

THE CHURCH GROWTH PLAYBOOK



*Uniting Attraction, Discipleship, and
Multiplication for Maximum Impact*



WHY CHURCH GROWTH MATTERS

Rest assured, if your church loves God and loves people, God wants your church to grow.

Why?

God loves people. He wants every person in your community to flourish and that means a life connected to him. Your church is a key part of that plan.

Longtime ministry leader [Brandon Cox says it like this](#): “We need to talk about church growth because it’s a matter of life-and-death, eternal consequences for millions and billions of people. That’s why we should challenge our churches to grow by sharing the gospel.”

Dream big, pray bigger

No doubt the last few years have been tough on churches. Surveys show that a sizeable number of church attendees didn’t return after the retreat of COVID-19. Before the pandemic, 25 percent of Americans never attended religious services. [A 2022 American Religious Benchmark Survey](#) says that number jumped to about a third of Americans in 2022.

So if your church has struggled with attendance in the last couple of years, you’re not alone. For some, that’s a reason to dampen expectations. We can’t expect to grow in this season of ministry, can we? Maybe it’s best that our church just treads water right now.

Or maybe it’s time to pray boldly. If your church can reasonably see itself completing your church growth goal, it’s too low. Any goal that you don’t need to hang on to God desperately for isn’t worth having.

Remember the story of Gideon? He was already facing incredible odds in defeating the Midianites when God told him to reduce his troops in Judges 7:2. Eventually, God left Gideon with just 300 troops. God wanted to show the Israelites that the impossible wasn’t too big for him.

Growing your church isn’t the same as growing a business. You can do that through your own brain power. You grow a church when God does what only he can do.

Just like Gideon, your church may face big headwinds. But the impossible isn’t too big for God.

Pray that God will give you bold ideas to reach people who need to hear about him.

Pray that God will draw people to himself.

Pray for God to do what only he can do.

A Comprehensive Approach

If you've studied church growth and church health for long, you've likely seen a number of debates about the right way to move forward.

Some people argue for an attractional approach. Invite people to a weekly service. You grow by getting more people to show up and worship.

Others argue for a missional approach that equips believers to tell people about Jesus and invite them into a discipleship relationship.

Still others say the answer is discipleship. If people are growing in their faith, the church will grow.

And then some say, it's all about training leaders. The more leaders you develop, the larger you'll grow.

But the best answer is

... all the above.

That's why this guide follows a balanced, healthy approach to church growth that includes an attractional, missional (or invitational), discipleship, and leadership development/multiplication plan.



USE BIG DAYS TO ATTRACT YOUR COMMUNITY

Over 2 million people often descend upon New York City to watch the ball drop in Times Square on New Year's Eve. Regardless of the political party, around 2 million people have shown up for recent presidential inaugurations.

Even after COVID-19, people like to gather with other people. In today's world, anonymity is a value. People like to be faceless and nameless in a crowd, especially as they check out something for the first time.

That's why your church needs an attractational strategy.

Start with 'Big Days'

Attractational evangelism typically revolves around events, often called "Big Days." Nelson Searcy has leveraged Big Days to launch and grow churches in New York City and Boca Raton, Florida. In his book, *[Ignite: How to Spark Immediate Growth in Your Church](#)*, he defines Big Days like this: "A Big Day is an all-out push toward a single Sunday for the purpose of breaking the next growth barrier and setting an attendance record in order to reach as many people as possible for Jesus."

Any discussion of Big Days in church ministry has to start with weekend worship services. You can't have a Big Day every Sunday (it would defeat the purpose of having a Big Day), but you can (and should) leverage worship services to push through attendance goals.

Start by introducing a new sermon series with a Big Day. Whether you preach topical sermons or verse-by-verse, brainstorm ways to connect the focal point of your sermon series to a felt need in the life of your community. Then promote the series on social media and encourage your congregation to invite friends and family.

Leveraging 'Big Days' with effective follow-up

Probably the most common Big Days in the life of the church are Christmas and Easter. For most churches, those are the two highest-attended services of the year. Churches usually make a big deal of these days.

But there's a difference between making a big deal of Christmas and Easter and strategically using it to capture momentum. You leverage these days best when you specifically build a follow-up strategy. Here are a few ideas to make the most of any special day.

- **Plan your sermons after the Big Day strategically.** Consider making the Big Day the first part of a new series. Think of the next steps to the message of the Big Day. If you focused that worship service on an evangelistic purpose, consider sermons centered on how to grow as a Christian (such as prayer, Bible study, and fellowship).

- **Start new groups.** Small groups (or Sunday School classes) are important discipleship and assimilation tools. Often though, new people may feel uncomfortable with getting into an established group. Having new groups ready for guests to plug into can help alleviate some of those concerns.
- **Consider a membership class soon.** The great part about membership classes is they should help give an overview of the church. If a guest has a good experience on a Big Day at the church, they will be in the right frame of mind to want to know more about your church.

While 'Big Days' and an attractional growth strategy alone aren't the only answer to church growth, they are an important part of the process.



BUILD AN INVITATIONAL CULTURE

Nothing is more powerful than a personal invitation when it comes to incorporating people into your church. When someone whose life has been transformed by Jesus and discipled by your church invites a friend to a service, they are much more likely to attend.

