



BREAKING 800 IN NEW CHURCH ATTENDANCE

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Admittedly there is little in the form of published books for churches breaking the 800 barrier in church growth. Therefore most of the valid research comes from periodicals, denominational surveys and consensus, or seminar lectures. Part of the reason for this is that 99.2 percent of churches in the United States of America have an attendance of eight hundred or less. The most common growth barrier for the majority of churches in America is the 200 participant barrier. Only fifteen percent of all churches pass this growth barrier. For the rare church that does find itself breaking the 800 barrier there is the challenge to sharpen the skills that have allowed them to grow past the previous barriers, while at the same time learning and implementing new skills that are unique to their growing attendance level. At the 800 participant level, there are a new set of critical issues facing the church and its staff. We shall discover and examine these issues in the following pages. Only one percent (slightly less than really) of all American churches are successful at maintaining a growth momentum, that carries them through and beyond, the 800 barrier in church growth! Even for the large church there are problems to maintaining a growth momentum consistently. Less than forty percent of the churches in the Southern Baptist Convention that have 800 members in their membership are growing. Fifty-eight percent have plateaued and slightly over four percent have declined.

In your estimation, "Where would you say are the largest churches found today?" Some would say they are found in the deep rural south of North America. Others believe they are found bordering the eastern sections of the Pacific Ocean. Still there are those who believe that the central heartlands of North America would be the answer. A shocking surprise falls upon the majority of church members in the United States of America when they find out that the world's largest churches (which would be churches having membership of 30,000 plus) are found on every single continent except North America! Bigness in the United States of America is the new kid on the block. Historically, Protestant denominations in America have been small. At the time of the Civil War, the size of the average Protestant church was less than one hundred members. A few large churches were in the center of the city, or at the center of the ethnic community. By the turn of the century, the average congregation still had less than one hundred fifty members. Through the nineteenth century, most of the frontier clergy received at least part of their income from non-church sources. The church was primarily a neighborhood experience, locally financed.

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FOURTEEN LIMITERS TO CHURCH GROWTH

The first issue to discuss concerning church growth past the 800 barrier stage is what has been called by Peter Drucker as vision limiters. Many churches once they reach this size will create, whether they realize it or not, restrictions that become fatal. Carl F. George in his "Beyond 800" church growth seminars presents some qualities that can be called vision limiters. I have adapted them for this dissertation so that we can understand why some 800 participant churches do not continue to grow. These vision limiters are:

NUMBER ONE: A PROBLEM-SOLVING FOCUS DOES NOT NECESSARILY GUIDE A CHURCH TO GROW SIGNIFICANTLY

It merely helps it maintain its present set of circumstances. Someone has said that church leaders have become keepers of the aquarium rather than fishermen of the deep. Tending the aquarium (or the flock) is an important role. No one should downplay its significance. At the same time, remember that doing so does not automatically lead to growth. True, in some cases where a strong birth rate is present, a problem-solving focus assists a church to preserve what it has and even enlarge as a result. But in most situations, unless evangelism is

present, growth cannot be sustained. Mere problem solving fails to capitalize on emerging opportunities presented the church from the Lord.

NUMBER TWO: CHURCH LEADERSHIP THAT BELIEVES THEY ARE ALREADY TOO BUSY

When translated, those words usually mean, "I feel tired, and my vision of a 'preferred future' is to be less tired. If I'm this weary now, what am I going to feel like if we add a 10 percent increase to every ministry I now oversee?" The need to work smarter is never more crucial than in a 800 participant church.

NUMBER THREE: SOME MEMBERS FOLLOW A LOCKSTEP VISION LIMIT

This barrier to an enlarged harvest says, "I must make certain not to go any more slowly than my colleagues are going." In other words, "My standard is to keep up with the rest of the pack."

The lockstep mentality does reflect a vision of sorts. And it can drive a church's behavior. "Well, Pastor, they're having a successful vacation Bible school Just

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look at their ad in the newspaper. Why can't we have a successful Vacation Bible school?" Sometimes it works because it promotes action through envy.

The lockstep pattern can work in reverse as well. If you break step and shoot upward like a sunflower in a garden of poppies, your "friends" may want to prune you back. If your church grows and receives attention at more than one annual denominational meeting in a row, you might be abandoned by the people who were once pleasant to be around. Some of them will be caught up in jealousy and will challenge your motives, shun you, and otherwise criticize you.

