



UNLIMITED GROWTH

A NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN FOR
CHURCH ORGANIZATION AND GROWTH

MIKE MAZZALONGO

Copyright © 2017 by Mike Mazzalongo

Paperback ISBN: 978-1945778544

Hardcover ISBN: 979-8876404664

BibleTalk.tv

14998 E. Reno

Choctaw, Oklahoma 73020

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977,
1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by permission.

(www.Lockman.org)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE	5
2. A BIBLICAL PLAN FOR GROWTH	19
3. THE 5 BIBLICAL MINISTRIES	35
4. IMPLEMENTING THE NEW TESTAMENT PLAN FOR GROWTH	51
5. 8 UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES FOR NATURAL CHURCH GROWTH	61
APPENDIX A MINISTRY FLOW CHARTS	75
APPENDIX B IDEA WORKSHEET	79

1. Remembering Who We Are

A Faithful New Testament Church

I'd like to begin this study by reviewing some of the requirements necessary to remain and flourish as a faithful New Testament church. The discussion about growth and unlimited potential can be stimulating, but we must first consider if we are willing to pay the price that these require.

WHO ARE WE?

We cannot preserve or grow something unless we know well what that thing is. Let us begin, therefore, by describing what a faithful New Testament church actually is.

A. Historically

We come from a Restorationist Movement begun in Europe and spread to the frontier of America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Restoration Movement began and continues to be an effort to shed Old-World denominational traditions and religious hierarchies in favor of the simple instructions given in the Bible for church organization and Christian living. The Churches of Christ seek after the Christian life taught by Jesus and His Apostles in the New Testament. It was this idea that appealed to me as a Catholic when I began to study the Bible in a serious way (which meant that I was willing to obey and put into practice the things that I understood as I studied God's word).

Eventually, the churches that espoused this approach (i.e. restoring and practicing only those things which the New Testament taught and commanded, and leaving behind those commands and traditions that had been initiated by human church leaders without a biblical base) were referred to as "Churches of Christ." These New Testament Christians (as they often called themselves) spread this restoration ideal throughout the world and now have thousands of congregations related primarily by the shared concept that only God's word is used to establish congregations of the church, and guide individual believers in spiritual matters, moral conduct, church organization and Christian living. This is why in the Churches of Christ there is no higher authority than the leadership of a local congregation (because in the New Testament each congregation had its own leadership structure and no person or committee had authority over a group of churches).

This and all other features that distinguish the Churches of Christ from denominations or sects are based on the foundational idea that all matters of church organization, conduct and teaching must be based on the instructions found in the New Testament in order to have authority for implementation. This is the reason why churches of Christ are different from Catholic, Baptist, Mormon or other church groups that identify themselves with Christ. This particular notion is based in part on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 28:19-20:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus' instructions as to the main mission of the church, making disciples, and the internal task of the church, teaching the church to know and obey what Christ taught (no room here for additional teaching by mere human thought) are clear and easy to understand even if they are not always easy to obey.

B. Theologically

A New Testament church is one that uses only the Bible and considers only the New Testament as the plan and guide for Christian moral teaching and conduct. Church of Christ theology is very simple. We are committed to doing the things that the Bible gives us to do, whether it be the preaching of the Gospel, worshipping God, or establishing and organizing the church, we are committed to doing these things in the way that the Bible instructs us to do them. Some refer to this approach as Pattern Theology. For example: Let us say that you have a pattern for a dress. If you use this pattern you can produce that dress a million times and always end up with the same garment. In Pattern Theology the Bible (specifically the New Testament) contains the pattern for the church. If we follow the pattern contained in the New Testament for the Christian church, we will be able to reproduce it generation after generation until Jesus returns. This pattern is such that it makes allowances for technical advances and different social and cultural settings. No matter the age or place, however, the New Testament provides the clear pattern for the establishment and function of the body of Christ, the church, in every generation.

To see how this approach works, let us take baptism as an example. The New Testament teaches (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:37-47) that those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God are to express that faith by repenting of their sins and being immersed in water (in Greek, the language in which the New Testament was first written, the word "baptize" meant to immerse) for forgiveness and the

reception of the Holy Spirit. The grammar, context, history and imagery all say and describe these actions. The candidates for baptism, therefore, are repentant believers and the sequence of their response to Christ according to His word is: belief, repentance and baptism. The results are forgiveness of sin, reception of the Holy Spirit and entry into the body of Christ, the church. Any deviation from this teaching and practice is a change from what the New Testament has instructed and is, therefore, not permitted. Pattern Theology respects the fact that both the Old and New Testament prohibit any changes, additions or omissions of its teachings (Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19).

A New Testament church, therefore, will follow this pattern of instruction exactly when teaching someone the gospel and how they are to respond. This reasoning and approach is followed for all aspects of teaching concerning Christian life, service and practice. We ask ourselves: "How does the New Testament instruct us in this matter?" It is this history and theology that not only makes us unique in the religious world but also links us to millions of other New Testament Christians around the world.

Pattern theology and its practice are what make the Churches of Christ unique in the religious world. Unfortunately, in recent years, many have moved away from this approach developed by early restorationist preachers and teachers (Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, etc.) in the desire to become similar and acceptable to the religious world in general. In doing this, many New Testament congregations have dealt away their historical and theological identity to the point where they have become no different than the denominational churches that the original Restoration Movement tried to separate from in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when these ideas began to take hold.

