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Focus On Mission:
Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

F O C U S

KENT R. HUNTER
with **RUPERT LOYD, JR.**

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Scripture references in this book are from *The Message* version. Why? According to the brilliant translator, Eugene Peterson, it's not meant to be a scholarly study Bible. It's meant to be a life-learning, engaging Bible that helps you to appropriate God's teaching to everyday life. God's plan is to effectively change your life through the divine power of His Word.

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Contents

Introduction	1
The Lens of Harvest: Prioritizing God's Mission Over Good Ideas ..	3
Start with the End in Mind: Rediscovering the Church's Mission	5
From Distraction to Mission: A Call to Church Revival	7
The Heart of the Harvest: A Call to Multiplication and Movement	9
FDM: The Formula for Movement in a Church on Fire	11
Anchoring the Mission: Speaking Truth in a Drifting Culture	13
Clearing the Path: Refocusing the Church on Its True Mission.....	15
Burn the Ships: Embracing Renewal for a Relevant Church.....	17
Back to Basics: Overcoming Clutter and Restoring Mission	19
Cutting Through the Noise: A Clear Focus for Effective Mission....	21
Conclusion	23
Questions for Discussion	25
About the Authors	29

Introduction

“If everything is mission, nothing is mission.”

—Steve Addison, quoting Stephen Neill

The Apostle Paul demonstrated focus when he said, “But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14 NIV).

When the Christian movement is productive, the result reflects a supernatural explosion of new people coming to Christ. It occurred in the New Testament in spite of the odds: Roman rulers, misguided religious leaders, and political pressures.

When churches explode with new members, Christianity becomes the movement Jesus ignited. It is a supernatural phenomenon, often called a revival. Yet, why doesn't it occur in every church all the time? How is it that poor nations spiritually thrive in one era, then suffer divine decline a few generations later?

Even in the early days of Jesus, there were some who believed and followed, yet missed the power of mission. They were “saved” believers, yet failed missionaries. Jesus clarified this challenge in Luke 10:2, “What a huge harvest...”—or could be! However, “the workers are few.” The Lord addressed this spiritual challenge: “So on your knees; ask the God of the Harvest to send harvest hands.”

The issue for many Christ-followers is the challenge of weak mission focus. Here is a good way to understand this challenge: Take your dominant hand and write the words, “I am Superman (or Superwoman).” Write it five times. Then do it with the other hand. It takes most people three times longer with their non-dominant hand. You accomplish three times more by focusing on your strengths. The way Jesus organized your church—every church since Pentecost—is to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. He launched an explosive movement.

All churches and Christian movements start out with the focus on disciples, just like Jesus did. Then they add facilities, programs, activities, and efforts that are nice, but not laser-focused on reaching the lost and making disciples. They add staff, and the subtle shift hijacks outreach efforts and mission effectiveness. The people on your church’s staff don’t know your unchurched neighbors. Mission focus is compromised. Churches plateau, age, and decline.

Focus matters. Remember the four men who took the paralyzed guy on a stretcher to get healed by Jesus? They couldn’t get in the door of the house where Jesus was teaching. That is no problem if you’re mission-focused! They tore off the roof and lowered the man, who got healed and walked out of that house on his own two feet.

Focus matters!

The Lens of Harvest: Prioritizing God's Mission Over Good Ideas

(1) There is a large harvest and fewer workers to get it done. This is not an occasional issue. It is the way of life in ministry. There is always more work to do. (The same is true for farmers, business owners, and many other occupations). “That’s the truth of the saying, ‘This one sows, that one harvests’” (John 4:37).

This is the triage principle and signals intentional decision-making with a bias for the low-hanging fruit.

(2) God is primarily focused on the harvest. Jesus was once asked, when he agreed to eat with Zacchaeus the tax collector, “What are You doing here?” He answered, “For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost” (Luke 19:10).

(3) This leads to the lens principle. With which lens do you practice triage and, in fact, eliminate activities that don’t fit? There is the “good ideas” lens. There is the “we’ve always done this” lens. There is the “many in our church want to do this” lens. There is the “the church down the road does this” lens. There is the “we did this at the last church I went to” lens. There is the “rich and big financial giver suggested we do it” lens. And, finally, or first, there is God’s lens, the biblical lens.

