

It's a Great Time to be the Church!



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We know our culture has changed drastically

To name a few of the changes...

Multi-culturalism, identity politics, sexual revolution, bioethical changes, economic disparity, record debt, distrust of institutions, dysfunction at all levels...

...and religiously we've gone from Protestant America to Judeo-Christian America to ?



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The changed context for ministry:

Five Popular Beliefs about Jesus

1. “The vast majority of Americans believe Jesus was a real person.
 2. Younger generations are increasingly less likely to believe Jesus was God.
 3. Americans are divided on whether Jesus was sinless.
 4. Most Americans say they have made a commitment to Jesus Christ.
 5. People are conflicted between ‘Jesus’ and ‘good deeds’ as the way to heaven.”
- “Americans’ dedication to Jesus is, in most cases, a mile wide and an inch deep.” – Barna Trends 2017



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The changed context for ministry:

The Morality of Self-Fulfillment

The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself. 91% of U.S. adults agree. 76% of practicing Christians agree.

People should not criticize someone else's life choices. 89% and 76% agree.

To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most. 86% and 72% agree.

The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. 84% and 67% agree.

While we wring our hands about secularism spreading through culture, a majority of churchgoing Christians have embraced corrupt, me-centered theology.” – Barna Trends 2017



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A context out of control:

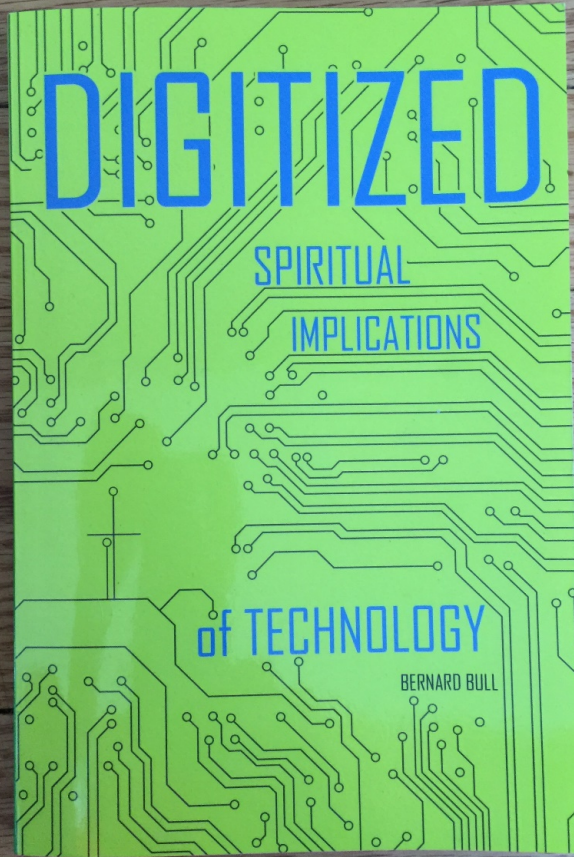
Accelerations of Change

“The twenty-first century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today’s rate of progress.” – Ray Kurzweil of Google

“The rate of technological change is now accelerating so fast that it has risen above the average rate at which most people can absorb all these changes. Many of us can’t keep pace anymore. ‘And this is causing us cultural angst.’” – Thomas Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late*



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The results of changed and changing context:

“Cultural Angst”

Legacy businesses are flailing

Government is dysfunctional

Institutional church is in decline

“Everyone’s in the dark looking for the switch. When you’re in the middle of history the meaning of things is usually unclear... In real time most things are obscure....‘Only slowly did it dawn upon us that the whole world structure and order that we had inherited from the nineteenth century was gone.’” – Peggy Noonan



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Nostalgic?

“Our frustration is driven in part by a **failure of diagnosis—a failure of self-knowledge, which in turn is rooted in a wide-spread nostalgia for midcentury America**. This nostalgia distorts our understanding of where we are and how we got here, thereby blinding us to some defining features of the present.... That nostalgia therefore makes it difficult not only to see a path out of our economic and social challenges but also to see a way past our divisions and to recover some genuine unity amid our raucous, fractured diversity.”

- Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 2016: 185-186



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The Changing Face of Ministry:

Faith in Jesus Christ!

always has been but now more clearly than ever
for ourselves
for our congregations
for our communities



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A Theological Look

Recall:

The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself. 91% of U.S. adults agree. 76% of practicing Christians agree.

People should not criticize someone else's life choices. 89% and 76% agree.

To be fulfilled in life, you should pursue the things you desire most. 86% and 72% agree.

The highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. 84% and 67% agree.



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Individualism and Its Effects

“**Individualism** involves the corrosion of people’s sense of themselves as defined by a variety of strong affiliations and **unchosen bonds** and its replacement by **a sense that all connections are matters of individual choice and preference**. It breaks up clusters of people into more isolated individuals held together by more casual affinities and more utilitarian relationships—each best understood in relation to the needs and wants of the individual. Politically **such individualism tends to weaken mediating power centers that stand between the individual and the nation as a whole—**



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Individualism and Its Effects

—from families to local communities (including local governments), **religious institutions**, fraternal bodies, civil-society organizations, labor groups, and the small and medium-sized businesses that make up much of the private economy. In their place, it strengthens individuals, on the one hand, and a central government, on the other, since such a government is most able to treat individuals equally by treating them all impersonally. For this reason, a **hyper-individualist culture is likely to be governed by a hyper-centralized government**, and each is likely to exacerbate the worst inclinations of the other.”

- Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic*, 2016; 99-100



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man
turned
in on
himself

heather
choate
davis

understanding sin in
21st-century america



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Some symptoms of “Man Turned in on Himself”

Promiscuity, consumerism, obesity, narcissism, apathy, greed.

Chaos: Each being god leads to chaos. “Chaos ‘bounces back’ to the modern man in the form of increasing anxiety and depression.”

Distrust: “Our self-centeredness turns our fellow man into our competition.” Therefore, distrust.

Affinity in virtual communities: “We therefore create ‘safe’ and undemanding simulations of community for ourselves through technology.” – Choate Davis, 44



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Where's God?

From God's side: **"The wrath of God is being revealed** from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" – Romans 1:18

God's "alien" work prepares for His "proper" work. "Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith" – Galatians 3:23-24

More dramatically than in "Christian" America, our ministry context is "Man Turned in on Himself."



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Seminaries struggle

“Mainline Protestant seminaries are facing an existential crisis after a decade of mounting red ink. Enrollment has fallen by nearly 25% over the past decade, according to the Association of Theological Schools, an accrediting agency.



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Seminaries struggle

“Mainline churches, where membership has been falling for decades, can support fewer full-time pastors than in the past. Denominations are pulling back their financial support, while the cost of educating students is rising.

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Seminaries struggle

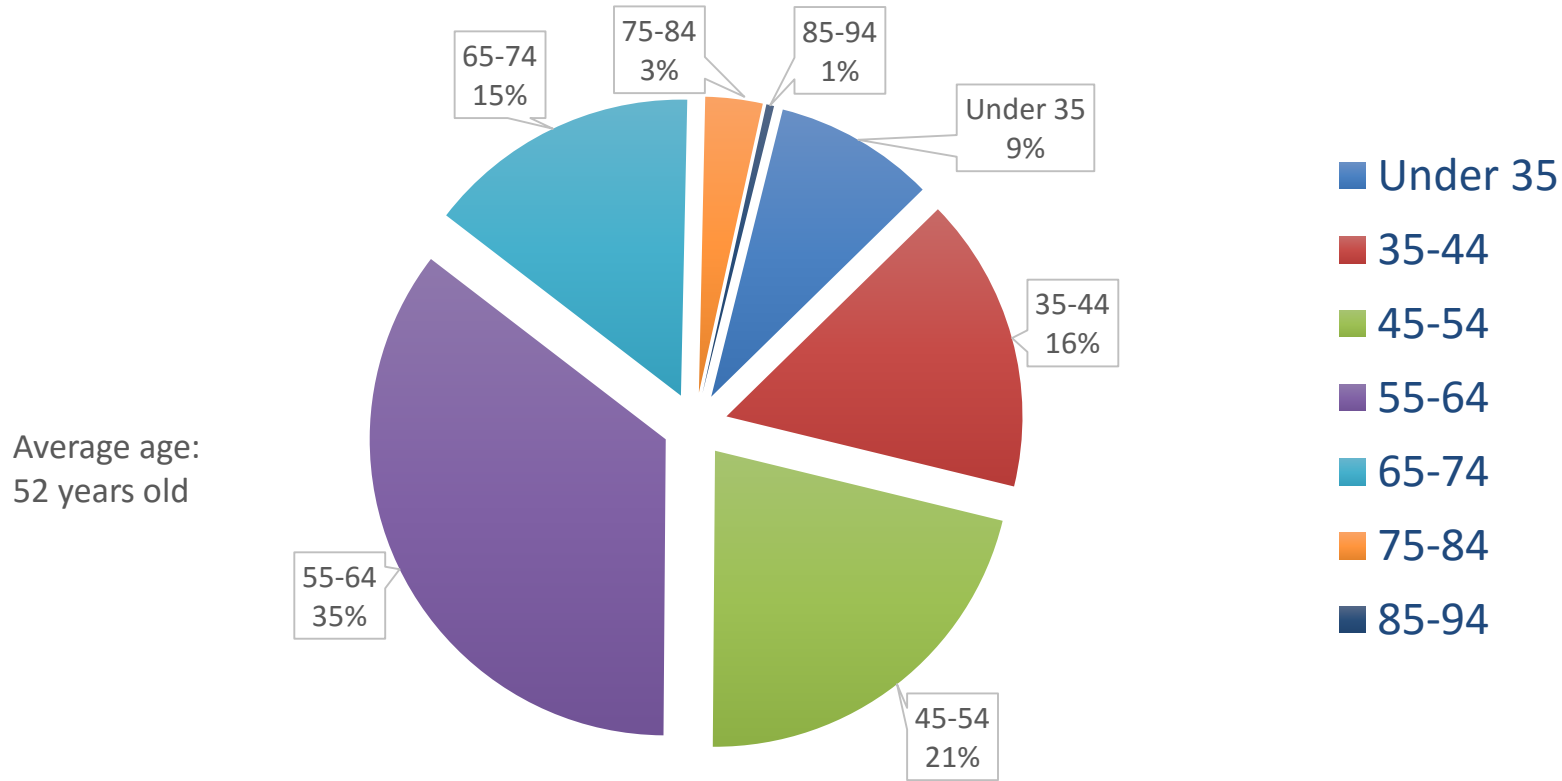
“As a result, some of the oldest and most celebrated seminaries in the country—including institutions that helped shape both Christianity and higher education in the U.S. – are on the brink of financial collapse.”

