



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Supreme Court declines religious-harassment case

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Supreme Court has declined to hear a Florida case about employees' rights to share their faith in the workplace.

In 1993, Kenneth Weiss was fired from his technician's job with REN Laboratories, Inc., in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. His employers claimed that they terminated Weiss in part because he harassed co-workers by offering a Bible to a Muslim co-worker and showing a lesbian co-worker Scripture passages calling homosexuality "vile."

Weiss subsequently sued his former employer under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, claiming religious discrimination. Weiss said the activities leading to his dismissal were an integral part of his faith.

A Florida jury initially found in Weiss' favor and awarded him \$129,000. The judge, however, threw out the ruling, citing a lack of evidence of wrongful termination.

The Supreme Court's decision not to hear the case leaves intact a decision by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which said that, though Weiss' workplace behavior was not prudent, he should receive another jury trial to determine if he was wrongfully dismissed. Neither Weiss nor REN Laboratories were satisfied with that decision.

Attorneys for the company told the Miami Herald that they were "between a rock and a hard place" in Weiss' case, since he was a supervisor and some of the people who felt harassed at his proselytism were working for him.

The company also said that other, non-religious issues contributed to Weiss' termination.

Weiss was represented before the Supreme Court by the Rutherford Institute, a conservative group that often represents Christians who feel they have been discriminated against in workplace, school or public accommodations. Press reports indicated the group had hoped the Supreme Court would use the case to set clearer guidelines for workplace witnessing.

However, Brent Walker, executive director of the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said it would be difficult for the courts to provide clear guidelines to private employers on such matters. "These cases are all fact-sensitive," he said. "It is impossible to come up with a bright line between permissible religious expression and religious harassment for all cases."

Walker said private employers and employees might find helpful guidelines for religious expression in the federal workplace issued by the Clinton administration in 1997. Those guidelines provide examples of permissible and impermissible religious behavior by government workers. For instance, according to the guidelines, handing a gospel tract to a co-worker is permissible unless the worker asked beforehand not to be given the tract. A supervisor requiring employees to accept and read religious materials, however, would be unacceptable under the federal guidelines.

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## **Christian researcher seeks to shatter churches' 'illusions'**

By Trennis Henderson

MIDDLETOWN, Ky. (ABP) -- Christian researcher and author George Barna doesn't try to make seminar participants feel good about what most churches are accomplishing across the nation. In fact, he does just the opposite.

"In one regard, I want to shatter their illusions that everything is fine and the church is healthy and we should just keep doing more of what we're doing," Barna said.

"I don't think that's true at all," he added, citing years of extensive research in the field. "One of the things we've missed is the incredible significance of a life devoted to discipleship. We've turned it into programs and activities."

On the positive side, Barna said he wants to give church leaders "ideas about what to do about the situation."

"I'd like people to have a more objective understanding of the church and our culture today," he explained. "If people think creatively, intentionally and strategically about our ministries, we have some hope."

Barna, who founded Barna Research Group in 1984, said the organization seeks to provide "current, accurate and reliable information" that can help churches and their leaders "make more strategic decisions."

Barna currently is on a 15-month, 54-city seminar tour. He said his research staff spent 18 months conducting more than a dozen national studies involving thousands of participants in preparation for the seminars.

Topics addressed during four 90-minute sessions are rechurched, growing true disciples of Jesus, building effective lay leadership teams and ministry evaluation.

Barna said the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have provided churches "an incredible window of opportunity to minister in America, but that window is not going to stay open very long."

Emphasizing the importance of strengthening discipleship in American churches, Barna asked: "When the crowd comes, how do we deal with them? How are our people interacting with other people" during this time of national crisis?

Describing effective discipleship as "one of the most daunting challenges facing the church today," Barna said, "The church is not making much progress here and it's not getting better because we've become comfortable with what we're doing."

Barna said true discipleship "is effective in transforming people's lives and that's our ultimate goal here." He added, however, "I don't think we've taken this seriously enough."

Warning that "everything in our culture today, morally speaking, is up for grabs," Barna said studies indicate "the differences between Christians and non-Christians is minimal because we act so much like the world. What this boils down to is a discipleship issue."

"We have to be concerned about discipleship that develops character," Barna added. Churches "ought to be doing something deeper that helps people understand what it means to be a Christian in the 21st century."

Effective discipleship can be measured, Barna said, by examining members' involvement in such areas as worship, evangelism, stewardship, service and personal witness to the world.