C. Character

Some of the things I've said so far are probably familiar to you. The character of the church, however, might be a less familiar idea. We, in the Restoration Movement, may all be Churches of Christ, but we do

not all have the same character. Just as children raised in one home by one set of parents mature with different characters, churches adhering to Restorationist principles also develop and mature differently. Here are seven of the main "types" of New Testament churches that can be found anywhere in the world:

1. Struggling Mission Church

This type is usually about 50 members or so with a missionary who preaches and serves as the minister. There are usually no elders or deacons in mission churches and this type of congregation stays this way for a few generations until indigenous leadership can be cultivated.

I worked with this type of congregation in Montréal, Québec (1984-1990). It was a New Testament church, but this was its type. I was the only minister and on Sundays I can remember opening the doors to the meeting place, turning on the heat, preparing the communion and then greeting the members as they would arrive. I'd lead singing, preach the sermon and shake everyone's hand as they left. Once finished, I'd shut everything down, take the trash to the corner and go home. This would be the norm until members were trained to take over various responsibilities for leading in worship, maintenance of the building, teaching and involvement in personal work. It was slow and sometimes discouraging, but necessary when establishing a new work where there were no other congregations planted (this congregation is still active and faithful with its own native preacher, building and mix of young and older members to this day).

2. Urban Team Mission Church

This is a mission point church where the mission team approach has been used. In other words, several missionaries converge on a spot in order to establish a church. This approach yields a much faster result in producing an indigenous local church with its own leadership.

3. Covenant Church

Covenant churches come in all sizes. They are congregations that have reached a plateau in their growth and for whatever reason remain at a certain size and effectiveness without much change from one year to the next. Their objective is to maintain a faithful presence in their community and provide ministry to their members, and in most cases support mission works in other places. Most Churches of Christ fall into this category.

4. Growing Church

Growing churches also come in all sizes and shapes, but what is unique about them is that they consistently exceed the national average of between two and four percent in their growth rates. A growing church is one experiencing anywhere from five to fifteen percent net growth of new members each year (Gary McIntosh - TheGoodBookBlog.com). Growing churches usually struggle with growth management issues. For example:

- How do we minister effectively to more and more people?
- We're running out of parking space.
- We need more Cradle Roll classes.
- We need to hire more ministry or support staff, etc.

5. A Dying Church

The death of a church has many causes:

- Population shift
- Failure to adapt
- Aging without renewal
- False or poorly focused teaching
- Poor leadership
- General sinfulness and laziness

The result is a church that is usually "going through the motions." Many of these congregations are rich in property value but poor in spirit and numbers. The death of a congregation is very sad but sometimes necessary to promote renewal and the redistribution of resources.

6. Extreme Church

Extreme churches are not known for their size or their effectiveness but rather for their positions on doctrinal or procedural matters (how to do things like communion, mission work, etc.). They are found at both ends of the "conservative - liberal" continuum. Extreme churches are primarily focused on guarding and promoting their positions and use these as a test of faith and fellowship. For this reason these congregations remain fairly small and isolated.

7. Leadership Church

Leadership churches have managed to harness their growth and resources to set the pace for ministry followed not only by their own members but by other churches as well. In other words, they are the churches that are used as models for church growth and development by other congregations in our brotherhood. It is to these churches that others come to learn how to better evangelize or how to be more effective in teaching certain groups (e.g. new Christians, immigrants, college students). Leadership churches have learned how to integrate large numbers of people into the body without losing spiritual intimacy. It is where people come to experience meaningful worship and observe more effective and dynamic ways to do church work.

At this point, there are two good questions to ask and answer as far as your own congregation is concerned:

1. What is your congregation's type?
2. What type of congregation do you want to become?

If you want to be a growing or a leadership type church, there is a second thing that you must know aside from who you are.

HOW TO BE A FAITHFUL NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH — EPHESIANS 4

If we strive to be faithful New Testament churches, the Lord will add more people to our body (Acts 2:42), but how do we do that? We want to restore New Testament Christianity - Yes. We want to be faithful to Restoration principles and ideals - Yes. This is all well and good but how do we actually do these things? We begin by putting aside the religious traditions that we ourselves have created and begin to follow the New Testament pattern for church organization and function in a serious manner. A good place to begin scraping off the barnacles of unbiblical religious habit and tradition is with a careful and reflective reading of Ephesians 4:1-24.

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- Ephesians 4:1-4

Many times teachers only focus on the Book of Acts in their teaching concerning the New Testament church. This is a good beginning since the Book of Acts contains a historical narrative that clearly explains the founding and early function of the church. However, to understand the spirit of the New Testament church we need to examine what Paul teaches about this in the epistle to the Ephesian church because it is here where Paul describes the way that New Testament Christians conduct themselves spiritually. Ephesians asks us if we are conducting ourselves with humility, gentleness and forbearance (forbearance means to patiently put up with other people's weaknesses) because

this is what happens in a New Testament church. Ephesians instructs us to love one another despite differences of character and opinion because if this is not happening, we cannot truly refer to ourselves as New Testament churches.

- Do we shrink our pride?
- Do we shrink our will?
- Do we shrink our own ambition down to size in order to build unity?
- Do we hold our tongues?
- Do we act kindly towards one another simply because it is the loving thing to do and not because people deserve it?

The faithful New Testament church lives and breathes by these guidelines. We cannot claim to be a faithful New Testament church simply because we serve communion every Sunday or that we baptize by immersion. There are proper ways of doing these things but doing so is not the only defining characteristic of a New Testament church. We don't use instruments of music in our public worship; this is correct biblically, and can be demonstrated through Scripture, but do we really think that this is the most important feature that defines what a true New Testament church is?

