

GROWING UP AND LEAVING HOME: MEGACHURCHES THAT DEPART DENOMINATIONS

By

Scott Thumma and Adair Lummis
Hartford Institute for Religion Research

The initial version of this paper was given as a presentation at the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association Nov. 3, 2007.

For denominational leaders, the megachurches in their fold present the challenge of an adolescent who has outgrown his parents' discipline. These leaders are well aware that megachurch pastors don't really need the denomination to play the same role that it does for smaller churches. (Thumma and Travis 2007:119).

Regional and national denominational executives very much want to keep within their folds their largest congregations, who contribute most to their coffers and draw the most attention. This gives large churches, particularly megachurches, greater independence than smaller congregations to pursue their own agendas, even within more hierarchal and connectional denominations. Megachurch leaders may still find denominational restrictions, requests, and requirements more than they can tolerate, want or value from their denominations, and seek to be completely independent from any outside Church authority. This paper discusses the relationship between megachurches and their denominations and then explores the reasons for and processes through which some of these very large churches become denominationally independent. It builds on 2005 national survey research on U.S. megachurches and subsequent interviews in 2007 with a sample of leaders who helped move their churches to independence.

I. MEGACHURCHES AND THEIR PARENT DENOMINATIONS: A Strained Relationship at Best.

Contrary to most perceptions of megachurches the vast majority are not nondenominational. Roughly sixty-five percent of the 1250 megachurches in the United States belong to one (or more) of over 50 organized denominations. The top 10 denominational affiliations account for nearly 50% of all megachurches, as the table shows.

AFFILIATION	PERCENT
Southern Baptist	16
Baptist, unspecified	10
Assemblies of God	6
United Methodist	5
Calvary Chapel	4.4
Christian	4.2

Four Square	1.2
COC – ELCA – VINE	1% each

The formal ties between the megachurches and their denominational home have been relatively substantial. Only 4 percent on megachurches surveyed changed denominational affiliation between 1985 and 2005. Just seven percent moved out of a denomination to become independent during that time period. Clearly they give a considerable amount to their respective denominations (based on studies of SBC and ELCA megachurches) and in some denominational traditions such as the Southern and National Baptist Conventions the roles of national and state convention presidents are held almost exclusively by megachurch or large church pastors.

Yet when one explores the relationship further a slightly different picture arises. The informal ties the megachurches have to their denominations are tenuous at best. In the 2000 national survey of megachurches only 37% thought the statement "Our congregation clearly expresses its denominational heritage" described them very or quite well. Likewise, just 29 percent of churches rated the authority of the denominational leaders as foundational or very important for them. Only 27 percent of these megachurches purchased worship, educational and other programmatic supplies and resources exclusively or primarily from sources within their denomination. On the other hand, 43% created their own, or bought them exclusively or primarily from sources outside their denomination.

Additionally, their congregation and network building, social ministry efforts and interactions with other churches indicates many of these denominational megachurches were actively creating parallel and separate networks of like-minded interrelated churches around them. Seventy percent planted new churches out of their congregation in the past 20 years. Twenty-two percent started a Network, Fellowship or Association of churches since 1985. These networks ranged anywhere from 15 members to over a thousand. Many megachurches participated in social ministries with other churches, although at only one-third the level in which they did their activities by themselves. They also participated in various activities (such as worship, programs, and church councils) with other congregations within their respective denominations and with congregations from other Christian bodies. Interestingly they participated in activities with congregations of other denominations at higher rates than they did with churches within their own denominations. Additionally nearly half of the megachurches sponsored pastors or ministerial conferences (47%) independent of their denominational efforts. Nearly 42% operated their own Christian school, and 30% had a Bible school or Institute.

