

The Room Has Left the Building

David Ewart

Prepared for 7-21 Presentation at Christianity 21, Denver, CO, January 9-11, 2014.

<p>Slide 1:</p> 	<p>Hi. My name is David Ewart. I was 3 years old in 1948. And in the next 7 minutes I want to show you that when I am 103, Protestant denominations in North America will be radically restructured, or non-existent.</p>
<p>Slide 2:</p> 	<p>Unfortunately, I have learned the hard way that If you don't ask the right questions, you end up trying to solve the wrong problems. And every congregation I've met always asks me: What can we do to get more young families to come to church?</p>
<p>Slide 3:</p> 	<p>I have shelves full of books and have attended countless conferences and workshops to answer that question. But all of these books, workshops, and conferences have focussed on the church in splendid isolation. They all had great ideas.</p>
<p>Slide 4:</p> 	<p>But what I didn't notice was that none of these ever seriously discussed the reality that congregations do not exist in isolation. Congregations function within a larger society with its own culture and values. And its own competing salvation stories.</p>
<p>Slide 5:</p> 	<p>Now no congregation can survive from one generation to the next by having babies. It just can't have babies fast enough to regenerate itself that way. Congregations must depend on society having babies who will go to church.</p>

The Room Has Left the Building

David Ewart

Prepared for 7-21 Presentation at Christianity 21, Denver, CO, January 9-11, 2014.

<p>Slide 6:</p> 	<p>But here's the catch. What if the society is producing babies who don't go to church like they used to? Because if that is true, then this is a problem that no congregation can fix. Respond to, Yes. But fix? No.</p>
<p>Slide 7:</p> 	<p>I think there are four or five changes in society that are having an enormous impact on Protestant denominations. Changes that help us understand why society's babies are not going to church as much as they used to. I want to talk about two of them.</p>
<p>Slide 8:</p> 	<p>When was the last time you had to be in the same room at the same time as the musicians to hear the music? ... In the late 1800's.</p>
<p>Slide 9:</p> 	<p>Now for the next hundred years, you still had to be in the same room as your stereo. But starting in the 1980's you could unplug your music from the wall. Amazing. Music without musicians and without a room.</p>
<p>Slide 10:</p> 	<p>And about 10 years ago, when you stepped out of the room, you were no longer alone, you carried the world in your hand. Google, Facebook, Twitter, etc., etc. have become a new space where we communicate, connect and congregate.</p>

The Room Has Left the Building

David Ewart

Prepared for 7-21 Presentation at Christianity 21, Denver, CO, January 9-11, 2014.

<p>Slide 11:</p> 	<p>This baby is hard-wiring her brain to expect that space does not end with the four walls of her room. To expect that time is not just, "Now," but "All the time," "Any time." Is this the baby who will regenerate our congregations?</p>
<p>Slide 12:</p> 	<p>What do you think are the chances that an iPad baby will disconnect from her world, and sit passively for an hour where every word she hears, sings and prays has been chosen ahead of time by someone else?</p>
<p>Slide 13:</p> 	<p>Here is our experience. Canada usually follows US trends. But I believe we are living your future. But this chart also shows that this trend started decades before the internet. And that's the second thing I want to talk about.</p>
<p>Slide 14:</p> 	<p>This map shows in green the world's non-religious population. In Vancouver where I live, 50% of adults report "None of the Above" as their religious background. Blame it on what you will ...</p>
<p>Slide 15:</p> 	<p>Christians behaving badly, secularism, consumerism, individualism, multiculturalism, the new atheists For the first time in human history, the church in North America finds itself in a culture of "no religion, all religions, whatever!"</p>

The Room Has Left the Building

David Ewart

Prepared for 7-21 Presentation at Christianity 21, Denver, CO, January 9-11, 2014.

<p>Slide 16:</p> 	<p>Instead of a rummage sale, I'm thinking the church is encountering a perfect storm. "Congregating" happens without a room, and without a fixed time. Evangelization will have to speak to those who have no religion.</p>
<p>Slide 17:</p> 	<p>Evolution shows us that when the environment changes, organisms must change or die. They must change their form to receive sustenance from what there is more of in the environment.</p>
<p>Slide 18:</p> 	<p>The era of the church building as the sole platform for ministry is ending. Communities of faith must also connect, communicate, and congregate in cyberspace. And they must connect with neighbours who view religion with suspicion, disbelief, or disinterest.</p>
<p>Slide 19:</p> 	<p>And the challenge is not just to become social media savvy. How will we baptize her on Facebook? Clothe the naked and feed the hungry on YouTube? How will we show her that religious practices are life-giving?</p>
<p>Slide 20:</p> 	<p>Throughout my ministry, congregations have tried to respond to changes in society by making our room more inviting, warm, and welcoming. But the room has left the building. And the practice of religion is leaving the culture.</p>

The Room Has Left the Building

David Ewart

Prepared for 7-21 Presentation at Christianity 21, Denver, CO, January 9-11, 2014.

Slide 21:



Let me conclude by paraphrasing Canadian poet, Patrick Lane.

The story of Jesus is our story now.

How do you want it to end?

That is a question that will get us working at the right problems.

Thank you.