

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Identify Receptive People

One of the Church Growth Movements contributions to our understanding of evangelism is the discovery of the principle of receptivity.

This principle basically states that people vary in being open and closed to the gospel message. Thus, people who are open to the gospel message today may not be tomorrow. Those who are closed to the gospel message today may be open tomorrow.

“People are receptive to the gospel of salvation when the major elements of the culture are changing.”

George G. Hunter, III states, “The church is called to discover, reach, and disciple receptive people i.e., people who are now ready and open to really consider the Christian possibility for their lives” (*The Contagious Congregation*).

How can we identify those who are receptive? Here are some indicators.

1. People are receptive when they are dissatisfied with their lives.

People consciously and subconsciously seek something new when their needs and motives are in crisis. This opens them up to considering new ways to satisfy needs and dreams.

2. People are receptive when major elements of a culture are changing.

When cultural foundations are changing, there is a natural search for new ones. Thus, changes in family values, kinship structures, educational, political, and social unrest typically create a time of receptivity in the lives of people.

3. People are receptive when they experience stress.

When individuals are going through times of stress, especially when stress is increasing, they look for ways to cope and reduce their stress to a tolerable level. They may look to new faith as a way of managing the stress in their lives.

4. People are receptive where religious faith is increasing.

When religions are growing, it is clear that people are open to religious faith, including the gospel of salvation in Christ. Thus, when people turn to religion, Christian or not, Christian churches should actively evangelize, knowing that the time is ripe for reaching new people.

Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.

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People in new communities are often receptive.

Pray for God to open your eyes to see receptive people.

5. People are receptive in new communities.

One of the clearest indicators of receptivity to the gospel is where new moved-in populations reside. As people separate from old familiar places, people, and routines, they become open to new friends, ideas, and possibilities. Thus, new communities often are filled with receptive people, and churches should target these areas for evangelism.

6. People are receptive in areas of rapid urbanization.

As people move into urban centers, they are often faced with the pressure of cultural change. Such pressure often causes people to become open to new considerations of faith and life. Thus, people who live in urban areas are often quite responsive to the gospel.

7. People are receptive when political, religious, or social oppression is removed.

Wherever an oppressed people are given freedom of thought and action, they often become receptive to the gospel. Thus, whenever a church spots people being given freedom of speech, thought, or practice, it is evidence that many people will be open to Christ.

8. People are receptive wherever change is taking place—political, social, or economic.

The key indicator of receptivity is change. Whenever people's lives are disrupted, they naturally become open to new ways of seeing, thinking, and acting. Thus, church leaders must stay attune to the changes in society being always ready to move forward to share the gospel with people facing changes in their lives.

9. People are receptive when they visit your church.

If people are willing to take the time and face the threat of attending your church, it shows they are open to the gospel. Since people in the USA have a choice to attend or not attend church, the fact that they take the initiative to visit your worship service is a clear indicator of receptivity.

10. People who are in the social networks of your own members are often receptive.

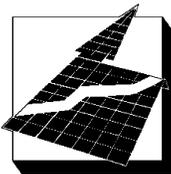
All studies conducted in the last fifty years show that the main way people come to faith in Christ is through family and friends. Thus, people within the kinship networks of your current church members and attendees are likely the most receptive to the gospel.

So . . . begin praying that God will open your eyes to see the receptive people around your church. Then train your current members and attendees to reach out to those in their own social networks. Identify receptive people who are not in your member's networks, and design new ministries targeted to reach them.



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Staff Your Church for Growth

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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Staff Your Church for Growth

Critical data show that half of all churches have some form of multiple staff, and many others are considering the addition of professional staff in the future.

Dr. Gary L. McIntosh has written a comprehensive manual for the 21st century church, focusing on how, why, who, and when to add staff in a way that encourages growth.

As churches seek to minister effectively in the twenty-first century, many consider adding professional staff members to meet the changing needs of modern congregations.

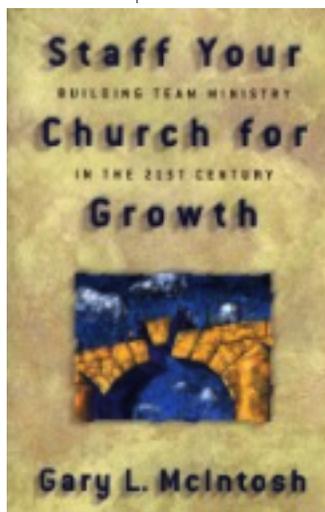
When is it time to hire another pastor? How should a church begin the process of looking for support staff? What responsibilities should a new pastor assume? Would a part-time or full-time position benefit the church most?

Twenty-eight years in the field of Church Growth have given Gary L. McIntosh the wisdom and experience to answer these questions, and his advice will guide you in selecting the staff that can help your church grow.

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- > models for team ministry
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