In short, for you to compare yourself with the "average" church, whether it leads to your grumbling or gloating, is unproductive. Doing so will tie you into a lockstep pattern that says, "We've got to do better, because I do not want to be asked by my spouse or colleagues why we're not keeping up."

NUMBER FOUR: A VISION FOR GROWTH THAT IS DRIVEN BY DESIRE TO KEEP THEIR DOORS OPEN FOR MINISTRY

These churches are motivated to pay their bills, so the extent of their vision is in direct proportion to the size of their bills. Unfortunately, some pastors and churches address this issue by adjusting the break-even point downward. After all, since more than half the expenses of a typical church go toward staff support, then the less money a pastor needs from the church, the smaller size the church can be. Pastoral spouses who work outside the church, second jobs for the pastor, generous relatives, outside donors, and other factors can be used to ensure that the ministerial family poses the most minimal drain possible on the church budget.

If abundant funding does come in, what happens to the vision? For example, suppose a windfall (something you receive as a result of something you do not do) comes your way from the bequest of a well-to-do member who dies. This favorable turn of finances does not necessarily remove the limiting survival vision. Instead, it usually demotivates leadership. There is no longer a reason to keep pushing. "We do not have to get out in the fray of battle anymore, so we will take it easy for a while." A church with a sizeable endowment account is almost impossible to motivate to grow.

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Or, what if the church does indeed grow and is able to pay its pastoral staff more; will that solve the survival limiter? In other words, will an increased pastoral standard of living affect the motivation for growing a church? Probably not.

NUMBER FIVE: THE GENERIC STAND ALONE VISION

In many people's imagination, the ideal church has its own building, presumably painted white with a small steeple, in a comfortable suburb with shade trees over the parking lot. It supports one full-time pastor who can give his wife the opportunity to be a full-time homemaker and can send their children through college. It has no need to enlarge the church facility. This pastor has a part-time secretary, a part-time custodian, and a part-time organist - not enough staff to create obligations for management, but enough that the nitty-gritty is done by others. Sunday school literature seems written primarily for this idyllic situation.

For many pastors and board members, this vision of a stand-alone church is enough to cause them to reach beyond where they are. Am I criticizing such a

church or lifestyle? No. Any light at all that causes you to see a preferred future condition is preferable to no light.

NUMBER SIX: THE COMFORT LEVEL LIMITER

This view is conveyed by words like, "If there were only one thousand dollars more in the budget, or just three or four more volunteers, then everything would be just fine." To detect situations like these, you ask a pastor or church board, "What would you like to see happen here?" If they answer, "Perhaps be 10 percent larger than we are now, so we would be in a more comfortable position." then you can predict that the church will stretch itself for about a year. Such a goal offers an incentive of sorts, but what if God has a greater scope of ministry in mind?

NUMBER SEVEN: THE NO-VACANCY LIMITER

Many churches activate the "No Vacancy" indicator at the earliest opportunity possible. If the parking lot is full, or the sanctuary is full, or the Sunday schools are full, do you do anything about it, or just enjoy it? When an opportunity

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arises for community-wide exposure, such as the hometown sports star coming to your church to give testimony of his faith in Christ, what circumstances lead you to conclude that you have put "enough" energy into publicity?

NUMBER EIGHT: A MIGHTY FORTRESS MENTALITY

Such a mentality is a fortress mentality in which the wagons are drawn in a circle. I grew up in a very conservative group which taught that we were the only true churches left. If only we had eyes to see from a satellite, we would have realized that the ecclesiastical landscape was filled with scores of denominations of our size and type doing likewise: pulling their wagons together in a very tight circle. Somehow, all of us were the only ones left.

NUMBER NINE: THE FAMILY STAFF LIMITER

I have been amazed how often pastors of larger churches have a family staff mentality. This idea simply stated is a job for all the children as they enter adulthood. Often when one individual in this structure falls, the whole organizational structure falls.

NUMBER TEN: THE GOLDEN ERA RESTORATION PROJECT

Many churches will point to thirty-year-old photographs on the wall that depict the Sunday school covering the whole block. Long-time members will lament, "If we can only rebuild what we had back then." When I take a look at the photo I usually see all white faces. Then I go outside and see nothing but African Americans, Hispanics, or Asians. I comment, "We'd have to recolor that photograph for it ever to happen here again." Unfortunately, that often silences them, because their vision of reenacting the past does not allow for an ethnic transition as well.

