

## **Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?**

### **A. The course content**

1. The Quest
2. Parkside Community Fellowship
3. Mercy Hill Church
4. First Church of Midway
5. Cornerstone Community Church
6. Peace Bible Church
7. Trinity Church
8. Immanuel Church

### **B. What we will try to learn**

1. How to determine what unites a church
2. How to discern the purpose of a church
3. How to understand the physical church
4. How does one learn what a church really teaches?
5. What is the real substance of a church?

### **C. How to prepare for each session**

1. Read the chapter from the book.
2. Answer the Study Questions on the first page of each lesson.
3. Consider the issues that are being raised by the readings.



## **1. The Quest – Study Questions**

1. What unites The Quest?
2. What is the purpose of The Quest?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. Who is the audience and who are the speakers at The Quest?
5. The Quest was openly engaged in “sheep-stealing.” Is this practice justifiable?
6. How can a congregation’s success change its mission?
7. What were the 5 steps of membership at The Quest?

## 1. The Quest

### —. Nature of the church

#### 1. The invisible church

- a. It is not possible for any of us to look into the heart of another person. Therefore, we cannot know whether a person has a saving faith in Jesus or not. *{For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? 1 Corinthians 2:11}*
- b. Therefore, the real Christian church, which is composed of all believers and only believers during the entire history of the earth, is invisible and known only to God. *{God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his" 2 Timothy 2:19}* Jesus commissioned this church to be spread to all nations. *Matthew 28:19.*

#### 2. The visible church

- a. To carry out the Great Commission it is necessary for people who identify themselves as Christians to work together in physical organizations which are collectively called the visible church because its members can be seen by those around them. *{Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24–25}*
- b. For a visible church to be a “true church,” it must preach the whole counsel of God’s word and only God’s word, using the word and the sacraments as Christ instituted them. *{Jesus said, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:20}*
- c. “False churches” are churches which preach less than what is in the Scriptures, add human ideas to it, and/or twist the Scriptures to corrupt their message. People who belong to false churches can be saved if and only if they believe the scriptural message rather than the false ideas about God’s plan of salvation that their church teaches. *{St. John wrote, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. 2 John 10–11}*
- d. “Pseudo-churches” or “sects,” like the Mormons, have the form of Christian churches, but deny or fail to preach that faith in Jesus’ vicarious atonement is the only way to salvation. *{St. John wrote, “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1}*

### A. Church marketing

#### 1. Selecting an audience

- a. To financially survive, a church must have members. Because providing adequate member services to a wide spectrum of people is impractical for any but the largest churches, a church must direct its advertising to a specific audience.
- b. For example, a church with a Christian school might target young families.

2. The allurement

- a. To get people through the doors of the church for the first time, churches might use “gimmicks,” loosely defined as special offers or new-member benefits.
- b. The danger in this is that people usually stay with an organization for the same reason they came to the organization originally. If they come because of a school, for example, they may only stay while they have need for the school.

3. Church growth

- a. In the American mindset, bigger is better. Churches therefore have an emotional incentive to increase membership numbers and particularly to increase the involvement of people who will be contributing money and talent to the church’s efforts.
- b. Church growth, however, also increases the need for money to expand facilities and to add staff to serve the growing membership. It can be a vicious cycle.

B. The entrance experience

1. Parking

- a. The Quest gave first-time attendees special parking spots so they could easily enter the facility. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. In general, how might a church address parking issues for its members and visitors?

2. Greeters

- a. The Quest had identifiable people trained for the specific purpose of meeting visitors before they even entered the facility and showing them around. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. How might this greeting activity have been handled differently at The Quest?

3. Amenities

- a. The Quest had coffee available to be taken into church like drinks at a theater. Is this a good or bad idea? Is this like having a beverage while watching television?

4. Management of children

- a. The Quest separated the children from the parents to improve the parent’s church experience. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. Did the children benefit spiritually from their experience at The Quest?

C. The program

1. Communication
  - a. The Quest had its own logo that was on everything. Is this a good or bad idea?
  - b. The Quest used bold posters and videos to sell its message. Is this a good or bad idea?
2. Membership
  - a. The Quest advertised its membership procedures before it presented its message. Is this a good or bad idea?
  - b. What was the purpose of each of the 5 steps of membership?
  - c. Is a formal plan for deepening membership commitment a good idea? What does this say about the nature of the leadership in the organization?

D. Worship

1. Order of worship
  - a. The Quest's idea of worship was heavily oriented toward entertainment and creating a mode of excitement. What was missing here?
  - b. What is the role of an opening hymn in Christian worship? Is one necessary?
2. Use of liturgy
  - a. The Quest did not have much that could be called liturgy. What things were missing that one might expect in a Christian church?
  - b. How "Christian" was the sermon?
  - c. How effectively was the speaker able to communicate his message?
3. Goal of worship
  - a. What was the effect of the service on Ben and Jessica?
  - b. Why would people return for this type of service?
  - c. Was the service facilitated by the comfortable surroundings?
  - d. Was communicating the saving message of Jesus important to the service?

E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible
  - a. How was the Bible used in worship?
  - b. Were the beliefs of those in the audience of any concern to the Quest leadership?
2. Fellowship
  - a. What held the members of the Quest together?
  - b. Were the activities at the Quest aimed at deepening the attendees biblical understanding?

