



The State of Things 2022

...He is not the God of the dead, but of the living...

Mark 12:27a

THE END OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE NEW ERA

September, 15 2022

by Ernie Myers, Senior Pastor

Where We Are, September 2022

As I write this update on the future plans of DC Church, **I want to begin by expressing whatever challenge that we have the future of our church is great.** We have a God who is with us; He has a plan for our ministry. Always hope. So identifying barriers to climb is not an exercise in pessimism. It is a push to succeed whatever the challenge.

What I am doing is trying to look ahead to what the times have in store for us and plan for those possibilities using the Wisdom of God. The idea is to be proactive not reactive. I share these things with you so that you will not be surprised by the coming events, but instead to be ready whatever the test.

When I last wrote of our future together in July of last year, we thought that Covid-19 was nearly over, though we knew that the recovery of our church's momentum would take some while, and we were just days away from the Grand Reopening. Then the Omicron Variant hit and Covid infections surged. This surge has slowed our recovery, but with the mildness of Omicron, we have continued on and are fighting every Sunday to recover our people and to reach new families and individuals with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Selling the Port Norfolk property remains a priority, there are nibbles, and when the property sells we'll be able to recover the expenses of the merger with Port Norfolk Baptist Church, and too, receive a goodly sum to dedicate to future campuses. The generosity of the people from Port Norfolk still impresses.

Along with the challenges of Covid and selling Port Norfolk we have some new things to surmount. An immediate challenge is the effect that inflation and recession is having on our people and church. Then we face the political divisions among the American people including the challenges of a dominant culture opposed to the values of the Judaeo-Christian ethic. To say it differently, in these times the Church in America is facing strong headwinds in its mission for Christ. And we are facing the problems that

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are dividing our denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the SBC's rapid decline in attendance. I will briefly deal with each of these new challenges, and more, so that we will be prepared.

Things to Overcome

Here's the challenges we face briefly stated:

1. Covid is now in the endemic stage (see addendum 1), the pandemic is over. The virus has been a blow to the American church, and to DC Church too. Our attendance has been affected, but is slowly trending up. Traditional worship at the DC Campus is doing well, WPC is holding its own and we had the largest attendance in some time at the Modern Service on August 28th with 263 adults and children present. Last Sunday, September we were just a few people short of 700 and kids attendance hit 160 young ones. Online attendance remains strong. We hope everybody who attended in-person worship before Covid returns, but it's time to move on from the virus into the future. **I am no longer worried about Covid;** I do not plan refer to it, except in passing, or to address it directly again.

*The
Pandemic
Is Now an
Endemic*

2. Inflation is raging in America (see addendum 2). Prices rose 8.5% in July 2022 versus 2023. The Federal Reserve is raising interest rates to tame inflation. The result of high prices and high interest rates is that we have now entered a recession – the economy is shrinking. A lot people are hurting financially, many people in our church are challenged, our church is facing financial headwinds as well. Our expenses have increased, especially the costs of heating and cooling our buildings has risen sharply.



To fight the best we can our financial challenges we have frozen ministry spending since June of this year. I doubt the staff will see cost of living increases for 2023. (I no longer receive increases by choice.) We are cutting costs the best we can.

I began being a Pastor in 1979, the height of recession and inflation in America since World War II. In 1980 the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to 20% to bring on recession and to shrink the economy. Inflation was tamed, but the nation faced great economic pain. My church had to severely restrict its budget and curtail ministry. But, we made it through and relocated to a new property and building in 1982. DC Church will make it through what lies ahead, too.

Note: At some point the Port Norfolk property will sell; this will allow the recovery of expenses incurred with the Port Norfolk merger and provide funds for our future campuses. I pray for this sale every day.

