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The State of Church Giving through 2006

Global Triage, MDG 4, and
Unreached People Groups

Excerpt: Chapter 8

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Global Triage for Word and Deed Need

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (KJV)

1 John 3:16-17: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (NIV)

The Revelation to John 3:16: “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (NRSV)

A Choice Before the Church in the U.S.

Previous chapters in this volume explore giving trends as one means to measure the level of church members’ commitment to their professed Christian beliefs. Giving trends indicate whether the hearts of church members are growing warmer, colder, or merely maintaining the status quo in regard to their faith.

Passages from the Bible also serve as a standard to evaluate church member commitment levels. Scriptural passages might support or refute conclusions about what the giving patterns mean.

Three Bible verses that share common elements in their references can add perspective to the present discussion. Each citation includes the name of “John,” chapter “3” as well as verse “16.” These three verses suggest an evaluation tool for church member commitment that complements the review of giving patterns in the U.S.

The first verse, John 3:16, introduces what may be termed “the offer.” Perhaps the verse is so familiar that the reader did not actually take the time to read through the words at the beginning of this chapter. The verse is commonly cited as a summary of what is termed the Gospel or Good News of God’s love shown through Jesus Christ to every person. The verse indicates a choice is available to each individual. Those who choose to believe in the option being offered will enter into a new reality that culminates in eternal life. By implication, this new life is not available to those who choose not to believe.

The second verse in this trilogy, found in 1 John 3:16, provides what may be termed a standard of “evidence” as to whether a person has truly accepted the offer made in John 3:16. The apostle John, in 1 John, writes to those in the church with admonitions about how the Christian life is to be lived. In 1 John 3:16, the action of Jesus in caring for church members is cited as the standard for church members’ care for others. The standard is elevated to the level of evidence as to whether faith is present in verse 17: If such caring actions as described in verse 16 do not result from the professed faith, one may legitimately ask whether the love of God is truly present in a person, and thus, whether the offer has been accepted through faith.

The third verse completes the set and introduces the concept of the “consequence” for the choice made to accept or not accept the offer. The name of the book of the Bible in which this third verse is found is often shortened to “Revelation.” However, the formal name of the book in several translations, including the New Revised Standard Version, is “The Revelation to John.” Thus the sixteenth verse in the third chapter of The Revelation to John shares the same common citation elements with the other two verses.

As noted in chapter 1 of this volume, in chapters 1 through 3 in Revelation, Jesus is addressing seven churches. Beginning in chapter 3, verse 14, Jesus is addressing the church in Laodicea. It is in verse 16 that Jesus confronts the behavior that this church is exhibiting. The church is not “hot” or enthusiastic. It is not “cold” or engaged enough to be actively resisting. Rather, the church in Laodicea is “lukewarm,” meaning that it is doing something, but just enough to maintain a tepid temperature. Perhaps this condition is singled out for special mention because it is especially dangerous. There is enough activity in a lukewarm state to be misleading as to who Jesus actually is, and what is the message that he came to proclaim. If the church does not choose to change its behavior, according to this verse, a consequence will result. Specifically, the church will be “spit out.”

These three verses provide a construct to evaluate the church giving patterns:

1. Grace can be accepted through faith.
2. If faith is present, there will be evidence.
3. If faith is weak in practice, consequences result.

In light of this structure, church member giving patterns in the U.S. can be reviewed.

1. The church in the U.S. continues to claim, through public statements and worship, that the offer made in John 3:16 has been accepted. Therefore there should be evidence.

2. An examination of available evidence can help determine if the church in the U.S. has enthusiastically accepted the offer in John 3:16 (hot), or if the church has,

These three verses provide a construct to evaluate the church giving patterns.

in fact, rejected the offer in spite of protestations to the contrary (cold). The third option is that the church has accepted the offer halfheartedly (lukewarm).

3. Given this construct, the consequence will be defined by what the evidence indicates. If the church in the U.S. is “hot” or “cold,” then the address to the church in Laodicea is not relevant to the church in the U.S. If evidence indicates the church is “lukewarm,” then the church in the U.S. can accept the consequence or make a choice to change.

As in the case of the church of Laodicea, the church in the U.S. is not without a choice, even if the evidence indicates it is lukewarm. In four of the addresses to the seven churches in chapters 1 through 3 of the Revelation to John, the description of problems in each church is followed by an option. Choosing that option can result in an alternative to the consequence described for present behavior. For example, the church in Laodicea is offered the opportunity to change its current self-centered indifference and acquire true riches from Jesus, resulting in a secure place in the kingdom that includes sitting with Jesus on his throne.

The construct of these three verses may also suggest that the church in the U.S. is at a choice point, if present giving patterns and other evidence reflect lukewarm behavior. On the one hand, if the church in the U.S. is lukewarm, a serious consequence is on the horizon, perhaps a separation from the larger body of Christ, and very likely marginalization in the culture.

If, on the other hand, the church in the U.S., confronted with its lukewarmness, should opt to “be earnest and repent” (Rev. 3:19b), then the church will reflect a change of heart as evident in increased concern for others, displayed through increased church member giving for the purpose of helping others who are in desperate need.

It is in the context of this choice that the practice of triage for both global word need and global deed need may be very helpful. There is a growing consensus that the resources and methods exist to alleviate the physical suffering of people around the globe. Church leaders also consider the task of presenting the Gospel to every people group on earth an increasingly attainable goal. In both cases, the problem is not that the needs are too great. The problem is that the available resources are not being mobilized to implement the available solutions. Neither word or deed task will soon be accomplished without effective moral leadership, the very strength that the church could choose to bring to the table.

Triage as an Organizing Strategy

Although experts now assert that both word and deed need problems can be solved, this view is by no means popularly held. Instead, most church members in the pew, as well as U.S. citizens in general, still see global problems as intimidating and threatening. To approach these overwhelming needs, the concept of triage may be helpful.

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (Unabridged) (1993) includes definitions for triage (trē’āzh), including: “2 : the sorting of and allocation of treatment to patients and esp. battle and disaster victims according to a system of priorities designed to maximize the number of survivors.” *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition* (1994) includes a definition that suggests the term has come into more general use: “*broadly* : the assigning of priority order to projects on

To approach these overwhelming needs, the concept of triage may be helpful.

the basis of where funds and resources can be best used or are most needed” [emphasis in the original].

Applying the concept of triage to the application of church giving may be appropriate. Patterns in chapters 1 through 3 and 5 of this edition in *The State of Church Giving* series indicate that giving to Benevolences as a portion of income has been declining in a fairly steady fashion since the late 1960s. Evidence below will help determine if this decline points to “lukewarm” rather than “hot” behavior. If this pattern needs to change, it also needs to be understood. A contributing factor to declining Benevolences allocations, including to the line items that address the great physical and spiritual need confronting so many around the globe, may well be the lack of an organizing strategy to help prioritize those needs. As Henri Nouwen and his coauthors, Donald McNeill and Douglas Morrison, observed in *Compassion*, it’s not that church members do not have enough information about world need. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and diverse fundraising mailings provide more specifics than ever. Rather, all this information may have unintended consequences:

For individual church members to respond to all the input about global need, those individuals need to feel connected to the larger body.

We might ask, however, whether mass communication directed to millions of people who experience themselves as small, insignificant, powerless individuals does not in fact do more harm than good. When there is no community that can mediate between world needs and personal responses, the burden of the world can only be a crushing burden. When the pains of the world are presented to people who are already overwhelmed by the problems in their small circle of family or friends, how can we hope for a creative response? What we can expect is the opposite of compassion: numbness and anger.¹

The helpful analogy of a “body” used in the 1 Cor. 12 to describe the functioning of the church can be of assistance at this point in the discussion. In the human body, for example, the eye may see the baseball coming. But the eye has no power to swing the bat. Only in coordination with the entire system does the eye stay on the ball while other parts swing the bat to connect with the ball and hit it out of the park. Thousands of nerves, muscles, blood corpuscles, tissues, and organs respond to the information the eye processes, to cooperate seamlessly and coordinate their efforts to produce effective action.

For individual church members to respond to all the input about global need, those individuals need to feel connected to a larger body. When church leaders are not providing strategic direction that helps set priorities to solve, not just cope with, global word and deed need, church members feel overwhelmed. They see the great needs but do not feel connected in a broad way that can address those needs. Members are trained, then, to respond to individual crises. They are not provided the opportunity to participate in expansive problem solving. They have no hope they can make a significant difference in the whole picture. At worst, they will respond with the “numbness and anger” cited by Henri Nouwen and colleagues. At best, when the effects of preaching and Bible reading can no longer be resisted, they seek immediate individual gratification by writing the crisis check or taking a mission trip.

Church leaders could empower their members by helping to set priorities that give those members permission to care about the entire need. In the same way that triage provides battlefield medical units with the ability to respond amidst the chaos

around them, a broadly accepted strategy of triage for global word and deed need could help replace hopelessness with engagement among church members.

The concept of triage introduces the idea of addressing needs in a priority order, to maximize the number of survivors. On a battlefield, those who will die from their wounds need only be comforted. Those who will recover with minimum attention can be moved elsewhere. It is those who will recover only with intervention who command the attention of the medical personnel.

Triage can be applied to both spiritual and physical need around the world as well.

Defining Triage for Global Word Need. Evangelism, for the Christian, is a basic responsibility that comes with accepting the offer made in John 3:16. Jesus directed his followers, in his last earthly encounters with them, to spread his message to every nation, as well as to help those, added to the faith through their witness, to understand and obey his commands (Matt. 28:19-20; see also Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-48; John 17:20, and Acts 1:8). To accept the offer of John 3:16 is to accept the task of spreading this message.

How might one apply triage to empower church members to act on this responsibility?

Applying the triage model, one finds that only two of the three levels in the medical categories can be appropriately transferred to evangelism. That is, the offer in John 3:16 is available to the entire world. There is no nation or individual who is to be excluded from the offer. Thus, no person or set of people can be placed in a category of “nothing to be done.”

That leaves two medical triage categories for application to the word need around the globe: those who can have access to the Gospel without direct intervention, and those who can have access only with direct intervention.

Countries in which the church has been broadly established might be parallel to the medical category of those who will recover with minimum attention. Where the church has been established, it is possible that individuals may be provided with information about God’s saving love through Jesus via individuals he or she meets at work or school, through social networks, through the media, or through other broadcast activities such as reading material or even movies. Since individuals in these settings have access to information about the Gospel, intervention need not be an immediate priority.

Another set of people in the world is termed “unreached.” The definition of unreached varies among different ministries. However, a working explanation for the present discussion is that an unreached people group is a group of people who presently have no access to the message that God loves them through Jesus Christ, and will not have access without intentional intervention. As with the definitions, the count of the number of unreached people groups varies dramatically. One count is that 5,903 such people groups remained as of the year 2008.² Activities directed at providing these people with a choice of whether to accept or reject the offer made in John 3:16 would seem to correspond to the medical triage category of those who may recover if direct intervention provides the means. That is, if the Gospel is presented, these people will have a choice whether to accept or not. If they have no access to the Gospel, no such choice is possible.

“Unreached” is a people group who presently have no access to the message that God loves them through Jesus Christ, and will not have access without intentional intervention.

It should be noted that this discussion of triage involves setting priorities. Saying that evangelism efforts focused on unreached people groups should take precedence over evangelism in areas with established accessibility to the Gospel is a statement of emphasis, not meant to exclude or cancel all activity to the “reached” group. Triage is a matter of how to mobilize uninvolved church members to complete a task, rather than a determination that one category is more important than the other.

As Augustine of Hippo is quoted, “God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.” Sharing the Good News of Jesus, as evangelism is often defined, with the neighbor across the street is just as important on an individual level as supporting the efforts to send a contact person to an unreached people group across the globe. However, if evangelism is to be approached as a task with a goal, rather than a vague ongoing responsibility, there will need to be a primary objective around which to organize. “Global evangelism” could become an accessible goal to the vast majority of church members by setting as a priority those who will not hear about Jesus’ love without intentional efforts. Such a focus may, in fact, also result in a fresh presentation of the Gospel to those in the reached areas where the Gospel is more easily accessible. The excitement of church members who are empowered to care about unreached people could be attractive to their neighbors outside the church.

