



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
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Growing the Family of God

Telling the Story

Serving the Community

Nurturing Believers

Coffee with Jim



It was recently recommended that I read a book with the rather disconcerting title, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*. The book's author Thom Rainer is a church consultant and researcher who studied and reported on the demise of fourteen churches.

Let me abundantly clear. I am not sharing this because I believe our church is dying or even sick; much less on the critical list. However, we can be healthier, more dynamic and more deeply engaged in ministry than we are at present. As we age and gray it is incumbent upon each of us that we carefully evaluate our ministries in terms of future generations. It is no surprising revelation that only about one-third of Americans profess a deep religious commitment, while another third professes no religious conviction or affiliation at all. It may fairly be termed a crisis.

The first point Rainer makes is that the erosion of the church is slow, and many long-term members do not recognize decline as it happens around them. The common thread in each of the churches studied was that they lived with the past as hero. These churches were not clinging to biblical or theological truth they were clinging to the past; the good old days.

The autopsy further revealed that dying churches refused to look like the community. Simply stated, the church refused to change with ethnic and racial transformations in the community. The church became a fortress, raising the drawbridge to exclude any who did not fit the boon days when the church was thriving. When a church refuses to have a heart and ministry for the community, it is a dying church.

We have all heard the expression, "follow the money." That is true of dying churches. As churches struggle in the throes of death, the budget, as well as the attitude turns inward. Rather than reaching into the community the church focuses inward. In each of the churches that were autopsied the financial pattern was one where funds were used more to maintain the machinery of the church than funding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. No church can survive on such an inward focus indefinitely. Eventually the church will die of heart failure.

Somewhere in the history of the deceased churches the Great Commission had been abandoned; sacrificed on the altar of the past the church has failed to "go make disciples" and rely on the presence and power of Jesus to accomplish the task. The reality is the church has made a choice to turn inward and away from its foundational call to be the presence of Christ in the world. It is

From the Pastor (cont.)

impossible to walk forward when one is always looking backward. The good old days are past. Dynamic churches have vision for what God is doing in the present and an expectation for God's ongoing work in their future. The Great Commission is not merely a couple of verses of scripture to be memorized, but a lifestyle to be embraced and lived in the community of faith and for the community outside the church building.

Each of the autopsied churches manifested at least some level of self-absorption prior to their death. For example:

My music styles

My opinion of the length and order of worship

My thoughts on the color of the building, carpet, rooms, etc.

My opinion on programs

In short, My, my, my. . .

When this attitude prevails, the church is doomed before it closes its doors.

As the church continues its downward spiral into "it's all about me" pastoral tenure decreases. It is virtually impossible to pastor a church that is always looking back to the good old days when Reverend so and so was pastor. It cannot move forward.

I am consistently proud of the way our church prays together and prays for those outside the confines of our faith community. With tears in her eyes a woman recently related the blessing she received when she knew that our church was praying for her. "I'm not even a member of your church," she said. That's the way it is meant to be. Living churches don't pray from a prayer list. We pray from our hearts for everyone who asks and everyone whom the Holy Spirit lays on our heart. Prayer is not about lists. It is about sharing our joys and concerns with God who loves us and is genuinely concerned for the people and issues that concern us. Prayer is the lifeblood of the church. When we stop praying together we are on a downward spiral leading to death.

The church needs to be clear about her purpose. This is not limited to a mission statement but is an ongoing process of revisiting and reevaluating how we live our ministry in the community. What does it mean when we say we are "Growing and Developing the Family of God?" To me it means that we are constantly reaching into the community to call people to discipleship, nurture them in faith, and welcome them into the Kingdom of God on earth as it is heaven.

One final symptom that each of the deceased churches shared was a focus on facilities. Stewardship demands appropriate care for the facilities that support our ministries. But let's be clear: they are facilities to support ministry; buildings and grounds are not ministry.

Ladies Afternoon Out

Ladies, come and join us on Monday, July 30th from 1:30 - 4:00 pm. We'll meet in the Kum Dubble classroom and celebrate the Red, White, and Blue with dessert, fellowship, and fun!