Ask yourself: Why did Jesus come? Why did He die on the cross? What big idea drove the early church to do what they

did? What did Jesus commission us to do? When you get to heaven, you want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21 NIV). What will be the lens by which that statement will, or will not, be spoken over you? How many meetings you attended? How many potluck dinners? Rummage sales?

There are good things to do, and there are God things to do. What is it we must do? In John 15, Jesus once again speaks of the harvest. The Father cuts off branches — churches, Christians, programs, activities — that don’t produce fruit. He prunes others. Why? So that they will produce more fruit. John 15:16 defines this: “I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won’t spoil.”

Start with the End in Mind: Rediscovering the Church's Mission

If you read books about leadership, there's a warning that is very basic: "If you forget what business you're in, you're about to go out of business." It's called drifting from your core purpose. Without clear focus on your primary mission, you end up on the slippery slope toward mediocrity—and, ultimately, disaster.

Stephen Covey, in one of the all-time classics *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, said it this way: "Begin with the end in mind." Begin what? Begin *everything*! It's called having a clear focus—an unrelenting commitment to your primary objective. Otherwise, what got you here won't take you there, especially if it has to do with eternal truth.

Christians confess that they belong to a universal, holy, Christian church. The word "holy" implies separated or special—divinely so. The Apostle Paul didn't write a modern business book. However, he did write about the Lord's business. In 1 Peter 1:13-16, he addresses God's intentional, focused mission: the business of your church, the mission of your life. It's about the priority goals of every believer. Peter begins, "...roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear ... don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what *you* feel like doing" (emphasis mine).

What is the purpose of your church? What is God's purpose for you *in* your church and *through* your church? It's easy for

people in congregations to stay busy. It's a lot harder for those same people to be focused on doing the *right* things. Doing things right is not the same thing as doing the right things.

Peter continues in verse 14, "As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life." The best snapshot we have of "God's life" is in Jesus' life. You know, the One who said that He came to "find and restore the lost" (Luke 19:10).

So many churches are filled with busy people focused on good things that aren't uniquely God things. Here's one of many examples: food pantries. Is helping the poor with food a good thing? Absolutely! Is it a God thing? Absolutely! Is it *uniquely* a God thing? Not at all! All sorts of groups help people with food and have nothing to offer that has eternal significance. But Christians and churches do. Yet, most don't, even though people are more receptive for you to "share the hope that is within you."

Every day some Christians approach the pastor with a "good" idea that has no impact on the salvation of others or the spiritual growth of Christians. The end result? Busyness is a narcotic that makes us feel good. Mission energy is sapped. Unbelievers miss Jesus. Churches decline.

Don't just do "...what you feel like doing." Do what Jesus Christ called you to do: Make disciples who become disciplers who disciple others.

From Distraction to Mission: A Call to Church Revival

You have probably heard this cute but powerful phrase: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

When Jesus heard His friend, Lazarus, was severely sick, He told His disciples He needed to go there—to Bethany. It was a dangerous destination—close to Jerusalem where the religious leaders were out to kill Him. Jesus knew the danger, but His focus was on His mission. His disciples tried to dissuade Him. They knew the danger—and the risk. But Jesus was on a mission!

How is your mission?

Here is what happens: Well-meaning Christians come up with a “good” idea—an activity or program for the church. They pitch it to the pastor, staff, and/or board, and it becomes part of the lifestyle of the church.

It seems like few church leaders are able to ask: “How does this fit with our divine mission?” Even fewer are willing to say, “No!”

So, churches everywhere are distracted by disruption—“good” things. The focus of the mission becomes diffused.

Yet, not every “good” thing is a “God” thing. Church people are worn out like the person climbing the ladder with enthusiasm—but it’s on the wrong wall.

When a nation becomes more secularized, part of the issue falls at the feet of Christians who have failed, to a degree, in their God-given mission. However, the issue behind the issue is a lack of *focus* on the one thing that God has called us to do: Make disciples of Jesus Christ. Distractions lead to disruption of the mission. Focus requires an elimination of distractions.