Defining Triage for Global Deed Need. Church growth methods have emphasized “seeker-sensitive” approaches that identify the “felt needs” of those to be reached by the church. There is one “felt need” that is repeatedly being stated by national and world leaders. That need is to mobilize the resources necessary to address global poverty, and in particular, to reduce the number of preventable under-five child deaths.

A consensus has developed among nations that is summarized in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs include a set of eight goals to be achieved by 2015, with targets within each goal, and indicators of progress toward the goals.³ The goals include poverty and hunger, primary education, reducing child mortality, and safe drinking water (see Table 38). These well-intentioned plans may be difficult to embrace for the average citizen. As Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion*,

has observed, the MDGs consider the condition of the Developing World, a category that encompasses five of the six billion people alive. Collier suggests that such an approach is “politically correct” and, in a non-politically-correct tone, he states that aid agencies like to be able to justify “a near-global role for their staff.” However, the cost for not prioritizing need is “that our efforts are spread too thin, and the strategies that are appropriate only for the countries at the bottom get lost in the general babble. It is time to redefine the development problem as being about the countries of the bottom billion, the ones that are stuck in poverty.”⁴

Table 38: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education
MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
MDG 4: Reduce child mortality
MDG 5: Improve maternal health
MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Collier's work addresses the 58 nations, in scattered geographical locations, whose economies seem to be stuck in a no-growth cycle.⁵ Another area of concern, and a focus of the present discussion, are the most vulnerable residents of those and other countries: the children who will die without direct intervention. These children certainly live in what Collier terms "the bottom billion" people in the global economy. However, they also are born into developing countries that have not yet managed to spread the increasing economic growth evenly within their borders. It is these children who are the focus of a triage approach to global need, regardless of their country of residence.

MDG 4 is to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate of children under the age of five. It is true that some children die from causes that cannot be addressed through compassion and assistance. Children born anywhere in the world, even those with access to the most modern medical care, may die because of birth defects, disease, accident, or war.

However, the majority of the children under five who die around the globe are killed by causes that could be prevented for low-cost intervention. A report on the progress toward reaching the MDGs noted, "Most children under five die from just one or more of five common conditions — diarrhoea, measles, respiratory infections, malaria or malnutrition — for which treatment is relatively inexpensive."⁶

Oral rehydration therapy, for example, is a simple technique that has been hailed as a major medical breakthrough and is credited with saving lives. Yet, one source notes, "Only 20 percent of children with diarrhea receive oral rehydration therapy, a sugar and salt mixture stirred into water."⁷ As a result, diarrhea accounted for 17 percent of the under-5 child deaths in the 2000-2003 time period.⁸

The United Nations has declared "there can be no task nobler than giving every child a better future." But action requires leadership, and the broad effort required to implement the solutions will include the participation not only of government "but also of people of influence representing all civil society, from NGOs [non-governmental organization], religious groups and business and private enterprise to people's movements, academia and the media, community and grass-roots groups, families — and children themselves."⁹

The intentions of the world leaders in 1990, and again in 2000, was elevated to the level of promise made by world leaders to the world's children. In 1990, "the largest group of world leaders ever convened" met under the auspices of the United Nations and "discussed, in frank and impassioned terms, their responsibilities to children — and about the future." The result was that "71 heads of State and Government and 88 other senior delegates promised to protect children and to diminish their suffering" as well as to assist their "human potential." Ten years later, the Secretary General's report, looking back on that 1990 declaration, wrote, "world leaders promised something else of immense importance: that they would always put the best interests of children first..."¹⁰

The role of the religious community in mobilizing people to address this need was reiterated in a UN resolution: "Religious, spiritual, cultural and indigenous leaders, with their tremendous outreach, have a key role as front-line actors for children to help to translate the goals and targets of the present Plan of Action into priorities for their communities and to mobilize and inspire people to take action in favour of children."¹¹

MDG 4 is to reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

A follow-up UN document summarizes the consensus of the leaders:

In the dawn of the twenty-first century, the normative framework, the communications capacity, the technical know-how and the financial resources — even while poorly distributed — exist for the world to be able to act in concert on the understanding that children are central to humanity’s progress. It is no longer a question of what is possible but of what is given priority. Those who have the responsibility and resources to act may find more urgent issues for their attention — but there is no issue more important than the survival and full development of our children.¹²

Melinda Gates, of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has also urged increased and broader involvement in addressing global need. To that end, from a more personal perspective, she described some of the people she has met in her travels. Mothers invited her into their homes. Often, she found herself sitting on the floor, on one side of mat, while the mother she was visiting sat on the other.

In some countries I’ve visited, mothers don’t give their children names for weeks or even months because they don’t want to start caring about them. The chance that their children will die in those first weeks is just too high...

On my side of the mat, when my kids are sick, they get antibiotics. On the other side of the mat, when their children get sick, they may be receiving a death sentence.

Fortunately the story is starting to change...Efforts to treat and prevent the world’s most devastating diseases are improving the lives of millions of children.

To keep this momentum going, we must remember that these mothers love their children just as much as we love ours.¹³

“...when my kids are sick, they get antibiotics... when their children get sick, they may be receiving a death sentence.”

These quotes suggest that a consensus has developed around stopping preventable child deaths. Government leaders have acknowledged the role that religious groups can have in mobilizing a broad sector of the society to assist with this goal.

In defining triage categories for the church to address, there is sufficient Scripture to support a focus on helping, in Jesus’ name, to stop preventable child deaths as the top priority. These millions of preventable child deaths fit both the medical category of triage—intervention can prevent death—as well as the moral and spiritual focus of taking care of the weakest among us (e.g., Psalm 41:1, 72:13. 82:3. 4).

Again, this goal is an organizing focus. Having a goal of triage does not call for the elimination of other activities. What a declaration of triage categories does do is provide a way for the many church members not now involved to approach global need. Being able to understand the overall picture helps specific individual actions to make sense.

Is Triage for Global Word and Deed Need Necessary? The above paragraphs discuss the concept of triage, and suggest some categories the church may want to endorse. However, some in the church, both leaders and members, may not yet be convinced about the need for such a strategy. “The church is already doing so much,” members may say. Leaders will respond that their “plates are already full.” Why should the church in the U.S. feel any need to increase the intensity of its efforts to involve more church members in addressing global need?

It is here that the construct of the three verses is relevant. The offer of grace in response to faith in John 3:16 is the basis for the church’s existence.

The second verse provides the basis for determining whether the concept of triage is necessary for the church in the U.S. If there is sufficient evidence that church members are currently addressing global word and deed need at an adequate level, then it would be safe to say that a strategy such as triage is not necessary.

If, however, the examination of the evidence suggests that the church's response to these needs is only lukewarm, then the church needs to be prepared for the consequences. The choice before the church, in that case, is to change or be "spit out." If the church opts to change, the strategy of triage may be the most effective available to foster that revised action.

The next step, then, is to review the church in the U.S.'s present level of response to the global word and deed need, to determine if a change is in order.

An Examination of the Evidence

According to 1 John 3:16-17, the acceptance of the offer in John 3:16 should result in recognizable behaviors. The standard is that God, through Jesus Christ, actually laid down his life for each person. As a result, the believer is called to lay down life for those in need. The example of the expected behavior given in verse 17 is the application of material resources to the needs of others. In the present discussion, it is this standard that will be used to examine the evidence of whether church members in the U.S. display the behaviors associated with accepting the offer of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

There are different types of evidence that can be considered to evaluate the behavior of the church in the U.S., and whether that response qualifies for praise or consequences.

Giving patterns provide a numerical basis for evaluation.

The allocation of present word mission activity provides another.

The rate of progress in alleviating physical need, particularly in the area of preventing child deaths, provides a third.

A fourth source of evidence is the comments from informed leaders who are familiar with the church's activities.

Church Member Giving Patterns. Information in previous chapters of this volume have already presented data about church member giving patterns. This data can be reviewed as evidence about whether the church in the U.S. is hot, cold, or lukewarm toward helping others.

Giving to Benevolences. Chapters 1 through 5 establish that there is a decline in giving as a percent of income from the late 1960s. Further, the portion spent beyond the congregation through Benevolences, that is, spending on "others," including the category of "missions," has declined steadily. Meanwhile a larger portion of dollars donated to the congregation stays within the congregation to serve the needs of current members.

As explored in chapter 6, in 2006 there would have been \$170 billion more available through the church if church members had grown in their giving levels toward ten percent of income. This growth could have occurred as their incomes increased over the decades from 1968 through 2006. Estimates are that the resulting

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increase would be sufficient to impact major global word and deed needs faced by others. However, the percent given to Benevolences declined rather than increased.

In the composite denominations, as noted in chapter 1, if Benevolences giving as a percent of income had even stayed at the same level as it was in the late 1960s, in 2006 there would have been \$2.5 billion more than there actually was available for reaching out beyond the congregation to help others.

The overall level of giving to missions was about two cents of each dollar donated to the church from 2003 through 2006. That number compares to an average of eight cents spent on denominational overseas missions in the 1920s.

Church Giving to Global Need Compared to Immigrant Remittances. In chapter 6, an analysis of *The Index of Global Philanthropy 2008* presents more detailed discussion on that study's estimate of cash flow from the U.S. to other countries. One observation from this report, regarding church member giving focused on international outreach, is relevant to the current review.

The largest single source category of cash flow from the U.S. to other countries, larger than U.S. official development assistance or all of private philanthropy including giving by religious organizations, or larger even than private capital flows, was the \$71.5 billion remittances from immigrants in the U.S. to their home countries. This amount is eight times greater than the Hudson Institute figure for the amount shared through religious organizations based in the U.S.¹⁴ That was true even though the native-born church member population in the U.S., estimated at 155,670,239,¹⁵ was four times greater than the 37,547,789 people in the U.S. who were foreign-born.¹⁶ The amount sent internationally by foreign-born people in the U.S. was estimated at \$1,904 per person. If native-born church members had given at that level, it would have totaled \$288 billion more than was sent internationally through religious organizations in 2006.

Findings from Church Member Giving Patterns. These numbers indicate that the smaller group of foreign-born people residing in the U.S. sent significantly more dollars overseas than the amount invested in global ministries by the much larger number of native-born church members invest.

Current giving patterns suggest that present overall giving levels among church members in the U.S. are moderate at best. However, if word and deed need is adequately funded at these levels, then this evidence of moderate giving does not necessarily establish that these giving levels are a problem. Therefore, it would be wise to examine other available data about whether needs are being met.

Allocation of Word Mission Resources. Another category that can be examined in order to explore whether the church in the U.S. is responding to God's grace in a "hot" or "cold" or "lukewarm" fashion is the allocation of word mission activities.

Selected facts from an annual table by David Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*¹⁷ indicate the following:

- 95.6% of people have access to Scripture in 6,600 languages, leaving 286 million in 7,000 languages with no access at all.

If native-born church members had sent money overseas at same rate as that of foreign-born people living in the U.S., the additional giving would have totaled \$288 billion more in 2006.

- UBS [United Bible Societies] goals for Bibles distributed p.a. [per annum] are over 200% achieved in 106 countries, over 100% in 47 others, but under 100% in 86 others.
- 40% of the church's global foreign mission resources are being deployed to just 10 oversaturated countries with strong citizen-run home ministries.
- Christians spend more on the annual audits of their churches and agencies (\$970 million) than on all their workers in the non-Christian world.
- Out of 690 million Great Commission Christians, 70% have never been told about World A's 1.9 billion unevangelized individuals.
- 91% of all Christian outreach/evangelism does not target non-Christians but targets other Christians, many in wealthy World C countries and cities.

