



ILLINOIS Focus



Ron Aguilera, President

CHURCH GROWTH: FIVE THINGS GROWING CHURCHES HAVE IN COMMON



members don't invite their friends, you probably won't grow. Of course, this assumes church members actually have non-churchgoing friends they can invite. Shockingly, too many church members don't. Many Christians separate themselves from the world, fearful over the direction of the world and its influence. But we are called to reach out...and it's hard to reach a world you don't love...or know.

THREE: CHURCHES THAT GROW HAVE A MEANINGFUL ONLINE PRESENCE. The online world continues to evolve. Church members, and everyone you want to reach, move easily between the digital and real worlds these days. Growing churches realize their online presence is their front door. People often decide whether or not they will attend by your online presence. Growing churches have found that a strong online presence

The age of Christendom is over. No longer is it a given that a person has a Christian worldview. Every year, it seems to get harder and harder to reach people for Jesus, or to even begin a dialogue on the subject. It's not for lack of effort. Most church leaders try hard, pray hard, and do their very best to advance the mission of the church to go and make disciples. But the facts speak for themselves. The majority of churches in the United States are in decline. All churches are losing ground in their community to the tune of 94%. (In other words, their community is growing faster than the church is.) And yet, even in the midst of that, some churches are growing. In those churches, there are a few common factors that drive this growth. In my observation, here are 5 factors necessary for church growth:

ONE: A CHURCH WITH MEMBERS WILLING TO EXTEND INVITATIONS. One of the things church growth literature does not talk much about is how much personal invitation fuels church growth. In almost every growing church you see this: people inviting their friends. So, if your church

TWO: A MISSION FOCUSED CHURCH PREPARES FOR GUESTS. It's one thing to invite your non-believing family and friends, it's quite another to have a healthy experience to invite them into. Our churches must prepare a worship service that is attractive and appealing and that lifts up Jesus. The music must be well done, the singing should be vibrant, there must be compelling preaching/teaching, and a good "welcome" strategy that makes your guests feel welcome.

draws people to come and experience a greater community. Growing churches offer both a great online presence and a powerful church experience.

FOUR: GENUINE COMMUNITY/ RELATIONSHIPS. The paradox of our age is that we've never been more

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ISSUE FOCUS CHURCH GROWTH

Six-Year BAPTISM REPORT

The following is a summarized version of a baptismal report from the years 2013-2018. As you might be aware, our conference is distinguished by 6 Areas. The Areas are largely differentiated as follows:

- Area 1 – Southern Illinois
- Area 2 – Central Illinois
- Area 3 – Western Illinois
- Area 4 – North Chicagoland
- Area 5 – South Chicagoland
- Area 6 – Hispanic Congregations

Here is a brief summary :

- Area 1 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 9 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 5 Congregations = 6-10
 - 3 Congregations = 11-40
- Area 2 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 7 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 3 Congregations = 6-10
 - 5 Congregations = 11-20
- Area 3 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 6 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 4 Congregations = 6-10
 - 1 Congregation = 11+
- Area 4 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 9 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 12 Congregations = 6-20
 - 4 Congregations = 31+
- Area 5 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 5 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 11 Congregations = 6-30
 - 4 Congregations = 31+
- Area 6 Total Reported Baptisms
 - 5 Congregations = 5 or less
 - 17 Congregations = 6-30
 - 5 Congregations = 31+

Brief Observations:

1. 34.96% of Congregations Experienced 5 or less Baptisms in the 6 years.
2. Largest percentages of Congregations experienced between 6 and 10 baptisms (25%).
3. Roughly 60% of our congregations averaged one baptism a year.
4. 42.5% of congregations baptized between 6 and 20 baptisms over six years.
5. 11.6% of congregations baptized 31+ over six years.
6. 13% of those experienced zero baptisms between 2013 and 2018.



Ready. Set.
GROW!

John Grys, Executive Secretary

As Jesus departed, He prepared his followers for what was about to happen. "You will be my witnesses," He began, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1.8) Shockingly, while the followers had a theological misunderstanding (revealed by the prompting question in verse 6), Jesus didn't allow that misplaced theology to get in the way of mission.

The Leader ticks off a missional progression of growth—even into those undesirable communities like the dwelling places of those half-breed Samaritans. Growth beyond the "friendly confines" of Jerusalem (though the accounts of gospel writers would say this location was not so friendly) would require the powerful presence of the Spirit. For the followers of this Leader to "missionize" the Samaritans would require more than change. Graceformation would be needed.

