

Emerging Trends for Effective Ministry in the 21st Century

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Introduction

In this article I focus on the emerging trends underway at the beginning of the twenty-first century and their implications on effective ministry in the coming years. I approach the task knowing that only fools or prophets attempt to predict the future, so instead of trends I will share some of the clues I see today that give us a hint of the future.

Every clue is based on the assumption that we are living in transitional times. Something really BIG has been taking place the last 40 years that happens only once or twice in a millennium. Every four or five hundred years the world profoundly changes. We are living in such a time.

The ontological and epistemological foundations of Modernity and Christendom are giving way to new world views. This may be observed in two ways. First, is the death of the modern age. The world has been dominated by observable science during the Modern Age. Physical matter was the fundamental building block of the last four hundred years. If something wasn't scientifically observable, it didn't exist. Matter existed; Spirit didn't. Second, is the death of Christendom. By Christendom, I mean a culture in which the laws, educational systems, business, commerce and social interactions are unquestionably dominated by the Church and Christian values. Christendom is a culture that actively pro-

motes the Christian Faith and often disparages or even persecutes expressions of other faiths or no faith.

The way people process knowledge and perceive realities are going through a metamorphosis. We're moving from incremental and exponential change to radical discontinuity from all that has come before. The world twenty years from now will not be recognizable. The result is that we now live in a world with no rules.

Scientists have a word for what we are going through. They call it a "wormhole." Two theories exist about wormholes. One theory is that a wormhole is a portal in space that offers rapid travel from one universe to another. Scientist think that whatever enters exits the other side totally different. The other theory is that a wormhole is a hole in space into which whatever enters ceases to exist. Like people caught in a wormhole, we are spiraling away from a worldview that has existed for 500 years to one that is not yet born. No one can avoid this ride. Everything is being pulled into the wormhole.

The primary characteristics of the world of the wormhole are speed, blur, and flux. In such a world flexibility is essential. Whether one is liberal or conservative or belongs to this group or that no longer matters. All that matters is that one is revolutionary in the way mission is carried out. For more on this subject see my new book *Leadership on the OtherSide* from Abingdon.

This wormhole is causing major shifts in the way people perceive knowledge, process information, and respond to stimuli. These shifts form the foundation for the emerging trends affecting ministry in the twenty-first century. What follows are some wormhole questions that may hold the key to understanding the future. The answer to these questions is found in further questions yet to be fully realized.

What will Christianity look like when it understands that North America is a mission field?

What is the difference in being missional and doing evangelism?

What is the difference in being a pastor and being an apostle and a cross-cultural missionary?

What will authority look like in an out-of-control, anti-institutional, non-religious worldview? Our present world is undergoing deconstruction in every facet of life. Institutions are losing favor and spirituality is back and is redefined.

What does it mean to live in a world where one's spirituality is more important than credentials?

Can we imagine doing evangelism that is not carried out within the context of conquest? George Hunter's work on Celtic Evangelism is extremely helpful here.

How do leaders lead without control?

What will Christianity look like when it is not defined by the printed word? When personal narratives, electronic ink, visual images, holographics, and virtual reality occupy much of people's time; at least three sub questions emerge. How will we communicate the message and engage truth? How do we transition from handing out data that informs people to offering an experience that transforms people? How will we help people grow spiritually instead of just teaching them more about the Bible?

What will Christianity look like when the church is missional rather than institutional. The Reformers "marks of a true church" is out. Church will not be defined as the place where the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments dully administered, and church discipline exercised. Already, concerns such as house churches, cell groups, warehouse churches, cyberchurches, and "city reaching" are gaining priority over the health or growth of our congregations.

How will we "be" the church instead of "going" to church?

What is the difference in being missional and doing evangelism?

How will we celebrate such things as communion, baptism, and ordination?

The ultimate question as we move through the wormhole—What is non-negotiable and what is eternally significant to God's mission? All else will probably change.

Mega Clues

Because there are so many important trends, I will focus on-

ly on what I consider to be the *Mega Clues* that will directly effect ministry in North America. Here are the Mega Clues:

Mega Clue #1: The machine oriented, command and control, top down world of the Industrial Age is giving way to an Organic oriented, out-of-control, bottom up world of Postmodernism. In such a world the nurture and growth of people replaces the management of organizations.

Mega Clue #2: The belief in multiple forms of truth is replacing the concept of ultimate truth. In such a world, clarity of mission is essential.

Mega Clue #3: The anti institutional sentiment of the last 25 years continues to grow. This will also mean that the public will not only be skeptical of churches but of large churches in particular and will pass laws to make their life uncomfortable. In such a world churches will become smaller.

