



# THE PASTOR'S PEN

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## A Church on Fire...

One of the hot topics that church leaders in the U.S., Europe and South America are dealing with today is the decline of church membership in most all of the denominations of Christendom. Everywhere you read about the decline of mainstream religions and the exodus of those under thirty-five from our churches, it seems that dozens of possible explanations are given to identify the problems of the modern church. Truthfully, some of the explanations make no more sense than a joke told by a three-year-old. In other articles and books, researchers have tried to figure out the problems in the church today so that someone else might come up with a solution. To help put the problem into a proper perspective, please allow me to share a simple story with you to illustrate the real issue at hand.

During a recent ecumenical gathering of ministers and priests in town, a secretary rushed into the meeting shouting, "The building is on fire!"

The Methodists immediately gathered in the corner and prayed.

The Baptists cried, "Where is the water?"

The Quakers quietly praised God for the blessings that fire brings.

The Lutherans posted a notice on the door, declaring the fire was evil.

The Roman Catholics passed the plate to cover the damage.

The Jews posted symbols on the doors, hoping the fire would pass.

The Congregationalists shouted, "Every man for himself!"

The Fundamentalists proclaimed, "It's the vengeance of God!"

The Episcopalians formed a procession and marched out.

The Christian Scientists concluded there was no fire.

The Presbyterians appointed a chairperson who was to appoint a committee to look into the matter and submit a written report.

The secretary grabbed the fire extinguisher and put the fire out.

Hopefully you got the point of this parable. It is not to ridicule other religious groups, but to point out just how out of touch most churches are with people and the issues of today. Most of those leaving the church are exiting because the church has lost its relevance to them and where they are at in their life. Many churches have become more concerned with structure, style and what they want to be, than with dealing with the needs of the people around them. If the church does not deal with the issues and problems that its people are facing in a practical, helpful way; then what good is the church to them?

What is important for all of us to understand is that Jesus did not call us to come to church and sit in a pew; He called us to be the Church and serve others. Until we are willing to love our neighbor as ourselves and prove it by our actions, the exit lines will only get longer and longer. Real fellowship, genuine friendship, sincere care, true concern, actual love, reaching out in meaningful service, meeting spiritual needs, dealing with the physical worries of others are all required for the Church to grow and be a vital part of the community where it is found.

You want to see your church on fire? You want to see your church grow and prosper? You want to see your church be a beacon of faith for the next generation? The answer is simple. It is the same as the answer to the question: "What are you doing that makes you a living, active part of the Church today?"

Leaving the sidelines behind,

*James*