

9 Very Hopeful Signs for American Churches



By Thom S. Rainer

I remain an obnoxious optimist about the future of American congregations.

No, I don't have my head in the sand. I know many congregations are struggling. And I fully expect we will continue to have a net loss of churches for the next several years.

But I do see the very real possibility that this negative trend will bottom out and begin to move upward. Why am I hopeful? Allow me to offer nine reasons for my optimism.

1. **A new wave of corporate prayer.** More church leaders are emphasizing prayer. The perfunctory prayer meeting is being replaced with new forms of passionate and concerted prayer.
2. **A rekindling of evangelism.** It seems like many churches just forgot evangelism for a season. As silly as it sounds, we Christians stopped telling people about Jesus. There is a new wave of real enthusiasm for sharing the gospel.
3. **A balance between theological and practical.** Practical ministry without a solid theological foundation is like a body without a skeleton. Theology without application is like a skeleton without a body. More church leaders are realizing that theology and application are not either/or choices. They are both/and mandates.
4. **The waning of worship wars.** I am hopeful that a new emphasis on congregational singing is taking the focus away from battles over ill-defined

worship styles. We have wasted far too much time and resources insisting on our preferences rather than engaging in true worship.

5. **A heightened emphasis on church revitalization.** Church planting is still paramount. But we cannot neglect over 300,000 churches in America needing to be revitalized. It is heartening to see this emphasis take hold.
6. **A surge of re-birthed churches.** The trend in the past for many congregations was decline and die. Today many of these dying churches are making selfless decisions to give their properties to healthy churches. These re-birthed churches will continue to grow in number.
7. **A renewal of meaningful membership.** My book, *I Am a Church Member*, has sold nearly 1.5 million copies. Yes, I know that is a self-promotional comment. But it is also a reality that more and more churches are taking the issue of church membership seriously.
8. **A concerted focus on impacting the community.** It is heartening to see churches actually make a difference in the communities where they are located. For a season, I wondered if the “Jeruselems” of Acts 1:8 would be forgotten in America.
9. **Balanced views of numbers.** In recent history, two camps evolved over the view of numerical reporting in congregations. One camp saw numbers as an end and gave undue focus there. The other camp eschewed any emphasis on numerical counts. Today more congregations use numbers as a means toward greater accountability, but not as an end to be accomplished.

I could cite several more hopeful signs for American congregations beyond these nine. We may soon hit a bottom in the number of churches and weekly attendance. From there we may see an incredible renewal of congregations across our nation.

In a very etymological sense, revival may be just around the corner.