

Peter's "Top Eleven List" of Major Cultural Changes Having an Impact on the Church

Over the past forty years we have experienced an incredible degree of change in our society. This has had a significant impact on the Mainline Church in general and The Presbyterian Church in Canada specifically. Here is a summary of some of the greatest shifts that have affected the church over the past 40 years. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list. That would take a book.

The Societal Shifts We've seen...	Reasons for the Change...	Impact on the Church and New Practices that are Arising...
<p><u>Rapid Social Change:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Third Wave" (Toffler); "The Re-Norming of Society" (Fukuyama); "Bowling Alone" (Putnam); "The Technological Age"; "<u>De</u>-Constructionism"; "<u>Post</u>-modernism"; "<u>Post</u>-Christendom", "Globalization". • we know things are changing but we are unsure what we are becoming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western affluence • Rapidly changing social consciousness • Rapidly changing technology • Instantaneous global Communications. We are indeed "the global village" • Improved educational opportunities • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg Bibby notes that worship attendance in theologically conservative churches has been increasing since the 60's and will continue at least until 2015. In an age of societal uncertainty these churches offer a clarity in their sense of Christianity that many in our society find both appealing and needed personally. Bibby: "For the first time in Canadian history more Protestant teenagers identify themselves with the Conservative Church rather than the Mainline Church" • By comparison, mainline churches appear to be <i>caught</i> in the Third Wave and, like society, feeling uncertain about what is happening. • Ever since the LAMP Report of 1969 we have heard of the need for "relevance": in clergy training, preaching, modern worship music, congregational life, etc.
<p><u>Changing Role of Women:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working wives. In 1976, 76% of all Canadian mothers in traditional-looking families were stay at home moms. This has declined substantially since then. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women's liberation movement ▪ The advent of birth control in 1960 ▪ Increased participation of women in post-secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Women were the greatest pool of church volunteers in the past. Now, time constraints created by being in the workforce and having busy families has put pressure on this. ▪ It is common for young people who were involved in church in their childhood and teen years to drop out of church involvement as young adults. The period of non-involvement tended to be from high school graduation until the birth of a first child. In recent

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<p><u>Changing Role of Women:</u> (Cont'd)</p>		<p>decades, the average time between marriage and the birth of a first child has increased significantly, which causes young adults to stay away from church life even longer. Consequently, the new <u>longer</u> habit of non-involvement is reducing the proportion of young adults returning to church.</p>
<p><u>Individualism and Pluralism:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising Individualism is expressed today through: consumerism, freedom of choice, democratization. It has fostered great diversity in our society. • Individualism means people are the final arbiter of truth rather than institutions. • The value of pluralism allows for different choices and truths to co-exist among people. ▪ Pluralism insists on respect for diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism has always been a part of our culture, but it has been growing in strength since the mid-1900's. • Individualism is supported by freedom. We define freedom as liberation ("freedom from...") and choice ("freedom to..."). One reduces limitations and the other maximizes possibilities. • People older than 50 tend to maintain their sense of self-identity through their belonging to organizations. The younger generation, raised more strongly in individualism, does not have as much need to belong to support their sense of self-identity. As a consequence they are less likely to be joiners of organizations, including churches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainline churches depended on homogeneity for growth (the children we raise, the ethnic group of our community, the immigrants to our country). Canada has moved from "homogeneity" to "mosaic" at all levels • Diversity means there can be quite a range of opinion in Presbyterian congregations regarding worship styles, contemporary music, homosexuality, Satan, universalism vs. the need for salvation, The Burns Supper, specific decisions of the Session, etc. Recent studies of the PCC have all highlighted a high incidence of congregational conflict. • It becomes harder to preach and teach "authoritatively" in diverse congregations. Preaching moves from telling people what is true to helping people be their own theologian (Wade Clark Roof). • A strong value for individualism can make it hard for some today to appreciate the meaning of participating in a <i>community</i> of faith. On the other hand, today's individualism leaves many yearning to find community. Many congregations are trying to address this need in congregational life, outreach projects, small groups, Alpha, recovery groups, etc. • Many congregations are recognizing that they are multi-cultural, composed of a number of smaller groups each with their own unique beliefs, priorities and goals. The more a church assumes it has a monoculture the increased probability that it will lose current people and

