

Ten Trends that Will Shape the Church in 2018

Never in my lifetime have I seen local congregations at such a critical juncture. Cultural Christianity is all but dead. The “Nones,” those without any religious preference, are increasing. Many of the communities are no longer friendly to local churches; some have become adversarial.

But in the waves of these seas of negativity, are mercy drops of hope and possibilities. Look at these ten major trends carefully. See how God would have your church respond.

1. **The audio revolution.** The e-book has not proved to be nearly as popular as we thought it would be. Many blog writers are reporting declines in readership. But audio books are rising in popularity. Listeners are moving to podcasts so they can learn while they jog, drive, and exercise. Outside of preaching podcasts, churches have many other opportunities to reach and disciple people through audio ministries.
2. **Boomer retirement crisis.** Boomer pastors and church leaders are retiring in large numbers. But most of them don't have succession plans. They are in churches from the small to the large. We will have many churches that are looking to fill these voids with little success.
3. **The deferred maintenance crisis in church facilities.** My friend, Tim Cool of [Cool Solutions Group](#), keeps reporting about churches that have done little to keep their church facilities in acceptable condition. For many of them, they are experiencing times of reckoning. A church with which I have familiarity had to close 4,000 square feet of space because it was deemed unsafe and uninhabitable. Like Tim says, you pay some now or you pay more later.
4. **Churches moving into retail spaces.** The United States has a surplus of retail space, and that surplus will grow. The demise of many brick-and-mortar stores and chains presents an incredible opportunity for churches to find prime space for new and additional sites.
5. **Ongoing church closures.** This trend shows no signs of slowing. I hope church leaders and members will be more receptive to acquisitions and mergers before its too late. Too many of these churches are expecting to be bailed out without lifting a finger.
6. **The rise of the neighborhood church.** Churches that were once at the center of life in a neighborhood have declined and died. But we see them experiencing a renewal and revival both through acquisitions and re-plants.
7. **The learning revolution of the best church leaders.** It is almost cliché to talk about the pace of change in our world and culture. I won't bore you with the statistics and reality of change. But one thing is becoming glaringly obvious. Church leaders who are becoming ongoing learners are becoming the best leaders of these churches. Indeed, we created [Church Answers](#) to provide a learning platform for church leaders on a regular basis. Those church leaders who are not continually learning will not be leading well.
8. **Downsizing of worship centers/sanctuaries.** This trend is one I have mentioned in recent months, but the pace of downsizing has accelerated. For certain, some of it is due to declining attendance, but that is not the only factor. A number of churches have

intentionally moved to smaller worship services through multiple services, venues, and campuses.

9. **The rise of networks.** More churches are aligning with both informal and formal networks with a common cause and common purpose. Those that are part of denominations typically choose to stay with their denominations for both doctrinal and legacy reasons. Acts 29 is an example of a church planting network more aligned with Reformed churches. Watch for new networks to form with different emphases and a broader evangelical doctrine.
10. **More Great Commission intentionality.** When cultural Christianity was alive and well, churches could do minimal evangelistic activity and still grow by transfer growth. Such is not the case any more. Churches will have to be highly intentional evangelistically in the months ahead or they will head toward death and closure.

In future posts, I plan to offer solutions for churches for many of these issues.

Many congregations are at a tipping point. Some will die. Some will thrive. My prayer is that the summary of these trends can be used of God in your churches to move your congregation toward greater health and Great Commission obedience.

> [Read more from Thom.](#)