I believe that in making the case for New Testament Christianity we have emphasized the minor things of our faith to identify us (we only sing, we immerse, we commune every Lord's day). We have described and insisted on the externals and in many cases failed to demonstrate the higher principles of our faith and the heart of our religion. This is why I believe it is important that we, as New Testament Christians, need to know what exactly it is that we want to restore and preserve.

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men."

⁹ (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

- Ephesians 4:7-10

A New Testament Church understands, as Paul explains here, that it was Jesus and only He who came from heaven down to earth and then went back again. Paul states this in an opaque way, but he's simply saying that only Jesus came from heaven, went into the ground, resurrected and returned to heaven. Jesus is the only one to have done this. Paul adds that in doing so Jesus demonstrated His lordship over all things on earth and in heaven. The point, as far as we are concerned, is that the New Testament church holds only Jesus as head and Lord of the church. This position and authority are claimed only by Him, not tradition, human intelligence, opinion or what is popular.

A faithful New Testament church is not ashamed of naming Christ as its Lord. He is the reason behind everything that is done in our personal lives and in the church.

¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

- Ephesians 4:11-12

A New Testament church is organized and functions in the way the Bible says it should function and be organized. If you want to grow, you must first be organized in the way the New Testament organizes the New Testament church. This means that apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders and teachers are valued for what they truly are. They are gifts or favors that the church has received as blessings from God. You rarely have a growing church or a leadership church without the blessing of elders, evangelists and teachers. There are many small churches who would give anything to have just one of these gifts, and having ministered for congregations that didn't have elders or good

teachers I can assure you that significant growth is not possible without this type of spiritual skill and leadership.

A New Testament church prays to be blessed with these gifts from God and when they receive them these congregations are wise if they support and follow their leadership. A New Testament church also understands that the work of these men is to use their particular gifts in the task of helping the church to grow spiritually. For example:

Role of Evangelist

Evangelists (preachers) proclaim the gospel. They plant and organize churches according to the New Testament pattern. They develop leadership and continually encourage the church to do what is right before God. This is their job description according to the New Testament (II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:5).

Role of Elders

Elders guard the church. They are guardians against false teachers and teachings. They minister to those who are weak in the spirit. They provide an example of godly living for others to follow as well as overall leadership. When the majority of the elders' time is taken up with building maintenance or budget issues, they are wasting their time (Acts 20:28-30; I Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:6-9).

Role of Teachers

Teachers continually help the congregation in understanding and applying God's word to their lives. Many teachers don't qualify as elders for some reason or other, but all elders need to qualify as teachers (II Timothy 2:24).

Role of Deacons

Although not mentioned here in Ephesians, deacons provide initial service and management of church affairs as well as training for members who wish to serve in the various ministries of the

congregation. Deacons are the ones who mobilize the church for work. In the Jerusalem church seven men were selected to serve the food needs of widows in order to free the Apostles for their ministry of teaching and prayer (Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 3:8-13).

Why this work by all of these people?

¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,
- Ephesians 4:13-15

God wants His Church to think and act as a group, like Jesus thought and acted as a single person. A New Testament church faithfully represents the person of Jesus in what it says and does before the world. For example, a New Testament church:

- has the compassionate eyes of Jesus
- speaks His words
- has a pure heart
- offers a ready and helpful hand of service
- has feet that are prepared to go anywhere with the good news

If you want to be a faithful New Testament church, this is the church that you aspire to become. Not only the church that has communion on Sunday, does not use instruments for worship or has only male church leaders. These things are biblical and thus correct, but they are the superficial things. If you make these the objective in recreating the New Testament church in this generation, don't ask yourself why spirits are dry, why members are not motivated, why the church does not have the joy of the Spirit.

What joy (other than knowing that we have obeyed a command) is the knowledge that we are not using instruments in worship or that the men provide spiritual leadership in the congregation? These are not the things that promote growth. The pursuit of purity, seeking after the Spirit, offering forgiveness, demonstrating compassion and practicing humility, these are the things that cause growth. The New Testament church of the first century was known for its loving heart (it took in abandoned babies), its moral purity (Christians rejected the sexual immorality of pagan Rome and other Gentile nations), and its faithfulness to Christ (choosing to die as martyrs rather than denying Christ). These things were the earmarks of the New Testament church then and should be what we are trying to replicate in the twenty-first century.

One last thing you must know in order to become a faithful New Testament church:

EVERYONE HAS TO BE CHANGED

Although the New Testament church is a corporate thing involving a group of people, God works on individuals within the group. In other words, He works within the group in individual hearts to affect the entire group.

A faithful New Testament church, therefore, is a church where change is taking place in the hearts of individuals.

¹⁷ So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; ¹⁹ and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ²⁰ But you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former

manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³ and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

- Ephesians 4:17-24

Note that after Paul has described the spirit and organization of a faithful New Testament church, he goes on to describe what is happening inside each person's heart in order to bring this church to life. What animates the church is the ongoing change within individual Christians. The road to achieving the twin goals of fidelity and growth runs through the heart of each individual member.

SUMMARY

Thus far we have learned that becoming a faithful New Testament church should be the primary biblical goal for every congregation. Unlimited growth is not possible unless we pursue this objective. In order to become and remain faithful as a New Testament church we must know our own history and theology. Knowing our past and who we are theologically will guide our movement into the future. My hope is that all congregations become dynamic leadership churches experiencing unlimited growth.