NUMBER ELEVEN: CLOSING THE BACK DOORS

This approach may range from keeping the young people from dropping out to raising the church's visitor-retention ratio. In some cases, a more blunt description is that of recovering ghosts. The matriarchs and patriarchs of the church can walk through the sanctuary and find people in every empty pew.

These people might come back for a homecoming event or when in town over the holidays, but trying to produce attendance growth from them can be like

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giving blood to a leukemia victim. If you fail to do something about the bone marrow, you must keep pumping in transfusions. The idea of building bridges with former members is not wrong. It does reflect a form of vision. It drives some ministry. It may not be all God has in mind, however. You can invest enormous amounts of energy trying to reach disillusioned or lapsed members, but the old wounds are very hard to heal. As Lyle Schaller and others have pointed out, it is probably two or three times more fruitful to go after unsolicited contacts than to attempt to raise the dead.

NUMBER TWELVE: THE "SPECIAL" EVENT

"Let's sponsor a concert series," someone will say. Or, "Let's have an annual homecoming and get some action going around here." This approach, which rallies the church and boosts the morale, too often produces results that last for only a few weeks. It may momentarily fill the hall, revival style, without regard to whether there is a durable structure underneath. It produces more of an audience than a spiritually connected congregation.

NUMBER THIRTEEN: A MESA-CULTURE MENTALITY

It says, "We will reach all who can climb to where we are and meet our standards." When these words are translated into denominational terms, it means that the majority of persons in the outside community cannot qualify. Such groups might vigorously affirm that the gospel is for all people, but at the same time they create subtle entrance requirements, usually of an ethnic nature, that exclude the majority of the surrounding community.

NUMBER FOURTEEN: THE OUTGROWN OR ANTIQUATED VISION

Many a preacher leader has built the largest facility or attendance in town. Such leaders have touched what they knew of need in the community but then lost their vision, because nothing new replaced it. If they fail to seek the Lord for fresh direction, or if through the work of the enemy they become distracted or preoccupied by some intervening mess, they will plateau, rest on their laurels, or even stagnate.

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SO HOW DO LARGE CHURCHES GROW

I have heard many times in my master's work (which was not at this institution) that it was easier to grow a church of 1,000 than it was a church of 100. I use to believe that was so until I learned first hand that a church of a thousand, or eight hundred for that matter, has a whole lot more to lose if it does not continue to grow! Churches of 800 or more participants usually need to gain one hundred or more additions to their membership each year just to remain at the same level, not growing or declining. When this is considered it is far easier to see why large churches usually are more aggressive towards evangelism. They need to be for their very existence.

In order to cross the 800 participant hurdle, a church's leadership must continue to hone their ranching abilities. Otherwise problems of ministry will cause too much fatigue and inadequate spans of care will surface. Regardless of the size of ones church these issues keep on creeping into the pastor's study. A church wanting to increase beyond the 800 barrier must address something greater than proficiency training; it must introduce certain fundamental, significant changes in the church's organizational structure. One of those changes is the shifting role of the church board. By the time a church reaches the 800 barrier,

the transfer of initiative taking must have left the security of the board and been reseeded as the domain of the senior staff. Other necessary changes deal with demographic targeting, facilities usage, and organizational design.

CARE ORGANIZATIONS

A necessary step to break the 800 barrier, is to continually revise your estimate of what systems are needed to see to it that your people receive the care they need. Remember, your faithfulness or unfaithfulness as a pastor is not measured in terms of fatigue.

The first step toward a solution is to organize your time around delegating duties and training apprentices. Until you become dispensable you cannot become promotable. God cannot hand you a new assignment if it would sink what he has already entrusted to you to oversee.

A second step is to rethink the organizational structure itself. Properly managed spans of care are critical to a leader's effectiveness. The fundamental message

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that Jethro gave his son-in-law Moses was the wisdom in breaking an organization into smaller parts so that everyone could have an opportunity to be heard and have his or her questions addressed (see Exod. 18:13-23). A church, therefore, is most effective when it organizes itself around the spans of care that prove to be most manageable. Once the group size exceeds about thirteen people, it will lose the qualities of intimacy, accountability, pastoral care, hands-on personal prayer, safety in self-disclosure, and surrogate extended-family support that the cell alone can deliver. Instead, it becomes a class (15 to 25 people) or a congregation (25 to 150 people). General fellowship and a family like feeling may be present, as well as acquaintance-making opportunities. The leadership will have opportunities to use their own spiritual gifts and train other leaders who are capable of leading additional groups. But neither the class nor the congregation can disciple most people with the quality of care they need.

