

Unit 7: Methodist Historical DNA and Modern Cell Churches: Is There A Match?
Lecture: Prairie DNA

The historical process by which John Wesley's discipleship system adapted to the frontier in the United States is described in the excerpt below from Chapter One: Systemic Problems from the Resource page at www.disciplewalk.com.

Third Systemic Problem: Traditional "Prairie" DNA

Rapidly growing cell churches credit their success to John Wesley's use of class meetings in England. The churches of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference are also hereditary descendants of Wesley's societies with very different characteristics. Expediency, a basic principle in Wesleyan DNA, led to a different adaptation to the prairie environment which is now highly resistant to change. Cultural DNA is information which defines norms and homeostasis.

John Wesley was a complex man living in complex times. The Industrial Revolution brought a vast migration of people from rural to urban areas. The Methodist Societies became a spiritual village within the city for many dislocated people.¹ Wesley blended methods from Anglican religious societies and Moravian sources to create an evolving discipleship system that came to embrace laity in ministry first as small group leaders and then as lay preachers.² Wesley's discipleship system trained people in holiness and spiritual maturity where they lived. Salvation was a process first of prevenient grace, then justifying grace and finally sanctifying grace. Methodists remained fully engaged with people at each successive stage of grace and helped one another to move onward toward perfection.³ Wesley's primary goal was to change the behavior of individual people toward holiness; the class meeting was an expedient innovation that began as a tool to raise funds but soon became Wesley's tool for individual supervision in holiness.⁴ They used tickets with expiration dates to control who remained within the

¹A question for historical investigation would be whether there are significant differences between Wesley's practice of Methodism in urban and rural areas. It is possible that I term "Prairie DNA" began in rural England where the stimulus of a smaller rural population brought forth these patterns. If so, then Asbury would only be practicing the form of Methodism with which he was familiar.

²Steven W. Manskar, *Small Groups and Accountability: The Wesleyan Way of Christian Formation*, http://www.gbod.org/smallgroup/Manskar_Accountability.pdf (accessed June 18, 2007). Cf. David Hunsicker, "John Wesley: Father of Today's Small Group Concept?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1996), under http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrn/31-35/31-1-09.htm (accessed May 1, 2007).

³Hunter identifies four stages in Wesley's process compared to nine for Willow Creek. George G. Hunter, III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 154-156.

⁴John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 8:252-255. There was a problem in Bristol with raising funds for the debt on the New Room. Captain Foy proposed that the Bristol society be subdivided and that each member give one penny. He asked to be assigned eleven of the poorest individuals whom he would visit each week; he would pay the penny for any unable to make a contribution. Each week class leaders met each person in their class, reviewed the behavior and spiritual condition of each individual, reported that condition to the stewards, and turned in an offering from each person. Eventually the decision was made for the class to meet as a group so that those who would seek to deceive the leader about their behavior could be immediately be confronted with the truth by their neighbors. The

Society.⁵ Class meetings provided a living human network for the direct spiritual supervision of each person each week.

Wesley kept his people busy.⁶ This kept them visible in a busy, urban world.⁷

Methodists also attended the local Anglican parish church for worship and the sacraments. All of this activity made the Methodists very visible to their neighbors. The value of holiness was obvious due to the immediate improvement in quality of life. The goal of the movement was to “spread scriptural holiness across the land.”⁸

The Wesleyan discipleship system was always more focused on holiness than evangelism; while field preaching drew large crowds, Wesley’s Societies statistically “constituted only a fraction of one percent of the populace” in any given year.⁹ The crowds did not enter the societies; they are not an example of rapid evangelistic church growth similar to the church of Acts or modern cell churches. Wesley’s emphasis on disciplined behavior, however, made them an influential fraction compared to the passivity of the typical Anglican clergyman. Wesley’s societies had high expectations of laity and low expectations of clergy.