These facts seem to indicate that church leadership in the U.S. is not effectively directing its supporters toward an urgent focus on "reaching the unreached."

There are groups that call for such urgency. For example, building on the Student Volunteer Movement that sent 20,000 students into global missions from 1886-1940, the Student Volunteer Movement 2 is "an international network of students, leaders, churches and organizations serving a grassroots mission movement among today's emerging generation toward the fulfillment of the great commission in our lifetime."¹⁸ One category of special focus on their site is: "The Forgotten – SVM2 urgently increases awareness and solicits commitment for work among those who have been forgotten by the church, the unreached."¹⁹

Over 100 years after the 1910 Edinburgh conference, the task remains unfinished.

Three examples are presented below as to the degree of urgency with which other church leaders are pursuing efforts to reach the unreached.

Edinburgh II, 2010. A broad variety of groups are planning a major event in the year 2010. That year will mark the 100th anniversary of first World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910.²⁰ That original conference was seen as a significant event in the task of global evangelization:

The watchword, or motto, of Edinburgh I was "the evangelization of the world in this generation." The conference was supremely dedicated to what the Western missionary movement understood as the completion of the "unfinished task." It was believed that by proper strategic planning, coordination of goals, and mobilization of resources, the completion of the unfinished task of world evangelization could be accomplished within the lifetime of those present at the conference. In no sense was the goal of the conference to be understood as world conversion; the aim, rather, was to offer the saving Gospel to every living being on the face of the earth.²¹

One hundred years after that event, the task remains unfinished. Meanwhile, in that 100 years, communications and travel have improved, information databases have been enabled by computers and the Internet, and individual incomes have increased that could make accomplishing the task more feasible.

As noted in chapter 6, an estimate of the number of unreached people groups, the number of missionaries needed to engage them, and the cost per missionary allows a cost per people group figure to be calculated. That figure is \$30,832 per people group. "Evangelicals" are one group of self-professed Christians who have traditionally indicated a particular concern about the task of evangelism. There are

at least an estimated 79,800 “evangelical” households with incomes high enough that they could be approached to fund the cost of engaging at least one of those people groups at the estimated cost of \$30,832.

Yet, the planning energy for Edinburgh II is not the completion of the task in the immediate future. Completing the task could happen through locating less than 6,000 of the 79,800 possible households that would each be willing to fund one people group engagement. Were the energy that is being focused on conference plans to discuss the task, instead be focused on the immediate and urgent completion of the task, then the Edinburgh II event could be held as a celebration of the steps taken to complete the original vision of the gathering at Edinburgh I.

The Southern Baptist Convention and Unreached People Goal. The Southern Baptist Convention magazine, *SBC Life*, contained a full-page advertisement, declaring that 2,800 more missionaries are needed to “engage” all the unreached people groups.²² As demonstrated in chapter 6, at an estimated standard cost of \$65,000 per cross-cultural Western missionary, the total cost to field these missionaries would be \$182,000,000 a year.

A timeframe has apparently been discussed for this challenge. One former SBC International Missions Board [IMB] trustee reported that, “The stated goal of the IMB was to engage all unreached people groups of 100,000 and over by the end of 2005. That goal was extended to the end of 2008. In addition, the IMB has established a stated goal of engaging with the gospel all people groups of the world, regardless of size, by the end of 2010.”²³

There is apparently a supply of people willing to serve as missionaries to help reach this goal. According to Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, “We have so many people volunteering to be missionaries that we’re actually asking them to wait six months.”²⁴

There are two major sources in the SBC of funding for these potential missionaries. One is the percent of income to the Cooperative Program (unified budget) that is allocated to the SBC’s IMB. The other is the annual Lottie Moon Offering, taken at Christmas in Baptist churches across the nation.

The goal for the 2008 Lottie Moon Offering was not set to challenge Southern Baptists to increase the offering in order to raise the \$182,000,000 to fund the additional 2,800 missionaries needed to engage every unreached people group. Rather, the offering goal was increased by \$5 million from the 2007 amount, \$165,000,000, to \$170,000,000.²⁵

Had the Southern Baptist leadership calculated the cost of the additional 2,800 missionaries needed, and then challenged Southern Baptists to fund those positions, those church members would have been asked to contribute an additional \$11.16 per member to the Christmas offering in order to meet this urgent goal.

Unreached People in Asia. Gospel for Asia is one of the ministries that does not import Western cross-cultural missionaries. Rather, the focus is on training indigenous workers to serve within a country. The ministry needs not cross-cultural personnel but rather cross-cultural financial support. However, even though the ministry has been successful in planting churches and training workers among unreached people groups, a lack of finances continues to hamper the efforts. KP

To put the \$182 million needed to engage unreached people groups into perspective, the 2008 video game “Grand Theft Auto IV” pulled in about \$310 million on its first day of sales.

Yohannan, who is the director of the organization, was quoted in an article in which a reporter indicated that for Gospel for Asia a “lack of funding was a problem, despite it costing just \$30 a month to train a student: ‘Every year we are turning away students from our Bible school simply because we don’t have the resources to keep them in our center.’”²⁶

Findings Suggested by the Evidence regarding Word Need. Estimates of the cost to reach those who do not have access to the good news of Jesus Christ are available. People are willing to serve as missionaries. More than enough people with household incomes and shared values exist to help fund the outreach.

Yet the task is not done.

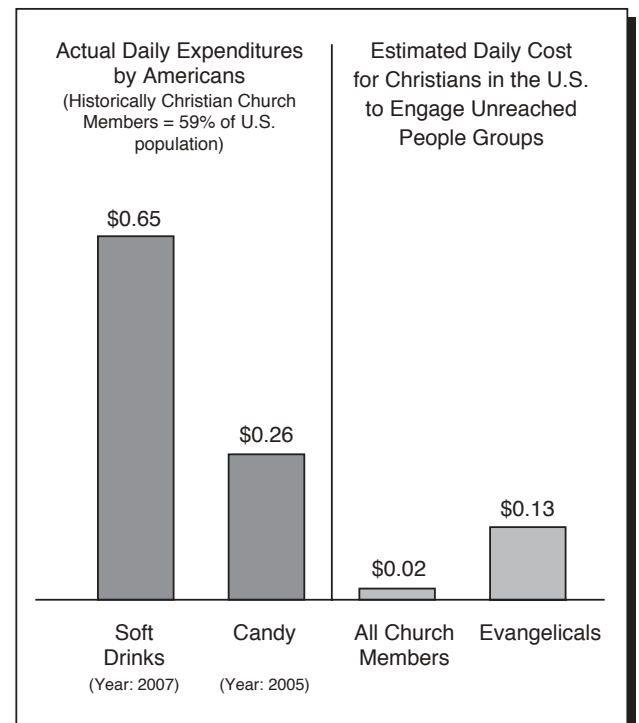
This in spite of the fact that the cost per member in the broad spectrum encompassed by the historically Christian church in the U.S. would be \$1 per year per member, to raise the estimated \$182,000,000 needed to engage the remaining unreached people groups.

To put that number into perspective, note that the 2008 video game “Grand Theft Auto IV” pulled in about \$310 million on its first day of sales.²⁷

As presented in Figure 21, another comparison is that between the estimated daily cost to engage unreached people groups, and American consumer patterns. In chapter 6 of this volume, a cost of \$1 billion was at the high end of the estimate to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the unreached people groups around the globe. That price tag translated to 2¢ a day for all historically Christian church members, or 13¢ a day for Evangelicals only.²⁸ Those daily costs can be contrasted with daily expenditures on two items by Americans. It may be noted that 59 percent of the U.S. population claims membership in a historically Christian church, with 80 percent claiming adherence to the Christian faith. In 2007, Americans spent 65¢ a day on soft drinks,²⁹ and in 2005, Americans spent 26¢ a day on candy (“including chocolate, non-chocolate, and gum”) to satisfy their collective sweet tooth.³⁰

The church in the U.S. is certainly not cold to the issue of evangelism; enough activity is occurring to prevent that conclusion. However, the numbers do not suggest that the church as a whole is hotly pursuing the goal. No doubt, there are heroic efforts on the part of many individuals and organizations to spread the Gospel in keeping with the Biblical mandate. However, given that the task has not been completed in the 100 years since the first Edinburgh conference, it is clear that present efforts are not sufficient. Only a mobilization of the entire body of Christ would be able to accomplish the goal. The evidence suggests

Figure 21: Comparison of Daily Cost to Engage Unreached Peoples with American Soft Drink and Candy Expenditures



Source: empty tomb analysis (chapter 6), *Soft Drink Digest*, EdgarOnline

empty tomb, inc., 2008

the church is more comfortable discussing the goal than accomplishing it.

Rate of Progress in Alleviating Physical Needs. Evidence regarding the level of the church's commitment to global deed witness is available in terms of the rate of progress in alleviating physical needs.

Unlike the task of evangelism, the church is not the only institution addressing the physical needs of people around the globe. Government agencies and secular institutions also are focused on these needs. The church has, however, been a major factor on the front lines of service in health clinics, schools, and other church-sponsored missions. For example, one estimate is that "between 30 percent and 70 percent of the health infrastructure in Africa was owned by faith-based organizations."³¹

Thus, the church, with its broad network and wide presence, can also be included in the evaluation of progress made in solving physical problems facing many around the globe. Has the church mobilized its members in a way that many of the problems are solved? Before that evaluation is done, however, it may be worthwhile to review briefly the basis for the expectation that deed witness on the part of the church is a legitimate component of a faith response to John 3:16.

Is Deed Witness a Legitimate Responsibility of the Church? The examination of the evidence about the church's commitment regarding the meeting of physical needs should not be sidetracked by the issue of whether the church should limit its witness to word only. Indeed, the very verses which suggest that faith will manifest evidence of its presence, 1 John 3:16 and 17, explicitly refer to the application of material resources to the needs of others.

Missiologist and founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission Dr. Ralph Winter spoke on this topic to the Korea World Mission Conference in the summer of 2008. "Dr. Winter told those gathered, 'Evangelism is the highest priority, but it becomes weak and lacks credibility if it does not generate committed believers who will tackle the world's problems...'" He went on to ask, "What is the use of evangelism if it produces Christians who don't act, who don't do, who don't follow God's will? All they do is sing in church..." He further stated, "The biblical record shows that Jesus accompanied his work with his deeds, works of mercy..."³²

The founder of Mercy Ships, Don Stephens, observed, "For the gospel in the 21st century, Muslims, Hindus, and animists—they must see the Good News as well as hear the Good News. The gospel has two hands—doing it as well as teaching it. I see this in the model of Jesus."³³

In a previous edition in *The State of Church Giving* series, a discussion of both Scriptural passages and the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin concluded that the main issue facing Christians, both individually and in their collective reality of the church, is a question of "faith or no faith."³⁴ The concept of *sola fide*, or by faith alone, is clearly supported by Scripture. As noted in 1 John 3:16-17, as well as other passages (e.g., Matt. 25:31-26; Luke 4:14-21; Luke 10:25-37), it is also to be expected that faith will be made visible through behavior. Thus, in the present discussion, it will be assumed that there is every expectation that faith will result in acts of mercy. The purpose of exploring the evidence, then, is to determine whether the church is manifesting its deed witness in a halfhearted manner, or in a committed fashion.

In the present discussion, it will be assumed that there is every expectation that faith will result in acts of mercy.

Four areas will be considered.

To examine whether the church is “hot” or “cold” or “lukewarm” in efforts to declare Jesus’ love through deed witness, one factor considered is whether the church can realistically have a major impact on global deed need.

A second source of evidence is whether available solutions are being applied in a reasonable way.

A third source of evidence is how urgently church leaders are seeking to mobilize members in their presentation of solutions for global needs.

A fourth source of evidence is the amount of progress being made toward MDG4, “Reduce child mortality.”

