

‘Loose’ Emergent churches to add more structure: Board as safety net, not top of pyramid

News in the [July 12, 2005](#) issue

The Emergent church movement—activities so loosely organized by design that many proponents call it the “Emergent conversation”—has succumbed to its own growing popularity and named its first national director.

Or rather, make that “national coordinator,” according to a second, later news release last month by the overwhelmingly volunteer organization, which prides itself on being nonhierarchical.

The movement, which seeks to encourage theological insights and a social conscience within a postmodern culture, has had at least a minimal structure in order to qualify as a tax-exempt organization. Its leaders say it has attracted interest from mainline and evangelical Protestants alike, as well as Catholics.

But author-pastor Brian McLaren, who chairs Emergent’s four-person board of directors, said after a recent summit meeting in Minnesota that the movement will be growing organizationally in several ways through the summer “so we can respond well to the momentum,” which brings media requests; calls for cosponsored events, publishing partnerships and new networks; and other demands.

Appointed as U.S. national coordinator and starting part-time in October is Tony Jones, 37, a minister who has been involved with Emergent since its inception in the middle 1990s. Holder of degrees from Dartmouth and Fuller Theological Seminary, the Minnesota resident is also a doctoral fellow and senior research fellow at Princeton Theological Seminary.

“While the fluidity and amorphousness of Emergent has served us quite well in the past five years,” Jones wrote on the group’s principal Web site, “it is now starting to become a hindrance.” Unanswered requests and unfulfilled promises accumulate,

Jones said, “but we have not had the structures and processes in place to adequately follow up.”

Jones, whose role will expand to full-time by June 2006, said in an online article dated June 17 that the movement’s supporters should think of Emergent’s board and officers as safety nets rather than “the top of a pyramid.”