

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

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“Reaching people who have not been reached.” This might be the core of the church that has Christ at the center, a focus that extends from the marching orders of Jesus given to His followers. “Go make disciples of all the world,” and then, “Be my witness in all the world, beginning in Jerusalem.” In the 38 years I pastored a church, I found these two simple commands were hard to stay focused on for me and for the church family. The distractions and demands for me and the church were enormous. For me, the ability to keep the church growing was to believe that God wanted my church to grow. Biblical underpinning was what helped me stay on track, and prayer was the key.

- I developed a theology of church growth — the why that would motivate me and keep me and the church moving. I preached this theology, used it to influence church staff and leaders, as well as internalized it. If I don't believe that everybody needs Jesus, my church is probably not going to put energy and focus into reaching people without Jesus.
- I prayed consistently that God would help us reach people the church was not already reaching.
- In worship services, team meetings, committees, etc., we prayed together that God would help us grow and reach the people we were not already reaching. Every team was somehow connected with the idea of reaching people we were not already reaching, even as we served and blessed those we had already reached.
- Preaching sermons and message series that focus on reaching people and growing the church. Build a foundation as a church family around the biblical mandate to grow every member and they can be involved.

Besides partnering with God through prayer, which is a non-negotiable part of a growing church, it also helped us as a church stay connected with a common vision, the whys and wherefores we did what we did, made the changes we made and moved in the direction we moved. It was a unifying element which is very important, considering that growing churches can create a chaotic environment people need to adapt to and are not solely focused on members' needs.

Churches have cultures, and part of this journey to reaching people we have not reached is to create a culture of church growth. Many, if not most churches, simply do not have this culture because no one has led to create it. Teaching, preaching and praying a theology of church growth consistently and clearly is an important place to begin.