



Church Growth

A Discussion of Recent Church Growth Research
and the Practical Conclusions







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Follow-up Study: To obtain full credit and benefit from this class, you must complete the following two assignments:

Read the follow-up reading on the website www.prepareinternational.org

- ✓ To Be Announced

Write a 3-5 page paper answering the two following questions:

- ✓ What were the three most important things you learned in this course (list and describe them).
- ✓ How can these truths affect your life today?
- ✓ How will you use these lessons in your ministry?



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Lesson 1: A Proper Perspective

Since the 1970's, there has been a growing emphasis in on church growth models. As entrepreneurial churches began to experiment with different church structures and practices, several of these pioneering churches began to experience significant growth rates. There were two primary responses from the church at large:

1. There must be something inherently wrong with a church that grows this quickly,
or
2. We need to copy what they are doing so that we can grow.

Unfortunately, neither response produced anything of lasting value. Those that were skeptical quickly began to project evil motives and compromising attitudes on the pioneers while the "fans" began to impose cosmetic changes to their churches with lackluster results. Some churches did experience growth, but most of the new members came from other churches rather than through new converts.

- ▶ If you could design a church from the ground up, how would you do it?
- ▶ What would make your church different from other churches?
- ▶ Why would your church succeed when others have failed?

Checking Our Motives

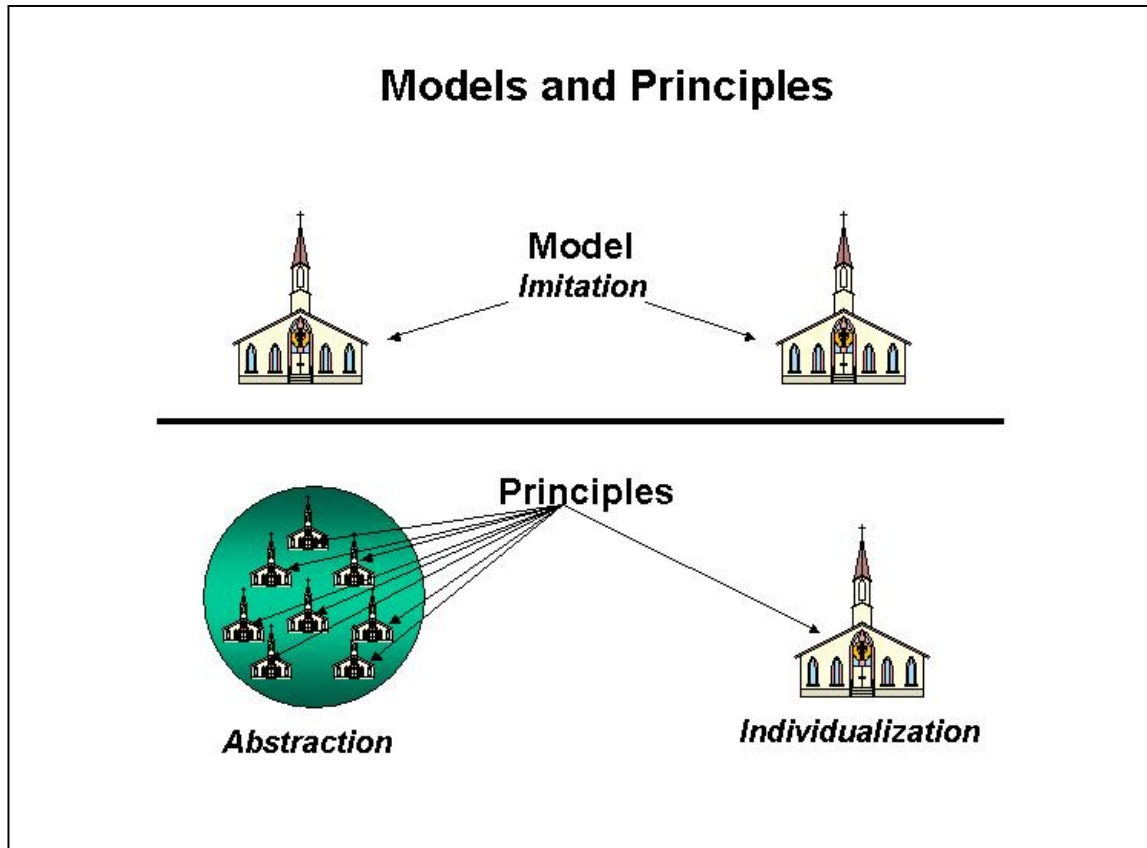
Church leaders began to question the underlying assumptions of the "model" or "replica" approach to church growth. When churches tried to change their structure or behavior without changing the fundamental values of the leadership and membership, the membership usually revolted to some degree. The membership often accused the leadership of seeking growth just for the sake of "numbers" or higher attendance. Leaders began to realize that if real and positive change is going to occur, there has to be a deep and fundamental change in the values and vision of the church. As a result, church leaders began to look for a new answers to the challenge of church growth.

