

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## Moving Off A Plateau: Part Two

Church growth is a complex issue and there are no simple answers. Thus, the following ideas for helping a plateaued church grow do not present a total picture.

Certainly none of the ideas listed below used alone will put a plateaued church back on the road to growth. They are, however, insights that should help lessen the grip of the stagnating forces and free the plateaued church to move forward toward renewed growth and vitality.

If churches desire to grow off

“Worshippers in plateaued churches must commit to following growth leadership.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

a plateau, they should consider the following ideas.

*First, allow the pastor to lead.*

The old statement that “the buck stops here” is evident in the fact that church growth, from a human standpoint, lies with the pastor of a local church. This means at least three things for plateaued churches: a commitment to pastoral longevity, a commitment to pastoral authority in making ministry decisions, and a commitment to pastoral direction. Plateaued churches must commit to following growth leadership from their pastor if they hope to get off the plateau.

*Second, create a growth consciousness.*

A growth consciousness will develop in the people as they understand God’s mandate to find and fold the lost; when they see the possibilities for growth in their own church; and as they experience small growth successes.

*Third, multiply groups.*

Plateaued churches are normally made up of one fellowship group. The fellowship is sweet and the people are neat. However, to grow off a plateau, a church

must start new groups and ministries to involve new people.

*Fourth, publicize the ministry.*

This means developing a first rate web site that provides information on where the church is, when the church is, and what the church is (see the December 2009 issue of *Growth Points* for more information).

*Fifth, focus on outreach.*

Plateaued churches must be intentional and comprehensive in reaching out to new people. It is the old concept of not putting one’s eggs into one basket. Several approaches to outreach ought to be developed. Specifically, the natural networks of people already in the church should be used to greater effectiveness. Keep trying different ways to evangelize until one works.

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# Put the pedal to the metal for renewed growth.

## Pastors and leaders must commit to a three-year process.

### *Sixth, motivate the worshippers.*

It is certain that a church cannot move off a plateau without the involvement of those already in the church. It is best to motivate people based on their gratitude to Christ, obedience to the Great Commission, and love for neighbors. Be sure to get people involved in your community gathering information about needs and working in service projects.

### *Seventh, add staff.*

One of the main reasons churches plateau is due to a lack of staff. Staffing at a ratio of one pastor for every 150 persons in the church is a good rule to follow. Additionally, if the church does not have a significant number of volunteers, say about fifty percent involvement, it will also be necessary to hire support staff at a ratio of one for every 150 persons.

### *Eighth, stress assimilation.*

In some situations plateaued churches do a fine job of reaching new people only to lose them with inadequate follow-up procedures. It takes a minimum number of visitors equal to your average worship attendance to see growth. For example, if your church averages one hundred worshippers, you will need at least 100 visitors per year to grow. If your church is seeing enough visitors to grow without growing, it is likely that you have an assimilation problem. Think through the entire process for welcoming guests and establish a new process for visitor welcome and follow-up.

### *Ninth, expand the church.*

The fact is some churches just do not have enough room to grow. Seating and parking are the primary issues to explore. Your church can only grow to around eighty percent of its seating capacity, and will only have an attendance equal to two people per car. To grow off a plateau most churches need to

go to two worship services, expand seating and parking, relocate, or use multiple sites.

### *Tenth, put the pedal to the metal.*

Once you decide to grow off the plateau, put in your maximum effort for three years. It takes one year to put a plan into place, another year to get it going, and results come in the third year. The pastor and church leaders must commit to seeing the process through. If, after three years you are still on a plateau, you should seriously consider obtaining the services of a church consultant. There may be other issues involved that only an outside resource person will be able to see. However, three years of concerted effort will produce good results in most churches.

The existence of plateaued churches in North America is a real issue, and a renewal of growth in many of these churches would greatly expand the kingdom of God. Growing, vigorous churches reach more people than do plateaued ones.

Leaders of plateaued churches must first see the potential for growth, and then make bold plans to move toward growth trusting God for the results. What potential do you see for your church? What plans have you put in place?



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