

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Isolation or Relationship?

John Naisbitt forecast the phenomena back in 1988: “high tech-high touch.” His contention was that as the influence of high technology grows in our society (drive-through restaurants, bank ATMs, Internet shopping, downloaded movies) it is increasingly easy to live without much human interaction. The result is an increasing void in our community psyche for the high touch of relationships.

Online social networks are a

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-Robert Putnam

ludicrous effort of high technology to cure itself. As someone once noted, “Facebook is to friendship what fast food is to nutrition—a quick way to feel like we’ve gotten what we need. When compared with what we really need, what we get is insubstantial”

A few years ago my friend Charles Arn was conversing with a marketing executive from Ford Motor Company. He posed an interesting question: “If the church were a business, what product would we be selling?” “Interesting question,” Charles responded. “What do you think?” The executive responded, “I think our product would be—or should be—relationships.” He continued: “First, the church strengthens our relationship with God. Then, we grow through relationships with others in the church. Finally, the church should help us grow in our relationships to those outside the church.”

Now, most of us don’t like to think of a church selling a

product, but if we did, what better “product” could we offer in this increasingly high tech culture, than high touch with God and then others. It sounds somewhat like Christ’s response when asked what was the greatest commandment: 1) to love God, and 2) to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Actually, most churches have already designed and engineered their “product,” and most members are experiencing the benefits. For many, the friendships they have in church are the only meaningful relationships in their life. And since relationships are known to contribute to health and longevity, perhaps it is not a coincidence that Christians have been shown to be healthier, live

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

New website address:

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What are we offering people?

New groups are the best place for relationships to flourish.

longer, and be happier than non-Christians. How sad, then, that when the need for our “product” is so great among non-believers our ability to deliver our product is so weak.

Think, for a moment, about the people who do not have church as a part of their life. Where do they find a place to really connect with others? At work, perhaps. But those relationships are fairly superficial. Some seek relationships through a club or activity. But, for the most part, we're losing our friends. Robert Putnam, in an article in *TIME* (July 3, 2006) observed, “Faith communities, in which people worship together, are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.” In his book *Bowling Alone* he elaborates on the relationship between religion and relationships, noting how people who attend church are much more likely to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and belong to sports groups, professional academic societies, school service groups, youth groups, service clubs, hobby or garden clubs, literary, art, discussion and study groups, school fraternities and sororities, farm organizations, political clubs, nationality groups, and other miscellaneous groups.

Perhaps it's time to revisit the description of our product. Maybe we really are in the business of relationships. Consider the following ideas:

First, there are excellent Christian books, videos, and study courses on friendships. Start a Sunday adult class on the topic. Encourage your small groups to learn more. The topic is great for teens. Help members develop skills for nurturing relationships, not only with existing friends and family, but with new people.

Second, start new groups. Groups are the very best place for new relationships to flourish. Make a point to open the groups, and intentionally “advertise” the groups-to unchurched people.

Third, in all your groups realize that there are different levels of relationships. Encourage and train group leaders in the skills of sensitively moving beyond superficial relationships to nurture deeper relationships among members in the group.

Fourth, confession is good for the soul. It is also good for nurturing deeper relationships. Consider how this important dynamic of Christian living can be integrated into your church's training ministry.

Fifth, the most genuine manifestation of friendship is love. Jesus said, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). Teach people in your church how to love.

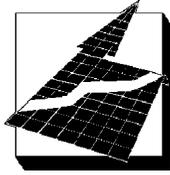
Last, spend time with your own family, neighbors, and acquaintances building relationships.



Adapted from the forthcoming book *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of*

Thumb for Leading Your Church (Baker Books April 2013)

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Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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Doctor of Ministry in Multi-ethnic Ministry

Guess what? To advance the fulfillment of the Great Commission among the nations, all a person needs to do is step outside, no plane ticket needed.

Local churches can have as much impact as their overseas missionaries just by talking to those next door. With the shifting ethnic landscape of America, church leaders have more chances than ever before to personally engage a widely diverse set of people with the Gospel. Yet, the average congregation in North America is about ten times less diverse than its surrounding neighborhood. Something needs to change.

If your church wants to be relevant within an increasingly diverse context, it must refocus its ministry. How can your congregation more beautifully reflect the diversity of its neighborhood and the world-wide family of God?

An Opportunity

Beginning June 10-21, 2013, Drs. Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan will lead a three-year Doctor of Ministry cohort on Multi-ethnic Church Ministry. This specialty track is intended to assist church leaders to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to impact the world by “making disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 18:19).

It focuses on assisting church leaders to become aware of the changing North American ethnic and cultural contexts, and to become competent in planting, growing, and shepherding multi-ethnic churches.

Requirements:

Qualified applicants will have a Master of Divinity degree (or its academic equivalent of 72 units of masters level work) with a minimum 3.0 GPA from an accredited school as well as three years of full-time ministry experience since graduation.

For more information, call the Talbot School of Theology Doctor of Ministry department, or give us a call if you have any questions. The cost of the

program is reasonable and designed to fit into your budget. Applications are being accepted now.

Take a look at the Doctor of Ministry website:
www.talbot.edu/dmin/multiethnic/.

You may also call the DMin office at (562) 903-4822 for additional information.

Or call Dr. Gary L. McIntosh at (951) 506-3086.

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