Francis Asbury preached the gospel on the empty prairies during a vast migration of people from urban to rural areas. Prairie Methodists simultaneously built churches and communities in the rural

class meeting was never educational in purpose or focused on bible study, but always on the modification of behavior toward holiness. Roy Hattersley, *The Life of John Wesley: A Brand from the Burning* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 200-201. Unlike the cells of a modern cell church, class meetings did not select their own members, select their own leaders, develop apprentice leaders or multiply into two class meetings.

⁵Wesley, *Plain Account*, 256, 259-260. Wesley created boundaries so that people sorted themselves into groups at the level best suited for them; certain behaviors were required to get a ticket that would allow a person to participate in different activities of the Society. Requirements of obedience made certain that no strangers were present. Participation in a penitent band on Saturday nights cleared the way for return.

⁶Wesley provided his followers with a wide variety of activities in addition to the class meeting so that Methodists always had something holy to do instead of yield to temptation. These activities included twice daily sermons preached at five a.m. on the road to work and in the evening, a variety of small groups called "bands" to practice more intense spiritual discipline, monthly half-night prayer meetings, visitation of the sick and a variety of other community ministries. The complex Wesleyan discipleship system evolved to fulfill what was lacking in the typical Anglican parish, thereby supplementing rather than separating people from the church. One must wonder what would have evolved if Wesley, like Asbury, had been a bishop able to appoint ministers to his liking to parishes under his control. When Methodism was freed of the tension of remaining in the Anglican church and became a church itself, it dropped in time most of what characterized Methodism as Methodism under Wesley. Cf. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 251-252, 255, 257-261.

⁷Wesley's movement used a variety of methods, from the five a.m. preaching to social service, to keep Methodism in the forefront of awareness in urban environments filled with competing recreational distractions, temptations and competing churches. They created a "go" organization which penetrated their communities and drew people into beneficial relationships.

⁸Hattersley, *Life of John Wesley*, 207. Cf. Weems, *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 128.

⁹David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992), 131. Wesley’s pattern by itself will not reverse the current membership decline.

wilderness. They faithfully replicated Epworth and Wroot¹⁰ across the Midwestern frontier, replacing passive Anglican curates with fiery Methodist circuit riding preachers. Churches began as class meetings, shepherded between visits of the circuit rider by located preachers or licensed exhorters as class leaders.¹¹ The terminology on the prairie is one of circuits made up of class meetings rather than Societies of the British type. There is no evidence of multiple classes being formed on the prairie in a single location as was normal in Wesley's urban societies.¹² Class sizes increased to as many as seventy-three.¹³ There is no evidence that anything like the band system developed on the prairie; the band concept was strenuously pushed in the first *Book of Discipline* of 1785 but all references had disappeared from the *Discipline* by 1844.¹⁴ Class meetings and tickets were the major elements of Wesleyan Methodism found on the prairie.

Prairie class meetings became prairie churches, based on a single cell; this is a classic limitation to church growth as classes grew larger and became small churches.¹⁵ The role of the class meeting to enforce church discipline seemed to disappear in America by the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶ Both Watson and White note that the tone of writings on class meetings in the nineteenth century in America becomes increasingly apologetic and persuasive, concluding that the once natural popularity of the class meeting must be waning.¹⁷ Class meetings flourished in early days between visits of the circuit riders ranging

¹⁰Epworth and Wroot were the small rural parishes in which Wesley grew up, and of a type very familiar to Asbury and all immigrants from England.

¹¹One suspects the presence of exhorters and located preachers led to class meetings that were more like worship services between visits of the circuit rider than the careful lay supervision toward holiness found in Wesley's classes in England. Cf. Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 20-24. Ferguson indicates this erosion of small group process as coinciding with rise of the camp meeting in 1805 and 1840. Cf. Charles W. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: Methodists and the Making of America* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 149.

¹²Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 14. Melton recognizes the pattern of single classes becoming single churches but refers to "some societies with several classes" in the 1840s without identifying locations; these could have been in urban Chicago. I have found no single specific citing of a downstate Illinois Methodist church with more than one class meeting and no record of the use of bands or select bands on the prairie. Cf. J. Gordon Melton, *Log Cabins to Steeples: the Complete Story of the United Methodist Way in Illinois Including All Constituent Elements of the United Methodist Church* (n.p.: The Commissions on Archives and History, Northern, Central and Southern Illinois Conferences, 1974), 109, 111.

