



The Church is Evolving—Good, Bad or Indifferent???: Gale-force winds are blowing swiftly against Christ's Bride—those called to be the bearers of the TRUTH. Though the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, yet the church is presently experiencing major cultural turbulences that are bringing unprecedented change to the Body of Christ. Before our eyes, the church is evolving (changing) to something very different than what it was even 25 years ago. At the risk of sounding like a hyper-fundamentalist, I must confess my belief and concern that the world has crept into the church. Growing numbers are viewing the Sunday meeting crowd as being outdated and out of touch with its surroundings. If you want a snapshot of where the American church is heading, take a few minutes and study the cultural and religious trends in Europe. Though the majority of Americans profess to be Christian, Christianity is being redefined to mean something outside of the biblical purview and this is/will have major implications as the church conducts missions in the world. There is not enough space to explore this topic, but let me start by peeling away a few layers of where the church is and where it is heading.

Intimate Christian fellowship is giving way to anonymity in the church—staying anonymous while associating with others. The church is very much like a gathering at a sports event where many are cordially snuggled together desiring/shouting for a common goal—victory for their team—yet, they don't know each other. In some ways the church has moved into this arena. Consequently, MEGA churches across our country have been birthed to attempt to stay relevant to our changing times. Massive congregations have "almost" celebrity icons/pastors that are so popular and gifted that "campus churches" have become a growing phenomenon. This enables a pastor (better word preacher/teacher—I'll explain later) to be at multiple locations via a video screen. No longer does "the preacher/teacher" have time to know his congregation. The sentiment coming from the pulpit is either the preacher majors on teaching and minors on pastoring (counseling, visitation, etc.) or vice versa. Unfortunately, this kind of pulpit isolationism is bleeding over to those sitting in the pew. There is a flourishing tendency throughout the church for less intimacy (koinonia/fellowship). Is this the biblical way? According to Acts chapter 6, the Word and prayer must be the major focus of our spiritual leaders. Yet, I submit that this should be done without neglecting pastoral responsibilities. Failure in pastoring is having grave consequence among the laity. How does that work? (Another topic for later.) It is not uncommon for a person to go to church and never being asked his/her name. A few years ago, I was in a large Baptist church in Houston. The only words spoken to me was from a middle aged lady as I was walking out the door: "I like your sweater." In reality the twenty-first century church is orientated less as a community/fellowship and more like a gathering at a football game. Let me say it plain and straight—church people don't really know each other. Sad to say that the lost can sit beside the saved in the pew without ever being asked their savific experience. If one examines the Scriptures carefully, the New Testament church portrays a very tight nit assembly. Sharing of meals (house-to-house) and even wealth was a common practice. Gifts of the Spirit were given by God to empower the Body of Christ. It was a godly setup that fostered interdependence where one's strength helped with another's weakness. This setup was mandatory for an authentic healthy church. One had the gift of healing, another a gift of helps and administration and so forth. God's calling and anointing on each individual member was the purpose of empowering and strengthening the church. Today, the preacher struggles to know names of even the regulars. Rarely is the preacher invited over for a plate of fried chicken, coffee and good fellowship. Americans are so busy! They no longer expect nor to they want the preacher (or visitation team) to visit their home. When home from a busy day at work, many members would like a restful time before the beginning of another day. Not much space left, but allow me peel away another layer of change that troubles me.

The older generation feel they are losing "their church." This is too deep, but here are a few things many struggle with (right/wrong—I am not picking sides, but stating the facts) that have divided/split congregations: Contemporary Christian music has trumped the traditional hymns with drums, guitars, receptive choruses, loud amplifiers, etc. The younger think the older saints don't know how to worship, raise hands and shout; they are antiquated and outdated. The traditionalist survey the congregation on Sunday morning with troubled and sad eyes as they witness: One drinking coffee, another sporting a baseball cap, only a few have a tie and coat, frizzed up hair, nose rings, tattoos, iPhone Bibles, scriptures up on a screen rather than a Bible in the their lap, a causally dressed pastor, sermons laced with videos and drama, etc. The cry from the traditionalist is: "I HAVE LOST MY CHURCH!" Again, I am not going further to try to unpack this serious cultural division, but let it suffice to say, the church is evolving and divided. For sure, the tension is huge among millennials and the aging population. Finally, only room to mention one more layer.