If you have questions, suggestions, comments, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Jan Jolynn Staley at 815.210.3721.

Small Group Notes

Monday Night Bible Study

The Monday night Bible Study will resume meeting on Monday, September 10th with a study of Revelation. If you are interested in joining this small group, please see Virginia Asper as soon as possible to ensure adequate study materials.

Grief Support Group

The Grief Support Group will meet on July 11th at 10:30 am. They will finish their current book of study, "Facing Loneliness".

There will be no meeting in the month of August but the group will meet again on September 12th at 10:30 am to begin the study of a new book, "Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow", by Nancy Guthrie.

In times of deep sorrow and disappointment, everything we believe can be called into question. Nancy Guthrie gently invites readers to lean in along with her to hear Jesus speak understanding and insight into the lingering questions we all have about the hurts of life.

The grief support group is led by Mary Frobish and there are books available for those who wish to join the group.

Men's Night Out

It's time for another Men's Night Out! The next Men's Night Out is scheduled for Wednesday, July 18th. Everyone should meet at the church at 6:00 pm for an evening of fun, fellowship and food!

Nursery Care Available

Nursery care is available during worship services for infants and toddlers through age 3.

The nursery is located across the hall from the sanctuary.

Newsletter Deadline

All articles for inclusion the September edition of our church newsletter must be submitted to the church office no later than Friday, August 17th. You may submit your articles by phone (842.4321), fax (844.6943), by e-mail (Rhonda@fbcpontiac.org) or by leaving them in the black box outside the church office door.



Thank You

Dear Church Family,
Thank you for the cards, prayers, and comforting thoughts since the passing of Roger Gray. Thank you to those who helped with dinner and those that provided the food.

Thank you all very much,
The family of Roger Gray

Thanks to the volunteers at First Baptist for providing the meal after the funeral of my dad. Your home cooking felt like love and caring.

Sincerely,
Tim and Celia Gray

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars for Sunday, September 16th! On that day, we will host a special outdoor worship service followed by a church picnic and plenty of fun and games for the whole family!

Come and celebrate the mission and ministry of our church!



Prayer Chain Number:
815.419.4454

The GRR Annual Assembly

The Annual Assembly (Growth Conference) is scheduled for September 28th - September 29th.

This year's event will be held at the Chateau in Bloomington and will feature speakers Shane Claiborne, Tony Campolo, and Sharon Koh. There will be a special panel discussion on Friday afternoon with Claiborne, Campolo, Koh, and David Fitch and there will be time on Saturday for table discussions.

Mark your calendars and watch upcoming newsletters and bulletins for more information on how to register to attend this event.

Office Notes

In honor of the Independence Day holiday, our church office will be closed on Wednesday, July 4th.

We wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday!

Community Corner

Volunteers are needed at OSF St. James Medical Center! People are needed to help guests by pushing wheelchairs to transport patients to doctor's offices, to their cars upon discharge or after appointments, delivering/picking up mail, and delivering flowers to patients.

Hours are 8:00 am - noon or noon - 4:00 pm. Days vary and are flexible based on your availability. Receive a free meal on the day you volunteer! If you are interested in donating your time and talents, please contact Paulette at 815.842.4535 for more information.

From the Pastor (cont.)

In closing this short tome Rainer offers twelve responses in three categories to support sick and dying churches.

The first set of responses are for those churches who think they might have symptoms of sickness.

1. Pray that God will open the eyes of the leadership and members for opportunities to reach into the community where the church is located.
2. Take an honest audit of how church members spend their time being involved.
3. Take an audit of how the church spends its money.
4. Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize your community.

The next four responses are for churches who know they are "very sick."

1. The church must admit and confess its dire need.
2. The church must pray for wisdom and strength to do whatever is necessary.
3. The church must be willing to change radically.
4. That change must lead to action and an outward focus.

The final four responses are aimed at dying churches. These responses allow the church to die with dignity.