¹³Charles Edward White, "The Rise And Decline Of The Class Meeting," *Methodist History* 40, no. 4 (July 2002), <http://myweb.arbor.edu/cwhite/cm.pdf> (accessed June 4, 2007), 7. Pagination is from the online resource.

¹⁴Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 75.

¹⁵For information on single cell churches and church growth resistance, see Carl Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 32-60.

¹⁶White, "Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting," 4n29. Cf. David Lowes Watson, *Class Leaders: Recovering A Tradition* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), 50-51.

¹⁷"Wesley's problem seems to be keeping the classes pure, while his successors' problem seems to be keeping the classes going." White, "Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting," 5. Cf. Watson, *Class Leaders*, 44.

from once a month to six months.¹⁸ As Methodists formed churches, the old timers in the class meeting experienced power struggles with the shift to resident clergy.¹⁹ The non-denominational Sunday School movement also put pressure on the Methodist class system as early as 1830²⁰ and is widely seen as displacing the class meeting after 1875.²¹ Participation in the class meeting as a requirement of membership was discontinued in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1872.²²

It is an gross oversimplification, however, to say that Methodism on the American frontier went “where the people were.”²³ Early Methodism, according to Lovett Weems, “seemed more at home in rural settings” and was more successful there.²⁴ Asbury developed “a distinct rural orientation adept at expanding into thinly populated areas.”²⁵ Asbury and his contemporaries deliberately chose to plant churches in isolated rural settings, avoiding even the developing towns as “alien to Methodist values and ‘famous for wickedness.’”²⁶ Eighteen of twenty Methodist chapels in the Delmarva peninsula of Delaware in 1784 were in the countryside.²⁷ The *Western Christian Advocate* in 1843 notes that in the Midwest, “the towns were almost universally avoided by our preachers as places of too much dissipation for the Gospel to obtain a foothold.”²⁸ Asbury did not go where the people were or would be; Asbury

¹⁸The 1872 Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church indicates a second purpose in the “design of the organization of classes” is to “establish and keep up a meeting for social and religious worship, for instruction, encouragement and admonition that shall be a profitable means of grace to our people.” This is a purpose far wider than Wesley’s class meeting and probably reflects actual practice. Cf. Watson, *Class Leaders*, 48. Cf. Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 14.

¹⁹Watson, *Class Leaders*, 48-50, 152.

²⁰Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 85, 88, 119, 121, 144. The growing emphasis on Sunday School diverts leaders and energy from class meetings. Cf. Watson, *Class Leaders*, 51-52. Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 137, notes that references to the class meeting decline abruptly in British Methodist autobiographies in the 1830s. Yet White notes that there is some evidence of a 40% continued participation in the class meeting in 1900. Cf. White, “Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting,” 5n35.

²¹Watson, *Class Leaders*, 75.

²²White, “Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting,” 6. The same change occurred in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1866 and in Britain in 1912. For an excellent description of the causes of the decline, cf. Watson, *Class Leaders*, 39-59.

²³Weems, *Leadership In The Wesleyan Spirit*, 21-22.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁵Nathan Hatch, quoted by Weems, *Leadership In The Wesleyan Spirit*, 22.

²⁶Weems, *Leadership In The Wesleyan Spirit*, 24.

²⁷*Ibid.* For a broader description, cf. William H. Williams, “The Attraction of Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula as a Case Study, 1769-1820” in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., *Perspectives On American Methodism: Interpretive Essays* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 31-45.

