

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## Proponents and Opponents

As church leaders are well aware, bringing about change in an established church is wrought with difficulty. Yet, creating change in a newer church is very easy. Why is it so easy to do new things in a new church but so problematic to start new ministries in an older one? One of the major issues is the movement of people from being proponents to opponents.

There are four types of people found in churches. First, there

“Progressives live on the growing edge of the church and are proponents of change.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

are the radicals. Radicals (R's) are **proponents** of creative programs and a source of good ideas. They like the excitement of starting new ministry programs, which is one of the reasons they are often found in new churches. When radicals are found in older churches, they are a source of energy. But, radicals are usually expelled during the first decade of a church's existence, and thus are rarely found in older ones.

Second, there are the progressives. Progressives (P's) live on the growth edge of the church and are **proponents** of change. They tend to see the growth needs of the church before others do and spearhead new directions. Progressives are a major benefit to pastors in established churches, as they communicate the need for change to the conservatives.

Third, there are the conservatives. Conservatives (C's) see the value of the status quo and do not like to jeopardize their personal comfort. Thus, they are **opponents** of change.

They carry the bulk of the church's financial burden, and are good at saving money. They will only take risk when assured of a high level of success. Conservatives keep leaders of the church honest by asking a lot of questions, and often feel church leaders exaggerate statements to the congregation.

Fourth, there are the traditionalists (T's). Traditionalists never buy into change and are natural **opponents** to anything new. They have to be dragged along as a church starts new programs and ministries. They make emotional statements that radicals react to, but progressives and conservatives tend to ignore them.

**Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.**

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# Radicals enjoy, even desire, change!

## Traditionalists never buy into change.

The four groups—radicals, progressives, conservatives, traditionalists—do not exist in a church in equal numbers like figure 1 depicts.

Rads	Progs	Cons	Trads
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Figure 1

During the first generation of a church's existence (the first twenty years), about forty percent of a church is made up of radicals. Because they are natural risk takers, radicals are attracted to new churches. Progressives make up about fifty percent of the congregation. Less than ten percent are conservatives. Traditionalists are rarely found in new churches (see figure 2).

Radicals	Progressives	C's
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Figure 2

By the second generation of a church's existence (the second twenty years), the radical are nearly gone. Less than ten percent of a church will be radicals by the twentieth year of its existence. Around ninety percent of the worshipers are equally divided between progressives and conservatives. Traditionalists begin to make an appearance, with about ten percent of members now found among this group (see figure 3).

R's	Progressives	Conservatives	T's
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Figure 3

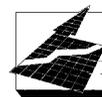
When a church reaches its fortieth birthday, radicals are totally gone, and the progressives often make up less than ten percent of the total congregation. Ninety percent, or more, of the people are now found among the conservatives and traditionalists (see figure 4).

P's	Conservatives	Traditionalists
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Figure 4

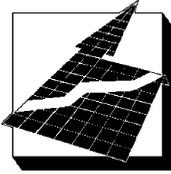
Understanding the existence of radicals, progressives, conservatives, and traditionalist gives clues to why new churches grow faster than older ones. For instance, new churches are empowered by people who like, even desire, change—the radicals and progressives. However, by the time a church is forty or more years old, these groups are rarely represented among church leaders.

What is the make up of your church? In what ways do these groups impact the growth and decline of your church?



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# One Church Four Generations

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

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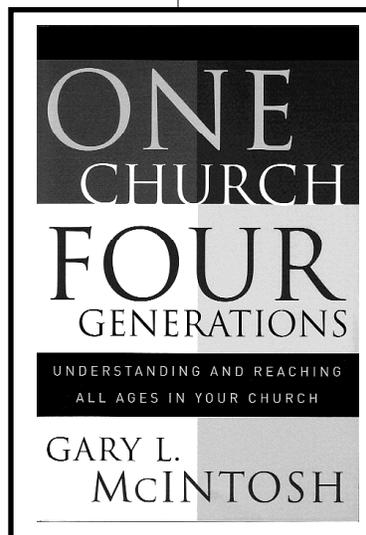
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