## **2. Parkside Community Fellowship Church – Study Questions**

1. What unites Park Community Fellowship?
2. What is the purpose of Park Community Fellowship?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. What are the advantages/disadvantages of internal publicity?
5. What was the focus of the activities at Parkside?
6. How does Parkside differ from the local YMCA?
7. Compare and contrast the approach of Parkside and The Quest.

## 2. Parkside Community Fellowship Church

### A. Churches as cloisters

#### 1. Monasteries

- a. Monasteries were created to separate church members from interaction with the world so that they could study the Word of God undisturbed by worldly cares.
- b. Monasteries became fortresses against the world in which its members could avoid the trials and tribulations of the world and, in the process, also their Christian responsibilities within the world.

#### 2. The all-encompassing church

- a. Desiring to grow is the American way. Churches are not immune from this desire, and a significant amount of time in many churches is spent striving to increase membership.
- b. People like to be involved in activities with compatible people. Many churches therefore feel it is part of their mission to provide as many activities as possible, even when those activities have no real connection to gospel ministry.

#### 3. Sectarianism

- a. Churches want to protect their members from falling to the allurements of the secular world and losing their faith. There are indeed many dangers to faith. One approach that churches can use to accomplish this task is to provide their members with the whole armor of God through rigorous doctrinal training from the Scriptures.
- b. An easier approach is for churches to keep their members so busy with activities within their own walls that they never have time to interact with the world outside the church. Unfortunately, this often also pulls families apart as everyone seeks their favorite activities.

### B. The entrance experience

#### 1. Parking

- a. Parkside appeared to have adequate, but non-designated parking. How important is this for visitors?
- b. The entrance to the church was not obvious from the parking lot. Is this a major problem or just a slight bump for visitors to navigate?

#### 2. Amenities

- a. Parkside had coffee available near the entrance and a place for people to congregate before the church service. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. Parkside also had food available before worship. Is this a good or bad idea?

3. Greeters

- a. At Parkside the primary greeter of new people appeared to be the pastor, who was also the tour guide. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. The pastor seemed unconcerned about the rest of the worshippers. What does this say about the pastor's role at Parkside?
- c. The pastor spent his time talking about the church facilities, of which he seemed inordinately proud, rather than the spiritual mission of the church. What does this say about the purpose of the church?

C. The physical plant

1. The gym

- a. The gym was a multi-purpose facility intended to be used all week long. Is this a good or bad idea? What problems might this cause?
- b. The pastor wanted to have the church facility be a "home away from home." What are the pluses and minuses of this?

2. The "fireside room"

- a. While this multi-purpose room had many resources, what was its major limitation?
- b. What might have been done instead?

3. The youth room

- a. What does the youth room reveal about the wealth of the congregation?
- b. How will this room impact the relationship between the youth and the church? What sort of expectations will it build for their future religious life?

4. The sanctuary

- a. The sanctuary was not as modern as the rest of the building. Is this a problem? Does it send a message?
- b. The chancel furnishings were meager. Does this tell us anything about the nature of Parkside's beliefs?
- c. Parkside's pews were arranged in a U-shape. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this design? How does it compare to the traditional design where all the pews face the front or to the fan shaped design?

D. The program

1. Communication

- a. Parkside announced all its activities before the service. Is this a good or bad idea?
- b. Numerous people participated in the announcements. Is this a good or bad idea?
- c. What was the attitude toward membership at Parkside versus The Quest?

## 2. Activities

- a. Parkside's activities were plentiful and involved numerous groups. Is such a division of the congregation a good or bad idea?
- b. Parkside's activities seemed to be tangentially related to religious training rather than centered on religious training. What does this say about the nature of the membership of the organization?

## E. Worship

### 1. Order of worship

- a. Parkside's worship centered around the good life at Parkside and the happiness it would bring the members. Are the inclusions of testimonials good or bad?
- b. Worship at Parkside was passive. It happened in front of the congregation, which was minimally involved. Is there an upside to this type of worship?

### 2. Use of liturgy

- a. Parkside had more liturgy than the Quest, but it seemed to make little impression on the Campbells. What things were missing?
- b. How "Christian" was the sermon?

### 3. Goal of worship

- a. What was the effect of the service on the Campbells?
- b. Why would people return for this type of service?
- c. Was communicating the saving message of Jesus important to the service?

## F. Theological considerations

### 1. Use of the Bible

- a. How was the Bible used in worship?
- b. Were the beliefs of those in the audience of any concern to the Parkside leadership?

### 2. Fellowship

- a. What bound the members of Parkside together?
- b. Were the activities at Parkside aimed at deepening the attendees biblical understanding?

### **3. Mercy Hill Church – Study Questions**

1. What unites Mercy Hill?
2. What is the purpose of Mercy Hill?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. What are the characteristics of “main-line churches”? (Besides being along a railroad)
5. What is the “social gospel”? How does it mesh with the Christian gospel?
6. What are the likely membership demographics at Mercy Hill?
7. Compare and contrast Mercy Hill with the Salvation Army.

