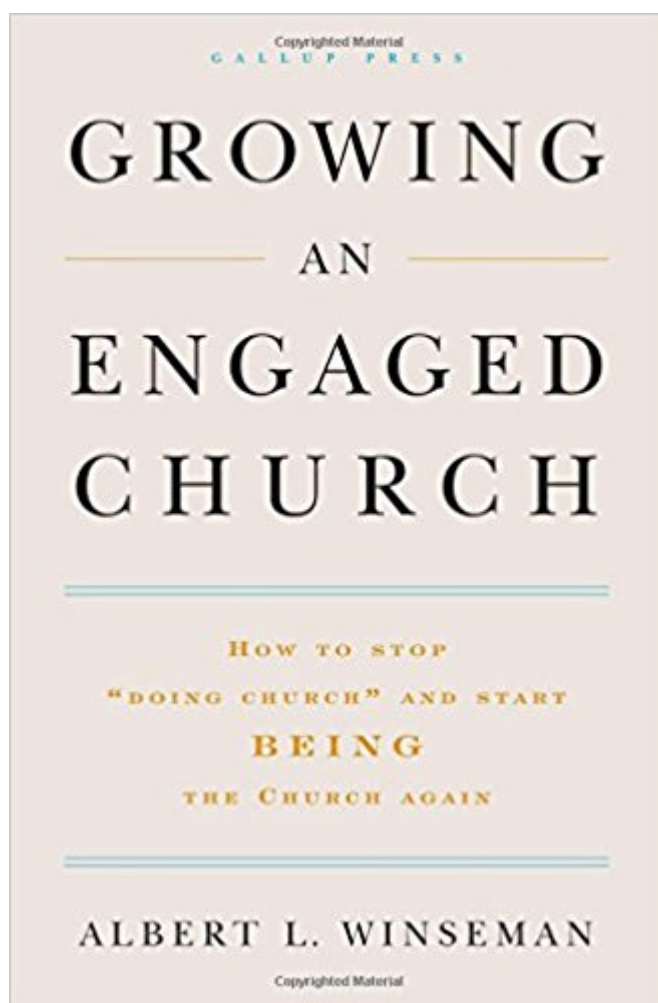


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# Growing An Engaged Church: How To Stop "Doing Church" And Start Being The Church Again



## Synopsis

Growing an Engaged Church offers unique, research-based, often counterintuitive solutions to the challenges facing churches today, including declining congregant participation, decreasing contributions, and slumping membership. Ministers, priests, and church boards will find the evidence and answers in this book provocative, eye-opening, and, most importantly, actionable. What if members of your congregation . . . were 13 times more likely to have invited someone to participate in your church in the past month? were three times as satisfied with their lives? spent more than two hours per week serving and helping others in their community? tripled their giving to your church? What would your church your parish look like? And how would you go about creating this kind of change? One thing is certain: Church leaders are never going to inspire more people to be actively and passionately involved in their congregations by doing the same things over and over again. Pastors and lay leaders need something fresh. Something new. The last thing they need is just another program or to set up a laundry list of new activities for members. Based on solid research by The Gallup Organization, Growing an Engaged Church will appeal to both Protestant and Catholic clergy and lay leaders who are looking for a way to be the Church instead of just doing church.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Al Winseman, D.Min., is The Gallup Organization's Global Practice Leader for Faith-Based Organizations. He consults with congregations, denominations, and other religious organizations

across the country, helping them put the power of engagement to work to improve their effectiveness. Winseman is a coauthor of *Living Your Strengths* (with more than 20,000 copies sold to date), a book that helps members of congregations discover and use their God-given talents and strengths. Prior to joining Gallup, Winseman served as a pastor in the United Methodist Church for 15 years leading thriving churches, including one he built from the ground up. He lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, with his wife, Jane, and their two college-aged daughters, Julie and Kaleigh.