Wall Street Journal, August 11, 2017

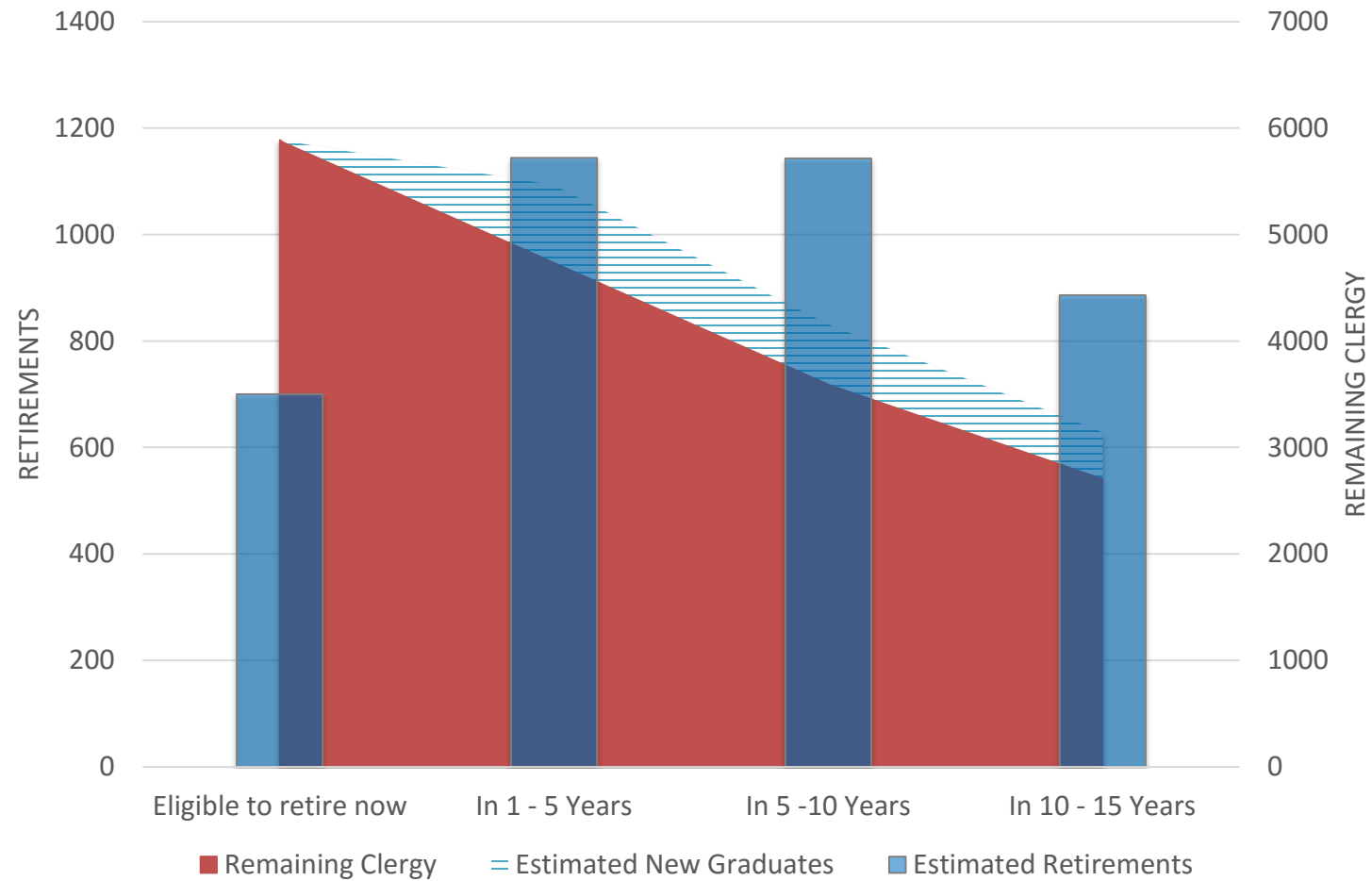


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All Active Ordained



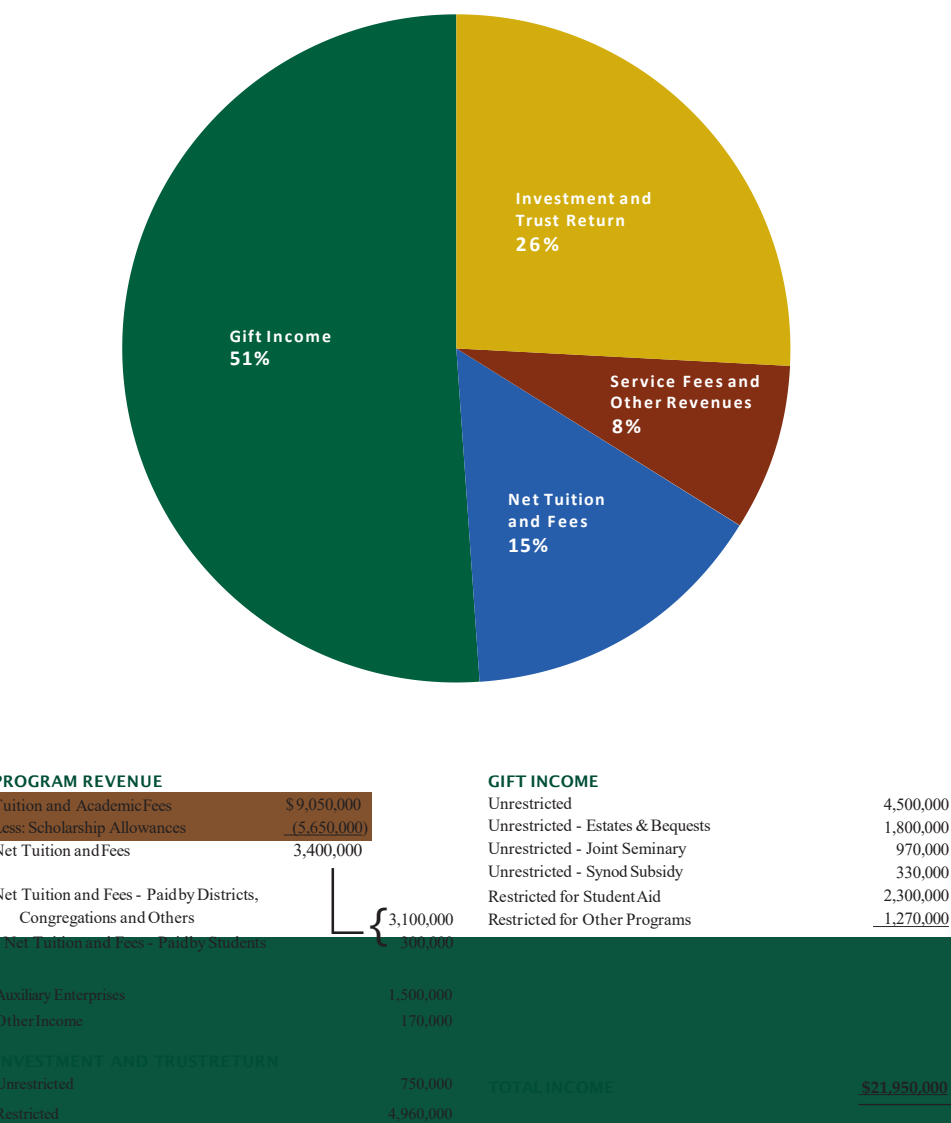
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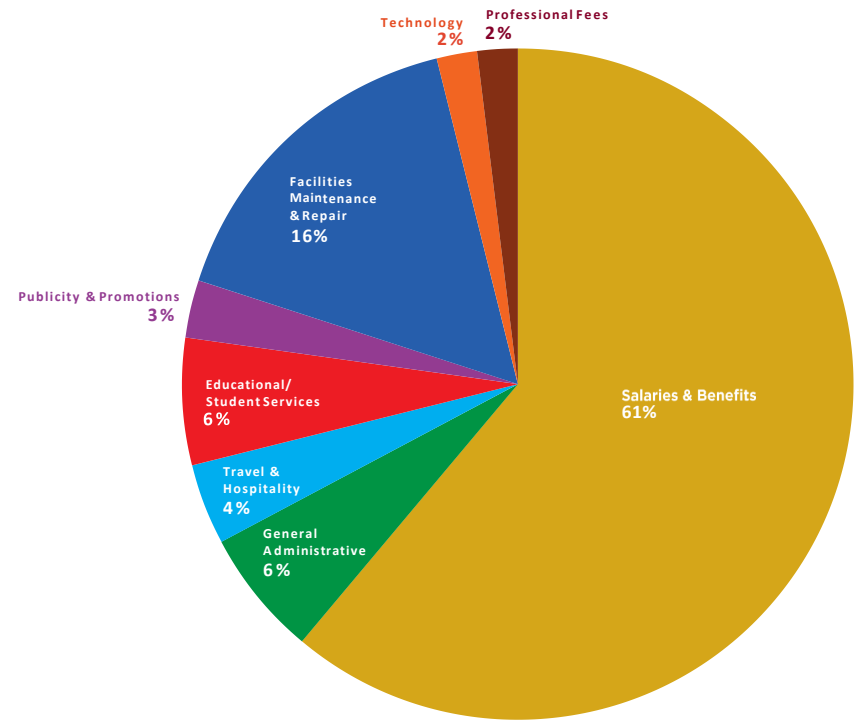
"Remaining clergy" refers to the number of ordained ministers today. It does not factor in others losses to the Roster. New graduates are an estimated projection based on current trends in "new graduates" ordained to the Roster (around 150/yr currently, but declining by an average of 5% each year).

