

The Art and Science of Predicting What's Ahead for the American Church, Part 2

[In my earlier post last week](#), I offered the first seven of fourteen predictions for American churches for 2014. I must admit I am concerned about my focus on American congregations when so much is taking place in churches around the world. I am challenged to write more global posts for fear they will become too generic without local applications. I will continue to work on that issue.

For now, I will continue to look at American congregations. As a reminder, I noted that predicting is as much of an art as it is a science. Each of the predictions has a reasonable explanation. For these fourteen predictions, I gleaned from several sources:

- Data-based research, particularly LifeWay Research.
- Trends that are already underway and gaining momentum.
- Conversations with hundreds of church leaders.
- My own experiences, based on 25 years of consulting and research of American congregations.

For these fourteen predictions, I added a new feature, a confidence factor. For example, if I said I had 100 percent confidence that a prediction would become reality, it would mean that I have absolutely no doubt about it. None of these predictions have a 100 percent confidence factor. But none of them fall below 70 percent either. That means I have a fairly high level of certainty about each of these trends.

The order of the trends is random. They are not ranked in any particular priority. On Saturday, I shared [the first seven predictions](#). I conclude today with the final seven.

1. **More large churches will function like mini-denominations.** These churches will have multiple locations. They will have one senior or lead pastor, and several other campus pastors. They are more likely to fund their own missions priorities, even if they are also contributing to a denominational missions fund. Many of them will write their own small group literature. Some will have their own church planting strategies. (70% confidence factor)
2. **New worship centers will be built smaller.** There will be a greater emphasis on smaller gatherings more frequently. This trend is being affected significantly by the preferences of the Millennial generation (born 1980 to 2000). A related trend is that many congregations will find ways to downsize their existing worship centers. (70%)
3. **Increased emphasis on small groups.** In 2014 we will see a decided shift from nearly two decades of the “worship revolution” to the “small group revolution.” Church leaders are rapidly discovering that members who connect to groups are the most faithful members in the church by a myriad of metrics. That is not to suggest that worship will become unimportant; it is to suggest that small groups will have a greater emphasis than the previous quarter century. (75%)
4. **Longer pastoral tenure.** There will be incremental but steady growth in the length of

tenure of pastors at a given church. Part of the reason is the influence of the Millennials who do not view larger churches as their next step in ministry. Part of the reason is economic; moving in today's economy is not nearly as easy in pre-recession days. Hopefully, the main reason is a sense of God's call to stay rather than move. (75%)

5. **Local churches increasing their roles as ministry training leaders.** The role of ministry training in the past decades fell largely upon Bible colleges and seminaries. More churches in 2014 will partner with those colleges and seminaries to provide contextual training at a local church. (90%)
6. **Church movement to the community.** The posture of many American churches in the most recent decades has been to find ways to get people in the community to come to the church. That is shifting, perhaps dramatically. In more churches, the congregation will move to the community. Instead of a philosophy of "y'all come," the dominant theme will be "we'll go." The congregants will be a more powerful presence in the community they serve, thus ministering to, influencing, and reaching more people with the gospel. (80%)
7. **More multiple teaching/preaching pastors.** In larger churches, there has been a decided trend toward having more than one teaching and preaching pastor. Now the trend is taking place in smaller churches. We will see more churches with attendance under 200, even some under 100, with more than one teaching/preaching pastor. Of course, not all of them will be full-time vocationally at the church, so there will be more bi-vocational pastors whose role is to be a second or even third pastor in these smaller churches. (85%)

These fourteen predictions are not infallible. But there does seem to be growing evidence that most, if not all of them, will become a reality in 2014.

Let me hear from you about my perspectives. Happy New Year!

Read [Part 1 here](#).

Read more from Thom [here](#).