Thank God that Jesus never lost His focus. In so many churches, peripheral clutter has become tradition. Like Lazarus, much of the church's mission is lifeless, trapped in a tomb. Yet Jesus is the master of resurrection. For your church, it is called a revival.

The Heart of the Harvest: A Call to Multiplication and Movement

Why has the Christian movement grown, flourished, waned, and decreased in so many areas of the world throughout history? The simple answer is that God relies on people. And, from generation to generation, there is drift from the basics of healthy, vibrant faith: the essentials.

In 2 Timothy 2:1-14, the Apostle Paul passes on “the basic essentials” to the next-generation leader, Timothy. In fact, in 2 Timothy 2:14, he summarizes his instructions clearly: “Repeat these basic essentials over and over again to God’s people.”

What are these *essentials*, and how do they match up with your church, your staff team at church, and the way you raise (or have raised) your children in the Christian movement?

Paul begins, “...throw yourself into this work for Christ” (verse 1). He implies you should help the next generation become immersed in the essentials that follow. These basics are nonnegotiable. The first essential basic is the difference between “church” as “organization” or church as “movement.” Paul tells Timothy, “Pass on what you heard from me ... to reliable leaders who are competent to teach others” (verse 2). In one sentence, Paul captures the key ingredient of a movement: the multiplication of essentials. How did Jesus say it? He said, “Make disciples” (Matthew 28:19 NIV). And this is implied: Disciples disciple disciplers. Disciples don’t just “know”

the right stuff. They are trained to do ministry and to develop the next generation.

This is not the role of the organization or the staff only. It's every believer equipped, as in Ephesians 4:7-13: "He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church...." Multiplication! Movement!

In 2 Timothy 2:5-7, Paul reflects on examples of focus on essentials. He says that the soldier doesn't get distracted making deals in the marketplace (church bazaars? social clubs?). No, the soldier concentrates on carrying out orders. Paul switches metaphors: An athlete must play by the rules, or he never gets anywhere. However, the farmer is the one who gets the harvest: planting seeds, cultivating, then reaping the harvest! The farmer is focused—or will go out of business (verses 5-7).

Paul writes from jail (verses 8-13). Yet, he is clear: God's Word isn't in jail. Unless, of course, the church of Jesus Christ drifts off task, loses sight of the essentials, or adds layers of nonessentials disguised as "good" ideas, but not "God ideas" for the Christian movement.

Paul summarizes in verses 11-13: "If we die with Him (Jesus), we'll live with Him; if we stick it out with Him, we'll rule with Him; if we turn our backs on Him, He'll turn His back on us; if we give up on Him, He does not give up...." Yeah, Jesus raises up others who will be faithful to the basic essentials. You can stop the movement in your church. But you can't kill it in the world. How important are the essentials to you?

FDM: The Formula for Movement in a Church on Fire

This formula was developed years ago by Mick Woodhead in Sheffield, England:

FDM: Focus + Discipline = Momentum

What if you carried a card in your pocket that says “FDM” on one side and on the other side has the formula: “Focus + Discipline = Momentum”? It would be a daily reminder that Christianity is a movement. In order to be a movement, you must have momentum. Momentum requires focus. Focus requires discipline.

“Discipline” comes from the word “disciple.” Jesus called His equipped followers “disciples.”

In 2 Corinthians 5:9, the Apostle Paul writes, “Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing.” Do you think it pleases God when we lack a sense of urgency about those who are without Jesus: in our neighborhood, in our social relationships, or in our church? Is the main thing the main thing for your church? Do you know what is the main thing for God?

The clock is always ticking. Everyone dies. Those without Jesus as their Savior live in a situation that is urgent. Do you get that about those around you who are not yet believers? Do you care? Do your actions reflect that urgency? Does your church demonstrate that urgency?

Many churches take *forever* to get things done. Their form of government seems like one hurdle after another. It seems like it takes forever to move forward, to get anything done. There are hoops and loops and layers of logistics that would frustrate anyone. However, lost people don't have "forever." No one does! Can you imagine Paul or Jesus having all those meetings, all those time-wasting decisions? It seems like the governance structure of most churches, the decision-making approach, was created by a turtle! Where is the focus?

The issue behind the issue is usually FDM—or lack of it. Paul, Jesus, and every Christian in fact considers every lost person a four-alarm fire. Urgency is required! Time is of the essence! Perhaps a fire needs to be built under every Christian in every church.

