

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 1/22/2024

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, January 23 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who serve us as customers in the various businesses we frequent. Ask that GOD bless them in their employment and give them adequate income from their work. Seek to show appreciation for their efforts at service.*

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With the decline in worship attendance in Christian churches, there is greater concern about getting more members. We must remember, however, that JESUS did not call us to make members but rather to make disciples. Evangelism should be a priority in congregations and among its members. Bringing people to CHRIST is the goal of disciple-making, though that mission is supported through other church practices like worship, education, fellowship, stewardship, mission, and so on.

A recent article by Jane Andrews talked about the reasons why people aren't religious anymore. Understanding the whys for people moving away from worship can help us to deepen our effectiveness in making disciples.

1) Disappointed by Religious Institutions - The reported controversies and scandals of religious leaders and institutions have turned people off to the Church. Unfortunately, the actions of some few overshadow the good work of many. The media is far more interested in the stories of congregational and pastoral failure than in the positive efforts of the Church to make a difference in the world. We need to tell those helpful representations of what the Church truly is.

2) Science vs. Religion – There is much more we can prove today than there was even a few decades ago. Many prefer empirical truth to the faith-based teachings of religion. It has not helped that many parts of the Church have made it an either-or proposition instead of embracing that GOD works through scientifically proven processes that also show the power and wisdom of GOD.

3) The Desire for Personal Freedom – Strict religious requirements can seem limiting. Traditional religious practices can feel restrictive or impossible to meet. The message of freedom through faith in CHRIST is being dominated by rules that fail to meet people where they are at, and allowing them to grow into the spiritual life GOD wants for them to discover.

4) Judgmental vs. Love – JESUS interacted with many who did not meet the values of the Church of HIS day. HE accepted people who came and invited them to recognize GOD's unconditional love for all people. When faced with the choice between friends and even family and the Church which seems to condemn some of those beloved people, many are rejecting the Church. They simply don't want to be a part of something that rejects those who matter to them.

5) Chasing Material Success – The pursuit of career goals, financial security, public recognition, and personal power often leaves little or no room for spiritual pursuits. People are more focused on what matters now than those things that are less measurable and tangible within the life of faith.

6) Access to Diverse Beliefs – Today's world provides great opportunities to learn about different ideas and beliefs. Being aware of the different practices and teachings of varied viewpoints is leading some to create "designer religions" that contain a spectrum of beliefs than those from just one set of values or teachings. At the very least, it is leading people to question and rethink their own beliefs.

Some of these shifts in spiritual practice are having a tremendous impact on the Church today. As you can imagine, sharing faith in the face of these perspectives seems formidable. JESUS, however, never promised

that making disciples would be easy. Nevertheless, HE calls us first to be faithful in our efforts to help people connect with GOD. Second, HE promises what many of us fail to recognize and trust—the promised and present HOLY SPIRIT that will guide us and equip us to share what we have found in our home congregations: a place to belong, to grow in our discipleship, help for our witness, and a center for our relationship with the LORD.

In CHRIST's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey