



## 9 dangerous fault lines for churches in 2024

By Thom S. Rainer, Founder & CEO of LifeWay

I've never stood face-to-face with a tsunami, and trust me, I am thankful for that. These monsters of the deep are as fascinating as they are fearsome. Just the other night, what started as a quick dive into tsunami videos turned into a full hour of awe with a dash of trepidation.

Here's what this amateur earthquake enthusiast learned: when the Earth's fault lines shift, it's a red flag. And in a way, many churches have their own fault lines – trouble spots that, if ignored, could lead to serious problems.

On the one hand, I am hopeful for local congregations. I continue to see God working in countless churches. Those stories remind me that He is not done with us. On the other hand, I see numerous warnings, more than I can remember in my lifetime. I call those warnings "fault lines." If ignored, those fault lines can result in earthquakes which will produce deadly tsunamis.

So what are the fault lines we see as we move into 2024? Here are nine of them in no particular order. They give me great concern for our churches.

### 1. Denial

It's the church version of "see no evil." But ignoring issues doesn't make them vanish – they become bigger.

### 2. Complexity and busyness

Have you ever seen a church try to spin too many plates? Spoiler alert: they crash. I spoke with the leadership of a church with fewer than 40 in attendance. The church had 9 committees and 15 programs and ministries. Their members were so busy spinning those plates that they had no time to reach those in their community. Obviously, this church is declining and probably dying.

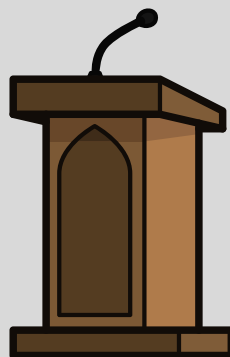
### 3. Silver bullet obsession

Many churches think if they get the "perfect" pastor, everything will be fine. That pastor must be married with 2.7 kids, 42 years old, and have 25 years of pastoral experience. In some cases, the silver bullet is an era instead of a person. If our church just did everything like it did in the 1980s or 1990s, all of our problems will go away.

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## Pulpit schedule

As First Baptist begins the process of seeking a new senior minister, others are filling in on Sunday mornings. The following is the current list of who will be giving the message.



Dec. 31: Chuck Russell  
Jan. 7: Mark Click  
Jan. 14: Kevin Hairston  
Jan. 21: Dennis Metzger  
Jan. 28: Dennis Metzger  
Feb. 4: Chuck Russell  
Feb. 11: Tim Mohon  
Feb. 18: Scott Burns  
Feb. 25: Mark Eaton

**4. Evangelistic ignorance**

In many churches we help, our consulting and coaching team has to define “evangelism.” Only 5% of churches have any type of true evangelism initiative where the church intentionally reaches people in their communities with the gospel. We can no longer grow our churches with biological growth and transfer growth only. Evangelism means we will reach people with conversion growth.

**5. Staffing for the year 2004**

Too many churches hire staff like it’s 20 years ago. Their job descriptions fit well in an earlier era. Churches can also be extraordinarily slow in moving to a bi-vocational or co-vocational model of staff ministry. Some positions are no longer needed, and others can be filled virtually.

**6. Doctrinal deviation.**

Much has been written about the leftward slide of mainline denominations over several decades. Our team at Church Answers has been using the same church survey since 1996, and we are seeing an alarming increase in doctrinal deviation in self-described evangelical churches. For example, more church members in these churches are unwilling to affirm the doctrine of exclusivity. They are denying Christ’s own words in John 14:6 where He said unequivocally that He is the only way of salvation.

**7. Ignoring toxicity**

Church toxicity is often denied or ignored. Our team recently received a plea to work with a church that had lost two-thirds of its attendance in just a few months.

They refused to deal with a toxic member who ultimately ran off the pastor. Church members were already leaving regularly because of the toxic church member. When he succeeded in forcing the pastor out, one-half of the attendance left in a week. The toxic member is still at the church.

**8. Deferred maintenance**

Many churches have delayed maintaining and repairing facilities, grounds, and equipment. They find themselves in a position where they cannot afford to pay for repairs today. Sadly, I spoke to several church leaders who feel like their church will close in 2024 because they cannot pay for even the minimal repairs needed.

**9. Lack of priority of groups**

One clear trend we see today is that healthier churches tend to focus more on groups: small groups, Sunday school classes, community groups, life groups, etc. Those who participate in groups tend to give more, attend worship more frequently, be more involved in ministries, and serve with joy. Failure to give priority to groups is a certain sign of a fault line. Any or all of these nine fault lines could become earthquakes that produce tsunamis in 2024. I pray that you will deal with the fault lines in your church before it becomes too late.

*Posted on Dec. 18, 2023, Church Answers.*

*Link: [churchanswers.com/blog/9-dangerous-fault-lines-for-churches-in-2024](http://churchanswers.com/blog/9-dangerous-fault-lines-for-churches-in-2024)*

*(Reprinted with permission.)*

**Where are my offering envelopes for 2024?**

Due to the recent staffing changes, we fell behind in ordering offering envelopes that are distributed to every tithing person or family. We ask that you use the envelopes in the pews, and include your donor number if you know it. If you don’t, see member Janet Day.