How often are is your church involved in these activities with other churches from:	Our Denomination	Other Christian Denominations	Other Faith traditions
Joint worship services	26%	34%	12%
Joint programs/celebrations	24%	32%	14%
Social outreach programs	26%	41%	14%
Church councils, min. assoc.	19%	33%	12%

This data leads one to ask what might be gained by the megachurches in maintaining the ties with their parent denominations. One clear role that denominations have played is that of bestowing and reinforcing an identity for individual congregations. If a church were United Methodist, Assemblies of God or Episcopal it helped define who they were not just internally with creed and rituals, hymns and practices but also externally in the eyes of prospective members. Someone new to town knew immediately the religious marketplace due to the distinctive brand names. However, this function of denominational life is almost completely unnecessary for megachurches once they reach several thousand attendees. The church's name, its distinctive congregational identity and its pastor's reputation often greatly outweigh the denomination's identifier. These very large churches pride themselves on having a clear and well-defined vision and mission; in fact, this is part of the reason for their success. The church's name is often an indication of its commitment to the denominational identity. For megachurches, the denominational identifier doesn't fare very well. From 1985 to 2005, twenty-one percent of megas surveyed in 2005 had changed their names and dropped the denominational label.

Another benefit of a close association with one's denomination is the availability of resources in terms of money, literature, retirement and health insurance packages and schooling/ordination credentialing. However, these large churches with average annual incomes of over six million dollars and staffs, on average of over fifty full-time employees and several hundred volunteers easily dwarf many of the regional offices of their denominations, and at times even the national office in number of paid staff and size of operating budget. This reversed situation of congregations having more resources than the higher institutional level results in various consequences in terms of mutual expectations and interaction for both parties, as indicated in a study of regional judicatory executives in eight denominations (Lummis 2002). These churches operate their own retirement and benefits packages. And, as stated above, nearly half create their own literature or go outside the denomination for such resources while less than a third get their worship, educational and other programmatic supplies and resources exclusively or primarily from sources within their denomination. Increasingly these congregations are also nurturing potential pastors from within their churches, mentoring and training them and even ordaining them within the church rather than sending them to denominational seminaries.

A third function of a close relationship to the denomination is a well-defined community of like-minded churches and pastors with which to associate. While this is important for many megachurch pastors who do have solid ties and relationships with other denominational pastors, inevitability as the megachurch pastor becomes more of a celebrity they are sought out by some churches and shunned by others. These largest congregations do not always act as supportive "big brothers" directly in mentoring smaller congregations in the region, regional executives have reported. This situation is compounded by implicit expectations from denominational offices that they expect more support and involvement from their larger, affluent congregations than their smaller, struggling ones.

This situation is understandable since very large congregations have different structures and issues from congregations no more than a tenth their size. This makes transferability of advice, programs and staff resources from the largest to the smaller congregations difficult. As one explained

Large churches have more in common with each other than with other churches...In this city, there is a large Methodist church of 3000, a large Baptist church of 2000 and another large black church of 4000, and my (mega) church. As pastors, we all relate together because we have similar problems, similar ideas, and we know how to help each other...we have more in common with each other than with pastors of our same denominations.

On the other hand, sincere efforts of the largest congregations within a denomination to assist smaller ones in their vicinity, may be resented by the smaller churches as attempts to “lord it over them,” according to one judicatory executive. Pastors of the small church may fear being absorbed by the megachurch if they accept too much from it and become too dependent upon it. This fear has some grounding in fact, since four percent of megachurches merged with another church in the past 20 years and ten percent absorbed other churches into their organization during that same period.

A fourth value of denominations, and one of the primary originating motivations for the creation of this national structure in the first place, was to develop more powerful mission societies and evangelistic enterprises. The rise of nondenominational mission organizations, the decline in scope of denominational program and the dissolution of these programs as evangelistic mission activities in favor of social welfare efforts have all caused many megachurches to abandon or decrease support of them. One study of the largest churches in the Evangelical Lutheran Church showed that their biggest churches gave 2 percent less to denominational mission programs but overall they gave 2 percent more than smaller churches to mission programs – they redirected 4 percent for extra-denominational mission efforts. It is no doubt disappointing to denominational executives that their largest congregations show minimal deference to following denominational priorities and procedures. Instead, these churches often signal their autonomy by operating their own national and international mission programs, rather than supporting such programs jointly with their regional judicatory or national denominational bodies.

Denominational functioning is built on equitable exchange of goods and services. The denomination provides various services and benefits that individual churches seldom can do themselves. In return the denomination has the expectation of loyalty, allegiance and fair compensation from the churches. But this relationship is also built on less economic, though less quantifiable, factors such as devotion, commitment to a family identity, a distinctive theological heritage and loyalty to the religious brand.

