

Growing an Engaged Church, by Albert L. Winseman ***How to Stop “Doing Church” and Start Being the Church Again***

Summary for application in churches teaching the Science of Mind

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes a book written for mainstream faith groups: *Growing an Engaged Church*, by Albert L. Winseman. Two important points to remember as you review this material:

- This book is written from the perspective of and for faith groups who see themselves as purveyors of “the great commission.” In this faith culture, the main task of the spiritual community is to “build disciples, or followers, of Jesus Christ” (Winseman, 2006). This approach is a significant cultural shift from the main task of Science of Mind communities, whose business, as I see it, is to nurture individuals’ and the community’s spiritual awakening by teaching the principles of Science of Mind as put forth by Ernest Holmes. Much of the material is relevant and useful, some of it is not. I have focused primarily on material that seems more adaptable to Science of Mind teaching and priorities.
- The strategies and conclusions of the book is based on sound research that was originally conducted in corporate environments, then proved true in faith communities as well, with some adaptation. More information about the research methods and data are available at www.gallup.com.

This document offers a review and main points of each pertinent chapter. These reviews are slanted toward application in Science of Mind churches, which in some cases required making judgments about content; therefore, some content has been slightly modified.

GROWING AN ENGAGED CHURCH, BY ALBERT WINSEMAN

Introduction: A Heart Attack Waiting to Happen

This section details some of the critical issues facing mainline churches, particularly growth-related challenges. Key figures include:

In the United Methodist Church

- Lay membership in the Annual Conference was about 146,000 in 1970 and about 84,000 in 2004.
- Average weekly attendance has decreased by about one-third in that same time period.
- Average age of clergy is 54 and there are only four ordained clergy under 35.
- In 2004 only two clergy were ordained and they were both over 40.

In the Presbyterian Church (USA)

- Membership has decreased from 4 million in 12,000 churches to 2.4 million in 11,000 churches.

In the Southern Baptist Church

- 10% of Americans identified themselves as Southern Baptist in 1995 and only 4% in 2005

Although megachurches have established a firm membership base in the last 20 years, real growth is not reflected in this trend as “the percentage of American Christians who choose no denominational affiliation has remained steady” (p 5).

In the Catholic Church

- Membership has remained steady overall, which indicates an actual decline given population increase and the number of immigrants to the US from predominantly Catholic Latin American countries.

According to Winseman 18% of church members are “fully spiritually committed” while only 5% of nonmembers are. He asserts that it is significantly more difficult to be “fully spiritual committed” without the support of a vital spiritual community, a position I find compatible with my own beliefs and experience and the teachings of Science of Mind.

The overall premise of this book is that churches must stop “doing” and start “being.” He defines “doing” church as focusing exclusively on “institutional preservation” and “being” church as returning to the basics, focusing on creating a vibrant spirit of community and service.

The key to this shift is congregant engagement. *Engagement is defined as a rational and emotional commitment to the spiritual community: its congregants, its leaders, and its vision.*

Using the parable of the sower and the seed, Winseman suggests that the work of creating engaged spiritual communities lies in preparing the soil so “God can do great things in your midst” (p 12). The balance of the volume discusses engagement in detail.

Chapter One: Jeff and Tricia’s Search for a Church

The chapter details the story of one young couple’s search for a spiritual home and some of the “disengaging” practices they encountered. From this story and significant Gallup research, Winseman draws the following conclusions:

Engaged churches make new people feel “not just welcome, but also wanted” (p 24). He asserts that the principle question on people’s minds as they come to new organizations are:

- Am I valued?
- Do I make a meaningful contribution?

To ensure that these two questions get answered in the affirmative, churches in which congregants are fully spiritually committed and fully spiritually engaged:

- Constantly form new groups of new people who can create shared history and bond with one another.
- Implement membership classes/procedures that reflect the value they place on membership.
- Clarify the expectations of membership.
- Make avenues for contributing transparent.
- Foster a deep and strong emotional connection with the community.

Four key points (p 30-31):

- Hospitality is more than a growth strategy; it has intrinsic value as something that nurtures spiritual growth

on the part of the congregant, which is the main task of the church.

- Engagement is emotional at its root, and the emotional commitment is a state of “being” that leads to rational commitment, which then leads to right “doing.”
- “[P]eople don’t show up at worship services because they want to know more about God; they come because they want to experience God. They want to have an emotional connection with the holy.”
- “[F]or that bond to have optimum strength, it must go beyond just the worship experience.”

