

BECOMING ALL SAINTS

All Saints Lutheran Church Congregation Development & Education

When you get anxious reading this, pray.

A MESSAGE FROM THE TRANSITION AND CALL COMMITTEES

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phillipians 4:6-7

We want to start out with saying right away that the information we are going to share with you in the next few pages caused anxiety in our committees. In the transition interviews and the Spring Forward While Looking Back Celebration, many of you have talked about the "good old days" when All Saints was flourishing, attendance was high, children attended Sunday School in masses, and the longevity of the church wasn't a thought. In those same interviews, we talked about the best parts of All Saints, where our passion, time, and money go within All Saints, and what we want for the future.

Many of you shared concerns about the shrinking numbers - less attendance, less programs, and less money to support our budget. We reveled in the wonderful parts of All Saints and quietly absorbed the downfalls. As we combined answers from our congregation members, we agreed that we can't continue all things as they have been. But, how do we revitalize and will we be successful?

It is possible, but we have to be proactive in prayer, self evaluation of church and ourselves, and we can't be complacent in taking action.

The Transition committee discussed the signs of decline at All Saints prior to reading "Autopsy of a Deceased Church" by Thom S Rainer. However, this book revealed more than we anticipated. In the following pages, we will share what we learned. We ask you to pray deeply. If you're at loss for words, find time to be still and ask God to join you.

God cares for you. He knows what is on your heart, and will be with you.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6-7

Scripture to Study and Contemplate

FAITH IN GOD (HEBREWS 11: 1-16)

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. 2 For by it the people of old received their commendation. 3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. 5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

DON'T GRUMBLE, REJOICE! (PHILLIPIANS 2: 12-18)

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”[c] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

THE GREAT COMMISSION (MATTHEW 28: 16-20)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



Who is Thom S. Rainer?

A little about the author of the books we recommend

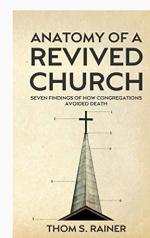
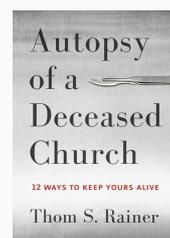


Thom S. Rainer is the founder and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource for church leaders. Prior to founding Church Answers, Rainer served as president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. Before coming to LifeWay, he served at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for twelve years where he was the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism. He is a 1977 graduate of the University of Alabama and earned his Master of Divinity and Ph.D. degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to speaking in hundreds of venues over the past 20 years, Rainer led Rainer Group, a church and denominational consulting firm, from 1990 to 2005. The firm provided church health insights to over 500 churches and other organizations over that period.

Rainer and his wife, Nellie Jo, have three grown sons: Sam, Art and Jess, who are married to Erin, Sarah and Rachel respectively. The Rainers have ten grandchildren: Canon, Maggie, Nathaniel, Will (with the Lord), Harper, Bren, Joshua, Collins, Joel, and James.

He is the author of more than two dozen books, including *I Am a Church Member*, *Breakout Churches*, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, and *Anatomy of a Revived Church*. Read more at churchanswers.com.



Want to read more?

These are the four books by Thom S. Rainer we will be referencing:

[*Autopsy of a Deceased Church*](#)

[*Anatomy Of A Revitalized Church*](#)

[*Becoming A Welcoming Church*](#)

[*I Am A Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference*](#)

Click on each title above to be taken to a Smile.Amazon link for purchase. Don't forget to select All Saints to receive a charitable donation from your purchase.

EIGHT SIGNS YOUR CHURCH MAY BE CLOSING

Thom S Rainer

"We call it the death spiral.

I know. It's not a pleasant term.

I can understand if it causes you to cringe.

By the time I am contacted about a serious problem in a church, it is often too late.

The problems are deeply rooted, but the remaining members have been blind to them, or they chose to ignore them. There are eight clear signs evident in many churches on the precipice of closing. If a church has four or more of these signs present, it is likely in deep trouble. Indeed, it could be closing sooner than almost anyone in the church would anticipate."

1-THERE HAS BEEN A NUMERICAL DECLINE FOR FOUR OR MORE YEARS.

Worship attendance is in a steady decline. Offerings may decline more slowly as the "remnant" gives more to keep the church going. There are few or no conversions. Decline is clear and pervasive.

2-THE CHURCH DOES NOT LOOK LIKE THE COMMUNITY WITHIN WHICH IT IS LOCATED.

The community has changed its ethnic, racial, or socio-economic makeup, but the church has not. Many members are driving from other places to come to the church. The community likely knows little or nothing about the church. And the church likely knows little or nothing about the community.

3-THE CONGREGATION IS MOSTLY COMPRISED OF SENIOR ADULTS.

It is just a few years of funerals away from having no one left in the church.

4-THE FOCUS IS ON THE PAST, NOT THE FUTURE.

Most conversations are about "the good old days." Those good old days may have been 25 or more years in the past. Often a hero pastor of the past is held as the model to emulate.

5-THE MEMBERS ARE INTENSELY PREFERENCE-DRIVEN.

They are more concerned about their music style, their programs, their schedules, and their facilities than reaching people with the gospel. Their definition of discipleship is "others taking care of my needs."

6-THE BUDGET IS SEVERELY INWARDLY FOCUSED.

Most of the funds are expended to keep the lights on and/or to meet the preferences of the members. There are few dollars for ministry and missions. And any dollars for missions rarely include the involvement of the members in actually sharing the gospel themselves.