Mainline Christian churches have been in decline for nearly 40 years, and increasingly are labeled as lifeless and outmoded. Albert Winseman's *"Growing an Engaged Church"* provides a thoughtful approach on how to turn this around and create a church that is full of life and in tune with the needs of all who seek to be part of something bigger than mere existence. Winseman's work is based on the use of the Gallup Faith Poll and Congregational Engagement Index which is detailed at the end of the book. As his subtitle suggests, Winseman makes the case that most mainline churches insist on "doing" church (going through the motions) rather than "being" church, that is, building a parish of dedicated and energized members who are growing spiritually and, at the same time, are reaching out in concern and service to the world. Humans are fundamentally spiritual beings, and that spirituality needs to find expression. Churches are ideally suited to meet this need but by failing in their task of "being," talents and strengths of members and prospective members go largely unrecognized and unharnessed. This translates to a vacuum for spiritual expression and a huge loss of human potential that otherwise could be tapped for the transformation of society. Engagement describes the degree of belonging an individual has in his/her church. Engaged members drive the spiritual health of every church and the more engaged members there are in one's church, the healthier it is. A healthy church is the good soil that produces fruit in abundance. Winseman destroys the myth that believing leads to belonging and establishes a new paradigm belonging leads to believing. He shows how the level of engagement provides the linkage to belonging and believing. He then provides a framework to engage members of a parish/congregation, the metrics to measure engagement, and lists the rewards that come with high level engagement. There are three factors underlying the concept of engagement: 1. Feeling welcomed - "Am I valued?" and "Can I make a meaningful contribution?" 2. The value of membership - Does the commitment required for membership reflect the value placed on membership? 3. Emotions do matter - Engagement is how one feels about their church. Conservative churches have been doing a much better job at connecting with people at an emotional level than mainline churches. For the bond to have optimum strength, it must go beyond

just the worship service or Mass. And there are four outcomes that result from an "engaged church": 1. Members will be more satisfied with their lives. 2. Members will be more inviting - inviting others to "come and see." 3. Members will be more engaged in serving others. 4. Members will be more inclined to give - engaged churches/parishes give more in terms of both percentage of income and actual dollars and time. Church leaders - pastors, elders, deacons, pastoral council members, et al - will find "Growing an Engaged Church" provocative and useful in their quest to insure that their church fulfills its mission as a place to worship God, as way stations for rest and renewal in a broken world, as a place where fellow seekers can connect, and where all are empowered to reach out to a hurting society.

This is a great breakdown on how to reinvigorate your church. It is very similar to the techniques used in the corporate world to institute change. I would recommend it to anyone interested in moving the direction of your church, volunteer organization or company.

I was asked to read this as preparation for a Chapter retreat (a Chapter is like a board of directors for the congregation). I honestly have to say that a lot of this is common sense, and bringing the perspective of Engagement to congregational life is the same thing that many companies are doing to retain their best talent. So, in that respect, the book provides good ideas on how to take steps to increase Engagement, and define what Engagement looks like. Another strength of the book is the avoidance of technical jargon, which does help quite a bit in getting through what otherwise could be a dry statistical read. Those strengths earned the book a strong 3 stars. The main weakness of the book is that it isn't really an "all inclusive" package. I realize that Engagement looks different across different congregations and communities; and that Engagement is not a "complete off the shelf" solution in and of itself. However, the book doesn't really provide a comprehensive plan or guidelines for working through an Engagement process, instead referring the reader ever so gently to Gallup Faith (which I am sure will provide the resources, permission to use their copyrighted survey questions for a fee). Make note, that you are not allowed to use any of the survey items in any order on your own without permission from Gallup (the copyright is clearly listed below every set of questions and graphs). The main reason I'm docking two stars here is that this is basically a glorified marketing brochure for a consulting organization / firm with some teaser tips (albeit good teasers). Overall, the concept is good, and could be workable for many congregations at least in principle. With Strengths Coaching courses running from \$ 2,900 to 4,500 per person (and probably consulting fees by the hour to boot), I'm sure that the very struggling congregations this program

can't really make full use of the material in this book since they cannot afford to access Gallup's ME25 Engagement measurement and consulting program or the strengths coaching.

This book laid out for me many of the ways we can improve participation as well as spirituality in our congregations. This is an extremely important part of Stewardship, and it provides many wonderful ideas for improving the connection of your congregation to your church. I bought several copies to share with my Stewardship Council because I think it is important.

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