²⁸Weems, *Leadership In The Wesleyan Spirit*, 24.

went where there was no competition to holiness from outside influences.²⁹

Methodism has continually adopted new methods as expediency provides them. The camp meeting shaped prairie Methodism. Asbury called camp meetings “fishing with a large net.”³⁰ It is hard to imagine in this century the human hunger for socialization and activity which the camp meeting fulfilled in the prairie environment. When Alexis De Tocqueville asked a Detroit man in 1831 if religion had reached that “half peopled” area, he replied:

Almost every summer, it is true, some Methodist preachers come to make a tour of the new settlements. The noise of their arrival spreads with unbelievable rapidity from cabin to cabin - it's the great news of the day. At the date set, the immigrant, his wife, and children set out by scarcely cleared forest trails toward the indicated meeting place. They come from fifty miles around. It's not in a church that the faithful gather but in the open air under the forest foliage. A pulpit of badly squared logs, great trees felled for seats, such are the ornaments of this rustic temple. The pioneers and their families camp in the surrounding woods. It's there that, during three days and three nights, the crowd gives itself over to almost uninterrupted religious exercises. You must see with what ardor these men surrender themselves to prayer, with what attention they listen to the solemn voice of the preacher. It's in the wilderness that people show themselves almost starved for religion.³¹

The camp meetings countered rural isolation by combining religious activity in the center of the camp with socializing, courting, barter and recreation on the outer edges.³² This tradition of combining evangelistic preaching with family vacations evolved into the Chautauqua movement, both in resort settings and traveling tents.³³ Camp meetings eventually became campgrounds and then conference owned church camps, at Asbury's suggestion.³⁴ The camp meeting was the primary evangelistic tool of

²⁹Roger W. Stump, “Regional Migration and Religious Commitment in the United States,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23, no. 3 (September 1984): 292-304. Stump’s experimental results favor the “adaptation model’s prediction that religious commitment rises among migrants to regions of higher native commitment, such as the South, and fails among migrants to regions of lower commitment.” Asbury’s placement of churches in isolated settings, therefore, creates a high expectation environment which will have a higher evangelistic influence on those living nearby; placing churches in town would give the majority of “sinners” a greater influence over a minority of Methodists. Asbury did not need to locate churches in towns to draw a crowd, be visible or have an influence due to the camp meeting’s ability to draw a crowd during the nineteenth century.

³⁰Russell E. Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting: A Reconsideration of Early American Methodism,” *Methodist History* 23, no. 1 (July 1985): 202.

³¹G. W. Pierson, “Tocqueville and Beaumont in America,” quoted in Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 231-232.

³²Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 119-120, 124, 129-131. Cf. Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 3, 208-228, 234-236, 240, 243-244. Cf. Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 24-25. Cf. Melton, *From Log Cabins to Steeples*, 115.

³³Charles A. Parker, “The Camp Meeting on the Frontier and the Methodist Religious Resort in the East: Before 1900,” *Methodist History* 18 (April 1980): 179-192. For an example, see The Lakeside Association, *History of Lakeside*, <http://www.lakesideohio.com/lakesideexperience/History.aspx> (accessed June 18, 2007). Cf. Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 245-247. Cf. Melton, *Log Cabins to Steeples*, 119.

³⁴Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 145.

the Second Great Awakening in United States history and so successful that it doubled the proportion of church members in America from one in fifteen to one in seven between 1800 and 1850.³⁵

The camp meeting is the quintessential “come structure” of American religious history. Both the camp meeting and the prairie church met the human need for socialization in the midst of rural isolation. Both drew a large crowd because they were the only source for human interaction on the frontier. Revivals would later be organized around the visit of an elder at quarterly conference who would provide the sacrament to members followed by camp meetings open to the public. These events created a community that “defined itself by act” or by an event, rather than by an address.³⁶

Events brought people together; God acting in grace seemed less a salvation process and more of a salvation event. It was God, acting in a series of events, who convicted the sinner, brought the crowds of sinners to the camp meeting, brought salvation through the response to an evangelistic sermon and brought sanctification as a second work of grace. Any human role was minimized. The salvation event, mediated by a gospel preacher, is the descendent of the sacramental event mediated by a priest ordained in apostolic succession. Anglican sacramentalism, too, is a part of the Wesleyan heritage.³⁷ *Prairie DNA* continues to focus on events as the method to bring people into the church building to hear the gospel.