The Ability to Impact Need. “For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12, NRSV). In this verse, the apostle Paul was presenting the Corinthian church with an overview of responsibility in giving. Chapters 8 and 9 in the second letter to the Corinthians provide a basis for the concept of stewardship in the church. This particular verse made it clear to the Corinthians that they were not responsible in an abstract way, but rather they were to be responsible for those resources that were in their control.

Similarly, on a physical level, the church in the U.S. cannot be held responsible for solving global problems that are beyond the scope of human ability to solve. The church of course can pray for divine intervention in any situation and should not rule out miracles. But the church cannot be held accountable for whether a miracle occurs. It is only in the realm of current physical reality that the church can reasonably be held to standards of accountability. If the challenge, for example, of preventing child deaths is, in fact, so outsized as to be impossible for any human community, the church cannot be singled out as having failed to solve the problem. If that were the case, then a limited effort to handle specific conditions with no expectation for a major impact would be reasonable. However, if the evidence points to solutions that could solve, rather than only cope with, problems that are currently killing millions of children, then the church’s responsibility changes in character.

In fact, a growing consensus exists that many problems that have plagued so many people around the globe are not inevitable. Bill Gates, of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in an opinion piece in *Newsweek*, wrote, “The evidence is in: we can stop diseases like malaria and TB from killing millions of people each year.” Further, he stated, “Today governments, aid groups and communities are simply refusing to accept the notion that diseases like malaria and tuberculosis will haunt us forever. The evidence is in: these problems can be solved.”³⁵

A World Bank report stated, “An estimated 63 percent of child deaths could be averted with oral rehydration therapy to combat diarrhea, insecticide-treated bednets to prevent malaria, breastfeeding to improve nutritional status, and antibiotics to treat acute respiratory infections, if these were implemented universally...”³⁶

Paul Collier, the author of *The Bottom Billion*, believes that specific actions can be taken to assist even the poorest countries to improve their circumstances. In looking at one problem, he wrote, “Because Africa is the epicenter of low income

A growing consensus exists that many problems that have plagued so many people around the globe are not inevitable.

and slow growth, it has become the epicenter of coups. But, controlling for these risk factors, there is no ‘Africa effect.’ Africa does not have more coups because it is Africa; it has more coups because it is poor. That’s also true of civil war; Africa became increasingly prone to civil war as its economic performance deteriorated, not because it was Africa.”³⁷

Progress seen in one African country in regard to one child killer supports Paul Collier’s observation. A report on conditions in Zanzibar, off the coast of Tanzania, found a drop from 20 percent of children being malaria-positive in 2005 to a rate so low in 2008 that it could not be measured.³⁸

Actions of various church groups have no doubt contributed to this and other progress in various locales. Participation both with staffing and financial contributions has resulted in positive gains.

Yet, the growing body of evidence suggests that too many children are being killed by preventable conditions. The implication, for the present discussion, is that the existence of possible solutions creates a responsibility for the church to insure that its actions are at a level significant enough to help implement these solutions. If the church is not making these solutions a priority, then the church is not being faithful. As James 4:17 asserts, “Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin” (NRSV).

The Application of Available Solutions. The evidence indicates that progress can be made in addressing conditions that are killing children around the globe. However, there is also evidence that the implementation of these solutions is not commanding the attention it deserves. A progress report on efforts to reduce the number of child deaths concluded that goals had not been met, “not because they were too ambitious or were technically beyond reach. It has fallen short largely because of insufficient investment.”³⁹

For example, the Hudson Institute’s *The Index of Global Philanthropy* suggested a total figure of \$192.1 billion flowing out of the United States to other countries in 2006. This category includes U.S. official development assistance, U.S. private philanthropy, U.S. remittances from immigrants living in the U.S. to their home countries, and U.S. private capital flows.⁴⁰ With all this money flowing from the U.S.’s \$14 trillion economy, there has been no moral leadership to insure that the estimated amount of \$5 billion needed to stop two-thirds of the under-5 child deaths, or 2.6 percent of the total amount leaving the U.S., was directed to that purpose.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) began its 2008 report with the question, “What is a life worth? Most of us would sacrifice a great deal to save a single child. Yet somehow on a global scale, our priorities have become blurred. Every day, on average more than 26,000 children under the age of five die around the world, mostly from preventable causes. Nearly all of them live in the developing world or, more precisely, in 60 developing countries. More than one third of these children die during the first month of life, usually at home and without access to essential health services and basic commodities that might save their lives.”⁴¹

Part of the failure to apply available solutions to the pressing needs may have to do with agendas interfering with priority action. Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion*, has approached the issues facing Africa from an academic rather than an aid agency point of view. He is a Professor of Economics and Director of the Center for

The evidence indicates that progress can be made in addressing conditions that are killing children around the globe.

the Study of African Economics at Oxford University, and former director of development research at the World Bank. His experience with aid organizations led him to conclude:

Every aid agency is divided into fiefdoms—rural development, education, health, and so forth. Trying to get an aid agency to focus its resources on an export growth strategy runs afoul of all these interests, for if there is more money to be spent on the country, you can be absolutely sure that the rural development group will lobby for its share of the spending, whether that is important for export growth or not, and the same is true of the education group, the health group, and all the others. In bureaucracies, spending means more jobs, promotions, success; it is how, in practice, staff measure themselves. So the present aid system is designed for incrementalism—a bit more budget here, a bit more budget there—and not for structural change. Yet we know that incrementalism is doomed because of diminishing returns to aid. Just doing more of the same is likely to yield a pretty modest payoff. For aid to promote structural change in countries requires structural change in aid agencies.⁴²

One would hope that the description of such a worldly problem, specifically competition between departments, would not apply to the church. As part of the “new creation” that comes with accepting the offer in John 3:16, the church can and should be demonstrating an alternative to behaviors described by Collier. It was the church’s Founder who said, “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24, New American Bible). The apostle Paul advised the church in Rome,

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime... not in dissension and jealousy. (Romans 13:11b-13, NIV).

Yet, observations suggest that church institutions may also exhibit counterproductive behaviors. For example, in a 2008 U.S. White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives conference held in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, the president of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, noted in his address that there is a “vice” in faith-based organizations, specifically the “inconsistencies mainly based on the partisan sentiment that compromise the ability to serve broader public interests.” An article on the president’s address quoted him as saying, “ ‘This sentiment was aptly captured by the then President of the World Bank, Mr. James Wolfensohn, when he stated in 2002 that “half the work in education and health in Sub-Saharan Africa is done by the Church, but they don’t talk to each other and they don’t talk to us”,’ said the President.”⁴³

The World Health Organization published a report on the role of both public health and faith-based initiatives in Africa. “The report estimated that between 30 percent and 70 percent of the health infrastructure in Africa was owned by faith-based organizations. It added, however, that there is often little cooperation between these groups and public health programs.”⁴⁴

If cooperation between faith-based organizations and secular programs in any way hinders the ability of the faith-based organizations to express love for those served in Jesus’ name, then the lack of cooperation is understandable. Yet, one might wonder what dynamics prevent churches from cooperating with other church

“...put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime... not in dissension and jealousy.”
Romans 13:11b-13, NIV.

groups in pursuit of the common goal of solving problems that are killing children. Could the lack of cooperation among various church groups trying to minister to the same problem have to do with a concern about territoriality? And what of departments within the same denomination? Is there competition for budget dollars? If so, the church's approach may fall within the category of what Paul Collier has labeled "fiefdoms." If denominations and church organizations are competing with each other, and if denominational departments are competing for budget dollars, to the degree that possible solutions to global problems are being hampered in their implementation, then children are dying because the church is not faithfully displaying God's new order for loving a hurting world in Jesus' name.

The Degree of Urgency in Church Leadership Regarding Global Need Solutions. The literature on the topic of global need more and more is voicing the opinion that the task is doable.

For example, a 2005 report from a study group of experts was titled, "How Many Child Deaths Can We Prevent This Year?" The conclusion was that about two-thirds of the deaths could be prevented through low-cost interventions that could be distributed even in low-income countries.⁴⁵ The title of the study is of particular interest in the present discussion. The specialists did not refer to solutions for the next decade or the next century. Rather, the report was focused on how many children—how many of those "ones" that Augustine said God loves as if there were only that "one"—could be saved from death in the current year.

The world's leaders have committed to pursuing the MDGs, intended to reduce global poverty, including the number of children dying. In an attempt to hold themselves accountable, the United Nations and international agencies have announced a deadline of 2015, with regular evaluations. Comprehensive reviews were scheduled for 2005 and 2010.⁴⁶

Children's lives could be saved but are not. At least one MDG evaluation report cited the lack of leadership as a contributing factor to missed targets. A progress report from the United Nations General Assembly, at the 2005 marker, about the missed interim goals in preventing child deaths, concluded, "Yet the missing ingredient is often not so much resources as an absence of vision, misplaced priorities and insufficiently committed leaders."⁴⁷

Vision is, or should be, a hallmark of church efforts. Commanded to hope, and having a basis for that hope, church leaders should be rallying their members to raise their sights toward increased service, with an overflow effect on the world. As Jesus told the disciples, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, NRSV). New life leads to new actions.

At a time when the world is declaring its need for visionary leadership, there is evidence that even the boldest church leaders are tempering their visions.

The Pace of the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. For example, Saddleback pastor Rick Warren is using the celebrity and visibility he gained through his phenomenally popular *The Purpose Driven Life* to focus churches on the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. The acronym is currently defined as: Promote Reconciliation; Equip Servant Leaders; Assist the Poor; Care for the Sick; Educate the Next Generation.⁴⁸ In a video titled "It Is Time" on the P.E.A.C.E. Plan Web site, Rick Warren says it is time to change "an

Children's lives
could be saved
but are not.

audience into an army” and “consumers into contributors” as well as “spectators into participants” that “will change the world.”⁴⁹

However, TIME magazine’s David Van Biema, covering a P.E.A.C.E. Plan conference, observed, “Warren seems intent on tamping down expectations of speedy results from his ambitious project — a desire that runs somewhat counter to his inborn salesman’s instinct. ‘This plan could take 50 years, so it might not be completed in my lifetime,’ he said at one point. ‘That’s why I call the next generation the reformation generation.’”⁵⁰

Similarly, Warren told ABC News that it is not a five-year or 20-year plan. “It’s a 50-year plan. Reformations take 50 years. It does not happen overnight. The problem with most of our planning is that we set our goals too low and we try to accomplish them too quickly. Instead, we need to have bigger vision and bigger goals and devote the rest of our lives to it. I’ve got maybe 20 years to give to the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. It will not be accomplished in my lifetime. It won’t, unless there’s an absolute miracle.”⁵¹

The Pace of the Malaria Partnership. Two church groups have taken on an ambitious goal of raising \$200 million to combat malaria in Africa. With the UN Foundation, founded by CNN-founder Ted Turner, serving as a facilitator, The United Methodist Church, and Lutheran World Relief, in conjunction with LWR’s constituent bodies, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, announced plans to raise the \$200 million to focus on ending malaria.

The United Methodist Church and Lutheran World Relief were the two groups willing to step out and take action on the proposed UN Foundation project.

According to a press report, “The United Methodist Church has entered into a partnership with the U.N. Foundation and Lutheran World Relief called the United Nations Foundation Malaria Partnership. It includes efforts to strengthen health systems, build grassroots constituencies through Nothing But Nets and work with Roll Back Malaria on global advocacy efforts.” A \$5 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is designed to help in planning the campaign.⁵²

The United Methodist Church received an initial grant from the Gates Foundation to explore the feasibility of the church raising the \$100 million from its membership.⁵³ The church plans to raise the money over several years, according to the president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops.⁵⁴ The goal was accepted at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.

The ELCA News Service issued a release on April 18, 2008, indicating that the proposal was affirmed by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. According to the release, Lutheran World Relief approached both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with a proposal to raise the funds over a five-year period.⁵⁵

Evaluating the Pace. Both the P.E.A.C.E. Plan and the Malaria Partnership are unique initiatives to challenge the church in the U.S. to act on global need. Rick Warren, The United Methodist Church, and Lutheran World Relief, in conjunction with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, are to be commended for exhibiting leadership in the area of at-scale efforts to encourage increased missional outreach by Christians in the U.S.