Lack of equity in exchanges between organizations result in resentment, not only on the part of those that cannot return the favor in kind, but also on the part of those who provide the benefits and do feel they have received insufficient affirmation for so doing. Sociological theorist, William J. Goode (1978:19-20 et passim) remarks that social esteem is partly contingent on the actor being seen as providing “selfless behavior” for the common good, not simply to gain prestige. At the same time, if actors not only gain little or no appreciation from their membership or reference groups for their good deeds, but also are confronted with additional demands and disrespect from significant others within, there is a good chance they will curtail further efforts to support these collectivities.

AN INCREASINGLY COMMON SITUATION

It has become clear in recent decades that the expectation of loyalty and the fair exchange of goods and services between individual churches and the regional or national denominational offices are being eroded. This is certainly true for the megachurches in these denominations but it is also true for smaller, but resource rich, churches. It is likely that many congregations of any size, not just megachurches, no matter how much they value the denominational tradition and resources, still want as much autonomy as they can get. With the continuing diversification of theological positions in denominations, the niche elective parochialism and de facto congregationalism of churches of all polity types the denominational hold on churches is waning.

Many regional leaders who reported an increase in congregationalism (or basically the claim by congregations they should do as they please without denominational approval) attributed this in part to the Boomer generation's emphasis on having self-determination and decision-making input in all institutions. This results in lay members wanting ever-greater voice in determining mission objectives and budget allocations for their congregations, judicatory and national church. If such lay members are thwarted or ignored, they may challenge authority not only of their clergy but also of their regional and national denominational leaders. These disenchanted members can be pivotal in getting their congregation to reduce financial support to the offending level.

Emphasis on self-determination may also, as several of those interviewed proposed, contribute to members' greater sense of localism and less interest in cooperating in projects with church bodies outside of their own congregation. Some regional leaders observed that on the congregational level, church localism is often accompanied by distrust of other congregations, resulting in church isolation. Church isolation and localism can easily extend to more distant denominational bodies, such as the regional judicatory and national church offices, driving some congregations to adopt a stance of anti-denominationalism. Anti-denominationalism among lay leaders can also be fueled by their general lack of confidence that any large organization or institution will make decisions for the common good of smaller groups in their purview, another value perspective attributed especially to the Boomer generation.

Consumerism is the term used by several regional executives and senior staff to refer to a tendency for congregational leaders themselves to care a great deal less for the common good than for what benefits their local church. This value orientation, also seen as characteristic of Boomers, is reflected in local churches' resistance to or at least questioning of annual requests that they pay their fair share to national or regional coffers; "What is our church getting for our bucks -- from our denominational staff?"

Denominational megachurches, as Hadaway (2003:353) describes in the Southern Baptist denomination, see themselves as "benefiting the denomination rather than the other way around." In this denomination and others, Thumma (2007:26-27) also reports that megachurches tend to act independently, "downplaying" their denominational affiliation. However, it is clearly not the megachurches alone that are subject to the pressures to function independently of the denominational fold if not in actuality then in spirit. More research (such as that of Roozen and Lummis, 2007) needs to be done that focuses on the denominational churches of all sizes which

hold their label lightly or reject it outright. By looking at those megachurches that have left their denominations we may see some indication of what finally severs the ties that bind.

THE DEARLY DEPARTED MEGACHURCHES

Although two-thirds of the megachurches belong to some denomination, the concentrations of these in any denomination are quite small, and the independent megachurches are the modal group. Some megachurches grew from independent origins, but some left their parent denominations. Under what circumstances do megachurches decide not simply to downplay their family of origin and ignore parental dictates, but also actually leave home?

To attempt to answer this question we used information from the 2005 Megachurches Today study of 406 megachurches. This study included 29 megachurches that became independent: 13 ten to twenty years ago, and 16 in the last decade. The survey data from these 29 were analyzed against the larger group. Additionally, content analysis was done on the web sites of 19 of these churches. Finally, interviews were conducted with a number of leaders of those churches in the more recent grouping.

