

Who Stole My Church?

What to Do When the Church You Love Enters the 21st Century

by Gordon MacDonald

Reviewed by Barbara Dahlgren

Do you love your church, but can't stand the new hymns? Do you appreciate your fellow Christians but wish they would dress a bit more formally for services? Do you look forward to the future but find yourself sometimes missing the "old days"? Then this is the book for you.

Gordon MacDonald tackles the difficult topic of churches struggling with change. He wisely uses a fiction genre to make a sensitive subject more readable. Yet, this does not diminish the interesting facts you learn about how churches have made changes through the centuries to remain relevant.

MacDonald presents himself as the pastor of a fictional church in New England. Some of the older members are having difficulty adjusting to newer ways of doing things, such as using contemporary music instead of traditional hymns, using band or CD accompaniment instead of piano or organ, relaxed dress codes, and so on. In frustration, one member asks, "Who stole my church?"

In a bit of desperation, Pastor MacDonald decides to have a weekly meeting of 20 older-generational church members so they can discuss their irritants and concerns. At the meetings these members examine what is happening in their church, compare it to church history, and try not to throw their hands up and say, "What's the use?"

Who Stole My Church is not plot driven, and seems more like a parable than a novel. It doesn't really offer solutions for the problems derived from change, but much can be gleaned from the dialogue form used in these weekly meetings. Having been a pastor



for over 40 years, MacDonald offers great insight into local church dynamics. At times I felt as though he had been eavesdropping at some of our leadership meetings.

Toward the end of the book, some of the younger-generational congregants get involved. The result is that both generations end up understanding the other just a little better—not by justifying their feelings but by exploring why they lean toward differ-

ent styles of worship, don't like each other's music, or see evangelism and discipleship from different perspectives. At the end, not everyone in MacDonald's core group embraces change. Some walk away. Some continue to struggle. Some learn to cope. Most have a deeper understanding of what church is all about.

I highly recommend *Who Stole My Church*. It is an easy, insightful, and informative read. Personally, I found a certain comfort from realizing I am not the only one trying to adapt, and that churches through the ages have had to continually reinvent the way they "do church" to keep up with changing times. *Who Stole My Church* can also be used as a small-group tool for open dialogue, since there are points to ponder about each chapter at the back the book.

Gordon MacDonald, *Who Stole My Church?: What to Do When the Church You Love Enters the 21st Century*, Thomas Nelson, 272 pages, \$21.99.