

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Target Groups

“Everyone Welcome” is often seen on signs in front of churches. However, churches that try to reach everyone quite often end up reaching no one, or at least very few persons for Christ. In contrast churches that are effectively reaching people for Christ have a well-defined target group.

Churches make well-intentioned mistakes that keep them from experiencing biblical church growth, and one of the

“The best way to reach the world for Christ is to begin with a target group, and then work outward from there.”

— Gary L. McIntosh

major mistakes is to not do adequate research to understand the people they are seeking to reach with the gospel. Despite our good intentions, if the method of evangelism we use does not fit the particular harvest, we will be ineffective.

While reaching the whole world with the gospel is the mission of the Christian faith, fruitful churches recognize that the world is made up of many different audiences. Since different groups of people have quite different cultures, needs, and methods of communication, a church that intentionally tries to reach a specific group with the message of Christ, will normally be much more effective than one that tries to reach everyone with a general attempt. Every church should have a sign that says, “Everyone Welcome,” but a deliberate strategy must be in place or they will only see accidental growth.

At first glance, it may seem that aiming at select groups of people is not biblical. Upon further reflection, however, it

becomes obvious that it is the only strategic way to actually reach the world for Christ.

Think for a moment how God began to redeem the world. From the beginning, God has been concerned for the entire world, not just certain people. God's desire is to redeem every tribe, nation, people, and family upon the face of the earth. Yet, how did he go about reaching the world? His plan started with a clearly defined target audience in the person and family of Abram, and worked outward to the whole world from there.

Jesus also loved the entire world, but he began with a target group of Galileans and worked from there to reach the world.

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

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Know yourself and your congregation.

Your vision must be intentional.

Identify Your Target Group

Your particular mission and vision, if it is to be fully realized, must be intentional. The question, “Whom are we burdened for?” does not arise out of selfish desires, but out of a humble desire to come alongside particular peoples as missionaries, to identify with their pain and misfortune, and to lay down our lives for their welfare and for matters which impact their eternal destiny. What follows are some ideas to help you find your specific target audience.

First, know yourself and your congregation. Ask yourself questions like the following: How old am I? What is the average age of people in my congregation? What do I like to read? What are people in my congregation reading? What music do I enjoy? What music do my people prefer? What is my educational level? What is the educational level of my congregation? Who tends to follow my leadership? After asking and answering these questions, make a list of people who may be a close match. If God directs your heart toward those who are different than yourself and your congregation, be willing to invest time in learning about them (language, values, communication, decision-making, etc.)

Second, investigate the people and places you have listed as a potential target audience. Where are people like you? Where do people live who are similar to you? Once you have located where people live, begin to study them to determine their needs, struggles, and pains. Be sensitive to God's leading as you investigate the various groups of people in your community. To whom are you drawn? Which group of people has needs that your church is ready and able to meet?

Third, Look for those who are receptive and open to the gospel. In general people tend to be most receptive when they are going through changes, relocating, facing challenging circumstances, or have major needs. Which people that you have identified as potential targets appear to be the most receptive?

Fourth, narrow your list down to one or two groups of people. Conduct additional research on the people God has placed on your heart. Ask: Whom am I being drawn to? Where am I most likely to be fruitful?

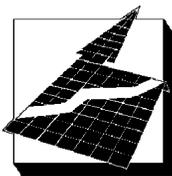
Fifth, design a new ministry specifically aimed to meet a need of your target group. Initiate it and begin working to reach this group for Christ and your church.

Church leaders can no longer be inhibited about developing strategies aimed toward particular groups of people. Congregations that take the Great Commission seriously are burdened and drawn toward particular groups in their community and around the world.



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Beyond The First Visit

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

P.O. Box 892589 Temecula, CA 92589-2589

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Beyond The First Visit

Does your church put out the “welcome” mat or the “do not disturb” sign?

We all like to think that our church is the friendliest in town. But do visitors see it that way? Church consultant Gary L. McIntosh invites you to take another look at your church through the eyes of a first-time guest to identify the things that might be holding them back from a second visit.

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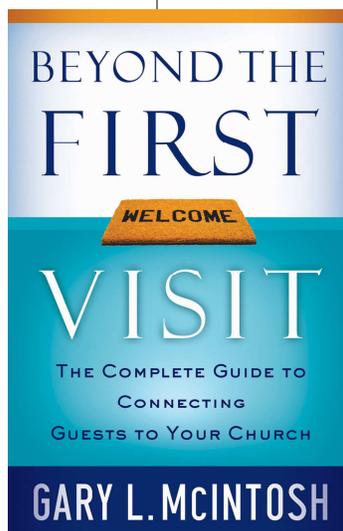
—George G. Hunter, III

Dr. McIntosh has served numerous churches in over 87 denominations throughout the United States, Canada, and Southeast Asia.

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