Their profile

In many ways these churches looked much like the larger group of megachurches. There is a wide diversity of styles and characters among all the megachurches and this too is reflected in the smaller group of newly independent. Yet there were a few distinctive, and statistically significant (.05 or greater), differences. Nearly 50% of these churches were in California compared to 15% of all megachurches. Additional higher concentrations of these than expected were from Michigan and Alabama. These congregations were founded on average over 30 years later than the denominational ones (average 1980 vs. 1947). They were more likely to still have the pastor during which the growth occurred and this clergy person was younger than average. These churches has smaller sanctuary seating by almost 500 seats; and, not surprisingly then, they had more services and more satellite locations. Their income was significantly less than other megachurches – less than half as much. It is to be expected, and was the case, that these churches were much more likely to have changed their name. Their worship was rated as more informal and less thought-provoking. These churches used electric guitar and drums in worship at a great frequency than other megachurches. Interestingly they rated significantly lower in having a clear mission and sense of purpose. These churches also had greater concentrations of new converts in their congregations. The newly independent were somewhat more likely to have partnered with other churches on international efforts and for local community service.

Their public presentation

The public presentations these churches gave on their web sites also told an interesting story. Only 3 of the churches openly reported the name of the denomination that they left, although an additional 5 implied they had left a denomination without giving its name. Three of the newly independent churches had been church plants and two described themselves as going independent after a new pastor was hired. Three of the churches explicitly attributed their rapid growth to megachurch status on the fact that they became independent. This status as an independent nondenominational church was a significant component of its identity for nearly all of the churches.

Their reasons for leaving

The conversations with leaders at these churches yielded yet another window on the dynamics that created the exodus from the denominational fold. Three primary reasons emerged from our conversations – one having to do with target audience in distinction to the denominational audience, another related to a local mission emphasis and openness to all potential members and the third revolved around choosing clergy apart from denominational rules. In essence each of these related the ability to pursue a vision and mission of the church in freedom from denominational restrictions.

A. Poor Fit Between Social Identity of the Denomination and the Present, Preferred Group.

There were several variations expressed by megachurch interview respondents on why the past denominational affiliation collected the kind of members who did fit well with the characteristics of those they presently attract.

- Denominational family were locals, we want to attract cosmopolitans

The pastor of one megachurch that experienced a growth of over 1,000 members in the last three years attributed this in part to their reaching out to the predominantly cosmopolitan upper middle class community by dropping the denominational name, which connoted a local evangelical ethos.

We immediately began growing once we pulled out of the denomination. Really the main reason is, this is a very white-collar community and are not that attracted to the whole Pentecostal movement. ... No one would have known it just to come in. But just having the label in a community, a white-collar community kind of concerned people, kept some people from even visiting us. Once the church became non-denominational, it kind of opened the door for more people to give us a shot.

- Denominational Family of Origin was good, but too stuffy for Generation X

While the foregoing denominational departure was somewhat conflicted, congregations may encounter smoother transitions to independent status when they which move out to offer the type of music and activities that would appeal to the kind of avant-garde youth and young adults that many in denominational congregations would rather do without anyway.

We broke off from (the denomination) about six years ago, and within that time we have grown to 8,000 members. The membership is young, over 60% younger than 35, and at least half of these are single young adults.. There are many colleges in our area, with an average youth population of 136,000 a year, (the present senior pastor) went to the colleges and gave worship retreats with rock music that appealed to the youth, who brought in their friends. So many in fact - that we started meeting at a college auditorium. When we soon grew too large for this. Now the congregation has almost finished building a church with an auditorium/sanctuary that sits 3,500 at a time. We have many different ministries, not only the usual ones to the homeless and those in prison, but we have just started a ministry to female sex-workers who want to leave the occupation. .

B. We want to be a community congregation; not a denominational one.

Connected reasons given by three congregations for leaving their parent denomination for independent status is that they wanted to be (1) a congregation for the whole surrounding

community in which they were located; and (2) they wanted no denominational restrictions on who could be considered members, e.g. no denominational membership classes, no prior affirmations of faith. At the same time, these megachurches typically have their own altar calls and tend to espouse a conservative evangelical theology, it is simply not a theology linked with a particular denomination.

Although megachurches sponsor many small groups to build homogeneity within diversity of their membership, they also stress commonality of core beliefs exemplified in preaching and worship for all members (Thumma 2006). Evangelizing young adults of all races and ethnicities does not mean that ethnic distinctiveness is a megachurch priority over theology, as suggested by the case study of one megachurch famous for its ethnic diversity, Mosaic in Southern California (Marti 2005) Those predominantly young adults who belonged to the different ethnic minorities drawn to Mosaic, were those who wished to be assimilated into majority culture, not worship within the more traditional ethnic congregations favored by their parents and grandparents. Ethnic diversity was not a ministry, educational or mission focus of Mosaic, but rather simply a characteristic of its membership. Mosaic is also an example of the evangelical “new paradigm” churches. These are the churches, which as Jackson Carroll (2000:81) put it, “are seeker friendly, but theologically conservative.”