These projects are pacesetters for the entire body of Christ in the U.S.

Two church groups have taken on an ambitious goal of raising \$200 million to combat malaria in Africa.

However, in the present discussion, it is also important to evaluate the pace they are setting.

The fact that the projects are so exceptional is important for what it says about the general commitment level of the church in the U.S., in regard to global need. The fact that these projects stand out so boldly indicates that there are few similar efforts at mass mobilization of the church, pointing to a lack of broad and bold initiative on the part of most church leadership in general.

Because the P.E.A.C.E. Plan and the Malaria Partnership are presenting new models of action, it is tempting to withhold any further evaluation. Yet, in a consideration of whether the church is “hot” or “cold” or “lukewarm,” the pace of these efforts needs to be considered, since the projects will likely be influencing other efforts that follow.

Both the P.E.A.C.E. Plan and the Malaria Partnership are important because they are promoting large-scale responses that are merited by the problems addressed. However, in both cases, a sense of urgency is lacking in the goals set. The timetables seem defined more in terms of marketing the plan in a way meant not to ruffle potential funders, rather than in light of the needs faced by those who will be helped.

Setting goals with and without benchmarks. The purpose of the 50-year goal on the part of Rick Warren may be to encourage a long-term commitment on the part of churches that participate in the P.E.A.C.E. Plan. The five-decade approach may be a counterpoint to the typical response of crisis fundraising that the church appears to be trained to follow. However, the goal may also weaken the vision, giving church people a sense of permission to undertake the project in a manner that values their personal convenience above the lives of those who will die in the intervening years. Rick Warren leaves room for a miracle to reduce the announced multi-decade timeframe. Another effect of the 50-year goal is to eliminate a level of accountability that would come with shorter-term benchmarks toward that goal.

Let it be acknowledged that the task of encouraging broad movement on the part of those in the hundreds of denominations and tens of thousands of congregations in the U.S. is no easy task. “Herding cats” is an apt metaphor. All the more, the leaders trying to help the church break out of the contentment and self-satisfaction of current church efforts may need to leave the path of convenience. Apparently the first followers of Jesus had similar difficulties. One can hear the discomfort of the disciples who came to Jesus: “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?” (Matt. 15:12, NRSV). The woes, the talk of death, the losing of life were interfering with the growth of the movement—just when things were starting to build nicely! But Jesus was not interested in coddling his hearers. He was interested in obedience: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots” (Matt. 15:13, NRSV).

Efforts in the area of meeting global need have not been held to the same standards that for-profit industries apply. In a self-critical comment, a UN report stated, “It is often said that in many United Nations conferences, goals are ever set but never met, and that commitments on paper are rarely translated into action on the ground.”⁵⁶

Efforts in the area of meeting global need have not been held to the same standards that for-profit industries apply.

Global leaders are concluding that these aid efforts should no longer receive a “bye” in the first round of accountability. The term “benchmark” was prominent at the World Economic Forum in early 2008. The BBC’s report of the event stated that “One of the drivers of the initiative, outgoing Microsoft boss Bill Gates, said it was important to get business on board, because companies knew about benchmarks and how to deliver them.”⁵⁷

There has been a long history of noble sounding, well-intentioned efforts, many with church leadership. With the unrealized potential of the church at a low estimate of \$170 billion additional dollars if giving had approached the tithe in 2006, the church as a whole has not identified an agenda that will mobilize members to act on that potential, and will need to change its traditional approach if it is to do so.

Setting benchmarks in the context of the big picture. The Malaria Partnership aims to raise \$200 million through The United Methodist Church and Lutheran World Relief, in conjunction with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. If this effort serves as a prototype for future action by other denominations, it will prove to be more than a noble enthusiasm.

Hundreds of thousands of people are infected by a disease that was eradicated from the United States in a two-year campaign, from 1947-1949.⁵⁸ People burying their children today may well wonder how quickly church leaders will move to provide the same relief and protection that has been available in the U.S. for many decades.

Church members may also wonder about the bigger picture when they hear of a proposal like the Malaria Partnership. A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Council that approved that denomination’s participation in the project was quoted as observing, “My perception in this whole process has been that we’ve driven it with the amount of money available rather than looking at the other end. What’s the need?”⁵⁹

One can only conjecture as to whether this churchman would be more or less interested in the project if he found out that Ted Turner, founder of the United Nations Foundation, has voiced a goal of no less than “to stamp out malaria.” In a press release regarding the Malaria Partnership, Turner was quoted as saying,

Some say that envisioning a world without poverty is naïve. I say that accepting a world of rampant poverty is cowardly. Some say that poverty alleviation hasn’t produced enough results. I say that we just haven’t tried hard enough... Stopping malaria will go a long way toward giving people in poor and rich countries alike new hope and confidence that we can succeed in the fight against poverty and realize the MDGs.⁶⁰

As a businessman, Turner may be more used to setting goals with the intention of accomplishing them than are those in the nonprofit sector. Church leaders, both in The United Methodist Church and Lutheran World Relief, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as well as uninvolved denominations, need to ask some searching questions about the proposed project to insure that it avoids the tradition of noble but unrealized intentions.

For example, is the focus in the project on worthy action for its own sake, or is ending malaria the accepted objective?

“Some say that envisioning a world without poverty is naïve. I say that accepting a world of rampant poverty is cowardly.”

If so, one key step in solving a problem is having a cost estimate. A figure of \$2.5 billion a year has been cited to both treat and prevent malaria in all age groups.⁶¹

Given that figure, will the Malaria Partnership's goal of raising \$200 million be set in this larger context of eliminating malaria? Will the efforts of The United Methodist Church and Lutheran World Relief be presented, designed, and pursued as an intentional prototype that sets the stage for other denominations to build on and implement with their own constituencies? Who will provide the visionary leadership that leads to other communions signing up for a part of the total price tag? Will the \$5 million planning grant activity include the development of strategies to engage wealthy church members of the involved communions to match the donations of other members in the denominations? Will applications of the funds be clearly outlined both to gauge progress toward the goal and also to help church members who contribute know how their participation is making a difference?

The Malaria Partnership may take the traditional tack of a current noble focus that will be replaced in a few months or years by the next emphasis, such as The United Methodist Council of Bishops Children and Poverty Initiative of 1997-2004.⁶² If instead the Malaria Partnership places this initial effort in the larger context of the entire task to be accomplished, then the project can make a valuable contribution to increasing the temperature of the church in the U.S.'s commitment to obeying Jesus Christ's directive to love God and neighbor.

The Malaria Partnership cost per member. In considering whether the pace of the Malaria Partnership goal is setting a new tone for meeting global needs, numbers once again provide helpful information. The United Methodist Church has referred to the timeframe for raising \$100 million as "several years." The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America press release referred to raising the money over five years. What are the expectations conveyed by those plans?

The United Methodist Church had 7,976,985 members in 2006. If the church were to declare that the goal is to raise the extra \$100 million in one year, that goal would translate to an extra contribution of \$12.54 per member in that year, or \$0.03 a day.

The cost per Lutheran would be greater. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America had 3,580,402 members in 2006, while the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod had 1,856,783. The cost per Lutheran calculates to be \$18.39 for one year, or \$0.05 a day.

However, in each case, the initial goal is not a one-year timeframe. Whether the goal is spread over "several years" or over five years, the cost per member decreases proportionately.

Communication happens on many levels. The scope of the project communicates the structure of the vision. The timeframe communicates the urgency and seriousness with which the vision is undertaken. Diluting the goal over "several years" or "five years" does not convey the sense of urgency that the facts seem to merit, specifically the estimated 800,000 children under five who will die from malaria each year the project is delayed.⁶³

The scope of the project communicates the structure of the vision.

The Consequences of the Current Rate of Progress toward the Millennium Development Goals. The 2000 and 2005 evaluations of the progress toward meeting the MDGs found many of the interim targets had not been met. For example, consider MDG 4—“Reduce by two thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.” In 2006, an estimated 9,733,000 children under the age of five died. Of this total, 99 percent occurred in what is termed the Developing World. MDG 4 seeks to reduce the rate at which these children die. The “under-five mortality rate” is the “Probability of dying between birth and exactly five years of age, expressed per 1,000 live births.”⁶⁴

One statistical review of the progress toward this goal read, “The benefits of reaching MDG 4 are enormous. If the goal is achieved, the deaths of 5.4 million children under five will be averted in the year 2015 alone (as compared to the situation in 2006). But if current trends continue and the goal is not achieved, an additional 4.3 million child deaths could occur in 2015 alone.”⁶⁵

Considering what will happen in 2015 sets a marker by which to judge the completion of the goals.

However, focusing on the impact in 2015 maintains an academic distance from the problem. The words “if” and “will be averted” and “if current trends continue” place a comfortable distance between goals and the effects of their implementation—or the failure to implement them.

Another approach is to consider what were the actual consequences because the goals did not meet the benchmarks for, say, 2006.

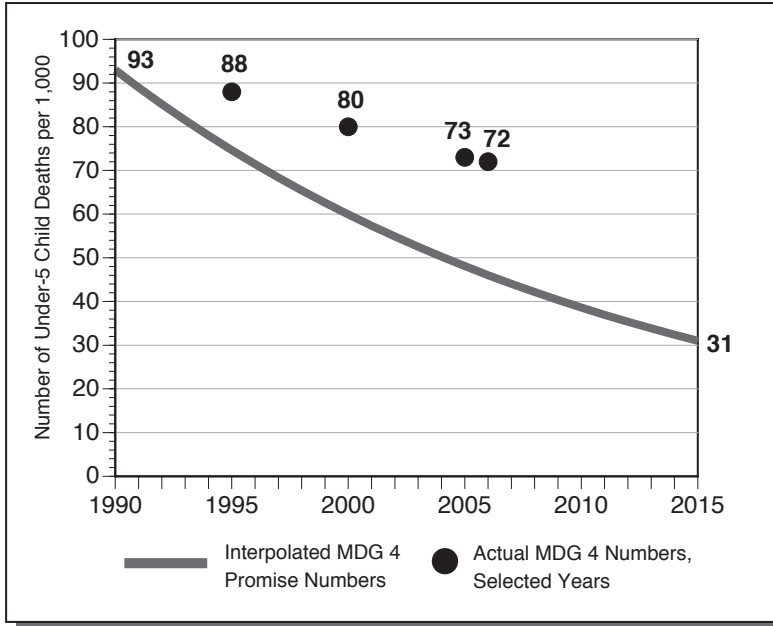
Table 39 presents an exponential interpolation for the starting rate of 93 under-five child deaths in 1990 and the MDG 4 goal of 31 in 2015. As shown in the table, the numbers for 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2006 indicate that the target numbers have not been met.

