

What Happens at “Grow My Church!”?

The *Grow My Church!* Course usually lasts 12 weeks with a couple of field trips in the middle. The Course is designed for a small group of 6 to 10 people. Some courses are held at lunch time. Most are evening courses typically lasting 3 hours.

Each gathering begins with a meal and a chance to get to know others. During the remainder of your time the group watches 3 video presentations interspersed with pointed conversations on the session’s topic. Everyone is welcome to contribute their opinion and ask questions. The emphasis is on exploration, discovery, and problem solving in an informal environment. The talks cover the following topics, acting as a springboard for group discussions:

- 1. Introduction – Festive meal, meet each other, course overview**
- 2. Landscape – The world and the Church in transition**
- 3. Leadership – Who’s in charge?**
- 4. Purpose – What are we here for?**
- 5. Worship – What are we doing on Sundays?**
- 6. Spirituality – Putting God in the middle**
- 7. Service – Reaching beyond ourselves**
- 8. Fellowship – Building Christ-centered community**
- 9. Generosity – How much is enough?**
- 10. Hospitality – How to welcome visitors**
- 11. Invitation – How to attract visitors**
- 12. Congregational Growth Plan – Our recommendations**

Who is *Grow My Church!* For?

The Grow My Church! Course is for anyone who has a deep love for their church and wants to help it grow. But The Course is also not for everyone – depending on your ministry context and your place in the congregational life cycle – this course may not be for you – so read on.

A core conviction of the *Grow My Church!* Course is that churches were created to grow. They are organic by nature and meant to thrive, expand and replicate spiritually and numerically. However, there are instances in which numerical growth is either very difficult or impossible (i.e.

congregations in small, post-manufacturing Midwestern towns where everyone's leaving). We might note that the crowds that followed Jesus fluctuated in numbers and that neither Jesus, nor the New Testament writers put much emphasis on numerical growth. And while numerical growth has nearly always accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, this does not mean every effective congregation will be around forever.

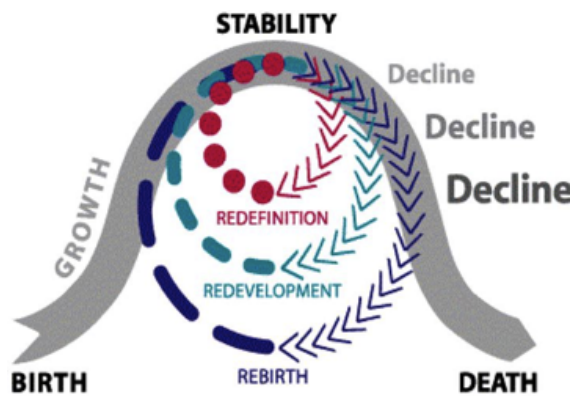
It's also true that a great number of North American churches that are not growing are just fine with that. Many congregations say they want to grow but deep down really just want things to stay the same, replace those who leave or return to what they once were. When push comes to shove, some congregations are simply unwilling to make the kinds of changes needed to grow.

So when we talk about turning around a decline, or moving a congregation off a plateau we must be clear that it is difficult work. It involves redefining and redirecting a mission that may or may not even be articulated. Growing a church is almost always divisive and will result in broken relationships. As one church consultant puts it, congregational growth cannot come without change and change cannot come without conflict. This work is for the brave, strong and bold who are as determined, as Jesus was, to see the Church make a real difference in the world.

The Congregational Life Cycle, depicted in the graph below is a helpful tool for understanding what churches go through and how we might approach this work. On the bottom left we see the birth of our congregation followed by an intense period of growth. In fact, those early days often go unmatched in energy over the congregation's life. As the church grows and reaches a healthy stability, programs become established and church attendance becomes routine. This is when church consultant Alice Mann says congregations form the answers to three crucial questions:

- Who are we?
- What are we here for? And
- Who is our neighbor?

How frequently, honestly and thoroughly we address these questions ultimately determines our place on the Life Cycle.



A distinguishing mark of healthy churches in the *Redefinition* mode is that they are routinely asking these three questions – they are constantly looking to redefine themselves. They are on the lookout for opportunities to fine tune, shift and realign their mission and ministries to keep up with changing needs. Preventing decline by making small changes during stable times is always easier than falling further and

having to make even bigger changes.

To use a few secular examples, both Red Lobster and Olive Garden redecorate every seven years. Campbell's soup has redesigned its soup can label dozens of times over the last one hundred years. Did you notice? Few people do, and that's the point. Redefinition appears in churches when new ministry styles are introduced and new ministries launched to meet modern needs. Healthy churches continually monitor their programs and groups that are no longer effective and are not afraid to pull the plug on endeavors that have grown stagnant.