7-THERE ARE SACRED COW FACILITIES.

It might be a parlor or a pulpit. It could be pews instead of chairs. It might be the entirety of the worship center or the sanctuary. Members insist on holding tightly to those things God wants us to hold loosely.

8-ANY TYPE OF CHANGE IS MET WITH FIERCE RESISTANCE.

The members are confronted with the choice to change or die. And though few would articulate it, their choice by their actions or lack of actions is the choice to die.

Churches with four or more of these signs have three choices.

They can embark on a process of change and revitalization. Or they can close the doors for a season and re-open with a new name, a new vision, and some new people.

Of course, the third choice is to do nothing.

That is the choice to die.

Thousands of churches will unfortunately do just that the next twelve months.

The Prayerful Commitment

"AND PRAY IN THE SPIRIT ON ALL OCCASIONS WITH ALL KINDS OF PRAYERS AND REQUESTS. WITH THIS IN MIND, BE ALERT AND ALWAYS KEEP ON PRAYING FOR ALL THE LORD'S PEOPLE."

EPHESIANS 6:18

At the end of each chapter of Autopsy of a Deceased Church, readers are asked a simple question:
"Will you make a prayerful commitment?"

Rainer says, "The commitment is really between you and God. Perhaps God will raise up an army of church members who are no longer satisfied with business as usual. The trauma of observing an autopsy is only beneficial if it is received as a warning to the living. This book is not about dwelling on the past, but bearing fruit in the future. The prayer commitment in each chapter is a positive challenge to take the hill so to speak, where others may have failed. The commitments are vital in this book. Because if we heed the warnings of the autopsy, we stand to benefit far greater than we could otherwise imagine." We encourage our congregation to use these as daily prayers. The first seven are below and the remaining commitments will be in Part 3 of the series.

Prayerful Commitment One

God, open my eyes that I might see my church as you see it. Let me see where changes need to take place, even if it is painful to me. And use me, I pray, to be an instrument of that change whatever the cost.

Prayerful Commitment Two

God please let me be part of the solution and not the problem. Show me what I need to see. Open my eyes to Your reality. And give me the courage to move forward in the directions You desire.

Prayerful Commitment Three

God, give me the conviction and the courage to be like the heroes of Hebrews 11. Teach me not to hold onto those things in my church that are personal preferences and styles. Show me not only how to let go, but where to let go, so that I may heed Your commands more closely.

Prayerful Commitment Four

God, give my church and me a heart for our community. Let me see the people through your eyes. And give me the courage and wisdom to let go of this church, so that others who best reflect this community can lead us and teach us.

Prayerful Commitment Five

Lord, help me to grasp that all the money I think I have is really yours. Help me to grasp that all the money our church has is not the church's but Yours. Give us healthy giving hearts to use these funds according to Your purpose.

Prayerful Commitment Six

Lord, remind me that I am to be a Great Commission Christian in a Great Commission church. Remind me that, in Your strength, I am to do whatever it takes to reach out into my community with the transforming power of the gospel.

Prayerful Commitment Seven

**Lord, open my eyes to the needs of others.
Show me how to live more like Your Son,
who always put others' interests first.**

And especially show me that attitude as I serve in my church.

think...

talk...

pray.

Think about the following questions and take some time for self reflection. Talk about them with friends, family, or another church member. Pray about the questions and the answers and use them to guide you through the week.

- If All Saints was given a "physical exam" today based on the article *Eight Signs Your Church May Be Closing Soon*, what do you think the doctor's diagnosis would be: healthy, slightly sick, very sick, or dying? Why?
- Are there any areas at All Saints where you are resisting change simply because of your own preferences?
- Look at Hebrews 11:13-16 and discuss it in light of churches that die holding onto the past.
- Does All Saints try to reach and minister to its community, even to the point of giving up authority to better reach the people? Explain your yes or no.
- Why do most dying churches have members who are nostalgic about the "good old days?" What are the biblical implications of that mindset?
- Look at and describe the different parts of Matthew 28:19-20. Is All Saints more obedient or disobedient to those biblical commands?
- What is the relationship between Jesus' promise to always be with us in Matthew 28:20, and a mind-set that focuses on one's own comfort?
- What are some unfortunately common areas where church members insist or demand their own preferences? Why do you think that happens?
- Pull out your Bible and read 1 Corinthians Chapter 12. Relate the passage to how we are to have the right attitudes and actions in our church. Where do you feel you fit in by attitude and action? Where do you want to be? Where does God want you to be? Pray about it and ask someone else to do the same.

Pray for A New Pastor

Heavenly Father,
We thank you for being with us during this time of transition and leading us where you want us to go. Please guide the Call Committee to search for a pastor with a heart and a vision to reach and minister to people beyond our own walls. Keep leading us to be the kind of congregation that encourages and supports our pastor, volunteers, and ministries without focus on our own personal preferences. Lead us in your Great Commission!
To You we give the glory and deep gratitude for Jesus, Your son.

Amen.



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Call Committee Update

Exciting News! The Call Committee has received word from the RMSELCA that we will receive names of four candidates on Friday, October 2nd. We will meet the next week and begin reviewing candidates to determine who we want to interview.

We ask that you would continue prayers for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we prepare for the interview processes.

We also ask that you keep reading BECOMING ALL SAINTS which is being prepared, reviewed and published by members of the Transition Committee. These educational readings and prayer will help us to develop as a congregation to be open to change and prepare us for our future.