



March 25, 2026

# MESSENGER

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On the web: [www.altadenabaptist.org](http://www.altadenabaptist.org)

## Contact Information:

Due to the fires, our mail has been forwarded. Please send mail to PO Box 91055, Pasadena, CA 91109. You may still call the church phone at 626-797-8970;

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## MEGAMALLS and MEGACHURCHES

Shopping Malls emerged in the United States as part of the post-WWII economic expansion, becoming increasingly popular during the 1960s. They seemed to pop up in every area of suburban growth. Their popularity resulted from the rapid increase in automobile ownership and major road improvements, which made it easy and inviting for people with a little extra money in their pockets to spend leisure time away from city centers. The malls were usually built around one or two "anchor" retailers, such as Sears, Macy's, Nordstrom or Target, with numerous smaller stores connected by an indoor walkway, and they were inevitably surrounded by immense parking lots. They always included food courts and, quite often, movie theaters, therefore becoming ideal locations for middle-class teenagers to meet up and hang out.

Malls became bigger and bigger, with some earning the title **MegaMalls**. The largest in the United States, the "Mall of America," opened in 1992 in the Minneapolis-St. Paul MN area, covers 129 acres of land, houses 520 separate businesses and has an estimated 32 million visitors per year. But, actually, the concept has gone worldwide, to the point where there are now eleven MegaMalls larger than the "Mall of America" spread around the world. Ironically, two of the biggest four are in **Iran**. The one in Tehran is the largest anywhere, hosting more than 2,500 separate businesses and providing parking for 20,000 cars.<sup>1</sup>

Tehran's mall was built in 2018, which is also the year that marks the high point of U.S. MegaMall development. In that year, the total amount of retail space in the nation was calculated at **24 square feet per person**. However, that seems to have been a tipping point. From then on, the MegaMall phenomenon has been going downhill. Some anchor stores (Sears, for example) have disappeared, or have been closing many of their outlets, and mall foot traffic has decreased significantly, causing many smaller businesses to close. This has led to the actual collapse of an increasing number of MegaMalls.<sup>2</sup> Owners have found that demolishing them is too expensive, so they've tried to re-imagine them in different ways: as Sports Complexes with a variety of fitness gyms and game shops, Medical Hubs with clinics and doctors' offices, Community College campuses, Entertainment Centers or even Creative Housing complexes. But sometimes they just limp along without any central theme or purpose, as pathetic half-alive "*Zombie Malls*."

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Now let's talk about **MegaChurches**! They grew in popularity and influence during roughly the same time period as MegaMalls have flourished, and for many of the same reasons: the dominance of the car culture, the need for teen gathering places, an effective mid-twentieth century business model. Their major expansion was in the late 1990s and early 2000s, magnified by TV broadcasting and celebrity leaders. And, like MegaMalls, their day seems to have come and gone. Many are failing because of scandals resulting from lack of moral or financial accountability in their leadership. Others have found that the model of perpetual growth is impossible to maintain. Over time, all MegaChurches experience a widening gap between the corporate goals of the organization and the personal spiritual needs of the people associated with their ministry.<sup>3</sup>

A major change that has had a dramatic affect on both institutions is the increasing use of modern technology by individuals through personal cell phones and computers. Teenagers routinely connect through **social media**, eliminating the need to meet in mall food courts or church activity rooms. Shoppers find it much easier to find what they're looking for online and have it dropped at your front door by Amazon. Eating out happens a lot less when you can count on a quick, efficient delivery from Dominos or DoorDash. Sermons, worship music, Bible studies and even spiritual counseling can also be accessed without getting out of your easy chair. In brief, it seems clear that MegaChurches are in the process of suffering the same fate as MegaMalls.

It's important to think about this as we consider how to Rebuild ABC for the future. Let's avoid the MegaMall/MegaChurch model. Let's commit to sound Biblical principles, such as focusing on the Gospel, building a spiritual community, being open to the Holy Spirit's guidance, respecting and caring for every

individual, trusting fully in God as we lean on one another. If that happens best in a smaller church, then let's embrace being small.

Pastor George Van Alstine

<sup>1</sup> You'll find a listing of the largest MegaMalls in the world in this Wikipedia article: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shopping\\_mall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shopping_mall). In 2005 a supersized mall was built in Dongguan, China, but it has been a colossal failure, filling only 10% of its shops to date. They anticipated seeing 600,000 people a day, but are attracting less than 10,000.

<sup>2</sup> There were more than 2,500 American malls in the 1980s. this number has dropped to about 800 and is projected to continue downward over the next decade.

<sup>3</sup> This YouTube video (I can't find the author; probably his initials are A. I.) gives a good explanation of why MegaChurches came to be and why they're failing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juDdV5oXqQ4>