

*White unto Harvest* is a must-read for pastors, staff, and leadership in a church. I believe it will change their attitudes toward the potential contributions of seniors. It will also help them to understand the approaches needed to meet the needs of senior adult members and give great insight on how to reach them and make them effective in their ministries as ambassadors of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:15). Arn's strategy will help senior adults focus on becoming ministers of the Gospel rather than simply receivers of the ministry.

---

McIntosh, Gary L., *There's Hope for Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012., 195 pp., Paperback \$15.15 paperback.

Webster, William O., *A Place of Grace: A Resurrected Church's Journey to Vitality*. Xulon Press, 2013., 227 pp., Paperback \$13.94 paperback.

Reviewed by James R. Farrer. He is the founder of Vital Signs Church Consulting. He has worked with 18 different denominations, leading seminars coast to coast.

Seventy-five to eighty percent of congregations have plateaued in members or are declining in attendance. At least 3500 congregations close every year. With these statistics in mind, Gary L. McIntosh's book, *There's Hope for Your Church*, lays out a blueprint for church revitalization. William O. Webster's book, *A Place of Grace*, recounts the practical application of many of McIntosh's principles resulting in a Rust Belt church resurrection.

A myriad of conflicting reasons have been given for both membership increase and decline. However, empirical research on this topic was first undertaken on the foreign mission field where financial and human resources were slim. McIntosh is a leading interpreter of this knowledge. He also knows how people come to Christ and to the church in North America, after having coached or consulted with 1000 congregations and having served 83 denominations.

McIntosh is professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. He has turned his experience into 22 books and 300 articles. However, *There's Hope for Your Church* is not a rehash of stale material. McIntosh distills his wisdom into this coaching guide for restoring vitality to congregations.

The book does not paint a smiley-faced picture of church renewal. In the preface, McIntosh bluntly reports that the process is "messy." Pioneer church consultant Lyle E. Schaller came to the conclusion that the central issue to the future of an organization is initiating needed change. Psychiatrist Karl Menninger has emphasized the anger and sense of loss that normally accompany change.

What are the underpinnings of the change process which keep it moving forward even against setbacks? In the first chapter, McIntosh stresses the necessity of hope. Victor Frankl's research about his fellow prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II indicated that people died when they lost meaning and hope in the future. Similarly, McIntosh has observed that congregations drift into apathy when confidence in their church's future wanes. At that point, problems do not spawn opportunities for solutions, but rather despondency from a lengthening list of difficulties.

In one of his most important chapters, McIntosh reminds critics of the church growth movement that the key is not promotion to attain more numbers nor any issue of skillful management. He suggests that the starting point is always prayer. In fact, a national four-year study by the Religion Department of the Lilly Endowment found that the congregations which that achieved results in reaching new adults with the gospel had rediscovered prayer, but it also noted that many church leaders continually resist a serious commitment to prayer.

McIntosh stresses other important spiritual actions if turnaround is to occur. These biblically based factors include confessing sin that may stand in the way of God's blessing and confronting church leaders who have exhibited divisiveness, a spirit of control, or disparagement of outsiders; these actions will now become a priority if the congregation is to move forward.

Since this is solely a step-by-step handbook coaching a church into the future, some readers may clamor for an even deeper concentration on such topics as the biblical basis for growth or more details on leadership. However, the publisher presents advertisements of several of McIntosh's books whose titles focus on such issues, and the author includes helpful endnotes.

In fact, the book's chapter titles are a checklist for revitalization. Each chapter includes a brief case study, and the book concludes with three appendices. The first Appendix encapsulates ideas on rebirthing a church. The second deals with the advantages and disadvantages of congregational mergers, and the third lists books that target the steps in church transitioning.

William Webster's book, *A Place of Grace*, is a model of what can happen when a leader and congregation build upon the principles outlined in the McIntosh book. The story of Grace Church is truly one of resurrection.

As an associate pastor in Pittsburgh, Webster received an inquiry about becoming the pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Martin's Ferry, Ohio. The entire upper Ohio River valley had experienced a precipitous drop in population because of the rapid decline and near demise of the region's steel and coal industries.

Although Webster had hoped to serve a larger congregation and despite the pessimistic outlook for the community and Grace Church, he felt called

to walk in ministry with the small number of church members remaining at Grace.