Research groups like Barna Research, and The Institute for Church Development began to spring up with a mandate to understand what makes the church tick (as in the tick-tock of a clock). One of the most significant studies on church growth in the last decade was conducted by The Institute for Church Development (located in Germany).¹ This study found a that the healthiest churches understood the need for both quantity (growth through evangelism) and quality (vibrant church life and discipleship).

¹ Christian Schwarz. 2000. Natural Church Development

Discovering Principles of Church Growth

What we've discovered is that vibrant churches all seem to share common values and pay attention to common principles. The structures are not all the same. The models vary greatly. What makes the difference are the principles that the church is built on.



In order to take an in-depth look at the principles that appear to be essential to church health and growth, we will cover, in some detail, the findings of the research study conducted by The Institute for Church Development.

Planning vs. the Holy Spirit



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For centuries, church leaders have struggled with the uncomfortable relationship between the desire to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and the need to pay attention to good organizational planning.

Question:

- Can you carefully structure a worship service and still be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit?
- Can you strategically plan the ministry activity of the church and still follow the direction of the Holy Spirit?

Our tendencies lean in one of two directions:

1. Reliance on Method and Model or
2. Hyper-spiritual assumption that all human planning amounts to striving.

There is a third option, however that rejects both tendencies and seeks to develop a biblical and practical balance. This third option should become our goal.

Option 3. Goal: to coordinate our efforts in order to cooperate with the movement and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Faith always demands action. God never intended for his people to simply wait around for God to accomplish His purposes on the earth. Once we have clear direction from God, he fully expects us to respond by taking action. And the truth is, God prefers targeted action to random, scattered behavior.

Gen 12:4 Abram was seventy-five years old when the LORD told him to leave the city of Haran. He obeyed and left with his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all the possessions and slaves they had gotten while in Haran.

Example: Abram obeyed God's command to leave his home and go. What kind of plans did Abram make in order to ensure a successful trip to Canaan?

Gen 41:33 Your Majesty, you should find someone who is wise and will know what to do, so that you can put him in charge of all Egypt.

Gen 41:34 Then appoint some other officials to collect one-fifth of every crop harvested in Egypt during the seven years when there is plenty.

Gen 41:35 Give them the power to collect the grain during those good years and to store it in your cities.



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Gen 41:36 It can be stored until it is needed during the seven years when there won't be enough grain in Egypt. This will keep the country from being destroyed because of the lack of food.

Gen 41:37 The king and his officials liked this plan.

Gen 41:38 So the king said to them, "No one could possibly handle this better than Joseph, since the Spirit of God is with him."

Gen 41:39 The king told Joseph, "God is the one who has shown you these things. No one else is as wise as you are or knows as much as you do.

Gen 41:40 I'm putting you in charge of my palace, and everybody will have to obey you. No one will be over you except me.

Gen 41:41 You are now governor of all Egypt!"

Example: Joseph took the direction of the Lord and planned accordingly so that Egypt could survive the coming famine.

Good planning is essential if we are to successfully accomplish God's commands. Our action does not negate God's plans, unless we willfully set our plans without his guidance. It is true that we must always guard against striving out of our own will and design, but planning does not automatically equate to striving. If we are planning in order to carry out the designs of God, we are positioning ourselves to receive his power and blessing as we, by faith, take hold of the result that He desires.

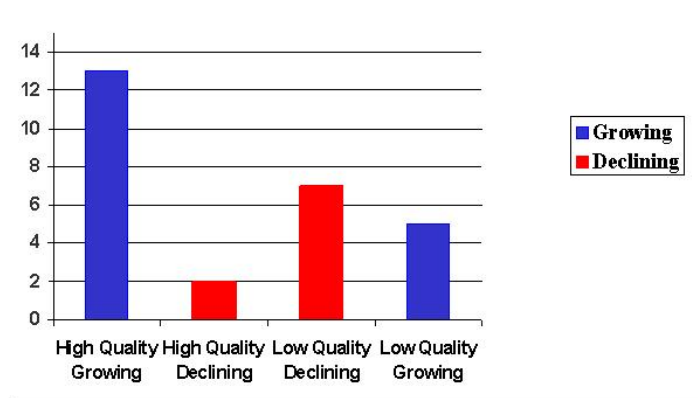


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As a result, the study found that all the churches fit into one of four categories:

1. High Quality – Above Average Growth
2. High Quality – Declining in Number
3. Low Quality – Declining in Number
4. Low Quality – Above Average Growth

The Distribution



Although there were a small number of churches that fit into the 4th category (Low quality – Above average growth), the study concluded that there seems to be a direct relationship between the quality level of the eight characteristics and the four categories identified above. In other words, the higher the quality in each of the eight characteristics, the higher the probability that your church will grow numerically.

