

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Pioneer into the Community

As North American culture glides toward secularism, significant numbers of church attendees view their church as a place to gather in safety with others who hold similar beliefs and values. To them, the church is a home where they come each weekend to be healed, comforted, and encouraged before they venture back into an unfriendly world. Instead of venturing out to reach a lost world, numbers of churches have settled down to maintain their home away from home.

Your church may be so comfortable the people have lost their pioneering spirit. Face it! If you and your church have stopped pioneering, you're settlers. It's time to start pioneering again. Here's how to do it.

First, believe in the power of the gospel. Paul described how the Thessalonians received the gospel: "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5; see Rom. 1:16). The gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ is powerful because God is in it. When it's preached, God works through it to

bring people to salvation. Yet, Paul makes it personal when he says, "our gospel." He had made the gospel his own, and so must you if you hope to preach it with power. You must preach the gospel out of your own experience of saving grace.

Second, expect the gospel to bring growth when it is proclaimed. A metaphor the apostle Paul used throughout his epistles was of *seed that grows*. "I planted, Apollos watered," Paul declared, "but God was causing the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). There is a living seed to sow—the gospel of salvation through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:1-11). When it's sown, God makes it grow. Luke reminds us "the word of the Lord continued to grow and be multiplied" (Acts 12:24). Paul noted that the same gospel was "constantly bearing fruit and increasing" (Col. 1:6). Bearing fruit is an agricultural expectation. A sower always plants in anticipation of the seed growing.

Are you searching for a leadership coach? Email Dr. Gary L. McIntosh at cgnet@earthlink.net for full details.

Third, encourage everyone in your church to demonstrate the gospel. The most powerful testimony to the gospel's power is loving people. Jesus affirmed, "all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34-35). Part of what gave the gospel power when preached to the Thessalonians was the loving relationships among all concerned. Paul noted. "Having so *fond an affection* for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also *our own lives*, because *you had become very dear to us*" (Emphasis added. 1 Thess. 2:7-8).

Fourth, cultivate a sending mentality in your church. People outside of your church have no interest in your world. You must connect with their world. Christ didn't say, "Hey! I'm up here in heaven. I hope you get interested in it." Rather, he came down to earth, entered our world, spoke our language, and felt our pain, so that he could take us up into his world (See John 1:14; Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). We need to do the same with people outside our church.

Fifth, teach everyone in your church to be a contagious inviter. Andrew invited his brother Peter to meet Jesus, and Philip invited Nathanael. In both cases, the invitations resulted in them becoming disciples (Jn. 1:40-51). On a

personal level, non-Christians, as well as unchurched people, are open to discussing spiritual concerns. It's invitations to church that are not as well received as in the past. Your people must still invite others, but to dinner in their home, or lunch at a restaurant, or some social event. Ask your people to use these times to share how Christ has changed their own lives.

Sixth, focus your efforts on who you are trying to reach, rather than those you are trying to keep. Narrow your focus from *everyones* to *someones*. You won't have a good outreach plan unless you can specifically say whom you're trying to reach. The best *someones* you should focus on are the folks your church members are already doing life with—neighbors, friends, associates, and family members. Have your people take an inventory of those they do life with but are far from God. Those are your *someones*. The obvious question is, do you know who your *someones* are?

Seventh, make your church highly visible in the community. If non-believers have heard positive gossip about your church, it will help your attendees invite and invest in relationships. In our secular society, around twenty-five percent of people are not predisposed to think of church, let alone attend one. What they are seeking is hope. Position your church as a place of hope, which means a place of healing, restoration, and redemption.

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