3. The political and cultural divisions in America have cooled the climate for evangelism in America. (see addendum 3) The non-religious, the so called Nones, are now 30% of the population. Many other Americans have an antipathy towards Christians and our faith that is deep and durable. America was once a Judaeo-Christian nation, then it was post-christian (having a Christian tradition, but non-religious), now it is non-christian (pagan). Church attendance has fallen below 40% (that number may be high) and many evangelical pastors and Christians have ceased to have a Biblical world view. (see addendum 3) Many local churches, due to Covid, the cultural climate, and perhaps a lack of vigor, are suffering low attendance. (see addendum 4)

The national climate will make the work to reach people for Jesus and to grow our church more difficult for a period of time. We need to remember that for most of the last 2,000 years real Christianity has been a countercultural movement and Christians have been a minority of the population. It reminds me of a joke: This company that makes shoes sends two of their salesman respectively to two different South Pacific Islands.

One salesman writes back, "Please bring me home, nobody wears shoes here." The other writes back, "Send me all the shoes you have, nobody wears shoes here."

The moral of this little story is that in challenge you can find opportunity. The effort to start more campuses and to expand the Deep Creek Academy (see below) is to find opportunity.

*Send More
Shoes!*

4. I do not want to write much here on this. Our Southern Baptist Convention, our beloved denomination, is in great trouble. The attendance at our churches has decreased

dramatically since 2007, the year the SBC's decline seems to have begun. In 2007 we were close to 7,000,000 people per week in worship, in 2022 we are at 5,000,000 or less per week. Some of this decline can be attributed to the cultural changes that I touched on in point 3 above. But it is more than this. Progressive Christianity (this is the term for Intersectionality, commonly referred to as Wokeism) has entered Southern Baptist life. Progressive Christianity emphasizes social justice over evangelism. Partially as a reaction to this, Calvinist and Conservative leaders have formed a group to resist the incursion of the progressives. Both of these groups together are probably a minority of our denomination, the majority of us are traditional Baptists, meaning by traditional that we have been as a denomination conservative evangelicals centered on evangelism and missions and not a political or exterior agenda. This whole thing would take a book to express. While I am decidedly not a progressive, and am definitely a conservative and a traditionalist, I don't like any of this. The rancor is so great that the wheels are already moving to division and separation.

Exacerbating this division, and maybe an even greater problem, is the way Southern Baptist leadership dealt with reports of sexual misconduct and abuse that people made against pastors, staff and church members over a 30 year period. The total number of cases are between 700 to 800. The leadership of our denomination had direct knowledge of *some* of this abuse and did not adequately respond to allegations for a number of sometimes understandable reasons, but reasons that were nevertheless wrong. The SBC has acknowledged these failures at the recent annual Southern Baptist Convention. As a result of the denomination's inaction to address reports of sexual abuse, numerous lawsuits have been filed, some that are class action, (as of June the lawsuits total 23) against the Convention, I expect many lawsuits to come. As with the Boy Scouts recently, these lawsuits may force the Southern Baptist Convention into bankruptcy. (Not our church, but the denominational body) What is more, the U.S. Department of Justice has opened an investigation of the abuse and the denomination's response. What a mess! I pray for us.

DC Church needs to be aware of these challenges to our denomination. Understand that the SBC and the local church, our church, are separate things. Every Southern Baptist church is self-governing, it owns itself. There is great danger that the poison will spill over into the local church making the work of reaching people even harder. The greatest

danger is reputational, that we will be tarred by the controversy. I guarantee the national media will continue to broadcast the SBCs failings. As we keep ourselves tuned in to the happenings we may need to take steps to wall ourselves off from potential damage to our church. We'll see.

Note: Every Southern Baptist Church is self-governing (autonomous), owning all church property. Our denomination is a loose confederation of 49,000 churches and missions cooperating for the purpose of missions and theological education.

What We Are Doing

Long Range and Near Term

New Campuses

As Addendum 4 documents in part, churches in Southside Hampton Roads are struggling. We continue to look for opportunities to begin more campuses and to expand our ministry. We are in a pause at this time in looking for another new campus as we wait for the sale of the Port Norfolk building, and for our church to recover momentum after Covid. Nevertheless, we are working to stay aware of the possibilities. Our church is committed to saving churches and keeping a witness for the Lord in strategic areas of the Southside.

