



# 2026 CONFERENCE

MARCH 16-17, 2026

## REIMAGINING CHURCH



Dr. Tracee J. Swank leads Church Doctor Ministries. She is a certified church consultant, Christian leadership coach, StoryBrand Guide, and Business Made Simple Coach. She works with pastors, ministry leaders, and Christian entrepreneurs to help them fulfill their God-given vision and mission in the Kingdom.

Tracee holds a master's degree in theological studies and a Doctor of Ministry in Kingdom entrepreneurship. She enjoys speaking at conferences, leading ministry immersion trips, and mentoring leaders in creative, Kingdom-focused projects. When not traveling for ministry, she resides in northwest Ohio with her husband, Matt, and their black Lab, Beckett. She enjoys gardening, cooking, and cheering for Ohio State University. (Go Bucks!)



J. D. Payne serves as the Thomas Welby Bozeman Chair of Christian Ministry at Samford University where he teaches missions, evangelism, and theology. He has been a professor for twenty-seven years, pastored churches for nineteen years and served with a mission agency. In 2014, he was given the Donald A. McGavran Award for significant contributions to the Church Growth Movement in the United States. He holds memberships in the Great Commission Research Network, Evangelical Missiological Society, International Society for Frontier Missiology, and Evangelical Theological Society.

J. D. has served as the book review editor for The Great Commission Research Journal. He is the author of sixteen books on missions and evangelism including *Apostolic Church Planting*, *Apostolic Imagination*, and *Understanding Evangelism*. He blogs at [jdpayne.org](http://jdpayne.org), hosts Strike the Match with J. D. Payne podcast, and produces a YouTube channel. He is married to Sarah, a physician in internal medicine and pediatrics. They have three adult children and live in Birmingham, Alabama.

# WORKSHOPS

## **Expanding Your Digital Foyer: Digitally listening to, connecting with, & meeting the needs of nones, dechurched, and others.**

*Bob Whitesel, Jan Paron, Everett Brand, John Murray, Cindy Schrader*

Expanding Your Digital Foyer explores how churches can listen to, connect with, and meet the real needs of nones, the dechurched, and spiritually curious people who may never walk through a physical door first. Grounded in the core conviction of helping churches use foresight to become future-ready, this 50-minute keynote reframes digital spaces as the church's new front door. Through four focused 7-minute talks and an interactive Q&A, leaders gain practical insight into digital listening, relational connection, and missional engagement, equipping them to anticipate cultural change and extend meaningful hospitality beyond the building and into everyday online life.

## **Innovation in Churches: A Theoretical Framework**

*David Dunaetz*

This paper presents a theoretical framework for understanding innovation in churches, emphasizing its necessity in light of challenges such as cultural changes. The model identifies six key elements: cultural context, a culture of innovation, program/process innovations, social capital, program loss, and progress toward the church's mission. It explores various types of innovation (product vs. process, radical vs. incremental, technical vs. administrative) and highlights factors that foster innovation, such as creativity, openness, future orientation, risk-taking, and proactiveness. Social capital is noted as a critical moderator of innovation success. Ultimately, the framework aims to help churches better fulfill the Great Commission.

## **Generation Z: Signs of hope and areas of needed growth**

*Daniel Price*

Using data from Lifeway Research's 2025 discipleship survey, the presentation will engage with the results from the survey with a specific focus on Generation Z respondents. The analysis will show positive actions among Gen

Z churchgoers while balancing that with questions which reveal concerning responses. This will provide leaders with information to help to engage Gen Z while addressing belief gaps.