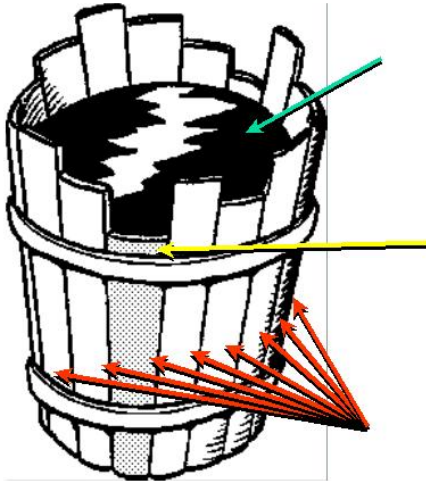
Principle: The lowest quality characteristic affects a church's ability to grow in quantity. This is also known as the "minimum factor".

Another way of saying this is, your church will not grow past your weakest characteristic. As we increase the quality of all characteristics, we increase our church's ability to hold more people.



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The Minimum Factor



Six “Biotic” Principles

Biotic means “based on life and the life-cycle”. It rejects the idea that you can successfully “construct” a church like you would a robot. The biotic philosophy builds on an organism’s ability to reproduce itself. It claims that if all the conditions for growth are healthy, the church will grow on its own, all by itself. The six biotic principles are:

- Interdependence
- Multiplication
- Energy Transformation
- Multi-usage
- Symbiosis
- Functionality



Lesson 3: The Eight Quality Characteristics of a Healthy Church

Let's take a look at each of the eight quality characteristics identified in Christian Schwartz's research study.

Empowering Leadership

There has been much debate over proper leadership style. Should the pastor be a "people-person," or should the pastor be more "task-oriented"? Is one style more biblical than the other?

The survey found that for healthy, growing churches leaders tended to be goal oriented with a high value on relationships and partnership. *Pastors of growing churches were good at empowering their leadership.*



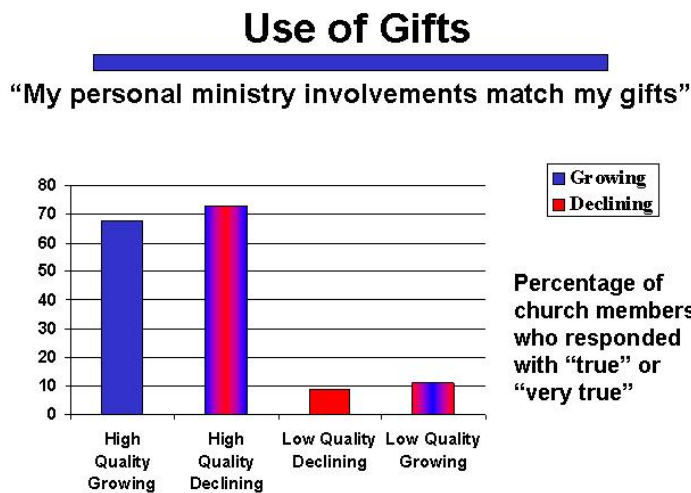
Two Interesting Results of this Study Regarding Leadership

- Formal Theological training had a negative relationship to both quantitative growth and church quality.
- The leadership factor that demonstrated the strongest relationship to overall quality and growth was the leader's readiness to accept outside help.



Gift-Oriented Ministry

The survey study showed a significant difference between churches that make use of members' spiritual gifts. It signified a remarkable difference between high quality and low quality churches.



Passionate Spirituality

This characteristic focuses in on how enthusiastic individuals are about their relationship with Jesus.

- Prayer life is active and affective.
- Members actively read and study their Bibles
- Enthusiasm about church is high
- Churches that tend to be legalistic are below average in spiritual passion

Functional Structures

Functional Structures refers to organizational and administrative structures used to guide the government and activities of the church. The study found that high-quality, growing



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churches have an ability to design organizational structures that will best fit their needs. The churches that felt a loyalty to old, established structures (traditionalism) or churches that felt that structure was unspiritual tended to be declining, low quality churches.

