

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## Barriers to Evangelism

New churches are usually much more effective at winning new people to faith in Christ than older churches. For many reasons, as a church grows older it develops barriers that keep it from making new disciples.

The list of evangelistic barriers is long, but the following are a few reasons churches become less effective at evangelism. Once a church recognizes some of the barriers, it can then take action to eliminate them.

Emphasis on the Great Commandment often comes with a reduced emphasis on the Great Commission.

First, the major barrier is the low commitment to personal evangelism found in the members and regular worshipers of a church. Are a church's individual members sharing their faith with friends, acquaintances, and family members, or are they neglecting such activity? In newer churches between two-thirds to three-fourths of the people first attend due to the invitation of a friend or family member. As these new people get involved, they enthusiastically share their faith with other people with whom they come into contact. As this early enthusiasm wanes, the evangelistic potential of a church declines.

Second, related to this is the low evangelistic conscience found in many churches. The focus of sermons on biblical knowledge, historical events, and modern issues often comes with a reduced emphasis on the need for salvation. Or, another way to state it is, the recent emphasis on the Great Commandment often comes with a reduced emphasis on the Great

Commission. Unless the fact of the lostness of mankind is preached passionately from the pulpit, a church is not likely to be passionate about evangelism.

Third, differing perspectives between the *pioneers* and *homesteaders* often leads to less evangelism. Pioneers are people who have been in the church for many years. They often identify with previous pastors and recall building projects that occurred years before. Newcomers are homesteaders who appear to intrude on the turf of the pioneers and identify closely with the current pastor. Typically the pioneers resist doing any new form of ministry that might reach new people for Christ (thereby bringing in new homesteaders).

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

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# Outreach and evangelism are not the same.

## Newcomers desire friends more than friendliness.

Fourth, another primary barrier is little training for evangelism in most churches. Churches tend to get results related to the training and teaching they offer. It is not surprising that churches, which train their members to share the gospel, get the best evangelistic results. And, it is not surprising that churches weak in evangelism rarely train and teach members to evangelize. Studies demonstrate that evangelistic churches train a minimum of 10% of their people yearly to share their faith.

Fifth, a misunderstanding between the words *outreach* and *evangelism* creates another barrier. Outreach is any ministry that connects a church with its non-churched community. Thus, when a church reaches into its community with missional acts of service (e.g., food distribution, job counseling, divorce recovery, etc.), it is doing outreach. In contrast evangelism takes place when non-Christians are challenged to place their personal faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. The problem is that many churches are doing outreach but not evangelism. But, since they do not understand the difference, many churches think they are active evangelistically, but they are not.

Sixth, most churches focus on being friendly rather than being friends to newcomers. While it is true that guests to our churches want a friendly welcome, long term what they really seek are friends. When guests encounter a friendly church they naturally expect that they will be able to make lots of friends. Unfortunately, it is easier in most churches to become a member than to make lasting friendships. Since most people come to Christ through family and friend connections, this lack of friend making in churches leads to fewer

people accepting Christ as their personal savior.

Seventh, related to the lack of friend making is the inability of churches to assimilate newcomers into areas of service. Churches tend to have few entry level places of service for newcomers. In addition most of the available areas require high verbal skills. Newcomers who are not competent with public speaking tend to find few places of service. Churches that do well in evangelism offer numerous places where people with nonverbal skills may be involved (craft groups, work projects, mission trips, etc.).

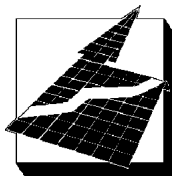
Eighth, the lack of seeker events is another reason for the low level of evangelism in many churches. Churches that effectively reach new people for Christ offer from four to eight events each year aimed primarily at reaching non-Christians. In contrast churches with low evangelistic success offer less than three such events a year.

Which of these barriers do you find in your church? How can you begin today to eliminate one or two of these barriers? When will you start?



Gary L. McIntosh is editor of *Growth Points* and speaks at several leadership events each year.

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# Beyond The First Visit

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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## Beyond The First Visit

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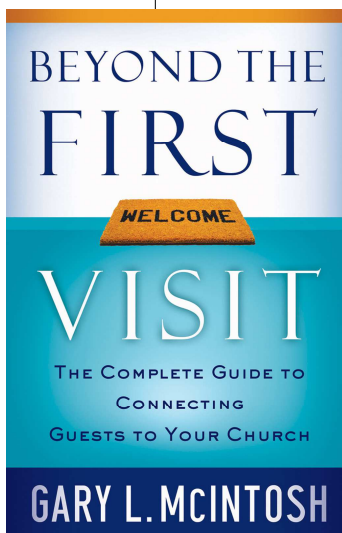
—George G. Hunter, III

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

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