In illustration, a megachurch informant interviewed in 2007, said one factor in their congregation’s leaving their parent denomination and changing their name, was to:

Reach out to the community more, and not have any barriers there that would keep us from bringing lost souls in. We still have the same beliefs pretty much. We believe in baptism, we believe in the Trinity, we believe that Jesus is the only one you can go through to be saved... We just try to be sensitive to other people’s feelings and beliefs and I think we have done a great job of it. We started at 35 people, and we have grown a lot since we went became our own church about three years ago, and now we are up to 3,000.

C. We Want to Find & Follow Our Own Leaders: Not Denominational Choices

A major contributing factor for why pastors may take any sized congregation out of the denomination that they perceive as serving faithfully and effectively for many years, as Roozen and Lummis describe (2007) is because they feel disesteemed by denominational officials, and may even have their congregational leadership abilities questioned. A pastor that grew a small church into a megachurch within the denomination, however, subject to such disesteem from denominational officials, would seem particular apt to depart the denomination, taking the congregation along.

The consensus among regional denominational leaders in eight denominations (Lummis, 2001) is that the pastor’s beliefs and loyalties are the main factor in whether a congregation identifies with the denomination. Because pastors are so important in keeping congregations within the denomination in this post-denominational age, regional judicatory executives take particular care in trying to get congregations to call denominational loyal as well as effective clergy to fill their vacant pulpits.

This can result in judicatory officials “trying to change the local churches’ constitutions” to ensure that they only hire denominationally approved clergy. Such actions create irritations and provoke reactions as one megachurch senior pastor who was hiring junior clergy explained:

I wanted us to be able to select our own (junior) clergy from any or no denomination. We used to be able to do this in the denomination. Now the majority of congregations here have new constitutions that say churches have to have a minister who is in full standing with the denomination. The denomination has control of the ministers because they grant the standing...And that is causing a lot of frustration in the local church because the local church is far more conservative than the denominational leaders. So we changed our constitution from saying we are “an affiliate” of the denomination to saying we have “historical ties” with the denomination. The (judicatory officials) then wrote us a letter saying that the church no longer had denominational standing. We are absolutely happy; it was almost like taking an albatross off our neck; the congregation just felt a sense of relief... Our five clergy are well educated and heavily credentialed; we do not come from any one denomination.

In two other megachurches, where conflicts with their parent denominations arose when they wished to hire outside the denomination, informants were interviewed also was a precipitating factor in these churches becoming independent. Newly independent megachurch seeking pastoral replacement through the senior pastors’ networks or as in the case of one southwestern megachurch through headhunting companies serving a variety of clients, such as “Bridgeworks” or the employment service “ChurchStaffing.com” that specializes in large church pastors and staff positions.

The decision to leave a denomination is seldom rescinded in congregations, because for any congregation the process of leaving is painful, even though there may advantages (Rozen and Lummis 2008). For megachurches this is likely even truer because their becoming independent is perceived as major contributor to their growth.

STAYING AUTONOMOUS & FAMILY CONNECTED

To round out this picture of denominations and their megachurches, it is necessary to remember that most fast growing smaller churches and megachurches become strong, autonomous, and self-sufficient, and also still stay closely connected with their families of origin, and help out as needed.

Some senior pastors who began their megachurch church may take the initiative to look for ways to help pastors of new or struggling churches, because they understood how to help and what the resistance might be.

When we were a small church of fifty people in pain, I told the Lord that if we ever survived, that I would help as many struggling pastors as possible whatever the denomination. So we have helped any way we can. We have answered questions, sent resources; given away stuff.