Secondly, we must know how to remain faithful as a New Testament church. This requires that we follow the Scriptures diligently, challenging one another to become patterned after Christ, knowing and obeying His words contained in the New Testament.

Finally, each member needs to be changed. Every time one member is changed in some area to become more Christlike, more obedient or knowledgeable, the entire congregation is changed. The growth of the body takes place as the heart of each member is changed by the Spirit of God. Remember, nothing changes unless a change is made, and the first change always begins with me.

2. A Biblical Plan for Growth

I've heard thousands of prayers: opening prayers, closing prayers, prayers for the sick, prayers before you eat, prayers before the devo or communion, prayers concerning all kinds of church activities, however, the following is a prayer that I have never heard and it goes like this:

*Dear Lord,
Please shrink our church because we are
too large a congregation. Amen.*

Contrary to this imagined prayer, every appeal to God of this type is for the church to grow, but how is this accomplished? What needs to be done in order to grow a local congregation and how do we sustain that growth? Finally, how is this accomplished without compromising Scripture or losing the values and the spirit enjoyed when the congregation was small?

It is interesting to note that while many want their small church to grow, the same people will complain that large-sized congregations are so impersonal. Nobody ever says, "I want to plant a church and make sure that it does not grow beyond 40 people so we can maintain that small church feel." On the contrary, we always want to be big, then when that happens become nostalgic about how great it was when we were small and like a family.

With these things in mind, I'd like to explain the meaning of the title for this book, "Unlimited Growth: A New Testament Pattern for Church Organization and Growth." This will be a good way to explain and synchronize the dual objectives of growth and meaningful participation in a church patterned for us in the New Testament. I am convinced that if we organize and grow the body of Christ according to God's instructions, we will succeed in having a church that is large enough to undertake challenging ministries and intimate enough to care for our most personal needs.

1. Unlimited Growth: A New Testament Pattern for Church Organization and Growth

When studying the topic of church development, I realized that the growth of the church was truly unlimited. Jesus said that the church was to be built on the rock of Christ and His Word, and nothing, including the most powerful force of evil, could overcome it (Matthew 16:18). From these words we can conclude the following truth about church growth: sometimes growth is fast, sometimes it is slow, sometimes it is dramatic, painful or exciting, but in the end it is, above all, unstoppable. We understand this to be true because this has been given to us by Christ Himself. Unlimited growth of the church, therefore, is a concept firmly established in the Bible.

This means that every congregation has the potential for unlimited growth and development, but for various reasons some churches plateau at a certain number and remain there indefinitely, or shrink back and even disappear. However, each congregation can experience continual spiritual and numerical growth if it follows the New Testament pattern for church organization and development that God has provided.

2. Unlimited Growth: A New Testament Pattern for Church Organization and Growth

I believe that it is both biblical and expedient to acknowledge and use the concepts developed primarily by Restorationist thinkers and writers in the task of growing congregations. Restorationism, the name of the movement from which Churches of Christ were established, has something to say about church growth. We seem to think that the gurus at fast growing community style churches have all the answers for rapid church development. We drive by a Life.Church that has taken over a shopping center and think, "They must be doing something right. What are we doing wrong?"

Although the rapid growth of these churches is desirable, we must realize that many of the theories and practices that contribute to the growth of their organizations also damage the integrity of their stewardship of God's Word. If we judge success only by numbers then the Communist Chinese are the most successful since they have the largest numbers of people living under their ideology. Of course, this is not how we judge the value of a social or political system and it shouldn't be the way we evaluate the success of a church either.

It's an old argument, but nevertheless true, that sacrificing biblical purity and obedience for fast growth is not worth it, and it does not serve the best spiritual interests of the church. When Jesus returns, He will be looking for the church that is faithful, not the church that is largest in size (Luke 18:8).

PATTERN THEOLOGY

Pattern theology rests on the idea that the Bible contains instructions and directions (patterns) that guide us in spiritual and moral living as well as church organization and function. We like to think that we initiated this idea, but it is not so historically. Even though this pattern idea grew out of earlier concepts developed during the Reformation Period and has many challenging its value as an interpretive system

today, pattern theology continues to provide an excellent way to discern the simple meaning and application of Scripture in a very practical and consistent manner. Simply stated, pattern theology seeks out the patterns or blueprints contained in the New Testament for how we ought to do things in both our personal lives as well as our corporate church life. Pattern theology is not an approach that has been superimposed on the Bible by teachers and theologians. On the contrary, it is a system already embedded in the New Testament and given to us by God in order to help us discern correctly what He has taught us, and faithfully carry out His will generation after generation.

I want to explain why the pattern theology approach is a good idea by using an example given to me by a military flight instructor who attended a congregation that I was preaching at in San Diego, California. He explained that planes, and even missiles for that matter, are not flown or launched in a perfectly straight trajectory until they arrive at their destination. They don't simply fly from point A straight to point B. He explained that the pilots, using instruments and computers, continually calculate a variety of factors while making ongoing adjustments to the direction of the plane or missile in order to compensate for weather and other factors that continually force them off course. In other words, whether it be an instrument or the pilot himself, the goal is to continually maneuver in order to stay on course until they arrive at the destination or target. In the same way, "restorationism" in general and it's tool of "pattern theology" serve as a spiritual gyroscope or compass that enables the church to continually correct its course and stay true to the goal of New Testament Christianity which the Bible has chartered for the church.

