
GROWTH POINTS

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

Growing Churches: The Basic Rules

Church leaders spend a great deal of time thinking about how to help the church they serve grow.

Jesus promised the growth of his church when he said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). Pastors and other church leaders know their church should be growing by making new disciples. And yet, by and large, they make poor plans to see growth happen.

By all accounts, church leaders are only batting about .200. When it comes to church growth, at best one-fifth of churches are growing; two-fifths are plateaued; and two-fifths are declining.

These numbers are well known and reported among church leaders, but few understand the basic rules of how churches grow. It’s a truism that all churches grow by church growth rules, even if they are unaware of it. It’s better, of course, to know the basic rules and use them to plan for the future.

There are no perfect church leaders this side of heaven, but there are a few who are able to help their church grow. They do so by following the basic rules of growth.

The Basic Rules

The growth, plateauing, and decline of churches has been a subject of research for over eighty years. Here are a few of the essential rules that, if followed, often result in a growing church.

1. Growing churches are led by growing pastors.

It’s nearly impossible for a church to grow unless its lead pastor(s) believes God wants his church to grow. They have to pay the price for growth to take place by dreaming for growth, working for growth, teaching for growth, and planning for growth.

2. Growing churches are built by teachable people.

In a similar manner, it’s nearly impossible for a church to grow unless the people in the church are willing to follow growth leadership. They must pray for growth, pay for growth, and participate for growth.

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3. Growing churches make evangelism the priority.

Churches that grow focus major attention on outreach and evangelism. They preach the Gospel of Salvation, train their people to build relationships with the unchurched, and invite others to place faith in Christ Jesus.

4. Growing churches welcome new people into the fellowship.

The process of welcoming new people and involving them in the church's fellowship is well designed by growing churches. They expect newcomers to show up, and are prepared for them.

5. Growing churches know the people in their ministry area.

The ministry area for most churches is within a 20-minute (or 20-mile) radius around the church's campus. Leaders make a studied analysis of those in this area in order to understand how to communicate the Gospel effectively to them.

6. Growing churches start new ministries.

Stating it another way, it takes new ministries to reach new people. Thus, growing churches continually start new programs and ministries aimed at the unreached people in their areas.

7. Growing churches speak the language of the unchurched.

Language includes more than words itself. It also means understanding the communication patterns, music tastes, and heart felt needs. Pastors who preach to real needs in ways that the unchurched understand, often are in growing churches.

8. Growing churches involve people in ministry.

When over fifty percent of a congregation is involved in ministry, a church is usually growing. Thus, recruiting, placing, and training servant workers in ministry is a key aspect of growing churches.

9. Growing churches develop leaders.

Leadership development is necessary for continued growth. Churches grow at a rate of ten people for every leader in a church, or a 10:1 ratio. When a church develops leaders, it grows.

10. Growing churches fit the culture.

When a church identifies with the essential cultural milieu of a community, it tends to grow. Growing churches fit the cultural context in which they minister.

Which of these rules does your church follow? Which do you need to practice? Which will you begin to use?

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