

Being Church in the 21st Century

Themes from the Emerging Church

What does it mean to “be church?” Does it matter? What are we hoping for? Why church? These are among the questions thoughtful Christians are asking in every corner of the church. For Lutherans who understand that THE Reformation was not once for all but an ongoing call to renewal and reform, these questions are especially important. If the church is to be the Body of Christ in the world—a transformational movement that indeed makes a difference—the questions and issues that are part of the emerging, postmodern church can and will help us shape a church that has greater authenticity, integrity, and depth.

This major cultural and religious shift—some even call it a new kind of Christianity—includes a renewed



exploration of the teachings and actions of Jesus. What did Jesus have in mind and what does it mean to live the message of Jesus today? And how does the church interpret and embody Christ’s sacrificial love and overwhelming grace to a world desperately in need of hope and transformation? In the midst of all the organizational and institutional machinations, “being church” is about becoming Christ’s presence in the world, encountering God in each other and in all of life. The call to servant leadership, to church as a verb, a movement, crosses denominational lines, cultural differences, and generations. Theologians old and new are helping us rethink and re-imagine the church in the 21st century.

*Lord,
this is the
people that
longs to see
your face.*

This collection of resources attempts to provide an entry into the amoeba-like movement of the emerging church. It includes past and present voices that help us wrestle with ongoing change and cultural shifts. Saint Augustine reminds us to say amen! to what we are, the Body of Christ in the world. And so as baptized people of God, we receive Christ’s body and blood at the communion table boldly responding, Amen! May

we continue to look for ever more meaningful ways to be church—
sharing, living, and proclaiming the radical news of Jesus Christ and
God’s overwhelming love and mercy.

Julie K. Ageson
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Coordinator, ELCA Resource Centers

THEMES to consider

- Church as faith-based, service-oriented community
- Incorporation of ancient, modern, and postmodern practices into worship and community ritual
- Reclaiming and reworking Christian practice and tradition
- Social justice focus rather than rule-based Christianity
- Return to liturgical practices
- Radical rethinking of evangelicalism
- Servant-based faith in local communities
- Emphasis on tradition, not traditionalism
- Emphasis on faithfulness rather than fundamentalism



- Openness to questions of faith rather than answers
- Transformational practices rather than membership in a Church

WEB SITES to browse

www.soulsunami.com/section6.html Leonard Sweet’s Soul
Tsunami site

www.spiritgarage.org A worshiping community in Minneapolis

www.sarcasticlutheran.typepad.com A “theology pub for the irreverently orthodox and the reverently unorthodox” hosted by Nadia Bolz-Weber from Iliff School of Theology in Denver

www.emergentvillage.com An overall site about the conversations including conferences and gatherings

www.emergingchurch.org Karen Ward's introduction with additional links and blogs

www.vintagefaith.org An extension of the work of Dan Kimball and his work in *The Emerging Church* and *Emerging Worship*

www.resonate.ca Information about the emerging church in Canada

www.emergingchurch.info Information including articles, stories, and discussion from the church in the United Kingdom

<http://jonnybaker.blogs.com> A blog from the United Kingdom

www.theooze.org A site to help church leaders collaborate and share resources

www.thethoughtfulchristian.com A collection of topics for small group discussion from PCUSA

www.wiredparish.com Reggie McNeal's site for exploring church and culture

PEOPLE to watch

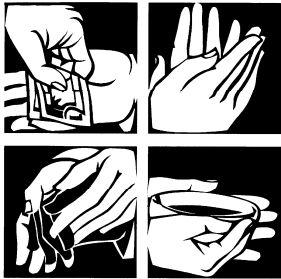
- **Brian McLaren's** work is a primary introduction for ongoing reformation and a new kind of Christianity. From the introduction by Phyllis Tickle: *The emerging church has the potential of being to North American Christianity what Reformation Protestantism was to European Christianity. And I am sure that the **generous orthodoxy** [defined by McLaren] is our 95 theses.*
- **Leonard Sweet** writes and speaks about church as a verb and evangelical movement.
- The late **Robert Webber** attempted to rethink evangelicalism by recovering "classical" Christianity especially in worship and ritual.
- **Douglas John Hall's** work about the shape of church is clear and uncomplicated in *Why Christian?* and in a series of lectures called "The Rise and Fall of Christendom."
- Lutheran **Karen Ward** provides a helpful introduction to the emergent conversation at www.emergingchurch.org
- **Diana Butler Bass**, project director of a research study on vital congregations, describes new life in the mainline in her books—*Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* and *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations*—and in an article called "Vital Signs" from *Sojourners Magazine*, December, 2005.

