

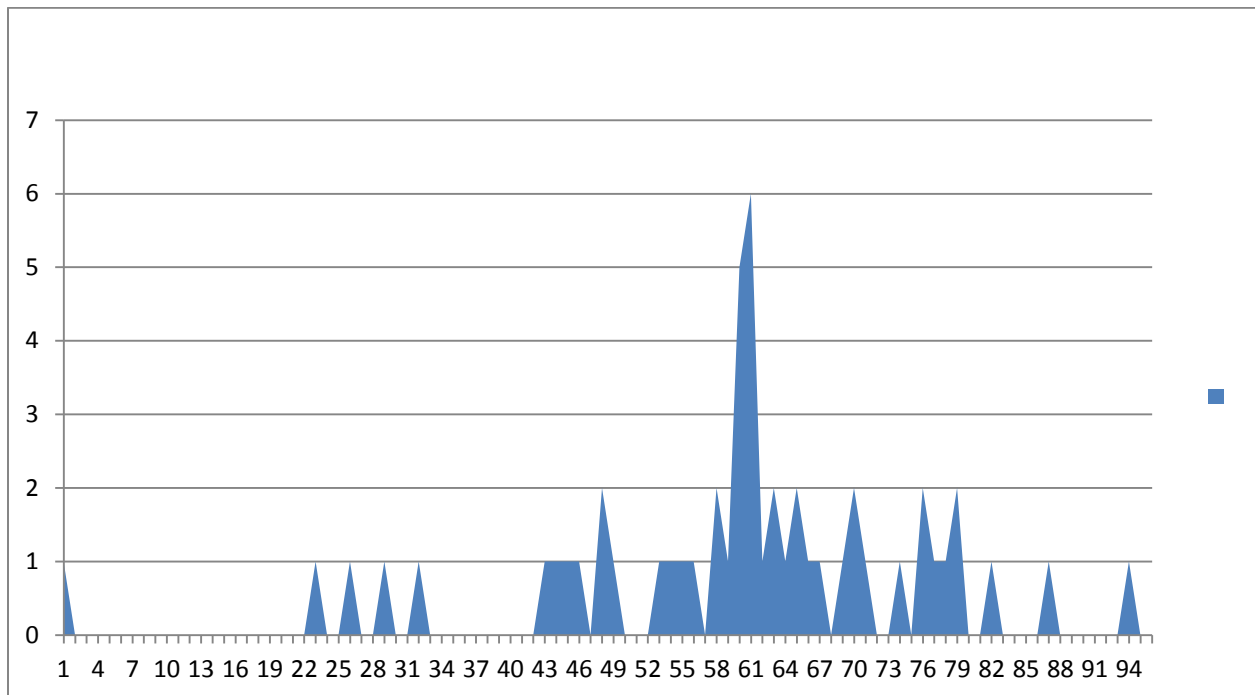
Give it Away

The scriptures of the morning is the account of Jesus saying, give your life away in the service of the gospel. To attempt to preserve or pursue your own life is to lose your life.

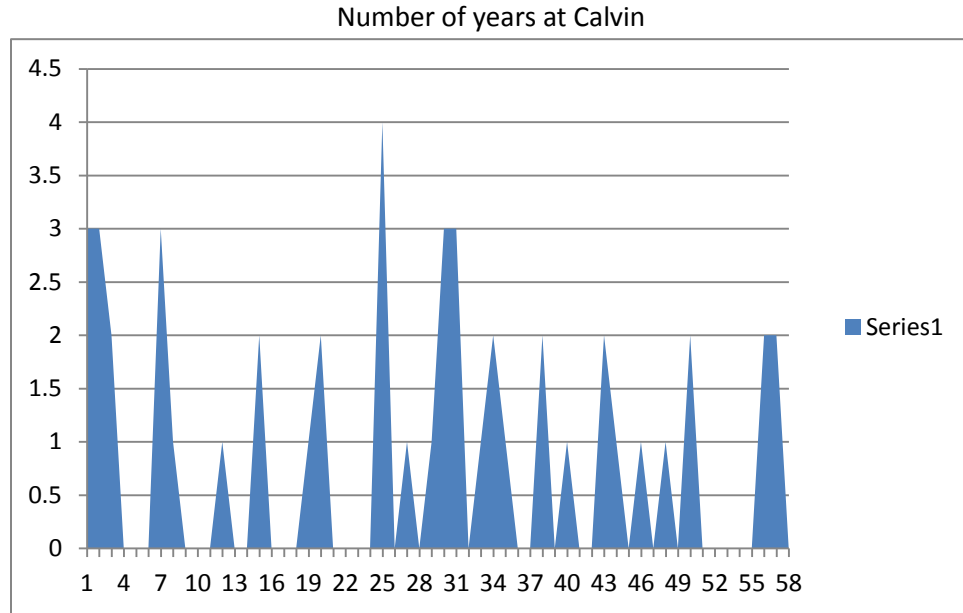
Isn't it fascinating that I can say to you give your life away, and not encounter much back pressure, but if I say – give your church away, we risk significant contention.

It is against the context of Jesus saying – service and sacrifice are the gospel, so give it (your life) away that I would like to return to the topic I introduced two weeks ago: the world that Christ faces and the future of the church of Christ.

First is a sociology observation. The median age of the congregation is 62, which incidentally is the national median for Presbyterians.



And the important aspect of how long you have been associated with Calvin is that 8 people are new. (3 years or less) New people bring fresh perspective and enthusiasm. They are the most likely to invite someone to the church.



Given the age of the congregation you probably have stability for about 10 years. Incidentally this ten years will be a time of abundance precisely because of the baby-boomer retirees. They bring the experience and skill of a lifetime and the considerable physical activity of 65 year olds. They bring this abundance across the next 10-15 years until they will begun to meet the increased physical challenge of being in their 80's.

Sociology implied, but aside – we then look at the church which we are building for our grandchildren, Christ's next church.

The reason we must look at the next church is because the last church, the church which we knew is gone. The church which we knew was built upon two sociological strengths – the support for church growth in American civil religion and the middle class birth rate. We will consider these in backwards order.

I will jump to the conclusion : we don't have children. While we could fuss over statistics and I shared some fascinating graphs the bottom line is the middle class birth rate is significantly down.

And at the same time- the pressure of American civil religion that encouraged church attendance has also declined.

These are the demographics which form the foundation of the church in our time. Demographic pressure **is against** church growth. It is this pressure against the church which brings us to the central consideration for the morning : the problem of hope.

For the problem of death, is not passing on, but giving up. We all die. Yet facing our end presents the oft avoided difficulty. The church's problem is not the change and adaptation which we will meet. Our problem will be the desire to give up because we don't know how to meet the change.

The solution to the problem of hope, does not lie in our feelings, neither in confidence nor in feelings of helplessness. The solution is in the discipline of what we think and do.

Hopelessness is a feeling. **But feelings do not rule us.** Bravery is not being without fear, it is acting in disregard of our feelings, and in accord with our purpose. So hope is our choice and our action. It is a discipline. A discipline. That we chose and act in hope, rather than in hopelessness.

And we have strong tools in this discipline: **we have the purpose of Christ's church, we have the fellowship of Christ's church, and we have the grace which was given to us to give away.**

All of these propel us forward to meet the changes in our time and to adapt the church to the time it now faces.

In the end, the church, was not "ours" but it was Christ's for the time it met. What now stands before us is to find and move into Christ's church for the next time. What is ahead of us is nothing less than Christ meeting our world. It is our task, and our time!