On the prairie the process of salvation became one which sought to get people into a service of worship where they might respond to the proclamation of the gospel by the preacher rather than one which sought to get people into a class meeting where they might be spiritually mentored by a lay person. All barriers were dropped and all activities of the church were opened; who could tell but that this day was a sinner’s last opportunity to experience salvation? Evangelism became focused on decision-making events rather than on disciple-making community.³⁸ Revival services became crowds of strangers before, during and after time in worship. New class meetings would not be formed to disciple the new converts; a few would become incorporated into a single existing class meeting already crowded with advanced disciples. Rather than training new disciples to become disciple-makers, classes focused on personal piety and holiness.

The camp meeting event forever shaped the prairie Methodist experience. The great “two a day” checkerboard church planting that began after the Civil War replicated these small “come structure”

³⁵Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe, *Televangelism: Power & Politics On God's Frontier* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1981), <http://religiousbroadcasting.lib.virginia.edu/powerpolitics/C6.html> (accessed May 1, 2007), 102. Cf. Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2006), 206-210.

³⁶Russell E. Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting: A Reconsideration of Early American Methodism,” *Methodist History* 23, no. 1 (July 1985): 205, 203-213.

³⁷From a sacramental point of view, salvation occurs at the event of Christian baptism and the event of holy communion confers spiritual strength and maturity as a means of grace. There is a trend among modern churches to embrace the sacramental faith of justification through baptism and sanctification by good works. Wesley supports sacramentalism but declares it insufficient in section four of John Wesley’s sermon, “The New Birth,” *Works of John Wesley*, 6:75-76. Cf. Ted A. Campbell, “Conversion and Baptism in Wesleyan Spirituality” in Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, eds., *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 160-174. Whether evangelical or liturgical, this approach relies on the paradigm of a salvation event which occurs during worship rather than in ongoing relationships of community participation. One modern form of seeking a salvation event through worship is someone “serving Christ” by watching worship broadcast on television.

³⁸Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 9.

churches every five to seven miles apart in the rural countryside.³⁹ Prairie DNA was phenomenally successful in its time; from 1860-1920 the Methodist Episcopal Church grew from one million to well over four million members,⁴⁰ far outperforming Wesley's societies. This membership increase coincides with the end of the requirement that all Methodists participate in class meeting as a condition of membership.⁴¹ After vigorous employment in the 1870s, "after 1880 there is no mention of camp meetings being encouraged officially by the Southern Illinois conference."⁴² This expedient tool shaped the prairie Methodist experience and that historical influence is active and visible today.

Prairie DNA shapes the Illinois Great Rivers Conference paradigm. Cultural DNA controls and maintains a homeostasis of traditionalism,⁴³ preventing church growth by inhibiting the historic Methodist tendency to expediently adapt to changing conditions. Prairie DNA has eleven basic characteristics.

First, Prairie DNA operates as a "come structure" focused on attraction. Second, Prairie DNA has an institutional worldview focused on the church building as the place for people to come. Third, it uses events to draw people to the building. Fourth, it seeks to be visible within the community by promoting these events. Fifth, it lowers barriers in an attempt to make the institution more attractive to outsiders. Sixth, Prairie churches experience community in conversations before and after worship and other events. These practices all reflect the customs of the camp meeting era.

Seventh, Prairie churches are organized and controlled by a single cell of persons. Eighth, these lay leaders are resistant to new ideas and new people. The old timers will rarely allow the pastor to lead. A classic symptom of Prairie DNA is the conviction that laity in the church know more about Scripture, spirituality and what their church should do than their seminary educated pastor.⁴⁴ The goal of prairie

³⁹Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 148. Southern Baptists averaged four hundred missions a year in the 1890s and thirteen hundred in the 1990s, a daily average of 3.6 a day. Lyle Schaller, *The Interventionist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 195-196.

