, and the room capacity is limitless. City churches are becoming city-wide churches, city-wide churches are becoming regional, and regional churches are gaining national influence. What the internet and Amazon did in e-commerce where borders don’t exist, COVID has made necessary in the local church.

During this season, a digital platform established prior to COVID has been the key to the digital growth of influential churches. However, for most churches, their online presence was a secondary alternative to live service, not a primary function of evangelism and engagement. Now, churches are trying to figure out what to do with the discipleship aspect of digital engagement and [unfortunately] are just beginning to have those conversations.

“What the internet and Amazon did in e-commerce where borders don’t exist, COVID has made necessary in the local church.”

CHAPTER TWO

**So
What's
Next?**

In this conversation, many people have retorted, “you can’t replace corporate worship!” or “people should still worship corporately.” I’ve heard that word “should” in church a lot. It’s the same language of the retailers who are filing bankruptcy, right now. Instead of asking the question: “what *should* people do?”, I feel the better question is: “what *would* people do?” or “what will they do?” Consumers are telling us what they want and how they want it. If we continue to force them into behaviors that are inconsistent with behaviors they are developing in other areas of society, we will eventually lose our relevance to them. Am I against corporate worship? Not in the least! I love corporate worship and can’t wait to get back. I do think corporate worship will change, though, in the way we use it and what it looks like. As I said earlier, we’re still building the airplane in the air for corporate worship during this time. Let’s take a closer look at what’s changing and what we’re building.

CHAPTER THREE

Redefining What Corporate Worship Really Means

For 300 years following the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, people met “corporately” in homes or in Jewish places of worship. It took three and a half centuries for people to come to the idea that a worship hall (*aula ecclesiae*) is synonymous with the word “church” (*ecclesiae*). In the fourth century, most of the churches built during the third century were burned down during the Diocletianic Persecution, the most severe period of persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire. So, similarly to COVID (persecution aside), church buildings were completely shut down, yet the Jesus movement was not. Churches, or the people who comprised the church body, were not gathering in “corporate worship.” Despite not meeting in *aula ecclesiae*, Christianity not only survived but thrived coming out of this tyrannical period of oppression by the Roman Empire.

This example demonstrates the heart of corporate worship, which is not found primarily in a Sunday event, but an engagement of people with one another within the movement of the Gospel. How we use Sunday morning to further the Gospel will change with the “Amazon Effect” described above.

CHAPTER FOUR

Separating Your Why and How

Sometimes, it's easy to confuse why and how we do something. My friend and colleague, Jenni Catron, talks all the time about the "how"; it should be separated from and yet still remain an extension to "why." *Why* is missional; *how* is practical. Practices can change, but the mission should not.

For many churches, Sunday morning has been "the play" for years, but what we're learning is that Sunday morning is more of "the huddle." It was always supposed to be that way, but we corporately confused meeting on Sunday morning with being the Church. The Church is the people who, brought together by the cross, are the redemptive agents of the Holy Spirit to the world. This isn't accomplished in an insider culture where people have to come to us.

While it's sometimes difficult to see and remember that being the church includes Monday through Saturday and not only Sunday gatherings, it's important to remember your why: salvations, baptisms, impact, relevance for the Gospel, and redemption. *How* you've done it, meeting on Sunday, doesn't have to remain the same for you to accomplish your *why*, your mission to further the Gospel in your local community.