Redevelopment is a more serious and intentional type of renewal that requires more than simply re-thinking a new program or two – these congregations are in much steeper decline, are not growing in attendance, budget and spiritual maturity. This leveling off has been going on for years and the congregation has certainly noticed. Red flags may already be raised and members may be asking basic questions like:

- How well does membership – social, economic and ethnic, fit that of the surrounding community?
- Are the buildings in good shape and in regular use by both the congregation and the neighborhood?
- Do members know why newcomers try us out – and why they leave?
- Is our income no longer sufficient to meet ongoing needs and are budget gaps being filled with past savings and 'emergency' appeals?
- Do members find their spiritual needs fulfilled here?

Rebirth is necessary when churches have turned their plateau into a permanent resting place. Often the case is that things have changed all around but the congregation has not kept up. Consultant Mann says that

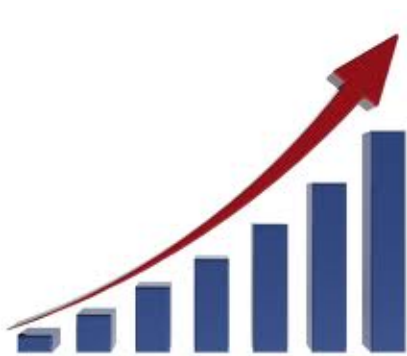
unless the deepest faith identity of the congregation does not match the context in which it is attempting ministry, the church will not grow.

Allowing the old congregation a proud and dignified death to make room for a new ministry is often the best way to go. Sure, it is sad, but it need not be the mark of failure nor condemnation. Celebrating a 'mission accomplished' is often nothing more than realizing the ministry context has changed and the Lord just may be calling forth a brand new kind of mission. Whether your church is ready for redefinition, redevelopment or rebirth, *Grow My Church!* can help you better understand the congregational dynamics that have gotten you where you are. It can lay the groundwork for critical introspection that can usher your church into a new era of vitality and renewal.

Why Grow?

Why grow your church in the first place?

Holy Scripture specifically, in Matthew 28, and generally, throughout the New Testament, speaks of growth, both spiritual and numerical. Jesus did not intend His followers to casually mention the Gospel to a few good friends, go home, and continue on with the status quo. Nor did He suggest that our relationship with Him would some day reach a plateau where we could safely stow it away, only paying attention to it on the occasional Sunday morning. Rather, the Gospel is about never-ending growth and transformation – as individuals and congregations.



That said, we churchgoers often tend to put more emphasis on numerical growth, perhaps as a by-product of our capitalist culture, which favors the quantitative, even though the Bible does not do this. Deepening our faith in Christ, deepening our spirituality, and our commitment to service in the world through the faithful ministry of the Church, is paramount in the Bible and in

this course.

Thus the cornerstone Scripture for *Grow My Church!* is not so much Matthew 28:19 as much as it is Colossians 2:6, "Continue to live your lives

in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Church growth is about growing more deeply into the vocation to which we have been called.

The fruit of healthy ministry, then, is found in changed lives, which is the goal of *Grow My Church!* This curriculum is not primarily about growing attendance in congregations, as much as it is about encouraging faithful ministry, which nearly always results in congregational growth. We seek to grow in purpose, faithfulness, service, spirituality, organization, etc. knowing that when we make progress in these areas we will most often see membership growth. As theologian Anthony Robinson points out, numerical growth is a secondary effect of faithful ministry, not its primary purpose. Growth along these lines tends to be slow and steady versus rapid and remarkable. *Grow My Church!* concentrates on establishing healthy structures, organizational habits, relationships, boundaries, and ways of being the Church that will endure over time. This is not a flash in the pan church growth program aimed at spiking attendance until the next ‘now and wow’ program comes along. It is intended to inspire honest reflection on who you are and rediscovering your first love, or a new one, with the goal of renewing your congregation for this new day.

Much of this work is done by simply returning to what our Creator first intended – growth. Just as the Lord planted a garden in Eden to flourish and mature, so, too was the Church created. Pastor Rick Warren says that churches are organic by nature – they were created to grow and when proper planting, watering and weeding are done, they flourish. Thus, our job is to pay attention to the things that nourish us and the things that don’t. It’s to identify the weeds – the things that choke out new growth and take away the valuable resources we need to grow. *Grow My Church!* can help identify these problem areas and return to fulfilling one of the Lord’s primary missions in the world – establishing a healthy, growing and outward-focused church.

The Grow My Church! Course includes:

12 Video Sessions - more than 4 hours of video teaching

12 Worksheets to accompany each session

23 Handouts to accompany various sessions

This is a completely downloadable course. Upon purchase you receive an invoice with a GREEN DOWNLOAD BUTTON -- you can immediately download, burn to DVD, and print out and start growing your church!