

EXCERPT



Next Sunday

An Honest Dialogue About the Future of the Church

June 14, 2022 | \$17, 192 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0302-2

As the church reckons with the abuse, racism, patriarchy, and unchecked power that have marked evangelicalism for too long, Nancy, a boomer and key player in the megachurch movement, and Samantha, a millennial wondering if the church's foundations still hold, have a vulnerable conversation about what the church has been—and what it can be.

Could Serving Others Be the New Apologetic?

NANCY

At a conference for church leaders where I was invited to teach, I was captivated by a message delivered at that same event by Pastor Ben Cachiaras from Mountain Christian Church in Baltimore. Ben said that serving is the new apologetic. In my years sitting at leadership tables at Willow, we boomers constructed a highly linear process for how we thought most people come to faith. In fact, we described a seven-step process. Now I see that the route many seekers take to Jesus is circuitous, unpredictable, and often messy. Ben described three different big-picture sequences that reveal the approach of churches in the past and then what he sees currently and in the future. It looks like this:

Christ. Community. Cause.
Community. Christ. Cause.
Cause. Community. Christ.

Sequence 1: Christ. Community. Cause. We used to see the most common progression for an individual was first to come to faith, through a relationship and spiritual conversation with a follower of Jesus, combined with front-door accessible experiences at a local church. This approach is now known by many as the attractional model. A conversion then led to community (such as a small group) and then eventually to a person discovering their gifts and beginning to contribute to the cause, making a kingdom impact.

Sequence 2: Community. Christ. Cause. Many faith communities began to see people first exposed to relationships as a response to their longing for community. Some would encounter followers of Christ through an Alpha group or book club or sports team. This might lead to spiritual conversations and then, after coming to faith, the pursuit of the cause was a logical next step, with the new Christ-follower asking, "How can I serve?"

Sequence 3: Cause. Community. Christ. But now Ben suggests that what comes first for many people outside the faith is contributing in some way to help others. Have you noticed how easy it is to recruit a neighbor or coworker to help with a local work project, to serve food at a shelter, to rally around victims of a hurricane or fire or tornado, to stand in a line with a humbling hairnet on their head while packing healthy food for the hungry in the developing world? Most people in our world want to do *something* to make a difference, and they jump at the chance to help in practical ways. Their experience often leads to community, to the beginnings of relationships. And eventually, for some, this will lead to a step of faith and a commitment to Christ. The entire sequence is now often reversed, with serving coming first.

At Soul City Church in Chicago we rally around a firm belief that "church should be seven days a week, not just one!" I believe that every local church, no matter where it is located, should focus on meeting the very real and practical needs of the community around them.

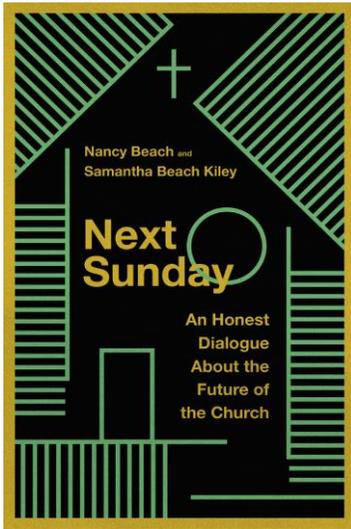


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"I don't know for how long, but I'm sure the church is in crisis. I'm a Hispanic pastor doing ministry in the States and even among 'my people' it's quite obvious that our main narrative is still fear, shame, and guilt. So every time I see somebody trying to understand this very moment in church history, I feel that we still have hope. If we don't understand our present, we don't have a future. Do you care about the church? You definitely need to read this book!"—César Soto, pastor of Amor Original in Austin, Texas

This begins with *listening* to discern what those needs are, meeting with local city council members or someone in the mayor's office, asking great questions, uncovering where the biggest hurts lie, and also learning about already-existing organizations that are doing good work and could use the support of a local church with both financial resources and volunteers.

In recent years I have been inspired by stories of local churches who have taken these steps and resist the tendency to be insulated in our holy huddles, only caring for the people inside our doors or people in far-away lands.

SAMANTHA

"What institution was intended to be a place where anyone could go to have their needs met?" My senior English class was stumped. In the third-story, corner classroom of our large public high school, we were discussing some texts meant to help us consider the elements of intentional communities or utopian villages. Mr. Sanders was a patient teacher. He let us bat around ideas ("A hospital?"), gently prompting us to think deeper ("All needs—physical, mental, emotional"). "A courthouse?" someone offered. "A place where *anyone* could go, not just those who could afford it," he guided us back to the question, like bumper rails for our bowling balls of ideas. We were fast, if not accurate.

Eventually, silence fell. There was nowhere *anyone* could go to have *all* their needs met!

