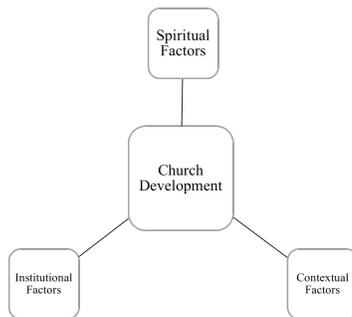


GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Three Factors of Growth

The growth of any church is a combination of three factors: Spiritual, Institutional, and Contextual.



Spiritual Factors

Spiritual factors include prayer, fasting, holy living, obedience to God's word, unity of the church body, reliance on the Holy Spirit, love for one another, and a host of other things related to the work of God in a local church.

To assess the spiritual factors in your church, look for answers to the following questions

1. How active are church attendees in personal prayer?
2. Does your church have regularly scheduled times of congregational prayer? If so, how many? How well attended are they?
3. How involved are church leaders in prayer activities? Do leaders model prayer to the congregation?
4. Does your church sponsor prayer retreats or other activities for focused prayer?

5. Do staff members have organized prayer teams?
6. How unified is the congregation?
7. Are there any corporate sins that have not been addressed?
8. How loving is your congregation?
9. Are members involved with fasting?
10. Is there a prayer chain ministry in the church?

Institutional Factors

Institutional Factors include budgets, facilities, worship styles, seating and parking capacity, decision-making approaches, plans (or lack of plans), and many more things related to the work of ministry.

To assess the institutional factors in your church, look for answers to the following questions.

1. What is the age of your church?
2. Do you have adequate seating, parking, and space for children?
3. How balanced are the different age groups?
4. What is your church's growth history over the last decade? Growing? Plateaued? Declining?

For information on scheduling
Dr. Gary L. McIntosh

Write: PO Box 892589, Temecula, CA
92589

Email: cgnet@earthlink.net

Call toll free: 1-877-506-3086

5. Where is your church on the traditional church life cycle?
6. What percentage of your people are serving in an identifiable ministry?
7. How many of your church's programs or ministries are focused inward on the existing body and outward on the unreached in your community?
8. What percentage of worshipers also participate in Sunday school or small groups?
9. What is the average age of your congregations attendees?
10. What is your average worship attendance?

Contextual Factors

Contextual factors include type of people around and in the church, the neighborhood, and community; economic trends, architecture of the church building, and the language spoke at church.

To assess the contextual factors in your church, look for answers to the following questions.

1. What is your church's geographical ministry area? How far will 90% of your people drive to church?
2. Is your ministry area growing, plateaued, or declining? How does this impact your church?
3. What is the socio/economic makeup of the people in your community? Do your participants mirror the same?
4. What are the top five music styles among people in your community? Does your church reflect these in worship services?
5. What is the ethnic makeup of people in your community? Is this reflected in your congregation?
6. What are the needs of people in your community? Is your church speaking to any of

these needs?

7. Does your community have a clear architectural appearance? If so, does your church's facilities fit the style?
8. What is the average educational level of people in your community? Are your church attendees above, below, or the same?
9. What is the primary language spoken in your community? Do you use that language in your church services and ministries?
10. What opportunities are there for your church to serve your community?

Insights

1. All three factors are interrelated. Thus, the growth or lack of growth in a local congregation is quite complex.
2. Dynamic churches work to understand and improve in all three areas, rather than just one or two.
3. The easiest factor to assess is the institutional factors. They are the hard elements related to growth.
4. The most difficult factors to assess are the contextual factors and spiritual factors. They are soft elements related to growth.
5. The most thorough assessment often comes through the involvement of an outside consultant or coach. As someone once noted, "It's difficult for fish to study water." Likewise, it often difficult for those involved in a church to seriously assess their own church.

So, how do these three factors converge in your church? Which factor is your strongest? Which is the weakest? What questions do you need to ask and answer this year?

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