Traditionalism was identified as a polar opposite to this quality characteristic. One out of every 10 high-quality church struggles with traditionalism but every other declining church of lower quality is overrun by this problem.

Inspiring Worship Assembly

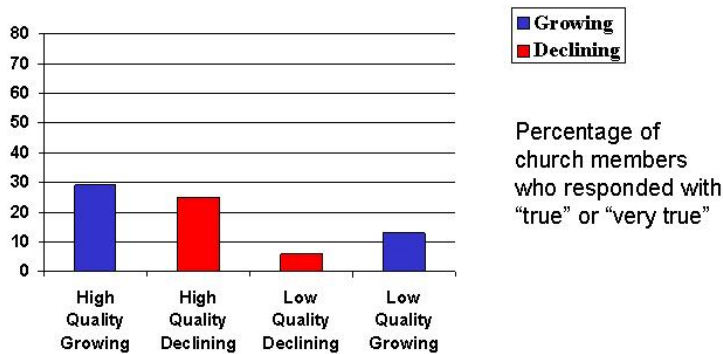
The word "inspiring" is defined, in this case, as "sensing the presence of God". It didn't matter if the church service was contemporary, seeker-sensitive, liturgical, or traditional. What mattered was whether or not the members sensed the presence of God in their worship services.

Small Groups

Growing, high quality churches tended to place a priority on small group involvement. However, the emphasis was not only on involvement, but on multiplication as well.

Priorities

"It is more important for us that someone be involved in a small group than attend church"

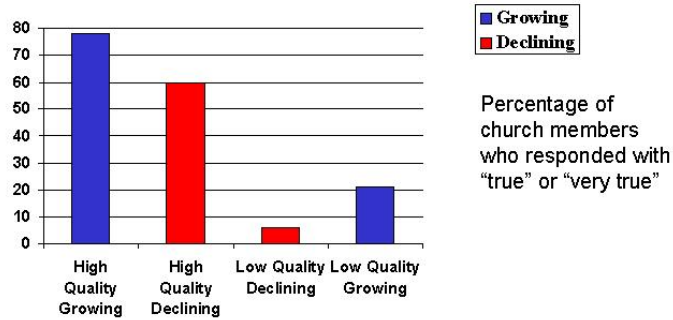




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Cell Division

“Our church consciously promotes the multiplication of small groups through cell division”



Need-Oriented Evangelism

The research showed that about 10 percent of church members have the gift of evangelism. Furthermore, the study suggests that any evangelistic method that will focus on the needs and questions of non-Christians will be more successful.

Loving Relationships:

The ability to receive and express love to other believers in a natural, and practical way.

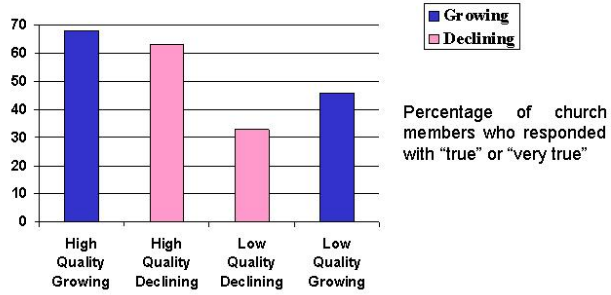
- Laughter is very important
- Hospitality is very important



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Laughter

"There is a lot of laughter in our church"





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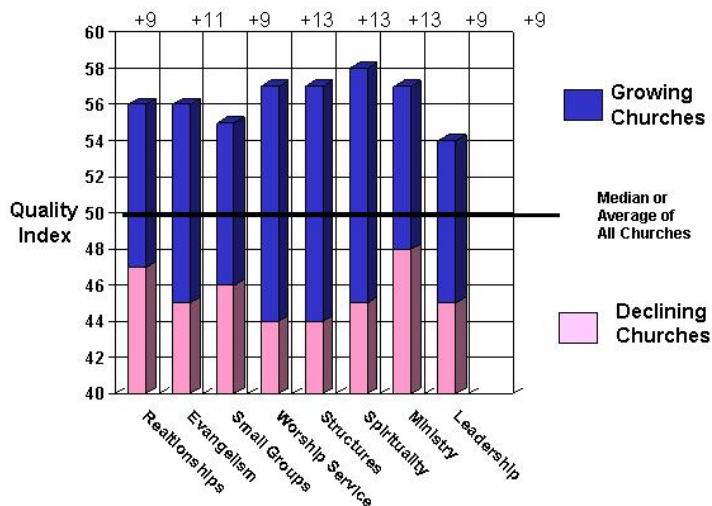
Lesson 4: Important Conclusions and Action Steps

One of the most important lessons learned from this study is the importance of principles rather than models of church growth. This one truth frees the individual churches from having to follow any one model and at the same time it gives direct guidance that can be tailored to the individual congregation.