**AB Women**

**Bible book of the month**

Jan. 2024 ..... Romans  
Feb. 2024 ..... Joel





# Vision Retreat

Jan. 13 | 9 a.m.-noon  
Room 200 at the church



## Thelma Stanger's 90th birthday celebration

The church is invited to an open-house style gathering in honor of Thelma Stanger turning 90 years old!

**11 a.m.-3 p.m. Jan. 7, 2024**  
in the FBC Family Center

Light food to be served

A Vision Retreat is planned for all of the First Baptist boards and other interested adults, gathering around 8:30 a.m. for breakfast foods in Room 200. The meeting begins at 9 a.m. and will go until about noon.

Mark Click will be leading a discussion and SWOT (strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats) analysis with CORE Values development. FBC Hamilton will produce a strategy for 2024.

Sign up on a Connect Card in the Sunday bulletin.

### Sunday School & Groups 9 A.M. Sundays

- Nursery/Toddlers – Room 206
- Children Pre-K – 6th grade – Room 103/104
- Youth 7th – 12th grade – Room 112
- Berean Adult Bible Fellowship – Room 200
- WINGS, Women In God's Service – Room 205

### Wednesday groups

#### 6 P.M.

- First Baptist Youth, grades 7-12 – Room 100
- Adult Prayer & Bible Study – Room 200

#### 6:30 P.M.

- First Baptist Kids, Pre-K through 6th  
Room 107

### First Baptist Youth

7-12 grades  
Led by JD & Becky Simpson and Natalie Lakes

9 a.m. Sundays  
6 p.m. Wednesdays  
in Room 100, the youth room

### First Baptist Kids

Pre-K-6 grades  
Jill O'Hara has been volunteering, and we welcome any other volunteers and helpers

9 a.m. Sundays  
6:30 p.m. Wednesdays  
in the Children's Worship Center on the bottom level  
(Rm. 107)

# Meet our new office administrator

We would like to introduce the newest addition to our staff, Lori Kempton. Originally from Springfield, Ohio, Lori has lived in Butler County for nearly 22 years with her husband, Jim. They have four kids and 11 grandchildren.

She holds a BS in Management from Indiana Wesleyan and has worked in the greater Cincinnati area for the last 15 years as a real estate agent.

Lori travels occasionally to speak for Stonecroft ministries in Ohio, Indiana and most recently Pennsylvania, telling others about Jesus.

In her free time, Lori loves photographing people, nature and the many animals that show up in her backyard. She's also an avid Bengals and Cincinnati Reds fan and finds joy supporting her home teams. Most of all, she loves doing whatever God asks her to do. Fortunately, her new assignment is to serve First Baptist Church of Hamilton with her gifts and abilities!



## How to contact the office

Lori Kempton, office administrator  
lori.kempton@firstbaptisthamilton.org  
(513) 868-1412  
9 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday through Thursday

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## People serving on FBCH boards in 2024

### Board of Deacons

Jeff Miller  
Charles Campbell  
Dave Hazelwood  
Rich Hazelwood  
Alan McComb  
Dan Clemens  
Jerry Hampton  
Charles Russell  
JD Simpson

### Board of Trustees

Bill Corley  
Jordan Allen  
Larry Bowling  
Mandy Gambrell  
Bronlyn Tendam  
Bobby Stanger

### Board of Missions

Natalie Lakes  
Kathie Russell  
Krys Schramm  
Nella Hurst  
Cathi Thomas  
Ann Brown  
Megan Miller  
Lil Wilson

### Board of Deaconess

Pam Childs  
Marjorie Corley  
Linda Stanger  
Marilyn Bowling  
Brenda Brown  
Lisa Dulli  
Juli Ford  
Nancy Follmer

### Board of Christian Education

Becky Simpson  
Shelley Lakes  
Debbie Gibson  
Cara Ash  
Kathy Click  
Sheryl Thiemann

### Business meeting moderator

Bob Thiemann (1 year)

### Treasurer

Laurin Sprague (1 year)

### Clerk

Tonja Randall (1 year)

## A message from International Ministries Missionary Stan Slade

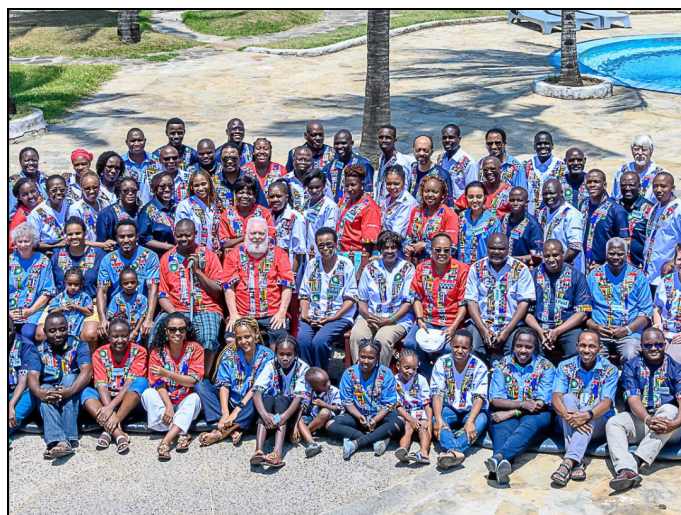
Dear friends,

This fall I had the opportunity to join gifted African leaders and support their work to help followers of Jesus grow in knowledge, wisdom and devotion. The photo above comes from BereanSafari, the annual week-long Manuscript Bible Study training event I have been privileged to be part of since it began in 2007.