If a church's goal is to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ, then it has two fundamental options: to use the effort and ministry of the professional clergy or to use the lay leadership. If the paid staff are the medium, they will always be weary and short. If an organization of lay volunteers is the medium,

the care will be ever expanding and adequate if the span of care for each can remain small enough to be effective. Whom should the leaders in a beyond-800 size church include in their personal spans of care? Other leaders, such as other staff members, the main church board, and those lay volunteers who have taken the responsibility to serve as coaches of lay pastors. By maintaining a leadership development focus within a reasonable span of care, a pastor can both avoid fatigue and continue leading the church to capture new growth opportunities.

DEMOGRAPHIC TARGETING

Regardless of the methods used to sustain growth in a church, consistency is a crucial issue. Why is it that large growing churches demonstrate continual growth in their membership weekly? A large part of the growth stems from the ministries of a particular congregation targeting key demographic community consensus. They have discovered the actual make up of their community and have sought to build bridges between their church and community.

Carl F. George in his seminars for the Charles E. Fuller Institute in Pasadena, California, shares six questions a church should ask as they seek to unleash their

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church into their community:

1. Does your community perceive your church as a source of help: In other words, how does your church position itself in the eyes of the population segment you are targeting?
2. Does your community know who and what your church is? Do you have a clear strategy to interpret your church's program to your most susceptible population segments?
3. Can you scratch that itch? Do you know how to organize the resources of your church in such a way that you can fulfill the expectations of the market segment you are targeting?
4. Do you help people take part? As responding seekers come to church gatherings, what is your pathway for induction? Is there a clear route to membership and/or to greater levels of participation? Does it follow a progression that starts where they are now and that gradually offers them higher challenges and more abundant opportunities for commitment?
5. Do your people experience vital Christianity? How does your church engender spiritual experience and formation? How does each

meeting in your church, from the worship service to the senior adult travel club, contribute to this objective? In other words, how do faith, prayer, and other disciplines of the Christian life lead to transformed lives at each meeting these newcomers could be part of?

6. How does your church maintain a quality of community that provides care for all your people? All churches must deal with this issue, especially as they grow larger. I believe that the most workable, long-term solution is an intentional, carefully coached system of lay-led small groups.

One of the privileges of a large church is that it has the talent and resources to market itself to very specific niches of a population. "Bridge events" can target special interests and offer additional entry points to the church. These might include, for example, a seminar offered by a Christian medical doctor on "Seven Keys for Coping with Stress"; a workshop on how to teach English as a second language; a bunch of auto mechanics who get together at a local garage every Friday night, and bring their friends, to do car repairs for widows and others in need; a youth group designed to appeal to the street-wise kids in the housing project down the street from the building.

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Remember your goals should be not to advertise your merchandise but to merchandise your advertising. The Walmart Company knows that come March, people will want to buy fertilizer for their gardens and spring clothes for their children. So its stores already have the merchandise on display when the need arises. Likewise, a church needs to know its targeted population well enough to have anticipated its felt needs, and be primed, prepared, and programmed to meet those needs in Jesus' name. Recognizing the need for increased market targeting, most churches, by about 800, have already begun to re-configure their staffs. The larger church typically maintains the concepts of worship, fellowship, and education, but hires staff who will cover all three elements within one age group or life stage.

Each of the staff members, from youth minister to senior-adults minister, receives the same assignment: "See to it that your age group comes to worship and has suitable program opportunities for fellowship and Christian education." These clergy, if given adequate resources and held accountable, can each carry 150 to 200 people. They typically sponsor large events, middle-sized gatherings, and small-group meetings. The usual net effect is that each age group or life stage behaves like a little church; it accepts some people and

excludes others; it takes good care of some and leaves others in the cold. Typically, more emphasis is placed on the teaching of intellectual concepts and on overall general fraternity than on the creation of intentional community. A church such as this centers on the necessity of the congregation-sized structure, and it offers cells and classes as "nice to have" but not as necessities. Likewise, the celebration is a festival or convention of congregations, not a gathering of cells. The age and life stage targeting is healthy: the questionable notions are whether the congregation-sized group can be a primary-care structure or whether the congregation-sized group can be a significant entry port to the growth of the celebration.

