

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Eleven Keys for Sustained Growth

Look far enough back in the life of any congregation and you are likely to find a time when it was growing. Most church leaders can recall a time when their church was effectively reaching people for Christ, embracing newcomers into the fellowship, and impacting its community.

Unfortunately, it is also true that most churches have not sustained such growth over the course of many years. Yet, some churches, if just a few, have been able to sustain growth over a long period of time.

“It is more productive to convert an opportunity into results than to solve a problem.”

—Peter Drucker

What can we learn from churches with sustained growth? Here are a few observations I have made based on interviews and visits to some of these churches.

First, churches with sustained growth work from a clear statement of purpose.

A purpose statement must be simple enough to put on a tee shirt, the back of a business card, or a bumper sticker. It must also communicate clearly what the church is about. The following are a few purpose statements I have found in churches with sustained growth.

“Find out what God is doing and get on board.”

“Bring Life to the Valley.”

“Connect people to Christ individually, locally, & globally.”

Second, churches with sustained growth meet the needs of people.

In North America people expect a church to provide a minimum set of basic services, such as, worship, childcare & children’s programs, youth programs, and small groups. A church with the best services is most likely to sustain growth.

Third, churches with sustained growth focus on opportunities rather than problems.

In his famous book *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker says that, “It is more productive to convert an opportunity into results than to solve a problem—which only restores the equilibrium of yesterday.” Turning problems into opportunities for ministry is a skill of growing churches.

Fourth, churches with sustained growth involve people in ministry.

At least fifty percent or more of the people in growing churches are involved in some form of service. Wise leaders expand the concept of ministry to go beyond traditional ideas of church service to include ministry in the local community and the world.

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What values do you stand for?

Focus on the present and the future at the same time.

Fifth, churches with sustained growth embrace newcomers.

Newcomers enter a church with three unspoken questions: “Am I welcome?” “Am I accepted?” “Am I valued?” They feel their questions are answered positively when they make friends, become involved in a small group or class, and find a job or ministry to do. Therefore, churches with sustained growth work hard to socialize newcomers into the life of the congregation.

Sixth, churches with sustained growth serve their community.

They do not see other churches as competitors, but partner with them and even some secular organizations to impact the community around the church for Christ. While churches have always allowed community groups to use the church building, for example, for meetings or weddings, today churches take more of a proactive approach through direct service to community leaders and people.

Seventh, churches with sustained growth train people to share their faith.

To sustain growth over a long period of time requires a continued connection with people outside the church. Churches that sustain growth train at least ten percent of their people each year in some type of friendship evangelism course.

Eighth, churches with sustained growth develop leaders.

Growth only continues as long as there are enough leaders in a church to support it. While some churches employ a leadership development program, often made up of classes, a simple way to develop leaders is to require all those presently in some leadership position to find an apprentice. Using a system of apprentices for every task or job doubles the number of workers and leaders, as well as preparing future leaders on the job.

Ninth, churches with sustained growth do better today than they did yesterday.

They think and act on ideas that provide continual improvement in current ministries, as well as envisioning what must happen to improve the future. They focus on the present and the future at the same time.

Tenth, churches with sustained growth stay true to their values.

The real measure of any church or team of leaders is “What values do they stand for?” Healthy churches move forward in ministry without compromising their core values and beliefs.

Eleventh, churches with sustained growth spend regular time in prayer.

Growing churches realize that Jesus Christ is the true head of the Church, and they turn to Him in prayer before they make decisions. Prayer is practiced, not just talked about.

Which of these eleven insights are found in your church? Which ones are missing? Pick one and begin improving on it this year.



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