

You May Be Lukewarm If Paper No. OCCG-018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A study based around the church at Laodicea being lukewarm and the church at Ephesus having lost their first love, which is taken to mean they were also lukewarm. The paper is to help make a determination whether you are lukewarm, not what to do about it if you draw that conclusion.

KEY WORDS:

Lukewarm

GLOSSARY:

Lukewarm: A word used in Revelation 3:16 as being between hot and cold in what seems to be a very important distinction. Response to the distinction indicates that it is not taken seriously.

Side Door Activity: A secular activity associated with a congregation to bring prospects into contact with members.

REPORT:

The congregations in Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) and the congregation in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22) reflected lukewarm congregations in the first century. Although written specifically to these congregations, the admonitions survive in the New Testament as instructions for us.

The brief letter to the Laodiceans mentions lukewarm as if the meaning was obvious to the reader. Likely “having left your first love” at Ephesus is an example of what being lukewarm is.

Whatever it is, it should be really important to us as being spit out of Jesus’ mouth can’t be a good verdict for us.

Our 12,311 congregations in the US are presently declining as a group by about 0.5% per year, so

it should be reasonable to say that at least 50% of our congregations are lukewarm or cold. Cold was not intended as a better alternative, just a clearer alternative.

Of the more than 50% of our congregations which are lukewarm or cold, virtually none of them would consider themselves to be lukewarm or cold. Most of our lukewarm or cold congregations rationalize that they are not lukewarm or cold. The most frequent explanation is that they are “busy”, therefore they are not lukewarm. Other statements heard have been “Lukewarmness is teaching error” and “We are too busy fighting error to be evangelistic”. In the first case it just seems a wrong interpretation, in the second case they need to read about Ephesus.

These results would indicate that subjective self analysis does not give a reliable indication of a congregation’s situation. As this is a really important subject and self analysis is

not a good guide, what are local leaders to do? What would also likely not be a reliable indicator would be to let the leaders at another lukewarm congregation give you advice. As criticizing you would be in effect criticizing themselves, subjectivity questions would creep in there also. It would be some better, but often not objective enough to be relied upon.

Paying a church growth consultant to come do an analysis has some potential, but he must give a report to the people who are paying him, and whose recommendation can have a lot of impact on his business.

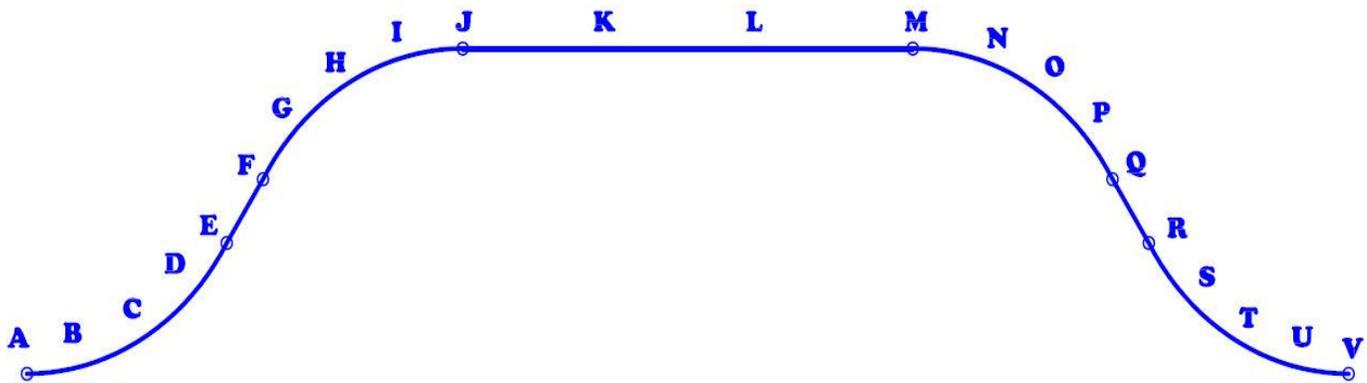
THESE RESULTS WOULD INDICATE THAT SUBJECTIVE SELF ANALYSIS DOES NOT GIVE A RELIABLE INDICATION OF A CONGREGATION’S SITUATION.