A week after making that decision, the regional denomination staff executive phoned and abruptly asked Webster what he thought he was doing since the church had so few people and would likely be unable to afford his salary. In addition, the judicatory had its own plans to close this “weak” congregation because there was a larger, well-endowed congregation of the same denomination one block away. A second strategy was to link Grace Church with one or more small congregations in the surrounding countryside. The conversation ended with, “Why would anyone want to go to Grace?” Despite this negativity, Webster accepted the invitation to become the church’s pastor. His commitment is an illustration of the first principle on McIntosh’s revitalization chart: “See the Potential.”

Upon arriving in late 1987, Webster learned that Grace Church rarely had visitors to worship. Making the future even more dismal, the town would lose ten percent of its population in the 1990s and another similar percentage in the following decade. Webster had been leading the small congregation to search the Bible to “discern God’s vision,” the fifth principle on McIntosh’s revitalization chart. One day, a church member told Webster that the Soviet Union’s Bim Bom Circus was rehearsing across the river for its inaugural U.S. tour. The man prodded Webster to join him and personally invite the circus troop to come to worship at Grace Church. The two were able to see the circus manager who declined the invitation, saying that practice was too important. However, three Sundays later at 6:30 a.m., the manager called to ask if a car could come to take several circus performers to the church. After the first car was filled, word came to keep sending more cars. The service began 30 minutes late, but now 75 Soviet circus people were in attendance. Despite the need to scramble, the members also provided a reception for them. This unexpected, almost miraculous, influx of outsiders, served as God’s vision for their church to reach segments of the population, often the unlovable, that no one else was reaching, often the unlovable. This event “lifted the morale” of the church members, another of McIntosh’s principles.

Since the community was Ohio’s first settlement and was along one of the main roads leading people to the western frontier, the congregation built a three-story hotel next to the church itself in 1870. The church’s hotel welcomed weary travelers and provided safe lodging and a readjustment center for pioneers who could go no farther west. The church sold the building in 1902. It was then used for a variety of purposes. One photo in the town’s archives shows a woman hanging outside an upstairs window inviting a man on the street to her room. In 2002, the church re-purchased the building in order to show hospitality and care to the poor, hurting, and lonely (Luke 14:21–23). Today, it is used for back door and side door ministries: an emergency shelter, a coffee house where Christian and secular musicians

play, and a site for adult literacy programs, a free legal clinic (one of only five in the state), and a “Sip and Play” program where toddlers are supervised while parents gather for support. It also functions as a staging location for street fairs and car shows, to list only a few events.

The book also contains much helpful research data, a hospitality checklist, and dozens of illustrations of what both small and large congregations across the nation are doing to care for their neighbors and to carry out the Great Commission. One may have wished the author had attempted to find a major publishing house, but as we learn from the biblical accounts, sometimes stories of resurrection cannot wait.

Webster’s book shows that pastors can learn by reading the Bible, by following the Holy Spirit’s leading, and by implementing the advice of a mentor like McIntosh who brings mature guidance to the greater church. Placing these two books in the hands of church leaders will spark their imaginations and demonstrate a tried and true pathway to renewal.

---

Todd M. Johnson and Cindy M. Wu. *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. 240 pp. \$22.99.

Reviewed by Beau K. Brewer. Beau earned a B.A. from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha, Oklahoma, in 2005, a M.Div. in Evangelism in 2011, and a Th.M. in Islamic Studies in 2015 from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Beau will begin work on his Ph.D. in Evangelism and Missions this fall (2015), and he is the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of the Roy J. Fish School of Evangelism and Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Todd M. Johnson is associate professor of global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. He is co-author of *The World’s Religions in Figures* (Wiley-Blackwell), co-editor of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh University Press), and co-author of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford University Press). He also serves as director of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. Cindy M. Wu holds a M.A. in Religion from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and has served in church-planting contexts in China, Mexico City, Houston, and Boston.

In an effort to promote ecumenical even cross-pollination across the globe and in mission fields for the greater good of peoples on the earth, *Our Global Families: Christians Embracing Common Identity in a Changing World* seeks to examine the diversity of both our global human and global Christian families and the deep chasm between them that hinders the work of justice and peace. The authors agree that Christian denominations struggle to embrace the changing world surrounding them and have a very narrow scope of their Christian identity that creates conflict between the “so-called”