The Expansion of the Deep Creek Academy

One of the most successful ministries of DC Church is the Deep Creek Academy. DCA is a preschool program that meets at the the Deep Creek Campus each day. The Academy is self-supporting and teaches, at present, 132 preschoolers in academics and the way of the Lord. Soon the program will expand to toddlers and infants. In the Fall of 2023 the plan is to extend to the West Portsmouth Campus with a similar preschool program.

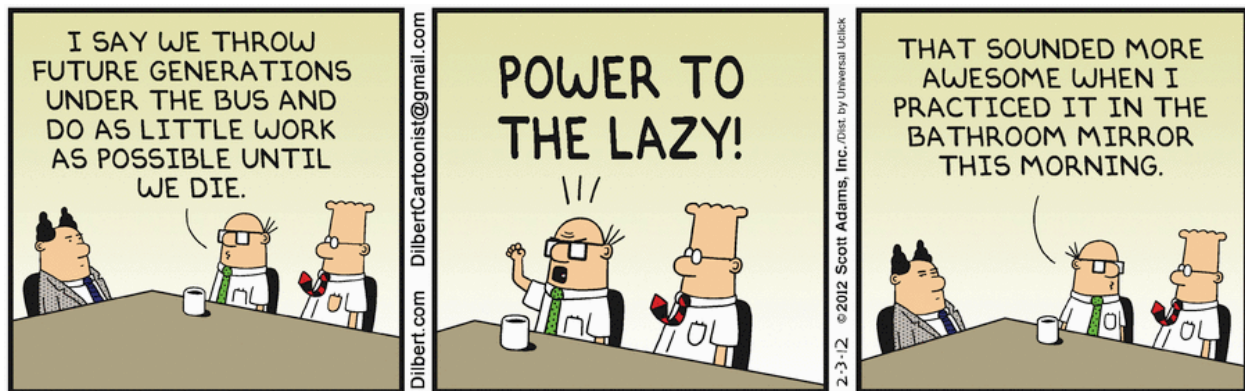
*Remember not the
former things, nor
consider the things of
old. Behold, I am doing
a new thing; now it
springs forth, do you not
perceive it?
I will make a way in the
wilderness and rivers in
the desert.*

Isaiah 43:18-19

The Academy is a beginning for us in Christian education. Our intent is too slowly and incrementally expand the Academy into the elementary grades and then into secondary education. Eventually, as God allows and with care, we hope that DCA will be a full

school, preschool through high school, teaching the historical Christian faith with an emphasis on traditional education.

The political and cultural uncertainties in America make this a good time to consider enlarging the Deep Creek Academy. I believe that there will be an increasing demand for private and Christian education over the next decade. In addition to providing the opportunity of traditional education for the families of our area, the expanded school will be a continuing source of evangelism and prospects for DC Church.



Who's Your One (WYO)

WYO is an effort of evangelism and church growth. We are leading and hoping that each of us will identify one person that we know, love, and concerned for that we can reach for Jesus. **WYO** has been delayed since the Spring of 2020 because of Covid, now we can do it!

Who's Your One includes prayer for your **One** and teaching and messages aimed at helping you reach that special person. The great effort begins October 9 and concludes on October 30 when we hope you will bring your one to DC Church for a great day of worship and outreach.

2020 Vision Remembered

November 13 and 20 will be **2020 Vision Remembered**. The aim is for DC Church to recommit to the vision of beginning campuses and reaching the Southside for Jesus. And we need to consider that every ministry that we perform, and every expense that

we have, is funded by what we give financially. In the middle of inflation and recession we will seek God's will on our future and each of our places in it.