Mr. Sanders rarely offered answers, but it seemed we were never going to arrive at this possibility without assistance. "The local church," he said.

We looked at him blankly. He suggested that at one time the local church was seen as a place where the hurting could be connected to resources in the community—whether they needed food, grief support, a bed, or legal aid. The church could serve as a central hub connecting those in need to ministries, partners, or contributions from those in excess (or whatever you call the opposite of "in need").

The very idea—that in a healthy society the church might fill an essential role of need-meeting like no other institution could—was deeply compelling. So much so that it's one of the only classroom moments I remember from all of high school. I never had much luck getting any of my friends in the Chicago theater scene to visit my church on a Sunday—not even on Easter or Christmas. But one weekend our church canceled services to go out and serve the city. I signed up to help sort clothes in a homeless shelter. When my group leader texted us that we could use a few more volunteers, I sent out a text early Sunday morning to eight friends—folks who had never been to or participated in Soul City Church before. Within an hour all eight showed up at the homeless shelter. It was the easiest invitation I ever made. And apparently—even for my friends who were skeptical about showing up at church—showing up to a homeless shelter was a very easy yes.

We are a socially conscious generation, passionate and eager to rally around efforts to combat injustice. Growing up with the internet has meant growing up exposed to inequality. This witness has formed us. We want to be part of restoration. I believe that if the church were to place a disproportionate emphasis on responsive and sustained service to the vulnerable, young people would flock to be a part of it.

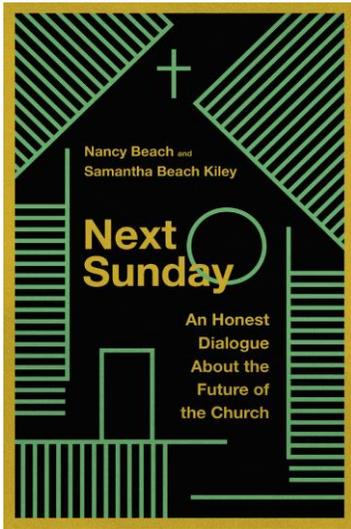


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"*Next Sunday* is a profound gift for those wondering if the promises of the church are better than the problems of the church. It is for the person still searching for something real and redemptive within the ancient practice of ecclesia. It is for the person still holding on to hope that an imperfect church, led by imperfect leaders, filled with imperfect people, is still one of the world's most beautiful and transforming communities." —**Jeanne Stevens**, founding lead pastor of Soul City Church, Chicago, and author of *What's Here Now?*

The very first words of Jesus' public ministry cast a vision of abundant liberation and generosity:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

What if this mission were front and center in our faith communities?

I think it would bring people like my friend Sarah Grace back to church. Though she was introduced to faith at a young age, like many of my friends, Sarah Grace has been on a journey away from the church, disillusioned by "unhumble" pastors, silence in the face of injustice, and exclusionary thinking. But she can't quite get away from Jesus. And even while she stopped feeling at home in church as she knew it, her spirituality has deepened, and she now finds herself longing to be part of a community again. So, she's been poking around websites.

"I just want to be a part of the church that's doing the most good. If I saw a website with a mission statement that said, 'We don't claim to know everything, but what we are trying to do is make positive change for these groups of people who've been left behind, and here are all the places that we invest our resources of time and money,' well, that's where I would go." At that point she stopped herself and asked an important question, "Although, I guess, why wouldn't I just go join a volunteer organization? What's the difference?"

As I write this, we are all cloistered in our "pods" due to Covid-19. I am wondering how to provide aid to those most affected by this disease. There are so many in need. I might have mission ADD.

But perhaps we have to temper our love affair with mission "success stories."

It's harder work than I thought. But, oh, wouldn't it be worth the discomfort, the difficult conversations, the rerouting, the undoing, the lament, and the patience if the church could become known as a place where needs are met? Such that a senior English class would immediately think of it and get on with their lesson.

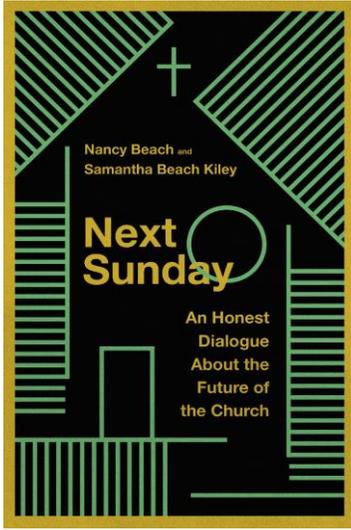
—Adapted from Chapter Three, "Monday Through Saturday"



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Q & A



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"This is a memoir of two people, a mother and a daughter, who live in two different worlds and the same world at the same time. Reading this book is a jarring experience as each explores basic ideas, like community and Sunday morning church services, on their own from their own world. They're the same but not, at the same time. It disturbs me because I wonder if I can even know Samantha's world. I know Nancy's world, it's mostly mine. But they are siblings in Christ, and some inner-world reality transcends their two worlds. I needed this book." —**Scot McKnight**, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary

A Multi-Generational Discussion About Matters of the Church

What do you believe are some of the conversations happening around the kitchen table about the church?

