

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Stage Two: The Growing Church

I have noticed that the first ten to twenty years of a church's existence are quite often the best years in terms of its numerical growth. While the first five years gets a church established, it is the next fifteen years where most of the growth tends to take place.

In fact for many churches the largest worship attendance occurs between the fifteenth and twentieth years of their life. The following characteristics are typically found in churches during the second stage of their life cycle.

“The leaders are results-oriented and have a concern for the growth of the church. A big part of the pastor's role is the development of resources and management systems to meet the demands of growth.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

The success of the first five years of ministry lead to a high level of goal ownership among worshippers. The strong sense of mission and vision builds as people grow in their excitement about what God is doing in their midst.

Volunteers are easily recruited, trained, and placed in ministry, since everyone wants to be part of the ministry success. Members and attendees alike donate their time, talent, and treasure to empower further development of the church's ministry. When new people come, they are quickly put to work, in part because of the huge need for workers to staff the large number of new ministries.

The call for financial support to purchase the first property and build the church's initial facility is received well. More money is pledged during the fund raising phase than is needed. Congregational self-esteem rises as the church successfully completes its first building campaign and construction project.

As new needs are discovered, fresh ministry approaches are implemented to meet them. New programs focus on responding to the hurts of people, with little thought given to how things

may have been done before. During the first five years of life the church focused mostly on ministry to families with small children. As the church moves into stage two new programs are establish for adolescents, and programs are added for middle school and high school students.

Teamwork is a hallmark of the church during this stage of the ministry, and programs are developed with an outward focus.

People sense the need for additional pastors, which results in the hiring of office and associate staff. The pastor effectively delegates some ministry work to volunteers, and people recognize that the pastor is a good organizer.

Growth creates challenges that, when handled well, propels the congregation

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Teamwork is a hallmark of this stage.

Cash flow must be kept current.

further into the life cycle. New management systems are designed and implemented to meet the demands of growth. Finances are handled more professionally, and processes for welcoming and networking new people into the church ministry are put in place.

The church starts new ministries to meet the needs of newcomers. As the church grows new need-oriented groups reach critical mass, and the church finds it must relate to them. For example, when the church is smaller there may only be one family with an autistic child, but as the church gets larger enough families will have autistic children that enough critical mass develops to have a new ministry around this particular need. Or, as the church gets larger a network may grow that is interested in off road biking, or missions, or any of a number of different needs and interests.

Expansion of facilities is another challenge for a growing church. The church will need to purchase its first facilities, or in some cases move to larger ones in order to keep its growth going. One of the major mistakes often made in the emerging stage is the purchase of property and a facility that are too small. If the church continues to grow, there will be a need to enlarge or relocate.

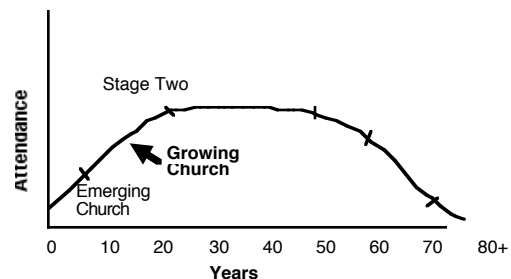
Related to the size of the facility is the need to use current facilities multiple times. The recent interest in multi-site and multi-venue approaches to ministry are two possible ways that churches in the stage two relate to the pressures of growth.

A clear pathway to leadership is still another challenge for the growing church. Growing people create growing churches. If a church cannot design and put into place a process of leadership development, growth will soon overwhelm the current leadership to the point that they burn out.

It is important for a growing church to keep its cash flow current, otherwise the ministry may outstrip the needed financial reserves. This

shows up as new staff, ministries, and facilities are added. Wise management of financial resources is crucial to continued growth. The elimination of ministries, or other areas that drain the church of cash while not providing a return for the expenditures, is another challenge.

The church must continue to maintain its ministry to the original target group, while adding new ministries to expand and enlarge its outreach to other groups of people in the community.



The key question facing churches in stage two is *Where should we invest our resources?*

Is your church in stage two of the congregational life cycle?

Which characteristics do you see in your church? Which ones are missing?



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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