1. Sell the property and give the proceeds to a new church start.
2. Give the building to another church.
3. If the church is in a transitional neighborhood, turn over leadership and property to those who reside in the neighborhood.
4. Merge with another church, allowing that church both ownership and leadership of the dying church.

Bach to an earlier point: I do not believe our church is sick or dying. I am sharing this lengthy article with you to ask you to examine our ministry priorities considering our personal commitments to the church. I am asking each of us to become our church's own personal physician.

We need to ask tough questions: Do we focus inward or outward to the community? Do we constantly hark back to the good old days? How do we spend our financial resources? Do we pray together? Is the Great Commission central to our ministry? Or has it been totally abandoned? Is our mantra "what about me?" Or is it what about God living and vital in our community?

We have enormous potential! God has plans and purpose for us. God has a vision for our future. I believe in you as God's people in this place.

Jim



July



- 2 Connie Grider
- 3 Steve and Lisa McBride ♥
- 5 Dorley and Brenda Dodd ♥
- 6 Sue Schell
- 7 Jackson Crawford
- 7 Janet Halford
- 9 Daniel Flessner
- 10 Mark and Amy Levin ♥
- 10 Lisa McBride
- 12 Mel Beck
- 13 Hayley Walters
- 14 Scott and Cindy Knight ♥
- 15 Louise Gray
- 15 Owen Wolfe
- 16 Ryan Miller
- 17 Andrea Goldsmith
- 17 Jay and Lisa Hurd ♥
- 19 Jim and Marian Dixon ♥
- 20 Caden Ferguson
- 21 Steve and Sarah Walters ♥
- 24 Eileen Hughes
- 26 Raceyn Miller
- 26 Janice Staley
- 26 Terry and Carol Stanton ♥
- 26 Bill and Phylis Bowman ♥
- 27 Dale Newsome
- 29 Janice Letsos
- 31 Clyde Francis
- 31 Kate Hoover
- 31 Sharon Matteson

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	2	3 9:00 am Ruth Circle	4 Independence Day Church Office Closed 	5	6	7 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
8 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	9 1:00 pm Single Women of Faith	10	11 9:00 am ROMEO Club 10:30 am Grief Support Group	12	13	14 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
15 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	16	17	18 9:00 am ROMEO Club 6:00 pm Men's Night Out	19	20	21 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC 9:30 - 11:30 am VBS
22 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	23 1:00 pm Single Women of Faith	24	25 9:00 am ROMEO Club	26	27	28 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
29 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	30 1:30 pm Ladies Afternoon Out	31				





August



- 5 Mike Toon
- 6 JoAnn Bockman
- 7 Rich and Janet Halford
- 9 Becky Easton
- 9 Deb Golliday
- 10 Debbie Dowdy
- 10 Bob and Debbie Dowdy
- 10 Brittany Bohm
- 11 Kim Ruther
- 11 Solomon Battleson
- 12 Bob Carroll
- 12 Joe and Pam Lind
- 13 Vickie Jaime
- 13 Alex Boase
- 15 Judy Judd
- 16 Eva Schiff
- 16 Carol Stanton
- 17 Pam Lind
- 17 Hadleih Mitchey
- 17 Carol Brill
- 24 Joy Henderson
- 24 Carol Jones
- 24 Jaime Wykes
- 24 Michelle Bohm
- 26 Christy Stanton
- 26 Mike and Carol Toon
- 26 Ron E. Watson
- 29 Marilyn Gould

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 9:00 am Ruth Circle 9:00 am ROMEO Club 1:00 pm Esther Circle	2	3	4 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
5 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	6	7	8 9:00 am ROMEO Club	9 7:00 pm Board of Ministries	10	11 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
12 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	13 1:00 pm Single Women of Faith	14	15 9:00 am ROMEO Club	16	17 Newsletter Deadline	18 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
19 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	20	21	22 9:00 am ROMEO Club	23	24	25 7:30 am PK Fellowship at FBC 8:00 am PK Study at FBC
26 9:00 am SMC 10:00 am Worship	27 1:00 pm Single Women of Faith	28	29 9:00 am ROMEO Club	30	31	