Chapter Two: What Really Counts

Chapter two begins to address the research undertaken by the Gallup Organization around church engagement. Winseman asserts that what is easiest to measure (membership, attendance and giving) are not necessarily the best measures of engagement (rational and emotional commitment). The problems with measuring these:

Membership

- This dimension can be difficult to define and definitions may differ from community to community.
- Most churches have at least some inactive members.
- Membership alone does not necessarily indicate spiritual health or commitment.

Attendance

- Attendance is influenced by many factors: format, music, guest speakers, weather, service times, etc.

Giving

- Gallup research has “discovered a decisive link between individuals’ spiritual health...and the amount of money they give...” (p 38), so this is the best measure of the easy three, but by itself does not provide a complete picture.

Winseman proposes four measures he (and Gallup research) considers more relevant indicators of spiritual health and engagement (p 39-41):

Life Satisfaction

- 61% of congregants who are engaged strongly agree with the statement, “I am completely satisfied with my life.” Agreeing with this statement does not necessarily indicate life does not have its challenges, but rather that these individuals are more prepared to cope with those challenges.

Inviting

- 64% of engaged congregants strongly agreed with “In the last month, I have invited someone to participate in my congregation/parish.” Positive feelings about the spiritual community lead to a desire to share the experience with others.

Serving

- To measure service, Gallup asked, “How many volunteer hours a week do you give to help and serve others in your community?” The median response of engaged congregants was 2-1/2, indicating a link between spiritual health and service.

Giving

- “Each year, engaged members give a median of %5 (\$2,115) of their annual incomes to their congregations” (p 41).

Winseman posits that attempts to influence these four dimensions by addressing the dimensions themselves (e.g., friendship Sunday) are ultimately unsuccessful because they focus on the outcomes themselves rather than the cause of the outcomes. “Outcomes are the result of causes. In order to affect the outcomes that are the indicators of spiritual health, leaders must focus on improving the causes of spiritual health...the two primary causes of spiritual health are spiritual commitment and congregational engagement” (p 43).

He then identifies two myths that keep us stuck in our old thinking about what makes a spiritually vital and healthy community:

Myth #1: Believing leads to belonging (p 44).

- In fact the opposite is true: people do not come to church because they already believe; they come because they want to belong somewhere. Focusing on nurturing people’s sense of belonging leads to greater commitment to the spiritual path and to the spiritual community.

Myth #2: An active member is a faithful member (p 45).

- “Activity that is not the result of engagement leads to burnout. And burned-out members eventually leave: psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and physically...engaged members regularly have the opportunities...to do what they do best, because leaders have invested the time needed to discover their members’ greatest talents and gifts, and have put them in roles they can perform with strength. Such leaders tap into their members’ greatest talents and passions—all the while focusing on fulfilling the congregation’s mission.”

Addressing these myths requires shifting from a focus on the outcomes to focusing on the cause of the outcomes—engagement.

Chapter Three: Spiritual Commitment by the Numbers

What is spiritual commitment? “Spiritual commitment reflects a personal depth of spirituality. It is individual in nature, and is seen in both behaviors and attitudes...a spirituality that [goes] beyond merely an inwardly focused, ‘feel good’ faith to one that [makes] a real difference in daily living” (p 50).

In an early research phase, the Gallup Organization devised a 12-item questionnaire to measure spiritual commitment and to determine levels of spiritual commitment. Subsequent research using this instrument revealed that spiritual commitment is not just about one’s personal relationship with the divine, but is also reflected in our behaviors and attitudes and in our relationship to our communities. “[Spiritual commitment] also manifested itself in socially desirable behaviors. The higher the scores...the more likely they were to strongly agree with six behaviors, including racial tolerance, forgiveness and compassion” (p 51).

Based on this early research, Gallup created a second instrument designed to measure spiritual commitment, assessing “differentiating items” that the fewest number of people could “strongly agree” with, the most compelling indicators of spiritual health. These nine items are (p 52):

- My faith is involved in every aspect of my life
- Because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in my life.
- My faith gives me an inner peace.
- I am a person who is spiritually committed.
- I spend time in worship or prayer every day.
- Because of my faith, I have forgiven people who have hurt me deeply.
- My faith has called me to develop my given strengths.
- I will take unpopular stands to defend my faith.
- I speak words of kindness to those in need of encouragement.

©2001, The Gallup Organization. All rights reserved.

Detailed descriptions of these items are available on pages 52 through 58. Generally speaking, however, the first four items are attitudes and the next five are behaviors. When ranked on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, they provide a fair picture of ones level of spiritual commitment.

