CHURCH GROWTH PRINCIPLES

Quality Characteristics vital for Church Growth

1. Empowering Leadership

- The leadership of the church should concentrate on empowering the other believers to do ministry.
- They should **not** use the believers to attain the leaders' goals, but rather instil vision into the believers and the help the believers fulfil their goals.
- They are servant leaders who equip, support and motivate individuals in the church to become all that God wants them to become.
- They share out the bulk of the responsibilities to the believers in the church.
- They invest the majority of their time in discipleship, delegation and reproducing the church.
- In other words – leaders need not be superstars!

Looking at 1000 churches in 32 countries on 5 continents, it was found that of the **fastest** growing churches only 42% of the pastors had graduated from seminary. Of the **slowest** growing churches over 85% had graduated from seminary. So we could deduce that formal theological training has a negative correlation to the overall quality of life in a church!

A second key factor in leadership is readiness to accept help and advice from others outside the church – i.e. a willingness to learn.

2. Gift-oriented Ministry

- This approach implies the conviction that God sovereignly decides which believers should take responsibility for different ministries in the church – i.e. He gives "spiritual gifts" to each person in the church.
- It is the role of the leadership in the church to help each member identify his/her gifts and integrate them into the appropriate ministry of the church.
- The assumption behind this is that believers serving in their area of gifting are less likely to function in their own strength and more likely to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Another assumption is that believers are **more** content/happy/fulfilled when they are using their spiritual gifts than when they are not – i.e. there will be more joy in living.
- The root of this characteristic is "the priesthood of all believers" and an attempt to bridge the clergy/laity gap.

In Western European Evangelical churches 80% of believers don't know what their spiritual gifts are and don't use them. No wonder we are not growing! Worldwide 73% of believers in fast-growing churches said they knew what their spiritual gifts were and were using them. In the slowest growing churches only 9% knew of their spiritual gifts. In the faster growing churches 63% of volunteer workers (laity) said they received training for the tasks they were doing. In the slowest growing churches it was 12%.

So training the ordinary church members to identify and use their spiritual gifts is very important.

3. **Passionate Spirituality**

Church growth has little to do with issues such as charismatic vs. non-charismatic; liturgical or non-liturgical; whether you are involved with "spiritual warfare" or not.

The issue revolves round questions like:

- Are these believers "on fire"?
- Is there joy and enthusiasm when they come together?
- Or are people coming to church because they are 'performing a duty'?

- In general, a tendency towards legalism (i.e. the believer must have the right doctrine, the right moral code and must belong to the right church) means that the church will grow slowly.
- Passionate spirituality is reflected in the prayer life of the church. Are there inspiring prayer meetings? Is there devotion to the personal study of the Bible and all the other spiritual disciplines (not in a legalistic sense)?
- Passionate spirituality also relates to a person's enthusiasm to share his/her experiences about God.
- Pure doctrine alone doesn't induce growth. It is the **application** of the truth with infectious enthusiasm into the lives of the believers that is crucial.
- So "defence of orthodoxy" won't do. An observable genuine **relationship** to the living God is immensely attractive.

Example: In fast-growing churches 76 of the believers said, "I am very enthusiastic about my church and I love being there." In slow-growing churches only about 30% said this.

4. Functional Structures to get the Church Organised

Of these eight characteristics this is the one that is most greatly debated. Traditionalists like **structure** but don't like the word functional! They like to maintain that structures are theologically determined. Others don't like structures at all sensing that they may replace the leading of the Holy Spirit.

When God created life, He also gave form. For example, we have a shape that is largely determined by our bone structure. Research has shown that growing churches nearly always have a "departmental" structure for various areas of ministry in the church. There is a leader over each department. 85% of the fastest-growing churches had this structure over against 32% of the slowest growing churches.

Departmental structures develop a leadership team and help to develop leaders within the church. Ideally all church structures need to be evaluated to see to what extent they improve the quality of the church. If a structure doesn't meet this standard it needs to be changed – e.g.

- ✧ Discouraging leadership structures
- ✧ Inconvenient worship times
- ✧ Demotivating financial concepts

Structures should be gradually evolving and changing.

The most negative quality a church can have is to be "tradition-bound". Only 8% of the fastest growing churches were "traditional", but over 50% of the "decreasing" churches were. In new churches there is nearly always the assumption that spiritual **life** and formal structure are incompatible and that structure = tradition = deadness. But this is not true. Look again at the example of bones. Without bones we would be a blob of shapeless jelly! Bones enable us to function, move etc. But there are no unnecessary bones. All are extremely functional.

5. Inspiring Worship Services

What should be taken into consideration in planning a worship service? Do growing churches all have "seeker-sensitive" worship services where unbelievers feel at home?

In fact of the fastest growing churches in the world only 3% had a worship service aiming primarily at unbelievers.

