

Steps of Sustained Church Growth

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: There are specific steps which occur in sustained church growth; if any of them are neglected, it will cause a church to stop growing. If multiples steps are neglected, the congregation will likely not grow again until all are fixed. It is the objective of the OC Church Growth Institute to be of assistance in this process.

REPORT:

There is a distinctly different dynamic between a startup or micro congregation and a large congregation. For sustained church growth, this article is presuming the congregation is large enough to have organizational needs and old enough to be mostly beyond “low hanging fruits” for converts, as you would expect to be “sustaining”.

When a larger / older congregation passes the point of being a startup/micro congregation, the operational changes they typically make will suffice for a time and become “business as usual.” These initial changes have typically incorporated a consolidation of decision-making power within the Eldership, which has effectively disenfranchised most of the other members. Often the changes were the result of a specific situation in the congregation. As the congregation continued to grow but the operational practices did not, the net result has characteristically been the stabilization of the congregation into a non-growth or maintenance mode. The congregation

then has a system rather than a vision.

An ongoing congregational vision for growth (Great Commission) needs to exist in which members can understand and feel included, can understand their roles, and will feel motivated to do their part. If this vision does not exist, the congregation will tend to be like a ship without a rudder which cannot make progress in the desired direction.

YOUR VISION STATEMENT

Consider the two following Vision/Mission statements: (1) “Sharing God’s love with others” and (2) “A Sustained 10% growth rate relative to our environment”. Number (1) feels warm and fuzzy and number (2) feels cold and hard. To compare the two, we shall list the actual steps or components in sustained church growth:

STEPS OR COMPONENTS OF CHURCH GROWTH:

Initial contact with converts

After the “low hanging fruit” has been addressed, it takes specific plans to generate new contacts.

Building relationships

Repeated contacts must be made with prospects in favorable and comfortable circumstances to develop trust.

Exposing them to the truth

Some will simply need to hear the good news of Jesus; most will need redirection from doctrinal error.

Convicting them of the message

Members need to be sure what the truth is, know how to communicate it, and be practiced at it.

Getting closure

A person or situation needs to exist to encourage prospects to make a commitment.

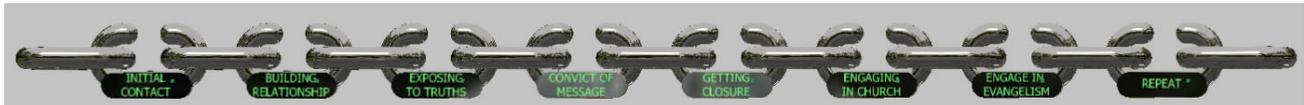
Engaging them in the activities of the church

If new members are not engaged, they will most likely drift away. The larger / older a congregation becomes, the more difficult this becomes. This means engaging them in both the physical activities and the Biblical study activities to mature them in the faith.

particular case. The “new prospects” now become engaged in the process in a never-ending cycle. When one generation stops, the church becomes lukewarm.

Every flatline or declining congregation with which we are acquainted has felt that they were meeting the requirements of vision statement #1 (Sharing God’s love with others), though none of them were meeting the requirements of vision statement #2 (A Sustained 10% growth rate relative to our environment). At least at this point, we can presume that vision statement #1 apparently does not do anything for you, and vision statement #2 may or may not.

Graphical Representation of Steps of Sustained Church Growth



Engaging in evangelism.

In the first century evangelism was relatively easy, if you believed you were well-equipped. Today, members who would teach need to be able to handle the 2000 years of departures from the scriptures in which your prospects may have spent their lives, in which their families may have

Another way of looking at this is graphically. The steps of sustained church growth are illustrated as a chain with links representing individual steps in the **first graphic**. If all the pieces are in place, the chain does its job.

The normal approach to solving the church growth problem is illustrated by the **second graphic**. In this case a single link is thought to be disconnected or at least not



believed for many generations.

Repeat

All of these steps happen, even if they are not identified as steps in a

working well. If a program can be found, a new committee started, or an existing committee reenergized, all will be well.

In many cases the following graphic is more representative of the situation, at least in the worst-case scenario. The following graphic shows all the links broken or disconnected. Likely all the pieces are doing at least a part of the work required, but there is no connection among them. In most congregations some of the connections will be working, but there will

member is dropping the ball like it can be in a missionary situation. A lone missionary must do all these steps if he is to get a congregation started. If a missionary hasn't been doing one of the steps, he can just start doing it. If he is not getting closure with any prospects, he knows it. In a congregation, lack of sustained church growth is a systems problem involving many members. Sustained church growth needs a systems solution.

BUSINESS SYSTEM BEHIND YOUR VISION STATEMENT:

At some point this process of church growth breaks down and church growth stops. The question is: WHY does it break down or stagnate?

We submit to you that if any of the steps in the process are neglected within a congregation, the process of church growth will stop. Obviously if no one gets closure to make a conversion it will stop. It is not as obvious, but if you do not engage a high percentage of your members in the work of the church it will

stop. If you bring second and third generation members into the congregation who only have a shallow understanding of the truth, it will stop congregational growth. If a high percentage of your members only attend for family or social reasons, they might as well attend a denomination, or might well want to make your congregation a denomination.