### 3. Mercy Hill Church

#### A. The estates in which people live

##### 1. The church

- a. The ministry of the church must center on the Great Commission that Jesus gave in Matthew 28:18-20. People's eternal future depends on it.
- b. People must hear the Word of God to believe it. {Paul wrote, "*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*" Romans 10:14-15}
- c. The church also has a role in educating the children of its members. {"*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*" Proverbs 22:6}

##### 2. The state

- a. The government's primary responsibility is to protect the people of the land and promote domestic tranquility and, to the extent it can, prosperity. {"*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*" Romans 13:1}
- b. In addition, the government must give help to those who are incapable of taking care of themselves for whatever reason.
- c. In addition, the government has a role in educating the children of its citizens.

##### 3. The family

- a. The family has the primary responsibility of providing for its members physically. {Paul wrote, "*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*" 1 Timothy 5:8}
- b. The family also has the primary responsibility for educating its children, although the church and the state can help with this task. {"*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*" Ephesians 6:4}

##### 4. The Community

- a. The community is composed of groups of people that live and work in an area. This includes social groups, service groups, charitable groups, and businesses.
- b. Communities differ from the state in that they do not have the power to tax or to coerce people to act in the best interest of the community or of others.
- c. Individuals in a community need to work with the various groups that exist to improve the environment of the community and help those who are receiving inadequate support from their families and the state.

5. The entanglement of the estates

- a. What is the nature of “community” today? How cohesive are communities? Where are they strong and where are they weak? What makes a community strong?
- b. Is a congregation inherently a community? What are the pros and cons of “communityness”?
- c. How might communities pull a congregation apart?
- d. Can a community capture a congregation? How might it turn a congregation away from the Great Commission?
- e. What is the church’s role in protecting the family?

B. The entrance experience at Mercy Hill

1. Parking

- a. The parking lot was small, which would have been a problem if a lot of the members came from a distance. What does this say about where most church members live now and have lived in the past?
- b. The parking situation was aided by the availability of public transportation. Should this be a consideration in siting churches?

2. Greeters

- a. Mercy Hill had a traditional usher dispensing bulletins.
- b. After the service the minister took some time to chat with the Campbells. What would have been the result if the minister had not had time to talk with them?
- c. What role did Bill play? Did he seem to be an official part of the program?

3. The sanctuary

- a. The sanctuary of Mercy Hill was old. What still made it attractive?
- b. The decorations were vibrant, but not particularly Christian. What does this say about the teachings of the church? (Can you judge a book by its cover in this case?)

C. The program

1. Communication

- a. Mercy Hill announced all its activities before the service. How can this misdirect the focus of the worshippers?
- b. One announcement seemed to set a tone that would dominate the theme of the service. Could such an announcement derail a service instead?
- c. How does the attitude toward membership at Mercy Hill contrast with that at Parkside and The Quest?

2. Activities

- a. Mercy Hill's activities were less numerous than those at Parkside, but highly focused. Does this make the congregation seem exclusive in terms of the members it will attract?
- b. Does Mercy Hill have any purpose other than to help the poor and needy? How does this purpose affect even the worship service?

D. Worship

1. Order of worship

- a. Mercy Hill's worship centered around what the church members could do for the less fortunate in the neighborhood of the church. Did this affect the form as well as the content of the worship?
- b. Worship at Mercy Hill seemed to have enough elements to appear Christian, but it accentuated food donations. If this happened week after week, would this become something like a sacrament in which people gave rather than received something of value?

2. Use of liturgy

- a. The liturgy at Mercy Hill mimicked the liturgy of other mainline churches, although perhaps it was a bit shorter. The thing that apparently stuck in the Campbells' mind was the catchy phrase from Francis of Assisi. How can catchy phrases be counterproductive?
- b. How "Christian" was the sermon?

3. Goal of worship

- a. What was the effect of the service at Mercy Hill on the Campbells?
- b. Why would people return for this type of service?
- c. Was communicating the saving message of Jesus important to the service?

E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible

- a. How was the Bible used in worship at Mercy Hill?
- b. Were the beliefs of those in the audience of any concern to the Mercy Hill leadership?

2. Fellowship

- a. What held the members of Mercy Hill together?
- b. Were the activities at Mercy Hill aimed at deepening the attendees biblical understanding?

**4. First Church of Midway – Study Questions**

1. What unites First Church of Midway?
2. What is the purpose of First Church of Midway?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. Would First Church of Midway be regarded as a mainline church?
5. Like Mercy Hill, First Church promotes the social gospel. What is the difference in their approaches?
6. What are the likely membership demographics at First Church?
7. Compare and contrast First Church with community service clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Optimists).

#### **4. First Church of Midway**

##### **A. The church political**

1. What's in a name? (Reference Shakespeare)
  - a. Including the word "first" in a church name might mean it was the first church in the area or that it was the first of its specific church body. However, it can also be used in an effort to claim superiority to other churches. Comments?
  - b. The inclusion of the name of the community in the church name can also be an attempt to indicate that loyal or important residents of the city or village attend that church. Comments?
2. The membership game
  - a. It was very clear that The Quest played the membership game by telling new attendees that many people moved from other churches to The Quest.
  - b. How did Parkside Community Fellowship play the game? How did Mercy Hill play the game?
  - c. In what way did First Church of Midway play a different game?
3. Volunteerism
  - a. What should motivate common (that is, general) volunteerism?
  - b. How should volunteering in a church differ from common volunteering?
  - c. How do some people game volunteering, that is, use it to their advantage?
4. The church as a stage
  - a. One can have a position in a congregation where one is barely noticed all the way up to a position where nothing is done without one's consent.
  - b. How can a person increase the importance of his/her role in the church?
  - c. Compare and contrast the ways in which people might increase the visibility of their roles at The Quest, Parkside, Mercy Hill, and First Church.