The clergy of a congregation-centered church, though all quite busy, usually lack a purposeful plan for developing their lay leaders. The organizational chart for their church usually offers limited insight into who supervises whom, because it lists only the paid staff and identifies their relationship to the senior pastor or church board. As a result, a volunteer or part-time director of preschool ministry may oversee a staff that handles five hundred people, while the main responsibility of an ordained minister of singles may be one thirty-five person class. My point is not to demean someone whose ministry is smaller

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than another's (or to be anticlerical). Rather, I am highlighting the inefficiency that is frequently a part of this commonly accepted paradigm.

THE FACILITIES USAGE

Another problem this type of church faces is that of structural fatigue. As a church continues to grow and begins to minister to thousands of people weekly, it will usually implement a matrix formula in which specialists support the generalists. For example, a minister of evangelism (specialist) will be brought on board who is assigned to support all the ministers of age level (generalists) in developing outreach training and programming for their particular church-within-the-church.

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

Even the church of 800 participants has certain limits that need attention yes, it could grow to a level of 1,200 to 1,400 participants with the traditional staff configurations. But at a certain numerical level it will plateau unless it changes its organizational design. For decades, the tried and true formula was simply to

keep adding additional staff members to help keep up with the growth. It has worked fairly well except that it has not helped the large church experience , what Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. has described as downsizing in his book Future Church. Downsizing is a phenomenon of large churches as they seek to minister with small cell groups to the individuals in their membership. Careful management of ones programming through age and life stages by the professional staff is quite successful. A careful shifting of focus from that of a shepherd to that of a rancher also strengthen the growth potential as larger congregations. Larger churches place the primary care ministry of the church into the hands of gifted lay shepherds who lead effective small cell groups. This emphasis directed by the Holy Spirit and applied by the 800 participant church can carry it over the 1000 participant mark. But eventually this church will even slow down.

Perhaps, there is an alternative to size limitations that growing churches find. I believe this alternative is found in the development of a group of lay leaders who would be disciples by professional staff in their particular disciplines and then they would in turn, train a group of lay embers who would, in turn, care for the pastoral needs of that particular demographic group. In other words,

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each of these pastors will be hired as a producer of other ministers rather than as a performer or primary care giver (other than to a handful of lay leaders). As but one application: Instead of having a minister of evangelism, now every staff member will be responsible for evangelism in every cell, because every cell is responsible for the evangelism of the people it assimilates.

The real church, then, is the cell. Even the worship service is cell driven in that it is a convention of cells. In this kind of church, a small group is not an add-on, like a new corner in a department store, to complement the youth department and the women's ministries department. Rather, the cell is the center of activity, and everything else is rationalized around it. When a church's organization structure is redesigned in this way it unlocks the terminal fatigue syndrome and lifts the lid on maximum church size.

A CHURCH GROWTH CHECKLIST FOR THE LARGE CHURCH

When a church reaches the 800 participant barrier in church growth, there is urgent need to develop an aggressive new-member recruitment strategy. Several factors should be considered regardless of the uniqueness of each

congregation. Often these factors are overlooked by the leaders of large congregations.

FACT NUMBER ONE: LARGE GROUP INTERACTION REINFORCES A SENSE OF UNITY

Perhaps the most overlooked factor in church growth is the importance of regular large group events to reinforce a sense of unity, fellowship, caring, and mutual support among the members of the large congregation. These large group events complement the smaller face-to-face groups of seven to thirty-five members that are so critical in reaching, attracting, and assimilating new members. An excessive concentration in the large church on small face-to-face groups often produces one of two results--and both are bad.

In some congregations the result is what can be described as a loose federation of groups and organizations that include perhaps as many as one-half of the members as active participants--but often less than a fourth of the members. These groups compete with one another for a variety of resources, including meeting rooms, staff time, and priorities in the schedule. The remaining fifty to

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seventy-five percent of the members are largely anonymous "outsiders" and "ex-members." In such a setting a few members will be even casually acquainted with more than four or five percent of the total membership. Many will feel that their primary allegiance is to that small group, not to the parish as a whole.

In other large churches, and especially the fast-growing congregations, the combination of the emphasis on small groups and the rapid influx of newcomers creates the risk of transforming what once was a caring congregation of friends and acquaintances into a passing parade of strangers. This is an especially important issue if the emphasis is on reaching young families residing in several different school districts. Friendship ties are very important! People feel more comfortable if, when they enter a room, their glance around reveals several familiar faces. This is especially important with children, youth, and adults of all ages. Therefore any new member enlistment strategy should include a continuing effort to help new-comers develop friendships with other newcomers as well as long-term members.

