

CHURCH FUTURES



Future Church Scenarios

The goal of scenarios is to inspire creative action in the present through anticipation of possible futures. These scenarios are stories developed to challenge assumptions and stimulate new ways of thinking about the present and the future. No one knows what lies just beyond the horizon but these possibilities can inform leaders of potential challenges and opportunities they may want to prepare for now rather than react to later.

Written as four imaginary letters from church leaders in 2020, these scenarios offer different perspectives on the church of the future. They are not predictions, projections, nor prophecies but rather an attempt to provoke a realization that the future may not simply be more of the same.

Preview

Scenario 1 – The *Multichurch*

Megachurches give way to the *Multichurch*, which is youthful, fast growing, predominantly ethnic-led, and places high value on public activism.

Scenario 2 – The *Vochurch*

Faith, business, and community development merge through female-led vocational networks that thrive as extensions of local congregations.

Scenario 3 – The *Hybridchurch*

The digital generation fosters a high degree of authenticity and interactivity in worship as they meet in both virtual and face-to-face gatherings.

Scenario 4 – The *Rejuvchurch*

Highly adaptive and transformative structures fuel the rebirth of dying congregations while creating an environment for individual transformations.

Scenario 1 – The *Multichurch*

At a Glance

- By 2020, the growing edge of American Christianity is young and predominantly ethnic.
- Hispanic and Asian pastors lead one-third of American megachurches.
- Evangelicalism has embraced public activism over faith-based influence on politics.

The *Multichurch* Letter

I'm Rev. Luis Sanchez, senior pastor of Rivercrest Church in Phoenix, AZ. For me, and millions of immigrants, the most significant development of 2011-2020 was the emergence of the *multichurch*. Today, 30% of all megachurches are led by Hispanic and Asian pastors. By 2030, that number could rise to 51%. As ethnic evangelicals, we reversed flatline growth of megachurches and created culturally relevant *multichurches* to serve both fast-growing immigrant communities and aging Anglos.

A decade ago experts wrote about the 'coming Evangelical collapse' and the demise of the megachurch. As it turned out, the decline was only within a spectrum of suburban white Christianity. What the postmodern and worship wars overlooked in 2010 was the rise of what Soong-Chan Rah called the 'next evangelicalism.' The shift from mega to *multi* was first noticed as mid-40s Hispanics came into leadership in historic megachurches in big cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, and Ft. Lauderdale. Our movement exploded as 2nd generation Hispanics and Asians, such as myself, discovered we could combine highly efficient methods and relational ministry for our own communities.

Thanks to the *multichurch*, the growing edge of American Christianity in 2020 is young and largely ethnic, whether Hispanic, African American, or Asian American. This demographic shift is clearly evident in the workplace. Since 2010 the minority portion of the working age population has increased from 28% to 37%, while the white portion declined from 72% to 63%. Just as Anglo-families of the 1990s created megachurches, the ethnic families of the 2010's formed *multichurches* for spiritual formation, youth ministry and eldercare.

The *multichurch* enabled evangelicals to finally reconcile the personal gospel of Billy Graham with the public activism of Martin Luther King Jr. While we still face a host of new challenges to righteousness, from same-sex marriage to genetic enhancement, long gone are the heady days of faith-based influence on politics. Today we must work humbly with Mormons and Catholics to advance smart family issues.

Gary, J. (2010, January). The post-church letters: Voices from 2020. Church Executive Magazine.

Scenario 2 – The Vocachurch

At a Glance

- By 2020, women emerge as the most influential leaders in the American church.
- Faith, business, and community development merge as a response to the need for local community transformation.
- Thousands of locally initiated female-led vocational networks exist as extensions of local congregations.

The Vocachurch Letter

I'm Dr. Melissa Kaufman-Reed, executive pastor of Highland Hills church in Columbus, OH. I am a representative of one-half of the America workforce, which is female. For us the most significant faith development, leading up to 2020, was the formation of thousands of locally initiated female-led vocational networks.

Vocachurches were born during the dark days of the Great Recession. While male CEOs kept receiving bonuses, the women of America realized we had entered a new era of austerity. Acting from faith to overcome frustration, we led America to invest in everything local—including ourselves. As working women, we started meeting weekly to speak into each other's lives and trade services between our businesses. We rejected long congested traffic commutes and transformed our workplaces through flextime, job-sharing, and telecommuting.

The first VocaNet was formed in Cleveland as a self-organizing, peer-coaching, innovation group. It was built as a three-fold cord of faith, business, and community development, combining the best of Anne Graham Lotz, Suze Orme, and Oprah Winfrey. It started to multiply. Historians tell us it was the rebirth of the Wesleyan class meeting of the 1700s, but with an edge that put faith-to-work. Each net practiced five LOCAL principles: local, open, caring, adaptive, and leadership. What Promise Keepers was to men in the 1990s, VocaNet was to women in the 2010s.