I began this book by saying that our goal is to be a faithful New Testament church because this is what Christ wants us to be. The question then becomes, "How do we reach this goal?" I propose that the biblical concept of pattern theology helps us not only establish the church according to God's design or pattern, but also helps it keep a steady course through different ages, locations and cultures. The use of pattern theology will help the church to function as a faithful New Testament church in any era, even to the return of Jesus at the end of

the world (for a more in depth discussion on pattern theology see: Thomas Olbricht, Hermeneutics in the Churches of Christ).

An important point to note here is that this feature (pattern theology) is not found in other religious groups. We, in the Churches of Christ, resemble other groups in many ways (i.e. others baptize by immersion or serve communion every Sunday as we do). What makes us unique is that we use pattern theology to remain faithful to the Scriptures. Those who do not use this spiritual gyroscope continue to change, evolve and mutate into church forms barely recognizable to their own founders and members, let alone the Bible. Do you think that Martin Luther would actually recognize the Lutheran Church of today? Martin Luther's plea was that the church should return to the Bible and only the Bible for teaching and practice (Martin Luther - Reformed Bible Studies Part 1 - Ligonier.org). I doubt that he would approve or even recognize much of what the Lutheran church does or stands for now.

We, like other church groups, are consistently pressured to veer off in one direction or another (e.g. too liberal or conservative). This type of pressure is stressful on the church, but nothing new since these disruptions were experienced by first century churches as well. In the same way that a plane or missile has to continually correct its course in order to arrive at its destination, the church must not allow culture, doctrinal disputes, sin and human events like war and famine to alter its direction which consists of being and remaining true to Christ and His Word. Being a faithful New Testament church is both our direction as well as our destination, and pattern theology is the instrument in our spiritual equipment that helps us remain true to both of these.

We are continually challenged to change course for something easier or in tune with the times, but despite this worldly headwind we can always make the necessary corrections that will set us once again on the course of biblical Christianity and New Testament church construct. Because of our Restoration principles (i.e. use only the Bible to direct our spiritual life and build the church) and pattern theology approach, we know our final destination, the direction to follow and how to make corrections if for any reason we have veered off course.

Is there a biblical pattern for church growth?

I firmly believe that churches who are not experiencing growth are usually unaware of the pattern for growth found in the New Testament. We return to the title, therefore, in order to complete the relationship between pattern theology, organization and the end result, unlimited church growth.

3. Unlimited Growth: A New Testament Pattern for Church Organization and Growth

I think that there is a definite relationship between organization and the rate of growth. In other words, how you are organized affects how you grow. This relationship exists in business. For example, badly organized and managed businesses usually don't grow much and are not very profitable. This relationship also exists in God's spiritual kingdom as well. If you think God doesn't care about organization, read the instructions about the building and the maintenance of the tabernacle (the tent and equipment used by the priests to offer sacrifice while the Jews were in the desert). Every detail, every piece of furniture, every ritual meticulously organized and detailed to function perfectly. Page after page of instructions to Moses on how to build the tabernacle, how to move it from place to place, how to put it together, who handles what, who is not permitted to touch; every detail is there (Exodus 25:1-40;33).

My point about this is the following: if God provided such clear and concise details for the organization and function of something that was only to be a shadow, a model of what was to come, how much more careful do you think He would be with the real thing? The tabernacle was only a preview of the church which is the fulfillment of what the tabernacle was pointing to. Can you imagine how much care God gives in providing instructions on how we ought to organize and function as the church?

The church, therefore, is the actual body (of Christ) not a shadow or symbol of it, so I propose to you that in His Word, God has provided a pattern (specific instructions) for the organization and subsequent growth of the New Testament church.

There are two things I want to mention about this pattern. First, there are many strategies for organizing and growing a religious group, but there is only one New Testament pattern. Go to any Christian bookstore and you will find shelf after shelf of books on how to grow churches. These are well-meaning and have some good ideas, but there is only one biblical pattern and it is contained in the New Testament. The fact that a particular church (even one that is a Church of Christ) is growing does not necessarily mean that it is organized according to the New Testament pattern. For unlimited growth to be possible you need to be following the New Testament pattern for it. Just because a congregation has one or two thousand members does not mean that it has reached its true potential. When even these mega churches stop growing, the reasons can usually be traced back to the fact that they have abandoned or failed to follow the New Testament pattern for organization and growth in the first place.

I once took part in a task force on church growth and development with elders and ministers from some of the largest congregations of the Churches of Christ. Their major complaint was that they had reached a ceiling and were no longer growing. They saw the potential and said, "It's not right that we have so many people, talent and money but are not growing. What are we doing wrong?" The answer (which they were unwilling to accept at the time) to their question was that they had reached their growth plateau because they were not using the biblical pattern for growth, which is unlimited growth.

When it comes to the issue of growth, the goal is not simply greater numbers, the goal is unlimited numbers, and unless we are organized and prepared for unlimited growth, the church is not fulfilling what the New Testament teaches about growth.

Think of church organization as the foundation for a structure. If, for example, the foundation laid is too small, it will not be able to sustain a

very large building. A foundation has to take into account the structure that will eventually be built upon it.

If you are designing a structure that has unlimited potential, you have to have a foundation that will sustain that.

God has mandated that there will be no end or limit to the growth of His church. Of course, the exception that proves the rule is that the church will stop growing only when Jesus returns, but not before. And so, God has provided a foundational and organizational pattern for that church which will be one of His own design without human error. In other words, if we follow the New Testament pattern to grow our church, there will be no flaws in the system that will cause it to stop growing. It will be one that will support any sized congregation.