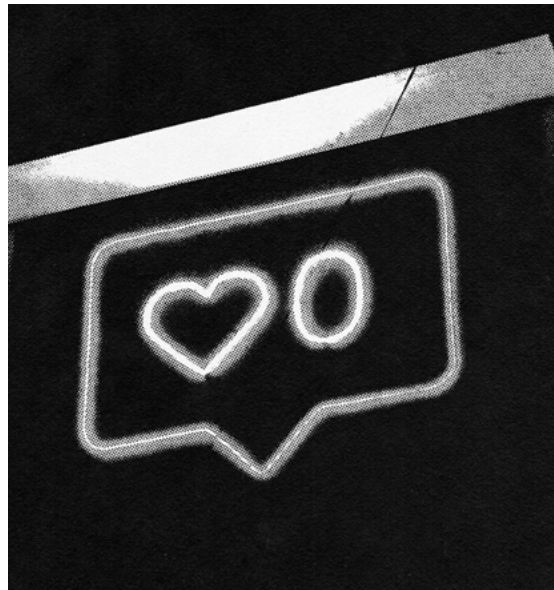
**WHY IS MISSIONAL;
HOW IS PRACTICAL.**

**PRACTICES
CAN CHANGE,
BUT THE MISSION
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CHAPTER FIVE

**High Tech Will
Never Replace
High Touch**

It's great to see churches thriving and adapting in a time where their business model has been completely and suddenly shaken. As the Church reaches a larger audience, we have to understand that people still desire connection. You've probably heard it discussed that Gen X'rs are the most connected generation in history but also the loneliest. Why? Inauthentic connection. Access and connection are not synonymous. Social media gives us the impression that we're connected without actually connecting us. The result is that people, especially younger people, derive much of their identity and values from likes, or a lack of likes, versus the benefit of real, authentic community.



Healthy churches focus on assimilation. To me, assimilation is simply leading people to find their role in the God-inspired story of redemption through the local church. That includes service opportunities, community groups, giving, host teams, and the like. The church is the conduit.

I don't have answers, but as we continue to increase our digital capacity, we will have to focus on systems of appreciation, celebration, and assimilation. People need to hear from us and feel seen by us.

Because we're dealing with people and not objects, we're dealing with how they experience us more than what they learn from us. Think about that. Instead of asking the question, "what do we want people to *know*?", we should ask, "how do we want people to *feel* when they experience us?" Instead of building a culture around information, which is often quickly forgotten, we should build a culture around experience, which is memorable. So what do we want people to feel? Heard. Loved. Connected. Appreciated. Curious. Fed. Equipped. Empowered. If we can cultivate a safe space for these feelings to grow, it will foster the long-term relationship that is required to establish authentic relationships and spiritual growth.

“ Instead of building a culture around information, which is often quickly forgotten, we should build a culture around experience, which is memorable. ”

The image features a solid teal background. The top and bottom edges of the teal area are irregular and jagged, resembling torn paper. The top edge is closer to the top of the frame, while the bottom edge is closer to the bottom. The text is centered within the teal area.

**HEALTHY
CHURCHES
FOCUS ON
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CHAPTER SIX

The Digital Platform: Your Greatest Evangelism Tool

Unchurched people have a certain perspective of the church whether from their own experience or a borrowed one. There is often a presumptive picture in their minds of what a church looks like and how it treats people, which can inhibit them from stepping inside the walls of a church building. Based on the development of my own personal ministry, I've learned that the unchurched typically have issues with Christians, not God. I believe that there is a God-sized hole in everyone's life based on the truths that people are both His creation and His inheritance. In short, people innately want God to exist. It's just difficult for them to reconcile a good God with bad circumstances or bad experiences, especially those experiences dealt by the hands of those who self-identify as Christ-like. We know that Jesus loves people for who they are where they are, no matter who and where that is.

That being said, we have an unbelievable opportunity with the digital platform to meet people where they are with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can introduce them to the Gospel in the comfort of their homes, eliminating the tension of walking into a foreign environment with new people whom they potentially already mistrust.

The digital platform of the church in 2020 can do exactly what the Gutenberg press did to Europe in the thirteenth century. The Gutenberg press pioneered access to the Gospel for everyone without perceived bias or abuse.

However, even in the genius of its application, the press pales in comparison to the reach of the internet. We have an opportunity to bring the message of healing and salvation to the living rooms of millions of people across the world. Similarly to the church before the advent of the Gutenberg Press, people have had to go to a church or to a priest/pastor in order to access the invitation of the Gospel. No longer. The seeds of evangelism are being sown to a broader, more accessible audience than ever before.

