



Preparing for Amazement Ministries

Empowering and equipping churches and leaders to create lasting and transformational health.

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Dear _____,

The church in the United States is in its most perilous position in all of its history.

Consider the following stats from reputable sources such as Barna, Pew and others:

- 40% of US churches are at risk of closing in the next year.
- 38% of US pastors are considering leaving the ministry altogether. This is up from 23% less than a year ago.
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, at least 9% of churches in the United States were plateaued or declining.

It is an important time in the life of the church in the United States, and we are working hard to empower and equip churches and leaders to create lasting and transformational health. Outside the work of God through the Gospel, health trumps all in the church and its leaders. Health is the greatest indicator in the effectiveness and longevity of a church. Unhealthy churches cannot produce healthy disciples of Jesus.

We have added two part time staff and are expanding our support services to churches, pastors and church staff. We are also looking forward to re-engaging our international ministry where we bring education and training to developing areas around the world where pastors and leaders do not have access to education and training. This work also helps us better serve the church in North America as well. We are growing our Pastors4Pastors initiative daily. We had 7 participants in November of 2021 and were up to more than 40 by February of 2022.

Consider these testimonies from Pastors4Pastors participants:

"Thank you today for so much, but most importantly for a safe place."

"I am so weary I need this."

"This is such an important ministry for my health."

"Ministry is so isolating I am glad I can be authentic here."

On the back of this page we have included some testimonies from our work in case you are interested. We have also included an article that was posted on our blog recently. We encourage you to check out our social media, YouTube channel and website, especially the stories of testimonies.

With the reach of our ministry growing, we want to thank the many of you who have been generous in praying for and supporting Preparing for Amazement through your generosity. We can't do this without you. As we look for the future and the good work that's in front of us, I'd like to invite you all to consider making our ministry a part of your regular Kingdom stewardship. In addition to the support many of your one-time gifts have provided, we are asking you to consider giving that amount on an annual basis as you are able. For our monthly contributors, we are inviting you to commit at least at the current giving level and to discern if you can give more. If you have not yet partnered with us financially, we are looking for 200 partners to commit to at a level of 50 or 100 dollars a month. Of course, any amount is welcome and will be put to good use. As always, we aim to be accountable and accessible when it comes to our partners. If you have any questions for us, please don't hesitate to ask.

Rev. Dr. Marcus J. Carlson, Executive Director

Look at the nations and watch— and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Habakkuk 1:5

Testimonies

"Pastoring leaders and churches toward health impacts real people. I am one of them. God sent Marcus to me when I hit the wall and Marcus helped lead me through it. Know I am deeply grateful and sense the other side of the wall. May you be encouraged as you press on as Christ compels you."

Jen Binford, Boise, ID

"In the Fall of 2020, Pastor Marcus Carlson came to our church to help lead our church into a new era of growth and spiritual leadership. His guidance and encouragement have helped our congregation grow and become a much more vital and healthy congregation. His personality invites conversation of all age levels to be heard and then takes that information to give much needed feedback for going forward. His knowledgeable insight into what is needed to not only go forward as a healthy church, but also a church who loves Jesus and wants to invite and share this love with others. Our church was blessed for his incredible love and dedication to us!"

Lucy Walker, Lay Leader, Spring Branch, TX

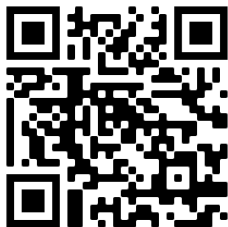
"The United States has become one of the largest mission fields on the planet. Many congregational leaders and pastors now find themselves leading churches in need of revitalization and recalibration in order to join Jesus on his mission. Marcus Carlson, with revitalization and servant-leadership experience, has mentored and coached me in my own ministry setting. With the heart of a pastor, he has walked alongside me – bringing encouragement, insight, and accountability. With the passion of a visionary practitioner, he has inspired and equipped me to lead God's people into a missionary lifestyle."