I'm not suggesting that a congregation in a city of 10,000 people will have 50,000 members, however, the church in that city could be one that has planted 100 other churches in various towns and cities. Its growth would be counted not in local members but in its unlimited ability to plant churches generation after generation. This is a common mistake made by leaders of larger (1000+ members) congregations. They think that church growth is only measured by the number of members in their congregation. They exist in places where there are dozens of congregations in the area and will spend millions of dollars to accommodate an additional thousand people (mostly transfers from nearby congregations) and call this church growth.

What they fail to envision is "kingdom growth" where they take on the responsibility to spread the number of congregations to places where there are none. This is legitimate growth and part of the unlimited growth pattern found in the New Testament (Acts 13:1-3), a pattern that goes far beyond the teachings concerning the manner we take communion or the presence of male spiritual leadership in the church. These are biblical teachings but form only the basics of a much greater set of instructions for the proper working of the New Testament church and its unlimited growth. The point here is that churches can

grow using a variety of methods, but only the pattern in the Bible for church growth can prepare a church for unlimited growth.

Here are two principles that summarize, in a few words, the New Testament pattern for church organization and growth:

1. Organize and train the church to function effectively and simultaneously in the five areas of biblical ministry.

Someone says, "What do we do and where do we start to put this plan into action?" Answer: You begin by training and organizing the church to function effectively and simultaneously (and I'll explain why this is important later) in the five areas of biblical ministry. There are only five areas of biblical ministry (everything we do in church fits into one of the five biblical ministries).

2. A church grows in proportion to its effectiveness in carrying out the five ministries outlined in Acts 2.

Someone will say to me, "You've been talking about the New Testament pattern for all of this, well where in the New Testament is this found?" The Bible provides the pattern for church growth in chapter 2 of the book of Acts. I've said previously that the inside of the New Testament church (the heart of it) is found in the epistle to the Ephesians. The outside, however, the mechanics and how it works, is written about and demonstrated in the book of Acts.

THE FIVE BIBLICAL MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

There are five areas of ministry demonstrated in Acts chapter 2. The main point I am making here is that when the church learns how to organize and function effectively in these five ministries, it creates an environment for healthy unlimited biblical growth that God Himself will provide. Let us begin, therefore, with an overview of each before we examine them in depth in the following chapters.

1. Evangelism

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

- Acts 2:37-41

Evangelism is preaching the gospel to the lost with the goal of their response in faith and obedience. There are different approaches, different cultures, different tools but this ministry always has the same message and objective. The Choctaw congregation where I serve as minister supports a preacher in Kenya, Africa. He teaches at a Bible college there and circuit preaches at seven or eight churches in the area. You could not find more different cultures than that of Choctaw, Oklahoma and Meru, Kenya. What Geoffrey Kirima, our missionary, is doing in his African location is exactly what I am doing in middle America: explaining to the lost that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for them, rose again from the dead, and they need to believe in Him and express that faith by repenting of their sins and being baptized. Different culture, different place, different language, however, the same message with the same objective: those who believe and repent (in Africa or the USA) are baptized and added to the church. This briefly summarizes the number-one ministry of the church wherever it is located.

2. Education

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching
- Acts 2:42a

Teaching the saved to obey all of Jesus's commands (Matthew 28:20) is the second major ministry of the church. Once believers have repented and have been baptized, they need to be taught the things of Christ. New converts not only have to be taught the commands of Jesus, but also how to obey and do the things of Christ. This second major ministry is easily summarized in a few words, but those of you charged with teaching God's word know that the teaching process is often difficult and continues for a lifetime.

3. Fellowship

and to fellowship,
-Acts 2:42b

Fellowship is an equally important ministry. Fellowship is the integration of each member into the body of Christ. Jesus adds us to the church at baptism (Acts 2:47), but the necessary connection that each new Christian needs to have with other members requires time and effort. Fellowship is an important factor in the building of a healthy and growing spiritual body.

4. Worship

...and to the breaking of bread and prayer...
- Acts 2:42c

In one verse Luke mentions three different areas of ministry, this one being the public and private adoration of God. Worship is something that needs to be taught, modeled, encouraged and organized. Luke

says that they continually devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and prayer (public and private worship).

5. Service

and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.
- Acts 2:45

The ministry of service requires the pooling of resources of the church in order to meet the needs of the disciples and the community at large.

These, briefly, are the five areas of biblical ministry. There are not six, not four, not twelve, only five. They are outlined briefly in the book of Acts (Acts 2) and then elaborated on throughout the rest of the New Testament. In Acts 2:47 we see the result that takes place when these five ministries are working simultaneously.

praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.
- Acts 2:47

Note that the very last sentence in this passage ties everything together.

- They were busy preaching to the lost and baptizing repentant sinners.
- They focused on training the new disciples to obey Christ's teachings.
- They provided encouragement and opportunity for fellowship as well as worship and this led to a natural outpouring of love seen in Christian service of all kinds.

What, then, was the final outcome of these things working together? Jesus added to their number. That's numerical growth!

A word here about the necessity of these ministries not only functioning but functioning simultaneously. I've said that in order to begin the growth process according to the New Testament pattern, we need to be functioning in all five of the biblical ministries and these five need to be operating simultaneously if there is to be growth. For example, what if a congregation has an effective outreach program that successfully brings the gospel to people in the community and many are baptized as a result. However, there are few opportunities for fellowship or service in this particular church. What is the result? New members don't make friends, they don't connect with possible mentors and are not given the opportunity or training to serve in some way. They are simply baptized and put into a pew with their only church experience being passive listeners to the weekly sermon. The final outcome here is that these new Christians lose interest and fall away after a period of time.

