

## **2020 – A WAKEUP CALL?**

**By Bob Young**

Obviously, THE story of 2020 is COVID-19. Unexpected, wreaking havoc, deaths beyond expectations, and still here, sticking around longer than many expected. The global death rate continues to spiral. Our world has been changed in many ways – especially obvious are the economic and social changes. Our world has expanded (with the challenges of travel, distant points are more distant) and shrunk (with increased technology) – at the same time!

The church has been hard hit, challenged. In the US, churches have scrambled to figure out how to minister to their own people online. Many Christians are still hesitant to gather on Sundays. Churches that do have Sunday gatherings have to figure out social distancing with limited space.

May I share an observation? The churches having the most difficult time in being and doing church are those whose primary focus before COVID-19 was primarily on the Sunday assembly and programmed activities. Leaders struggle with how to care for their members. Shepherding is a lost art among many church leaders. Most churches depend on self-reporting by the members; few churches are equipped to proactively maintain regular contact.

Another observation. For the past four to five months, many US churches have hardly touched the subject of evangelism and how to reach out effectively to the lost and the unchurched. Yet, a recent survey of the unchurched revealed that 21.5% would be open to a conversation about God. Wow! In a time of increased receptivity, most Christians and most churches are remarkably silent and inactive. Has God sent a gentle reminder that the church is not defined by buildings and programs?

Jesus gave the church a clear commission in Matthew 28:18-20 – make disciples who make disciples. The first Christians met in homes, contacted unbelievers in homes, and ministered in the context of the family. The early church met from house to house (Acts 2:42-46; 20:20). The early church was effective in making disciples who made disciples. In my local church ministry, Jan and I did the majority of our work in homes. We visited members; we visited those who visited the church. We constantly had people in our home. We visited in the home of every member during the first year of ministry with a new church. We know from personal experience that a church filled with Christians who reach out to others in the personal context of the home can experience phenomenal growth – doubling or tripling every few years.

While some churches have “home-based” small group programs that focus on members, I personally know of no US churches that have a consistent “home-based” evangelism effort to reach the lost and unchurched. Should we hear God’s wakeup call? Read the New Testament. The most effective way to make disciples that make disciples is through relationships established in our homes.

Perhaps the times and the culture have changed so much that building bridges of personal relationship over which the gospel can travel is no longer effective. In my mind as I read Scripture, there is no more effective way to share the gospel. God, renew our vision for what you have called us to be and to do. Remind us of the Great Commission and the charge to make disciples who will make disciples. The early church grew from a handful of disciples to tens of thousands in the early decades of church history. If the church you attend is not doubling or tripling every few years, why not? May our churches return to their God-given purpose – to bring together under Christ all things!