The scheduling of large group events, designed for an attendance of seventy-five to several hundred, and planned to bring people together across these

organization lines, is another means of overcoming this fragmentation and anonymity. Therefore, the first item on this checklist is an appreciation of the value of frequent large group events in large churches. This can be reinforced by a staff person, or perhaps a lay volunteer, who recognizes that many of the most effective techniques for strengthening small groups often are counterproductive when used with large groups, and who is skilled at planning and carrying out group events.

FACTOR NUMBER TWO: LARGE CHURCHES OFFER QUALITY

Many of the people who begin their "church shopping" by first visiting a large congregation before continuing their search for a new church home begin there because they are looking for quality. They expect to find quality in the large church. They may be forgiving of an inadequately prepared sermon or several off-key voices in the small or middle-sized congregation. In the large church, however, they expect quality. These expectations apply to the music, the preaching, the educational program, the youth fellowship, the quality of internal communication, and the reception accorded visitors.

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FACTOR NUMBER THREE: LARGE CHURCHES HAVE BUILDINGS THAT ARE CLEARLY MAPPED OUT

Many large congregations meet in buildings that were constructed in two or more stages. Some of these are confusing to the stranger. What does your building say to a newcomer? Does it clearly communicate the appropriate entrance? How accessible is it, and how comfortable is the building for person with handicapping condition? If it is not, are directional signs posted at the appropriate places?

FACTOR NUMBER FOUR: LARGE CHURCHES MUST WORK TO ACQUAINT MEMBERS WITH THE NAMES

Names tags are an essential component of the church growth strategy for the large church. They not only are useful in helping members learn the names of newcomers, but name tags also are an effective tool to help the members become better acquainted with one another.

FACTOR NUMBER FIVE: LARGE CHURCHES MUST BE STAFFED TO GROW

Many large churches plateau today simply because they have reached the comfort level of the professional staff. The staff in this case only can effectively lead a congregation of a certain size. Once the church has passed this level staff personnel that can lead it past this mark should be sought. If measured in simply quantitative terms, the majority of the large congregations are staffed to remain on a plateau or decline in size. They are not staffed to grow! The accompanying table suggests a beginning point for looking at staff needs for a congregation planning to remain on a plateau in size. The typical congregation averaging four hundred at worship will have two full-time program staff members (perhaps two pastors or possibly a pastor and director of Christian education) if it is staffed to decline in size, three if it expects to remain on a plateau, and the equivalent of four full-time program staff members if it expects significant numerical growth. This is in addition to the music staff, and might include a senior pastor, an associate minister, a full-time program staff member, a half-time person responsible for the assimilation of new members, and a half-time person in leadership development or in children's ministries.

FACTOR NUMBER SIX: LARGE CHURCHES PLACE HIGH PRIORITY TO
MUSIC

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A general rule is the larger the size of the congregation, the more important the ministry of music. This includes not only the chancel choir, but also a variety of other vocal and instrumental groups. The congregation averaging four hundred at worship can be expected to include six to ten choirs and musical groups. These face-to-face groups constitute one of the most open entry points for newcomers (especially for tenors) and can be a major asset in the assimilation of new members.

FACTOR NUMBER SEVEN: LARGE CHURCHES HAVE LONG-TERM PASTORATES

While no one has been able to prove that long pastorates produce numerical growth, it is rare to find a large church that has had significant numerical growth, and sustained that growth, without the benefit of a long-term pastorate. The large church usually will benefit from the leadership of a long-term pastor who is an aggressive proponent of church growth.

FACTOR NUMBER EIGHT: LARGE CHURCHES HAVE ABUNDANT OFF-STREET PARKING

The larger the congregation and/or the younger the people it is seeking to reach and serve, the more important is an adequate quantity of off-street parking. The off-street parking lot is basically a post-World War II phenomenon. People who grew up in this post-World War II world tend to take off-street parking for granted, while people born during the first third of this century view it as a luxury.

An adequate supply of off-street parking is especially important for (a) evening meetings and daytime events, (b) churches located west of the Mississippi River where most people expect there will be a parking space at the end of the journey, and (c) congregations with a meeting place in a location that is perceived to be dangerous. It is less important for Sunday morning than for evening events and weekday activities.