He said obstacles that keep churches from seeing greater success in discipleship development include:

- No measurable definition of success in the area of discipleship.
- A focus on transmitting knowledge more than developing character.
- Teaching that is random rather than systematic.
- Limited accountability for members' spiritual growth.
- Church leaders who are not zealous disciple-makers.

He said keys to effective discipleship include such factors as a clear definition of discipleship, measurable goals, ongoing spiritual self-assessment and widespread participation in intense discipleship opportunities.

"Do you have a model where people's lives are changing?" Barna asked. "What kind of church do you want to have? We're past the time of having any excuses."

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## **Churches evaluate ministries by wrong measures, Barna says**

By Trennis Henderson

MIDDLETOWN, Ky. (ABP) -- Most churches take time to evaluate their ministries, acknowledges Christian researcher George Barna. The problem, he said, is that they're evaluating the wrong things.

Churches regularly measure such areas as attendance, budget, programs and facilities, Barna said.

"We count all kinds of stuff," he noted. "The issue is those are inappropriate measures. They do not reflect transformation. They reflect quantity but they don't reflect quality."

By contrast, he added, "What Jesus looked at was people's hearts."

Research indicates only 9 percent of church leaders say their churches have measures that are "effective in helping them figure out how they're doing in ministry," Barna said. Up to a third of Protestant churches have no specific ministry goals each year, he added.

Emphasizing that spiritual accountability is biblical, Barna said church leaders must be willing to be vulnerable in order to gain useful information about their churches' spiritual condition.

"We've got to be a lot more tuned in to how well we're doing," he urged. "You can make it up as you go along as a Christian, but chances are you aren't going to get very deep in your relationship with Christ."

Though "accountability is a taboo subject" in many churches, Barna said clearly defining ministry goals is essential to success. "If you can't define it, you can't measure it," he said. "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it."

Barna said standards for effective evaluation begin with the Bible. "That's our dominant benchmark because that's our absolute standard," he noted.

Other standards include national norms -- how other churches are doing -- as well as local church records and current goals, he said.

Key questions to pose, Barna added, are: "Compared to where the church has been in the past, are we making progress?" and "Are we committed to doing what we said we would do?"

Once a church decides to pursue qualitative evaluation, Barna said leaders should "identify the non-negotiable outcomes that must be achieved for your ministry to be successful." Other steps include developing reliable measures, keeping the process simple and helping members understand why and how the evaluation process is relevant.

"Some churches gather interesting information but not useful information," Barna cautioned. "You can evaluate activities, but why bother? You're trying to figure out: Are people's lives being transformed?"

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## **Churches that reach the unchurched know what they're seeking**

By David Winfrey

MIDDLETOWN, Ky. (ABP) -- "Unchurched" people who visit a house of worship aren't looking for Jesus, but "value," says researcher George Barna.

Churches that are effective at reaching unchurched people recognize and respond to what visitors are seeking, Barna told about 200 church leaders during a recent workshop in Louisville, Ky.

Barna said unchurched visitors value anonymity, care for guests, ministries that are culturally relevant and multiple ways to get involved.

Based on thousands of interviews, Barna said he found unchurched Americans have a higher demand for control than most people who attend church. "These are high-control people," he said. "They're concerned about their image."

Unchurched people usually come to a church because they are struggling with an important, life-impacting issue, not because they want to worship, he added.

They bring that need for control with them and react negatively when they visit an institution that often exerts a high level of control in its members' lives, Barna said.

"When they walk in that door, they are paralyzed by the discomfort they feel in that place," he said, adding that most churches' language, music and customs do little to ease their discomfort.

Research has shown that churches effective at reaching unchurched people allow visitors to be anonymous, Barna said. Visitors don't want to have to wear a nametag or stand up and identify themselves. Both are common practices in many churches.

Still, they do want some personal treatment, Barna said. Visitors hope someone will give them an authentic greeting.

Visitors who share their name and address with the church would like a thank you from the senior pastor, but they don't want a home visit or a gift, he added.

A greeting from the senior pastor is important, Barna said, because of the "big-kahuna principle." That stems from his premise that most unchurched people have a high demand for control and are accustomed to being the center of attention, he said.

Any "thank you" must come "from one kahuna to another," or the unchurched visitor will feel as if he or she is being "shuffled off to the second string," Barna said.

