

Youth leave their faith due to a lack of nearby churches

May 23, 2013

by [Randy Bright](#)



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This morning, our youth pastor gave the sermon at my church and he said something that I found to be very interesting and profound. He said (I am paraphrasing) that year after year, he has seen the youth from our particular church leave the faith because they did not have a church.

What he was talking about was when youth graduate from high school, they tend to leave the church because of college, jobs, etc., and because they no longer have that place of spiritual underpinning, and if their faith is not strong enough, they no longer attend church and eventually let their faith grow cold.

I can relate to this. Growing up in a small town in southern Illinois, the church I attended from my birth was the center of my life and my family's life. We attended Sunday morning and evening services, Wednesday Bible studies, and numerous activities that our church held for our youth.

The youth of our church and a number of our sister churches in the towns around us attended Oil Belt Christian Service Camp, where for one week each summer, we not only had fun, but went through fairly intense Bible studies.

When we were in high school, there were Friday night activities after basketball and football games. For some of us who were in Boy Scouts, we spent over a year of Saturday mornings at our church+ earning the God and Country award.

In our small town of 5,200, there were at least a dozen churches of varying faiths, and each of those churches had similar activities for their youth. Most of the kids I grew up with had a similar faith to mine.

When I left for college, things changed. My faith did not grow cold, but it was less practiced. I did not study the Bible like I used to, and I didn't pray like I had before. I noticed that no one in my home town church seemed interested in keeping up with and encouraging people like me who had not found a church home where we attended college.

Fortunately for me, even though I did not attend church very much when I was at my college on weekends, I did when I was home for the weekend, and as soon as I began work after graduating, I found a church and attended it.

I was also fortunate that every location where I lived, I was able to find a church. The difference was the distance – when I lived in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area, my church was a 30-minute drive away. When I moved to Tulsa, one was 18 minutes away, and another was 35 minutes away. Even now, the church I attend is a 20-minute drive. This was quite a contrast to the 3-minute drive I was accustomed to in my hometown, where before I got my driver's license I could easily walk or ride my bicycle to church.

This may sound like a justification for the argument that New Urbanists make, that we need more walkable cities with our normal daily destinations are easily reached by foot or bicycle, so that we don't need cars. My real point is not that we should get rid of our cars, but that churches should be more plentiful.

If there were more churches, all of us, not just youth, but all of us could be more connected with our faith because we had a place to associate with other believers. But that is not the trend.

The number of churches in our country is in the decline for both internal and external reasons. Internal because many of our churches have not purposed themselves to perpetuate themselves. External because our cities are systemically putting regulations in place that will make existing churches disappear and make the formation of new ones impossible. As our churches disappear, the number of the faithful will diminish because they don't have a place to meet together to strengthen each other's faith.

The mantra of the new generation of churchless cities is community; for people to be healthy, they need community; for people to be prosperous, they need community; for people to be happy, they need community; for people to serve mankind, they need community. Not faith, not family, but community. But it was the church that perfected community a very long time ago.

The places where Christians can gather to worship, study, and fellowship with each other is critical to the legacy of morality and stability that those who are faithful bring to a community. And those places also mean more people who begin their lives with their faith continue it into their adult years. That, despite liberal arguments to the contrary, will always be a positive thing for communities.

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