There is a growing tendency to be "politically correct" and to carefully craft one's words so not to offend the listener (or lose members or offerings). The voice of the church has become weak. When I see various minority agendas (a fraction of the population) moving the entire culture toward (in some cases) catastrophic consequences, I often think, "WHERE IS THE CHURCH?" The Pew Research Center from time-to-time have stated that the majority of Americans are Christians (though many are Christian in name only). There is a fear that the church is insensitive and unloving and uncaring to their surroundings and consequently members being labeled as bigots. Again, I submit that the cultural pressure is molding the church into something that would make grandma turn over in her grave. From many pulpits, messages are more motivational and positive than biblical. Preachers are proclaiming the "Good News" fearing to speak fearlessly (with love and respect) the BOLD truth or what some would say is BAD NEWS (Hell, sin, holiness, etc.). Where are the John the Baptist who herald messages laced with the word REPENT? Why is the Bible being greatly challenged and charged with not being relevant? What was once consider wrong (sin) has become the "new" normal.

The church is evolving and in some cases changing...moving away from the scriptures. This is and will continue to effect Christianity in the USA and on the mission field. Maybe I'm simply overstating the issues regarding the evolution of the church. For sure we are living in the most exciting, complex and fearful times ever in the history of the world. Where does it all end? Read the Word...it will clearly tell you. May we be faithful to God and His Word with sensitivity, care and love without **compromise**. Help us God...Please help us!

Rick



NEWS BRIEFING: Mission Link International continues to meet the challenges of the mission field. Having been doing this for almost 20 years, I've grown up only to find out how ignorant I am of African culture. Below is listed some news worthy happenings and projects. Your support has been tremendous and I (with our board) are very grateful. PLEASE pray over this "news briefing."



- **NEW SCHOOL OPENING:** Our teachers are opening a new school in Kaliro, Uganda to train pastors. This will be our 3rd village school designed to keep students in their locality and family. It requires more from our teachers, but we are reaching more students. This school requires about \$55 per month for 12 months. A great investment!

- **PASTOR JAMES ABALYAWO:** Our head teacher/administrator is coming close to finishing his home. I cannot tell you how excited he and his wife are soon moving from very humble quarters to a house that is absolutely beautiful. Pastor James has been one of the most faithful men of God under MLI. Listed are critical needs and hopeful items. (Note: Please understand, though James has a budget, one must be flexible due to forgotten budget items or cost differences. The list reflects some updated figures from last newsletter.) **The List:** Finish painting (in/outside) is \$1450; water tank and shower is \$160; Pit Latrine is \$190; External Kitchen (wood/coal outside house) is \$900; Trimming out house - \$575. James has little or no furniture, so anything toward furnishings will be a GREAT blessing. LET'S TRY TO GET HIS FAMILY SETTLED VERY SOON.



- **OUR STREET BOYS:** We have had several donations that have (and will) help with Zack, Joshua and Isam, Isam, 9 years old, is doing well in school. Our prayer is that we can find a place for him to reside between terms. He cannot go back to the streets. Joshua has gone back to the streets to do drugs with his learned sexual addition. We have tried to follow up, but he continues to run from our director. Zach, (15/16 years old) is going to be trained as a mechanic.

- **LAND FOR LEPERS:** Our donor, Pastor Hubbard, has raised funds for the lepers and needs your prayers that the 9.6 acres will be finalized to grow maize (corn) for the lepers. Please pray that the seller, Eric, will honor his word and sell MLI the land. Survey is accomplished.