“ The digital platform of the church in 2020 can do exactly what the Gutenberg press did to Europe in the thirteenth century. ”

CHAPTER SEVEN

**What Will
Corporate
Worship
Look Like?**

In 2007, Frank Blake stepped in as the CEO of Home Depot with the enormous task of turning around the fourth largest retailer in the country. His strategy? Build fewer stores.

This was an unheard of and unexpected move for a company who had relied so long on directing all of its marketing towards developing foot traffic in its stores. At that time, Home Depot had many issues that needed to be addressed, including customer service and employee morale, but one of its biggest issues was the development of the digital retail experience and a correlating shift in consumer behavior towards online shopping. Who was making the biggest dent in Home Depot's profits? You guessed it: Amazon.

Frank Blake did not have the knee jerk reaction of trying to make Home Depot a digital company in an effort to take on Amazon. He realized the value of the in-person experience, and that the physical experience of coming into a Home Depot store was still of the utmost importance. What he recognized was that his online presence needed to be repurposed in order to achieve success in this shift. Instead of having a website and digital marketing strategy to specifically drive foot traffic towards retail stores, he realized that the website needed to be a unique shopping experience in itself. It wasn't a question of either/or; it was both/and.

Fast forward to 2017, and Home Depot was recognized as a world leader in digital transformation.

Under Blake's leadership, the company not only turned around, but thrived in the re-invention of itself. When Blake took over in 2007, Home Depot stock was priced at a measly \$38 per share. As of the end of 2019, the stock closed the year at \$214 per share, a 463% increase.

It would be easy to interpret the intention of this book to describe a replacement of a physical experience with a digital one, but that is not the point I am making at all. Digital church is not a replacement for corporate worship; it is an enhancement to corporate worship and a unique experience in itself. Successful retailers have learned that providing an additional experience has not taken away from physical, in-store engagement. To prove that point, Home Depot is now the 7th largest online retailer in the world, but their online sales only comprise 5% of its total revenue. By creating a first rate experience online, a new "front door", Home Depot increased its in-store sales by over 400%.

Home Depot is not an anomaly. Walmart, Target, and Macy's; all retail brands formerly focused on driving foot traffic, have all adapted to a unique online shopping experience and are now in the top 10 largest online retailers in the country. However, not one of the three brands sees more than 10% of its revenue from online sales, but all three companies have been increasing in profit and stock value since the adaptation to an online marketplace. What does that tell us? Digital engagement does not replace physical attendance; when done well, it *drives* physical attendance.



**DIGITAL CHURCH IS
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EXPERIENCE IN ITSELF.**

The Holy Spirit is not limited to a building, but the reality of simple human dynamics is that an in-person, connected experience will always trump a transactional digital experience. There is a beauty in having people come together to worship their Creator, united in a message of salvation and redemption, leaving changed by the presence of God. However, respecting corporate worship does not necessarily have to come at the expense of minimizing the value of digital engagement. When the two separate experiences for people can complement each other, it could create a more holistic and effective approach towards engagement. For many churches, the digital experience will become the new front door.

I say all that to say this: your online campus is no longer a commodity or secondary experience. It will be a campus and an experience in and of itself. If you do it well, you will drive physical attendance to your campuses.

I doubt very much that Frank Blake, when rolling out his digital experience for Home Depot, called in his “tech guy” and asked him to create a website. Considering this was at the core of Home Depot’s strategy, and considering the success of the digital transformation as we know it now, I am supposing that he found some of his best leaders to take on this assignment.

Your ability to convert online attendance to physical engagement will be strongly influenced by the leader you put in the role of the online campus pastor. This is not a “tech guy” or a manager.

To be effective, this person will have strong leadership skills and vision for the campus, with the ability to recruit volunteers to follow up with and engage with people who have attended online. If the right person is chosen for this role, it could easily lead to an enormous impact and growth in the influence of your church.