The subject of being lukewarm has been much of the focus of the work of the OCCG Think Tank. Even the logo of the OCCG Think Tank as seen above reflects the classic church of Christ pattern of being hot, then lukewarm, then cold. No one has disagreed with the sequence, but the question is where does the transition between hot and lukewarm occur?

The logo growth graphic is repeated below with possible locations for this transition to typically occur.

single event occurred in the congregation causing the congregation to become lukewarm. Likely events suggested were approaching a completely full auditorium with no plans to do anything about it, a significant change in doctrine, the appointment of a controversial shepherd, the firing of a popular preacher, or the hiring of an unpopular preacher.

Whatever the event was (or events were), the church continued to grow some due to inertia and



At this point it would be good for each reader to look at the graphic and pick a letter as to where you think this transition occurs. There is not a correct answer and it will vary some from congregation to congregation. It is just a method to try to help clarify the situation.

Members of the OC Church Growth Think Tank had a variety of initial responses to the question covering the range from “F” to “M”. The average response was about “J”.

After discussions, the consensus was that the transition occurred at “F”. The general logic to this was that the period from “E” to “F” reflected strong Great Commission growth. The period from “J” to “M” indicated little or no Great Commission growth and so was lukewarm. The period after “M” was a congregation which was cold and dying.

The period between “F” and “J” were considered transitional. “J” was settled upon as the effective transition to being lukewarm. It was likely that a

then settled down to a reasonably steady non-growth situation.

Once in a lukewarm situation, it is very important to return to an evangelistic growth situation, but is very hard to do. Whatever the factors are which prompted the transition to lukewarm are likely still in place and have probably multiplied.

As indicated before, self analysis is typically very difficult to do objectively at this time. In a clearly lukewarm congregation, the Shepherds are working as hard as possible, so what more could anyone expect of them?

The most frequent approach to solve this situation is for the Shepherds to urge everyone to work harder at what didn't work last year, but did work 20 or 30 years ago. This implies that no one was actually working hard last year, but is going to work harder this year. This is characteristically not true on either count.

This is probably a situation where leaders need to learn to work smarter rather than harder. The first part of working smarter is to honestly determine whether you are lukewarm or not. If you actually conclude that you are a lukewarm congregation, you are likely to make needed changes. As last year's plan won't do any better next year, you should be ready for taking a fresh look at how to scripturally operate your congregation in the **21st century** situation.

The objective of this paper is not to suggest to you what to do, it is just provide questions to help you decide if you are lukewarm

Following are 3 sets of characteristics found online to identify if you are lukewarm.

- You never read your Bible*
- You are not plugged into fellowship regularly*
- You look like the world*
- Your role models are celebrities*
- You only listen to secular music*
- You don't have a filter on your social media*
- You are embarrassed and ashamed to talk about Jesus or your faith*
- Your beliefs contradict the Bible*
- You have religious actions, but no real relationship with Jesus*

- You don't seek God before making decisions*
- Your friends don't take our walk with Jesus seriously*
- You want to know how far you can push the limit with God.*

- More focused by being accepted by people than being accepted by God*
- Rarely share their faith with others*
- Rationalize their sins*

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS PAPER IS NOT TO SUGGEST TO YOU WHAT TO DO, IT IS JUST PROVIDE QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE IF YOU ARE LUKEWARM

THIS IS PROBABLY A SITUATION WHERE LEADERS NEED TO LEARN TO WORK SMARTER RATHER THAN HARDER.

Only turn to God when they need something
Give financially only when it's convenient (Because their money is theirs, not God's)
They are both in the world and of the world.