FACTOR NUMBER NINE: LARGE CHURCHES USE MEDIA EVANGELISM

Scores of large churches have found that, from a cost effectiveness perspective, a high quality of advertising program in the newspapers and/or the use of direct mail is more productive than adding staff to go out and knock on doors. The

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church growth strategy for the large congregation should include an amount equal to a least five percent of the church budget for advertising.

FACTOR NUMBER TEN: LARGE CHURCHES CAREFULLY MONITOR MEMBERS PARTICIPATION

A critical component of the church growth strategy for the large congregation is a carefully administered system for monitoring the participation of the members, and especially the members who have joined the congregation during the past two years. One widely used system is to keep track of the attendance at worship every Sunday. A notebook is prepared listing every member by name (it is essential to list individuals by name, not simply family clusters), and a series of vertical columns covers the right-hand side of these pages. Each week, three to five people who were in a position to see everyone who was present for that service go through these sheets and mark each person who was present. It is not unusual to find this total is equal to 99 percent of the usher count, a far better coverage than is usually achieved by asking people to record their own attendance.

Anyone who has been a regular attender and is absent for three consecutive Sundays receives a personal visit. Anyone who has been an infrequent attender and is present for three consecutive Sundays receives a visit. A useful backup system is for the membership committee to keep a name-by-name record of each person who joined the congregation during the two previous calendar years. An up-to-date record of the worship attendance is kept for each individual, as well as a record of their participation in a face-to-face group, in a leadership office, and as a volunteer worker. These records will enable the membership committee to carry on a "preventive maintenance" effort to reduce the level of dropouts that is so widespread among the new members of large churches.

FACTOR NUMBER ELEVEN: LARGE CHURCHES ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE OVERALL ADEQUACY OF THE PHYSICAL PLANT

The large congregation that is developing a new member recruitment strategy may need to take a careful look at the adequacy of its physical facilities. Frequently such a review is limited to (a) the adequacy of the space for corporate worship, (b) the necessary number of rooms for the Sunday church school, (c) the offices for the paid staff, (d) the kitchen, and (e) the fellowship hall for large group events.

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These are important, but the review should also include these questions. What impression is conveyed to the first-time visitor by the exterior of the building? Is there a bulletin board that can be read by the drivers of passing automobiles? Are the signs directing the visitors to the appropriate rooms highly visible in the main entrance area? Does that entrance area include the necessary space and atmosphere to encourage people to speak to one another? (This is especially significant in the northeastern quadrant of the United States and in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.) What impression do visitors receive when they enter a restroom? Are there at least three attractive meeting rooms for adults—each with carpet on the floor, pictures on the wall, drapes over the windows, and comfortable chairs? Does the building include one such room that will comfortably seat fifteen to thirty people, one that will hold twenty-five to forty people, and one that will accommodate at least fifty to sixty people, but no more than one hundred? Does the nursery convey to the young mother carrying her first-born child that this is an inviting and safe place to leave that precious baby? Can someone in the office see the front door easily enough to be able to monitor each person coming into the building? Is there an excessive amount of glare from the lighting that older people may find distracting or disturbing?

These are among the factors that should be considered in the formulation of a strategy for growth in the large congregation.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a barrier breaker for God as we have seen, requires a willingness to sometimes walk alone. Society has an idiom which states, "it's lonely at the top!" A church growth pastor knows a little about that, but would probably state it this way, "Church growth is a lonely work the for the pastor called to that task." This is probably why most pastor's are not church growth pastors! Dr. C. Peter Wagner shares ten distinguishable characteristics of the church growth pastor.

1. Obedient to the Great Commission.
2. Willing to pay the price for making disciples.
3. Willing to measure results to evaluate success or failure.
4. Is a goal oriented person.
5. Is able to view the congregations potential.
6. Is an able strategist and planner.
7. Attempts to watch lay person's spiritual gifts with responsibilities.

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8. Knows what to do and how to get it done.
9. Maximizes the use of his personal spiritual gifts.
10. Has a good perspective on himself, his church, and his ability to get the job done.

Three tasks of the church growth pastor are evident from the above list: leader, manager, and change agent. This is what is required of a church growth pastor. But what is required of the local church? Good health in the church is also necessary for the church to grow. C. Peter Wagner has examined the health of churches and describes them a lot like a physician would. He has found eight diseases that keep the local church from growing.