Strangely, whether worship services aim at unbelievers or believers; whether the style is liturgical or free; whether the language used is "churchy" or secular makes no difference to church growth! The key factor is whether the people coming to the service have had an "inspiring experience". This inspiration comes from the Holy Spirit and where He is **truly** in control (rather than just presumed to be in control) the worship service will be a blessing to all.

When asked what "inspired worship" was like, believers used words like "fun" and "a joyous experience". The most negative correlation with "inspiration" was "**duty**". Believers going to church out of a sense of duty, hoping their faithfulness in enduring such a boring service will be blessed by God need to have their mind set changed! They usually pressure other believers to attend worship services. Inspiring worship services "draw" people to them all by themselves. So important factors include:

- A tasteful place of worship
- A well organised greeting team
- A meaningful order of worship etc.

These are important. Inspiring worship services depend both on inner spirituality and on external factors.

6. Holistic Small Groups

The continuous multiplication of small house groups (cells) within the larger church is an **essential** factor in church growth. But the life of the small house fellowship **must** be "holistic". If the house group merely discusses Bible passages, not much is contributed towards growth. There needs to be the practical application of the Scriptures to the lives of the group. Each member should be able to bring up issues and questions that are their immediate personal concern. It is in the small house groups that the believers learn to serve each other with their spiritual gifts. Eating together, praying together, planning evangelistic events together and pastoral care for one another should all take place in the small house group.

The planned multiplication of small groups is made possible only if there is thorough continuous leadership development. Leaders are trained primarily in the context of the small house group.

Which is more important the small house group or the large worship service? The answer is that they are **both** equally important, but they serve different functions. The reality is that much of the essence of what a Christian community is all about is worked out in small house fellowships.

Of all the eight factors that affect church growth, this is **by far** the most important! Of the fastest growing churches in the world 78% had multiplication in house groups; only 6% of the slowest growing churches had any house groups at all.

In discussing a strategy of evangelism or a plan for developing a gift-oriented ministry, it makes an enormous difference whether just the leaders discuss the issue or whether the discussion is taken right down to each house group. As each believer thinks and interacts with the issue they will learn the meaning of the terms and ultimately they will "buy into the process" much more effectively.

7. Need-oriented Evangelism

Generally there is confusion in the churches around the world between **the need for evangelism** and **methods of evangelism**. Almost all discussion is centred around **methods** based on **programmes**. But methods/programmes are very culture-bound. What are the **principles** of evangelism?

Some myths abound – e.g. 'Every believer is an evangelist'. This is not so! It is true that every believer has the responsibility to use his/her own specific spiritual gifts in fulfilling the Great Commission. But this doesn't make him/her an evangelist. Evangelists are those to whom God has given this specific gift. A worldwide average shows that about 10-15% of believers have the gift of evangelism.

Fast growing churches have **identified** and are **using** the 10-15% in the church who are evangelists. In asking the leaders of the fastest growing church, 70% could tell the names and the ministries of those who had the gift of an evangelist in their church. In slow growing churches it was only 21%. So this is one vital factor: identify, train and release your evangelists into ministry.

The second factor is equally important: Evangelism must be **needs-based** if it is to be effective. It has been worked out that the **average** believer in the world has 8.5 **trust relationships** with non-believers! Effective evangelism is done when there is **an already existing trust relationship**. If these relationships were effectively used, there would be little need to emphasise developing **new** trust relationships with non-believers.

The key to effective evangelism is the existence of a trust relationship. If there isn't one, then any programme/method of evangelism is unlikely to be effective. In order to develop trust relationships the **needs** – social, economic, physical and emotional – must be met. There is no way more effective at building up trust. The Gospel can then run down these corridors of trust. This is what is meant by **need-oriented** evangelism.

8. Loving Relationships

This is the last of the eight characteristics of growing churches. The entire church needs to learn how to **express** love for one another. There is a very high interconnection between churches that **demonstrate** love for one another and church growth.

How do you measure love in a church?

- How much time do church members spend with each other outside "church time"?
- How many cups of tea are drunk with other church members in a week? (hospitality)
- How often do church leaders publicly compliment church members for their input?
- How much laughter is there in the church? In the fastest growing churches 68% said there was lots of laughter and only 33% said this in the slow growing churches.

Unfeigned, practical love has a "magnetic" power of drawing in members far more effectively than evangelistic programmes that rely on **verbal** communication. People don't want to hear us **talk**. They want to see if what we say really **works**.

Love is an action – a deed. It is **not** the secular definition of a "feeling". If it were a "feeling" then there would be nothing we could do to increase this potential. But church leadership must strive and plan to increase the love potential in a church.

Finally

No one single factor leads to growing churches. All eight factors working together will almost certainly give rise to church growth. Note: myths like, "Church growth is exclusively a matter of prayer" are **not true**! Such a statement is taking one factor (passionate spirituality) and making it absolute at the expense of others. Much prayer with no love, no evangelism, no exercising of spiritual gifts? This is contrary to Scripture! The "key" to church growth is simultaneously working on all **eight factors**.