
GROWTH POINTS

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Define Your Publics

Years ago, pastors thought of only two publics: congregation and community. It was a generalized way to think, and pastors assumed the constituency that mattered was the congregation. Today church leaders recognize a variety of publics. Consider how you might communicate information to each of the following publics.

Employees. It's not good if paid staff hear crucial news through the grapevine. If they get most of their information secondhand, it may be untrue or distorted. It's of prime importance that you keep your paid employees up-to-date on pertinent information.

Church Members. The attitudes and opinions of your committed members matter a great deal. They expect to be kept informed of major plans, changes, and directions. Internal affairs are of particular interest.

Church Attendees. The regular participants at your worship services require knowledge on the larger aspects of your church. What is the church's vision, goals, hopes, plans, and needs?

Most don't care about the internal workings of your church, but knowing the larger picture is crucial to their ongoing support.

Parents of Children/Teens. Growing churches are usually places where parents can raise their children in safety. They await knowledge that affects their children's lives. Changes in leadership (children's or youth pastors) rank high on their need-to-know list. Instruction about how the church is building character in their young ones and keeping children safe is critical.

Financial Supporters. Those who provide regular financial offerings must receive significant news about the financial health of your church before it appears in the financial reports at business meetings. By keeping them informed—truthfully and timely—you'll sustain their confidence and good will.

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Financial Community. Pastors and other church leaders forget that banks, credit unions, and other financial loan companies are a key part of their publics. While churches call upon such organizations only in key situations (e.g., when seeking a building loan), it's important to communicate with them on a timely basis. Building a base of knowledge among these publics goes beyond simple recognition to building trust.

Volunteers. Businesses have shareholders who must be communicated with to maintain their morale and benevolence. Volunteers are much like shareholders, as they invest not only financially in a church but also personally through dedicated service. It's necessary for your volunteers to receive significant information about your church before the general public becomes aware.

Larger community. As a member of the local community, your church's duty is to strengthen and protect it. If you hope to be accepted and supported by the larger community, you'll need the confidence of its members and officials. Not only are you dependent on the community for your safety, sanitation, and health, but you'll also need cooperation when growth requires traffic control and building construction. Then too, this is the

community you've decided to reach with the gospel. It's good sense to provide honest and clear communication to those who live there.

Local Community Officials. What do community leaders—mayor, chief of police, fire chief, others—understand about your church? Do they see your church as a positive force in the community? Have they even heard of your church? What impressions do they have about your contributions to the greater good?

Target Audience. Churches grow and decline according to how well they are able to identify, communicate to, and connect with their target audience(s). Thus, it's good to ask: Whenever you make a decision that will affect your target audience(s), ask: "How can we communicate this in a manner to enhance understanding among those we're trying to reach?"

Suppliers. Churches forget that a network of suppliers provides services and goods that help the church's ministry. Think of the wide network of people who provide services and goods to your church during the year: electrical, telephone, Internet, janitorial, gardening, and industrial and commercial services (floor mats, washroom supplies, carpet cleaning, etc.).

Proper communication with all your publics builds your church's credibility.

***Growth Points* is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$25 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.**

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