

WHY GROWING CHURCHES PLATEAU — AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

Factors that cause initial growth	Erroneous strategic decisions that lead to plateauing	Corrective steps to regain initial growth
Focus is on meeting the needs of the congregation	Focus is increasingly on the needs of the staff.	Make planning decisions based upon congregational needs (via surveys, focus groups, etc.) ...not on the conveniences of the staff (which are usually expressed more vocally and assertively than congregational needs).
Celebration Convenience: multiple church celebrations are held at varying times	Waning Celebration Convenience: celebrations are combined together in larger facilities. As a result, fewer options are offered for congregants (but convenience increases for staff).	Maintain as many multiple celebrations as feasible in order to offer as many convenient worship times as possible
Prayer focus is on the unchurched and dechurched. (Dechurched: those who have terminated their attendance elsewhere due to real or perceived hurt, conflict, etc.)	Prayer focus is on church attendees. Most prayer is centered on the personal needs of a burgeoning congregation.	Employ 50/50 prayer (see <i>A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church</i>). Fifty percent of the prayer focus addresses congregational needs while the other 50% is faithfully reserved to address the needs of the unchurched and dechurched.
Urgency in prayer due to potential for failure.	Institutionalization of prayer takes place. Prayer forms are standardized and systematized, especially in the church celebration. Security in circumstances robs prayer of its urgency.	Don't wait for a crisis to reinvigorate the prayer life of a church. Consider the enormity and significance of the task you are undertaking: the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19)
Low overhead due to rented facilities.	Dramatic increase in overhead due to purchased or constructed facilities.	Rent longer than you think you need to. This will place hardship upon your staff, but increase your financial viability and future flexibility. Read <i>When Not to Build</i> by Ray Bowman.
Rented facilities are usually multi-functional.	Owned facilities are often segregated into activity specific spaces; i.e. immovable pews in an auditorium, small Sunday school rooms that cannot open up into larger facilities, etc.	Retain flexibility in your facilities. When it is time to build, employ architects who build malls, college classrooms, and theatres; not those who primarily build churches.
Budget is based on money in hand (i.e. past performance).	Budget is based upon projections of continued growth. If growth slows, fiscal flexibility will tighten quickly	Budget more conservatively than you feel you should. Church leaders are often optimists, but basing budgets on anticipated performance can be

	and dramatically, often leading to conflict and friction.	reckless. In addition, lower numbers can be deceptive; e.g. a church that was able in the past to increase a \$100,000 budget by 10% will find it exponentially more difficult to increase a \$500,000 budget by 10%
Experimentation is encouraged. Almost all theologically non-compromising ideas are considered.	The church begins to stay with "what has worked in the past," even if that is the immediate past. This often leads to incipient traditionalism.	Foster an environment of experimentation and exploration. Rapid changes in cultural predilections and preferences require this.
Housecleaning. Ideas that don't work are quickly abandoned. Limited resources and the precariousness of the church's survival create this situation.	Programs and ideas that may not be productive are given extra time "to develop." Jesus' parable on repentance (Luke 13:1-9) is often misdirected to rationalize extending the life of unproductive programs.	Be prepared to use vigorous analysis and empirical evidence to confirm productive programming. Often supporting evidence of a program's viability is anecdotal. Look for clear evidence of productivity (James 3:17).
Dysfunctional people become functional. All people, regardless of physical, social, or economic dysfunction are actively recruited. Prior leadership experience in another church is not required.	Functionally adept people are actively recruited. Prior leadership experience in another church is highly valued. Unproductive programming is often unintentionally cross-pollinated.	Inaugurate a lay-training system to mentor dysfunctional people into functional and productive lives in both church and society.

<p>Small groups are not needed. The church is driven by the "event status" of the celebration.</p>	<p>Small groups, though needed, are not developed, because the "event status" of worship drives the church's emphasis and reputation. Because intimacy is missing due to the lack of an expansive network of small groups, people feel the church is "too cold" or "not personal enough" and they go elsewhere.</p>	<p>A celebration event can sustain a church only initially, and soon must be accompanied by a network of small groups that encourage intimacy and commitment. All types of small groups should be developed, including adult Sunday school classes, leadership teams, home groups, ministry groups, interest groups, etc.</p>
<p>Christ is exalted as the instigator and sustainer of growth. The miraculous nature of growth inspires awe and a sense of the supernatural.</p>	<p>Leadership principles are credited as the cause of growth.</p>	<p>Fully understand the factors that contributed to growth in the first place and adapt these God-derived strategies to current needs.</p>
<p>--Bob Whitesel, <i>Strategies for Today's Leader</i>. Adapted and used with permission. You can subscribe to <i>Strategies for Today's Leader</i> at: www.strategiesfortoday.org</p>		