
HOW CHURCHES GROW – THEN AND NOW: PART 1

Session Description

If you've been trying to grow your church, but aren't seeing the results you expected, then you may want to tap into this episode. One of the most misunderstood realities is that the way churches grew once-upon-a-time just doesn't work today. Although that may not be "news" to many pastors, the church's "growth" practices often reflect yesterday's growth strategy. In part one of this two-part episode, Dr. Bill explains how and why the church growth strategies of 1955 worked so well then, but don't work now. In part two, Bill explains the core of how churches grow today.

Session Outline

The perceived realities of church circa 1955

- We lived in a "Christian" nation where "everyone went to church"
- Those who didn't go to church, knew they should
- Denominational "brand loyalty" was exceptionally important
- Christianity, churches, and clergy all carried positive reputations
- Sundays were sacrosanct in most communities ... almost nothing competed with Sunday morning worship services
- For many, if not most, the church was the "hub" of family, friends, and fellowship

How Churches Grew in 1955

See the Infographic on Pinterest at <http://bit.ly/10uyAU5>

1. Identify a growing suburb
2. Purchase property and construct a building
3. Hire a seminary trained pastor
4. Advertise in the newspaper and put up a church sign with the denomination's logo prominently displayed
5. Be sure to provide a quality denominationally appropriate worship service
6. On opening Sunday, the church would see a large number of Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, etc. attend
7. The pastor's primary task was tend to the membership and ensure there was quality programming for the church's members.
8. The congregation did the church growth work:
 - a. Babies were born
 - b. They were raised in the church
 - c. They were baptized and indoctrinated by the church
 - d. They remained in the church ... and if they happened to move, they would begin attending the "church of their choice" so long as it was their brand of church.

- e. New people who moved into the neighborhood would almost automatically begin attending their denominationally branded church.
- f. Since the nation was in the midst of a baby boom, the churches naturally grew.

-This process is known as “Biological Growth”

- 9. Seminary pastors were largely trained in pastoral care and church administration – because that’s what worked ... in 1955.

But It’s Not 1955 Anymore

The perceived realities of church 1955 aren’t today’s realities

- We lived in a “Christian” nation where “everyone went to church”
 - We no longer live in a “Christian” nation where “everyone went to church.” Today’s research shows that at best 15 percent attend worship on any given weekend.
- Those who didn’t go to church, knew they should.
 - Except for those who attend church wonder why others don’t go. Most people wonder why anyone would go.
- Denominational “brand loyalty” was exceptionally important.
 - Only a very few church people are brand loyal anymore. Today’s church members are often a hodgepodge of various denominations.
- Christianity, churches, and clergy all carried positive reputations.
 - That’s not at all true today.
- Sundays were sacrosanct in most communities ... almost nothing competed with Sunday morning worship services.
 - TV, family sports, stores, and pretty much anything/everything competes with the church. And it’s pretty hard to compete today.
- For many, if not most, the church was the “hub” of family, friends, and fellowship.
 - Although this is true of an older generation in the church today, it’s rarely true of those under 60 or so (the Baby Boomers) who are caught up in all sorts of other activities.

Part 2: A broad stroke of how church growth works in the 21st Century.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss how the culture has changed since the 1950s. What impact have these had on the church (if any)?
2. How has your church addressed these changes? What cultural changes has it not addressed?
3. Which of the changes do you think your church could best address? What changes would have to be made? How could those changes be enacted in your congregation?