

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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There's Hope for Your Church

There's hope for your church! Do you believe that? I certainly do. If you want your church to grow, you must believe it too!

Unfortunately, many pastors and lay leaders engage church life with a certain lack of hope. Having begun with great hope for what God would do in their church, over the years they have become worn down by resistance, barriers, and circumstances. Many appear to have tried, as best they know

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—Clare Boothe Luce**

how, to renew their church's vitality. Yet, after years of trying, struggling, and failing, they are discouraged—some even tired of trying to see their church grow.

One of my friends expressed it this way, “Many local churches start with good intentions that are somehow lost amidst the fray. Early advantages and opportunities slip through their fingers. Patterns of complacency and compromise emerge. *Slow death* goes to work with symptomless deception.”

Going from hope to hopelessness is an old story that was first noted in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. Ephesus experienced fatigue and forgot its first love. Pergamum became careless about church discipline. Thyatira ignored internal conflict and refused to confront sin. Sardis lost passion for the future by resting on past accomplishments. Laodicea lost its influence due to its affluence. Five of the seven churches mentioned, seventy-one percent,

faced difficulty, which is close to the seventy-five percent that are at risk in North America today.

Around three-fourths of established churches in North America are either declining or on a long-term plateau. Such churches are ineffective at making disciples—at least new disciples—and function with a lack of fruitfulness and hope.

Yet, as Clare Boothe Luce noted years ago, “There are no hopeless situations; there are only people who have grown hopeless about them.”

One of the most revealing illustrations of Luce's statement is found in the research of Viktor Frankl. As a survivor of the

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God is revitalizing churches right now!

Whether you think you can or can't, you're right.

Auschwitz concentration camp, he watched people living and dying daily and later published his observations in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He observed that people simply die when they have no hope. If people allow apathy to set in, if they have no purpose, and if they see no meaning to life, they give up. But, if they have hope, if they lean toward the positive in life, and if they have a purpose, they live.

While Frankl's focus was on individual people, I've noted that churches act just like individual people, that is, local churches have individual traits, personalities, and attitudes. Just like people, churches that have no purpose allow apathy to set in; they lose hope, and die. The good news is churches that see problems as opportunities, set goals, and move into the future with hope, live!

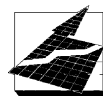
There's hope for your church! Do you believe that? I do. Why am I so hopeful? Let me give you two reasons. First, God wants your church to grow. The first mention of the church in the Bible contains God's promise that His church will grow: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matthew 16:18). The concept of *church* in this passage contains the seeds of both the universal church and local churches. Today there are approximately two billion Christians in the world. Compared to the small band of believers that met together in the upper room of Acts 2, it is clear that Christ's church has grown. He has kept His promise. These two billion people meet in local gatherings called churches. They may meet secretly in a home in China, out in the open under a tree in Africa, or in a modern, air-conditioned

building in Canada, but they gather in communities of faith to worship, pray, and learn. Thus, as local churches grow, the universal church grows; as the universal church grows, local churches grow. According to Christ, even the gates of Hades will not stop the growth of His church. Since your church is part of God's plan, there is hope for your church in this promise of God to build His church.

Second, God IS revitalizing churches right now. For the last three decades, I've observed churches throughout the United States and Canada being renewed and revitalized. God is in the practice of restoring, renewing, and revitalizing people AND churches, if they are willing to follow growth leadership and pay the price to see it happen.

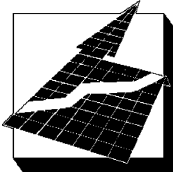
There's hope for your church! Do you believe that? If you do, your church is likely to thrive. As Henry Ford reportedly remarked, "Whether you think you can or can't, you're right."

So . . . how hopeful are you?



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President of the Church Growth Network
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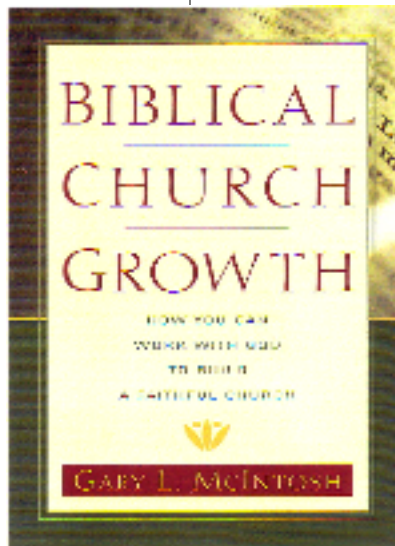
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