

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Small Group Participation

Most church leaders would agree that the purpose of bringing believers together on a regular basis is to nurture their spiritual maturity. The higher the percentage of church constituents who participate in such activities, the deeper will be the spiritual maturity of the congregation. Churches that emphasize small groups as their primary means of spiritual formation can realistically expect 70% - 80% of their overall constituency to be involved.

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There are few, if any, other means by which such a high percentage of a congregation will be involved.

It is quite possible for one congregation to be more spiritually mature than another. The Church in Berea, for example, was characterized as "being better disposed and more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they were entirely ready and accepted and welcomed the message of Christ with an inclination of mind and eagerness to search and examine the Scripture daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The purpose of every letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the early churches was to encourage spiritual maturity. His letter to the Christians at Colossae typified this priority: "We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in

the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9-10). This same desire and challenge remains for pastors today. How is it best accomplished?

Average attendance in church-sponsored small groups throughout the United States is around ten people. Thus, a church of one hundred people with seven small groups will have approximately 70% of its people involved in this process of spiritual development. This is a good number and percentage of people in a church who are striving to be "bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."

There are reasons why, in some churches, fewer than 70% of the constituents are

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Hold a Sign-up Sunday!

Educate people on the value of small groups.

involved in a small group. Some people can't participate because of work or family commitments. Others cannot drive at night. Some don't feel attracted to small groups, preferring larger fellowship gatherings. In churches that stress adult Sunday school, attendance in small groups will be less. And churches that don't have enough groups or enough *new* groups will see fewer involved.

In most situations, however, a strong small group ministry, which church leaders prioritize in the overall ministry of the church, will see over 70% of the adult congregation participating.

Here are some suggestions for how to see 70+% of your congregation involved in your church's small group ministry. Begin by educating church leaders and members to the benefits of involvement in small groups.

Educating your congregation about the value of small group involvement takes more than just one exposure. Here are some suggestions for building a "small group consciousness" in your church:

1. Sermons. What is endorsed from the pulpit obviously carries more weight than what is not. Give the biblical rationale for small groups (Heb. 10:24-25; Mt. 18:20; I Thess. 5:11; Acts 5:42; Acts 2:42, 46; Prov. 27:17; Acts 20:20; Eph. 4:15-16; etc.). Encourage everyone to at least try a short-term group to see how it feels.

2. Information Meetings. Several informational meetings can be scheduled for people to get more information on the exact nature and variety of the small groups available in the church.

3. Personal Letters. Write a personal letter to every person/family in the church informing them of the small group ministry, its purpose, and your passion for the spiritual development of members.

4. General Communication. Promote the new small groups in church publications, such as your website, newsletter, and bulletin.

Compile a list of people (including non-members) who could be personally invited to be part of a small group. And, identify the group(s) in which each person would most likely be comfortable. Then invite them to join a group.

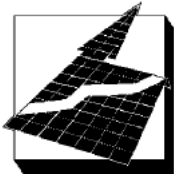
Hold a "Sign-up Sunday" to bring attention to small group opportunities. Focus the sermon on small groups, give testimonies, distribute a pamphlet on each small group, including purpose, content, meeting length, time, location, any age, gender, or other characteristics of the group. Sign-up sheets should be available with a limit of ten people per group. Then have people sign up!

You'll find a significant number will do so and become involved.



Adapted from the forthcoming book *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Baker Books March 2013) by Drs. Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn.

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One Church Four Generations

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One Church Four Generations

Church leaders of the twenty-first century, perhaps more than at any time in history, must reach out to a variety of groups within the church. How can worship services be modified to attract young people without driving the older members away? Is it possible for a church to have an intergenerational ministry? How can churches keep the youngest members involved?

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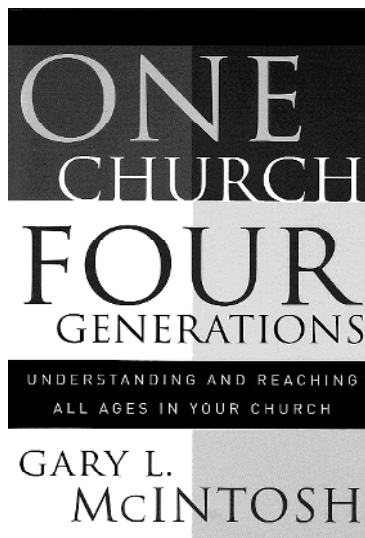
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