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<p><u>Individualism & Pluralism:</u> (Cont'd)</p>		<p>not attract so many newer people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congregations respond to diversity by diversifying congregational program (eg. Offering traditional AND contemporary worship services). As an <i>extreme</i> example, Tom Bandy suggests a congregation could have both pro-life and pro-choice groups.
<p><u>Consumerism:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal needs, preferences and priorities are an important driving factor for church involvement • Churches are discovering that they are part of a religious marketplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We say that people who are looking for a new church home are “church shopping” • Our society has become a consumer culture. Many people express their identity through what they consume. • Many churches recognize that their future depends on how “appealing” they are. • Recognition that “successful” churches become known and popular. Church folk often look to successful congregations to find the magic formula for growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We see in many churches a shift from "a producer's agenda" (that is, “we do what we always do and new people have to adjust to become like us”) to a consumer-driven model for designing worship and program (that is, “what should we do to meet the needs of those we want to attract to church?”) (Lyle Schaller). • A move away from a "one size fits all" approach to ministry to highly diverse programs that appeal to a range of interests. • Responding to need and local realities is becoming more of the motivation for ministry. This also means a shift away from supporting denominational causes and using their resources to responding to the desires and needs of those in the congregation. • The urgency to offer quality in worship, programming as well as in the church's facility to improve the appeal of a congregation. People expect quality in all that they participate and purchase in life. They want that kind of quality in their church life as well. <p>There is a move to increase "entertainment" in worship. (eg. Ginghamsburg UC Church An increasing number of churches are defining their “brand” or targetting their “market niche” in order to be successful. New ways of becoming appealing are designed: café churches, worship driven by bands with guitars and drums, specialized ministries .</p>

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<p><u>The De-Institutionalization of Spirituality:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church has moved from the center of life to being an option in life. • The majority of Christians do not believe that belonging to a church is necessary • There is a growing number of suppliers of religious services: retreat centers, authors, spiritual thinkers, other religions... • The disconnect of spirituality from institutions has increased an attitude of spiritual "questing" • In Canada, 2/3's of all those who "believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God" never go to church. The majority of Christians in Canada are "free lance Christians". 	<p>"Religion a la carte" (Bibby): in a culture of individualism and relative truth, people use their freedom of choice to tailor-make their own sense of personal religion. There is a tendency towards syncretism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An example: of the Canadians who can affirm the statement "Jesus Christ is the Son of God", one fifth of them also believe in reincarnation. • "We have shifted from a world in which beliefs held believers to a world in which believers hold beliefs" (Susan Harding) • Boomers, unlike their parents, do not have to belong to organizations to help affirm their self-identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a culture of religion a la carte and pluralism (having respect for the beliefs of others though different) spirituality in Canada is highly private • Many people do not desire the support and guidance of a church to help them in their spiritual formation • The Church is often seen as encrusted and rigid. Yet, on the other hand, in the fluid world of individualized spirituality the Church is also seen as a place of definition that can regularize spiritual practices and help develop one's beliefs. • Many churches have turned to various discipleship programs to help foster orthodox faith (eg. Alpha). The goal of such programs is to move people from being "spiritual tourists" to "spiritual pilgrims". • In a culture where spirituality is viewed as highly private, it can be hard to share our faith. It is noteworthy that in the USA 92% of Southern Baptists will never once share their faith. Imagine what the % is for Presbyterians! Yet, in a questing culture where people are open to the spiritual, people are more receptive to spiritual talk than we realize.