By 2015, the movement fused local care with local congregations. Today over one-half of VocaNets are extensions of churches, or Vocachurches. They stand in the long line of innovations from the Sunday school to home schooling. VocaNet has given women back their voices and vocations. Vocachurches now promise to be a main vehicle by which women will receive spiritual formation, give back to the community, and invest in a new generation.

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Scenario 3 – The *Hybridchurch*

At a Glance

- By 2020, the digital generation has begun to lead churches that meet as easily in virtual as face-to-face worlds.
- Refusing program driven passivity in church, they foster a high degree of authenticity and interactivity in worship experiences.
- Sermons are multi-person conversations led by a pastoral team that encourages media-based contributions from congregants.

The *Hybridchurch* Letter

I'm Aiden Harris, a DC or digital coordinator for Lumenaré Church, in Orlando, FL. I grew up digital as part of the net generation. Net Geners transformed the Internet into a place to create and connect, rather than just a place where you found information. The most significant development since 2010 has been the emergence of the *hybridchurch*. We call our churches hybrid because, like amphibians, who operate on both water and land, we meet as easily in virtual as in face-to-face worlds.

In 2020, the personal navigator is not the notebook computer but the PMD, or Personal Media Device, the successor to iBerry. We use our PMDs to connect and create as an *ecclesia*, when we are gathered or scattered. Our sermons are not single-medium monologues, but multi-person conversations mixed by DCs like me. They are highlights of the previous week's media-based conversations conducted by the pastoral team, along with instant polls and Twitter feeds. We still reach up in worship, but that itself is enriched by diverse techno or cultural elements assembled and replayed on 3D ultra screens, or on PMDs if we are scattered.

Three factors created today's *hybridchurch*. The first was Net Geners like me, coming of age. We refused to be passive in church. The second was next generation broadband. These fiber networks enabled multi-person video conferencing by mid-decade, from both home and work, at 10-gigabit speeds. The third factor was the catalyst—the global N-fluenza of 2016, which shut down all face-to-face meetings for eight weeks. *Hybridchurch* meetings literally saved the church during those 60 days. It has stayed with us ever since. While some Boomers still operate 'purebred' churches, Net Geners like me expect and demand the high degree of authenticity and interactivity found in *hybridchurches*. We believe the multi-splendored presence of God is seen in the many, not just the few.

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The *Rejuv*church

At a Glance

- By 2020, a spiritual movement based on highly adaptive and transformative structures fuels the rebirth of tens of thousands of dying congregations.
- These 'new wineskins' rejuvenate small and medium sized churches by appealing to the tastes and meeting the needs of multiple generations.
- Individual transformations are the norm in a new environment of unhampered creativity.

The *Rejuv*church Letter

I'm Scott Holmes, pastor of Marshalltown Community Church, Iowa. I am part of a spiritual movement that has swept the country this decade, resulting in the rebirth of tens of thousands of rural and inner-city churches. We are small to medium size churches with vibrant congregations that feature some traditional elements but have organizational structures that are highly adaptive, transformative, and open.

The *rejuv*church model was initiated by several of us from the Millennial generation who shared a concern that traditional church had become irrelevant to younger generations. Believing that bigger is not always better and that there is value in 'cradle to grave' institutions, we designed a multi-generational church experience to ensure a spiritual heritage for our grandchildren and for future generations. The concept quickly caught fire. By 2017, a loose federation of churches that cross the boundaries of previously insular religious camps provided a spiritual home for millions of Americans who had forsaken their spiritual roots.

Facing the rapid demise of traditional churches a decade ago, we adapted the 'swarm' concept as an innovative experiment that came to define the *rejuv*church movement. We were caught up in 'the perfect swarm' as Len Fisher described it. The swarm concept requires that groups self-organize around a focused purpose that has transformative power and a leader with a personal passion. There is no centralized authority to regulate the swarms. Like fish that coordinate their movements in shoals, or geese in flight formations, we found order in simple rules and self-organization.

We kept a minimum of basic elements such as Sunday morning worship services, Bible-based sermons, and the ordinances of baptism and communion. Yet we said goodbye to denominational dogma, boards and committees, and all the money and energy draining programs. We found that many people are willing to let go of the old ways in order to have a healthy, growing, dynamic church with magnetic appeal across generations. It turned out to be much more than an organizational change as individual transformations became the norm when people applied swarm-like creativity to spiritual growth.

Source: Steve Brimmer, 2009