Nancy Beach: *The Great Opportunity* report tells us that half the people who grew up in church have already left. What's with all the empty churches? Will future generations find a church worth fighting for? What characteristics will define a church that can flourish in the future? As a new generation steps into leadership roles, what values should be carried forward? What will we need to let go of? What needs re-inventing? What damage must be named before reconciliation can begin? Is there hope for the local church? These are the conversations happening at our family's kitchen table, and we wanted to open the discussion up to others who care about the future of the local church and wonder what the next generation might make of it.

Is there such a thing as a perfect church? How do you address that question in your book?

Samantha Beach Kiley: The good news is, deep down, I don't think anyone actually wants a perfect church. We want a place where we can learn it's possible to love people through what separates us. We want honesty about how hard it is to be in relationship and to do good in the world.

We recognize that the church is made up of all of us—and to see our local body become more missional, kid-friendly, anti-racist, etc., is going to require our participation and energy. We are not just inviting church leaders into the next era of ministry but all those would like to call a church home.

What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

Nancy Beach: Some of the key themes in the book are centered on community, authenticity, creativity, being missional, justice, inclusion, and church culture. Beyond that we hope readers find

- a hopeful outlook on the future of the church,
- an interest in dialogue across generations,
- a commitment to the reckoning we must undergo with those whom the church has historically oppressed/excluded,
- a willingness to invest in their imperfect, local community of faith,
- and the courage to ask hard questions of their church.

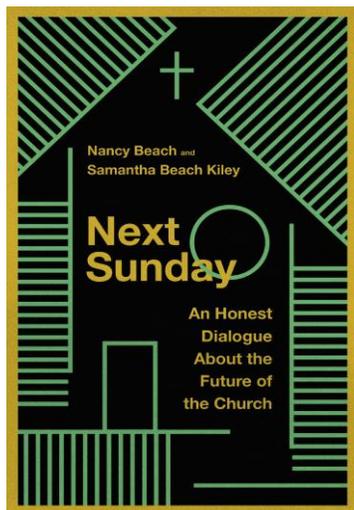


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“Lots of people are walking away from church, and years of pain give them good reasons for doing so. But others are processing their pain in ways that help them imagine a better tomorrow for Christian congregations. That’s what Nancy Beach and Samantha Beach Kiley do in *Next Sunday*. . . . The book feels like a generational passing of a baton, and that’s something that older and younger readers will benefit from.” —Brian D. McLaren, author of *Faith After Doubt*

Practitioners in the Field of Spiritual Leadership

“In *Next Sunday*, Nancy and Samantha bring humanity and humility to strategic church leadership. It is refreshing to hear the voices of practitioners in the field of spiritual leadership who have the experiences to back up their content. I am grateful for this new and authentic work for those with a desire to create a new model of what leadership can look like in the church.” —Nikki Lerner, culture coach and multicultural practitioner.



Nancy Beach serves as a leadership coach with the Slingshot Group, helping church leaders and teams flourish in life and ministry. She also continues to teach at conferences and workshops for both artists and women in leadership and serves on the teaching team at Soul City Church in downtown Chicago. She is the author of *An Hour on Sunday: Creating Moments of Transformation and Wonder* (Zondervan, 2004) and *Gifted to Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church* (Zondervan, 2008).

Nancy has long been a champion for artists and leaders in the local church. As a part of launching the youth group of Willow Creek Community Church in suburban Chicago, Nancy served as the programming director, building a community of artists who sought to create transformational moments in Sunday morning services. She was also a pioneer, serving as the first woman leader on the church’s management team and as the first female teaching pastor. With a front row seat and as a contributing voice for designing church with the “unchurched” in mind, Nancy became a global influencer, speaker, and author as other church leaders sought to learn from Willow Creek’s experience.



Samantha Beach Kiley is a creative communicator working at the intersection of art and faith. She serves as the associate pastor at Church on Morgan in Raleigh, North Carolina, a community committed to exploring and expressing the beauty of God.

Samantha came to ministry as a theatre-maker. Her plays have been produced in professional and educational settings, and, most recently, in family rooms and children’s hospitals with the national tour of her miniature show, *We the W(h)ee*. Her plays include *The Snare*, *Thing 100*, *We the W(h)ee*, and *Mill Girls*. Best of all, Samantha is married to Will, an Enneagram Seven, and mom of Eloise.

Find out more about Samantha at www.samanthabeach.work



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