



## Do Our Assumptions Still Fit?

by Lovett H. Weems, Jr.

Peter Drucker maintains that organizational problems are not the result of groups doing things poorly or even doing the wrong things. Organizations fail, he contends, because the assumptions on which the organization was built, and on which it is being run, no longer fit reality. Could our congregations be taking for granted some things that were safe assumptions in the past, but no longer fit? Consider the following:

- *People in our communities are religious.* The only religious preference that grew in every U.S. state since 2001 was “no religion.”
- *There are lots of “young families with children.”* Married couples with children under 18 living at home represented 50 percent of households in the 1950s; today, only 25 percent.
- *Most adults are married.* Married couples now make up just under 50 percent of adult households in the U.S.
- *Young adults get married in their twenties and early thirties and return to church.* Married people are more likely to attend church; but of young adults between 25 and 35, just over half are single.
- *Making our budget is a sign of vitality.* Perhaps. But some churches have more money because a higher proportion of their membership is over age 50, the group with 70 percent of the wealth in the country.
- *People find us through the newspaper or Yellow Book.* Increasingly, the first place a person learns about your church is the Internet.
- *Most people in our community already attend a church.* The percentage of unchurched people has increased in virtually every part of the U.S. in recent years. And do not be misled by the polls showing that over 40 percent of people worship each week. The actual attendance numbers do not back that up.
- *Many people have moved away.* This is true in some areas, but churches can be too quick to jump to conclusions. Often the children of church members have moved away; but there are new residents, often less well off, who have moved in. How else does a new church succeed in a building once used by a congregation that died because “all the people have moved away”?
- *There is one right way to worship.* A church member told a pastor, “I don’t like guitars in worship.” The pastor replied, “That’s exactly what people said when the organ was introduced.” Many worship practices considered normative today emerged out of a particular era and context that may have changed.

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