Acts is about the growth of the emerging church (becoming at first a recognized sect of Judaism) through the activity of the Spirit in the lives of those following this Risen Man. Church growth and missionization absent of the Spirit's activity produces whitened sepulchers. "Unless the Lord builds..." Yes, you know the passage.

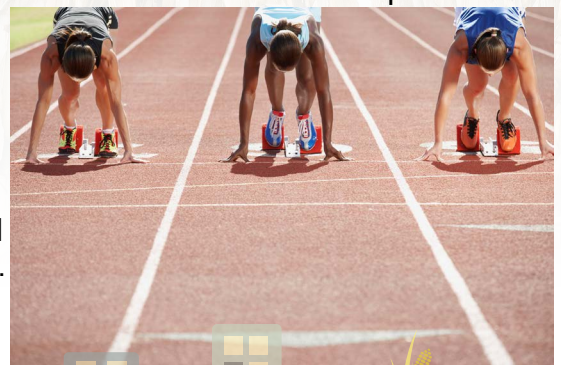
And so, Acts is about this activity and the ensuing growth that would impact geography and generosity. This audacious grace, enacted

and empowered by this personal Spirit, would take those followers way outside their comfort zone. Church growth always takes us out of our comfort zone. Always. Those held at a distance (represented by the Samaritans) and those held afar (represented by the "ends of the earth") were now to be brought close—not just in proximity but in unity.

And here is the paradox of church growth. For the growth of people formerly estranged, there would be the necessity of "strangers" and "enemies" becoming one in Spirit and part of one body. Church growth does not occur in isolation. It is a community narrative. For the connection of strangers and former enemies to share the same bread requires a heart growth the size of the Grinch. It requires the discomfort brought about by mission pursuit and the proper understanding that to truly love bears a hefty cost.

And this sobers me. Church growth is not for the weak of heart... and yet in many ways, it is exactly for the weak in heart. As I travel around our state and see many in our local congregations not satisfied with what is, but pursuing what can be (Acts 1.8), I take heart. The paradox of satisfied and discontent drives many to look beyond the barriers. For the work of the Spirit to advance geographically across our state, the Spirit must continually do the inner work on the hearts of those hands designated to be the hands and feet and heart of Jesus. Acts is about movement. Acts does not allow the reader to sit on the laurels of an empty tomb but to experience the power of the inner workings of the Spirit on the lives of those following their Leader. The mutuality of Spirit activity and human endeavor would take the story of the Risen One to places never imagined by those Acts 2 disciples.

Finally, and this is crucial for today, the followers of Jesus would need to learn the gift of abiding. Abiding presents the opportunity for the inner work to occur. Abiding provides for the follower to be present as the Spirit does the necessary inner work on heart and soul. For geographical expansion and barriers to be crossed, the inner landscape of the disciple must be transformed into the growing grace of God in those called to do his work. Ready? Set? Grow!



The Necessity of CHURCH PLANTING

Although the term “church planting” does not appear in the Bible, there are many references to planting seeds, preparing, and watering the soil. The very essence of the great commission challenges us to “go therefore and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). The explosive growth of the early Christian and Adventist churches was a cooperative effort between the Holy Spirit, preachers (pastors, teachers, apostles), and laity to plant new churches. Acts 13 and 14 gives us several key principles for effective church planting:

1. Church leaders came together to fast and pray. (Acts 13:1-3)
2. They sought guidance from the Holy Spirit for their strategy and direction. (Acts 13:4)
3. They faced “many tribulations”



but persevered with God’s strength. (Acts 14:22)

4. Their message was focused on Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection.
5. They worked with local churches attempting to gain support for their mission. (Acts 13:5)
6. The main focus was on reaching the “gentiles” or unchurched (Acts 13:47-48)
7. As they preached in cities, their focus was on making “disciples” and not just believers. (Acts 14:21)
8. They trained and



Pete Braman,
Ministerial Director

“strengthened the souls of the disciples”, and appointed elders over all new churches. (Acts 14:22-23)

The Bible gives clear direction on the necessity of planting churches. Ellen White emphasizes that, “place after place is to be visited, church after church is to be raised up.”¹ Planting churches must be an evangelistic priority again. As we consider church planting, what are the challenges and opportunities we face? Here are some common thoughts and misconceptions:

1. **Why do we need to plant new churches when so many of our churches are struggling to survive?** In a recent survey, 85% of our churches in North America are either plateaued or in decline.² Although church revitalization is another necessary discussion, research demonstrates that an outward focus is the main cause for turnaround in any congregation.³ A church that decides to birth another church often grows as a result.
2. **Doesn’t planting new churches create competition between churches?** The biblical model supports the concept that churches become complimentary

rather than competitive. The exciting possibility is that twice the number of new believers can be reached. A relatively new church

plant model gaining momentum is the multi-campus approach. Essentially, both the mother and planted church hold membership in the same place. The same goals and resources are shared. With over 80% of Americans living in urban settings today, there is a wide-open mission field comprising every people group and demographic. As with the Acts model, we must be prayerful and strategic in our planning.

