
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Leverage Thanksgiving for Church Growth

The Thanksgiving season provides a unique cultural moment when gratitude is already on people's minds.

Families gather, communities pause, and even the unchurched sense the importance of giving thanks.

For wise church leaders, this is an open door for outreach and discipleship. The question is: *Are you ready to leverage Thanksgiving for Kingdom impact?*

Thanksgiving provides fertile ground for church growth—numerical, relational, and spiritual. Churches that consistently engage their community in this season often see:

- Increased first-time guests in November and December.
- Heightened congregational unity as members serve together.
- Deeper discipleship as people learn to practice gratitude year-round.
- Renewed interest in outreach and evangelism.
- Boosted morale and energy levels among congregants.
- Expanded vision for the future.

Key Strategies:

As you prepare for this coming Thanksgiving season, consider some of these strategies:

Prepare

Begin planning weeks in advance. Clarify the “why.” Is your goal evangelism, community goodwill, or congregational discipleship? Communicate this vision to staff, leaders, and volunteers. Equip them with clear roles and resources.

Ask Good Questions

Here's a few to get you started: How can we meet tangible needs in our community this season? What simple steps will make it easy for members to invite others? How will we follow up with guests after Thanksgiving?

Plan for Follow-Up

Follow-up is often the missing link. Collect contact information at events or services and send a warm, timely invitation to return for Advent and Christmas.

Highlight Gratitude as a Gospel Bridge

Thankfulness naturally points beyond ourselves. Use the season to connect people to the Giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). A sermon series on gratitude can reach both believers and seekers.

Host a Community-Focused Event

Consider a Thanksgiving meal for those in need, a food-drive partnership, or a community concert of thanks. Publicize through local media and social platforms. Invite volunteers from your congregation and community.

Engage in Acts of Service

Mobilize small groups or ministry teams for practical service—deliver meals to seniors, rake leaves, or assist shelters. Service projects create natural evangelistic conversations.

Equip Members with Invite Tools

Provide simple invitation cards or digital graphics for members to share. Challenge each person to invite at least one friend or neighbor to a Thanksgiving service or outreach event.

Tell Stories of Changed Lives

Nothing communicates gratitude like a testimony. Plan for brief stories in worship services of how God has worked in individuals' lives this year. Authentic gratitude is contagious.

Reinvent Your Thanksgiving Service

Turn your Thanksgiving worship service into a Harvest Festival targeting people who often don't attend church. Focus the event on welcoming and loving newcomers with joy.

Launch a Gratitude Challenge on Social Media

Encourage members to share daily posts of thankfulness throughout November using a church-specific hashtag. Provide a list of prompts (e.g., "Thank God for a person who impacted your life," "Share a photo of a blessing this year") and invite participants to tag your church. This expands contacts with friends and family who may not attend church.

Offer a Thanksgiving Prayer Outreach

Set up a booth at a community event, farmers' market, or outside a grocery store the week before Thanksgiving with a simple sign: "How can we pray for you?" Distribute cards inviting people to your church, and follow up with handwritten notes or phone calls letting them know you prayed.

By intentionally planning outreach, empowering members, and connecting gratitude to the Gospel, you can plant seeds that bear fruit long after the turkey and pie are gone.

Remember:

**Thanksgiving isn't just a holiday;
it's a harvest opportunity.**

What unique opportunities does Thanksgiving present in your community for outreach?

How can your church use gratitude as a bridge to share the Gospel?

What one new Thanksgiving initiative will you commit to this year?

Growth Points is published twelve times a year. Subscription price is \$29 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. For other reprint usage, advance permission must be obtained.

Copyrighted 2025 ISSN 1520-5096