BereanSafari is organized by a committed group of volunteers from Kenya and Ethiopia. It is focused on serving East Africans, but welcomes people from the rest of Africa, and from the rest of the world. Participants engage in a highly participatory “deep dive” into a Biblical book using the [Manuscript Bible Study approach developed by my friend and mentor, Paul Byer](#). Members of a study group form a learning, interpreting community during the week as they share the discoveries and questions that arise through a close reading of the text of Scripture. Reference works are kept handy, to enable all to find necessary background information. Group leaders seek to be facilitators rather than lecturers: we assist group members to hear and value the contributions of all, and to keep returning to the text itself in search of answers to the questions that arise.

Over the last 16 years, BereanSafari has provided training, coaching and opportunities for many participants to develop skills as facilitators. It is a delight to be invited to serve alongside gifted and skilled African facilitators as we help others to hone their skills and hear God’s call to use them!

This year, the organizers invited me to help facilitate the study of Genesis. Our group had about twenty pastors, student ministry staff and church leaders from half a dozen countries. We spent the week burrowing into the opening chapters of the first book in the Bible, appreciating how they set the stage for God’s call to Abraham (and indeed, for the whole Biblical story, including Jesus).



As the week ended, there was great enthusiasm to follow up the learning we did together with online conversations and, Lord willing, a deep plunge into God’s work in and through Abraham at BereanSafari 2024 (scheduled for July 17-24). After the week of study, Cathy and I joined several friends in a brief animal safari, near the foot of Mt. Kenya. God’s creatures are amazing... and surprising: at first glance these two impalas appear to be smooching. In fact, this was just a lull in the midst of some very serious jousting!

After our time among the animals, Cathy returned home and I went onward to Ethiopia, for another week devoted to leading Manuscript Bible Study. This event was organized by EvaSUE, the Evangelical Students and Graduates Union of Ethiopia (like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, in the U.S.). My host, Messay Imru, directs Scripture Engagement for EvaSUE and is also a member of the BereanSafari organizing committee. I have long admired Messay’s skills, knowledge and wisdom, as we have worked together on BereanSafaris over the years. So, when he invited me to add a week in Addis Ababa to this Africa trip, I was eager to accept!

From Genesis in Kenya, then, I jumped to Revelation, in Ethiopia. From the Bible’s first book, to its last. That might seem a bit crazy, and perhaps it was. But what fun! And, what a great

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opportunity to see the overarching unity of the story of redemption. In fact, the revelation that John of Patmos received goes to great lengths to invite its hearers and readers to make deep connections between its message and the books of what we call the Old Testament (or Hebrew Scriptures). Both God (in Chapters 1 and 21) and Jesus (in Chapter 22) identify themselves as “the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” And, the climax to which the whole book moves is the New Creation, in which the dwelling of God is with humanity. The promise of Eden, so long damaged and delayed by human rebellion, will be forever fulfilled in the New Jerusalem. In fact, part of what makes understanding Revelation so challenging for us in the 21st century is the fact that it is full of allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures (so much so, that scholars have written large and detailed books devoted to the subject). So, the leap from Genesis to Revelation is not nearly as strange as one might first think.

In any case, I was very grateful for the chance to join Ethiopian missionaries,

development workers and pastors as we helped each other go deeper in our understanding of Revelation. It was a special treat to see how God has used my friend Messay to equip so many to be excellent students of Scripture—both to see it, and to benefit from it! Again, thank you so very much for the prayers and gifts that made it possible for me to be with them! As I write, I am headed to Indonesia, where IM’s team of itinerant global servants will have our annual gathering. It is an important time to share struggles, victories, learning and visions with colleagues engaged in similar kinds of ministry all around the world. It will also be an opportunity to help our Indonesian Baptist partners develop a wider vision of IM and its personnel. Thank you for walking and praying with me through these journeys and service opportunities! Thank you for making the work God does through me a part of what God is doing through you! Please join me in praying that they will bear fruit in the lives of the participants and all those they serve.

Love and blessings to you, Stan

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## Online giving is easy: Give it a try

If you’re using the internet, go to the website:

**<https://fbchamilton.churchcenter.com/giving>**

If you’re on your phone or tablet, download the “Church Center” app and find First Baptist Church of Hamilton.

You will need your bank account website login details to set up recurring payments. Have that in hand before proceeding. We ask that you include the processing fee, which is .25 to .30 cents per donation.

Church Center can also be used for getting more information about FBCH and to check in on Sundays. It is a service of Planning Center, which we use to keep membership records and more.



**CHURCH  
CENTER APP**