BUDGETED SUPPORT AND REVENUE BY CATEGORY



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BUDGETED EXPENSES BY NATURAL CLASSIFICATION



EXPENSES	
Salaries and Benefits	\$13,357,000
General Administrative	1,300,000
Travel & Hospitality	854,000
Educational/Student Services	1,397,000
Publicity & Promotions	640,000
Facilities Maintenance & Repair	3,450,000
Technology	550,000
Professional Fees	402,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$21,950,000



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Accountabilities

Federal government

State government

County government

City government

Metropolitan Sewer District



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**County and city coding
requirements**

Insurance carriers

Bankers/lenders

Auditors

Accrediting agencies

Donors

LCMS



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Well positioned for challenging times!

“The ultimate soul-forming institutions in a free society are frequently religious institutions. Traditional religion offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the age of fracture. Religious commitments command us to a mixture of responsibility, sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free.”

– Yuval Levin, 204

“Putting them (soul-forming institutions) within the reach of as many of our fellow citizens as possible must be among our highest and most pressing civic callings.” – Levin, 205



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The Face of Jesus in Faith-filled ministry: The Love of the Cross

“God’s love does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. Human love comes into being through that which is pleasing to it” – Heidelberg Disputation, Thesis 28.

“This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good, which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the evil and needy person”
– From the Proof to Thesis 28



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In Closing...

How old were you on 9-11?

“Dejection is a sign of sickness, and the same thing is true spiritually. Dejection spiritually is wrong, and we are always to blame for it” – Oswald Chambers

“God is repelled by sorrow of spirit; He hates sorrowful teaching and sorrowful thoughts and words, and He takes pleasure in happiness. For He came to refresh us, not to sadden us.” – Luther in Mattes, CJ Summer, 2018; 73

It's a great time to be the Church...of our Lord Jesus Christ!



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What kind of church will they have?