There is the story of the church that caught on fire during the middle of the night. All the neighbors were awakened by the commotion. They watched, standing in front of their houses. One guy who belonged to the church talked to his neighbor, who never went to church and showed no signs of being a Christian. The Christian man said to his neighbor, "I didn't know you were interested in the church." The man responded, "Well, I've never seen a church on fire before!" That says it all!

Are those in your church focused? Are you on fire for reaching your neighbors?

Anchoring the Mission: Speaking Truth in a Drifting Culture

When a nation drifts further from God, unspiritual, non-Christian fads and activities become a large part of the popular culture. There is a subtle temptation to back off the message of Jesus as it applies to every aspect of life. Some pastors and churches subtly and incrementally drift from the tough realities of life in Christ. The focus on mission becomes clouded.

The result is drift in two directions. First, the message gets watered down. Sensitive issues of scriptural truth are diminished or ignored to avoid running off Christians who are caught in cultural drift.

The other extreme can occur as well. It includes hard-core condemnation of the “evils of this world” without the balance of God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Staying true to the balance and tone of God’s Word is a tough balancing act in a national culture caught in massive spiritual drift.

This challenge is not new. In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Paul writes to the church at Corinth—a family of believers in one of the most corrupt and immoral cities in the Mediterranean world at that time. He says, as Christians, we face “hard times,” but we don’t “walk off the job.” He could not be clearer: “We don’t twist God’s Word to suit ourselves.”

When the message we proclaim is not in sync with the popular culture, the answer is not to change the message. Yet many Christians—whole churches and even denominations—drift subtly to fit the culture. It's called "syncretism," a foolish attempt to sync up with the culture. In effect, Paul is saying, "Just because the Gospel is tough news doesn't mean it isn't still Good News." Paul kept the biblical focus.

What is really odd, even absurd? Many churches—whole denominations—cling to worn-out language patterns, styles, and delivery systems in what has become a secularized mission field. This is the failure to be "indigenous" in the methods and containers you use to reach people who are without Jesus. The incarnation—Jesus in the flesh—is God's nonnegotiable approach: Reach people where they are in the ways they understand.

It's insane: So many church leaders, churches, and groups of churches drift from the truth and hang onto worn-out methods at the same time! It's the sure formula to make God's powerful movement impotent and ineffective. You can't be an effective missionary, like Paul was, unless you speak the truth in love and reach people where they are. Focus on the mission.

Clearing the Path: Refocusing the Church on Its True Mission

You may have heard this powerful saying: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

This short sentence represents identifying your priorities. It reflects the discipline to stay on task. It summarizes your focus and describes your mission.

One of the greatest deterrents to accomplishment is the clutter in life. It is the unimportant, nonessential, time- and energy-consuming junk in life that robs you—and cripples your focus.

Remember when, in Scripture, Jesus got the news his good friend Lazarus had died? He essentially said that they needed to go to the funeral. At least, I imagine that’s what the disciples heard. A resurrection was likely not on their radar—yet!

What was on their minds? Something like, “Hey, Lord, things are heating up against you. The religious leaders are out to get you. Lazarus’ home is too close to Jerusalem. You could get killed.”

Jesus had a greater mission. His focus was clear. He insisted they go.

You see this also with the Apostle Paul—one of God’s leaders who was definitely on a mission. In Philippians 1:18-21, we learn that Paul is in prison. So, what was his focus? He says,

“...everything happening to me in this jail only serves to make Christ more accurately known.”

Contrast this issue of focus with so many churches: pastors, leaders, and others. Over time God’s people can come up with hundreds of “good” ideas that require time, effort, and money. It becomes a diffusion of energy. Some are good ideas, but often they are not “God” ideas. This is an issue rarely addressed. Does your church need to have a rummage sale and clean out the attic, the garage, from all the junk? This is what happens: clutter. Diffusion of energy. Roadblocks to the real mission. The focus disintegrates into so many “good activities.” The result? When it comes to the main thing, Christians become impotent in mission.

Focus on the mission and watch God move—in you, in your church, and in your community.