Mega Clue #4: The interaction of all the sciences, disciplines, and people is seen in the Complexity Theory, Quantum Mechanics, the holistic approach to issues, and the blurring of secular and sacred. In such a world, it is not enough to just read theology. A good example is the marriage of information and technology.

Mega Clue #5: The Internet continues to grow and will become the primary form of communication, information, commerce, and networking throughout the world. In such a world, new ways are needed for Sunday school, teaching, worship, and communication.

Mega Clue #6: Communication and education are entering the visual, experiential, and interactive world of virtual reality. In such a world experience is the foundation of information.

Mega Clue #7: The transformation of and the apathy toward authority and tradition. Authority must now be earned and even then is seldom given. The basic root of authority now is the individual human being. In such a world, how one lives before others determines the amount of authority they might receive but even then authority is more team oriented.

Mega Clue #8: The world population is moving to the city. In such a world, urban missions, reaching the city, and new church

starts are the primary mission.

Mega Clue #9: Immigration is changing the face of North America. Europe is no longer the major stream of immigration to North America. In such a world, multi-cultural ministry is essential.

Mega Clue #10: Rational thought, located in the individual self is giving way to the intuitive, paradoxical, and emotional awareness of tribal think. In such a world, rational, linear thought is out of place.

Mega Clue #11: Bio-genetics is becoming the primary theological battleground replacing today's flashpoints of gay rights, abortion, and gender. In such a world, the temptation will be to explain everything by "my genes made me do it."

Mega Clue #12: Society continues to become more hostile to local congregations and more open to spirituality. In such a world, only high commitment churches will do well.

Mega Clue #13: Anti-institutionalism continues to grow. In such a world, the primary search is for wholeness, community, dignity, identity, and empowerment.

Mega Clue #14: The world is running out of world class leaders. In such a world, teams will replace the lone wolf, charismatic leader.

Mega Clue #15: Consumerism continues to grow unabated by low inflation due to the global economy. In such a world churches must be culturally relevant if they want to make disciples.

Ministry Implications

By far the greatest challenge of the early part of the 21st century is the need to raise up leaders who can function in a world of speed, blur, and flux. Every discipline, including the church, is running out of world class leaders. It is sheer folly to think that the people who lead us well during Modernity can give us the same quality of leadership in the postmodern/pre-Christian world. *Churches need to pour more time, energy, and money into training than they do construction.* For more on the issue of leadership see my new book *Leadership on the Other-*

Side, by Abingdon.

Leaders in the twenty-first century will provide an atmosphere in which people are transformed and empowered to discover and do God's will, not the will of the leader. Leaders of the future will not have followers. Instead, they will be the equippers of other leaders. Their success will depend on what they help others achieve. As a result, these leaders will ask different questions. They will ask "Who will I mentor today instead of what must I do today?" "Who will I discover today instead of what is my job description?" "How many others can I equip instead of how much can I do?"

Effective leaders will build a farm system beginning with Junior High that identifies and begins nurturing for leadership those upon whom God has laid his hand. Leaders will also develop a farm system that identifies recently converted adults. The further we go into the twenty-first century the more adults over 18 will become the focus of conversion and baptism. Churches must learn how to harness and empower their newfound passion because they will know best how to communicate with non-Christians. Twenty-first century leaders will organize a lay mobilization system that focuses on harnessing and empowering people's God-given abilities.

The clash between the old and the new will shape most of the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Radical change in society leads to turbulent and trying times in society and for established organizations. This will be made even more difficult by the fact that the United States is getting older and younger at the same time. Each of the two generations following the Baby Boom rivals it in size. Alfred North White says, "*The major advances in civilization are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur.*"¹ The issues of values, identity, security, relationships, order and purpose will become primary. Churches that know where they are going and why will do the best. The only established churches that will survive are those that are culturally relevant and biblically sound.

Rediscovering First Century Christianity

The growing segments of Christianity will continue to rediscover first century Christianity.