The study conducted by the Institute for Church Development was able to statistically validate the following three conclusions:

- On average, growing churches have significantly higher quality than do declining churches.
- It is possible to attain numerical growth with a low level of quality (perhaps through effective marketing strategies, etc.) but with a perceived lack of quality, sustainability (the ability, or lack of ability to keep the people that come) is a real problem.
- Every church that had a quality index of 65 or more in each of the eight quality characteristics was a growing church, without exception.

Growing and declining churches vary significantly in all eight quality areas



Action Steps to Prepare Your Church for Growth

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The following steps will help the leaders of the church accurately assess their current condition and set a course that will allow their churches to grow naturally.

A Clear Vision and Core Values

The first priority for every church is to understand what they are called to become and what priorities drive their day-to-day activities.

A vision is:

- a specific picture of what we feel God is calling our church to become.
- a statement of what we are becoming but have not yet achieved.
- An articulated guide for the congregation so they can know where they are going and the purpose for the coming changes.

Core Values are:

- Priorities that drive what you do as a church.
- Deeply held beliefs that distinguish your church from others.

Can you identify the core values of your church? What beliefs and priorities stand out in your church? Is worship a value? Is evangelism a value? Are small groups a value? What about hospitality? How many can you identify in your church?

It is very important to clearly articulate this vision to the church, on a regular basis. They must be given the opportunity to hear, assess, and accept the vision. This process is not automatic and many Christians tend to resist specific vision.

Once your congregation has begun to digest your vision, enough time must be given for your church to take on the core values that will be necessary to fulfill the vision. If you do not successfully change the values of your church, your attempts to implement new structures and methods will meet with heavy resistance. It is important to bring your membership along with you on the journey.

Ways to change the values of your church:

- Preach it and teach it.
- Train your leaders to take on the new values and use them in decision-making.
- Slowly begin to introduce new ministries and activities that are based on the new values.
- Constantly articulate the vision and values of your church.
- Slowly change the policy and structure of your church to reflect the new values.

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Determine Your Minimum Factors

It is important to get a clear evaluation of where your church is and what the strengths and weaknesses are. This will be most effective if you bring in an outside consultant to help you conduct the evaluation.

It is very common for the leadership of a local congregation to perceive things differently than the members. There is nothing wrong with this tendency as long as the leader makes the effort to discover the perception gaps and take appropriate action. However, it is also common for church leaders to avoid this evaluation process for one reason or another. Good leadership will not be afraid to take an honest look at themselves and their congregation.

The most common form of evaluation is a church survey. There are many organizations that offer surveys that can be of value. You can also work with a consultant to design a customized survey. Other options include focus groups (interviewing a representative group of church members and regular attendees), and leadership assessments (Bringing a consultant in to interview and assess the leadership of the church).

Set Goals to Improve Your Minimum Factors

If you find that you are strong in relationships, but weak in “structures”, set goals that will address the need for functional structures. If you are strong in Prayer and Spiritual Passion, but are weak in Small Groups, do not try to solve the problem by praying more. Prayer, your strength is always an important factor in the life of the church, but you need to strategically plan how you intend to improve your small group ministry.

Plan, Implement and Measure

Once you've determined your goals that will help you improve your minimum factors, you need to plan how you will accomplish your goals. Remember, your plans are your effort at cooperating with God's call on your church. He always has the authority to change the plans, but he also expects us to move forward in our planning.

Once you have made plans, empower the right people who can implement the plans. Help people set timelines and monitor the progress to be sure that the plans are being accomplished and your goals are being achieved.

Raise up Leaders

At every step of the way, find intentional ways to train and empower new leaders in your church. Find ways to do this formally (with small group leader training, for example) and find ways to do this informally (working along side potential leaders).

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Cooperate with the Holy Spirit

There is more than one way to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

- The most obvious way to cooperate with Him is to keep our ears open to what he might say to us, to seek our Lord's face and constantly be ready to obey any specific instruction he may give to us.
- Another, less glamorous way to cooperate with the Holy Spirit is to utilize the principles that He has set into place. Much of what we've been studying today are principles that the Holy Spirit has revealed to us through various channels.

If we are to obey what the Spirit is saying to the churches, we must pay attention to all the ways that he is revealing and communicating to us. It is foolishness to ignore one in favor of the other. We, then, are making a distinction that God is not making. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit both in our planning and in our moment by moment activity.