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Newsletter of Hosanna Lutheran Church

January 2011

Growing to Serve and Praise the Living Christ

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2011... A Year for Discernment, Focus and Transformation

As we begin a new year, let me begin with a question: What will the future of Hosanna Lutheran Church look like ten or fifteen years from now?

It is a question that is important to not only ask, but answer together and that is what we will be doing in 2011.

As I write this article, it is Sunday, December 19th and in about four hours the Mission Focus Team is going to meet to begin a process of getting focused and defining Hosanna's vision for mission and taking the initial steps at defining our core values (guiding principles) which will ground that vision. We seek to lead the entire congregation through this process, so that it is not a "top-down" kind of edict but a shared vision that will hold us accountable as we move into the future.

Along the way, you will see communication regarding the progress of this process and you will see invitations to give input along the way. Our hope is that we will finish this process by mid-year, but we also want to be patient in this discernment process, trusting that the Spirit will guide us to that moment when we can say, in faith, "Yes! That's what God is calling us to be and do!"

As I finish this brief article, I am asking that each of us pray often that God would guide us through this process. Pray for focus, the courage and wisdom for faithful discernment, and open hearts to be transformed. May God bless us all in this journey we take together!

- Pastor John

Quick Links

Hosanna Website

Hosanna on Facebook

Monthly Calendar

**Cyberline - This
Week at Hosanna**

The Backyard

**[Print text version of this
Hotline](#)**

Are We Becoming an Atheist Nation? 3 Reasons Young People Are Abandoning Religion

By Rev. Howard Bess, Consortium News
December 4, 2010

Chances are that if you are in your 20s or 30s, you are not hanging around a church.

Polling is now a highly sophisticated industry, and religious organizations

are being fed some irrefutable numbers about what is happening among their constituents.

In a single generation, the Christian church dropout rate has increased fivefold. The Barna Group, a leading research organization focusing on the intersection of faith and culture, says 80 percent of the young people raised in a church will be "disengaged" before they are 30.

In the past 20 years, the number of American people who say they have no religion has doubled and has now reached 15 percent. Those numbers are concentrated in the under-30 population. The polling data continues to show that a dramatic exit is taking place from American Christian churches.

Beyond those numbers, denominations across the board are acknowledging loss of membership, but it is worse than they are reporting. Many churches report numbers based on baptized constituents, yet actual Sunday morning attendance doesn't come close to those numbers.

Once baptized, always a reportable Christian!

Simply put, denominations are no longer a reliable source of membership information.

The mega-church movement also has flattened, with people leaving as fast as they are recruited. The only real growth among Christians appears to be in the home church movement in which small groups of independent believers gather in a house to worship.

While the polling numbers are in, the debate about the reasons is only just beginning. When a pollster asks if a person has left the Christian Faith and a church, the answer is answered "yes" or "no."

However, when the pollster asks "why?," the answers become mushy and the numbers lose their significance. Why are people leaving churches so fast?

I am not a pollster, but rather an observer of the religious scene. My impressions are anecdotal and in no way scientific. I receive personal responses to my columns, and I carry on conversations with a steady flow of people by e-mail or over breakfast, lunch or coffee.

I believe we church people and clergy need to look at ourselves for at least some of the reasons for the decline in membership. I offer three observations:

Churches are no longer intellectually challenging. More and more of our young people are college-educated and in the future even more must and will accept the challenge of post-high school education. They are thinking people who are expanding the limits of their curiosity and knowledge.

These young people often conclude that they know more than the person in the pulpit and are not willing to accept the church's rigid catechism, an educational method that teaches the religious questions and the correct answers. As an educational tool, catechism is outdated and provides no challenge to students eager to question and discuss.

Ministers must re-establish themselves among the leaders of the

intellectual community.

Churches are no longer leaders in moral and ethical discussions.

Young people have grown weary of churches that cannot get past issues such as homosexuality and abortion.