Table 39: Interpolated Exponential Curve of MDG 4 Under-5 Child Deaths Per 1,000 Live Births, Based on Actual 1990 and Goal 2015 Data, with Actual Data, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2006

Year	Under-5 Child Deaths Per 1,000 Live Births	
	Actual	Goal
1990	93	
1991		89
1992		85
1993		82
1994		78
1995	88	75
1996		71
1997		68
1998		65
1999		63
2000	80	60
2001		57
2002		55
2003		53
2004		50
2005	73	48
2006	72	46
2007		44
2008		42
2009		40
2010		39
2011		37
2012		35
2013		34
2014		32
2015		31

Source: empty tomb, inc. analysis, UNICEF data

Figure 22: Exponential Interpolation of MDG 4 Under-5 Child Deaths Per 1,000 Live Births, Based on Actual 1990 and Goal 2015 Data, with Actual Data, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2006



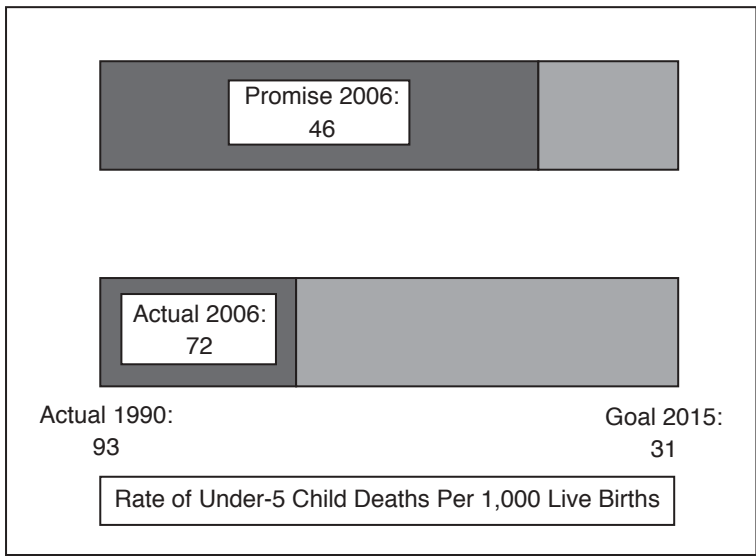
Source: empty tomb, inc. analysis, UNICEF data

empty tomb, inc., 2008

Figure 22 illustrates the comparison between the exponential interpolation of the goal numbers and the actual rates in selected years.

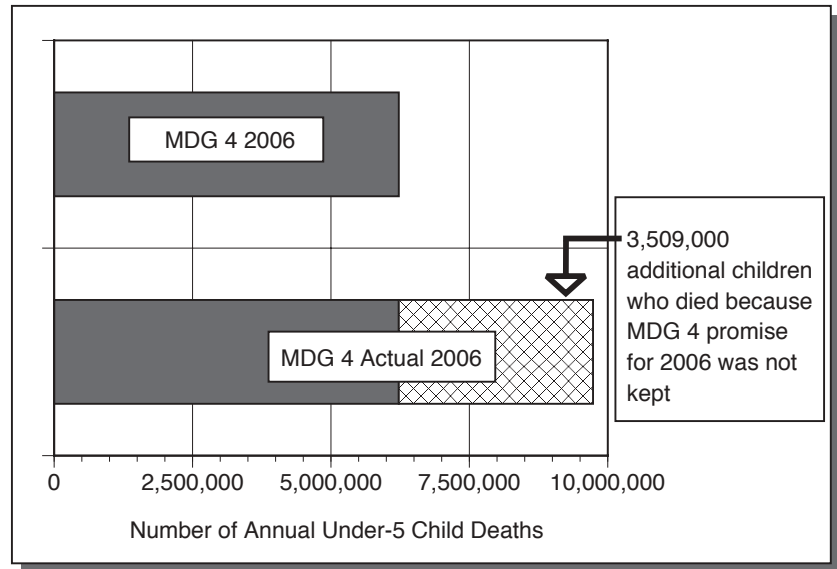
As of 2006, the world should have been three-quarters toward the goal with only a quarter of the way to go, in order to be on target. The goal is to reduce under-5 child deaths from 93 per thousand in 1990 to 31 per thousand in 2015. To achieve that reduction, an even rate of decline would have meant that child deaths had been reduced to 46 per thousand in 2006. See Figure 23.

Figure 23: World Progress Toward MDG 4 as of 2006



Source: empty tomb, inc. analysis, UNICEF data

empty tomb, inc., 2008

Figure 24: MDG 4 Projected Number of Under-5 Child Deaths and Actual Number of Under-5 Child Deaths, 2006

Source: empty tomb analysis, UNICEF data

empty tomb, inc., 2008

Instead, as of 2006, the world was only about a third of the way toward the goal, with two-thirds of the way still to go. Under-5 child deaths declined from 93 per thousand to 72 per thousand in 2006. The difference between the hoped for decline in MDG 4 mortality rate in 2006 to 46, and the actual mortality rate of 72, means that 3,509,000 children under the age of five died that year because the benchmark was not met as shown in Figure 24.

On a practical level, these children, their parents, and their communities ran out of time to continue the current academic discussion about the rate of progress in achieving MDG 4.

It may be further noted, that unless emergency action is taken, 3,822,089 babies and children will die next year in 2009, before their fifth birthday, from child killers that can be easily stopped for less than a dime a day from church members in the U.S.

Conclusions about the Pace. In this discussion of evidence about whether the church has accepted the offer of John 3:16, as defined by 1 John 3:16-17, what conclusions can be drawn? From whose viewpoint should we evaluate the rate of progress in alleviating global physical needs. Shall the pace be compared to the decline in the child death rate in past decades? Shall denominational officials who are aware of the various interest groups to be balanced have the primary input? Shall it be the church members who are, as described by Henri Nouwen, feeling powerless and distracted and preoccupied with their immediate friends and family? Or should the parents watching their children be killed by diarrhea, malaria, measles, and hunger, have a vote on how urgent the pace should be? It can only be a matter of conjecture, but whose vote might God weigh most heavily? If those parents of the dying babies had a vote, how might they rate the timetables described above: “hot” or “cold” or “lukewarm”?

Selected Comments from Church Leaders. A fourth body of evidence that can be considered about whether the church is “hot” or “cold” or “lukewarm” is presented in Table 40. This table presents an overview of observations from various leaders reflecting on the status of the church in the U.S.

What the Evidence Suggests. The verses 1 John 3:16 and 17 indicated that there will be evidence if the offer in John 3:16 is accepted. The evidence will be manifested in the use of worldly goods on behalf of others’ need. Further, the Revelation to John 3:16 indicates that a lukewarm response is not adequate to avoid consequences.

Based on the above review, the following may be observed.

Giving trends in the U.S. have been declining among church members as a portion of income.

The support for word missions is not adequate, based on the available solutions for the need.

The rate of progress in alleviating global need is not adequate, based on the available solutions for the need.

Various church leaders express concern about the conduct of church members in the U.S.

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that the church in the U.S. exhibits much of the same behavior that is criticized by Jesus in the address to the church in Laodicea. Rich, self-centered, and lukewarm in obedience, both church members and church leaders may want to consider whether the church is facing a choice, as consequences may be on the horizon.

Choice and Consequence

The consequence in Revelation 3:16 is that the church in Laodicea will be “spit out” of Jesus’ mouth if the church does not change behavior. The image evokes separation and marginalization. Jesus previously talked to the disciples about salt that has lost its saltiness being thrown out as worthless (see Matt. 5:13, Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34).

Indeed, there are signs that the church in the U.S. may already be experiencing consequences as a result of its current tepid behavior. For example, LifeWay Research found that 72 percent of the unchurched people surveyed thought the church is “full of hypocrites.” An article reporting on the study noted, “These outsiders are making a clear comment that churches are not getting through on the two greatest commandments’ to love God and love your neighbor, said [LifeWay Research Associate Director Scott] McConnell.”⁷⁴

Perhaps the church is perceived as teetering on the brink of irrelevancy because it is preoccupied with internal matters. Giving data in chapter 1 showed that giving as a portion of income to Congregational Finances began to increase in 1993, even while giving to Benevolences continued to decline. This internal preoccupation extends to denominational activity. For example, one nationally syndicated report on The United Methodist Church General Conference, perhaps reflecting the actual emphasis at the meetings, omitted any mention of the proposed malaria project or

Table 40: Church Leaders Comment on the Lukewarm Church in the U.S.

<p>“Christians today are just like the culture. We need to be transformed and then turn around and transform the world around us.” Chuck Colson, columnist and founding president of Prison Fellowship⁶⁶</p>
<p>“This generation sees what many are only recently coming to realize; the Church is in a pathetic state of decadence and decay. It is, to a large degree, fragmented, watered-down, and retreating from cultural relevancy. Biblical and theological ignorance, cultural apathy, and social indifference are a plague upon the American Church and what passes for Christianity in many circles is often a mere shadow of historical orthodox Christianity or worse something altogether different.” S. Michael Craven, president, Center for Christ & Culture⁶⁷</p>
<p>“But the ‘inch deep’ metaphor can also be applied to North America, where anti-Christian impulses surround and even permeate complacent churches. We find ourselves sadly yet inextricably complicit in our nation’s celebration of greed, habitual recourse to violence, and relaxation of sexual standards.” Jonathan Bonk, editor, <i>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>⁶⁸</p>
<p>“Rather than seek the God who spoke from the burning bush, we have decided the real drama is found in debating whether to podcast our services. Rather than encounter the God who sees idolatry as a pervasive, life-threatening temptation, we decorate our Pottery Barn lives with our tasteful collections of favored godlings. Rather than follow the God who burns for justice for the needy, we are more likely to ask the Lord to give us our own fair share. A bland God for a bland church, with a mission that is at best innocuous and quaint—in a tumultuous world.” Mark Labberton, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, California, and author of <i>The Dangerous Act of Worship</i>⁶⁹</p>
<p>On the decline in the church in the U.S.: “My primary assessment would be because American Christians tend to be incredibly self-indulgent so they see the church as a place there for them to meet their needs and to express faith in a way that is meaningful for them...There is almost no genuine compassion or urgency about serving and reaching people who don’t know Christ.” Erwin McManus, lead pastor of Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, a church that has grown from 300 to 3,000 in the past decade.⁷⁰</p>
<p>“I think if Jesus were here, he would say, ‘Some of you have been hanging around because of what I can do for you.’ ... The ugly truth is you love yourselves more than you love anyone else, and that gets in the way of being a disciple.” Kay Warren, author, global needs activist, and wife of Rick Warren, author of <i>The Purpose-Driven Life</i>⁷¹</p>
<p>“The way things are now in America, the way we do church, is kind of like a program... We are doing church as a club. We’re trying to make people feel good, to entertain them. So because of that concern — we don’t want them to go or to lose them — we kind of try to suit them... We are pleasing men instead of please God.” Sunday Adelaja, pastor of the 30,000 member God’s Embassy Church in Kiev, Ukraine, in a video interview with pastors in the U.S.⁷²</p>
<p>“We’re getting fancier and fancier at church worship. We know how to do church, [but] we don’t know how to be the church.” Dr. Ralph D. Winter, founder of the U.S. Center for World Mission⁷³</p>

the possibilities it represented. Instead, it focused on the protracted debate on policies regarding homosexuality.⁷⁵

The internal focus of the church in the U.S. can have practical consequences for Christians in other countries. Apart from the lack of financial support that results in under-funding for efforts to reach unreached people groups and programs to address poverty, there are also other repercussions. For example, the Anglican Archbishop of Sudan attended the July 2008 Lambeth Conference, unlike about one-quarter of the Anglican bishops, including many from the Global South who boycotted the meeting.⁷⁶ While at the Conference, the Most Rev. Dr. Daniel Deng Bul reaffirmed a statement by the Episcopal Church of Sudan stating that church leaders who did not practice biblical teaching on sexuality could not be accepted. In addition to the biblical basis, the archbishop described a practical consequence resulting from Western churches' rejection of traditional morality. "He also warned that the ordination of homosexual clergy and blessing of same-sex couples in the U.S. Episcopal Church had damaged the standing of the Bible and Christians in majority-Muslim countries. 'We are called infidels by the Islamic world ... It will give them an upper hand even to kill our people,' he said."⁷⁷

In another context, in an interview with *Newsweek* magazine, N.T. Wright, Anglican bishop of Durham, England, observed, "At the same time, I wish we could prioritize so that we were actually talking about issues of global justice and debt remission and global warming and so on. I mean, there's something very bizarre about the rich arguing about sex while the poor are clamoring for justice."⁷⁸

Americans in general are concerned about the general direction of the culture. A New York Times/CBS poll found that "81 percent of respondents said they believed 'things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track,' up from 69 percent a year ago and 35 percent in early 2002."⁷⁹