This is why it is important that all five ministries of the church operate at the same time. New converts (evangelism ministry) are added and then trained to know and obey God's word (education ministry). They are assimilated into the body through the various programs (fellowship ministry - new moms, men's devotionals, youth groups, marriage retreats, senior picnics, service projects, visitation, etc.) that enable them to meet and work with others in serving the Lord. Their knowledge of God's word grows because they are part of a church that offers a variety of class topics and themes that stimulates learning, and they are encouraged by fellow church members to regular attendance at all worship services where those who organize the worship prepare orderly, meaningful and enthusiastic services with sermons that both edify and challenge the hearers to greater faith and devotion to God and His church (worship ministry). Hopefully this will promote a desire for this new member to serve in some capacity (service ministry) and experience the peace and joy that come from visiting the sick, making repairs to the building, helping with the youth group or any other of the many opportunities for service organized and

facilitated by the deacons. Unlimited growth begins to happen when all five ministries are operating efficiently at the same time!

I've been at planning meetings where someone would say, "Next year, our goal will be 40 baptisms." This is the right spirit but the wrong goal. We don't set a certain number of baptisms as a goal. We make plans to do the things that produce baptisms. Projects like gospel meetings, personal evangelism classes, church advertising, etc. The work of the Evangelism Ministry is to set into motion the plans and activities that will bring people face to face with the gospel. For example, next year we will have a seminar on personal evangelism to train our people in this ministry; this will be followed by a series of mail-outs advertising some church project, seminar or outreach effort; we will add a door-knocking campaign; we will start a church website that live-streams our services and broadcasts a daily Bible message from our preaching minister. Notice that the word "baptism" is not mentioned here because these are evangelistic strategies that we will use in order to preach the gospel to our community. If we are effective in our ministry of evangelism, God will add those who respond to the church. Our job is to communicate the gospel message. If we do this, He will add. And if we are effectively carrying out the other four ministries as well, He will provide us with unlimited growth.

Here is a spiritual equation that summarizes much of what has been said in this chapter:

$$\text{MINISTRY} = \text{GROWTH}$$

The more ministry you have, the more growth you have. The less ministry you have, the less growth you have, simple as that. Some people say, "Wait a minute! We have plenty of ministries: quilters, food to the poor, men's retreats, etc. but we are not growing. Why?" The simple answer is that in order to have unlimited growth you must have all five biblical ministries working simultaneously.

When we organize and execute the New Testament pattern of ministry, which is our part of the equation, God will provide the growth which is the Spirit's part of the equation. The growth potential for this is unlimited. This is not legalism, or a "works" system, but rather faith ministering according to God's direction in His word.

EXAMPLE

I want to finish this chapter with the example of a local congregation that implemented these ideas and the results that they had. In the state of Oklahoma where there are approximately 600 congregations of the Church of Christ, the Choctaw congregation where I served (1993-2000) was second only to the Memorial Road Church of Christ (located next to Oklahoma Christian University), in sustained net growth percentage, for six years in a row.

Most denominations are in decline, but when there is growth, the average net growth for all types of churches in America is 3 to 5 percent, with a healthy growth rate pegged at between 5-12% (thegoodbookblog.com - church attendance growth rates). To calculate this number you take all the people that have come in (baptized, placed membership, restored) and subtract all the people that have left for whatever reason, and the balance is your net growth. The Choctaw congregation experienced a 15 to 20 percent net growth rate beginning in 1994 when we slowly began to implement and refine this particular approach to church organization and growth. When I began preaching there in 1993, attendance was around 200 to 225, when I left, it was over 500. We had to add 15,000 square feet of additional space and renovate the entire building to make room for that many people.

Later, I served the Canyon View congregation in San Diego California. We implemented the same ministry system and experienced the same result (15-20% net growth) even though Canyon View was located in a west coast urban environment and Choctaw, especially in the year 2000, was located in a rural area. Very different places, very different culture, very different approach to things and yet as long as we

implemented the New Testament pattern, God blessed us with the same rate of growth.

In 2003 my wife and I went back to Montreal, Canada (supported by both churches in Choctaw and San Diego) to do mission work for a small congregation that was experiencing difficulty. This was a church we had planted back in 1984 but because of various issues had fallen to only 20-30 people in attendance. We again implemented the same New Testament principles and soon even this French speaking congregation situated in one of the poorest inner city neighborhoods of Montreal began to grow at a 10-15 percent yearly net growth rate.

Someone once asked me, "Why can't we have a hundred percent growth rate?" I believe that this would be possible. After all, Jesus did say that the harvest would sometimes be thirty, sometimes sixty, sometimes a hundred-fold (Matthew 13:8). The New Testament system for ministry is perfect but it is executed by imperfect and sinful human beings. This may be why the Lord mercifully left room for imperfect results. The point to remember, however, is that in our day and time anything over 5 percent net growth is better than average.

SUMMARY

To summarize in the fewest words possible: Ministry equals growth. If we minister, the Lord will add the growth. Greater growth requires that we become more effective in each ministry area and that all five ministries are working together simultaneously.

3.

The 5 Biblical Ministries

Let's review briefly what we've talked about in the previous chapter.