Our new crop of church drop-outs is still very interested in alternatives to a selfish, hedonistic society. Justice is high on their agenda, and they are looking for opportunities for public service. Our young people want to be involved in solving environmental problems and in peacemaking.

By contrast, pizza parties and rock concerts -- techniques that have been used to make churches appear more relevant to the young -- are not high on the agenda of young people concerned about society's deep-seated problems.

In other words, too many churches are concerned about same-sex marriage when the preacher should be talking about the unacceptability of war.

Churches are no longer visionary. They have remained focused on saving souls for the next life and offering rituals tied to perpetuating theologies that no longer seem relevant to many young people. Churches are no longer significant players in shaping the life of our communities.

If ministers and churches will not lay out what the kingdom of God on earth might actually look like, young people will continue to look elsewhere for other models.

In that sense, I am less concerned about the young adults who are leaving the churches than the churches they are leaving behind.

Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska.

Hosanna is now on Facebook!

Because more than 25 people "like" us, we now officially have our very own URL (computer address) to make it easier to find our page! Thanks to all of you who helped us to reach this threshold.

You can go directly to our page by typing this in your address bar:

www.facebook.com/hosannalutheranchurch

Check our Facebook page regularly for event updates and to participate in discussions. Currently, we would like your input on what you think are Hosanna's greatest strengths. This is part of our process as we begin to talk about our core values.

-- Susanne Meier

Job Opening for a Gift Planner

MEF Gift Planner for TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod

The Mission Endowment Fund (MEF) of the Texas Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod (TLGCS) will sponsor a Gift Planner (GP) to begin serving the synod in 2011. The purpose of the GP will be to develop major and planned gifts in support of congregation, synod, ELCA, and other Lutheran ministries. For more information [click here](#).

2010 Christmas Message from Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation!"
Isaiah 52:7

When Jesus was born, angelic messengers broke the still calm of a Galilean night to sing joyously and proclaim, "This very day in David's city a Savior is born for you - God's Promised One, your Lord." Glad tidings of great joy! Common shepherds were the first and heartiest heralds of the promised Savior's arrival then, and today the joy in Jesus' birth fills every corner of this season.

Admittedly sometimes in modern America the commercial clatter and cultural clutter of the season seem to overtake the angels' song and the shepherds' joyous news. But such a majestic message of God's salvation cannot be silenced. Some loudly lament that the world will not listen to the Gospel message, but in this season so many beckon. "Christians, sing with us. Bring your songs of Christmas, of Jesus." A few may shush you, just as there were those who would later attempt to silence Jesus and his message of God's remarkable, revolutionary mercy, even to the point of crucifixion.

If so, then that is all the more reason to enter into the commotion and clutter, to let go of your inhibitions, to join the angels in singing and the shepherds in exulting with unashamed joy: Jesus, the Savior is born!

"Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy." "See, your salvation comes." Isaiah 52:8; 62:11

Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Family Life

- Saturday, January 8 is a Habitat for Humanity work day. Also, Confirmation is preparing lunches for the workers.
- Friday, January 21 - Lutherhill Mother Daughter Retreat
- Sunday, January 2 - CREW breakfast at Denny's
- January 9 and 23 - CREW Bible study
- January 2, 9, 16 and 30 - Kids Church
- January 23 - Worship Mentoring

Below, photo taken at the Advent Retreat at Lutherhill. A special thank you to Carey and Angela Jones (on the right) for helping.



Christmas is forever, not for just one day,
for loving, sharing, giving, are not to put away
like bells and lights and tinsel, in some box upon a shelf.
The good you do for others is good you do yourself.

~Norman Wesley Brooks, "Let Every Day Be Christmas," 1976



Illustration by Mason Chaney, 12-5-2010

Secret Worshipers

Dale and Georgia Bargmann
Sunday - November 28, 2010

Today my wife Georgia and I began a quest to visit different churches and report on our experiences.

