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# COST OF CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH

*by Daniel A. Brown, PhD*

As a church, we orient ourselves toward growth—not just in the number of people who call The Coastlands home, but in the quality of our individual and corporate life in the Lord. Our significance comes from believing in God’s plan to transform and utilize people for His glory. The more we are a part of that transformational and mobilizing process, the more we can be assured that our lives are counting for something. As Rick Warren says, “The sending capacity of a church is more to the point than the seating capacity of a church.”

For us, then, church growth cannot be separated from the fundamental growth of people as mobilized change-agents in their world. We do want a bigger church—wanting other than a larger church would be a statement of callous disinterest in the unsaved in our community. We want to grow big people who will, in turn, grow a bigger church. Growth isn’t easy or painless. It can be scary and unsettling.

From the many books/articles I have read, and from my own experience, let me offer you a brief overview of what it takes to bring about significant growth in any church:

- Much prayer—not just as an exercise of logging in time on our knees, but as an experience of listening to God for His particular leadings.
- A lot of hard work and time involvement—not burning people out with laborious tasks, but involving a huge number of people who each carry a significant load of responsibility.

- A sincere welcome of change—an attitude that embraces change both as a consequence of growth and as a necessary precondition for growth. Change leads to more change.
- An orientation toward the future—not a criticism of what has been or a disgruntled dissatisfaction with the present, but a determination to respond now to what will soon be.
- Risk taking—not a blind series of gambles, but a willingness to give the benefits of success more weight in our decision-making process than the potential costs of failure.
- Mobilizing new leaders—a determined effort to spot emerging leaders, to nurture them, to empower them by affirmation and responsibility, and to make room for them within the circle of more historic leaders.
- New ministry assignments—a flux and flow of people into different roles and into new kinds of serving and doing, so that almost everyone ends up doing things at least slightly different than what/how they are used to.
- Redefining purpose—a modification and development of the original mission statement for the church, taking into consideration what God has revealed, what people He has placed in this body, and what the windows of ministry opportunity are.
- Fresh programs and perspectives—an openness to ideas and possibilities which have not been considered before or which have previously been rejected; coming back around for another look and venturing off onto side paths which have not been explored.
- Additional thrusts in outreach—a purposeful breaking away from social and cultural restraints that exist within the church, and strategic attempts to break into near-proximity people of our community.
- A better assimilation process—a well-developed and refined system for making certain that everyone who comes to our church will have to make a conscious decision to resist being drawn into fellowship if they want to avoid it.

- Huge amounts of trust—a willingness to allow for the increased complexity which accompanies all change, and a willingness to trust decisions made by people who have had an excellent track record in the past.
- Teamwork and individual effort—maintaining an effective balance between working together and working alone; cooperating without letting others do all the work; taking initiative without insisting on your own way.
- Attention to the little things—an awareness that details quickly accumulate into patterns which send a strong message: messy-looking microphone cords, arriving on Sunday just in time to sit down, neglecting personal Bible study, etc.

Remember, growth doesn't "just happen." We must partner with the very process of growing if we want to grow. That partnership is costly for each one of us. Things rarely grow according to plan. Most large-church pastors tell tales of "catching up" to what God did in their midst; remaining open and flexible—along with being purposeful—seem to be critical to growth.