These are well meaning and we would agree with most of them, but something is lacking. They are mostly subjective judgments. For example, someone is "rationalizing" their sins, they do not think they are rationalizing their sins. Seeing this on a list will not do anything for them. Most cold congregations would say "yes" to most of those questions.

The search is for questions which will give an objective analysis in some way.

What follows on the next pages gives you a set of focused questions which are intended help you to analyze yourself on topics. These are questions which are so **specific and measurable**, you will tend to be objective about yourself.

There are no perfect questions and there is no correct score for the following. This is just for your assistance. Simply put a 1 or a zero in the blank provided depending on whether it is true or not true for your congregation. Sum up the total at the end of the questions. There is no correct minimum sum.

Some of the questions will not apply to your congregation at all and can simply be ignored. Likely you will think of other questions which would be helpful to add to the survey.

Contact us at the address below and we will add them.

We would strongly suggest that each shepherd and the pulpit minister fill out the questions and get a sum. Then compare the answers and discuss them in a closed meeting.

At that point, it is best to tell no one in your congregation about the questions or your answers. This is because, as an example, if you said you have concluded you are lukewarm in part because no one says they liked a song service, guess what will happen. Even if the song service doesn't improve, people will compliment it to get rid of the symptom of being called lukewarm. In that case you need to get with your song leaders and suggest they get together and figure out how to make the song service better (called delegation). The measure of the results will be the natural responsive comments by the members.

This is a pattern which can be applied to any question. It is important that you control the process to implement helpful change, not just to take on the symptoms of change.

One thing to know is that the questions are not going to be what you likely expect. **They are not identified as the cause, correlated with or symptom of lukewarmness. Just typically associated with lukewarmness.**

CONCLUSION:

A number of congregations might say:

1. Sure, if we did all that we would grow, but it would be a lot of work to implement what is implied by what is in the questions
2. We would have to completely change our operating practices.
3. This isn't what we did when we were growing 20 or 30 years ago.

In those cases:

1. It is likely not more work, but different work for Shepherds, which will result in growth rather than decline.
2. Customary operating practices are not a scriptural matter. The New Testament gives us a few requirements and much flexibility in implementation.
3. Paying homage to 30 year old customs instead of the scriptures is not appropriate.

We hope that this might be of some assistance to your congregation. It is presented with prayerful consideration with the health of the Lord's church in mind. If you can make suggestions on how to better communicate this issue to our sister congregations, please let us know.

FOOTNOTE:

It is true that this implies a level of organization which simply does not exist at many, if not most, congregations. The objective of the OCCG Think Tank Delcon Church Software Package is to help you overcome being lukewarm. DelCon is specifically written to match the church of Christ scriptural pattern of organization and practices.

The Delcon Church Software Package attempts to help in this process by providing an automatic monthly committee reporting blank. It can be used in the singing case by asking your worship committee for a regular report on positive and negative member comments regarding the song service. The integrated question can suggest the importance for an inspirational service without saying you are looking at it is a lukewarm symptom.

The program's sample DelCon job description for the Worship Committee includes this question as an optional Shepherd request items as an example.

The Delcon Church Software Package is sponsored by the OCCG Think Tank and is freely given to any church of Christ thru the address given below. An informational paper on the subject is posted to ocginstitute.org.

Send your requests, ideas and suggestions to info@thearray.org.

**THE OBJECTIVE OF THE OCCG
THINK TANK DELCON CHURCH
SOFTWARE PACKAGE IS TO HELP
YOU OVERCOME BEING LUKEWARM.**

MEMBERS:

More than 50% of your members have had a meaningful conversation with their shepherd in the past 6 months about a subject other than about giving: _____

More than 50% of your members have been visited by a Shepherd in the past year: _____

More than 10% of your members say they were inspired by the Sunday morning song service in the past 3 months: _____

More than 50% of your members have invited at least one prospect to church in the past 6 months: _____

— _____

More than 50% of your members have a role which involves at least 30 minutes a week on average: _____

