

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Transitional Churches

Grace Community is a church in transition. From its founding with twenty-six people in 1955, the church experienced solid numerical growth which peaked at 256 worshipers on its thirtieth anniversary in 1985. After that point, Grace experienced rapid decline to only 65 worshipers in 2010. Today, the mostly Anglo congregation keeps the doors of the church open by renting its facility to two churches—one Korean and the other Hispanic.

“Ethnikitis is an illness caused by changing community conditions beyond the control of a local church.”
—C. Peter Wagner

If the church continues on its current slope of decent, it is likely to close sometime in the next five to ten years.

Grace Community Church is struggling to respond to a changing neighborhood. When the church was started in the mid 1950s, the community around it was over 95% Anglo, with just 5% Hispanics. Like numerous other neighborhoods in Southern California, the area within a five-mile radius of Grace Community Church has changed. A recent analysis of the ethnic make-up of the church compared to the community showed the church comprised of 78% Anglos while the community is 40% Latino and 31% Asian.

Obviously, the church no longer reflects the ethnic make-up of its neighborhood. But, this is just the tip of a larger problem. Further analysis discovered the average age of church attendees is fifty years old, while the average age in the neighborhood is just thirty-four! The mismatch between the church and community is huge.

The illness facing Grace Community Church is called *ethnikitis*. C. Peter Wagner first identified this church disease in the 1970s. He described it as “a terminal illness caused by changing community conditions beyond the control of the local church.” The two major symptoms that are found in churches with ethnikitis are ethnic and socio-economic change.

Options for Revitalization

Wagner labeled ethnikitis a *terminal* illness due to the challenge of restoring churches with this disease to health and vitality. However, there are at least six possible options that churches with ethnikitis can chose.

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

New website address:

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Transition into a multiethnic church.

One percent of churches close each year.

Option #1: Close the Church

No one likes to think about closing churches. Yet, research has confirmed that around one percent of all churches close their doors each year, and transitional churches most likely make up the bulk of them.

Option #2: Continue the Present Ministry to the Dominant Ethnic Group

As the ethnic composition of a community changes during the years, the ministries of a church become less and less fruitful. When church leaders recognize they are facing the challenge of ethnikitis, they often decide to continue church ministry with very little change. Leaders who chose this option are essentially deciding to do nothing and die.

Option #3: Serve the People in the Immediate Community with Social Programs.

A second option that is closely aligned with Option #2 is simply to add social programs to serve the new ethnic groups in the community. While this is a better option than the second, it often just delays the inevitable.

Option #4: Develop a New Ethnic Church and Give Them the Facility.

Sometimes it is best to plant a new mono-ethnic church to reach the new ethnic peoples around the old church. If this option is selected, the Anglo church should donate the old facility to the new ethnic church and either merge with it, meet in a different room, or leave.

Option #5: Relocate the Church to a New Site

The primary option that transitional churches take is relocation. For many churches this is a wise option to chose

Option 6: Develop a Multiethnic Church

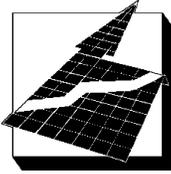
One of the best options is to transition into a multiethnic church. This strategy is most successful when the senior pastor has had significant cross-cultural experience, and the congregation has a high desire to demonstrate unity in Christ. The process begins by educating existing church members concerning the changing population trends around the church. Church leaders are educated on missional church growth strategies to enable them to understand what it will take to make to reach the new people in their community.

Is your church experiencing ethnic change in the neighborhood? If so, which of the six options above is your church adopting? Which should the church adopt? Why do you think so?



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How to Develop a Church Policy Manual

Ministry Insights for Church Leaders

P.O. Box 892589 Temecula, CA 92589-2589
www.churchgrowthnetwork.com

How to Develop a Church Policy Manual

Every church operates under a set of rules or guidelines. These guidelines may be identified as formal policies, informal policies, and tacit policies.

Formal policies are easily identified due to the fact that they are written and accepted through formal procedures.

Informal policies are unwritten rules that are used to keep things running smoothly.

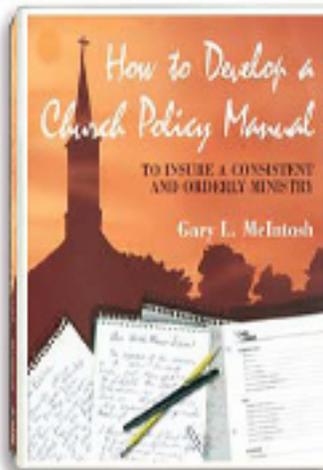
Tacit policies are unwritten and, very often, unspoken rules which are nevertheless used to make decisions in a local church.

Communication problems arise when the formal, informal, and tacit policies intersect. New attendees may be unaware of the informal and tacit policies, while older members use them readily in making decisions and setting ministry direction.

A policy manual is a way for your church to make public the informal and tacit policies of your church. By doing so, you will . . .

- Clarify how your church is run;
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- Effectively communicate with your congregation and staff; and
- Fulfill part of God's purpose for your church.

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