Our first church was St. Matthew Lutheran Church of Westfield (LCMS) on Bammel, immediately east of the Hardy Toll Road and literally on the other side of the railroad tracks. It was a gorgeous fall morning as we headed east on Richey Rd. to Imperial Valley, then right on Bammel. A slow-moving train prevented us from driving straight into the church parking lot. I noticed a line on the church's sign: "Serving the Lord since 1900." St. Matthew has a 100-plus-year-history, I said to Georgia as we pulled into the single designated visitor parking space near the entrance.

Like Hosanna, there is one 10 AM worship service. We followed the line of people as if we knew where we were going, responding to the "good mornings" of a few people standing in the small entry area. Not ignored, but not especially welcoming. Two men handed us bulletins. We chose a pew (padded) about a quarter of the way up from the back.

Fingering through our bulletins, a combination of news and worship service order, I noted the long list of prayer concerns, along with info on weekday Advent services preceded by soup/salad suppers, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services, Helping Hands, opportunities to study the word, an article called Life Quotes which opened with "Speak about adoption positively." Elsewhere was a paragraph on "We Believe and Teach," and a whole page on their practice of the Lord's Supper (they have "closed" communion). Haven't heard that term in a very long time.

The organ (electronic) began playing. Not a lot of people in attendance. My

rough count was about 100 when the shuffling in stopped. Definitely room for more. No projection screen. Black-painted brick wall behind the altar; a faux stained glass window with rectangles of color, no imagery. Fairly generic worship space.

The service began. Following the order of service was fairly easy; back and forth between a four-page insert and the Lutheran Service Book. Pastor Bogs, who led the service solo, directed us where to go as we moved through the liturgy. We sang every verse of every hymn and the ones chosen for this day were not easy to sing. I couldn't hear the other worshipers; the space is acoustically dead. We were surprised by the number of kids who came up for the children's talk -- on the symbolism of the advent wreath -- especially with the predominance of gray-heads (like me) in worship.

The memorable sermon points for me: Jesus walked several thousand miles over his three year ministry. He didn't just wait for people to come to him. He paid attention to those in need.

Then, after the offering, came the communion part of the service. I kind of dreaded it because of the "closed" announcement, both in the bulletin and by Pastor Bogs during the service. He needed to be notified, he said, of anyone's intent to commune because of his concern with our spiritual welfare. I didn't want to ask how to notify him. There were no cards in the pews, so I chose to do exactly what I've done for the past 40-plus years and walk up to the front, kneel and expect to receive the bread (wafer in this case) and wine. As it turned out, it was no big deal. The servers didn't pass me by. I took each of the elements, crossed myself, said thank you to God, and walked back to my pew.

The greeting of peace came near the end and it seemed genuinely warm. Then, after another sing-all-the-verses hymn, everyone was ushered out a row at a time. Several people asked our names and if we'd be back. "You never know," I said. I did tell Pastor Bogs I was on staff at Hosanna. "Oh," he said with grin, "Checking us out."

"Yes," I said. "Hopefully I'll learn something new or even be inspired. Visiting other churches helps me see things from a different perspective."

One final comment. I have a special concern for websites and I believe I do a good job with Hosanna's. I have to say frankly that St. Matthew's is not good, bordering on ghastly. The one thing it does have going for it is that I did find the service time fairly quickly. But, overall it isn't a good visual statement. Here's the link: <http://www.stmatthewlcms.com>

As Georgia and I walked toward our car, she said, "What a beautiful day."

"Yes, it certainly is," I responded.

The Church Does Not Lobby

A speaker at the National Council of Churches pointed out the difference between advocacy and lobbying.

Lobbying is exerting influence on behalf of those **with** power and money.

Advocacy is exerting influence on behalf of those **without** power and

money.

The distinction helpful.

To serve the poor without addressing the root causes of poverty is silly. To decry racism and hate without attempting to dismantle systems of institutionalized racism is hypocritical.