For the pastor above, who also gives time to being a regional leader for a cluster of other churches, feeling connected to his denomination is not one of his motivations for such sharing.. The challenge for many regional denominational leaders, however, is how to enhance senior pastors of their large, rich churches feeling connected to the denomination and to the judicatory. Regional leaders

realize that in many cases they must be the communicators, the instigators, the middle men and women for 1) getting leaders of the wealthy churches to feel connected to and appreciated by the judicatory; 2) then getting these leaders to understand what some of the needs are of poorer congregations, 3) and how best to meet these needs. The following are some of the ways regional leaders have used to accomplish the first objective of better connecting the pastors of the wealthy, growing churches to the denomination:

a. The judicatory connecting the clergy of other large churches with one another through special gatherings. Typically, this is done by the judicatory arranging a special conference just for the clergy of its largest churches, e.g.:

We are reaching out to senior pastors of large churches across this conference. We do things around what we call common tables. For instance, in the next two or three months, we will bring together all the senior pastors of churches 400 or more for a common gathering, to ask: What is it like for you guys? What is going on? That is one way the connection between those churches and the conference is linked.

b. The judicatory executives and senior staff making special efforts to be present at events, and participate as invited by pastors of the largest churches is another way they show these large church senior pastors that the judicatory values them and can be valuable to them. Regional leaders give a great deal of time to the needier churches who demand the most, as well as make efforts to visit all churches on some regular basis. Since pastors of wealthy congregations are less likely to seek out the judicatory executives or staff for support, however, it is more incumbent on the latter to take the initiative. A few regional leaders volunteered the information they did take efforts to find out when the big churches are having special celebrations and then attending, or offering to teach or preach at these churches when needed, purposively to show their return appreciation of contributions of these large congregations. They also took such opportunities to establish rapport with clergy and lay leaders in the affluent congregations to till the ground for later communication about needs of small churches and other judicatory mission imperatives.

c. The regional executive's appointing leaders of growing churches to major boards, commissions and committees of the judicatory can be an effective way of both acknowledging their expertise and increasing their commitment to their denomination and judicatory. As one regional leader put it:

To get our larger churches to feel they might yet be a part of the connection, we are putting some of their pastors on our Church Growth Committee so they can be heard.

Or in other words, maybe congregations growing into megachurches would stay more connected with their denominations, if the "parents" were more forthcoming and diplomatic in acknowledging the contributions and expertise of their offspring who deserve respect and autonomy as adults.

Such skills and strategies may become increasingly important, not only as more denominational churches become larger (See Mark Chaves, 2007 RRA H. Paul Douglass Lecture) and more financial autonomous but also as more churches look to megachurches as a model for doing church. Becoming a megachurch doesn't guarantee that the church will leave the denomination but it does make the church much more likely to diminish its relationship with the denomination. This sets up a situation whereby a change in pastor or shifts in clientele or conflicts

between the denominational rules or identity and a church's vision and mission can result in irreconcilable differences and the estrangement of parent and child. And most denominations cannot afford any more empty nests.

REFERENCES

- Carroll, Jackson. 2000. *Mainline to the Future; Congregations for the 21st Century*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Ellington, Stephen. 2007. *The Megachurches and the Mainline. Remaking Religious Tradition in the 21st Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goode, William J. 1978. *The Celebration of Heroes: Prestige as a Control System*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hadaway, C. Kirk. "Church Growth in North America: The Character of a Religious Marketplace." Chapter 17, 346-357 in David A. Roozen and C. K. Hadaway, eds. *Church and Denominational Growth*, Nashville: Abington.
- Hoffman, Lawrence A. 2006. *Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing.
- Lummis, Adair T. 2001. "Brand Name Identity in a Post-Denominational Age: Regional Leaders Perspectives on Its Importance for Churches." Paper delivered at the Annual Meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, October, Columbus, Ohio.
- Lummis, Adair T. 2002-2003. Series of On-Line Lecture-Reports for Regional Denominational Executives.
- Marti, Geraldo. 2005. *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Roozen, David A. and Adair T. Lummis. 2007. "Congregational Splits and Denominational Apostasy." Paper given at the Association for the Sociology of Religion Annual Meetings: August, New York City.
- Thumma, Scott. 2006 "The Shape of Things to Come: Megachurches, Emerging Churches and Other New Religious Structures Supporting and Individualized Spiritual Identity." Pp. 185-206 in Charles Lippy, ed., *Faith in America: Changes, Challenges, New Directions*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Thumma, Scott and Dave Travis. 2007. *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn From America's Largest Churches*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.