

CHURCH GROWTH PRINCIPLES

1. *A theology of dynamic growth.* A theology of dynamic growth is a vision of victory rooted and grounded in the will of God. Is the church merely “keeping house” and “skinning” the sects? Or is the church in touch with its God-given purpose, for example, to give glory to God by multiplying disciples? Possible motivational lessons from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians could include:

- “Why Are We Here?” (1:3-14)
- “God’s Great Power” (1:15-23)
- “The Motivation Of Grace” (2:1-10)
- “Reconciliation & Edification” (2:11-22)
- “Paul’s Stewardship & Ours” (3:1-13)
- “Enabling Prayer” (3:14-21)
- “Christian Unity” (4:1-6)
- “Christian Ministry: A Ministry Of Gifts” (4:7-16)
- “Renewal & Image Bearing” (4:17-24)
- “Imitators Of God” (4:25–5:2)
- “Children Of Light” (5:3-21)
- “The Bride Of Christ” (5:22-33)
- “Interpersonal Relations” (6:1-9)
- “An Equipped Army” (6:10-20)

These lessons will develop the purpose of the church by answering basic questions such as “who are we” and “why are we here.”

2. *Operational commitment to evangelism.* This involves putting verbal commitments and plans into action. What methodological tools are being employed? Do the methods genuinely meet needs? Or do traditions hinder spiritual and numerical growth? What is needed in many congregations is a long term goal of evangelizing the community using non-traditional

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means. This approach will take time and teaching, but the fruit will be greater and last longer.

The suggested strategy involves the multiplication of cells within the church by means of group process for teaching, shepherding, etc.

3. *Strategy mindedness and correct priorities.* Strategy mindedness and correct priorities come from a spirit of sacrifice and a determination to do God's will. It means doing that which is the most significant not just the good things. The calendar (time) and budget (money) will show where a church's priorities are. What is the foundational philosophy for calendar and budget? Is there a systematic approach to missions; is it the "shotgun" approach used? What is needed in many congregations is home evangelism. This need must be defined clearly and communicated to the congregation. The strategy of Jesus (that is, commitment and sacrifice) must be taught.

4. *Balance in discipling and perfecting.* Are the programs dictated by tradition (for example, the "invitation" at the end of worship as the major discipling effort, or the "one-way" style of teaching as the main perfecting thrust)? Or is there flexibility to allow for diverse needs and situations in the processes of discipling and perfecting? Do good "body life" and "mutual edification" occur in the assemblies? Is spiritual life transmitted in a dynamic or a stagnant environment?

5. *Membership mobilized.* How well are defined tasks accomplished?

6. *Commitment to the word and emphasis on purposeful preaching and teaching.* Is the Bible taken seriously? Do members live according to biblical precepts? Is the church alive? Or

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is there a perpetuation of dead tradition? Are Bible classes formal, dry, uninteresting? Do the same topics come up week after week for discussion? Are new ideas ever voiced? Does the teaching and preaching motivate member to live the Christian life? Is the preaching relevant? What is being done to train, motivate, stimulate, and encourage Bible class teachers? Does teaching and preaching occur in any other setting than the church building?

7. *Devotion to prayer.* Is prayer personal? Or is it merely ritualistic? Is prayer a priority item? Prayer must be taught. Jesus taught the disciples how to pray. A program of personal prayer and devotion would be good (for example, based on the Psalms). Personal needs must be expressed openly in the assembly, and specific prayers for those needs must be uttered.

8. *Celebrative worship.* Celebrative worship is worship that is meaningful and vital; it is a significant event with quality participation and praise. Is the congregation in a “rut” by adhering to a formal or informal liturgy? Is the Lord’s supper done hurriedly and ritualistically? Or is there true celebration? Slight and meaningful variations in the format of worship might be key to enhancing celebration. The people also must have something to celebrate. Christian worship is a testimony to the vitality of the people’s life in Jesus. If their Christian life is boring and drab, then there will be no celebration in worship.

9. *Interpersonal relations and incorporation.* Interpersonal relations can be enriched by placing new Christians into small groups for more personal involvement. Small groups that regularly meet in homes of church members can focus more intimately on the daily application of God’s word to life’s problems and will enrich the church’s fellowship.

10. *Leadership.* A good formula for leadership is: the number of active leaders or teachers in the church times ten equals the total number of members in the church. For church growth to occur, the number of leaders must be increasing. Do the leaders have a sense of purpose and vision for the people? Do the leaders communicate this sense of purpose and vision to the members? Do the leaders take the lead in carrying out the purpose and vision of the church? Or are the leaders “shackled” by old traditions and by old ways of doing things?

11. *Flexibility.* The structure and dynamics of the church must change as the size of the church increases. A larger church, perhaps, needs centralized policy-making but decentralized policy-implementation. The congregation must be taught the importance of “structuring for growth.” What kind of approach for development of leaders is used? Development of “seldom-used” members for placement in “take charge” roles may be needed. Maybe forming Christian service teams will help.

12. *Staff.* Depending on the needs for centralized coordination of the church’s efforts, leaders must decide whether or not to employ paid full-time or part-time staff members. Leaders must use caution, though, not to obligate resources for salaries that are critical for priorities such as evangelizing and shepherding.

13. *Research for growth.* Where is growth happening? Why is it happening? Research for growth will explore reasons for growth via case studies, etc. Research for growth will not look for programs to copy. Research for growth will look for foundational principles that can be applied to the church’s unique circumstances.

14. *Facing the facts.* Here are types of data that can help

Growth Patterns - Types of growth include biological, conversion, and transfer. Types of loss include death, transfer, and apostasy or excommunication.

Demographics - This looks at age, sex, occupation, and ethnicity of members and compares with the surrounding community. Who is being reached by the church? Who is not being reached by the church? How can outreach be improved?

Geographical Distribution - Is the church a community church or a commuter church?

Building / Facilities - What is the rationale for these facilities? Is more space needed for growth? Do the facilities keep certain groups of people from being involved (for example, the handicapped)?

Participation - Are the needs of all age groups being met? Are needs being voiced? Are needs being heard? Are needs being ignored?

Resources / Strengths - What potential ministries exist in the church? What skills, interests, etc. do the member have?

Programming - What is available for people to be involved in? Is the church single-cell, that is, everybody does only one thing? Or is the church multi-cell, that is, many activities provided for more people?

15. *Social realities.* What does the church have available to work with, that is, in terms of human geography, demographics, opportunities, needs of the people, cultural mosaics of both church and community, receptivity of the community to Christianity, etc.?