More than 50% of your members have someone in the congregation outside their family they consider to be a friend: _____

More than 50% of your members know your measurable growth goals: _____

A Shepherd is automatically notified if one of his shepherddees begins to decline in attendance: _____

— _____

A Shepherd is automatically notified if one of his shepherddees begins to decline in giving (that he/she is declining, not the actual amount): _____

— _____

All attendees are assigned to a specific Shepherd: _____

At least 80% of the attendees know who their Shepherd is: _____

At least 50% of your members have been in a serious discussion regarding basic church doctrines, not just someone telling them the answers: _____

At least 50% members do not sit in the same pew as a year ago: _____

MEMBER SUM: _____

ORGANIZATION:

More than 50% of your committees / ministries are less than 3 years old: _____

The average age of your Shepherds is no higher than it was 3 years ago: _____

Your Shepherds don't feel more overworked than your Deacons: _____

You have a measurable growth goal with a timeline: _____

Shepherds understand that their primary role is shepherding the flock rather than micro-managing the organization: _____

Shepherds understand that Shepherds doing significant ongoing Deacon work is a failure of shepherding: _____

Shepherds have a clear written method to do written delegation: _____

Shepherds have clear, regular written accountability from the delegees at least once a quarter: _____

Shepherds have clear, regular written accountability from the delegees at least once a month: _____

Delegees are instructed to be decisive if they are operating according to written job descriptions, within budget, and scripturally, without reconfirming with their Shepherd: _____

ORGANIZATION SUM: _____

GENERAL:

Bible classes are used for clearly evangelistic purposes in more than a general sense (e.g. time set aside): _____

Bible class curriculum is clearly designed to assist in evangelistic activities in more than a general sense (e.g. how to meet or what to say to prospects) : _____

Bible class curriculum does not simply repeat what everyone already knows (e.g. if they already know it, are you moving on to implementing it): _____

— _____

Wednesday night services are used for clearly evangelistic purposes in more than a general sense: _____

You have a ministry specifically assigned to starting new and monitoring existing side door activities: _____

You have a team specifically dedicated to participating in side door activities to influence prospects in coming to worship: _____

You know your service area growth rate (i.e. the growth of your zip code areas): _____

You are growing faster than your service area growth rate: _____

You have an active new building or planting committee: _____

You know when you will do new building or planting: _____

Your facility flexibility for evangelism activities is not restricted by immovable pews: _____

You are not debt free : _____

You don't pay someone to prepare the Lord's Supper trays: _____

You don't pay someone to maintain your grounds: _____

— _____

You don't pay a janitor: _____

GENERAL SUM: _____

SERVICE TIME OF MEMBERS:

You communicate a service time expectation of members at least monthly: _____

You maintain an actual written list of activities which members can engage in to do their service time which includes a written scope of commitment expected of members: _____

The written list of available service activities is available to those in contact with new members or new attendees: _____

You have a specific measurable goal for member involvement: _____

Your preacher understands his role in the pulpit is an involvement promoter in addition to conventional preaching: _____

Your staff understands their job is to assist members in doing their religion rather than doing it for the members: _____

You regularly measure and know your membership involvement level: _____

SERVICE TIME SUM: _____

GENERAL SUM: _____

MEMBER SUM: _____

ORGANIZATION SUM: _____

TOTAL: _____

GENERAL 2:

You have a sister inspect your facility and grounds on a monthly basis with a written report on visitor appeal: _____

You Google church of Christ followed by your town name and easily found your church location:

— _____

You have a website which is cell phone compatible: _____

Your visitor parking area is well marked and easy to find: _____

Your visitor center is easy to find and staffed before your Sunday a.m. service: _____

Someone greets all visitors: _____

Your restroom locations are well marked from all areas a visitor might be: _____

Your racial diversity matches your service area:

— _____

Your economic diversity matches your service area: _____

Members are reminded of your measurable growth goals at least once a month: _____

GENERAL 2 SUM: _____

TOTAL: _____