

# *Pastor's Reflections*

*By Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz*

As we consider who we are as a church—our identity, our possibilities for the future—who will our church leaders be in the second and third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Some reflections on where we are moving as a congregation.

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**Who are we and how do people find our church?** This is a topic of reflection for which pastors like me always have a keen interest. Who are the people coming to our church and how do they find us?

From my conversations with people, people find our church in three primary ways:

1. From our website, very expertly handled by Yvette Frantz. No less a person than our Conference Minister, Rev. Kent Siladi, has offered that our website ([www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)) is one of the best in the Florida Conference. I urge us all to check it out every week for updated pictures and reflections on church events.
2. From our personal invitations. In the wider church vernacular, we call this way of drawing people to our church *Invitational Evangelism*. This is historically one of the best ways of attracting new faces to our church with prospects of becoming new members. We always urge our members and friends to consider extending an invitation to a friend or an acquaintance who might be church hunting. All it takes is one positive experience for a visitor to find their new church home.
3. From random drop-ins. These are folks who have passed by our church for months or years, who have seen us in the community, and who finally decided one weekend to check us out.

My guess is that these three ways of drawing new people to our church will continue to work for us in the decades ahead. Certainly, the website is a relatively new way of reaching out. But it is increasingly effective as the age of technology becomes the common modus operandi for 21<sup>st</sup> century people.

**Where we do NOT draw new members.** Interestingly enough, our church does NOT attract new members from the private services we do with weddings, baptisms and funerals (Memorial Services).

I can think of only one family who has joined our church from the more-than 75 private baptisms I've done over these nine-plus years. And I can't think of one new member who has come to us as a result of a wedding (over 150) or Memorial Service (over 40) I've performed.

In my thirty-plus years in the ministry, such low interest in church participation and membership from these happenings has *not* been the pattern.

Part of what this suggests is that there are people in the community who want the services of the local minister/ priest but who, at the same time, are not necessarily interested in church participation or membership. On some levels, they want the church to *be there*. But they don't want to commit their time or finances to support it.

**Leadership.** Another question and concern I have is: **Who will be our new church leaders in the decades ahead?**

Always, in the church, leadership development is an important concern. Churches that do not plan for new leadership invariably go through a period of struggle when current leadership retires or moves away. I see this in churches all the time.

My concern for us at the moment is around our challenge to find new leaders among our younger adults (by *younger*, I mean under fifty years of age).

Our situation is not that we lack persons with leadership ability and talent. Our church overflows with talented, gifted younger persons. The larger issue seems to be one of *commitment*. Which begs the question: ***Do we need to become a higher commitment church?***

What this means is *do we need to expect more from our members* in terms of church participation and leadership? Is it fair to expect that every church member assume some level of participation (beyond worship attendance) and leadership in our church?

Questions of *commitment* are always a concern that voluntary organizations like churches deal with. On the one hand, we don't want to be demanding to the point where the joy is sucked out of church life. On the other hand, without *committed* leadership, how is our church going to embrace the second and third decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a vital sense of promise and hope?

I invite your reaction or suggestions to any of the above, as the spirit moves.