

Americans Open to Exploring New Ways of Experiencing God-2
Barna Report, June 2009
Summarized and posted by Bob Young
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In light of a Barna report which suggests that Americans are more and more inclined to find and practice faith outside the structures and context of traditional churches, what are appropriate responses by the church? [The report is available at www.barna.org]

To recap the major points of the survey:

- 88% of American adults say “my religious faith is very important in my life.” Spirituality is not declining, nor is faith going away in the near future.
- 75% say “God is motivating people to stay connected with Him, but in different ways...than in the past.” People say they want more of God and less of the stuff that gets between them and God, “stuff” that includes traditional church life for many.
- 45% say they are “willing to try a new church.” Almost half of Americans are open to changing their church home, suggesting lack of connections within their present faith community, desire for more significant connections, and an increasing lack of loyalty.
- 64% say they are “completely open to carrying out and pursuing your faith in an environment or structure different from a typical church” and not tied to a conventional church setting as they seek to experience and express their faith.
- 50% say “a number of people I know are tired of the usual type of church experience.” Half of all adults said they are aware of a willingness to experiment on the part of others who are tired of the common church experience.
- 71% say they are “more likely to develop my religious beliefs on my own, rather than to accept an entire set of beliefs that a particular church teaches.” Levels of distrust toward organized Christianity have been growing and a large majority of adults feel responsible for their own theological and spiritual development.

What this may mean for traditional churches. (These are merely observations and possibilities which come to my mind as I contemplate the survey results.)

- Churches are not attracting many new adherents.
- Churches that are growing usually do so by attracting new members from other churches.
- Churches may need to face the fact that loyalty is no longer a major reason people attend a certain church.
- Few churches are having a significant impact on the unchurched segment of society.
- Churches are not going to grow significantly by doing church better.
- Churches may be able to grow by simplifying church life.
- Churches may have to consider parallel structures that are non-building focused, such as house churches, cell churches, and SIMPLE church structures.
- Churches may have to give up on integrating the parallel structures into the building-centered model.

- Churches may need to evaluate their typical church experience to see what is biblical and what is traditional.
- Churches may need to demand personal faith and faith development (personal responsibility for faith) rather than pushing dogmatic belief systems on unthinking folks.
- Churches may need to renew their emphasis on spirituality lived out in daily life.