

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Lifespan of Ministry

All ministry programs have a four-stage life cycle. Peaks in their effectiveness seldom occur beyond the 15th year of their existence. As a result, leaders of growing churches understand that launching new ministry programs is essential to the health and relevance of their church.

The four stages of a program's lifecycle include...

1. Introduction. This is the most expensive stage of the lifecycle.

“The effective lifespan of any ministry program is about fifteen years.”

New programs may require more staff, remodeled facilities, or advertising. Launching a new ministry also holds the most risk, since it is unclear if the ministry will successfully reach the people for whom it has been designed. During this stage, the emphasis is on communicating and attracting a wide audience. The stage lasts from one to five years. If the new ministry program meets a need and takes hold, it moves into the second stage.

2. Growth. This stage is characterized by high interest and expanding impact to an ever enlarging number of people. Morale and enthusiasm are high among leaders and participants. Word-of-mouth is the best advertising as people invite friends. The greatest number of persons participate in the program at this stage, which normally lasts from the fifth to the tenth year.

3. Maturity. Interest and participation begin to level off. Fewer newcomers visit or attend the events. Other new programs

attract potential participants. In this stage, the leaders who have invested their energy into the program become defensive as questions arise about its continuing value and contribution to the church. Those who believe in the program endeavor to refine or redefine it to revitalize it. General appeals for new participants are usually ineffective.

4. Decline. Significant decreases in participation result in reallocating resources. Attendance becomes embarrassingly small and visitors, if there are any, don't return. Church leaders must deal with closing the program. This stage begins about year fifteen but may last a long time.

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

New website address:

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Awareness is the beginning of hope.

Start new ministries around people's passions.

Awareness of the natural lifecycle of a ministry program is important to keep a church going and growing. Most church leaders think that once a ministry is begun, it will be effective forever. The reality is that all ministries have fairly short life spans during which they effectively impact persons in and outside the church. Accepting and understanding this fact of ministry life, opens the way to strategic thinking about future ministry programs.

Make a list of every ministry program in the church, and identify where you think it is in its lifecycle. Don't think so much about the number of years it has been since it was begun, as much as which of the four stages it seems to be in at this time. The best way to do this is take a blank sheet of notebook paper. Across the top of the page make four columns and label them (from left to right): "Introduction," "Growth," "Maturity," and "Decline." Down the left side of the page list every program in your church. Then, place an "X" in one of the four columns for each of the programs in your church. This immediately presents a visual perspective on the life and health of your church's various ministry programs.

It is likely that you will have "X's" spread out in all four stages. An unhealthy picture will see most of the "X's" fall to the right side of the page in the *Maturity* or *Decline* columns. If so, you should seriously work toward starting some new ministry programs in the next year.

Here is a summary of recommendations for starting a successful new ministry.

1. *Nurture a "greenhouse."* Regularly let

members know that the church is ready and willing to help them start a new ministry around their particular interests or concerns.

2. *Find the passion.* Everyone cares about something. Encourage members to start a ministry around their passion.

3. *Research other ministries.* Churches around the country are doing many great ministries and outreach initiatives. A few hours on the Internet will gather all kinds of ideas and information on people, books, websites, churches, and organizations that will help in starting a new ministry.

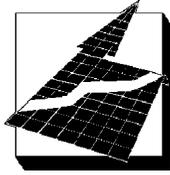
4. *Draw up plans.* To get from an idea to a fully functioning ministry requires specific goals, a timeline, people, and money.

5. *Plan the first meeting.* Prospective attendees will be asking, "Why should I change my schedule to be a part of your meeting?" Provide a good answer, and they will come.



Adapted from *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Baker Books April 2013), by Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn.

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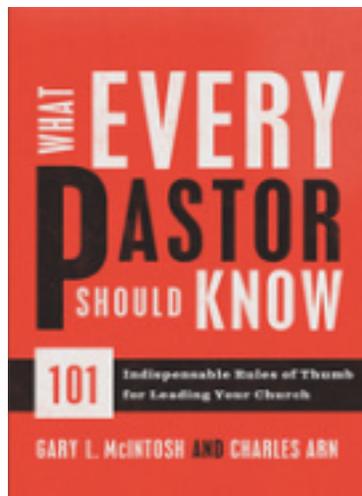
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