



The Connecting Church

Randy Frazee

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A senior pastor at Pantego Bible Church in Arlington, Texas, shares the secret of building a successful, healthy, functional Christian community. Original.

The Connecting Church Details

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Michael Culbertson says

A very clearly organized, well-written, easy read. Randy Frazee, pastor of a large church in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, presents practical tips for encouraging community in churches. Frazee's intended audience is leaders of suburban American churches (even as small as 100), but many of the principles can likely be transferred into other settings. The book is organized around three fundamental cultural problems that have intensified in the last half century and that impede community: individualism, isolation, and consumerism. For each, Frazee demonstrates the pervasiveness of the problem drawing on research in social science, outlines the biblical foundations of a solution, gives practical suggestions for how to achieve the solution, and explains one implementation of the solution, as expressed in the life of his church Pantego Bible Church. To make the discussion concrete, Frazee tells the story of Bob and Karen Johnson, a composite or type for contemporary suburban American families, relating each of the concepts to their lives. The example of this family, which runs throughout the book, culminates in a comprehensive narrative in chapter 13 of how the Johnsons take their first steps toward community by following the strategies Frazee has provided in the preceding chapters.

In part one, Frazee addresses the problem of individualism, which tears apart the bonds between people that are vital for community. His proposed solution is to find a common purpose---a set of shared beliefs and values for a group of people. This common purpose is characterized by authority, a common creed, traditions, standards, and a common mission, all of which support the establishment of the shared purpose. In brief, Frazee says the common purpose of the church is to form "little Christs," that is, to create disciples committed to becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. To help them achieve this, Pantego developed a "Christian Life Profile" (74-80) outlining thirty beliefs, practices, and values essential to the Christian faith. Worship services, Christian education, and small group discussions are centered around this profile, in an annual curriculum cycle. Each member of a small group is encouraged to identify (with the input of trusted others) one or two areas in the profile in which they would like to grow. The church then provides resources to help them achieve this growth, and fellow small group members encourage them and provide some measure of accountability for their goals. Not only does this help achieve unity of purpose, the sharing involved in helping one another grow strengthens the communal bonds in the small group.

In part two, Frazee addresses the problem of isolation, which results from individualism and hinders reconnection with others. His proposed solution is to find a common place, namely the neighborhood. This common place is characterized by spontaneity, availability, frequency of contact, common meals, and localized geography. At Pantego, they have chosen to structure their community groups around school catchment areas. Zone pastors oversee people who live in a particular high school catchment area; mid-size groups (of about 50 adults) organize around elementary school catchments; and home groups (of 6-12 adults and their children) form in neighborhoods within a particular elementary school area. In order to reduce the strain of juggling multiple disjoint social circles, the nested structure allows members to enter more deeply into the lives of a more concentrated social group. To this end, Pantego also decentralizes most of the life of the Body to the small groups---it's with one's home group, not some additional ministry or affinity group, that members participate in service, missions, and evangelism.

At Pantego, intergenerational integration occurs at the level of the small group, not at the level of the corporate worship service. Worship services are provided for adults, youth, and age-grouped children. These are intended to inspire, and the content (adapted in form for the particular audience) is consistent across services, so that families can all discuss the morning's service together on the way home from church. Mid-size community groups gather at church on Sunday mornings for instruction. Home groups meet, typically for about three hours on Sunday evenings, for involvement. It is here in the small group, where relationships

are closest, that children, youth, and adults enter into one another's lives.

Finally, in part three, Frazee addresses the problem of consumerism, suggesting the solution of common possessions, by which he does not intend communism, but rather making available all of one's "time, talent, and treasure" to the Lord's work according to His leading. Frazee characterizes common possessions by interdependency, intergenerational life, children, responsibility, and sacrifice. (Unfortunately, it isn't particularly clear how children characterize common possessions, but his comments about them are nevertheless helpful.)

Overall, Frazee relays how this model has helped vibrant communal life develop at Pantego Bible Church, and claims (perhaps a bit too confidently) that the model can work at nearly any other church as well. While the very practical structures Frazee constructs certainly support communal life, the book seems to lack treatment of some of the interpersonal relational aspects necessary for community. I could envision small groups embedded in Frazee's structure in which participants don't feel free to share deeply and vulnerably with one another or in which accountability is burdensome instead of growth a joy. Moreover, Frazee seems to rush past the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in forming community (though this is not altogether absent in the book), favoring instead the practical steps we can take. Nevertheless, *The Connecting Church* contains many helpful insights about about the nature of community, cultural features that inhibit it, and structures and practical steps that we can take to foster it---a fair amount of food for thought for anyone hoping for deeper involvement in the lives of others.

