

Cultivating Growth In Your Church

Tim Price / Harvest Ministry Teams / 407 Edwardsville Road / Troy, IL 62294 / 618-667-6241 / www.harvestministryteams.com

There are a few words that need to stay on our hearts and minds; in our vocabulary and conversation when we are cultivating growth in our church and ministries.

Hope – Any local church – no matter the size, attendance or budget – can offer hope. Extend hope to the congregation, the families and their friends. Extend hope to the community and region. Share the hope of Christ every chance you get, as it says in First Peter, “*always be prepared to give an answer should someone ask*”. Sometimes, extending hope, doesn't have anything to do with talking - but with being present.

Authenticity - What does your church do that is "uniquely" you? Hospitality? Is it the annual float in the parade? The Christmas program? Hosting a Boy Scout Sunday? Doing a food pantry? Concerts? Certain style of music during worship? VBS? Exceptional parking team? Occasional special kid's events? You have to find those things that fit the nature of your church / congregation and begin "blessing what you can bless". Encourage it, grow it and do it from the heart - with all you have. Some churches grow based on one particular thing they do and do well - and it might only be a once or twice a year thing. Be authentic in your desire to grow the church for the kingdom's sake and the mission of the gospel. Be real with people.

Compassion - Have compassion on people - on all levels. For the hungry, helpless, and lost. But also for those in your community who seemingly have all they need. They need a church to awaken in them and look after their spiritual needs. This is a hard thing to do when so often, people seem so self sufficient or ingrained in their own needs. But, a church that compassionately looks beyond themselves, through the eyes of Christ, grows - it's seems to be the only option. Have compassion on the people who drive by your church and wonder "What goes on in there?" You don't need a particular compassion committee to have compassion – just practice being compassionate. Pray for compassionate hearts among your congregation.

Consistent & Effective Communication - Up to date signs, posters and communication is crucial for creating opportunities for people in your congregation to extend compassion and for others to receive it. We need to incorporate banners, posters around town, yard signs, emails, and anything else to consistently, compassionately, carefully, and contagiously let the world know of the hope they can find in the church and through the lives of Christians. Take full advantage of free press releases, email blasts, and postcards placed in businesses around town. Outdoor banners are cheaper now than ever before – something around \$1.50 a square foot - full color: www.signs4superior.com. Email newsletters are easier than ever before with companies like www.constantcontact.com. It also seems that the idea of creating communication pieces is something that is pretty fun to delegate for someone who enjoys computer graphics and design. Consistent and effective communication also helps present an image to the community. And as I learned in marketing class once upon time, “post consumer advertising” is sometimes a great energy booster for your product. Many times effective communication helps boost the moral and excitement of those already attending our church and this in turn helps generate excitement for personal invitation (which is still the number one way that people become connected).

Helpfulness – Is the church helpful? What ways can we be helpful? Even without large programs, indeed, even a church with a single Sunday morning worship service can be helpful. We need to make sure that one hour is helpful to people's lives. How can we make it so? Provide

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fun children's ministry. Create, with the best you have, awe-filled worship. Preach messages that help people. Give people a chance to hear of real Life - Life with a capital "L" - Life in Christ Jesus - and the things He teaches. Make sure you teach, not theologize; be relevant and relational, not rhetoric-al; be helpful, not just homiletical". Talk to people. Call them. Offer to help. Extend care. Love them. Model that for your congregation.

Key Leaders - Always have something in mind for the person who comes up and desires (either with words or actions) to go deeper, help out, take part, get involved. Also begin the practice of thinking "who would enjoy helping to make this happen?" anytime you are about to begin a new endeavor, bring someone along side you. The church, no matter how small or large, is equipped with the gifts and talents needed to accomplish its mission in that particular part of the world for that particular time. The pastor isn't there to alone "do" the ministry. The pastor is there to care for and shepherd the flock, but the flock does ministry. Sheep beget sheep. How does a church grow? By being full of strong, healthy sheep. Always be praying for and waiting for key leaders to emerge, join or show up in your congregation. Pray for servant "stars".

Shepherding People - Before meetings, during gatherings and any time you can, share stories of faith, encounters, answered prayer and get to know people in your congregation. Befriend them. Love them - have coffee, lunch or breakfast with no agenda.

Have Fun (as Dr. Ken Callahan would say) - Whatever you can have fun doing - do it. If it's adding a children's sermon, a one shot kids event, a concert, a fundraiser, a "new year open house" in your home for the congregation, recruiting Sunday school teachers, planning for a major event, a short term Lenten Sunday school class, or maybe a series of fun nights during the summer. Whatever it is, just plan it and do it. And have fun in the love and freedom we find in Christ. That will be contagious.

"These are a few words (though there are many others as well) to keep in our conversations as we are cultivating growth in our church. Some of these thoughts came from my notes and reflections after having Ken Callahan, noted author and church consultant, at our church a few months ago. Around that same time, I received a question over email from a pastor, these are some of the thoughts I sent to him.

*Tim Price
Director, Harvest Ministry Teams
Worship Design Pastor, Troy UMC, Troy, IL
tim@harvestministryteams.com
618-667-6241 ext 414*