November 20 will be a big day. **It's Vision 2020 Sunday!** We will have a special offering to raise money for our church and ministry. This offering may allow us to end the spending freeze that we are enduring. **And it's also Everybody Together Sunday!** It will be the first joint service, with both locations and all three services meeting together, in three years. I'm believing that we will fill the Worship Center to overflowing.

The Schedule for the WYO and 2020 Vision Remembered

October 9 – Who's Your One Begins

The program includes special messages, guidance in prayer and help in reaching your "One"

October 30 – Who's Your One Sunday

Bring your "One"

November 13 – 2020 Vision Remembrance Starts

November 20 – Commitment Sunday, Everybody Together

We give a great offering and everybody from both campuses and all services meet together.

Physical Projects Accomplished

Despite the Pandemic, and using monies that you donated in the Vision 2020 effort, we have continued the renovation or improvement of our two campuses. We purchased a much needed 15 passenger van, replaced heating and air conditioning units at both campuses, installed a new cooling tower at WPC, continued upgrading the Online

Campus computer system, replaced the Worship Lights at WPC, replaced the parking lot lights at WPC, replaced entrance lights at DCBC, repaired and updated the children's wing bathrooms at WPC, and with monies from the Deep Creek Academy, replaced the preschool wing hallway flooring and renovated the preschool bathrooms at the Deep Creek Campus. Excluding the renovation work in the DCBC preschool, the costs of these projects was \$235,665.

The church approved borrowing to accomplish the planned renovation projects and to begin new campuses, but with your generosity, we have avoided debt. Nevertheless, we may need to borrow at some point to accomplish some things that are critical to do.

Future repair and renovation work includes coating the parking lots at both campuses, an exterior building for storage at the Deep Creek campus, replacing the parking lot and worship center lights at Deep Creek, and replacing the Deep Creek Campus gym floor. There is more work to be done.

Conclusion

One of the works of philosophy that has influenced my life the most is **Self-Reliance** by the great poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. I wish every high school student in America would read it, though it's kind of heavy going. In **Self-Reliance** Emerson said this, "Is not a man better than a town." This is profound; it means many things. For instance: Don't expect other people to solve your problems...The wisdom of crowds of people may really be nonsense...and, for us at this moment – The success of any work depends on individual men and women living their principles to the fullest. Here's the thing, God is already here, He is already with us and moving with power. Meeting the challenges of the Church in America, and our church in Chesapeake and Portsmouth in particular, depends on the answer to this question; will we as **individual** believers follow Him and work in His field? Will we live what we believe to the fullest. I believe the answer is yes.

S. D. G.

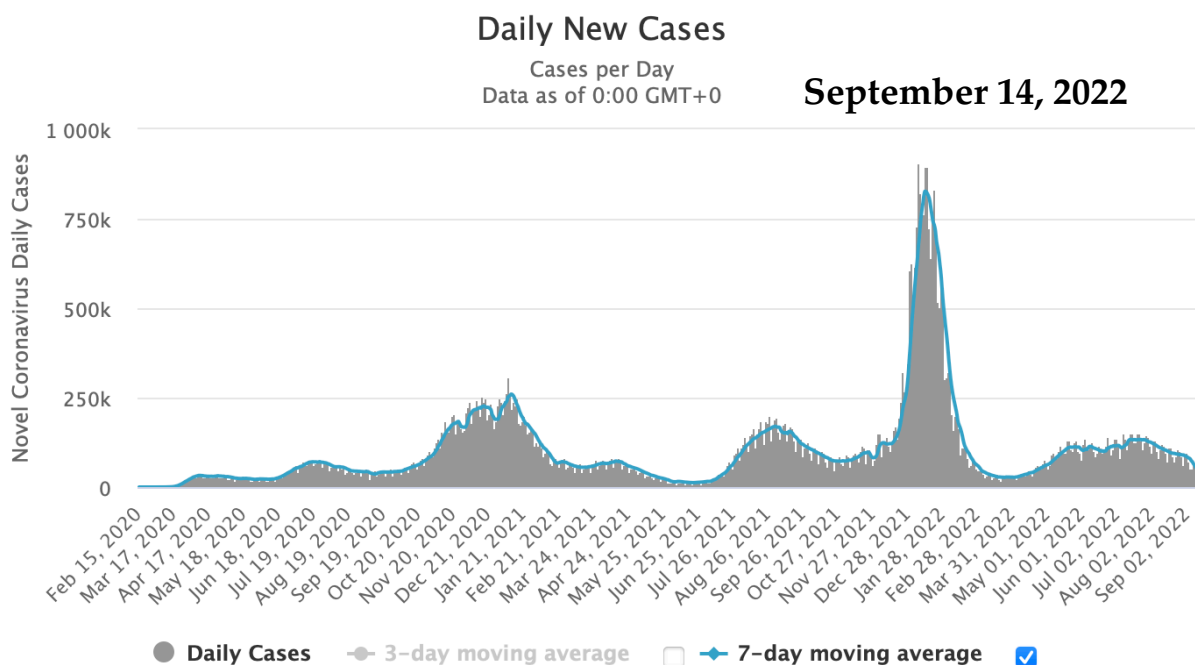
The material below is support material and is optional reading.

