



Eight Steps to Grow Your Church

By Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church

Do you realize that if your weekend attendance totals about 90 people, you're an above average church in the United States? If you're wondering what you need to do to grow your congregation, here are eight steps that can help you break an attendance barrier:

Decide that you really, really want to grow

Believe it or not, the primary barrier to church growth is desire. Do you really want to grow? If the answer is yes, then you must commit to this goal and be willing to accept changes...and the people in your congregation must also be willing to accept changes.

The Bible says, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone. But if it dies, it then bears fruit." In order for a church to grow, some things have to die. Those who had intimacy with the pastor have to learn to share him with new people. They have to be willing to let go of the control they have in certain decisions and in certain areas.

It takes an incredible unselfishness. They must be willing to die to some traditions, to some feelings, to some relationships in order for the kingdom of God to be advanced. That takes a lot of maturity.

The role of the Pastor must change

Once you decide you want to grow, you'll need to analyze your role as pastor. You must be willing to change from minister to leader. If everything depends on you - if you have to personally minister to every person in your church - then the church cannot grow beyond your own energy level. And that is a barrier! You become the bottleneck, an obstacle to growth.

This is called the Shepherd-Rancher Conflict. As the pastor of a little church you know everybody, you do all the praying, all the baptizing, all the teaching, you know every family, every kid, every dog and cat and you shepherd everybody personally. But there's a limit to how many people you can personally shepherd.

As the church grows you must change roles from Shepherd to Rancher. The Rancher helps oversee the under-Shepherds. Practically everybody on my staff does more weddings and counseling than I do (in fact, I do very few now because I don't want to show favoritism among our 17,000 members).



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You must be willing to let other people share the ministry. Ask yourself, “Would I be happy being a Rancher?” If you answer no, then I suggest you take on a goal that your church will sponsor new churches – so you’re still growing, but in a different way.

Mobilize members for ministry

Be willing to give up some leadership and entrust ministry to the people in the pews. After the congregation has decided it wants to grow, then start teaching the ministry of the laity and talking about the importance of every believer using their unique gift to minister to the body.

Let your people know, “If you don’t do your part in ministry by sharing your unique gifts, then the rest of us get cheated. If I don’t do my part in ministry, then you get cheated.” Help your people understand this concept and mobilize them to begin ministering.

Begin having multiple services

If you’re not already doing so, I encourage you to seriously start planning for it. By offering people a choice of services, you’re effectively putting another hook in the water.

Multiply your staff

In order to grow past that 200 barrier, you must begin moving to multiple staff. You must begin to specialize the staff under your leadership.

Plan big days

The best way I know to break through barriers is to break a few, all at one time. Plan a big day – an event – and your numbers go up. Yes, they go back down afterwards, but not as far as they were before the event. Keep doing this and you grow. Big holidays are an obvious time to concentrate on events – Easter and Christmas. Plan outreaches to the community.



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Have multiple cells

People will often complain about not being cared for when the real issue is that they're losing control. "There are so many people here I don't feel like anybody cares for me anymore" is a common complaint. Another is, "The pastor is too busy for me now." Caring is a legitimate issue, but you can respond through the multiplication of cells - groups of 8-12 people. Cells become tools for caring for the body.

Expand your facility

At Saddleback, we had over 10,000 members before we ever built our first building, so I'm not advocating rushing out to build a facility. In fact, many churches build too small, too fast. What I'm saying is – you need to plan for growth and project out what your needs will be.

Pastor Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., in 1980 with one family. Today, it is an evangelical congregation averaging 22,000 weekly attendees, a 120-acre campus, and has more than 300 community ministries to groups such as prisoners, CEOs, addicts, single parents, and those with HIV/AIDS. Recently, the church fed 42,000 homeless people – three meals a day – for 40 days.

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Kurt Williams, NACDB CCC, LEED AP, is a Design/Build veteran at T&W Church Solutions with over 25 years in the industry, 20 of those years guiding over 100 churches through the various stages of Planning, Designing and Building their new facilities. T&W Church Solutions is a Design/Build firm who partners with ministry-focused architects to serve the churches of Central Indiana as well as the only NACDB (National Association of Church Design Builders) Certified Firm in Central Indiana. Kurt can be reached at kwilliams@twcorp.net.