

Christian Reconstruction

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Critical Mass

Part 25: Low-Budget Steps to Church Growth

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:8).

God had a message to send, and Isaiah volunteered. Money was never the **issue**. Money is also not the main problem for the absence of local church growth. The absence of the Holy Spirit in the life and work of the local church **is** the number-one inhibiting factor. After that comes the absence of dedicated members: volunteers. Then comes the absence of a systematic program to mobilize the members, *i.e.*, absence of leadership. Only then is the absence of money a problem.

There are several possible reasons for the absence of the Holy Spirit: **sin** in the life of the local leaders, lack of prayer on the part of the members, an **amillennial eschatology** that **is** **suspicious** of church growth and openly hostile to revival, an **ethnic** enclave mentality that resists "gentile" **visitors**, or the Spirit's present unwillingness to bring salvation to the local church's prime **audience** (this sometimes happens on the foreign mission field). Until these reasons are pursued and shown to be irrelevant to the local congregation's situation, no new program for church growth should be adopted.

If you attend an **anti-growth** local church, it may be **time** to transfer your membership. Your efforts to build the local church will be frustrated. But if your congregation is willing to take some simple steps in order to grow, you should stay. Here are some relatively easy and inexpensive steps that could help. Suggest some of them. See how much resistance they meet.

Organized Prayer

Church growth should begin with a congregation-wide program of systematic prayer for church growth. Begin **this** prayer **project** with a **time-table** of anywhere from **six** months to a year. All organizational substitutes for this initiating prayer program must be abandoned. Systematic prayer comes first. Members should be encouraged to volunteer to pray at certain **times** each day for the souls of **specific** people or specific blocks **in** town, checking off on a printed sheet when they prayed and for how long. They should hand in or **mail in** this sheet weekly. **This** prayer program must be planned and monitored by the elders. It must be **official**, formal, and structured. I think the data on the sheets should be stored "in a computerized data base program. This information is in God's data base; why not in the local church's? Only **if** there is too much **resistance** to actual records should the reports be abandoned. **Military** scouts report to headquarters. Why not church members? The **idea** here **is** to make this program an organized effort **with** measurable **input** and **output**.

Having begun a program of systematic prayer for church growth, the local congregation must now make plans for a positive answer to prayer. These plans must be systematic. Volunteers must be requested from the pulpit, by elders, and any other way that the leadership thinks will work,

Invite Your Neighbor to Dinner

Begin a program that shows **families** how to **invite neighbors** to dinner. Our generation has forgotten how to do **this**, **which** is why nobody knows the name of the **families** three doors down the block on both sides. The dinner invitation strategy is part of a multi-stage invitation plan. The first evening should be for breaking the ice. The prayer before the meal may be the only sign of the religious commitment of the host.

The point is, friends invite friends to church. Every church should organize regular training sessions on how to make new friends. This can become a major benefit to members, not only for evangelism but also to teach people how to make new friends. The congregation's most successful friend-maker should be recruited to teach these skills.

Greeters

Greeters can be of two types: those who have invited specific **visitors** and those who volunteer to have a meal ready for first-time walk-ins. The first type of greeter must do everything that the second type does, but **with** a targeted family. Let us consider in **detail** the second kind,

The visitor may be part of the walking wounded, or a newcomer **in** town, or a church shopper-hopper. **In** each case, **his** immediate need is for a sense of belonging. **This** need is intensely personal. He **is** probably not walking **in** the door **in** search of better theology. He **is** not looking for a more **biblical** liturgy. He is **looking** for emotional support in a desert of **loneliness**. He is looking for an extended family. If your church can offer **this**, it will prosper. If it can't, it probably won't.

The greeter's crucial task is to serve as a surrogate friend **initially** and maybe a real **friend** later. The way to **initiate this** is through a shared meal. (Let's see: Where do we learn this principle?) The greeting family's wife should be ready to prepare a meal such as **chili**, stew, or soup. Better yet, the meal should have been prepared before the worship **service**. If no visitor shows up, the **wife** can serve the extra portions as leftovers. Families should be ready to eat the same meal two days **in** a row **if** no newcomer shows up.

It **will** take **time** to estimate how many greeter **families** are needed each week. A **minimum** should be two families. Volunteers must be put on a systematic schedule. The person who is in charge of **this** program should phone the volunteers

the **night** before church to remind them of their assignments.

Each greeter family should stand at the church door behind the person in charge of greeting. **His** task is to spot newcomers. He then introduces the newcomer to a greeter family, which then invites him to sit with them. Don't sit up front; newcomers get nervous being put on display. The greeter family can make sure the newcomers have hymnals and printed bulletins. **This** is crucial. The more the newcomer can be eased into the unfamiliar liturgy, the better. The greeting family has to serve as a **kind** of buffer, showing the newcomers by example when to stand up, **sit** down, say a response, or whatever. It would not hurt to whisper a **calming** word or two if things get off track. ("Sister Mary isn't having convulsions; she's just receiving a message from God. If this continues, Rev. Jones will have one of the elders lead her into our special soundproof 'extended message from God room,' and then we'll all stand and sing hymn 243.")