...on towards the goal...

We will make Jesus into everything possible so as not to face the one thing he is—God's challenge and invitation. In every naming of Jesus there lurks the danger that he becomes not the challenge of God who demands free response but the divine hero who rescues us...Jesus, the divine hero, evokes our sincerest thanks; Jesus, the divine challenge, evokes responsible action in the world.

~John Shea

- Leaders in youth ministry whose work focuses on faith practices, servant ministry, and rethinking church include **Kenda Creasy Dean, Rob Bell, Tony Campolo, Ron Foster,** and **Mark DeVries.**
- Among the topics for this synod's fall theological conference is the emerging church, sometimes called the postmodern church, and what this major cultural and religious shift looks like. Pastor **Jeff Sorenson** is director of The Eutychus Project, a group of congregations in the South Dakota Synod focusing on ministry to the next generation and what kind of church will "emerge" in the 21st century.
- Lutheran **Nathan Frambach's** Emerging Ministry: Being Church Today focuses on "God-spotting," mission, and mobile leadership. Go to www.augsburgfortress.org/education/emergingministry for excerpts and an overview. Frambach: *I hope to spark some imagination . . . conversation among people like you—Christ followers, the people of God—on mission, God-spotting, picking up the trail of the Holy Spirit and helping pave the road to the church that God intends. And perhaps gradually . . . without even noticing it, we will live into God's promised future.*
- **Dorothy Bass** has contributed a broad cross-section of work in the *Practices of Faith Series*. (titles below)
- Among other modern day reformers who help us think about church as a verb, practices of faith, and transformational servant ministry are **Nadia Bolz-Weber, Tex Sample, Sally**



Morgenthaler, John Dominic Crossan, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Dan Kimball, Kathleen Norris, John Caputo, Reggie McNeal, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Marva Dawn, Marcus Borg, Donald Miller, Phyllis Tickle, Desmond Tutu, Jim Wallis, Barbara Rossing, Richard Rohr, Anne Lamott, the late William Sloane Coffin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer . . . and so many others.

BOOKS to read

The following books provide thoughtful fodder for individual reading or small group discussion:

- Brian McLaren's work: *A Generous Orthodoxy, The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything,* and *A New Kind of Christian*
- Douglas John Hall's book and video (meant for young adults questioning the church but good for all ages) "Why Christian?" The video is a conversation between Hall and a 20-something who challenges the relevancy/meaning of church.

- Rob Bell's *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (see also the Nooma Films)
- A series of essays in *The Emerging Christian Way* edited by Michael Schwartzentruber
- Barbara Brown Taylor's *Leaving Church and Home by Another Way*
- *What Would I Believe if I Didn't Believe Anything? A Handbook for Spiritual Orphans* by Kent Ira Groff
- William Easum's *Leadership on the Other Side*
- *The Practicing Church* and *From Nomads to Pilgrims* by Diana Butler Bass
- William Sloane Coffin's *Passion for the Possible, Credo, Letters to a Young Doubter*
- *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg
- Reggie McNeal's *Present Future*
- Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus*
- Leonard Sweet's *Leadership on the Other Side*
- Practices of Faith Series by Dorothy Bass including *Practicing Our Faith; Receiving the Day; A Song to Sing, A Life to Live; Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian; Honoring the Body, In the Midst of Chaos; and Let the Children Come*
- Marva Dawn's *Worship for Postmodern Times, Unfettered Hope, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* and *How Shall We Worship?*
- N. Graham Standish's *Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose*
- *Who is Our Church? Imagining Congregational Identity* by Janet Cawley
- Martin Marty's *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*
- Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's *Public Church: For the Life of the World*
- Robert Rimbo's *Why Worship Matters*
- Donald Miller's *Searching for God Knows What, Blue Like Jazz, and Through Painted Deserts*
- *A New and Right Spirit: Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture* by Rick Barger



- Gordon Lathrop's *Central Things*
- *Be Not Afraid: Building Your Church on Faith and Knowledge* by Fredric M. Roberts
- a book in honor of Joan Chittister, a collection of essays called *Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-First Century* edited by Mary Hembrow Snyder
- Joan Chittister's *Called to Question*, *Heart of the Temple* and *InSearch of Belief*
- Donald Kraybill's *The Upside Down Kingdom*

God, Throw Fire On Us

God, kindle your weary church again, so that we will burn with your message. When others come to put out the flame of your love, we want to be burning so fiercely that all their water won't have any effect.