“Your ability to convert online attendance to physical engagement will be strongly influenced by the leader you put in the role of the online campus pastor.”

You will likely have more people experiencing your church online than in person, and because it's a digital experience, the high touch required in the follow up and assimilation of those people will have to be twice as good. People who show up in person will likely have already experienced your church digitally and have familiarity with your worship style, preaching style, vision, culture, and leadership. You will likely not be introducing yourself to them for the first time; they are there because they've been introduced and want to know "what's next." Assimilation is the most important aspect of creating discipleship and engagement from a digital platform. Otherwise, you are creating viewers, not disciples.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Separating Evangelism from Discipleship


With the digital platform as our greatest evangelism tool, online attendance only measures introduction, not impact. It's easy to confuse the two. Simply put, people are watching, but that doesn't mean they're engaged. If we desire to be more than a starting point, the key is how we move beyond introduction to engagement in utilizing the digital platform.

I've actually prayed a lot about how to move toward engagement. The Parable of the Sower in Matthew comes to my mind and heart. I've heard this parable explained many times within the context of an individual's heart condition, but I had never thought about it in terms of the church. Evangelism is scattering seed. The Holy Spirit is both the rain and sun that nurture the seed, but the development of the seed is predicated upon the soil in which it lands. If the seed sown is the invitation to salvation through the Word of God, then we also must prioritize the cultivation of the soil, which represents the local church. Otherwise, we aren't creating the fertile soil that gives people the means to grow.

Discipleship will require the church to be excellent at creating identifiable, attainable next steps for connection. When I buy tools from Home Depot, I receive emails with how-to videos for DIY projects. When I buy my kids clothes, Target also recognizes that I am likely a buyer of toys as well, and sends me emails about sales they are having. They even know my kids' birthdays. When I bought a suit at Macy's, I received emails about sales on button-down shirts and loafers. For retailers, the conversion of digital shoppers to in-store patrons does not happen accidentally, but rather very intentionally. The church has to do the same if we desire discipleship more than viewership. While it is easy to measure our engagement by online attendance, the real measure of success in creating disciples will be how well we translate online engagement to in-person connection.

“Discipleship will require the church to be excellent at creating identifiable, attainable next steps for connection.”





**PEOPLE ARE
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CHAPTER NINE

The New Landscape of Church Communications

As a result of the inundation of content that people receive, attention spans have become shorter and shorter and shorter. Following the idea that Sunday morning is the huddle instead of the play, we are forced to ask two questions:

“What is it that we want to accomplish on Sunday morning?”


“How do we continue it during the week?”

We’ve enjoyed seeing churches innovate through this time. Some of the influential churches we have worked with have set up Facebook groups for different ministry areas, and the staff, on a rotating basis, hosts a 15-minute devotional with each group every morning at 7am. Others have created a simple, short devotional that goes to the congregation daily. Churches are communicating service opportunities more consistently and also in smaller doses. They are calling people who give for the first time to thank them. They are leveraging volunteer teams to schedule and make calls with congregants to check-in and pray with them during this crisis.

“ As a result of the inundation of content that people receive, attention spans have become shorter and shorter and shorter. ”

In the past, we've attempted to pack all of our communication into the 60, 75, or 90 minute Sunday morning program. We even still have bulletins! (Please. Make. It. Stop.) From the advancement of technology and the changes in consumer behavior, we should be learning that people consume content in smaller doses. We have the opportunity to segment that communication and deliver it to a segmented audience. This creates shorter streams of content for easier digestion and to better hold those short attention spans while also directing the right content to the right people.

“ From the advancement of technology and the changes in consumer behavior, we should be learning that people consume content in smaller doses. ”



CHAPTER TEN

The Purpose of Church Buildings is Changing

While our company builds many church buildings, very few of them actually look like churches. We specialize in helping churches develop properties open for community use during the week, which means their buildings create revenue streams to support them. We have an enormous conviction to see buildings fund ministries rather than the traditional model of seeing ministries fund buildings. There are many moving pieces in seeing a building fund its ministry successfully, but the churches we have helped have an annual revenue of \$100,000 to upwards of \$3M, which is enough to offset a mortgage payment or replace it completely.