3. Isn’t planting a church more costly to staff and organize? We must first see church planting as an investment and not a “cost.” Jesus gave everything He had to save lost souls. There is certainly a faith step required in starting new churches, but to use a common cliché, “money follows mission.” Not only is God faithful when we follow His commission to seek and save the lost, but many will rally in support of the compelling mission of our church. Studies seem to indicate that winning members to an established church is more costly than with a new church. The challenge to fund full-time pastors has created a need to explore additional leadership options such as elders, volunteer pastors, and lay pastors. Training and empowering lay leadership is both a blessing and a need.

4. The pastor already has too many responsibilities, adding a church plant to his/

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THE NECESSITY OF CHURCH PLANTING: CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

her responsibility is not fair or realistic. While it remains true that our pastors are often stretched with responsibilities, church planting will not succeed without the support of dedicated lay leaders. Ellen White states emphatically that, “the work of God in the earth can never be finished until the men and women compromising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers, and church officers.”⁴ The “primary task of the pastor, according to scripture is to train and equip the members for their ministry.”⁵ Paul outlines a vivid reminder of the power and potential of church planting in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

- Pete Braman

References:

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press, 1948), Vol.7, p.20.
2. Russell Burrill, *Waking the Dead* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing, 2004), p.39.
3. Nelson Searcy, *Ignite* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), p.91.
4. Russell Burrill, *Revolution in the Church* (Fallbrook, CA.: Hart Research Center, 1993), p.107.
5. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1915), p.351, 352.

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connected as a culture, and yet, never felt more alone. Churches that are growing prioritize community, not just ‘fellowship,’ where the people who already know each other talk and visit while new people go unnoticed. I have been to churches that claim to be friendly, but that usually means they are friendly to each other. The mission of the church is centered on relationships. Love God AND love people, and not just the people you know. If anyone can get relationship right, it should

be the church. So, ask yourself, “What are you doing to forge the deepest relationships you can forge between people in your church?” Then do it.

FIVE: CHURCHES THAT GROW ARE OPEN TO CHANGE. This might be the hardest, because we are creatures of habit. And yet, we know that the definition of lunacy is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. I challenge you to gather as church leaders and determine how to best accomplish God's

mission to “seek and save the lost” and to discuss whether you need to rethink the current methods to accomplish His mission.

God has called us to make disciples. In our day and age, it gets more and more difficult by the day. Consider which of the things above you might implement that will help your church growth and reach those who God misses the most.

- Ron Aguilera

INTRODUCING...

Jacie Reagan was born and raised in northwest Indiana although she claims west Tennessee as home. She has lived in Michigan for over 20 years and Wisconsin for six years. She has been teaching for 25 years. Most recently she was the Building Principal at the Milwaukee Seventh-day Adventist School.

She says, "I endeavor to create a Christ-centered classroom where students can learn more about Jesus and how to have a relationship with Him. I believe that spiritual lessons are VERY important and can be taught in every subject.

In my classroom I like to use a variety of teaching strategies – cooperative learning, projects, and discussions. I strive to make my classroom a safe place for all students to share information, ask questions, and learn. I love to work with children and see them grow in learning, maturity, and in a relationship with Jesus.

My husband and I have 8 children and 24 grandchildren living in Michigan, North Carolina, Illinois, and Florida. Two of our sons are in the Army. I love to read, hike, cook, sew, do crafts, and spend time with my family, especially my grandchildren."

Jacie is the new Grade 5-8 teacher at North Aurora Seventh-day Adventist School.



Pastor Beett Kwon, a native of Korea and a fourth generation Adventist, has grown up in Korea, the Philippines, and the US. He is married to his academy friend, Janelle, and they are proud parents to 5 year-old Gracie, and 2 year-old Paul. He graduated from Columbia Union College (now Washington Adventist University) and Andrews University Seminary. Pastor Beett has pastored in Michigan for six years and is currently pursuing a PhD in New Testament at Andrews University.

He has joined the Illinois Conference team as part-time pastor of the Lombard Seventh-day Adventist Fellowship Church.