##### **B. The entrance experience**

1. Parking
  - a. Like Mercy Hill, First Church of Midway did not have enough parking space for its membership. What creative way did the church solve this problem?
  - b. Churches often borrow parking places from businesses and other entities in the community. Is this a good or bad idea?
  - c. How did the extra parking space of First Church seem to say something about the church? Were the Campbells reading something into the situation that was not there?

2. The welcoming attitude
  - a. The church ushers were “kind and friendly but not overly accommodating.” What might the reason for this be?
  - b. Ben and Jessica were quickly introduced to other church members after the service, yet something seemed strange. Were they introduced so they would learn the names of the other members or so the other members could evaluate them?
  - c. First Church clearly was a place that valued status. What is the problem with this?
  - d. Having people with political contacts can be valuable to a congregation in carrying out its religious activities. What are some examples of this? How might a congregation balance attracting members with useful skills with universal outreach?
3. Amenities
  - a. First church had fellowship with coffee/food apparently following the service instead of preceding it. What are the pluses and minuses of this approach?
4. Management of children
  - a. First church did not appear to have any program for children during the fellowship time, or at least, no one mentioned it. What does this show about First Church’s attitude toward younger couples?

C. The program

1. Communication
  - a. The activities of First Church were communicated through the bulletin. What does this say about the stability of the congregation?
  - b. First Church identified by various means those who had contributed to the church. How did this fit the nature of the congregation? Is this something a church should do or might do?
2. Membership
  - a. The members of the church appeared older and wealthier than the average person. What does this imply about how the church gains new members?
  - b. How to become members was not openly presented. Why might this have been?
3. Activities
  - a. The important activities at First Church seemed to be organized by status and wealth, such as raising money for college scholarships. Is this a common situation in congregations?
  - b. While the activities at First Church had positive stated purposes, they also seemed to exist to establish a pecking order among those who participated in the activities. Is this a problem only in wealthy congregations? How might this occur in any congregation?

#### D. Worship

1. Nature of worship
  - a. The worship at First Church was professional. The pastor, the musicians, and all the other worship leaders were highly polished in the performance of their tasks.
  - b. Nothing in the worship seemed to catch the attention of the Campbells. Unlike the previous churches, they did not find anything worth commenting about. Is it significant that new attendees have no memorable connections to anything in the service?
2. Goals of worship
  - a. The first goal of worship at First Church was to emphasize its standing as a place with first-class worship. Is this good or bad?
  - b. The second goal seemed to be to set the stage for the fellowship gathering after the service. Everyone would be prepared to play their roles in the church social structure.

#### E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible
  - a. The use of the Bible was not mentioned in connection with the worship service. Does that mean it was not used? How might the use of the Bible become pro forma in our congregations?
  - b. Ben and Jessica did not react at anytime during their visit to First Church as if they had encountered the Word of God. It did not appear to have been displayed anywhere, certainly not on the giving wall. What does this omission say about the congregation's focus?
2. Fellowship
  - a. Fellowship at First Church revolved around status and wealth. It is natural for people with common interests to talk with each other. Does this mean that a congregation is fated to become cliques?
  - b. Is it better to encourage general interaction among members or to allow or encourage natural groups to form? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach?

**5. Cornerstone Community Church – Study Questions**

1. What unites Cornerstone Community Church?
2. What is the purpose of Cornerstone Community Church?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. Would Cornerstone Community Church be regarded as a mainline church?
5. How does Cornerstone differ from First Church and Mercy Hill?
6. What are the likely membership demographics at Cornerstone?
7. Compare and contrast Cornerstone with First Church.

## 5. Cornerstone Community Church

### A. Moralism and biblical Christianity

#### 1. The moral law

- a. The moral law is the eternal will of God for mankind that He wrote into man's heart when He created man. Obeying this law would have allowed man to live a perfect life, but man lost both a proper understanding of the moral law and the ability to keep it when man fell into sin.
- b. The moral law was given again by God from Mt. Sinai to the children of Israel (Exodus 20). This presentation of the law is often called the "Ten Commandments," although they include much more as Martin Luther explained in his catechisms.

#### 2. Civil righteousness

- a. Civil righteousness is the willingness of members of the community to follow major portions of the moral law for the purpose of making the community a pleasant and supportive place to live. People do things because "they are the right thing to do," instead of for personal reward. {"*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Proverbs 14:34}
- b. Young people are born completely self-centered and must over a period of years be trained in how to get along with others and build a community environment from which they will ultimately profit.

#### 3. Moralism

- a. Moralism teaches that rules should be kept for the sake of the rules themselves. People's images of themselves are built on their meeting some predetermined standard and avoiding moral lapses.
- b. In its extreme, moralism becomes like Pelagianism, in which people try to earn God's favor by rigorously keeping rules which have little or no social merit, but merely demonstrate the strong discipline of the moralist. The Pharisees are frequently seen as an example of this.
- c. Moralism is often competitive. Like athletics, people want to excel to show that they are superior to others. This competition can lead to exclusivism, in which those who cannot meet some arbitrary level of performance are excluded from social groups and other activities.
- d. Not all efforts at self-improvement are moralism. College and technical education, for example, can permit people to get better jobs, and continuing education is essential in many fields to permit people to adapt to new devices or practices.