- **CHICKENS PROJECT:** It has begun and soon we will go to Kenya and purchase an incubator for hatching eggs. This project will empower African widows to raise funds by starting their personal chicken project once the master project is up and running.

- **MLI SCHOOL ELDORET, KENYA:** We are grateful for the \$925 donation for paint contributed for the MLI School/church in Eldoret, Kenya. Next phase (II) will be to construct the dormitory, library, kitchen, showers, etc.

- **TEACHING STAFF NEEDS A MOTORCYCLE:** MLI's staff needs a motorcycle, helmet, insurance, etc. for cheap transportation (critical). I would love to have this expense before leaving for Uganda on May 17th (\$1500).

- **DESK, DESK, DESK:** Desk are constructed for Pastor Timothy's school (top left picture). Thanks to a generous donor, many students now have a place to sit.

- **DEAF SCHOOL:** There are very few institutions for the deaf. Pastor Herbert of Kamuli Baptist Church and former professor at the Uganda Baptist Seminary, is helping start a school for the deaf. MLI's donor contributed fund to support their initial efforts, but ongoing funds are needed. \$350 (but more is needed for salaries, housing and food) will go a long ways for the next term. If they had the funds, much more could be accomplished. Maybe God will send us someone who will build a school for these children able to have a girl/boy dormitory. All things are possible through our GREAT GOD! (middle picture above left)

- **DUPLICATOR:** One of our staff members in Uganda desires to start a DVD copying business and needs a DVD duplicator. They range in price from \$160 for a 1-to-1 to \$240 for a 1-to-3 copying machine. A gift will help a Ugandan become self supporting.

- **PASTOR WASAWA HOUSE:** Pastor Wasawa is praying that he can build a house for his large family. MLI wants to supply cement and roofing. Pastor will supply handmade bricks and church labor. \$1275 is needed.

- **GENERATOR DONATED:** We are very grateful for the donor that gave the Baptist Church in Itukulu a NEW generator! (third picture left)

- **GENERAL FUND:** This fund gives MLI flexibility to take care of operational expenses and various needs/projects—and there are many. Without this fund, it would be very difficult and challenging to operate and assist the numerous needs we encounter.

PHONES, DIGITAL CAMERAS, CHRISTIAN BOOKS

We are in need of your old phones and digital cameras. Please drop them by the MLI office OR mail them to: 1677 Avon St. Ext, C'ville, VA 22902. Christian books/Bibles also needed for next shipment to Africa. Thank you so much!

KENYA 2016 MISSION TRIP POSTPONED

THE MISSION TRIP TO KENYA HAS BEEN POSTPONED: Mission Link International had planned a trip to Kenya to assist our African partner, Pastor Euticauls Wambua, with ministry in Korogocho Slum, Nairobi and the new secondary school in Mwingi. We will need to plan for a later date to do the following (though the itinerary is adjusted according to the skill level/experience of the team and the critical needs of our host. However, having put together many trips, I am confident we will need some to work with youth, computer savvy people for the installation of a computer lab (prefer new/use laptops that are not too old), "lite" carpenters and maybe painters. Our target time will be either the Spring or Summer 2017 depending on early responses. Hence, "TALK TO OUR OFFICE" and let us know your thoughts and schedule. Call or write Rick @ 434-984-1995 or thelinkoffice@gmail.com.

Sponsor a Widow with Monthly Support



For \$30 a month (just a dollar a day) you can make a difference in the life of a widow. Your support will help pay for school fees, medicine, home-based businesses, food, and much more.

Lovisa Mbeiza (Lovisa has not been adopted "yet." She needs a caring person to stand with her in prayer and with monthly support.) Lovisa is 62 years old with three (3) children. She lives in the village of Itukulu. Her husband died in 1994 in a vehicle accident. Lovisa states, "I am thankful to God for the support I get from Mission Link." (Note: Some of the widows in Itukulu have received stoves, water filters and pigs.)