Burn the Ships: Embracing Renewal for a Relevant Church

There is an amazing, radical story in history about starting out new, fresh, and uncluttered by the past. It occurred when the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés landed in North America in what is now called Mexico. His objective was to settle the land and start something new and fresh.

After they landed, Cortés commanded his army to burn the ships. There was no going back. They could only move forward. Cortés was committed to starting something fresh, new, relevant, and solid. He wanted everyone to know that there was no going back to the “good old days” or “the way we’ve always done it.” This was to be new, fresh, relevant, and indigenous.

Every Christian is faced with the need to burn the irreligious “ships.” They are not the essence of faith. *That* must never change. “The ships” are the containers that brought our forefathers and foremothers to faith.

The church must stand on the essential teachings of Scripture. But the containers, the delivery systems? They are the “ships” that must be burned. To perpetuate old containers is to make faith a religion. Perpetuated religion saps the power of faith. Why? It does something no believer wants: It makes the living Christ a relic of irrelevance. Spiritual focus is lost.

This was the dilemma facing the early church. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews speaks to this issue. Every Christian, every church, faces this issue—every day. In Hebrews 12:28-29, the writer of this letter to Jews—who became Christians—points out that, while faith *never* changes, delivery systems *must*. These verses say: “Do you see what we’ve got? An unshakable kingdom!” It is “brimming with worship, deeply reverent before God.”

This is a key element for effective mission and outreach: Keep the Gift; discard, upgrade, or renew the packaging. Hebrews continues: “For God is not an indifferent bystander. He’s actively cleaning house, torching all that needs to burn, and He won’t quit until it’s all cleansed. God Himself is Fire!”

What “ships” need to burn at your church? In your life? What packaging sends the message that God is out-of-date, old, and irrelevant? For some churches, it’s the building. Or it may be pews, out-of-date dress codes, Old English language, hymnals, or worn-out programs. These ships won’t sail for effective mission and outreach. For God’s sake, burn the ships! Focus on the living Jesus.

Back to Basics: Overcoming Clutter and Restoring Mission

Good leaders cast vision. Jesus is the greatest leader the world has ever known. He is the greatest visionary we will ever know. He changes lives, both dramatically and eternally. His vision is for every person who has ever lived. His vision is for local churches to influence others with the best Good News anyone could receive. That's amazing vision!

However, vision leaks. Not at Jesus' level. Not at the Bible's level. But at the church level, vision leaks. Churches—church people—lose focus. Congregations, even whole denominations, suffer from drift.

In Philippians 2:12-30, Paul, from jail, addresses potential drift among the Christians at Philippi. He says, "Keep on doing what you've done from the beginning. When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience.... Keep it up. Better yet, redouble your efforts. Be energetic in your life of salvation."

Yet, this is the key, the real source of power. He says, "Be energetic.... That energy is *God's* energy, an energy deep within you." This is the key, the power source: Get back to spiritual basics. What is the real issue? Clutter. With clutter, nonessentials cloud essentials. The result is drift.

What are the signs of church drift? Paul covers that, starting in verse 14 of chapter 2. He warns the Philippian Christians: "no

bickering, no second-guessing.” These are symptomatic signs of drift.

What is Paul’s strategy to refocus? He says, “Go out into the world uncorrupted....” You see, when you drift from your mission, God’s mission, you have lost focus; you are ineffective. You’re not doing what God called you to do. You’re not being who God called you to be. Paul continues that, when you’re on a mission, you are “a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society.” The mission is clear, the focus is good, and the vision is sharp. Paul says, “Carry the light-giving Message into the night....”

Sometimes church people forget about subtle drift. The Enemy goes to church, too—not to worship, but to corrupt vision and skew focus. Not by direct attack, but by diffusion of energy—by focusing on nonessentials. His strategy? Keep people busy doing stuff that changes nothing in eternity. Drift kills congregations. Does Satan have you wandering?

Cutting Through the Noise: A Clear Focus for Effective Mission

There is a huge difference between faith and religion. Faith is trusting Christ and, by His power, knowing He has washed away your sins in the waters of baptism. You aren't perfect this side of heaven. However, you are forgiven! With that pardoned life, the Holy Spirit empowers you to be church. You have the power to change the world, one person at a time.