CHURCHES to learn from

- The joint Lutheran-Episcopal church plant called Church of the Apostles in Seattle. Lutheran Karen Ward is pastor. www.apostleschurch.org
- A worshipping community called Spirit Garage in Minneapolis www.spiritgarage.org
- Mars Hill, Grandville, Michigan where Rob Bell was founding pastor www.marshall.org
- House of Mercy, St. Paul: www.houseofmercy.org A Baptist community that reflects on ancient-future "eclecticism" in the emerging church
- Solomon's Porch, Minneapolis: An experimental church led by Doug Pagitt, author of *Reimagining Spiritual Formation* <http://solomonsporch.com>
- Mercy Seat in Northeast Minneapolis: Christian worship and community for the critically orthodox www.nemercy.org
- A community of house churches in Southern California called The Church at Matthew's House www.matthewshouse.com
- Mosaic, Austin, Texas: www.mosaicaustin.org Creates its liturgy out of art, music, and storytelling in the Austin community

- Cedar Ridge Community Church in Spencerville, Maryland www.crcc.org where Brian McLaren once served as pastor
- House churches that reject the institutional church and include the House2House movement led among Lutherans by the Rev. David Thompson

DVD/VIDEOS for discussion

- Robert Webber helps viewers think about the meaning of church in "Ancient-Future Worship: A Model for the 21st Century."
- The NOOMA Film Series by Rob Bell is a collection of short one-person films about rethinking what it means to be Christian, what it means to be the church.
- The late William Sloane Coffin leaves a powerful legacy in the video, "An American Prophet" where he talks about the chief religious questions for the church.
- Joan Chittister's video series "Transfiguration Ministry to a Wounded World" will stimulate conversation about transformational church and making a difference in the world.
- Richard Rohr focuses on the meaning of church in "The Reign of God" and "How Do We Help? The Goal of Christian Ministry", two short videos that will stimulate conversation and reflection.
- The video series "Faith and Reason" including John Dominic Crossan's "How Did Jesus of Nazareth See Himself?"
- Liturgy Training Publications has done a number of remarkable videos about parish life. Grounded in word and sacrament, these short "live" pictures of parish life illustrate the church enacting what it proclaims. Each focuses on worship and God's coming to us in word and sacrament as the source of our identity. They illustrate how worship enacts God's reign here and now showing how the sacramental life of the church, liturgical renewal, and servant Christianity shape a new way of being in the world. The first is called "The Hardest Job: Leading a Parish to Live from Its Liturgy." Four others focus on individual parishes learning to "be church." Titles: "Lift Up Your Hearts", "The Word of the Lord," "We Shall Go Up with Joy," and (my favorite) "Say Amen to What You Are."
- Living the Questions is a web-based small group study for exploring Christian invitation, initiation, and spiritual formation.



- In “Making the Connections: Worship and Evangelism”, Gordon Lathrop helps identify the marks of the church.
- Tony Campolo’s “Christianity at the Turn of the Century” and “Called to Freedom”
- From the God at 2000 Conference: “Seeing God Again—What’s at Stake” by Marcus Borg; “The God They Never Told Me About” by Joan Chittister; and “The Prodigal God” by Desmond Tutu
- From the Spiritual Formation Conference 2003: “We All Get Healed” by Jim Wallis; “Now You Know that You Need One Another” by Desmond Tutu

Short Formula

Christians are people who have been freed to serve others, and in serving are made happy.

AUDIOS to listen to

- Richard Rohr’s “Authentic Religion” and “Rebuild the Church”
- Douglas John Hall’s “The Rise and Fall of Christendom” including “Possibilities and Temptations for a Cruciform Body of Christ” and “Response to the Humiliation of the Churches”
- Joyce Rupp’s “All of Life is a Holy Festival”
- Walter Brueggemann’s “The Problem of the Enculturation of the Church”
- CHARIS Ecumenical Center conference called “A New Look at Jesus”
- Barbara Brown Taylor’s “Home by Another Way”
- Joan Chittister’s “Scarred by Struggle, Transformed by Hope” and “Fulfilling the Promise”
- Barbara Rossing’s “Apocalypse Now and Then: the Next Millennium”

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