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<p><u>Urbanization:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout the 20th Century Canada has become increasingly urbanized. • In 2001 67% of Canadians lived in 30 urban locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the benefits of employment, services and opportunities • immigrants are choosing Canada's largest centers as their new home. More than 40% of Toronto's population was not born in Canada. • Urban Canada has become a "cultural mosaic" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people living in Canadian urban centers less likely to go to church compared to small town and urban dwellers. Canada's lowest rate of church attendance is found in urban centers with populations of 300,000 to 1,000,000. • in the PCC our congregations in large urban centers have been the source of the majority of our membership loss since the 60's -- a trend going in the opposite direction of the rapid urban growth over the same period. That being said, in 2001 54% of the total PCC membership lived in Canada's 30 largest urban centers. • Urbanization has contributed to rural population decline and the subsequent closure of rural congregations. • Large urban centers allow for the development of regional "mega churches". In the USA 50% of all worshippers now attend 10% of the churches. Canada is beginning to catch this American experience. For example, 10% of all worshippers in Calgary attend only 10 churches. "Corporate style" churches can offer diversity, quality programming and anonymity. • Much of urban new church development targets culturally distinctive groups. Immigrants are more likely to attend church than Canadian born. Reg Bibby reports that non-Christian immigrants convert to Christianity at a surprising rate.

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<p><u>The Frantic Life:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Busy-ness, shifting priorities and changing interests the major reason for adults under 50 dropping out of church involvement • The time crunch leads people to be cautious about what they do with their time. • A consequence is reduced "civic engagement" (participation in groups, clubs, church life). More people are "bowling alone" (Robert Putnam) • The 2000 demographic study of the PCC showed that our #1 source of member loss is baby boomers dropping out of involvement. #2 source of member loss is death. 	<p>Frantic life is the result of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two working parents and single parent families both lead to time pressures. • length of average work week increased over past decade. • increased range of options for leisure time as well as increased prosperity to afford them • highly programmed kids • commuting time and commuting stress • reaction: we have moved from "cocooning", to "burrowing" to "the armoured burrow" (Faith Popcorn) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boomers are half as likely to give time to their church mid-week compared to their parents generation • Adding new worship times (eg. Saturday night, Wednesday noon in city centers) to accommodate busy schedules. • Home Group / Small Group movement: meets needs of a "cocooning" generation for support and community. • Taking the church to the people (internet, email, voicemail, Bible studies in the office place, churches in malls, on-line Bible studies) • Increase church staffing to compensate for reduced volunteerism • Orientation in congregational life to make it as easy as possible to participate and contribute. A movement away from "membership for life" on standing committees ("Marathon" orientation) to short term, single purpose task groups ("Sprinter" orientation). • Movement towards short term Bible studies. "Not more than five weeks long" (Kennon Callahan). One Calgary Church offers Alpha over two consecutive Saturdays. • Movement to make church involvement more meaningful: participate in a way that uses spiritual gifts, view church participation not as "volunteerism" but rather as "ministry"; integrating spiritual growth and the experience of community into service opportunities. When people find church involvement more meaningful they make time in their busy schedules.

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<p><u>The Therapeutic Society</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are the Woody Allen and Dr. Phil generation People are no longer content to live with their issues and problems... they want solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the age of couples therapy, ADD / ADHD, Ritalin, "twelve step", "self-help" "support" and "recovery" groups, Prozac, rampant depression, late night infomercials with Anthony Robbins and a currency of pop psychology in society. Therapy has gone from being something to be ashamed of to being a badge of honour. Its popularity stems in part from characteristics similar to religion: therapy fosters personal meaning and encourages moral and spiritual transformation. People often turn here to meet their need for a stronger interior world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the USA the whole "small group" movement is huge: support groups, recovery groups, church groups. Robert Wuthnow reports that 40% of Americans are in some form of support group, 10% have been and 10% want to join one. This is not as common in Canada. Many churches are responding by creating their own group support systems. The creation of small groups in church life for Bible study, prayer, mutual support and fellowship is very popular in many churches. Other churches have created their own collection of "recovery" and "life change" style groups. It is common to hear people asking for sermons that speak to the common realities of life, which provide Biblical / spiritual / practical advise to help in daily living. Many people today expect preaching to be a form of therapy itself. This has become so common among evangelical churches that the trend is now being criticized. It is the "Oprahfication of preaching" (Coutts)
<p><u>From Objective Knowledge to Subjective Experience</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A shift in what we depend on to confirm for us what is true We live in a time when experience is desired simply for the sake of the experience itself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In a mosaic culture of relative truth, one needs something to authenticate beliefs as true. This comes from personal experience: "If this is my experience, then it must be true" We want to <i>experience</i> life fully: world travel, home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among many there is a desire in worship to gain a greater sense of God , in both transcendence and immanence. The shift from a worship <i>service</i> (oriented to God) to a worship <i>experience</i> (oriented for the worshipper): "motion and emotion are replacing passivity" (Lyle Schaller). The use of visuals is becoming very common. The consumption of coffee, tea, soft drinks and snacks <u>during</u> the worship service is becoming