Jonathan Burnett
Senior Pastor, North Shore Church

GROWING YOUNGER

Let us imagine a fictional individual. She is a millennial. Let us call her Milly. Milly is 27 years old, has a Master's degree and a good career. She is health conscious, unmarried and politically liberal. Milly was taken to church by her grandmother as a child. She stopped attending regularly in her late teens and after college no longer considered herself an Adventist Christian. Milly has nothing against the church but does not feel that it is relevant. Her views on the LGBTQ community and social justice differ significantly from those of her grandmother.

Milly has a very active social life and spends her free time meeting up with friends, volunteering, and consuming art and culture. As she nears her third decade, Milly is questioning her ultimate purpose in life. She wonders if she will meet someone with whom to share her life. She longs for something to bring meaning into her life and at times wishes she could find a church community that would be accepting of her and her views. She has a level of discomfort with the idea of joining a first-day church (although she attends occasionally) but she does not know of an Adventist church where she would feel accepted.



Let us imagine another fictional person. She is a member of Generation Z (currently aged 7-23). Let us call her Genny. Genny is 12 years old. She is full of life and optimism. Genny's friends are very important to her. She spends a lot of time on her phone connecting with them on ever-changing apps. Genny only uses Facebook to communicate with her Grandma.

Genny is technically a child, but life is changing rapidly and in a couple of years she will be starting high school. She has already met the boy with whom she will share her first kiss and over whom she will experience her first heartbreak. At times Genny is mature beyond her years. At times she is the girl who loves playing with her friends at the park.

Genny comes to church with her grandmother. She has a few friends her age. There is not much happening at church for her age group. Genny feels too old to fully engage in programs for the kids. Genny enjoys the modern worship songs the young adult praise team sings every other week. Genny would like to play the drums for the praise team but the young adults do not seem to notice her or her peers. Genny likes the pastor but his sermons go over her head. She wishes he would talk more about how we know the Bible is true and explain how dinosaurs fit in the story of creation. Genny loves church; she believes in God. However, she has questions. She is looking for something meaningful to be involved in with her peers.

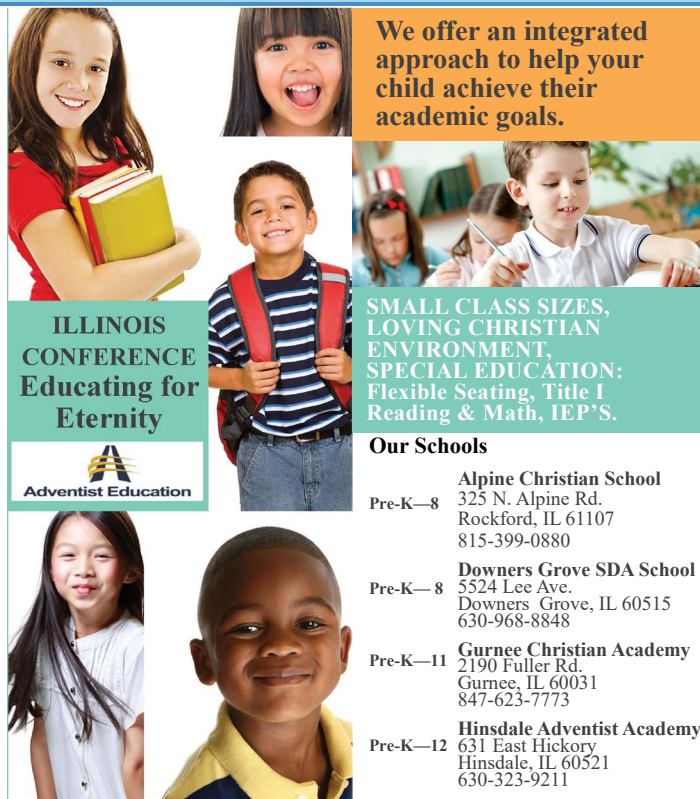
In 15 years Milly will be 42 years old, still in the prime of her life, but now with kids, a mortgage etc. In 15 years Genny will be 27! That's right, the annoying 12 year olds in our church will be in their twenties before we know it!

What if for the next 15 years we put all our energy into them? What if they became committed disciples of Jesus? What if we empowered and equipped them to reach their generation? What if in 15 years' time, we weren't wondering how to reach Generation Z - because we never lost them?

Of course, we must focus on making our churches welcoming for our lost Millennial sheep. We should be prepared to leave the 99 to search for the one. However, we cannot continue to make the mistakes, which caused us to lose them when they were younger.

Jesus said, "Don't push these children away. Do not ever get between them and me. These children are at the very center of life in the kingdom." Mark 10:14 (The Message)





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Phone: 630.856.2850

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Email: info@ilcsda.org

Address:

619 Plainfield Road
Willowbrook IL 60527

Illinois Focus Editor: Shona Cross
Design: Heather Lanphear