So how do you make invitations a more regular part of your church's life?

You build them into your church's culture.

Churches should strive to build two specific "invitations" into the life of their church. The first is probably the easiest. We need to encourage our members to invite their friends and family to a church service. The second is encouraging them to invite their friends into the Christian life (also known as personal evangelism).

Here's why churches need to do both. First, not every believer is comfortable sharing their faith personally. While it's a great goal to encourage everyone to share their faith, some will always be more comfortable inviting them to church.

Second, encouraging both will be more likely lead to reaching different people. Most people need to hear the gospel multiple times, in multiple ways, in order to come to faith in Christ.

So from here on, when this guide uses the term invitation, it'll refer to both.

Here are a few ways to develop an invitational culture in your church.

- 1. Tell invitational stories everywhere.** Your church's pulpit is a powerful tool for shaping the culture of a church. The church's pastoral leadership needs to lead the way by building a habit of invitation in their own lives. Share those stories as much as possible. In addition, ask lay people to share their stories during worship services and other public gatherings. But worship services are just the beginning.
- 2. Train people to naturally tell their faith stories.** While some might find it more difficult to share their faith, all of us should be encouraged regularly to share our own stories of faith. Whether you train your congregation to do this as part of a regular discipleship pattern or you have a specific class designed to teach this, it's important that your church helps facilitate opportunities for these stories.

Get people to write their stories out and practice sharing them in a friendly environment. Then talk about natural ways to bring up their faith stories.

Normalize your congregation talking about faith regularly. This doesn't mean just talking about their conversion story. Give your congregation practice talking about how God is working in their lives on a regular basis.

- 3. Give people tools to help.** For example, consider creating church invitations with basic information about your worship service that your church family can pass out to friends and family. You'll also find a number of resources online that can help your people share their faith. If you are part of a denomination or church network, ask your local, state, or national offices for resources they'd recommend.

Building an invitational culture takes time. Don't expect it to happen overnight. Consistently apply the ideas above, and your church will get there.

NOW MULTIPLY DISCIPLES

Jesus' mission for the church is not to get people into the church building. It isn't even to tell everyone about him.

He was pretty clear on what he wanted the church to do.

Jesus said: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Jesus called us to make disciples.

So any evangelism strategy you develop must partner with discipleship.

Define your target disciple

Get a good idea of what your goal is. To do that, you'll need to define what a growing disciple looks like in your context. Search the Bible. Think about your community. Then list a number of attributes and spiritual disciplines that should be a part of a disciple's life. This lets everyone know what you're aiming at when you develop disciples. It gets everyone on the same page.

You might include:

- Regularly attends worship services.
- Reads and studies the Bible.
- Engages in ministry within the church and in the community.
- Gives to the local church.
- Demonstrates the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Your list will look unique to your context.



DEVELOP A SYSTEM THAT MULTIPLIES LEADERS

Once you've determined what a disciple looks like in your context, it's time to build a system that creates those kinds of disciples. Churches don't make disciples on accident. They plan to do so.

Build a plan that naturally urges disciples to take their next step on the pathway you've developed. For example, when people join your church, they should be encouraged to join a small group. If they've found a small group, they start looking for a ministry where they can serve. Then they start to get involved in local mission projects. Maybe they do several of those things at the same time. That's fine. The key is that there is momentum that moves them forward.

Eventually, your discipleship plan should produce new leaders. When churches struggle to develop leaders, they struggle to grow. Replicating leaders is typically a prerequisite for growth.

That's why you need to expect multiplication as part of your discipleship process. Many of your disciples will eventually move into leadership (small group leaders, ministry leaders, etc.). As you train them for those roles, encourage them to have apprentices they can train so that the ministry getting done will eventually double. Make multiplication a part of your church culture.

Give up control

Developing leaders means current leaders need to let go of some of what they're doing. There is no other way to build leaders. It's not easy. Fear comes when we let go.

But control and growth can't coexist. Before you start developing leaders, make sure that's what you're wanting. Many churches say they want leaders, but they simply want volunteers to do their bidding.

Church multiplication expert [Mike Breen describes](#) the importance of unleashing every potential leader in your church like this: "Christian leadership is about listening for vision from God within community and then being given the authority and power to execute that vision—to take new Kingdom ground. That's the birthright of every Christian...to hear the voice of their Father."

Until you encourage your leaders to seek God's vision like this, explosive growth will always be out of your church's reach.

Train leaders to multiply themselves

Multiplication is the first priority of every leader regardless of what ministry they serve in. You need to expect it. Many churches start out with this expectation, but growing churches build it into their DNA.

You'll need a system in place to ensure your leaders are actively involved in making disciples. As a part of this system, leaders must constantly be asked, "Who are you investing your life in?"

Spend some time talking to leaders about the mechanics of multiplication. In fact, the best way to do this is to model multiplication for them. Let them see how you multiply leaders.

As you begin to multiply leaders, you're ready for the next step. It's time to start something new.