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<p><u>From Objective Knowledge to Subjective Experience</u> (Cont'd)</p>	<p>theatre, spas, ethnic restaurants, Vegas. An opera presented in Portland passed out "scratch and sniff" cards to go along with the performance!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The younger you are, the more speed you want! • When I was young, "daring" meant climbing cliffs. Today it means "base jumping" (jumping off that small cliff with a parachute). Challenging experiences are now "extreme". 	<p>more common.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The world-wide explosion of the Charismatic Church during the 20th century came about, in part, because experiencing God became more important to people. • Many people desire sermons that are touching rather than informative • The highlight in the Alpha program is the retreat (a spiritual experience away from home) and the invitation to be blessed by the Holy Spirit during the weekend. Cursillo retreats are similar.
<p><u>Generational Differences:</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a rapidly changing culture people of different generations are basically raised in different cultures • Culture is greatly shaped by the tools people use. Rapid technological change is affecting culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different beliefs, values, priorities, and norms of behaviour in different generations can lead to different expectations around church life. Culture clashes can be a source of conflict in churches. • Demise of the organ: in 1977 250,000 home organs were sold in the USA. In 1991 it was 13,000. • The majority of Christians under the age of 40 prefer contemporary praise music over traditional hymns • Our generation of grandparents went to church because that is what they expected of themselves. Boomers were raised in Sunday school but many have chosen to discontinue church affiliation. The children of many Boomers today are not even getting the basic Christian socialization of Sunday school. This is a significant shift in only three generations.

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<p><u>Move from a Spirituality of Dwelling to a Spirituality of Seeking:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Wuthnow • A spirituality of Dwelling emphasizes sacred space, the primacy of feeling secure, being rooted in tradition • A spirituality of seeking emphasizes questing, the search for sacred moments to affirm one's spiritual beliefs. Seekers recognize the varied and complex spiritual options they must navigate, negotiate and choose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwellers endured the Depression and the War, and found great security, meaning and identity in church life. • Boomers grew up in a time of relative stability, freedom and affluence. They did not need places of security. • Boomers have become disconnected from the institution of the church. The consequence: they have no authorities to point them to "truth". They, therefore, need to "quest" for it on their own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwellers find freedom within the support of the faith community. Seekers find freedom away from the constraints of community. • Dwellers join in order to feel like they belong. Seekers join when they feel like they belong • People when church shopping are not looking for the "right" church or the "best" church but rather the church that most closely affirms their personal sense of what faith / church are about. They want to find <u>their</u> "home" • Seekers are prone to changing their minds as their spirituality is being negotiated continuously. Their ideas of faith and their relationship with the church can be very fluid. Dwellers are not prone to this. • Some Seekers choose "supermarket" churches that provide multiple options to choose from. Other Seekers choose "boutiques" which offers a specialty focus that they affirm (recovery, justice, community service, etc)

Three essential questions for reflection:

1. Has your congregation ever to look consciously at these many changes as a way to appreciate what is going on in your congregation and the community you serve?
2. It is common to hear the refrain, "Presbyterian Congregations never change!". Through the lens of this "Top Eleven", think about how these societal changes have had an impact on your own congregation. Does this exercise help you better appreciate how much your congregation has changed over the past generation?
3. How can your congregation imagine its future in light of these societal trends? How can your church become more responsive to these trends?