“ While our company builds many church buildings, very few of them actually look like churches. ”

Let's briefly go back to the history and origin of church buildings. When the church became a building in the late third century, it was not only *in* the center of the community, but it *was* the center of community. It served as the gathering place for the entire community by remaining accessible to everyone and hosting the majority of community events. This continued through the Medieval Times, the Renaissance, and the birth of the American church. However, at some point in our history, we decided that we needed to buy land fifteen minutes away from the people we serve in order to afford large buildings that no one uses during the week.

We, as the Church, have spent millions and millions of dollars on buildings that get used once per week. For the attractional church model, we have even firmly stated and coached our churches not to meet in groups at our facilities but in their respective homes. Keep in mind that this idea was birthed by churches in suburban communities where homes are twice the size and half the cost of urban homes.

Relevance lives at the intersection of purpose and practice. It's the place where our *why* meets our *how*. In this next iteration of church buildings, it is my hope that we will design and plan for buildings to be as *relevant* as they are *reverent*. While we spend millions of dollars constructing buildings for our purposes, we neglect the countless businesses and community needs that fit similar program requirements. Yet, we have the opportunity to maximize both our facilities and our impact during the week to fund our buildings and to reach people who may not otherwise come on campus. We can, once again, *be* the center of community by *being in* the center of the community.

“ We, as the Church, have spent millions and millions of dollars on buildings that get used once per week. ”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Less Is More: Multisite Trends

Big box retailers have begun to think small. Smaller stores that is. Over the past few years, Target has built out approximately 100 stores of 12,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet mostly in urban areas or college campuses, a departure from the traditional model of its 150,000SF (square feet) suburban stores. Starbucks is closing 400 of its locations over the next year to provide pick up only and drive through locations. Ikea has moved towards providing a showroom in urban areas, where orders are shipped same-day from a larger distribution center.

Why does this less-is-more model work?

Retailers noticed a huge shift in consumer behavior years ago, especially as the online marketplace grew. People are becoming less and less accustomed to leaving their local area to drive anywhere. Commuter towns that supported large cities are now live/work/play communities within themselves. Items purchased online show up in people's mailboxes or on their doorsteps. People are getting more and more accustomed to working from home. These retailers are realizing that building a monstrous big box store and asking people to drive out of their way to visit them is the very thing that people are pushing back against. In order to be relevant to the customer, retailers are tailoring their strategy to their customer base, offering the benefits of online shopping with same-day pickup, and doing so in smaller footprints.

When asked about this strategy, one executive at Target was quoted to say that the strategy allows them to tailor their inventory and experience to the local audience in order to fill the needs of that specific area. There's a lot in that statement, but that's exactly the direction we see taking place in the relevant multisite models today.

In short, the strategy of building huge stores and asking people to drive more than fifteen minutes to visit them has become obsolete. Retailers are finding a higher level of relevance to their customers by offering a scaled down version of their stores, keeping the experience consistent with the larger outlets, but within the community it serves. Sound familiar?

“ In order to be relevant to the customer, retailers are tailoring their strategy to their customer base, offering the benefits of online shopping with same-day pickup, and doing so in smaller footprints. ”

As a company, we have been fortunate to work with some of the largest and fastest growing churches in America, which has given us the opportunity to learn from our clients as much as our clients learn from us. Last year, we served eighteen clients on the *Outreach Magazine Top 100 Fastest Growing Churches in America*, including four in the top ten. This gave us the opportunity to study trends among some of the most relevant churches in America today.

One interesting trend was that we did not build a single worship center over 1,500 seats. Almost all of the expansion was in venues between 500 to 1,000 seats, and those churches are adding at least one campus per year on average, filling them up quickly, and moving on to the next opportunity because of how quickly the campuses pay for themselves.