While some churches pride themselves on gestures such as delivering bread or cookies to visitors' homes, Barna said, "My own analysis is that it's irresponsible to do that."

Most unchurched people view home visits as an invasion of privacy and gifts as manipulation, he said. "We have a tendency to do more than the unchurched want to have done to them."

Barna said churches sometimes protest to him that visitors respond well to gifts, but he consistently has found that no more than a third of visitors respond positively, leaving at least two-thirds of unchurched people who respond negatively. "Not only have they hindered their own effort, but they may also have muddied the waters for others."

Barna recommended a strategy with unchurched visitors similar to that of any personal encounter: be genuine, relevant and real, and let the relationship take its course.

He listed characteristics of churches that effectively reach the unchurched. They include:

-- The senior pastor is a genuine advocate of reaching the unreached. Leadership for this begins with the senior pastor, Barna said. "This person was an effective advocate because they were out there and doing it."

-- The ministry is culturally relevant. From the worship style to the language being used, churches that reach unchurched people find ways to connect with people who don't know traditional church language and practices, Barna said.

Ironically, surveys have found that unchurched people's view of the ideal church includes a music program that has traditional hymns with contemporary instruments and arrangements. The reason, he said, is that most unchurched people have a church background and are comfortable with the hymns, even more so than praise hymns or other unfamiliar music.

-- Efforts are made to ensure that the church is serious but that everyone enjoys the experience. "This was one of those eye-opening revelations for me," Barna said, recalling a church that had programs in place to reach the unchurched but wasn't being successful.

In a conversation about why members weren't bringing their friends, one older woman said bluntly, "Oh pastor, I could never bring my friends."

"Why?" the pastor asked.

"I don't even enjoy coming here," she responded. "Why would I bring my friends here?"

-- The church facilitates and emphasizes relationships. Barna said relationships don't attract unchurched people to a church, but relationships are an important factor after they've walked through the door.

-- Church members are prepared to explain their faith. Too often, churches assume they can get visitors to confine their questions about Christianity to a "Church 101" class or conversations with a staff member, Barna said. But most people's deep, meaningful questions arise during dinner or other casual times with Christians they know or meet at church, he said.

-- The church provides multiple points of entry. From sports leagues to topical conferences and lectures, effective churches find a variety of ways to interact with their community. "Each is targeted to a particular niche of the community," he added.

-- The church builds name awareness. Such churches use their promotion budgets and advertising to help unchurched people have a positive impression of the congregation, Barna said. Such awareness is harder, he added, as research has shown that the average unchurched person today can't name one church within a 15-minute drive from his or her house.

"If I invite them to a place that they've heard of and they have a generally positive impression, the chance is much higher that they will visit," Barna said.

-- The church minimizes the loss of visitors by having a spiritually healthy congregation. An unchurched person who visits a congregation wants to know that it makes a difference in the lives of those who regularly attend. If it doesn't, he added, a visitor would conclude that church attendance is a poor use of time.

-- They adapt effective outreach methods from other churches. They also consistently track their success to see how effective their methods are working, Barna said.

-- When people come to worship, they experience the presence of God. "The unchurched tend to come when they are struggling with something and they need an answer," he said. "They're not coming for an intellectual service. They're coming for an emotional service."

Unchurched people likely won't know how to explain what happens when they are in a church experiencing the presence of God, but it likely will attract them to come back, he said.

Barna noted that during interviews with people who had encountered such an experience, they will say, "I wanted to go back and see if they could do it again."

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## **Lay teams offered as alternatives to leadership voids in churches**

By David Winfrey

MIDDLETOWN, Ky. (ABP) -- Fewer than one in eight senior pastors in the United States identify themselves as leaders, creating a leadership void in many of the nation's congregations, according to researcher George Barna.

Barna's research also has shown that fewer than 10 percent of all U.S. senior pastors can articulate God's vision for the ministry of their church.

"That does not disqualify them from service in church," he said. "They're good people. They're godly people. They are called to ministry."

Barna said lay-leadership teams can fill a leadership void in such congregations.

Too many churches expect to find leadership from a position instead of from someone who feels called to lead, Barna told church leaders at a recent conference in Kentucky.

"The church is looking for leaders in all the wrong places," he said. "God has brought us the leaders. They're sitting in the pews."

Team-based leadership can include a pastor who feels called to lead, he said, or it can free a pastor for ministry and involve more people to use their God-given gifts.