Yet, the church may not be seen as providing a viable answer to this concern. For example, "intimacy kits" are replacing Bibles in some hotel rooms.⁸⁰ A recent Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey released in 2008 provided some details about the declining church membership trends previously noted in chapter 5. "The survey finds that the number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16.1%) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with any particular religion as children. Among Americans ages 18-29, one-in-four say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion."⁸¹

One telling comment provided insight into the changing attitude in American culture toward the church. A quote and attribution cited in *Newsweek* read: " 'That church is no different than any other business he might have opened.' Robert Pollack, lawyer for Cynthia Howell, who wants her husband's church, Grace Christian Church of Brooklyn, considered a marital asset in their divorce."⁸²

Government But Not Also Member Mobilization. Many church leaders opt to focus on holding governments more accountable than their own members. With declining giving and membership numbers to report, great energy is focused instead on seats of secular power. This in spite of the fact that the culture is expressing increasing commitment to diversity independent of religious beliefs. For example, in Massachusetts, a traditional religious exemption was revoked: "Last March, Catholic Charities in Boston stopped providing adoption services after it failed to

The internal focus of the church in the U.S. can have practical consequences for Christians in other countries.

win an exemption from a Massachusetts anti-discrimination law that requires agencies to serve gay couples.”⁸³

In another direction, *New York Times* columnist Peter Steinfels highlighted six words included in a speech by presidential candidate Barack Obama on his plans for expanding government-funded faith-based initiatives, if he were to be elected president in November 2008. “That little phrase between the dashes — ‘or against the people you hire’ — ignited a political explosion.” According to Steinfels, “Religious groups that know the law have long agreed that federal money cannot be used for proselytizing or discriminating against beneficiaries. But they have never agreed that taking religious considerations into account in hiring personnel — certainly for top positions if not for all staffing — should be considered discrimination. And they point to the religious exemption in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and subsequent legislative and Supreme Court decisions to back this assertion.” Acknowledging that laws are subject to interpretation, Steinfels quotes a George Washington University professor’s observation: “A Jewish organization forced to hire Baptists soon ceases to be Jewish at all.... Without the ability to discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring and firing staff, religious organizations lose the right to define their organizational mission enjoyed by secular organizations that receive public funds.”⁸⁴

Three articles in March 2008 provide an interesting trilogy of encounters with religious groups and the secular culture.

A March 11, 2008, article reported, “Hundreds of Christian leaders marched to Capitol Hill to meet with their representatives and convey their message of social justice and peace to cap off a large annual ecumenical gathering...”⁸⁵

On March 12, 2008, a news article about a speech given to a gathering of church leaders reported, “The evangelical center is attracting more people and emerging as an influential voice of faith witness in American politics, says an evangelical scholar in his new book.”⁸⁶

On March 13, 2008, a reflection by one of the religious leaders at the 2008 World Economic Forum raised a question about the level of influence religion was perceived to have at the meeting. Rabbi Eric Yoffle, writing about the “eloquent” comments of Rick Warren, expressed surprise at the lack of integration of the religious leaders into the proceedings. “And this is why I and others among the religious delegation were so flustered at the role we played: there was simply no bridge between the religious discussions and the corporate responsibility discussions. I am not, to be sure, dismissing the importance to religious leaders of considering topics of metaphysical concern. We care deeply about God, divine justice and inter-religious connections.... Yet few of the business leaders seemed interested in creating a partnership with the religious community to pursue our common goals.”⁸⁷

There is little question that many religious leaders enjoy the process of lobbying government and business leaders, based on the frequent news accounts of such activities. However, is such activity foundational to the church’s responsibilities? Or is it more appropriately an overflow activity, following as a consequence from the engagement of church members in direct service? A report of the 2008 World Economic Forum indicated that those business leaders who did not seem interested in bridging with the religious community were very open to former Microsoft

Is lobbying government and business leaders more appropriately an overflow activity, following as a consequence from the engagement of church members in direct service?

president Bill Gates' discussion of "creative capitalism" with benchmarks for progress on world need. Many of those same business leaders probably are affiliated with religious congregations. Perhaps there was no bridge between the business leaders and the religious leaders at the Davos World Economic Forum because there is no bridge between the religious leaders and the business leaders from the pulpit to the pew. If the business leaders are not seeing the religious leaders make the concepts of global need accessible each Sunday, and integral to basic discipleship, why would such a bridge exist at a high-powered annual meeting in a retreat setting?

Robert Buchanan, editor of *Christian Century*, affirmed in a column the need to engage government but also reflected on the role of direct action by congregations. He wondered aloud, "Maybe the world would find churches more interesting and compelling if they showed something of the love of Jesus in their lives and practices."⁸⁸

Consequences for Church Structure. Another consequence that may result from a commitment to lukewarmness on the part of church leaders is the increasing irrelevancy and even replacement of present church structures. This development would be unfortunate on a number of fronts. Denominations have traditionally been the link between the congregation and the larger mission of the church. The denomination's ongoing global relationships have provided the congregations with a means of communication and coordination with the Christians in other countries. Congregations have also, in the past, been held accountable by the denominations to a broader set of policies and perspectives that reflect a consensus among the affiliated congregations. In addition to providing coordination of services, the denomination has been in a position to urge each congregation toward greater faithfulness to commonly held perspectives. One way this accountability has traditionally been communicated is through statistical reports.

Another consequence that may result from a commitment to lukewarmness on the part of church leaders is the increasing irrelevancy and even replacement of present church structures.

Roger S. Oldham, vice president for convention relations for the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, summarized the value of denominational reports as follows. Denominations allow collection of numbers that help monitor whether congregations are active in: (1) evangelizing (increased membership/baptisms); (2) discipleship (participation in programs); (3) Sunday school and Bible study enrollment; (4) stewardship and support of missions beyond the local congregation; (5) tracking members in a mobile society; (6) recognizing through trends what areas need special attention and strengthening.⁸⁹

The relationship between congregation and denomination works if mutual benefit is perceived. However, as denominations have not provided a large vision to bind the congregations together, congregations have sought that leadership elsewhere. Increasingly, other groups are seeing their role as servicing congregations, particularly in the area of global missions, once the strong identity of denominational headquarters.

For example, World Vision has launched the C2C (Church to Community) effort "which links a U.S. church with a specific Area Development Program." The program offers "Pastors Vision Trips" in which a congregation "...can send one or two leaders, one of whom must be the senior pastor." The goal is to engage congregations directly on the front lines of mission efforts.⁹⁰

The organization Compassion International sponsors a "Compassion Sunday" in which people present the option to sponsor children internationally. The para-

denominational group has been running an ad campaign on the theme, “A Question for your church from the world’s poor... ‘Do you remember me?’” One ad included a finding from a survey commissioned by Compassion: “Nearly half of all Christians went to church last year without hearing a single sermon about the poor or the biblical mandate to help the poor. Thirty percent of Christians say their church hasn’t offered them an opportunity to help the poor. Don’t let your church become a statistic!”⁹¹

Another traditional group has been changing its focus. “IFMA, the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America, is now known as CrossGlobal Link (www.crossgloballink.org). Association leaders accentuated their focus on ‘internal networking’ among current mission agency members and announced a ‘deliberate new effort to link with North American churches, especially churches bypassing agencies as they do mission directly.’”⁹²

The move away from traditional structures does not only affect denominations. Congregations may have embraced the consumer approach to the degree that the happiness of each individual member is now seen as paramount. As a result, one recent survey found a growing trend for individuals to define what suits their worship needs.

Each of six alternatives was deemed by most adults to be “a complete and biblically valid way for someone who does NOT participate in the services or activities of a conventional church to experience and express their faith in God” [capitals in original]. Those alternatives include engaging in faith activities at home, with one’s family (considered acceptable by 89% of adults); being active in a house church (75%); watching a religious television program (69%); listening to a religious radio broadcast (68%); attending a special ministry event, such as a concert or community service activity (68%); and participating in a marketplace ministry (54%).⁹³

The choice of the church in the U.S. to turn up the temperature of its commitment, or not, may mainly impact whether the church in the U.S is left behind while a dynamic movement grows without it. Various experts maintain that the momentum and leadership of the church has been shifting to the South and East on the globe, away from the traditional leadership role of Europe and North America.

Another factor that cannot be taken for granted is the freedom that the church in the U.S. has enjoyed for so long. Terrorism has already had an impact on the way American society conducts its affairs. The economy in the U.S. has been troubled and Americans may have to readjust their expectations from dominating the world’s financial activities to what some term a “post-American global economy.”⁹⁴

If the choice to treat global word and deed need with more urgency is delayed much longer, new risks may decrease the ability of church leaders in the U.S. to respond to those needs in a significant manner. The consequences of lukewarm activity in the church in the U.S. may already be set in motion. Meanwhile, children die because no one cares enough to organize to help them live. God’s work will move forward. The choice before church leaders may be whether Christians in the U.S. will be an active participant in God’s plans, or take a seat as a has-been on the sidelines.

Congregations may have embraced the consumer approach to the degree that the happiness of each individual member is now seen as paramount.

Signs of Hope

The analyses in this chapter, and in the previous pages, raise serious concerns about the health of the church in the U.S. It is reasonable to conclude that the church will not be able to maintain its present performance without resulting consequences. If trends are allowed to continue in an uninterrupted fashion, both congregations and denominations in the U.S. may increasingly become marginalized both nationally and internationally. The tragedy in that scenario would be the unrealized opportunities for service.

However, although there appears to be evidence that the church in the U.S. is far too similar to the church in Laodicea for comfort, it is encouraging that the church in Laodicea was offered a choice. To do nothing is to choose one consequence, one that represents increasing marginalization. To choose to change will require specific action.

Signs that Change Is Possible in Church Structures. As noted in chapter 6, individual congregations have demonstrated how to emphasize missions in a dynamic way.

The Ginghamburg Church near Dayton, Ohio, has grown to 4,400 members while placing an emphasis on keeping missions as a substantial portion of its operating budget.

The Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, California, is planning to build an outdoor amphitheater instead of a major new building for its 4,000 attendance at worship, in order to maintain its commitment to send 50 percent of its income outside the congregation for missions.

The Antioch Presbyterian Church in Chonju, South Korea, since its founding in 1983 through 2005, directed over 60 percent of the dollars it receives to missions outside of South Korea.

Denominations can also display ongoing or renewed commitment to missions.

Also noted in chapter 6, the Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches is a communion of 19 congregations that emphasizes international mission, with one missionary serving for every 45 members in the home churches.

In addition, the Presbyterian Church (USA) launched a major emphasis on mission activity. A financial campaign was conducted to raise funds to increase the number of missionaries sent out by the denomination. Further, a refocused staff position will be “charged with leading a work area dedicated to training congregational mission committees, mission networks and other mission initiators...” World Mission Director Hunter Farrell observed, “Whereas for decades the General Assembly (GAC) ‘did’ international mission in behalf of the denomination, changes in international travel and communication have opened up new possibilities for Presbyterians to participate in international mission.” A part of the new emphasis will “equip all World Mission staff to be more ‘client centered’ as they relate to mission initiators.”⁹⁵

The Christian and Missionary Alliance was formed with an emphasis on missions from the beginning. Adapting that interest to current technology, instead of listening

To do nothing is to choose one consequence, one that represents increasing marginalization. To choose to change will require specific action.

to music while waiting, callers put on hold hear reports about different global mission endeavors of the communion.

Other Signs that Present Opportunities. While some signs of weakening are present in the church in the U.S., other indicators suggest that it is not too late to change the behavior that Jesus found so intolerable in the church in Laodicea.

The interest among church members in short-term mission trips is so strong that it merited a story in *The Washington Post*, which dutifully reported criticism of the trend.⁹⁶ However, others refer to the trips as “vacations with a purpose.”⁹⁷ One pastor, in a review of a book on the value of such trips, reflected on her own experience, writing that “mission experiences take us out of our comfort zones; they break us open so we can see God, the world and ourselves with new eyes.”⁹⁸ The popularity of these trips suggest that there is a strong desire among people who attend church to integrate their faith with the broader world, an interest that indicates a foundation on which church leaders can build increased mission commitment.