Interestingly, none of the items address beliefs or theology. This is because it was found that beliefs are not generally good indicators of spiritual commitment: “We found no significant differences in responses to these items [e.g., ‘Jesus Christ is the Son of God’ and ‘I believe the Bible has authority over what I say and do’] between those who are spiritually committed and those who are not” (p 58). “Believing all the right things doesn’t automatically mean a person is spiritually committed” (p 59). In other words, those who are spiritually committed don’t just talk the talk; they live their faith every day.

By these measures, Gallup has determined that about 14% (one out of seven) of Americans are fully spiritually committed; that is, they strongly agree with all nine of these items. And, to bolster the argument that membership in spiritual community provides a nurturing environment for spiritual commitment, “members of faith communities outscored nonmembers on every item...the only item for which the difference is fewer than 19 points is ‘I speak words of kindness to those in need of encouragement’” (p 59). More complete data regarding survey results and interpretation are available on pages 60 through 62.

Chapter Four: The Engagement Imperative

Gallup research on engagement has identified three types of congregants:

Engaged

- These congregants are “loyal and have strong psychological and emotional connections to their church...spiritually committed...more likely to invite...give more, both financially and in commitment of time...drive everything in your church” (p 67). They are driven by their sense of belonging and of spiritual deepening in the faith community, the emotions of spirituality.

Not-Engaged

- Not-engaged congregants are part of the “crowd,” those who attend regularly but are perhaps more socially connected to the community rather than emotionally and rationally committed. The disengaged “give less, serve less, and invite less” (p 68) and are often very satisfied with their church simply for what it does provide to them. With just a little attention and focus, these congregants can become engaged members, contributing to their own spiritual health and the spiritual health of the community.

Actively Disengaged

- The first type of actively disengaged congregants attend infrequently but are perhaps on the membership roles and see themselves as “members” of the particular faith tradition.
- The second type Winseman refers to as “CAVE Dwellers: Consistently Against Virtually Everything” (p 70). A drain on the energy and resources of the church, the wisest approach to this type of congregant is to “avoid focusing your energy on them” (p 70). “Your job as a leader is not to placate the actively disengaged...concentrate on creating positive energy in your congregation—enough positivity to neutralize [their] negativity” (p 71).

Engagement and Spiritual Commitment

Note that spiritual commitment and congregant engagement (rational and emotional commitment to the organization, its teaching and its leaders) are two different, but related, things. Remembering that only some 18% of Americans are fully spiritually committed (strongly agreed with all nine items), note that 39% of engaged church members are fully spiritually committed. The implications are clear: to drive spiritual commitment and the accompanying individual and community spiritual growth (and the spiritual evolution of humanity) we must focus on engaging congregants. “It is belonging (engagement) that leads to believing (commitment)” (p 72).

Chapter Five: Measuring Engagement: What Do I Get? And What Do I Give?

To this point, Winseman has discussed only how to measure spiritual commitment and noted the link between spiritual commitment, the spiritual health of faith communities, and engagement. How, then, to measure engagement?

Gallup explored this question and identified 12 indicators of engagement, items that lead to the desirable attitudes and behaviors described in Chapter Two (life satisfaction, inviting, serving, and giving). These indicators, again measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, are (p 81):

- Q1: As a member of my congregation/parish, I know what is expected of me.
- Q2: In my congregation/parish, my spiritual needs are met.
- Q3: In my congregation/parish, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.
- Q4: In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation/parish.
- Q5: The spiritual leaders in my congregation/parish seem to care about me as a person.
- Q6: There is someone in my congregation/parish who encourages my spiritual development.
- Q7: As a member of my congregation/parish, my opinions seem to count.
- Q8: The mission or purpose of my congregation/parish makes me feel my participation is important.
- Q9: The other members of my congregation/parish are committed to spiritual growth.
- Q10: Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation/parish.
- Q11: In the last six months, someone in my congregation/parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.
- Q12: In my congregation/parish, I have opportunities to learn and grow.

These items are in order and divided into four categories, each of which builds on the previous:

- What do I get?
- What do I give?
- Do I belong?
- How can we grow?

People who responded 4 or 5 to these 12 items were highly engaged in their spiritual communities and highly committed to their personal spirituality.

What Do I Get? (p 83)

Items one and two address the question, “What do I get?” and are foundational to engagement. Congregants must feel as though they are receiving something of value in exchange for their rational and emotional commitment to the church.