Barna said such a model of leadership is biblical, listing Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, Paul and Jesus as people who used a team to lead in ministries.

The good news, he added, is that churches can transition from one leader going it alone to a team-based leadership approach.

Of the several dozen churches that Barna said his research group had studied that had team-based leadership, "only one or two actually started out as team-based churches. They had to make the transition."

Tips for shifting to a team-based approach include:

-- Making sure the pastor supports it. Churches that pursued a team-based strategy without their pastor's support ultimately split, he noted. "If the senior pastor doesn't support it, you're not ready for it yet."

-- Crafting a clear and comprehensive transition plan. Leadership takes place at two levels, Barna said: overall leadership for a church and individual leadership of specific ministries.

One plan could organize a "macro-level" team that assisted and served "micro-level" leadership teams for such ministries as worship, evangelism, discipleship, stewardship, service and fellowship.

-- Starting with one team for a specific ministry before switching the entire church over. "Let them fly under the radar screen as long as possible," Barna advised, encouraging churches to start with a team and ministry that is likely to make the switch successfully. One team can learn the challenges, work out the bugs and counsel future teams, he said.

-- Teaching the congregation why team-based leadership change is best. Many will be indifferent, he noted. "They don't care if it's 14 monkeys up here on tricycles for leadership as long as their needs are being met." But teaching the congregation about the change will educate future leaders about the church's direction.

-- Identifying and recruiting people who have strong leadership potential and openness to operating in a team environment. "People gravitate to places where they are well-led," he added.

Match leaders to produce compatible and competent teams. Teams should be structured according to people's passions, not openings, he added. "What vision excites that individual leader?" Barna asked. "You've got to be thinking, first of all, what is that person passionate about?"

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## **Churches possess 'genetic code' for survival, consultant says**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Churches run into conflict over issues ranging from theology to carpet color, because they lack a unifying identity that transcends minor differences, says church consultant Tom Bandy.

"My sense is that every church needs to be changing," Bandy, who with Bill Easum leads the consulting firm of Easum, Bandy and Associates, based in Port Aransas, Texas, said in an interview with FaithWorks magazine.

He isn't talking about just reorganizing the Sunday school. Bandy advocates radical, "transformational" change that focuses on the question: "What is it about your [church's] experience with Jesus that this community can't live without?"

Bandy said the first step is to quit fighting over things that don't matter -- issues of style and methodology -- and dive into the hard work of hammering out "a clear congregational consensus" about a church's unique role in God's purpose, what he calls its "genetic code."

In biology, DNA is the name given to a nucleic acid in a living cell that contains an organism's genetic blueprint and transmits its hereditary pattern.

Bandy says a church writes its own "DNA" by identifying its core values, bedrock beliefs, a challenging vision and a focused mission. Those building blocks will define and permeate everything else the church does -- worship, training, social ministries and buildings. In his analogy, like the body, a church's unique identity -- its DNA -- resides in every "cell."

That new identity empowers church members and staffers to launch out in creative directions, since they are not limited by "the way we've always done it," Bandy said. The genetic code, meanwhile, becomes "the vehicle of accountability in the life of the church."

"These values, beliefs, vision and mission become clear boundaries beyond which we cannot go as a church but within which any member of a church is free to do whatever they want," Bandy said.

"If someone is experimenting in worship and [a church member] calls you up on a Saturday night and says, 'Did you know what so-and-so is doing in worship? Are they allowed to do that?' . If all you can say is, 'Well, it's okay with me,' then you're trapped, because the person on the other end of the phone is going to say, 'Well, it isn't all right with me!' And then you've got to have denominational officers adjudicate it and take it to an annual meeting and vote on it. And you're cooked!

"But if, instead, you're able to say, 'Well, I know it's a crazy thing and it's a wild idea and I never would have dreamt of it.' And you even might say, 'It even offends my aesthetic tastes because I don't like rap music, you know.' But you're able to say, 'Despite all that, it doesn't go beyond the hard-core consensus of core values, beliefs, vision and mission.' Then you have integrity. .

"And very likely the person at the other end of the phone will say, 'Well, you're right. It doesn't go beyond that.' Now the person at the other end of the line may say, 'But, Pastor, I don't have to go, do I?' And you'll say, 'No, you don't. If you don't want to, you don't have to.' But it doesn't go beyond that boundary of values, beliefs, vision and mission."