#### 4. Modern Gnosticism

- a. Gnosticism rose in the eastern Mediterranean area about the same time as Christianity. In fact, the Gnostics, whose name comes from the Greek word for knowledge, used some of the same terminology as Christians, but the words had very different meanings.
- b. Gnostics believed in a great good god, but they also believed in many god-like beings. They claimed that the god who created the world, the Demiurge, was an ill-tempered god and Jesus had been sent to free humanity from him so they could return to the great god.

- c. Gnosticism tried to infiltrate Christianity by claiming that believing in the work of Jesus was not enough for salvation. People needed the secret knowledge that only the Gnostics possessed. The church battled this false teaching for several centuries.
- d. Gnosticism has continued in various forms throughout the centuries. Always it teaches that there is special knowledge, unknown and even ridiculed by world, that is essential for man to reach his full potential.

## B. The entrance experience

### 1. Parking

- a. The parking for the church seemed adequate and sufficiently close to indicate it had been planned with some forethought.
- b. The entrance to the building was initially a mystery, but signs were soon found to give the options for the attendees. Was this good enough or might signage have been handled better?

### 2. Amenities

- a. While greeters were scarce, there was coffee so that people would feel welcome.
- b. After the service, there were more refreshments available to lure people to hang around and perhaps buy a book or get involved in a discussion of the sermon.

### 3. Management of children

- a. Cornerstone had an alternative program for children during the worship service, although the Campbells did not take advantage of it.
- b. Unlike at The Quest, there was no real effort to separate the parents and the children. Based on the nature of the congregation, does this appear to be an oversight or to be because the church regarded children as less important to membership decisions?

## C. The program

### 1. Communication

- a. Like most of the previous churches, there were announcements before the service as if these were of first importance.
- b. After the service, however, the heavy selling of the books available and often created by the senior pastor took place. How did this activity reflect the purpose of the church?
- c. How might this activity actually be a member recruitment effort? If so, is it a good or bad idea?

### 2. Activities

- a. The activities of the church seemed to be centered around self-improvement in worldly matters. What relevance does this have to the Christian message?
- b. Even the children's activities appeared directed toward improving their character. How will this be good for the children? How will it be bad?

3. Deepening involvement

- a. The purpose of the church seemed to revolve around self-improvement. If the church was successful, won't people "graduate" and stop coming to the church?
- b. What is the trick that was being used to lure the people to keep coming back for more even though they should have been making progress? How is this like the Roman Catholic system of indulgences and acts of penance?

D. Worship

1. Order of worship

- a. The service seemed balanced, with music and Scripture-reading before the sermon and music after the sermon. However, there was no mention of prayers. Why might prayer be deemphasized at Cornerstone?
- b. In what way was the sermon and the worshippers' response to it radically different than what we saw in the other churches the Campbells had attended?
- c. Like at some of the other churches, the music was all performed by a praise band without congregational involvement. What are the advantages and disadvantages of handling music this way?
- d. Does it appear the music was appropriate for the way the worship at Cornerstone was carried out?

2. Goal of worship

- a. The message of sin and grace did not appear in the sermon and perhaps not in the whole service. What does this say about the real religion of Cornerstone Community Church?
- b. The goal of worship seemed to be to sell both the ideas of the senior pastor and the books that were developed from his sermons. Is this a fair assessment of the worship of Cornerstone? Might the use of note-taking and compiling sermons into books be used legitimately in the Christian Church. If so, how?

E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible

- a. Was the Bible used at all at Cornerstone?
- b. Why was the sermon not based on a biblical text? Might the pastor been able to preach the same sermon by using an appropriate biblical text?

2. Fellowship

- a. Was the fellowship at Cornerstone really Christian fellowship even though the sermon was discussed much more than in most Lutheran churches?
- b. What makes the "fellowship" at Cornerstone somewhat like that at First Church?

## **6. Peace Bible Church – Study Questions**

1. What unites Peace Bible Church?
2. What is the purpose of Peace Bible Church?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. Would Peace Bible Church be regarded as a mainline church?
5. In what ways is Peace similar to Parkside?
6. What are the likely membership demographics at Peace?
7. Contrast Peace's central message with that of Cornerstone's.

## 6. Peace Bible Church

### A. Moralizing the state

#### 1. Utopianism

- a. Everyone would like the world to be perfect by their definition of perfect. Peace, justice, civil order, freedom, liberty, free enterprise, fair wages, and more might be attributes of the world in which people would like to live.
- b. The difficulty in reaching utopia is that not everyone prioritizes the attributes of utopia in the same order. As resources become available, to which characteristics of human betterment should they be first applied? Disagreements might become heated. Many people are willing to accept more wealth than they create, but few are willing to accept less.
- c. An even greater struggle is likely to arise on how to produce the resources needed to build and sustain the utopian society. If “it takes money to make money,” whose money is going to be taken to create wealth that will flow into the common chest?