- Q1: As a member of my congregation/parish, I know what is expected of me.
Central to their receiving, and to their giving, is a clear understanding of what is expected of them as community members, in terms of both attitudes and behaviors. Winseman asserts that “[c]lear expectations lay the foundation for everything else your congregation is called to do and be. Without them, members will drift—eventually, right out the door.
- Q2: In my congregation/parish, my spiritual needs are met.
Meeting spiritual needs is key to engagement because this is what sets spiritual community apart from other organizations in which congregants may take part. The fulfillment of the individual’s desire for divine experience is foundational to the purpose of spiritual community and to congregant engagement. And spiritual needs can be met in different ways for different congregants: Sunday services, small groups, leadership opportunities, community service, classes, meditation services, enriching music—any of these can meet or not meet an individual’s spiritual needs. For this reason, it is important that our spiritual communities offer a variety of spiritual growth activities.

What Do I Give? (p 87)

Items three through six address the question, “What do I give?” and build on the foundation of items one and two.

- Q3: In my congregation/parish, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.
Most of us genuinely want to give of ourselves and highly engaged congregants give from their strengths (what they do best). It is the spiritual community’s job to support congregants in discovering their strengths and putting those to work in service to the divine in others. Strengths-based service ministries value all jobs and tasks as inherently valuable and meaningful and encourage congregants to develop their strengths by practicing those ways of giving that are most meaningful to them.
- Q4: In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation/parish.
Q5: The spiritual leaders in my congregation/parish seem to care about me as a person.
Recognition that is appropriate for and meaningful to the individual fosters engagement by fulfilling our need for love. Recognition and praise that is genuine, heartfelt and authentic is a demonstration of caring on the part of spiritual leaders, and is a powerful motivator, fostering a sense of safety that supports congregants in challenging themselves to ever deeper spiritual development.
- Q6: There is someone in my congregation/parish who encourages my spiritual development.
61% of spiritually committed members strongly agree that someone in their congregation encourages their spiritual development. This may seem like a given, but what lies beneath this is that taking a genuine

interest in congregants' development, and opening the context of what spiritual development means, is a powerful key to engagement. "[I]t tells members they have something valuable to contribute, and that others want to help in their development so they can contribute more" (p 92).

Chapter 6: Measuring Engagement: Do I Belong and How Can We [I] Grow?

Do I belong? (p 95)

The essential theme here is that once congregants begin to contribute, and to feel as though their contributions are valued, they begin to feel a stronger sense of "ownership" of the spiritual community; they feel as though they belong to something larger than they are. This promotes a positive cycle of engagement/growth/greater engagement/deeper growth, etc. Questions that address this sense of belonging are:

- Q7: As a member of my congregation/parish, my opinions seems to count.
Asking for, and taking into consideration, congregants' opinions cultivates engagement. Even if the opinions are not acted on, congregants who feel as though their opinions have been heard, acknowledged for their value, and carefully considered will usually support a decision, even if it is in conflict with their opinion. Key to successfully navigating the wealth of opinions in any congregation is clear, open and authentic communication.
- Q8: The mission or purpose of my congregation/parish makes me feel my participation is important.
Agreement with, and active participation in the vision and mission of the church is one of the primary indicators of that sense of belonging, which leads to greater engagement.
- Q9: The other members of my congregation/parish are committed to spiritual growth.
A sense that others in the congregation are committed to their own spiritual growth is highly correlated with "inviting." And spiritual growth is individual: "...it's not just cultural diversity that people expect and appreciate, but spiritual diversity as well...agreement on central [teachings] is crucial, [but] the way in which spirituality is expressed is unique to each individual.." (p 101).

Questions that may help you think about whether your congregation nurtures a sense of belonging (p 102):

- Are your members expected to grow spiritually?
- Are your members clear about the mission of your congregation?
- Are you following up on your members' progress?

- Q10: Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation/parish.
We are social beings and church fills a social, as well as a spiritual need. Friendships are indicators of trust and trust is the foundation of effective teamwork (see Lencioni model). "The more genuine trust there is in the congregation...the more effective and healthy the congregation will be" (p104).

Keys to building friendships at church (p 104):

- Create a climate in which members feel valued and relationships are important.
- Offer opportunities in which there is no agenda except relationship building.
- Establish small groups.

How Can We Grow? (p 105)

The data on these questions indicate that although most churches offer many opportunities to learn and grow, they do not always provide adequate challenge to congregants to take advantage of those opportunities or to integrate new learning and growth into their daily lives.

- Q11: In the last six months, someone in my congregation/parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.

Part of setting clear expectations for congregants involves providing feedback to members on their progress. For example, an expectation may be set in membership class for service to and financial support of the community, but if they never hear about how they are doing in these areas they are likely to do one of two things: stop doing it or set their own criteria for doing, both of which are dis-engaging.