Yet, the human tendency is toward clutter. The clarity and focus of the mission are sidetracked. How? With *religious* additions. The secret to effective impact includes the elimination of clutter.

In Colossians 2:10-23, the Apostle Paul encourages these new Christians to focus. He wants them to “realize the fullness of Christ,” clarifying: “His power extends over everything” (verse 10).

Paul lists the diversions that tempted those Christians at Colossi to lose the focus of the mission. He clearly lists the roadblocks they were tempted to add, ones that would take them off mission: circumcision, a long list of laws (verses 11-12), details of diet, worship services(!), and holy days (verse 16).

Where does all this clutter come from? In truth? Well-meaning Christians! They are Christians who are filled with “good ideas” for your church, but they are not spiritually mature enough to

realize that these ideas are not “God ideas”—at the top of God’s list is the clear purpose of why Jesus came, lived, died on the cross, rose to heaven, and gave us our mission. Paul says, “Don’t tolerate people who try to run your life” (verse 18). Don’t let others run your church, diffuse your mission focus—and pile on clutter! Paul says that these people get sidetracked and divert your church: “They’re completely out of touch with the source of life, Christ” (verses 18-19).

In verse 20, the apostle is quite direct: “Put all that puffed-up and childish religion behind you.” Here is how it works: Growing churches are full of infant Christians. They know just enough about the Bible to be saved by grace through faith in Christ. But they are biblically ignorant enough to derail a whole congregation from effective mission focus. They have “good ideas”: “Let’s have a rummage sale, a bake sale, a card party,” and on and on and on. Most pastors find it hard to say “no”—knowing they might leave their congregation to join another “country club” church.

Some of these people have been in your congregation for fifty years. However, their Christian maturity? Their Bible depth? Especially, their mission clarity? Their maturity is one year deep, repeated fifty times! The result? This clutter wears out active, mission-minded Christians. It consumes their energy and diffuses their focus. The church becomes missionally anemic, and, in time, the congregation is headed for decline.

The antidote? Focus on spiritual growth, Bible study, and mission focus, and direct the congregation to catch the mission that really matters.

Conclusion

“Focus matters.” Churches that drift from their mission lose their effectiveness, not because they lack resources or good intentions, but because they have forgotten their primary calling: to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. The challenge is clear: Remove distractions, eliminate the clutter, and refocus on what truly matters. Like the four men who tore off the roof to bring their friend to Jesus, we must be willing to do whatever it takes to see lives transformed.

So, what’s your next move? Every believer and every church must take an honest look at their priorities. Are you actively engaging the lost, or has mission drifted into the background? Will you pray, as Jesus commanded, for more workers in the harvest? Will you adjust your time, energy, and resources to reflect a true disciple-making focus? The harvest is ready—will you step into it?

Questions for Discussion

What does the statement “If everything is mission, nothing is mission” mean in the context of church effectiveness and outreach?

How does this challenge the way many churches operate today?

In Philippians 3:12-15, Paul speaks of a singular focus on pressing toward the goal. How does this mindset apply to the mission of the church, and what are some practical ways churches can maintain such focus in a culture of busyness?



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About the Authors



Dr. Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries. He believes that God has called him to help Christians and their churches become more effective for the Great Commission, to reach unbelievers and to make them disciples of Jesus Christ. Dr. Hunter is the author of more than 40 books. He has consulted more than 1,800 churches from 80 denominations, as well as nondenominational and independent churches. He developed the SEND Movement, which trains congregational members to become missionaries to those who are unchurched in their social networks. Kent writes the bimonthly Church Doctor Report, found on www.churchdoctor.org. Kent lives on a tree farm in northeast Indiana with his wife, Janet. Kent and Janet have two grown children, Laura and Jon.



Dr. Rupert Loyd Jr. has a BA in history from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, an MDiv from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, and a PhD in leadership from Union University in Cincinnati. He has over 40 years of pastoral experience in both urban and suburban churches, including multiethnic, multi-congregational churches. Throughout his career, he has maintained a presence in both the church and the academy. Dr. Loyd currently teaches graduate and undergraduate classes in the College of Business and Leadership at Lourdes University, and he holds the post of lead pastor at Marketplace Community Church in Toledo, Ohio.