#### 2. Calvinistic values

- a. For many decades beginning in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Geneva Switzerland was probably the most law-abiding city in the world, certainly in Europe. The Calvinist reformation wedded the church and the state so that the church proclaimed God’s laws, and the state enforced them.
- b. In Calvinist society, success is a gift given by God to the upright. One proves that one is part of the elect by living a very moral life, and God rewards such behavior with visible prosperity. {Solomon wrote, “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*” Proverbs 14:34}

#### 3. Humanistic values

- a. Humanistic values make the needs of each human being the top priority of every society. Each person should see himself or herself in the form of every other person and treat that person in the same way he or she would want to be treated. Humanism values the Golden Rule. {Jesus said, “*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*” Matthew 7:12}
- b. The humanistic view of what constitutes the inherent rights that must be extended to all people has grown as time has passed. Nor is some people’s antisocial behavior any longer being regarded as justification for reducing these rights to them.

#### 4. How should the church respond?

- a. The church cannot deny the importance of righteousness in the life of the individual or the community. Nor can the church be without mercy on those struggling against poverty or injustice.
- b. The church must preach that we all are totally helpless before God so we should show mercy as He shows mercy, yet it must also preach the law as a curb to doers of evil.

B. The entrance experience

1. Parking

- a. Parking seemed adequate at Peace Bible and did not merit comment by the Campbells.
- b. The church sign, however, was so political that it might have made other first-time attendees rethink entering the church to join the worship. Was it too much?

2. Greeters

- a. Greeters were present and dispensed bulletins at Peace Bible – no problem.
- b. The bulletins themselves, however, were a big problem – there were too many inserts. What types of materials belong 1) in the text of the bulletins, 2) as inserts in the bulletins, and 3) as handouts after the service?

3. Amenities

- a. No amenities, like coffee, were mentioned at Peace Bible. This might mean there were none or other events distracted from them being noticed. Are amenities necessary? Are they helpful to the church or a distraction?

C. The program

1. Communication

- a. Peace Bible excelled at communication; however, what they communicated might be regarded as of questionable merit by some people. Peace distributed a lot of materials with their bulletin. How much of the information would the typical worshipper read? All? A good portion? Almost none? What can we say about information overload?
- b. The information continued with announcements before the service. Might this approach be intentional to put the people in the mood for the type of sermon that they were about to hear?

2. Membership

- a. Like most of the churches we have previously encountered, the path to formal membership was not mentioned to new attendees. Instead, involvement was empathized before the people considered membership. Is this a good approach?

3. Activities

- a. While Peace Bible might have had some among its activities which were related to the Bible, that was not obvious from the Sunday morning agenda. No specific activities to attract or occupy children were apparent.
- b. The primary activities at Peace were politically related. The caucus meeting that was held in the church with the church's blessing appeared to be more important to the organization and its mission than other activities. That a politician involved in the caucus process gave the announcements causes all of them to be linked to politics. What are the issues here?

3. Deepening involvement

- a. The purpose of the church seemed to revolve around state and local politics. If the church were successful in promoting its values through this means, what are some of the possible effects on its membership and standing in the community?
- b. What are the varying effects that the strong political component that existed at Peace likely to have on its current membership? How might it affect new attendees like the Campbells?

D. Worship

1. Order of worship

- a. Worship began with announcements and an emphasis on a non-religious part of the church program. What effect would this have had on worshippers?
- b. Peace featured much more congregational participation in the worship than in the other churches we have seen, except for the food offering event at Mercy Hill. Was this good or bad or some of both? What is the proper role of lay participation in a worship service?
- c. The sermon seems to have blurred the Campbells' memory of the rest of the service. Does this often happen with good sermons? Bad sermons? Or is it the sermon that is erased by the concluding portions of the liturgy?

2. Use of music

- a. The worship contained simple musical responses by the congregation. In most of the previous congregations it appeared the praise band performed without any congregational involvement. Peace involved the congregation, but was there substance or as it just "ja, ja, ja" singing?

3. Goal of worship

- a. The goal of Peace's worship seemed to be to build a community around moral values shared by the congregation and Representative Miller. Is this a fair assessment?
- b. Even though God was not shut out of the service, how did the worship lead people away from the message of sin and grace?

E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible

- a. The Bible was read and obliquely mentioned in the sermon. Why was this not enough?
- b. Are there Bible accounts or verses that can legitimately be used to support political purposes? What might be some examples?

2. Fellowship

- a. Not much was mentioned about the fellowship at Peace, but based on the sermon content, is it likely members were discussing deep theological truths after the service?

## **7. Trinity Church – Study Questions**

1. What unites Trinity Church?

2. What is the purpose of Trinity Church?

3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. Would Trinity Church be regarded as a mainline church?

5. In what ways is Trinity very different from the other churches we have seen?

6. What are the likely membership demographics at Trinity?

7. Contrast Trinity with First Church.

## 7. Trinity Church

### A. Churchism

#### 1. Denominations

- a. Each congregation is an independent gathering of people who think of themselves as Christians, although some congregations may be part of a multi-campus organization or a bishopric.
- b. Some congregations remain free of loyalty to any larger group, and several of the churches that we have seen in this book might fall into this category. Such churches need to find the people who staff the professional positions in the congregation (e.g., pastor, music director) without outside help.
- c. Most congregations have some level of affiliation with a denomination or association of churches. Congregations seek such affiliations so they have a ready source of trained church workers, so they have access to a wide range of support materials, so they can carry out distant mission projects, and so they have places to transfer their members who move.
- d. Dominations demand loyalty in terms of doctrinal principles taught, church practices, and financial support of their activities.
- e. Dominations also have their own set of idiosyncrasies, which have more to do with historic roots than the faith they practice, although denominations often deny this.