Addendum 1

Covid 19 has moved from a pandemic to the endemic phase. Endemic means that the virus is a permanent, low level, part of the background of our world and society. Covid is just another routine respiratory virus out of the many that already trouble us. It is possible that Covid may mutate into a more virulent strain, but most likely it will continue to become milder.

Americans have moved into an acceptance of this new era. People have returned to restaurants, stores, shops, theaters and a more normal life. But, for some reason church attendance across America has struggled to recover.

I wrote about this two years ago; I expressed my fears for the Church in America and for our own church as the virus sapped our desire to be with each other in fellowship and worship. Experts were saying that polls and studies were projecting a precipitous drop in church attendance because of Covid. The projections were for a 40% to 60% decline, which turned out to be accurate for the American church. Post-pandemic church attendance in America has fallen below 40% of the population according to Gallup. My belief is that attendance is even lower than this. What is worse is that the



projections were that 20% of church attenders would never return. Two years ago I hoped to our Lord, and hope even now, that would not be true, but it may possibly be.

Addendum 2

America is going through a time of high inflation. In July of 2022 it was 8.5% over July of 2021. In July food inflation was up 10.9% and gasoline was up 44% year over year respectively. The cost of housing, rent and automobiles is exceeding the inflation rate. Many appliances and goods are not available, or have long wait lists.

Inflation causes heartache and pain for families, businesses, and churches. A recurring study found that 59% of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, 8 million plus people are behind on their rents. Pay increases are occurring at a rate less than inflation thus people have less money to buy increasingly expensive goods.

The tools to fight inflation from the Federal Reserve center on slowing the growth of the economy which has the effect of reducing demand for goods and services forcing prices down. (As demand goes down, prices go down. I know, it's complicated.)

Unfortunately, this often ends in recession, that is, the economy shrinks. A shrinking economy means fewer jobs and lower pay. Since the economy began to shrink 6 months ago, by commonly accepted standards, we have already entered a recession.

The Federal Reserve has announced over the last few weeks two things: They will continue to raise interest rates until inflation is under control. And that they expect it will take two years until inflation returns to the recommended level of 2% a year. There is a lot of pain left to go.

I know that many of us are hurting financially. It weighs on me. I am so sorry. And, I appreciate every dollar you give.

For your church everything we do, every ministry and program, costs more. The cost of heating and cooling our buildings and other utilities, has jumped. I was so inspired that Covid, and the decreased attendance it caused, did not affect our giving. The offering in 2021 was a record. In 2022, as inflation has taken its toll, our weekly income has slowly decreased. August is usually the lowest offering month each year for us; this makes sense, our people are vacationing. Nevertheless, August 2022 was a particularly poor month for your church's offering income.