Additionally, we suggest that if there are multiple links broken, fixing one of the steps will not restart church growth. All steps must be addressed in order to have



likely be more than one break.

If someone makes an initial contact to teach new prospect, but no one exposes that person to the message with the hope of getting closure, it simply doesn't work.

A leadership can take comfort in the fact that an individual deacon or member gets on fire in a particular area, but in many cases the individual simply burns out before he or she gets any cooperation.

The point to this is that church growth is not an isolated problem where just one

sustained church growth.

It is our observation that when some church leaders think back to when the congregation was growing, they think back to a time when stabilizing changes were made but the congregation was continuing to grow some; so they try to reinforce the stabilizing changes. This is the opposite of what needs to happen. Other church leaders have actually never seen any organization other than the current stabilized one, and presume that exactly this structure is scripturally mandated.

To a large extent, the role of the OC Church Growth Institute is to try to assist congregations in the transition from a discretionary operational pattern which is not working to an alternate scriptural embodiment of church organization which will support church growth.

OCCG INSTITUTE COMPONENTS OF CHURCH GROWTH:

The same steps or components of church growth from above are repeated below, with specific OC Church Growth Institute programs designed to help in these areas as are described following.

Initial contact with converts

Delcon¹: requires that a congregation commit to a known church growth goal vision. Prepares committee and staff job descriptions which mandate operation in accordance with that vision goal, and requires regular reporting to leadership on progress towards that vision goal. It provides a composite visitor log which summarizes visitors and collects useful information about them and then prints it out in multiple reports.

SHORT ANSWERS² provides quick answers to questions to help negotiate

an initial contact. All the answers are restricted to the size of a cell phone screen for easy reading.

Building relationships

CAS³ (Congregational Assessment Survey): Reports on activities that generate multiple contacts between prospects and members, including reporting on how many repeated contacts are made.

Exposing them to the truth

Project Paper Posters⁴ can be posted at all relationship events to provide expose to Biblical truths. Available for your printing in 3 different colors.

Online topical lessons⁵ used in Bible Classes will expose visiting prospects to specific truths.

Wings of Eagles videos⁶ 3 20 minute videos which provide assistance in communications in a personal evangelism setting or a class room setting. Available online or for your downloading.

Convicting them of the message

Wings of Eagles videos and online topical lessons⁵ in our Bible Classes will help convict our own members so they will be better equipped to help someone else become convicted. We currently have many members who no longer know exactly what they believe, and we as leaders often don't know what they believe.

Getting closure

Wings of Eagles videos⁶ will ask the conversion question for you, or at least set it up for you.

Engaging them in the activities of the church

Delcon¹: Provides Involvement Forms, collects open roles, provides listings of uninvolved members, assists in matching uninvolved members with open roles, reports this information to the leadership regularly.

Maturing them so that they can become effective evangelist.

Online topical lessons⁵ (generally in Bible class format) acquaint members with the topics and provide an immediate, permanent, online access for your members at any time. When a member goes through this lesson series, they will have a known knowledge base. The purpose is to equip members with a greater depth of knowledge than can be retained by our conventional verbal / memory only class systems. A lot of our teachers spend time on preparing written lessons for their classes, which are seldom actually retained. If the teachers will use the online lessons and use their available times to help improve these lessons with us, everyone will benefit. You can add to this resource either by updating a lesson or adding a new lesson.

Delcon¹: Is focused on job descriptions with reporting accountability which effectively allow Shepherds to delegate more **tasks** and have better control (i.e. **DE**Legate with more **CON**trol). Helps

to mature younger members and frees Shepherds to do Shepherding.

Repeat

CAS³ (**Congregational Assessment Survey**): Provides an occasional third party, mostly objective study of your congregation's operation. No matter what you do, it will become "business as usual" after a while and you will need to take a fresh look at your programs and operations. You have limited time and other resources, and they should not be expended on programs which are no longer effective when they can be spent more beneficially.

Church Growth Consultations⁷: We can provide third party confidential advice on the status of your congregation and possible solutions for you to consider.

Church Leaders Workshops⁷: We can host a workshop at your congregation or in your area to provide open discussions on church growth issues.

Youth Rallies⁷: We will host local or area wide youth rallies, generally on the topic of Impossible for Evolution.

We encourage you to consider use of these resources, and if you have additional resources other congregations will benefit from using, let us know so we can help get them distributed.

Reviewers: Judy Haley, Melissa Rowell

References:

1. <https://occg.institute/delcon/>
2. <https://occg.institute/short-answers/>
3. <https://occg.institute/cas/>

4. <https://occg.institute/papers/teaching/>
5. <https://occg.institute/christian-array-topical-lessons/>
6. <https://occg.institute/2-wings-of-eagles/>
7. <https://occg.institute/refocus/>