Rev. Jonathan Haseley, Pastor, Omaha, NE

"The seminar on "Leading through Change" is very insightful for pastors and leaders who serve in established congregations that aim to become more missional in their local contexts. Moreover, Marcus' networking through this organization will enable seminarian students like me to have the same opportunity to intern in American congregations, gaining cross-cultural experience that will impact their future ministries in their home countries."

~Andre Vogel, Brazil

View more testimonies here:



Learn how to support our work here:



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It's Time to Sound the Alarm!

The Church in the U.S. is in Trouble, Big Trouble

The sky might actually be falling.

The Church in the United States is in the most perilous position in its history.

Don't misunderstand what I am saying here. The church of Jesus Christ will never die, not in the U.S. and not anywhere else around the world. The church of Jesus Christ is people, the followers of Jesus. For that reason, the Church will never die as there will always be followers of Jesus.

While the Church of Jesus Christ will never die, local expressions of that Church have died, are dying and will die.

Consider the following statistics from reputable faith-based researchers including Barna, Pew and others:

- 40% of US churches are at risk of closing in the next year.
 - In recent years, that number was closer to 10%.
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic:
 - 70% of US churches were in decline.
 - 20% of US churches were plateaued.
 - 9% of US churches were growing only by transfer of members.
 - 1% of US churches were growing by reaching new people.
- Currently, 38% of US pastors are considering leaving the ministry altogether. This is up from 23% less than a year ago.
- The average church currently has an attendance that is 43% of pre-pandemic numbers.

I work with churches, pastors, staff and lay leaders on a daily basis. Based on my experience and observations, these numbers are accurate (at best) and conservative (at worst), because pastors/leaders are growing weary. Each week I hear from a pastor on the edge, ready to leave their job or ministry altogether.

Why? Crisis is an accelerator. As a society, we have become more divisive and angry. We are all emotionally fatigued from the challenges of the last couple years. This anger, anxiety and fatigue has oozed into the church and plays out in profound emotional ways in our churches. During the pandemic, pastors were forced to choose between two options, each of which would make 50% of the congregation unhappy. People in churches are taking their anger and anxiety out on their pastors and staff, saying and doing things they would never consider doing to anyone else in their lives.

Churches who were unhealthy before the pandemic have started to crumble. Churches that were healthy before the pandemic have thrived. Unfortunately, the vast majority of churches, pastors and church staff are unhealthy.

Crisis is also revelatory. It reveals our priorities, our heart, our attitudes, our motivation. For many, the global Covid-19 pandemic has been a moment of great growth, health and reprioritization. For others, the pandemic has only enflamed their already toxic attitudes and habits.

The Church has lost sight of its primary mission, to share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (God's unconditional love and grace) and to make disciples of all nations.

Instead, in this time of conflict and uncertainty, we have focused on sustaining institutions instead of bringing the Gospel to a world that needs it more than ever. Our focus has been getting people to come back into our buildings instead of loving a hurting world. This is more than just naive. It is contradictory to the scripture and the early church, which never needed institutions or buildings to be the church.

Leadership guru Patrick Lencioni notes that 'organizational health trumps everything.' At Preparing for Amazement Ministries, we have come to realize an important corollary concept to this: in the church, its pastors and its leaders, outside of the work of God through the Gospel, health trumps everything.

Health trumps.

That is the answer to the challenges that the church in the US is facing. Health. Why does health matter? Health matters, because outside the work of God through the Gospel it is the most important factor in the effectiveness and longevity of a church. Why does health matter? Health matters because without it we cannot be the church that God created us to be, a church that imitates the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus. A church that models the early church in its context, a church that loves God, others and the world well. Why does health matter? Health matters because without it making disciples is impossible. As individual churches our focus should not be on being the biggest church, having the nicest building or most charismatic staff. Rather, our focus should be on being the healthiest church we can be and helping our pastors, staff, leaders and congregation find lasting and transformational health.

It's time to sound the alarm. The church in its current form in the US is in trouble. If something doesn't change, the church as we know it may not exist for our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

The challenges are complex and real, but the solution is simple: health. Health trumps.

Dr. Marcus J. Carlson, Executive Director