#### 2. Congregations and their denominations

- a. Some congregations, particularly in rural areas where there is little turnover in membership, have very little interaction with the denomination to which they belong. They are more of the “pastor’s church” rather than a member of a larger group.
- b. Larger congregations, which have a significant turnover in membership or in their preaching and teaching staff, are more likely to have strong interactions with their denomination and to promote the program of the denomination more strongly.
- c. Congregations which have several of their members involved in denominational activities, like Trinity, may effectively be captives of their denomination, putting denominational priorities before their own and serving as a testing ground for denominational initiatives.

#### 3. The denominational effect

- a. Small denominations often suffer from nepotism. Members of one congregation may have relatives in other congregations of the denomination. If the denomination runs a common high school or college for members of its congregations, young people will meet and marry members of other congregations in the denomination. This type of network, particularly among church leaders, may make church discipline difficult and lead to gradual denominational drift in doctrine. Such a denomination is basically an extended family in which bad uncles and rebellious brats are tolerated to prevent rending the organization.
- b. The larger the denomination is, the stronger its church politics. Leadership positions and prize pastorates are limited, so competition, all done in a “churchly manner” of course, can become intense. Rather than protecting the heretics, hunting them becomes more popular.
- c. A person can have a position in a congregation where he/she is barely noticed all the way up to a position where nothing is done without that person’s consent.

- d. The danger with denominations of any size is that the organization of its operational issues can undermine its theological positions over time.

B. The entrance experience

- 1. Parking
  - a. The parking lot was large and the entrance of the building easy to find. What might be some reasons for such a large parking area in an older residential area?
- 2. Greeters
  - a. The first greeter was not human, but a large digital display where messages for all to see could be posted. Is this a good type of way to greet people coming to the church?
  - b. The church had an official greeter-couple, but they did not seem too active. Can this be a problem with official greeters?
  - c. An unofficial greeter seemed more engaging. Was he really trying to greet them or was he just being nosy about strangers?
- 3. Amenities and children
  - a. There was no evidence of coffee or food. Perhaps the Campbells just missed these.
  - b. There was no mention of children's activity or religious training.

C. The program

- 1. Communication
  - a. The communication of the denominational identity was immediate and strong. It appeared in numerous places, so that even if people did not know what it meant, they could not ignore it. Is this a good idea or counterproductive?
  - b. The announcements were given before the service and seemed to set the tone for the service. The pastor announced not only major initiatives in the denomination's program, but also introduced an honored guest. What did this say about the real message of the church?
  - c. The communication was very thorough, down to the ability to get charitable credit for the specific offerings being sought. Is such detail a good idea for church announcements or might it be handled in some other way? If so, how?
- 2. Membership
  - a. The church seemed more eager to learn whether the Campbells were somehow already involved in the church rather than to try to get them to join. What are the good and bad aspects of trying to fish for a connection with visitors?
  - b. Why might the church have taken such a seemingly unusual approach to the Campbells? Might our churches unwittingly do the same thing?

## 3. Activities

- a. Aside from the Bible college, Trinity did not seem to advertise any activities. Might this indicate something about the membership of the congregation?
- b. Based on the over-adequate size of the parking lot and the lack of announced activities, might this be one of the churches losing members to The Quest?

## D. Worship

## 1. Order of worship

- a. After the announcements, the service followed in a manner common to most of the other churches the Campbells had visited. Is this an example of “doing just enough religion” to satisfy the consciences of the attendees?
- b. The sermon and the prayers stayed on the theme of the announcements. Did Christ get squeezed out?

## 2. Use of music

- a. Except for the mention that the hymns were more modern, nothing more was mentioned about the music.

## 3. Goal of worship

- a. The goal of the worship seemed very clear; it was to promote loyalty to the work of the national church denomination.
- b. Was there an implication that the care of the souls of the local congregation was not very important to its purpose because the senior pastor was missing half the time?

## E. Theological considerations

## 1. Use of the Bible

- a. Like in other churches the Campbells have visited, the Bible was read, but what was read must not have been memorable or its relationship to the message of the sermon was unclear.
- b. Do our churches also have biblical readings which are forgotten as soon as the pastor closes the Bible?

## 2. Fellowship

- a. The people gathered after church in the narthex. The regulars seemed to gather there but no more is said about the gathering.
- b. The Campbells’ experience with the man in front of the national church presidents’ pictures reenforced the feeling that the purpose of the church was to push the national agenda. Why might this be expected to discourage potential members? Is it bad to have pictures of previous church leaders or pastors on the walls of a hall?

## 8. Immanuel Church – Study Questions

1. What unites Immanuel Church?
2. What is the purpose of Immanuel Church?
3. Comment on any of the following:

The architecture:

The floor plan:

The furnishings:

The sights and sounds:

4. What was the point of the author using a simple church like Immanuel?
5. Does a church have to be small and remote like Immanuel to be a faithful church?
6. What are the likely membership demographics at Immanuel?
7. Which churches that we have seen might be closer to Immanuel than at first appears?

