
HOW CHURCHES GROW – THEN AND NOW: PART 2

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

In the last episode, we left off with the cultural differences between 1955 and today.

Reality: In the majority of churches in the US, little has changed in the way "church" is done since 1955.

- Churches tend to be a bit less formal ... in terms of dress.
- Many churches have added screen technology, but in most cases it's nearly 100% text based, i.e., it's an extension of the paper bulletin.
- Many churches have added a public address system of some sort.
- Most churches have improved the comfort level for the members (air conditioning, etc.)
- BUT: The music, the instruments, the sermon, the order of service, the structures, and the work of the pastor is very similar to the 1950s.

Reality: Biological church growth isn't a viable option for the church today.

- The approximate average age of church members in the US is sixty. Few grandparents are giving birth to children these days – or are willing to!
- The birthrate in the US is at an historically low rate.
- Upwards of 60 percent of children raised in the church leave ... and never come return.
- Of the children who remain in the church, few are brand loyal ... and fewer still continue to attend the church of their childhood.

All that's to say that the church of today doesn't, won't, and can't grow using the same methods as those used "back then."

How Churches Grow Today

See the Infographic on Pinterest at <http://bit.ly/12gNxqn>

The reality is that churches grow in a lot of different ways ... but for churches under 350, and that's the vast majority of churches in the US, there are some common practices.

In this episode we're going to use the supposition that a church wants to grow by reaching "young" families (and it seems that most churches want to focus on that demographic).

1. Get the church's hospitality for young families in place:
 - a. Especially get a guest friendly nursery in place
 - b. Equally important is tweaking either tweaking the current service, or start a new one, that is "indigenous" to young adults (relevant and inspirational)
2. Free the pastor from most administrative and member-care responsibilities so s/he can spend at least 50 percent of their time building networks with unchurched people who largely correspond to the church's target audience (young adults in this case) – this is the primary blockage to most church's growth today.
3. The pastor must actually spend significant time networking, meeting new people (five-a-day ideal), following up with visitors, and helping assimilate returning guests – this is the second most common blockage to most church's growth ... pastors who aren't intentional about spending 25–30 hours a week with unchurched prospects.
4. The congregation must be intentional in "adopting" the visitors and returning guests by gracious hospitality and including them in both their church and their friendship circles.
5. Repeat 3 and 4.

If your primary target is someone other than young families, change up #1 to meet the hospitality and relevance/inspirational needs of your target audience ... and then implement 2–5.

This is the primary effective growth practice of the 21st Century church. And yes, it really is that simply ... but as you already know, it's not necessarily easy.

Discussion Questions

1. Imagine yourself as someone matching your congregation's "target" who has virtually no church experience. Discuss what a visit to your worship service would be like.
2. What hospitality issues need to be addressed to make your worship service attractive to a visitor?
3. What tasks keep your pastor most busy during the week? What tasks would the pastor have to let go of in order to spend at least 50 percent of his/her time networking with the unchurched?
4. Which of the above church growth practices are keeping your church from growing? What can you do about that?