Coming in November will be **2020 Vision – Remembered. Vision Remembered** will be a remembering of the plans we have approved as a church and our vision for the future of our wonderful people. Our plans include beginning new campuses as God provides the opportunity and the continued renovations of our properties. We are going to spend some time talking about our ministries and program and the Church Budget that funds our work. We are going to talk about tithing and financial giving. The program concludes with a very important special offering to fund our financial needs.

I've been a Pastor a long time, yes, since 1979. I began pastoring during a time of high inflation, high interest rates and a deep recession. Inflation in 1980, my first full year as a pastor, peaked at 13%. The Federal Reserve took strong action and pushed interest rates to 20% causing a deep recession. It was a really difficult time for America, and not uniquely, my church. America teetered on financial collapse. Income for my church dropped steeply, we cut our budget deeply and our church suffered to maintain our program and ministry.

But here's the good news. America got through the high interest rates and deep recession. Our nation received good leadership and the 1980s was a time of a fast growing economy, low inflation, a growing stock market, and prosperity. My church got through it, too. We relocated to a new property in 1982, built a new \$2,000,000 building in 2022 dollars, and had a period of strong numerical growth. Here's the truth, DC Church will get through this troublesome time, too.

Am I asking anything of you. Yes, I'm asking you to give the best you can considering your financial challenges. That's all. I know that you will do your best for your church.

We are working as hard as we can to sell the Port Norfolk property. It will sell at some point. The monies from this sale will be of great help for our church's mission in the future.

Addendum 3

This is an article from the Christian Post Detailing a Recent George Barna Survey – it is reprinted as support

for the idea of a cultural and theological shift in America. It is reprinted as a quote.

Note: George Barna is the leading Christian pollster in America

“At least a third of senior pastors in the United States believe one can earn a place in Heaven by simply being a good person, according to a nationwide survey.

The findings were among several surprising responses as part of a survey conducted earlier this year by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

The American Worldview Inventory 2022 examined more than three dozen beliefs held by pastors. Researchers found that in addition to believing that people can merit salvation based solely on their good works, one-third or more of senior pastors surveyed also believe the Holy Spirit is not a person but rather “a symbol of God’s power.” Others said that moral truth is subjective; sexual relations between two unmarried people who love each other is “morally acceptable” and biblical teaching on abortion is “ambiguous.”

At least a third of those surveyed also said they believe “socialism is preferable to capitalism and that allowing property ownership facilitates economic injustice,” which researchers say could point to the “increase of cultural and political influence into the church.”

After data reported earlier this year found just 37% of Christian pastors have a biblical worldview, the latest CRC report analyzed that research across all major U.S. denominations, and found that a “loss of biblical belief is prevalent among pastors in all denominational groupings.”

The current report focuses on roughly half of those beliefs, revealing that a shockingly large percentage reject biblical teaching on some of the most basic Christian beliefs.

Among Evangelical pastors, for example, around 43% said they do not believe that the personal accumulation of wealth is provided by God for the individual to manage those resources for God’s purposes.

Another 39% of Evangelical pastors surveyed said there is no absolute moral truth and that “each individual must determine their own truth.” Roughly the same percentage

(38%) didn't answer in the affirmative when asked if "human life is sacred," while 37% said having faith, in general, is more important than in what — or more specifically, Whom — one has faith.

Perhaps most startlingly, three in 10 Evangelical pastors (30%) didn't answer in the affirmative if their salvation is based on having confessed their sins and accepting Jesus Christ as their savior.

George Barna, CRC's director of research, said the results could be linked to another trend he observed in the data.

"While studying the spiritual behavioral patterns of pastors, it became evident that a large share of them do not have a regular spiritual routine," Barna said. "There was a correlation between possessing biblical beliefs and a consistent regimen of Bible reading, prayer, worship and confession.