	First Century	21st Century
The Only Creed	Jesus Christ is Lord	Jesus Christ is Lord
The Primary Concern	The Person and Work of Jesus Christ	The Rediscovery of Jesus
The Primary World View	Polytheism	Polytheism
The Primary Issue	Ethics	BioEthics
The Primary Enemy	Gnosticism	Gnosticism and/or Bullies
The Primary Technology	The Roman Roads	The World Wide Web
The Primary Methodology	House Churches	Cells/small groups
The Primary Governance	Prayer and Discernment	Prayer and Discernment

The sharpest contrast between thriving and dying churches will be a commitment to Jesus Christ, indigenous styles of worship, and lay ministries. These will remain the “BIG 3” in healthy congregations because they are the essence of the church. In a pagan society you have to say which God you are referring to—the God of Jesus Christ. At the heart of this church will be the question, What is it about your relationship with Jesus Christ that the world cannot live without knowing? Indigenous worship is in the language, technology, and culture of the people you are trying to reach. The Priesthood of the believer will finally emerge. Most of the ministry in healthy churches will be done by the laity. Lay pastors will be the norm.

Local church and apostolic leadership will be based on experience and proven results rather than academic training. Authority is no longer just what one knows or the degrees one has; now it is how one lives and what one does with his or her life. Most pastors will bypass the traditional seminary.

Church planting will be a primary mission of thriving, local church and denominational systems. A swell is already developing among church planting groups and coaches. More and more local congregations are taking on the role of planting churches instead of waiting on their denomination. More and more new churches strive to plant a new church within the first five years of their life. Church planting resources are multiplying rapidly. Three things are driving this trend: one, it is biblical; two, most churches in the U.S. are located in the wrong place today (the people have moved); three, it is easier to grow a new church than to transition a dying one. Behavioral modification (ethics) will be a primary focus of congregational preaching and teaching.

The effective local church is organized around The Prime Directive. In a world of no rules, the church must be clearer than ever about its mission, thus the current emphasis on mission or purpose statements or core values. The Prime Directive is making disciples who make disciples. This PD replaces "felt need" programming. Discipleship is understood as Fractaling. All leaders are equipped to equip others. New Hope Fellowship, Honolulu is an example. Felt needs will be responded to primarily as a way to make disciples.

A Permission-Giving system undergirds the prime directive. This is a church where every person in the church is encouraged to live out their spiritual gift without having to ask permission from a centralized authority or having to rely on the ordained clergy to live it out as their representative. Church government will change from representative democracy including nominating and voting to permission giving structures based on spiritual gifts and demonstrated leadership. For more on this see my book *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* from Abingdon. The organizational model is weblike and has as little top-down characteristics as possible. Flexibility is the keyword for the structure. Doers and Supervisors are the same. Responsibility for what one does and how one does it enhances the prime directive. Representation and representative democracy will disappear in the church. The Prime Directive measures everything. Voting is out; prayer is in. Leaders are willing to drop anything that does not

enhance the PD or add anything that might enhance it. Innovation and risk taking is a normal way of life.

Reaching a defined area or group of people (Postmodernity's emphasis on organic and relational) will replace the present focus on growing churches (Modernity's emphasis on institutions). Institutional life will cease being the PD. The focus will be on the Kingdom rather than institutions. This focus on kingdom is behind one of the most potentially revolutionary ministries in the United States the many trans-denominational efforts to reach large metropolitan areas. The number of parachurch groups and multi-denominational emphasis on reaching the large city is multiplying each year with groups such as Vision New England, lead by Steve Machia; Mission Houston, lead by Jim Herrington; International Urban Associates, led by Bakke; and the Harambee Christian Family Center in Los Angeles, lead by Rudy Carrasco. These ministries and leaders have roots in the community. Their goal is not just to convert people and to help local congregations as much as it is to spiritually and socially transform the city.² Emphasis will shift from an emphasis on small, medium, and large churches to what is the percentage of penetration of all the churches into the city.

Churches will become smaller, more intimate, and will have higher commitment. The number of deeply committed Christians will become more numerous while nominal, cultural church members will continue to decrease. Covenant will be the gateway to leadership. I see no evidence that the postmodern/pre-Christian person will simply go through the motions of "going to church" like many church members during the last fifty years of Modernity. The continued existence of the mega church will depend mostly on how well the churches handle succession.

Multiple sites will become the norm because of the loss of the importance of place in the twenty-first century. The many technological advances such as the Internet will make location irrelevant. Couple this with the desire to follow the PD instead of building institutional churches and you have a formula for churches with more than one location.

Multi-track churches will become the norm among healthy,

established churches. Many churches will find that established patterns of worship, education, pastoral care, and nurture will be necessary to reach people born on either side of and in the middle of the wormhole.

Mainline denominations will continue to decline while new loosely associated groups will emerge. The market share of mainline churches has shrunk from 40% in 1906 to 16% in 1999. Now we are approaching an age mesa. Almost 60% of all mainline members are over the age of 50. This raises a serious question for young mainline pastors — Is the mainline course the best course for us to follow? Parachurch groups will take over most of the educational and support aspects of denominations and judiciaries of all levels. Denominational affiliation of the effective churches will either increase or diminish depending on whether denominational leaders view the church as a teaching church or do they view it as a maverick to bring in line or a cash cow from which to extract money?

