

Growth Points

with Dr. Gary L. McIntosh

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Why Focus on Growth?

This last week I spoke at a leadership enrichment conference in St. Paul, Minnesota. Leaders from twelve congregations gathered to think about how to lead churches of various sizes, as well as how to staff a church so that it grows.

As we discussed some of the principles together, one of the participants asked, "Why should we care about numerical growth anyway?"

It was an interesting question, and one that I was surprised to hear. There are many good reasons for us to focus on the numerical growth of our churches. We should be concerned about numerical growth because . . .

12 Surprising Facts about the American Church

David T. Olson conducted a nationwide study of American church attendance in over 170,000 churches. A sampling of his results are noted in the article "Why Focus on Growth?"

For further information, go to www.TheAmericanChurch.org and/or contact Dave Olson at DaveTOlson@aol.com. Information is available by direct download, CD, or print.

—Editor

(1) Numbers equal people. Christ's command to "make disciples" cannot be accomplished without adding people to the church. If we are obedient to the Great Commission—finding, winning, and folding lost people into our congregations—we must be concerned about numerical growth.

(2) There are large numbers of people who need to believe in Christ and connect with His church.

A study by David T. Olson, "12 Surprising Facts about the American Church," reports that only 18.7 percent of people in the United States attended an orthodox Christian church on any given weekend in 2000. That means 81.3 percent of our population is effectively outside the discipling network of any Bible believing church. If we are not concerned about the numerical growth of our church, are we not neglecting the 81.3 percent who need salvation in Christ?

(3) Church attendance will continue to decline if we do not focus on growth.

Olson projects in his study that church attendance will drop to 17.1 percent in 2010, 15.6 percent in 2020, and 11.7 percent in 2050. If we do not focus on the growth of our church, this trend will continue.

(4) Small churches are declining. Most churches with an average attendance between 50 and 299 are declining. This equates to the often quoted number of 85 percent of all churches in the United States.

(5) Older churches are declining. Every decade of churches that were planted between 1840 and 1960

gave declined in attendance during the last decade (1990-2000). If your church was started over forty years ago, there is a strong possibility your attendance is declining also.

(6) Church planting is not keeping up with population growth.

The strong effort at church planting during the decade of the 1990s provided a net gain of 4,600 churches in the United States. This is an outstanding number. Unfortunately, to keep up with the population growth, another 38,802 churches were needed. We must, of course, continue to plant churches. But, we also need to focus on the numerical growth of existing ones at the same time.

(7) The American church is in decline.

Protestant churches grew a total of 5.7 percent in the decade of the 1990s, but population growth was 13.2 percent! If we are to keep up with population growth, our churches must focus on numerical growth.

Should we focus on growth? Absolutely! The gospel expects it, the health of our churches demands it.

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Make A List and Check it Twice

A Check List for Faithful Ministry

People often ask how I get so much accomplished. The answer is simple. I use a check list. Each day I make a list of the projects I need to accomplish, and then focus on the one or two items that must be done. As I check off the items completed, it provides a sense of accomplishment. It also keeps me moving forward in my life and ministry.

I also keep a check list of more important, long-term goals, dreams, and projects. Every few days I look over my list and reflect on how I am doing. Check lists. They help keep me focused and on task.

Successful pastors also use check lists. Here is one list that a pastor in a growing church uses to keep on target. Maybe it will be helpful to you.

1. Do I know my philosophy of ministry?

As you look at your ministry, do you have a sense that you are working from a plan? Do you know what direction you are going and WHY you are heading that way?

2. Do I have a well defined purpose?

Have you written a purpose statement for your own life? When you other reflect on you life ten years from now, what do you hope they will say?

3. Do I know my priorities?

In the midst of all the “good” things you could be doing, have you determined what are the “best” things? Have you reviewed and adjusted your priorities in the last week? Month? Year?

4. Do I regularly analyze the church situation?

Have you taken a good, hard look at your church lately? Is attendance going up? Is it plateaued? Perhaps declining? Is there harmony or conflict? Low morale or high? What’s the honest situation?

5. Do I regularly make plans for the future?

“If you fail to plan, you plan to fail” is an old but true statement. Have you developed a financial plan? Educational plan? Retirement plan? Church growth plan? Leadership development plan? Others?

6. Do I set daily, weekly, and monthly goals?

What do you hope to accomplish today? This week? This month? This year? The road to success is paved with goals. What are your goals?

7. Do I know the life-style of the church and body?

Have you considered how your church body likes to worship? Have fun? Make decisions? What is the personality of your church? Take the time to describe it in detail on a piece of paper or on your computer.

8. Do I have a way for people to contact me?

While you need to protect your time, you also need to be available to your people. How easy is it for leaders to tell you their needs? Are you listening to others?

9. Do I delegate jobs and tasks to others?

What are you doing that you should NOT be doing? Why not give away those jobs and tasks to others?

10 Do I transfer leadership to others?

Leaders are developed when mentors give away not only responsibility for tasks, but authority to do the tasks. Who have you transferred leadership to in the last week? Month? Year?



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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