

# Everywhere in America, local churches are truly needed

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There is something that I have become absolutely convinced about in American culture, and that is that there is a critical, vital need for the presence of the local church.

That may seem to be stating the obvious, but in American culture, among the seculars of our society, the church has become unnecessary or even parasitic upon society, viewed as those among us who take but don't give. Ironically, those who hold the views may be the same people who believe that an entitlement, like free food, housing or medical care, should be a natural right.

I have been writing about this subject in some form or another for the better part of a decade now, trying to alert our nation's churches about this trend of exclusionary thinking and planning that is now permeating American cities and will eventually reach into smaller towns as they imitate the larger cities that have implemented codes and practices that effectively shut churches out.

There are several things that make this scenario possible.

The church at large is undergoing monumental changes in this country. Many are becoming secular in nature and thus see God and his church in a much different light than was seen before. Some time ago I read an article by a pastor who wrote that the church had been slow to catch up with acceptance of the gay lifestyle. This represents a sector of the church that no longer understands God or his wisdom, but invites God to accept human wisdom over His own.

There is another sector of the church that no longer sees value in Biblical education, but places the greatest value on evangelism. To their credit, change in worship style is incredibly important in that it has the potential to lead young people to Christ, who might not otherwise be attracted by older, more traditional churches. However, they lack the follow up in providing the in-depth education and understanding of God's Word needed for longevity. Ask any church how difficult it has become to find qualified teachers. The Biblical scholars that were common among the older, more traditional churches are dying of old age, and the knowledge they possessed is dying with them.

Among those older, more traditional churches are the neighborhood churches, the rural churches and the suburban churches whose members are beginning to die of old age. Their aging facilities are also disappearing without replacement. Church consultants have long held that congregations are born, live and eventually die in a natural progression. This is a fact that some do, but it is neither Biblical or even necessary.

Many cities are rejecting churches in their communities. Many would deny this claim, but the truth is that new zoning codes are making it difficult to impossible to build new churches, at least in the way that churches would like to do so. There are many cities that are in dire financial straits and see the need to place as much property onto the tax rolls as possible, placing churches

under more pressure to participate in taxation schemes or even face expulsion under the guise of eliminating blight.

This perfect storm of changes within our churches and our society is still a silent epidemic. I am often met with quizzical looks when I describe this problem because it has been so well hidden. Churches don't want to admit that they have problems and cities don't like admitting that they don't like churches.

None of this has diminished the need and the importance of the local church. The local church exists to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but it also exists to serve and to bless the human race with good works.

The local church should be the place where anyone can find friendship and acceptance, where sin may be rejected but sinners are welcome.

The local church should be the primary source where people can go to find the help that they need, from discerning people who have the wisdom not to destroy lives by simply giving stuff away, but by teaching people how to provide for themselves and their families.

The local church should be the place that provides Biblical education, deepening the wisdom of its people to the point that lives are made whole from poverty, broken marriages and families, or lifestyles that destroy society.

Churches are needed everywhere; in neighborhoods, in densely populated urban areas, in sparsely populated rural areas and in the suburbs. There is no place in this great country that could not benefit by the creation and existence of one more church. Maintaining existing presence and establishing more presence is perhaps the most challenging task American churches face today.



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