## **Reimagining the Relational–Missional Church: Data-Driven Insights for Innovation, Renewal, and Next-Gen Leadership**

*Soo Min (James) Park*

This research presentation draws on the Relational–Missional Church Survey (2025) a nationwide study of pastors, leaders, and laity; to examine how, and how well, congregations express the Church's attributes (catholicity, unity, holiness, apostolicity) and key characteristics (Church Militant and Triumphant; Visible and Invisible Church; Marks of the Church; Baptism; Eucharist; Preaching of the Word; Church Discipline; Covenant Nature of the Church). The analysis examines (1) correlations and trends between relational–missional practices and each ecclesial attribute and key characteristic, (2) variations across leadership levels and generational, ethnic, and regional contexts, and (3) applicable insights derived from higher Likert-scale responses. The study then draws implications and derives theory- and empirically informed strategies for innovation, renewal, and next-generation leadership, offering directions for the advancement of the relational–missional Church in light of *Missio Dei* and *Relationalitas Dei* (the relationality of God shared with His people and reflected in their love and relationship with Him and with one another).

## **Predictors of Turnover Intention Among Youth Ministry Leaders**

*Steve Cullum*

Youth ministry leaders play a vital role in the discipleship of teenagers. When leaders are spiritually, emotionally, and mentally healthy, they are positioned to guide adolescents toward Christ. This research examines the organizational and ministry-specific factors that lead youth ministry leaders to consider leaving their roles. Understanding these dynamics has practical implications for reducing attrition and increasing the long-term impact of youth leaders on adolescent faith formation.

## **Measuring what Matters: Developing Kingdom-Minded Metrics of Success**

*John Husted*

In an age where traditional metrics of success continue to prevail. Where churches measure success by numbers, programs, and platforms, this workshop explores a deeper and more biblical framework for evaluating ministry impact. This workshop takes into consideration the overarching biblical theme of witness and asks the question: Can witness be a metric of success for the Church? Together, we will examine how a church's identity shapes its actions. Participants will learn how witness is a meaningful metric that the Church must take seriously in today's world.

## **Communal Co-Intelligence: A Framework for Utilizing AI in Leadership Development**

*Doug Foltz*

This session introduces communal co-intelligence, a framework for a theologically grounded integration of AI into leadership development processes. Emerging from a study of church planting coaches using AI-powered feedback, the framework demonstrates how AI can function as shared communal wisdom leveraging AI competency analysis aligned to community standards, and mentor coaching. AI handles time-intensive analytical evaluation and reporting, freeing pastoral leaders to focus on mentoring relationships. This approach addresses a critical ministry challenge: multiplying leaders without diluting organizational culture or overwhelming staff. Participants will explore design principles that preserve human agency and discernment, discover how AI can restore apprenticeship-based development in resource-constrained contexts, and examine practical applications across coaching, church planting, and broader leadership development domains.

## **In Their Own Words**

*Mark Thometz*

A presentation of recent interviews with people who have converted to Christianity since 2020. What realizations did they have in their conversions and what factors drove them to a changed life? What can

# WORKSHOPS

the church learn from new converts to Christianity? This research hopes to find the areas where the gospel message most connected to people's lives and led them to a place of conversion.

## **Understanding Contexts for Reimagination: A Study of Asian American Youth Ministries Today**

*Eunice Hong*

Despite growing concern about youth disengagement from Christianity and the Christian church (Pew Research Center, 2025), strategies specifically tailored to engage Asian American youth remain under-researched. Drawing from interviews with 16 senior pastors and youth leaders across North America, this paper presents key findings on current ministry practices, with implications of emerging approaches to foster deeper youth engagement in Asian American church contexts.

## **Missional Imagination: The Secret Sauce Behind Kingdom Innovation**

*Jay Moon*

What if the greatest barrier to kingdom impact isn't a lack of resources—but a lack of imagination?

Before innovation ever takes root, it

begins with a missional imagination—the Spirit-shaped ability to see what everyone else sees... and envision what God could do through it. In this interactive session, we'll explore why missional imagination is the necessary preparation for kingdom innovation and how it fuels fresh expressions of mission in today's changing world.

You'll discover practical tools to assess your own Missional Imagination Quotient (MIQ) and learn how to move it forward—personally, organizationally, and globally. Whether you're leading a church, conducting research, or planting movements, this session will help you identify where you are on the imagination spectrum and take concrete next steps toward greater missional impact.

Come ready to reflect, rethink, and maybe even reimagine what's possible for the Great Commission in your context.

