

A banner with a green background featuring a field of grass. The text is centered and reads: DR. LAMAR E. SMITH CENTER FOR EVANGELISM & CHURCH GROWTH.

DR. LAMAR E. SMITH CENTER FOR EVANGELISM & CHURCH GROWTH

Not long ago I read a book entitled *Move* by Greg Hawkins and Callie Parkinson. This book celebrated what they learned from 1,000 churches that did an involved survey. This survey revealed the attributes of growing churches that were effectively making disciples. The church I served at the time was one of those churches that did this survey. The survey included churches of every type, theology, size and denomination. Several Methodist churches were included and two from the Central Texas Conference.

I want to give a quick summary of what the survey discovered. The following is what vital congregations of faithful disciples were consistently doing to sustain growth and effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

- They kept people moving, the church modeled personal and congregational momentum.
- The congregation felt personal ownership of the church's vision.
- The church pastored the community and the world.
- They embedded the Bible in everything.

I think you probably know that many Methodist churches feel like they are doing just fine, not growing but still doing okay. And in many ways, they are. They worship together, work on missions together, pay the bills, mow the grass and keep things going. But the reality is that a lot of our churches are in what I would call "stable decline." We know when the decline is precipitous because we can't pay the bills, no one is in the pews and we are looking at closing the doors. But stable decline is more deceitful. This happens so slowly we just don't notice or, as pastors, we might hope the next pastor can deal with it (there is always a lot on a pastor's plate anyway). Decline happens so slowly that the church family often does not notice. Metrics observed from long-term church attendance, as well as a look at MissionInSite can be helpful here.

The good news is with visionary and cultural changes it doesn't always require us to turn the church on its head. Creating momentum, communicating an appealing vision, pastoring our community with the love of Jesus and dusting off the Bible consistently and comprehensively. It's not that hard to do, but it does require intentional leadership, focus and consistency.

By the way, the church I served at the time was one of the top 100 attended Methodist churches in the nation. The Reveal Survey showed we had a score of 67 out of a possible 100 when it came to effectively making disciples. This was not an awful evaluation, but it wasn't good either. We made a lot of slow, healthy changes, and over the next six years, our attendance increased from 1,500 or so a weekend to, 2,500 or so a weekend. I am convinced if we had not responded to the survey, we would have stayed where we were, resting on our laurels and a stable decline would have set in. If you want to learn more, just google *Move* and the authors' names. This book is an easy and quick read but very insightful.