

FLGA District Lutheran Hour Ministries Outreach Initiative

Since 1998 the LCMS has experienced significant losses every year. The LCMS holds the dubious distinction of being the US denomination with conservative theology that has lost the most members. The percentage loss (13%) was also the highest for the 15 largest evangelical protestant denominations. . . . Around half of the congregations confirmed no adults. A significant number of the rest confirmed small numbers.

To be clear, the downward trend . . . should alarm, not because of institutional concerns, but it means that we are not reaching the lost for Christ. The impact of this loss is not only observed by empty pews on Sunday morning . . . but most importantly in precious souls being lost from Christ forever.

The Barna study indicated that . . . *"The . . . consistent practice among exemplary churches was well thought out and consistently executed follow-up with their contact lists."* Congregations that added a lot of new members tended to speak of a robust system to maintain connection with those who were prospects of the congregation. After the initial connection was made, the congregation intentionally nurtured the relationship with the hope that eventually the contact would consider their congregation their spiritual home.

This process is critical. A congregation can be excellent at connecting to the community and even have a cultural outreach, but if they are not intentional about keeping track of these new friends and intent upon strengthening ties leading to discipleship, the congregation (and the Kingdom) will likely see little growth. Barna: *"The second set of behaviors that was common to all the exemplary churches revolved around very persistent follow-up with visitors . . . These churches were excited to see new people, and they made sure to let those people feel valued. (They made sure to do this in a non-intrusive way that would not make their guests uncomfortable.)"*

Barna: "These pastors talked, and talked, and talked about the importance of reaching their community. They talked about it from the pulpit and in smaller settings. They communicated unequivocally to their people an expectation to be reaching those outside the church, and they provided concrete steps to do so. These conversations, over time, established a missional culture within the congregations."

In the congregational survey, when lay members were asked what helped them be effective in outreach, the preaching of their pastor was often mentioned. The power of the pulpit should not surprise us.

[Note: To read the entire article, go to the FLGA District website at flgadistrict.org. Scroll down the middle column (Latest Updates) until you find "FLGA District Lutheran Hour Ministries Outreach Initiative." Click on the green box at the bottom of the article (Find Out More). At the bottom you will find various links. Select the first one: "Power Point with notes." Browse the entire report and all the links. The complete Barna report is also there.]