"In some of the denominational groupings, a majority of pastors do not engage in those foundational spiritual practices on a regular basis," he added. "Yet, among the pastors who have the most consistently biblical beliefs, there is also a daily routine that incorporates all of those disciplines."

The data from this latest report came from a nationwide study of about 1,000 Christian pastors across several segments of churches and/or denominational families and was conducted between February and March of 2022."

This is a disquieting poll from the Pew Research Center

"The practice of Christianity as a religion is declining in America, according to a new report by Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey published on Tuesday.

Christianity's demographic has been dwindling since the 1990s, the report said, as many adults transition to an identity of atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular."

In the early 1990s, about 90% of people in the U.S. identified as Christians, the report said. In 2020, Christians accounted for about 64% of the U.S. population, including children.

Meanwhile, those who are not affiliated with a religion has grown from 16% in 2007 to 30% in 2020, according to the research. All other religions, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, accounted for about 6% in 2020.

Depending on whether religious switching continues at recent rates, speeds up or stops entirely, Pew's projections show Christians of all ages shrinking from 64% to between a little more than half (54%) and just above one-third (35%) of all Americans by 2070. Over that same period, "nones" would rise from the current 30% to somewhere between 34% and 52% of the U.S. population.

Even if nobody switches their religious affiliation in the coming decades, the number of religiously unaffiliated people is hypothesized to approach or exceed the number of Christians by 2070, the report found.

Switching rates are based on patterns observed in recent decades, through 2019, according to Pew. "For example, we estimate that 31% of people raised Christian become unaffiliated between ages 15 to 29, the tumultuous period in which religious switching is concentrated. An additional 7% of people raised Christian become unaffiliated later in life, after the age of 30."

The decline of Christianity and the rise of the "nones" may have complex causes and far-reaching consequences for politics, family life and civil society, Pew notes.

Religiously unaffiliated Americans today are not uniformly non-believing or non-practicing, Pew adds. Many religious "nones" partake in traditional religious practices despite their lack of religious identity, including a solid majority who believe in some kind of higher power or spiritual force."

Addendum 4

As I mentioned in a recent sermon, on July 22, the last Sunday of our vacation, Debbie and I watched Pastor Larry's excellent message at the 9:30 am service. Then we drove out to attempt to visit as many local churches as possible in one hour and a half, the time of the morning worship service. I thought I could get a good handle on these church's attendance by the number of cars in their parking lots. (A rule of thumb would be two people per car.) Most churches we looked at were Southern Baptist churches, but not all. One thing I wanted to do was measure the spiritual temperature of our area,

especially in the area of West Portsmouth. Also, I was looking to gauge the effect of Covid on church attendance and to see possible locations for future campuses.

Doing this kind of thing has spiritual danger. We should not compare our church with other churches. We are working together to reach people for Jesus. And the results of the little study could unsettle you, it made me very sad.

We visited 18 churches in that 90 minute window. (3 churches had concluded their services, so we counted 15 churches.) Excluding West Portsmouth, the 7 churches we visited in Portsmouth totaled 265 cars. WPC had 49 cars in their parking lot; this means that our Portsmouth campus is one of the larger churches in the city. Sadly, one church in Portsmouth that used to be one of the largest churches in Hampton Roads had 34 cars in their lot.

In Chesapeake we made it to 8 churches. These 8 churches totaled 274 cars, with one church having 125 cars. On August 7, between the two campuses, DC Church had 242 cars in our parking lots.

Excluding the one church that had 125 cars, the surmise is that the average attendance in the remaining 14 churches is around 60 people, several churches are much smaller than this.

Some years ago I wrote a paper on church attendance for the North American Mission Board. As part of this paper I surveyed the worship attendance of every church on the Peninsula of Virginia, excluding our Catholic brothers and sisters who do things differently in counting attendance. The results were that only about 11% of the people on the Peninsula attended church. My surmise is that this close to being the case with Southside Hampton Roads in 2022. **Send more shoes.**