Many churches shape their identities around their traditions, programs, worship style, personalities or experiences, Bandy said. Many have "a generic sense of mission" that's tied to a denominational identity.

But those may not be relevant to the church's situation today. And they may be of little help in charting a clear direction for the future.

How a church arrives at its consensus is almost as important as the result. The process of developing core values, beliefs, vision and mission should not be left to the church staff or key lay leaders, Bandy said.

That's because traditional church bureaucracies are ill suited for the postmodern world, he explained. Empowering rank-and-file members for ministry and leadership is the way to become truly effective.

"The world where the CEO and the board and the hierarchy lay down a mission agenda, encourage people to do it and raise money to do it is ending," he said. "The top-down world is disappearing all over organizational life, and the bottom-up world is what is emerging."

Churches that trade their bureaucracies and committees for a team-based approach to decision-making and ministry will find their membership much more receptive to transformational change, Bandy said.

"When you look at the corporate, social-service or nonprofit world, the organizations that are struggling are the old top-down hierarchies, and the ones that are [succeeding] are the bottom-up kind of organizations," he said.

"That's what's on everybody's mind. It is more fulfilling. It's more satisfying."

In the bottom-up world, he said: "The individual has more and more power to discern, design, implement and evaluate the mission for themselves. They may need to be resourced, networked, trained and supported. But they do not need to be told what to do."

Since church members often encounter a bottom-up philosophy in their working world, they often expect the same to hold at church. "It is the laity which is familiar with team-based, bottom-up organizational life," Bandy said. "They're the ones who now more and more are coming to the church saying, 'This is what we need to do. And we will help you do it. And if you do not do it, we're out of here and we'll go somewhere where we can.'"

"The very churches that are bottom-up, team-based, flattened-hierarchy, and empowering organizational model are laity led, not clergy led," Bandy said.

In general, Bandy said: "The clergy are . behind the learning curve. They grew up and were trained in seminary in nothing but hierarchy jobs."

But that isn't always the case.

"Oddly enough, many church people put on blinders when they come to church," Bandy continued. "When they go to work or to a social-service [organization], they live in a bottom-up organizational model. But then when they go to church, it's like they check that at the door, and they want to return to something hierarchical or bureaucratic."

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## **Clergy role expectations hinder lay empowerment, Bandy says**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Traditional role expectations between clergy and laity often create an unhealthy "co-dependency" that hinders lay empowerment in churches, says church consultant Tom Bandy.

"We expect the clergy or staff to do all the continuing education, all the spiritual growth," Bandy said in an interview with FaithWorks magazine. "And they in turn will visit us every week, make sure we're taken care of in the hospital and guide us through the life cycles until we die."

"We need to break that codependency," Bandy said. "That's an addiction issue."

"It may be very painful to break, because I know many clergy who deep in their hearts would prefer that their laity not grow," Bandy said. "The climate of many traditional churches is: 'I don't want you to grow, because if you grow, you may make better sermons than me. You might be a better visitor to the sick than I am. You might be a better teacher than I am. If you grow and they see you're better, then what will I do?'"

"That kind of laity-clergy codependency," Bandy said, "is holding churches back from the passion for spiritual growth."

Ironically, Bandy said, "spiritual hunger -- the desire to go deep" is lacking in many traditional churches while thriving elsewhere. "I see it in the public," he noted, "the unchurched or those who may just have dropped out of the church."

"All kinds of people are passionate about continuous learning, constant education. People are taking community college courses. Look at all the books on the tables at Barnes and Noble on spiritual growth. All kinds of people in the public are concerned about what I would generally call spiritual things. All those people passionately interested in learning, and they are willing to learn from Oprah . or from anybody.

"There's a huge desire. I just describe it has a desire to go deep -- to reach further, to climb higher, to be stiller, to go deeper. That's a very broad target, I know. But it is a passion for spiritual growth."

"Everybody is passionate to grow and learn except traditional church members, who are not on a high learning curve," Bandy said. "That's hard to say, but you can see it constantly when you go out into the community."

Churches, using a classical educational model, instead tend to "front load" Christian learning by teaching the Bible and doctrine to children, youth and new converts, Bandy said. Longtime Christians, meanwhile, busy themselves with running the institution and its programs.

Most traditional adult Christians don't want to grow spirituality, Bandy alleged. He cited research indicating only 2 percent to 8 percent of adults in the typical church are involved in regular spiritual disciplines, such as daily Bible reading, small-group participation, personal prayer, ministry action or theological reflection.