Tim says

The Connecting Church provides a challenge to the consumerism, individualism, and isolation of America and the American church. Emphasizing three points, common purpose around doctrine, but also authority, actions, and virtues of being; common place, in neighborhood organization and intentional community in a location; and common possessions, spiritual and material, he paints a picture of an entirely reorganized church focused on community. It is a winsome vision - a real community to be part of and to reach out from. I especially like his comments about the loss of community, the necessity of geographical proximity (always good to hear someone say one should move for the sake of the church), and dangers of consumerism and individualism. Now to try and import some of his ideas for use at and around the home.

Kate says

What a challenging book, but in a good way! The author is right when he says that the concept of true Christian community is counter-cultural, but it has challenged me to think about the way I build community with the people around me. I thought it might be a bit outdated, being over 10 years old, but honestly it's still relevant today and the problem is probably even bigger now. I'm keen to find ways to bring genuine community into my life.

Samantha says

The only reason I gave this book 4 stars is because I was definitely not the intended target audience. My husband read this, loved it, and recommended it to me. It generated some amazing conversations between us about the definition of community and what we would like our lives and relationships to look like in an ideal

situation.

I recommend it, with the caveat that the general premise is based on the fact that you are already a deeply entrenched Christian looking to get more out of your church experience. Some of the assumptions were difficult for me to fully absorb, so it took me quite a while to finish reading.

Matthew Lindell says

The general premise is that small groups and community are broken. They are primarily broken because of our individualistic, consumer driven culture. Additionally, we have too many circles we are trying to manage (work, church, kids school, kids sports, etc.) which dilutes our ability to go deep and find fulfillment in any. Our churches seek to fill these voids but don't actually address the core issues or seek to create authentic community.

The answer then focuses on several key themes. The first is to reduce the number of circles with the neighborhood becoming a key focus. He suggests that we should seek to live within 10 minutes of our place of employment, that we should seek close relationships with those in our community. The church he pastors, has geographical small groups as opposed those focused on affinity (age, life stage, hobbies, etc.).

Fraze did a good job of also laying out key ingredients to healthy community (common purpose, frequent interaction, interdependence, etc.). Where I struggled with the book as that it was it's general organization...it didn't flow cleanly together (I frequently outline books for quick later reference). At times it felt like a jumbled conglomeration of good ideas that didn't have strong flow and certain sections should have been cut.

So why 3 stars? Another reviewer said the following and I completely agreed: "This book begins with a bang but ends with a big yawn. The author should have ended the book at about chapter 9."

It had some great ideas and research but missed in the organization and finished product - I blame the editor more than the author.

Larry Yurk says

This is a great read for the relationship side of church small groups. So far, it provides a penetrating analysis of the reasons small groups are not working in many churches for many people.

Brian says

Great research presented and some great ideas for small group and church development.

Mike says

Fraze does a really good job at diagnosing the problems inherent in today's institutional churches. Going beyond small groups and getting people to function together in small, geographic communities would get us

closer to the experience of the first century church.

I found two drawback to his plan, though. First, he relies on a form to be followed for effective Christian living. I am not a form of Christianity-by-the-numbers. Further, while he gives a pretty good picture of how individual geographic communities can function, he spends little to time discussing the other two tiers of his church model. I noticed that he has put out a "2.0" version of the book, and I wonder whether it provides more of the structure inside the framework of his model.

Sam B says

Excellent book. This is the community we should (and I'd bet most people do) crave. Why don't we seek it more intentionally? Very challenging, immensely beneficial.

Jess Martin says

Great balance of theoretical framework and examples of community-oriented churches in action.

Amanda Mckinley says

This book is what inspired our community to move into the same neighborhood. Great points. Convicting statistics. Probably a little outdated by now, but still has some underlying philosophy that is timeless. We need people. Living in close proximity matters.

Garland Vance says

As a person who is interested in creating community, I found this to be one of the insightful and practical books on Christian community. Frazee addresses the biggest roadblocks to community, the ways that we can carry out community and the reasons why this is so vital to the church.

I am not a pastor but still found this book very helpful and would encourage many Christians to read it--not just pastors.

It will shape the way that you do life together wih those around you.

Jeff Noble says

Connecting Church, The by Randy Frazee (?)

Matt Moran says

This was good. At times a little too Willow Creek, a little too Texas, and a little too pie in the sky. But still

helpful.

Best points:

Frazer is spot on when he says that the individualism, consumerism, and isolation that is central to American life is death to Biblical community.

The local church must become the hub of the believer's life.

Real community is marked by spontaneity, frequency, availability, and shared meals. All of this requires geographic proximity.

Chris says

This book begins with a bang but ends with a big yawn. The author should have ended the book at about chapter 9. It, however, gives an excellent argument for our need of a community in our church. A must read for a post-modern Christians who are confused about what a church ought to be.

Recommended