Some of the fastest growing churches in America are recognizing the value of a smaller footprint and more intimate worship experiences for their members. This forward thinking strategy is garnering similar results to Target. They are moving towards personalization and quality, not size and quantity. Instead of serving one large demographic, they are serving a larger number of demographics.

I have noticed a very strong inverted scale of economy in these smaller venues: the smaller the room, the higher the participation rate in serving and giving. I've been noticing that trend for years and have dug into why that is the case so consistently. What we found is that when people walk into a 3,500 seat room, they feel like a *product* of the story; but in a 500-seat room, they feel like a *part* of the story. They feel there is more to do, it's harder to disappear into a crowd, and they look forward to seeing certain people every weekend.

If we agree that assimilation is leading people to find their role in the God-inspired story of redemption through the local church, we have found that this is easier to do in smaller venues.

This is important for a few reasons. COVID has erased the two major factors in determining attendance: room size (capacity) and driving distance. The local church now has a larger footprint through its digital outreach. We also believe that digital impact, when done well, will drive physical attendance. These two factors coupled together will likely drive a larger number of locations with smaller campuses, similar to what we are seeing in retail.

In 2019, 40% of all multisite growth was through church mergers, and we can expect that trend to increase. Most of the churches being merged are smaller venues between 500 to 750 seats and only need basic updating, but they have the core facets of a church building with seating, parking, and family ministry space. Because most of these churches did not have a digital presence prior to COVID, they will likely not survive this pandemic, and these organizations will want to see their legacies survive through another local church instead of seeing their buildings converted into apartments. I personally believe that this is going to be the number one strategy for multisite growth coming out of this season.

In short, I don't believe that COVID has changed anything, but rather accelerated a change that was already taking place. As multisite continues to be the number one strategy for church growth, I believe that we will continue to see a larger number of smaller venues, where attendance to those venues will be driven in large part by the digital platform.

“ If we agree that assimilation is leading people to find their role in the God-inspired story of redemption through the local church, we have found that this is easier to do in smaller venues. ”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Summary

I am passionate about this discussion because I am a product of this discussion. I swore in my twenties that I would never set foot in a church again. I had an awful church experience growing up, and I had a huge problem with Christians. However, I had (and still have) a mentor named Don Martin who is a Jesus follower. He always invited me to church, and I always said no. One day he bought me a DVD series from North Point Community Church, and I was introduced to this guy named Andy Stanley. It was a non-threatening way to engage with this church without having to set foot in this church. I realized that I had a problem with judgmental Christians who projected their religion on me, but I did not have a problem with God. The God that this Andy guy was talking about seemed inviting and practical.

I still didn't want to go to church, though. I enjoyed consuming content from my home without having to risk more personal shame from Christians. However, my mentor's wife, unbeknownst to me, signed me up for a small group. A few months into watching North Point from home, I received a phone call from a guy named Josh Adams who invited me to his home to discuss the Bible and Andy's series. I was intrigued, so I went. God used it to change my life, and Josh is still one of my best friends today.

I went to that small group for months before I made the decision to go to church. When I finally set foot in church, I loved it. I was prepared for it. I had people I knew sitting next to me ready to support me in case I felt weird. On December 15th, 2010, I gave my life to the Lord, and since then, I've never been the same. The same guy who swore he'd never set foot in a church again now gets to write about what the Lord has done in his life to thousands of churches. Only God.

I was introduced to church in a digital format. I was followed up with in an inviting way. I took small steps, and my new community was okay taking small steps with me. I felt loved and prioritized the entire time. Sunday morning was the end result, not the starting point. Not everyone follows the same path, but there are a lot more people out there like me. People who are, unknowingly, hoping that the church will adapt to them so they can experience the love, acceptance, and power in the invitation of a relationship with Jesus Christ.



Ministry
Solutions