## **Factors Contributing to Missions Mobilization in Africa: A Qualitative Study of the Ministry Commitment of Youth in the Baptist Church in Central Africa**

*Nehemie Kaserka*

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how young leaders

in the Baptist Church in Central Africa (CBCA) describe factors that contributed to their missional engagement. To conduct this basic qualitative study, data were collected online by interviewing 20 participants. The central finding of this study was that the key factors of family, church, school, mentors, peers, and stories of Western missionaries influenced the missional engagement of young people in the CBCA. However, while these factors contributed to their missional engagement, the mother in the family sector played a crucial role. Interacting with chaplains also significantly impacted the missional engagement of the youth. Additionally, stories of past missionaries with present relevance, along with the social hierarchy that encouraged the youth to confide in the elders, contributed to the missional engagement of the CBCA youth. This work contributes to the perspectives of the few African scholars who aim to advance missional theory as a framework for understanding missional movement from the Southern Hemisphere. Furthermore, on a practical level, the study encourages entities like schools and churches to give young people more opportunities to serve as a significant means of shaping their missional engagement.

## **New Researchers Cohort Launching September 2026!**

The church needs leaders who think deeply, lead boldly, and act with missional clarity. Beginning September 2026, three focused cohort tracks will launch: North American Church, Next-Gen, and Global Missiology. Applications close August 14th. Details on cost, thought leaders, and mentors are coming soon. Express your interest today by emailing GCRN or visiting the website.

## **Do we have your correct contact information?**

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[GreatCommissionResearch.Network/update](https://GreatCommissionResearch.Network/update)  
to make sure we have your information!



[info@greatcommissionresearch.network](mailto:info@greatcommissionresearch.network)  
**GreatCommissionResearch.Network**

# CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

## MONDAY, MARCH 16

- 1:00–1:15** Welcome
- 1:15–2:00** Keynote 1 (Room 128B): “Donald McGavran, the Apostolic Imagination, and Church Renewal for 2026 and Beyond – Part 1,” J. D. Payne
- 2:15–2:50** Breakout Block 1  
Room 128B “Expanding Your Digital Foyer”  
Room 128A “Innovation in Churches”  
Room 116 “Measuring what Matters”
- 3:05–3:50** Keynote 2 (Room 128B): “Purpose and Identity - Discipling Next Generation Leaders to Discover What’s Next,” Tracee Swank
- 4:05–4:40** Breakout Block 2  
Room 128B “Expanding Your Digital Foyer”  
Room 128A “Understanding Contexts for Reimagination”  
Room 116 “Predictors of Turnover Intention Among Youth Ministry Leaders”
- 4:40–5:30** Networking / Exhibit time

### Banquet (Worship Center 118)

- 5:30–5:40** Welcome to Banquet & Prayer
- 5:40–6:10** Dinner
- 6:10–6:15** Awards
- 6:15–6:30** President’s Address
- 6:30–7:00** Networking and Connection
- 6:30–9:00** Exponential Innovation Trade Show and Shark Tank



## TUESDAY, MARCH 17

- 8:00–8:05** Welcome
- 8:05–8:50** Keynote 3 (Room 128B): “Donald McGavran, the Apostolic Imagination, and Church Renewal for 2026 and Beyond – Part 2,” J. D. Payne
- 8:50–9:25** Breakout Block 3  
Room 128B “Missional Imagination”  
Room 128A “Communal Co-Intelligence”  
Room 116 “Factors Contributing to Missions Mobilization in Africa”
- 9:40–10:15** Breakout Block 4  
Room 128B “Reimagining the Relational–Missional Church”  
Room 128A “Generation Z”  
Room 116 “In Their Own Words”
- 10:30–11:15** Keynote 4 (Room 128B): “Purpose and Identity - Recognizing and Releasing Next Generation Leaders Through Innovation,” Tracee Swank
- 11:15–11:30** Closing / Next steps
- 12:00–1:30** Past President Lead Team Meeting (Off-Site)