The church must do advocacy. It is part of the prophetic witness. The prophets influenced kings on behalf of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the resident alien.

"When our days become dreary with low hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yes terdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." - Where Do We Go From Here? - Martin Luther King Jr.

Bible Boot Camp, Part 3

Enlistees... This month we turn our attention to a beloved story in the Old Testament about an ancestor of King David and Jesus. We'll call it **"Where You Go, I Will Go,"**

So grab your Bibles or your laptops/Powerbooks and read the book of Ruth. It's only four chapters. The book of Ruth is all about loyalty, love, transformation, kindness and acceptance.

[Ruth 1-4](#)

Insights:

- The main characters:
 - According to the book "All the Women of the Bible" the name Ruth ranks number 7 on the list of the top 100 names female names in America. Ruth is probably a contraction of reuth meaning 'companion' or 'friend.'
 - Naomi means 'pleasant', but the name she called herself later in the story, Mara, means 'bitter.'
 - Boaz means 'powerful' or 'strong.'
 - Mahlon and Chilion mean 'sickness' and 'used up'.
 - Orpah means 'back of the neck'; she turned her back on Naomi. (FYI: Oprah Winfrey was originally named "[Orpah](#)" after this character in the book of Ruth. However, her family and friends' inability to pronounce "Orpah" caused them to put the "P" before the "R" in every place else other than her birth certificate.)
 - Elimelech means 'my God is king.'
- The genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew is a mostly male lineage. Only four women are included, one of whom is Ruth.
- Ruth's famous words are often used in marriage services: "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to

separate us!"

- Ruth was not a Jew, but a Moabite. Mosaic law prohibited any association with Moabites because of their idolatry. Deuteronomy 23:3-6 is very specific about this: *"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants for ten generations may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. These nations did not welcome you with food and water when you came out of Egypt. Instead, they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in distant Aram-naharaim to curse you. But the Lord your God refused to listen to Balaam. He turned the intended curse into a blessing because the Lord your God loves you. As long as you live, you must never promote the welfare and prosperity of the Ammonites or Moabites."*
- **Did you know...** Uncovering a man's feet and lying down was a nonverbal way to request marriage?
- **Did you know...** The land of a family or clan could not be sold permanently?
- **Did you know...** Taking off a sandal and handing it to another was a public way of renouncing property rights and transferring them to another?

Now, answer these questions:

- Where is Bethlehem? [Link to map](#)
- Where is Moab? [Link to map](#)
- How did you meet your mate (or best friend)?
- Who took the initiative on the first date?
- How could you tell you were right for each other?
- Skim through this story and note how many times God is mentioned.
- What is God's role?
- How does God provide for each character?
- What role has God played in your life?
- How has God provided for you? Your family? Each family member?
- What signs of hope do you find in the story of Ruth?
- What resources does your church community have for helping the homeless, unemployed and hungry?
- How could the biblical principle of gleaning (recycling) be applied to helping the needy?
- How does Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and Boaz's loyalty to Ruth defy the historical prejudices of the original readers? (See the above quote from Deuteronomy.)

Ruth's story illustrates the triumph of courage and ingenuity over adverse circumstances.

January Highlights

Saturday, January 1 - New Year's Day

Monday, January 3 - Office Closed

Tuesday, January 4 - Care Team Meeting - 7:00 PM

Saturday, January 8 - Habitat for Humanity Work Day and Confirmation Serves Lunches to Workers - 8:00 AM

Sunday, January 9 - Equal Exchange Coffee Sunday

Wednesday, January 12 - WELCA Board Meeting - 5:30 PM

Sunday, January 16 - Mission of the Month Noisy Offering

Sunday, January 16 - CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - 11:30 AM

Wednesday, January 19 - Confirmation Class - 7:00 PM

Saturday, January 22 - Cub Scout Pinewood Derby - 8:00 AM

Thursday, January 27 - Bishop's Worship Excellence Team Meeting - 10:00 AM

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[Directions and map](#)

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