The lack of spiritual desire and commitment is "one of the biggest obstacles" faced by those who want to see transformational growth in the church, Bandy said.

But filling that gap is one of the easiest ways to breathe new life into programs and ministries, he added, because church members who grow spiritually naturally become more involved.

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## **Churches more open to change, but obstacles remain, Bandy says**

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Tom Bandy says he is seeing a new openness in churches to what he calls "transformational change."

Bandy urges churches to develop a "genetic code," a consensus statement of core values, bedrock beliefs, a challenging vision and a focused mission. Those building blocks will define and permeate everything the church does -- while freeing clergy and laity to adapt to changing needs.

"Generally speaking, I find churches more prepared to do that today than they were even five-to-seven years ago," Bandy, a consultant with Easum, Bandy and Associates, based in Port Aransas, Texas, said in a recent interview with the Christian lifestyle magazine FaithWorks.

Yet, Bandy said, some obstacles remain in every setting.

"There are basically three kinds of people in the church," Bandy explained. "About 20 to 25 percent are rearing to go, ready to make that shift, ready to build that new genetic code and experiment wildly in a mission to the Gentiles. They're just really passionate.

"Then the largest group in the church, the second group, is about 60 to 65 percent. These are frankly wonderful, fine, upstanding people but not particularly imaginative. Traditional kind of a people, but they are healthy people. They are coachable people. You give them a video, they'll watch it. You talk to them, they'll listen to you. .

"And the third group, that 10 to 15 percent, are the controllers. I describe them as not-healthy people. They're dysfunctional people. And by dysfunctional I mean these are people for whom no coaching, no education, no training would help . because what they need is therapy, not education. Dysfunctional leaders are people who have a need to control.

"The hard thing is, the longer your church is in decline, the more you magnetically attract those dysfunctional people. So what happens when you want to change? You're in a tough place, because if you don't begin changing, the 20 percent who are rearing to go will get up and leave."

If a church does chart a new course and embrace change, Bandy said, a different group will likely leave, the controllers.

"Bottom line, you're going to lose somebody in the next 10 years. That's the hard thing. The good news [is] if you are willing to transform and change, you will have more impact in missions and you will involve more people in you're church than ever before. But there will be a price to pay."

Bandy said the issue of worship style is where conflict most often emerges in churches, but that is only a symptom. "If you really track it down, there is nothing theological about it. It really is all about control. It's all about imposing my way, how I experience the power of God, and trying to impose that on everyone else. For me, most of the fighting around worship or music does not lead me to talk about theology or beliefs. It leads simply to talk about issues of control and power and how people exercise power over other people."

"One of the ways churches traditionally exercise power is through worship," he continued, "not through the boards, not through the finances even, but by simply controlling the worship and music that you allow people to use.

"I believe that what diffuses conflict around music and worship is when you have that [clear] sense of identity."

There isn't one plan or magic formula for transforming a church, Bandy said. "I would warn transformational leaders that just like the top-down world is over, so also the strategically planned world is over.

"Transformation is very messy business. . It's not organized. It's not a strategic plan that you follow over five years."

He suggested, however, "four major leverage points" in the church that can be catalysts for change:

- Mentoring core leaders
- Improving adult faith formation
- Upgrading technology
- Transforming or multitracking worship

Where do you start? "You start wherever the stress is the least and the opportunity is greatest," Bandy said.

Starting is important because delay could be costly.

"I don't think any church is going to be able to survive with business as usual. But the pace of change

will vary from place to place. There are some churches that can carry on probably for seven to 10 to 15 years, doing much the same things as they are now -- the same staff configurations, the same worship strategy, the same overall mission strategy."

"There is a window of time, but it's very difficult to measure. I have seen it many, many times. There's a moment when the tide is in, the wind is right, the moment is right, so to speak. And you can miss the moment. You begin to lose critical mass. You begin to attract too many dysfunctional people. You no longer have the financial resources or whatever. You simply can't make the transformation."

How big a window depends on many circumstances, including demographic changes and community transition, Bandy said. But it's getting smaller all the time.

"Unlike the past, when they gave you time, the public today is very impatient. If they don't see you seriously undertake systemic change, transformation, in your church within a certain period of time, they will give up on you. They'll walk away and they'll join another church. Or it might be a 12-step program or even another religion. But they're going to go, and you will not be able to drive them back."

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