Worship will continue to become more eastern and high tech. The issue is no longer contemporary versus traditional worship. Spirited traditional worship is also growing churches and making disciples.³ The key is whether or not it is “spirited.” Does it have the mystery of the East as well as the high tech of the West? Does it cause the hairs on the back of our neck to stand up? Does it stimulate hearts and challenge minds? Or do we continue to pray that Aunt Suzie does not die during worship while playing the organ.⁴

Worship is moving from an emphasis on music to visualization. The Arts are vital to the worship experience. Pre-Christian churches are taking on the characteristics of a gallery that includes great pieces of art from every recorded period in history. Spectacle and meditation are replacing reverence and praise. Ancient and future are merging. Secular and religious are blurring. Preaching is more Q&A and conversation than oratory. Everyday food and drink are becoming part of the liturgy. Mystery is back. Incense is in. Sarcasm is okay. The Arts are back. I won't be surprised if multiple images replace music as the primary form of worship for the pre-Christian....something like MTV on

fast-forward with the sound turned down. In such a format, music becomes the backdrop for the constantly changing images. One hint from the past that suggests this might be a possibility is the fact that the images used on many music videos have little or nothing to do with the theme of the song.

Holographic imagery will form much of the basis for much of worship. Several years ago at a national workshop at Ginghamburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio, I mentioned the use of holograms in worship. I mentioned it there because Ginghamburg had just made a large financial commitment to reach the unchurched through multimedia. Tom Bandy and I wrote about the use of holographic imagery in worship in our recent book *Growing Spiritual Redwoods*. We called this church, The Virtual Church of the Resurrection.⁵ Aside from the usual funny looks, people will always respond that the cost of such media is too high. My response is to ask them a question, Do you have a pipe organ in your church? If so, then what I am talking about will be less expensive than a pipe organ. It's just a matter of priorities. If it doesn't entertain, stimulate, and touch all of the senses, it won't educate or be worshipful. Edutainment will be the major form of education.

More and more Protestant pastors will be women and Deacons and Women Religious will run the majority of Catholic churches. We are already seeing Protestant seminar enrollment reflect the growing role of women. More Women Religious are running many Catholic Churches. We will begin to see many of these clues come to the front as women balance the emotional and cognitive aspects of leadership and lead in an intuitive and organic manner.⁶

Cyberchurches will become some of the largest churches and may be the new form of megachurch.⁷ The Electronic Church is already with us. The rapid growth of email and the Internet is unprecedented in history. There is no way to deny the cyberchurch its place in the sun. Those who say that the cyberchurch is not authentic because it can not offer valid community, simply have not been part of a cybercommunity. We have watched our online forums plan face to face meetings on numer-

ous occasions. Those who refuse to see the authenticity of the electronic church are no different from those who said that the printed Bible would never catch on because people could not read.

Social ministries will flourish as government continues to fail in the social sector. The government has come to the realization that it cannot provide everything that society needs. We will see it pull away from social services more and more. It will offer more funds to groups willing to provide basic services and it will tie less and less strings to those funds. Just about every social service, including social security, will be out of the hands of the government by the midpoint of the twenty-first century. This abandonment of people will leave a vast hole into which our churches can step and again become the primary educator and service providers.⁸

Teams will replace committees. Most churches will be lead by co-pastors who have not gone to a formal seminary. Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock is the best example at the moment.

In summary the future belongs to those who can change the fastest and easiest for the purpose of making disciples whom make disciples.

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NOTES

1. Cited in the National Interest, No. 41, (Fall 1995): 18.
2. Three good books on this growing field are *City Reaching* by Jack Dennison; *Cities: Missions' New Frontier*, by Greenway and Monsma; and *Planting and Growing Urban Churches*, edited by Conn.
3. One of the best examples of this is Church of the Resurrection UMC in Kansas City, Kansas. Go to www.cor.org
4. The Church of the Resurrection (UMC) in Kansas City, Kansas is good example. www.cor.org.
5. Growing Spiritual *Redwoods*, pps. 90-93.
6. For examples of such leadership see, Sally Helgesen, *Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*, New York: Doubleday, 1990.
7. Two examples of churches online are www.cyberchurch.org
www.hawaiian.net/~rnpilot
8. For more see James Dale Davidson & William Ress-Mogg, *The Sovereign Individual* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).