## 8. Immanuel Church

### A. Christianity and worship

1. Misguided reasons people go to church – Focus on worldly self
  - a. Church is a place to go where one finds people like oneself. In this way it is like a tavern, a restaurant, a golf course, a gym, or a country store. Common concerns can be expressed, and personal experiences can be shared.
  - b. Church is a place where people can be entertained. In this way it is like a disco, a concert hall, or a theater. Music, lights, and dynamic speakers can raise attendees' mood and send them on their way feeling invigorated.
  - c. Church is a place where one can bond with others to carry out important tasks for the general good or for those in need. In this way it is like a community service group, a political caucus, or a business retreat. People try to build up each other's commitment for the group's cause.
  - d. Church is a place where people support each other. It is like Alcoholics Anonymous, a psychology group therapy, or a group of old friends. People lean on others to help them to get through difficult situations.
  - e. Church is a place that gives one a sense of moral wellbeing. It is like other positive habits that a person has which make the world seem better (e.g., brushing one's teeth, showering, putting everything back in its place, and showing up for work on time.) It helps wash away the bad taste of sins committed.
2. Misguided reasons people go to church – Focus on religious externals
  - a. Worship is inherently a performance. The pastor, the musicians, and those supporting them are all playing roles in a pageant, much of which was scripted by others either in ancient times or at distant locations. Performing the pageant well makes everyone feel good.
  - b. While different liturgies have different parts, getting all the parts in, rather than whether the parts accomplish their intended purpose, often seems to drive the implementation of the liturgy. Whether the attendees retain anything from what was presented is a seldom-asked question in liturgical circles.
3. The significant parts of the worship service
  - a. God's Law must be preached in all its severity and in a manner so that it applies to the people in the congregation. The members of the congregation must be led to accept their personal depravity and their inability at self-help.
  - b. God's Gospel must be preached as an accomplished fact and freely available to all who have sinned and cling to Jesus rather than their own dead works.
  - c. The Gospel must be applied to the members of the congregation, first by asking for their confession of sins and then by giving them God's absolution, by word and/or by sacrament, as appropriate.
  - d. People must be asked to confess their faith in the Triune God or in key doctrines of the Scripture as they were presented in the sermon.
  - e. People must be given the opportunity to praise God in manners that strengthen their faith and/or link them to their brothers and sisters in the church throughout the ages.

- f. Common prayers must be offered for fellow Christians and concerning those things that affect the church ministry, mission, and environment.
- g. God's blessing should be placed on God's people.

4. Teaching the message

- a. Formal worship is not the most important part of a church's activity; helping people grow in their faith is. Spiritual growth can only come through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit only works through the means of grace, particularly the study of the Scriptures.
- b. Formal teaching of congregational members of all ages by the church is essential to their spiritual growth and understanding.
- c. Studying God's Word at home is every bit as important as attending worship services. There is no better insurance against divorce, rebellious children, and the falling away from faith than gathering together daily at the Savior's feet to learn from Him.

B. The entrance experience

- 1. Parking
  - a. To park at the church, one must first find the church, and that took some doing for the Campbells. Would signs telling where to turn off the main road have helped?
  - b. The parking lot had adequate space. It appears the congregation was small.
- 2. Greeters
  - a. The first greeters were a flaking church sign and leaning tombstones. Did this lack of maintenance say anything about the quality of the church?
  - b. How were Jerry and Helen different from previous greeters? What was good and what was bad about this?
- 3. Amenities
  - a. The amenities consisted of questionable coffee. What was questionable about this whole situation?

C. The program

- 1. Communication
  - a. The means of communication was a bulletin with typographical errors. What does this say about the church?
  - b. No announcements were mentioned, as the Campbells' minds had gone to other things. Might they have missed something important?

2. Membership

- a. Partaking of communion was linked to membership in the congregation. This is what is called “close communion.”
- b. There seemed to be little interest in the congregation in obtaining new members. This might explain why rural congregations are dying. What could Immanuel do to attract new members without compromising its doctrine and worship?

3. Activities

- a. No activities were mentioned. Was this perhaps a result of the size of the church?

D. Worship

1. Order of worship

- a. The order of the service followed what is often called the “common service,” a variety of which has been used in the Christian church for centuries.
- b. The service empathized the preaching of relevant strong law and gospel. The absolution and confession and the communion portion of the service seemed to particularly impress Ben and Jessica.
- c. The presence of a large crucifix in the front of the church seemed to set the tone for worship. Is it better to have a crucifix or an empty cross? Why?

2. Use of music

- a. Traditional hymns were used. The skills of the organist were not very good. This is a common problem in smaller congregations in rural areas. Is the problem worth addressing with technology?

3. Goal of worship

- a. The immediate goal of the service was clearly to proclaim God’s law and gospel and be sure that the attendees would receive God’s forgiveness for their sins. Any comments?
- b. What was the ultimate goal of the service?

E. Theological considerations

1. Use of the Bible

- a. The Bible was read as at other churches.
- b. Material from the Bible was used in the sermon to illustrate the pastor’s points.

2. Fellowship

- a. What happened after the service was not reported. It is uncertain whether other members showed interest in the Campbells. Why would this interaction have been important?
- b. There was no mention of the Campbells interacting with the pastor. Wouldn’t this have been significant enough to mention if it had occurred? Did the author goof at this point?