Strategies for increasing engagement by following up include:

- Give congregants genuine, regular and individual feedback on their progress (not just the minister, but other leaders as well).
- Show them how far they have come: provide visual systems (progress charts, photo displays, etc.).
- Record successes (class completions, volunteer service, etc.) and visibly acknowledge them.
- Ask congregants to plan and track their own development and provide support for that (check ins, small groups, etc.)

- Q12: In my congregation/parish, I have opportunities to learn and grow.

Highly engaged congregations provide opportunities for their members to learn and grow. The spiritual leaders' role is to create a variety of opportunities designed to meet differing styles and needs, then support congregants in taking advantage of them. Accurate record keeping and timely follow up allow leaders to identify the programs and opportunities that attract the most people and have the most impact, then leverage those in service to the church's vision.

Winseman (p 110) believes that "more than any other factor, engagement drives a congregation's spiritual health. Only 29% of the members in most US congregations are engaged."

Chapter Seven: Inside an Engaged Congregation

This chapter profiles an engaged congregation: St. Gerard Majella Catholic Church in Port Jefferson Station, New York. In 1991, this spiritual community was characterized by dis-engagement and had about \$500,000 in debt. At the time of this publishing, about 46% of their congregants were highly engaged and those who are actively dis-engaged decreased from 22% to 12% (as measured by the Gallup Q12 assessment). Their financial position is significantly strengthened and they currently have a \$2 million surplus, primarily designated toward construction of a new church building.

The strategies St. Gerard used to increase engagement include:

- Strengths-based service opportunities (assessing strengths and finding ways congregants can serve from their strengths).
- Small groups (often strengths-focused).
- Visual systems that acknowledge strengths and contributions.
- Focusing attention on what is working (as evidenced by accurate and timely record keeping).

Chapter Eight: Strategies for Improving Engagement

The top three strategies recommended for increasing engagement are (p 125):

- Clarify the expectations of membership
Clarifying expectations goes both ways: members should know what is expected of them, and they should also know what they can expect from their spiritual community. This reciprocity creates an environment of accountability, trust, respect and caring, resulting in a more committed, spiritually vital church.
- Help members do what they do best
To be fully engaged, congregants must be interested in what they are doing and feel like they are truly making a contribution. This means doing what they do best. “Members who strongly agreed that they have the opportunity to do what they do best were more than 2-1/2 time more likely than the average member to be engaged (76% to 29%) and 38 times as likely to be engaged as they were to be actively disengaged (76% to 2%)” (p 132).

Winseman recommends three questions to open conversation about connecting people to service opportunities that are suited to their strengths:

- What are your talents and strengths?
- What do you love to do?
- If time and money were no object, what would you do for God?

He also recommends reading *Living Your Strengths* and using the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment to identify and leverage strengths.

- Create small groups
“Forty-three percent of congregants who belong to small groups are engaged—more than double the percentage of those who do not belong (18%)...those who belong to a small group score significantly higher on every item of engagement—an average of 18 points higher!” (p 136-37).

Winseman recommends exploring the following types of groups:

- Study groups
- Talent discovery and strengths development groups.
- Accountability groups.
- Support groups.

He also points out that “Jesus did most of his ministry in small groups” (p 139).

Chapter Nine: The Dynamics of Engagement

The study of engagement originated from research in the workplace in which it was learned that organizations with a highly engaged workforce are more likely to meet their business goals, both across industries and cultures (Gallup has gathered international data to support this thesis). Although the “outcomes” for faith communities differ from those of business, Gallup learned that level of engagement in spiritual community does impact overall spiritual health. And the key to engagement is the emotional and rational connection to the organization—its vision, its leaders, its members. “...[M]embers need to ‘feel’ they *get* something of value, they *give* something of value, they *belong*, and they...can *grow*” (p 142).

Engagement is dynamic, changing with shifts in needs and environment. Engagement levels drop, for example, when congregants don't have the opportunity to do what they do best. Major change can be dis-engaging and must be managed consciously by re-clarifying expectations and communicating fully and often.

In addition, although there is a link between spiritual commitment and the outcomes defined in Chapter 2 (life satisfaction, inviting, serving and giving), “on three of the four outcomes—life satisfaction, inviting and serving—engagement has a relationship that is three to six times stronger and on giving is about 1-1/2 times stronger” (p 148). Ultimately, engagement seems to powerfully drive spiritual commitment and the four outcomes while spiritual commitment alone more moderately drives the four outcomes.

Chapter Ten: Preparing the Soil

“Committed, passionate people in a congregation can deeply affect other people's lives, and change them for the better.” If this is part of your community's vision and mission, consider engagement a powerful driver of commitment and passion.

More information: www.gallupfaith.com