ETHNIKITIS: Ethnikitis is one of two terminal diseases of the church and is beyond the control of the local church. The church experiencing this disease, is located in a changing neighborhood -- either racially, ethnically, socially, or economically. Persons attending these churches often drive for miles. They live in one community and worship in another. The church makes no effort to reach

the community residents. They are not like us and we do not want them. Gradually, older members die and do not have replacements, thus causing the church to gradually decline and die.

OLD AGE: Old age is caused by conditions beyond the control of the local church. The community is static, no one moving in and no one moving out. As residents die, they are not replaced. Many rural churches find themselves in this condition. The young move to the city seeking employment. The church is composed of mostly older people.

PEOPLE BLINDNESS: Church members are blind to the people around them. Church members become so busy and preoccupied with their own lives that there is no time left of others. Have you ever traveled along the same road to work every day and suddenly noticed a house you had not previously seen? This is people blindness. The people are there, but you do not see them.

HYPER-COOPERATIVISM: Churches spend much of their energy and time cooperating with other churches in revivals, Bible schools, and city wide

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crusades. As a result, there is little time for growth activities. Churches that work alone experience the best growth.

KOINONITIS: Koinonia is the sweet fellowship that exists within the body of Christ. People have a deep love and concern for one another. All their available time is used on old relationships to the point there is little time for those outside their cell and fellowship group. As a result, the church turns inward and cares little for outsiders and the unchurched.

SOCIOLOGICAL STRANGULATION: Of the eight diseases, this is the only one of a growing church. The influx of new members is so great that the facilities actually become inadequate. People will not continually fill an auditorium beyond 80 percent of the seating capacity. The parking lot must provide for ample parking. No one wants to waste time looking for a parking place.

ARRESTED SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT: This disease is a result of quantity growth without quality growth. Persons make an initial decision to accept Christ, but do not grow in their relationship with the Lord. Members lack a

basic discipleship commitment.

SAINT JOHN'S SYNDROME: Church members know the songs, say the right words, pray the right prayers, make their appearance at the right functions, go through the right motions, but their intentions are hollow and meaningless. Their Christianity is nothing more than habit.

There is a price to be paid for growth. Growth means change in churches and change means grief. There are several price tags amid the growth process. Many churches are not willing to pay what's required to break the various barriers to growth. The first of these is crucial and that the attitude of the church members. Wanting to grow and desiring to grow are two very different issues in regard to attitude. Most people in churches believe they want to see the church grow. Usually only a few have a desire for this growth. This can be seen every time a crucial decision on the growth of the church is needed. At this important point in the life of the church a rejection of the necessary changes to enable growth to occur signals want but no deep desire.

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The second crucial church growth price tag is how the congregation assimilates new members. Churches that grow fast usually assimilate newcomers quickly.

A third price tag is the variety of group life in the church. This one singular tag is the hardest for congregations to pay. Single-cellness churches refuse to change. Multi-cellness is an attribute of numerically growing churches.

The next component is a recognition that an individual's personal decision to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, the act of uniting with a particular congregation, and the acceptance of that new member into that congregation by the other members are three separate, unrelated, and distinct steps. Too often it is assumed they are one and the same. A recognition of this fact of the process of Christian commitment is a seriously neglected price tag on church growth.

Additionally, high on this list of the price tags of growth is the need to define in precise terms who this congregation is seeking to reach, to identify their

specific needs, and to determine how this congregation will respond to those needs.

The sixth price tag is that frequently church members assume that church growth means more of the same. They expect that their congregation can double in size without any significant change in the qualitative dimensions of congregational life. This is an illusion. An acceptance of change is a price of growth.

Seventh, a growing congregation usually must expand its staff to accommodate a growing number of members. The neglect of that factor can be seen most clearly in the congregations that have built a very large building to accommodate a much larger number of people and then meet the mortgage payments from the salaries of staff who are not hired. They end up as an overbuilt, understaffed, and frustrated congregation.

The last price tag is one that is overlooked most of the time. This is the ability to

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define evangelism in terms of people, not as streets and city blocks. The primary emphasis in the evangelistic outreach of the growing church is on the needs of people, not on their places of residence.

It is realized that this is not a complete list concerning the price to be paid by churches for growth, but they do demonstrate the needs for functional decisions that are compatible with the thirst for growth. Assimilation is just the beginning of the giving of ones life as a pastor and church to a great and Holy task. It is a journey, and hearing the sovereign on high respond, "I am well pleased, thy faithful servant" is the ending.

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