



WHAT REALLY HAPPENS WHEN A COMMUNITY LACKS A CHURCH?

BY: TROY GRAMLING

As a society, we are becoming more fragmented and more siloed into groups we agree with. You can blame the expansion of social media in part, but the increase in online presence has also come with a decrease in the traditional community gathering places of our society — our churches.

According to the evangelical research firm Lifeway Research, in 2019, approximately 3,000 Protestant churches were started in the U.S., but 4,500 Protestant churches closed.

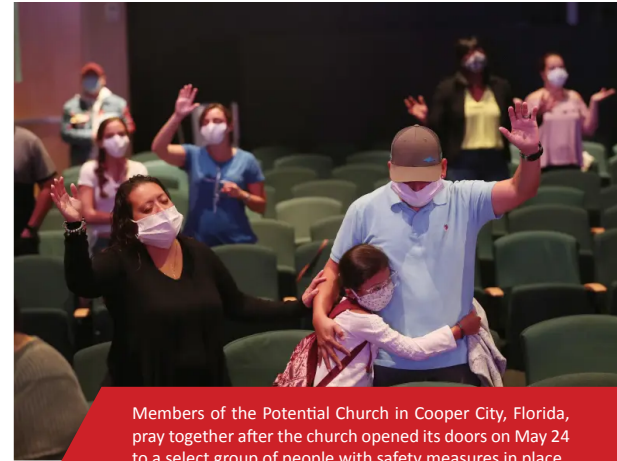
This slow decrease in real-world, offline places where neighbors can come together means more than just ever-increasing fragmentation.

Communities in the United States without a church often suffer a void in essential services as well. Unlike many European countries with robust social safety nets, the United States without a church often suffer a void in essential services as well. Unlike many European countries with robust social safety nets, the United States lacks such comprehensive coverage. This is where churches step in, offering support, a sense of belonging and a place to turn when facing life's challenges. Potential Church has played this pivotal role in our community for the past 45 years.

Originally named "Flamingo Road," the church recognized the geographical limitations of its name, and, in October 2010, renamed itself "Potential Church." This change symbolized a readiness to explore new horizons and broaden the ministry's reach, making it accessible to people from diverse backgrounds worldwide. The new name reflected a commitment to expanding the global presence of the church and a belief in the untapped potential within each community the church touched.

Just using our church as an example, it's easy to see how we can offer positive transformation in the community, state and around the world that counterbalances the negative forces that drive our communities apart. We not only provide tangible actions and services, but also the often-overlooked realm of emotional support. The church provides counseling for those preparing for marriage and offers solace and guidance to those facing relationship difficulties or grief, always aiming to be a compassionate ally along the journey.

The church's partnership in the community extends to practical assistance as well, including childcare services for parents seeking respite. This not only lightens the load for individual families, but it also strengthens community bonds. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church supported first responders by providing free childcare, allowing them to focus on their critical duties. The indirect benefits from these sorts of services are immeasurable. Just in this narrow example, how many lives would be affected if first responders were left to juggle parenting and job duties during the pandemic?



Members of the Potential Church in Cooper City, Florida, pray together after the church opened its doors on May 24 to a select group of people with safety measures in place.

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And that just scratches the surface. During hurricane seasons, Potential Church collaborates with the city to secure homes and participates in post-hurricane cleanup efforts. Additionally, from home renovations to providing meals to the hungry and toys to families during the Christmas season, Potential Church extends a helping hand to the needy among us.

All these endeavors have a ripple effect that resonates throughout our community, making a positive impact in the lives of those around us. By providing these invaluable services, the church alleviates some of the spiritual, emotional and financial burdens that the community would otherwise have to bear. The work of the church is continually reinforcing the bonds of our shared humanity and contributing to a vibrant, compassionate and interconnected society.

Pastor Troy Gramling has led Potential Church for over two decades, overseeing its growth into a vibrant congregation of over 20,000 members, with locations in Cooper City, Florida, and Lima, Peru.