

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Ministry Area

Many church leaders work from the belief that their church is to reach the entire world for Christ. While this is a solid biblical foundation to work from, the reality is that the average church serves a limited ministry area within a twenty-mile radius of the church's primary facility.

Over the last decade, I conducted research in churches from numerous denominations located in forty-one states among people who had been in

church for less than two years. Over 1,100 people participated in the study, which provided numerous insights regarding evangelism and church growth.

The study included churches and people in towns with populations of 10,000 or greater, and represented all sizes of churches from small to mega. One of the findings focused on how far people live from their church.

How far do people live from the church they attend? What is the radius of a church's ministry area? The study found that forty-five percent of people live within five miles of the church they attend for worship services (eight percent live within two miles). Another twenty-four percent travel between six and ten miles to church. Thus, over two-thirds of a church's attendees travel less than ten miles to church.

Another twenty-one percent of people live between eleven and twenty miles away from their church, leading to a

combined ninety percent (90%) traveling less than twenty miles to church each Sunday. Just ten percent of the entire study group was willing to drive over twenty miles to church on any given Sunday.

People who have recently committed their lives to faith in Christ live even closer to church than those with a more mature faith. A full one hundred percent of recent converts to Christ live less than twenty miles from their church. Ten percent live within two miles and another forty percent lives between two and five miles away. Thus fifty-percent of new converts live within five miles of the church they attend.

“One hundred percent of recent converts to Christ live less than twenty miles from their church.”

— Gary L. McIntosh

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

New website address:

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How far do people drive to your church?

Few people will drive farther than 20 miles to church.

A few exceptions to this ministry area guideline are found in rural communities, and among some ethnic populations. The research described above did not include communities with less than 10,000 people where one might need to drive a great distance to find a church. Also, people who have a high ethnic consciousness will often drive one to two hours to find a church that uses their first language and worships in their preferred cultural forms. However, around ninety-five percent of churches in the USA will find that a twenty-mile radius is their normal ministry area.

What You Can Do

Understanding your church's ministry area provides several strategic insights for a more fruitful ministry. Consider the following ideas.

First, focus evangelism on your current attendees networks of friends, family, and associates who live near your church. Since ninety percent of your regular attendees live within a twenty-mile radius of your church, it is highly probable that their social networks will be found within that same radius.

Second, offer outreach events in your own ministry area. Offering outreach events within your ministry area makes it easy for your regular attendees to invite those in their social networks, which will empower your church's ability to assimilate new believers into its fellowship.

Third, concentrate follow-up on newcomers who live within twenty miles of your church. As you think strategically about follow-up of newcomers, consider sending an email or letter to those who live outside your ministry area, while

placing most of your effort on those who live within that boundary.

Four, advertise within twenty miles of your church facility. Advertising is an effective way to connect with non-churched people in your community. However, advertising that goes outside of your own ministry area is not fruitful disciple-making. Stay within your ministry area for the least cost and most effective results.

Five, form ministry partnerships within your own community. Developing missional partnerships with local schools, parks departments, and city governments is a popular way to serve those in the church community. However, the best results will come from partnership that work close to the churches base of operation, that is, within its ministry area.

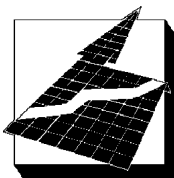
How far do your church attendees live from your church facility?

Where are you focusing your outreach efforts today? Where should you focus your outreach?



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President of the Church Growth Network
For information about training workshops
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Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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

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How to Develop a Pastoral Compensation Plan

This manual is intended to serve as an interactive planner for church leaders who want to develop a pastoral compensation plan.

The concepts and exercises work equally well for a church that already has a plan and simply wishes to evaluate it, as for a church that has no plan and is just beginning to deal with the issue.

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- An understanding of the general financial make-up of church budgets.
- A basic knowledge of compensation models, salary supplements, fringe benefits, and reimbursements.

Developing a compensation plan is difficult, but taking the time to devise such a plan will clarify communication, lift morale, improve ministry among your church staff, and enhance pastoral longevity.

The manual includes: introduction, handbook, appendix, and CD. 100 pages.



The author, Dr. Gary L. McIntosh, is an experienced consultant having worked with over 5,000 churches in the past thirty years.

Gary's wide experience among churches representing over 87 denominations provides a solid foundation for his counsel.

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