

It's impossible to grow a church if our emphasis is only about reaching the people we have already reached! I am confident that all church leaders know this. But do we operate and lead our church by this basic premise?

It's the most natural thing for us to think about, plan for, prepare for and serve our members and constituents. They are the ones we know. They are the ones we serve. They are the ones we love. They are the ones that pay the bills, give their daily expectation, and, often, even unintentionally demand certain things from church leaders and the church.

In my first church, circa 1978, I learned quickly that pleasing the members and meeting their expectations seemed to be the highest value for the church. During this time, the world was Christian and people were visiting regularly who had Methodist roots. I found that if I preached well, was nice to people and made an occasional visit, they came. They also knew this drill, as did our members. This way of doing church had an unexpected consequence. That consequence was a slow decline for the churches that operated this way, a decline that continued around the nation as the unchurched population increased and the reached population declined.

It took me years to learn how to operate differently.

Today growing churches are reaching people they were not reaching. They plan, build, envision, budget, prepare, lead and even pray around the principle of reaching the unreached. They know why they want to reach them, who they are trying to reach and continually plan and refocus on how they are going to reach them. It's churches that plan to grow that typically grow.

What would we change, do differently, begin or end if our goal was to reach the following?

- Millennials
- Single mothers
- The crowd that's burned out on church
- The crowd that's never been to church

- Older, recently retired people who have recently moved
- People dealing with addictions, grief or brokenness
- Baby Boomers in transition to retirement and looking for more
- A different culture or ethnicity
- A different economic group than we usually reach

The art of church growth is reaching people we are not already reaching. This is rarely an accident and most often intentional by churches and church leaders serious about making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.