After the service, the greeter **will** invite the **visiting** family to dinner. If the **visitors** say no, then the greeter should immediately ask them over **sometime** during the week. Set a date. If there **is** still resistance, then the greeter should invite them back next week and offer dinner after church. This accomplished, the greeter should then excuse herself and then let the person in charge of the greeters know that there is an extra table of food available **if** there are surplus **visitors**. The coordinator can then see if some **visitor** was neglected.

The person coordinating greeters at the door had better have a gift for names and faces.

The Yellow Pages Listing

Your church **is** already paying for this. Your money is almost certainly **being** wasted. You should run a display ad as large as you can afford. The ad should lead with a statement of your congregation's **unique** service in your community, preferably one that no other congregation offers. Problem? If that **service is** either liturgy or theology, nobody **will** call. People don't care about theology and **traditional liturgy**. **Believe** me; they really don't. Unless your home missions program **is** self-consciously a program to **pick off** members of other churches, list a benefit for the **non-Christian** visitor. Write it in bold face letters, but not all capital letters, which are **difficult** to read. Try to keep the promise to 17 words or less. Do not list a slogan; offer a benefit that your congregation really can fulfill. It may take several **meetings with** members to draw up a **list** of the benefits for **joining**. Then pick one for the Yellow Pages headline. Here are samples,

We offer **service** opportunities for dedicated people who are ready to make a **difference in** [town].

We **train** young people to become successful: in school and **in life**

We help families struggling with financial difficulties to get control of **their** budgets and **their** lives.

Whatever your unique service proposition **is**, it should be prominently displayed in your Yellow Pages ad. Then comes the church's name (bold face but smaller print), address, **time** of **meetings**, phone number, and a **note**: "Call us for a free

map and a list of **our** Sunday school programs and **if** you want one, a daily **Bible** reading program for people **with** hardly any time to read." The **main** rule **is** this: do not waste space on your church's name, **its** logo, or anything except **its unique** service **proposition** and (if you can afford it), a list of other benefits you offer.

Set up a special phone line for the Yellow Pages ad. **This** way, you can track where these calls are coming from. Keep a record of these calls. The person who answers the phone **is** immediately ready to meet the Immediate needs of the caller. The caller should be asked to **give his** name and address, so that the free map (or whatever) can be sent. The caller is already expecting to receive a free item by **mail**, so he **is** ready to give out his address. You must get **this** reformation,

The Mailing List

The name and address go into a mailing **list**. even if this list **is** kept in a card **file with** 3 by 5 cards. Buy a cheap used computer. If you have almost no funds, buy a used Apple **McintoshSE**; don't pay over \$300. It **is** small, easy to use, and has a built-in screen. Buy three programs" **Claris Works**, **My Advanced Data Base**, and **My Advanced Mailing List**. The last one costs under **\$50**. **This will** get your mailing **list** started. The program **is amazingly powerful**. Start tracking the data: name, address, phone, dates contacted, responses, interests, business, children, etc. It is far easier to persuade a caller that your church offers him real benefits than to **build up** a congregation through **cold-calling**, door-knocking, and **tract-passing**.

The mailing **list** should be designed to identify the person's interests. The goal **is multiple** follow-ups. You should make at least seven contacts in eighteen months. Even **if** there is no **initial** result of the contact, letters or postcards sent every few months may produce a **positive** response. Include in the **initial** packet you send out to each caller a form that asks for — such information as family members' names, ages, **birthdays**, cultural interests, and other facts that **will** help your church to meet his needs. To get them to mail back the form, offer a benefit, such as a choice of two or three reports out of a dozen: how to get young children to behave better in public, how to help children learn to read, how to understand the Bible, where to get reformation on **family** budgeting, etc. The point **is**, offer a real benefit for the person to send back that data sheet. Then enter the data and use it to create **motivational** letters on a regular **basis**.

Conclusion

If the church **is** worth attending, it must get this message out to those who ought to be attending, in terms that these people will understand and respond to. This requires a coordinated plan. Set numerical targets for these recruiting programs" number of new visitors, number of repeat **visits**, number of dinner **invitations** from members to people on their blocks, number of contacts by mail per quarter, number of follow-ups by greeters. All of **this** should go **into** the computer. The elders should know how **well its** projects are working. The members should know that they are part of a team **with** a plan,

A bad plan **is** better than no plan. A bad plan can be revised,