⁴⁰Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., "Part Two: The Nineteenth Century," in John G. McEllhenney, ed., *United Methodism In America: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 91.

⁴¹White, "Rise and Decline of the Class Meeting," 6. The requirement was ended in the Methodist Episcopal South in 1866 and the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1872.

⁴²Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 145. The holiness movement was well received in Southern Illinois but suspect within the Methodist Episcopal denomination. While the conference remained officially distanced, participation continued unofficially; six Holiness Camp Meeting Associations were founded in the first half of the twentieth century in Southern Illinois, with Methodists providing the major support in five of them. Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 153-155, 171-172. Cf. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 280-285.

⁴³Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 46, 28-29. One could argue that self-righteous traditionalism could be called "the leaven of the Pharisees;" cf. Luke 12:1, Matthew 16:6, 11-12 and Mark 8:15.

⁴⁴Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 46, 28-29, identifies the two factors most negatively correlated to church growth as liberal theology and traditionalism. The pattern of appointing comparatively liberal clergy to churches composed of comparatively traditional laity has been very common in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference for more than a century. It has been perceived as a resistance to an educated clergy but not understood as a reason for church decline when the two most negative growth factors are brought together in conflict. Cf. Evers, *History of the Southern Illinois Conference*, 140-142, 157-160. For a 1968 analysis of this trend, see Rodney Stark and Charles Y. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 213-

DNA is to keep the church as close as possible to the way it was in the days of the second Great Awakening; this is often seen in the choice of songs to sing. In the labeling of generations such as Modern, Postmodern and Millennial, prairie church folk are by preference still living in the nineteenth century or earlier.

Ninth, assimilation of newcomers whose primary contact with a church is through a worship service is a challenge requiring a high investment of energy.⁴⁵ Tenth, prairie evangelism focuses on a salvation event mediated by a preacher and offered less and less frequently. Wesley's followers heard evangelistic sermons twice daily and were individually coached every week in the class meeting. On the prairie, revival events are first quarterly, then annually, and finally disappear. Rather than challenging people to practice a disciplined faith in a small group on a weekly basis, prairie churches assimilate uncommitted people. When sin brings suffering, prairie churches try to soothe problems through pastoral care rather than solve problems through repentance and holiness.

Finally, when prairie churches are under stress they remain faithful to their DNA and respond by pushing the trend to preserve their traditional homeostasis. They do something to the building itself in order to make it more attractive.⁴⁶ They call upon the pastor to do more and lower the requirements for laity in the hope of attracting strangers; prairie DNA has low expectations of laity and high expectations of clergy. They offer more events to draw people in. They make a heartfelt gesture at ministering to community needs. They continue to do what worked over a century ago to attract people; it continues to fail.

The old ways fail today because the world has changed. The world today has more attractive buildings than the church. Society offers more exciting and entertaining events than the church. The old church softball league in the church yard is replaced by a multitude of agencies from the YMCA to schools to park districts offering a wide diversity of sports in expensive facilities. There are no isolated areas left where the church can be simultaneously mediocre and superior because there is no competition from the world. The church's amateur attempts at social service are dwarfed by the deep pockets and dedicated professionals working in government and social service agencies ranging from welfare to Big Brother-Big Sister. The world has secularized and improved the quality of all these attraction ministries, and now the church cannot compete. It is not that there is a migration of rural people to urban areas; there is a migration of urban culture to rural areas. It is all urban now, and the prairie DNA church can neither cope with the change nor compete with a secular world that has adapted to current reality. The gap between church reality and current reality can be measured in decades.

⁴⁵For assimilation methods, see Michael J. Coyner and Douglas T. Anderson, *The Race to Reach Out: Connecting Newcomers to Christ in a New Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

⁴⁶Church planting consultant Jim Griffith stated that the first action of a "bad DNA" church to the growing stress of membership decline will be to first "do something to the church sign" and then fix up other parts of the church building and grounds to be more attractive. Jim Griffith, presentation, Office of Congregational Development, Conference Office, Springfield, IL, March, 2005.