Reaching the “unchurched” in the U.S. may also be more convenient than many think. Ellison Research found that even the “unchurched” attend church occasionally. In the survey, only 29% did not attend a worship service at any time during the year. Ron Sellers, president of Ellison Research, “pointed out that congregational growth is not just a factor of attracting new people, but of keeping those who visit. ‘We estimate that up to 43 million adults who do not regularly attend worship services will visit a church or place of worship at some point during the year, to say nothing of children and teens who visit with their family or on their own.’ ”⁹⁹

The Ellison Research finding can be coupled with a LifeWay Research survey result. LifeWay Research explored the attitudes of “formerly churched” members. Almost two-thirds of those surveyed were “open to the idea” of attending church regularly again. Reasons to return included getting closer to God, having shared values, and making friends. A sizable percent also cited a desire “ ‘to make a difference/help others’ (30 percent) in their community. ‘Too often churches wait for people to be spiritually mature to engage them in service when many projects or tasks are ideal entry or reentry points for people on their faith journey,’ said [associate director of LifeWay Research Scott] McConnell.”¹⁰⁰

Triage as a Strategy for Change. The evidence considered above strongly points in the direction of a tepid church in the U.S. Although activity is present, it is not results oriented. The weakening church has a choice whether to continue along its present path, or to embrace the offer in John 3:16 and enthusiastically exhibit behaviors that would produce the fruits described in 1 John 3:16-17.

In this context, the concept of triage as a strategy could assist congregations to implement adjustments in order to change the present trajectory towards marginalization. The solution does not involve activity for its own sake, but rather a goal-oriented focus that provides a place for each church member’s monetary gifts to be used as part of a larger action.

For example, the concept of triage for deed need can provide a basis to determine whether sponsoring a missions trip or a long-term medical missionary would be more helpful to help children living in an African refugee camp. The recognized goal is reducing child deaths. Which action will contribute to that goal? How does each proposal impact the goal? Are the resources sufficient to be able to do both?

The evidence considered above strongly points in the direction of a tepid church in the U.S. Although activity is present, it is not results oriented.

The church could take on a long-term relationship with a medical missionary, and through the relationship, ask whether there is a role for short-term assistance. The discussion changes from “What do we feel like this year?” to “How do we fit into God’s bigger plan?”

A side consequence may be the strengthening of the church. That was the experience of a church in Ukraine that is now starting to garner international attention. God’s Embassy Church in Kiev, Ukraine, was founded by a Nigerian-born pastor, Sunday Adelaja, and “white Europeans make up 99 percent of his church.” The church now has 30,000 members, and its satellite locations raise that number to 100,000. In a teleconference in April 2008, Pastor Adelaja suggested that the church “should not be pulpit-focused, but rather concentrate on how to reveal Jesus Christ to people if they want to experience growth.” Referring to his own experience, “his church first experienced massive growth after four fruitless years when he started to go out and fed the poor and took care of the drug addicts and alcoholics in Ukraine.” He strongly emphasizes the need for church members to understand the need for them to “impact the culture for God.” He was quoted as saying, “You have to really keep on pushing them to believe in themselves that they can change the world for God.”¹⁰¹

These studies are consistent with the New Testament affirmation: “It is better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Another factor in service to others that may help the church refocus its energy is the growing body of literature that suggests that helping others also helps oneself. Arthur C. Brooks, author of *Gross National Happiness*, was interviewed by Marvin Olasky of *World* magazine. Among other observations, Brooks asserted that three things make people happy: “Meaning in their lives, control over their environment, and success in creating value in the world. And the way people get these things is not with money or power or fame—it is with their values.” His research found a high correlation between faith and happiness: “Religious people of all faiths are much, much happier than secularists, on average.” Happiness gained through money has its limits, according to Brooks, which is why Americans’ happiness has not continued to increase exponentially with their incomes. He concluded through his research that, “It is abundantly clear that when people give to others, they get happier, healthier, and even more financially prosperous. The scientific evidence detailed in the book is quite incredible, showing that people can create miraculous changes in their lives when they give.”¹⁰²

Other researchers exploring the hypothesis that “spending money on other people may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself” found that “spending more of one’s income on others predicted greater happiness both cross-sectionally (in a nationally representative survey study) and longitudinally (in a field study of windfall spending). Finally, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experienced greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves.”¹⁰³

These studies are consistent with the New Testament affirmation: “It is better to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). These findings point to a truth that the church can emphasize in helping people to sort through the materialism and consumerism that has confounded even those who would lead congregations. Evidence supports what the Bible has long directed: Seeking God’s kingdom first is a good way to go (Matt. 6:33). People who are excited about the impact they are having on global

word and deed need may be the best advertisement that a congregation can display to its community.

Triage Goals Focused on the Years 2008-2009. The year 2010 is shaping up to be a significant year for both global word need and global deed need.

Engage All Unreached People Groups, 2008-2009. Various groups are already planning for a consultation on global evangelism to celebrate the centenary of the Edinburgh I conference in 1910, and to plan for current evangelism activities. Those leaders could, alternatively, evaluate the task of global evangelism using the triage strategy. In the final few months of 2008, instead of fundraising for a conference, the leaders could locate the well-to-do families who would each commit to funding the engagement costs of one of the unreached people groups. The engagement activities could be launched in 2009. Then, the gathering in 2010 would be an authentic celebration both of the heart of the first conference in 1910, and also the faithfulness that resulted in action among those present 100 years later.

Recover Momentum in MDG 4, 2008-2009. Progress in the reduction of the mortality rate of children under five has led to many deaths that could have been prevented. The body of Christ has a unique and broadly spread communication network that reaches out even into remote areas of many nations. During the last quarter of 2008, funds could be raised to provide the basic materials needed to prevent millions of child deaths. During the year 2009, actions taken through churches' global networks could move the progress of MDG 4 back on track. By the MDG progress evaluation conference set for 2010, the reached benchmarks could be celebrated, while plans are made to reach the next targets for 2013. That timetable would leave the two years between 2013 and 2015 available to make any adjustments necessary to insure success in protecting more of these little ones in their most vulnerable years.

Recover a Focus on Basics. News reports describe church leaders spending considerable time and energy wanting to influence government and business leaders to do justice. Perhaps church leaders find it easier to tell prestigious people what to do than to face the hard work of mobilizing members to give money for global word and deed need.

The apostle Paul did not seek out the opportunity to present the Gospel to the Roman government. However, his intense focus on preaching to anyone who would listen led him to the Roman emperor's court.

At least one observer suggests that it may actually be to the church's benefit for the era of "Christendom" in world history, when a close association between Christianity and the ruling majority existed, to be in the past.

Writing in *World* magazine, Westminster Theological Seminary professor of New Testament Vern Poythress commented on the marginalization of Christian values in American society. Some people, he writes, suggest that the solution to counter the marginalization is for committed Christians to seek positions of power in media and politics. He sees that approach of limited value: "But I fear that we may still fall into the trap of idolizing power. The power of the Christian faith is the power of the cross, power in human weakness, the power of God's love. Christian faith spread in the Roman Empire not by strategically placing Christians in the Roman Senate and in the aristocracy, but by people hearing God's good news—the 'foolishness' of the

The year 2010 is shaping up to be a significant year for both global word need and global deed need.

gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Christianity spread by orphanages, by caring for the sick, and by returning good for evil.”¹⁰⁴

A major difference between the early church and the church in the U.S. is that those early Christians were seeking to establish a new order. Christians in 21st century America have been the caretakers of the new order and it has weakened under their watch. Today, the task is to recover and reestablish the excitement and beauty of action that had such a powerful impact in the first centuries.

The challenge faced by the church is a recurring one. John Wesley was already worried about the Methodist movement turning moribund during his lifetime. The very behaviors that result from accepting the offer in John 3:16, such as “industry and frugality” lead to increased “riches”: “But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.” Wesley struggled to find an answer, and concluded:

Is there no way to prevent this? This continual declension of pure religion? We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal: we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich! What way then (I ask again), can we take, that our money may not sink us to the nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who ‘gain all they can,’ and ‘save all they can,’ will likewise ‘give all they can’; then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.¹⁰⁵

The challenge before the church is to recover its faithfulness to the purpose that grows out of accepting the offer in John 3:16.

Can Change in the Church Make a Difference? The challenge before the church is to recover its faithfulness to the purpose that grows out of accepting the offer in John 3:16. The motive cannot be mixed up with a desire to recover the church’s privileged position in American culture. As with recovery from a physical addiction, perhaps the church may not be able to make the choice to move from “lukewarm” to “hot” until it has truly hit bottom. It would be so much better, both for Christians in the U.S. and for those who could be helped by the church’s faithful actions, if the choice were to be made now. Many children will die, many without hearing that Jesus loves them, if the church in the U.S. continues to pursue a tepid balance of public posturing and weak personal responsibility, made evident through a limited response to global word and deed need. And if the church delays the choice long enough, it is possible that the great resources and public freedom currently enjoyed will no longer be available to Christians in America. That would be a tragedy, to look back on opportunities lost through dissipation. Grace would still be available for those grieving and repenting as they looked back with 20/20 hindsight on the possibilities ignored, but the loss would be real.

Yet, suppose the church recognizes the writing on the wall and opts to change. One of the first steps for the church will be to take its own giving potential seriously. The numbers in chapter 6 indicate that church members in the U.S. have significant resources that could be mobilized. This increased money could be applied to the solutions that are available in both the areas of word and deed witness.

Church leaders will be faced with the challenge that faces every good coach. How does a team come to believe in itself enough to perform at its maximum capability?

In this case, perhaps 1 John 3:16 offers more than a basis for the evidence of whether an individual or a church has accepted the offer in John 3:16. The apostle

John urges the early Christians to reflect on God's love for them through Jesus Christ: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (KJV). Jesus could have stayed in Heaven, by all reports much nicer than any terrestrial home with outdoor kitchen and thermal controlled bath that the richest resident of the globe can boast. Jesus could have been waited on hand and foot by beings whose very presence would tempt us to fall down before them (see Rev. 19:10 and 22:9). Yet Jesus chose to leave all that privilege and comfort in order to lay down his life for each "one." Perhaps no other apologetic for faithful service, or stewardship, or discipleship, or church renewal, could accomplish more than the contemplation and deep personal ownership of the truth that Jesus laid down his life.

When the truth of that reality is embraced, the action described in 1 John 3:16 seems like a natural next step. It is encouraging to know that followers of Jesus are encouraged to look not at whether the task seems possible, but whether the task springs from love, faith, and obedience.

A positive mindset can also help. One engineer looked at the speedy progress being made in the repair of the collapsed Highway 35W bridge in Minneapolis and observed, "Anything can be done if people put their minds and their wallets to it."¹⁰⁶

After placing one of his characters in a harrowing position that required extraordinary action, C.S. Lewis observed through his narrator, "It was necessary and the necessary was always possible."¹⁰⁷

The task before the church can be seen as overwhelming. It can also be seen as exciting. As N.T. Wright has described it:

But the whole point of the Gospels is that the coming of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven is precisely not the imposition of an alien and dehumanizing tyranny, but rather the confrontation of alien and dehumanizing tyrannies with the news of a God—the God recognized in Jesus—who is radically different from them all, and whose inbreaking justice aims at rescuing and restoring genuine humanness.¹⁰⁸

The Christian faith teaches that, until the return of Jesus, God's work will be largely accomplished through Christ's body. If the part of the body of Christ located in the U.S. chooses not to carry its weight, the work of God will go on. However, if the church in the U.S. chooses to embrace the opportunities set before it, Christians in the U.S. could have a great deal to contribute.

The work of God will go on. However, if the church in the U.S. chooses to embrace the opportunities set before it, Christians in the U.S. could have a great deal to contribute.

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