START SOMETHING NEW

Nothing grows a church faster than starting something new. Whether it's a new ministry, a new worship service, a new campus, or a new church, starting a new work (particularly one that will replicate itself) gives you new opportunities to reach people you wouldn't normally have.

Starting something new is always a risk. Sometimes in church life, we naturally recoil from this. It's easier to do what we've always done than to risk starting something new that could easily flop. It's clearly a step of faith.

But if you want to grow, it's critical to find opportunities to do this.

Everything else in this guide leads to this point. When you attract, invite, and disciple, you're better prepared to start something new.

Why? To start something new, you need new leaders. You can't expect to stretch your current leaders to cover these new areas of ministry. You'll need people you've disciplined to be ready to lead.

You'll need to invite them into a relationship with Christ and into the life of the church, disciple them into a lifelong relationship with God, and teach them to replicate themselves as they begin something new.

So what are some new things you can start that lead to growth?

- **Start a new small group/Sunday school class.** Find a group of people who aren't being engaged by your community group (or Sunday School) ministry. Maybe it's an age group, a language group, or even a professional group. Try to gather a new Bible study out of that group of people. It can be people outside of the church, but even if you start a group among people inside of the church, it will still likely spur growth by giving people a new place where they can invite like-minded friends and family.
- **Start a new worship service.** This is particularly a good idea if your current worship services are nearing capacity. Find a new time (and ideally a new worship style) and start a new service. Encourage a few of your established leaders to start meeting in the new service, thus opening up some space at your old worship services and your new one.
- **Start a new church.** No matter where you live in North America, your community needs new churches. Do some research and find pockets of people in your community who aren't being reached by any church's current ministry. Begin to pray for opportunities to start a new congregation in a new geography, among a new language group, or for a new age group.

Those are just a few of the ways you can start something new and help your church grow.

DON'T DO IT ALONE

If anything in this guide sounds easy, it isn't by design. Developing a church growth plan that leads to starting new work takes effort. What you've read so far is just the beginning.

In fact, often a church growth strategy takes so much work that many churches never bring it to fruition. It's one thing to visit a conference, read a book, and outline a plan. It's entirely different to put the plan into action.

Paul realized the value of partnership in ministry, writing in the book of Philippians: *"I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now"* (Philippians 1:3-5).

So how can an outside partner help your church?

- 1. Expertise:** An experienced outside partner gives you wise counsel with leaders who have been in the trenches with other churches and ministries focused on growth. You're busy preparing sermons, training leaders, and serving parishioners. An outside partner brings in a specific set of skills related to church growth.
- 2. Objectivity:** When your team is involved in the day-to-day operations of your church, it's easy to get tunnel vision. Outside partners come to your church's growth plans with a clear vision.
- 3. More time:** You and your fellow church leaders already have enough on your plate. An outside partner can focus on your church's growth plan without taking away from your already packed schedule.
- 4. Accountability:** It's easy to let your church's growth strategy slide for a variety of reasons. Your partner will help you stay on track by scheduling regular milestones related to your progress.

Partnering with ACST

With our Growth Strategies Consultancy, you'll find a partner with the experience you need to take your next step into the future God is calling your church into.

We know how important fruitful growth is to your church. Our custom, onsite or virtual consultancy will help you find and fuel opportunities to start new ministry efforts that fuel new growth.

We'll partner with you to:

- Discover where in your community your church has a unique opportunity to provide assistance and blessings.
- Help you find the kinds of ministries that will flourish among the people you're trying to reach.
- Help you gather the necessary resources to confidently rally backing from both within and beyond your church for this new work.

To learn more about ACST's Growth Strategies Consultancy, visit acstechnologies.com/services/expertise/consulting/growth-strategies.

Choosing the Right Ministry Partner

The know-how you need from experts you trust.

ACS Technologies is the original pioneer of Church Management Software (ChMS). We are firmly dedicated to serving local churches all over North America by providing the best-in-class ministry software and service solutions that help you fulfill Christ's mission for your Church.

Tools and support to strengthen churches.

We build great software, but we don't stop there. We have a "service-first" approach that truly sets us apart. With hundreds of dedicated support and consulting personnel, your staff can reach our team 24/7. We're in your corner to help you with the ministry challenges you face every day.

Ideas and solutions powered by integrity.

Integrity is real for us, and it means consistently being faithful stewards by doing the right thing for church success. We have earned the trust of pastors, church staff, congregants, our employees, and colleagues for over 40 years.

A plan to meet your needs and move your ministry.


We're not just interested in satisfied customers. We see ourselves as your real ministry partner and will work with you to make disciples that will last for an eternity. We're excited to talk about your goals, create a plan together, and set you up with the software, service, and resources you need.

We believe in YOU!

ACS Technologies believes in the local church. Over 75% of our team has experience serving in their local churches. We know firsthand that serving the Church means serving people, and we take seriously our commitment to helping ministries like yours achieve their God-given mandate - to make disciples in their communities, states, and across the world.

Let's Talk

We know the challenges of switching or implementing new technology and how that can be intimidating. But we also know the unbelievable changes that have happened within churches that have partnered with us for their ministry needs. Let's connect and see how we can assist you in the greatest thing you do - grow God's Kingdom.

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