1. The Bible shows us that the potential for church growth is unlimited. This is the goal when it comes to church growth.
2. The Bible also provides a pattern as well as multiple examples to guide us in the organization of the church so that it is structured to accommodate unlimited growth.
3. This New Testament pattern can be summarized as follows: We must train the church to function effectively and simultaneously in the five areas of biblical ministry in order to promote unlimited growth.
4. The relationship between ministry and growth is the following: The church grows in proportion to its ability in carrying out the five biblical ministries effectively and simultaneously.



Used by Permission of CBS

SPINNING PLATES

In the 1960s Erich Brenn performed a stunt on the popular Ed Sullivan variety television program where he spun five plates on the tip of five long poles that were embedded in a straight line on a table. He started by spinning one plate on one of the poles and added successive plates until he had all five spinning simultaneously. The crowd watching would scream in anticipation when one of the plates would begin to wobble precariously while he was attempting to get others up and spinning. This would send him rushing back to the first plate in order to roll the small pole between his hands which, in turn, would speed up the turning of the plate and prevent it from crashing to the floor and ruining his act. In the end, he was able to get all five plates spinning on five separate poles simultaneously, as well as five bowls twirling on the table beneath them, all to the amazement and wild applause of his audience.

I reference this video because it demonstrates, in a visual way, the ministry system laid out in Acts chapter 2. For example, the primary goal in church work/growth is to establish each of the five biblical ministries and make sure that they are functioning effectively (spinning). In the act, Brenn would have to re-start one plate or another as it lost momentum. Isn't this what happens in ministry?

Everything is working well until a key family responsible for maintaining an important part of a certain ministry has to move to another town leaving you scrambling to find someone to take their place. Getting those plates (ministries) up and spinning, and continually maintaining their momentum when they falter for one reason or another is a familiar cycle in the day to day work of growing the church.

There are no pre-sets in managing ministry. The New Testament pattern for ministry is one that requires constant monitoring, ongoing encouragement and endless adjustments so that all of the different areas of ministry keep on spinning (ministering effectively and simultaneously), and when they do the synergy produced results in growth (the Lord adds - Acts 2:47). I refer to this type of synergy as "liftoff." At some point the church seems to have a life of its own. Things begin to happen that you did not plan for. People begin serving in the name of the Lord in ways you did not imagine or require. Members begin to take ownership for the maintenance and growth of the church without being asked and there are more acts of service and love being done than can be counted or accounted for in ministry flow-charts or involvement forms.

Like a plane that leaves the earth when it has reached a certain speed, the church has an entirely different momentum and way of movement (liftoff) when all five ministries are efficiently working together producing what seems like effortless and unlimited growth.

THE FIVE BIBLICAL MINISTRIES

Now that we understand the process for unlimited growth, let's take a closer look at each of the five ministries described in the New Testament (Acts 2:1-47). Luke introduces them in the following order:

1. **Evangelism** - Acts 2:1-41
2. **Education** - Acts 2:42a
3. **Fellowship** - Acts 2:42b
4. **Worship** - Acts 2:42c
5. **Service** - Acts 2:43-47

These are the five areas of ministry that the church **must** be active and effective in if it wants to grow. No matter what you do in church work, it somehow fits into one of these five areas of ministry that Luke describes in Acts 2:1-47. Let us, therefore, examine each ministry more closely.

1. The Evangelism Ministry

On Pentecost Sunday we see Peter establish the evangelism ministry as he begins preaching the gospel to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the Pentecost feast. In Acts 2:14-41, which includes a summary of Peter's sermon and the crowd's response to him, we see the basic elements of the ministry of evangelism.

A. Preaching the Gospel

The ministry of evangelism begins by preaching the gospel to the lost. Peter's summary point is:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”
- Acts 2:36

B. Telling the story of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus to those who don't know it

There are many ways of doing this, however, the primary objective is to communicate this information to those who do not know it. A complementary objective is to encourage a response of obedience from the hearers.

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”
- Acts 2:37-40

Note here that Peter not only gives them the information contained in the gospel but urges a proper response (repentance and baptism) from them as well.

C. Baptizing repentant believers

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
- Acts 2:41

The evangelism ministry is rather straight forward and easy to understand. It is the first area of ministry where believers communicate the Gospel of Jesus to the lost with the objective that they respond with faith (believing as true that Jesus is the divine Son of God), repentance (a change of heart where one leaves the pattern of sinfulness in one's life and replaces it with a pattern of righteousness), and baptism (immersion in water in the name of or by the authority of Jesus).

This briefly explains what evangelism is and tries to accomplish, but not the way to accomplish it. There are many ways or methods given to us in the New Testament to carry out and be effective in the evangelism ministry. For example:

- **Confrontational Evangelism** – Peter in Acts 2. This is straight forward preaching or public speaking. This is my own personal approach to practice the ministry of evangelism. In college, my major was Missions (church planting and organization), but my minor was in Mass Communication. My interest has always been the use of media in ministry. From

the very beginning I wanted to learn how to use media in the work of the local church, and how to best use media in communicating the gospel to the lost. However, there are all kinds of ways to practice confrontational evangelism: newspapers, pamphlets, meetings, small groups, seminars, blogs, etc.

- **Intellectual Evangelism** – This is an approach that the Apostle Paul used in Athens (Acts 17). Christian writers, scholars and debaters who proclaim the gospel in books and other ways. They explain the gospel. They provide proof of its authenticity in comparison to other religions and philosophies. Preachers find helpful information in preparing their sermons and classes from resource books and other materials researched and written by Christian scholars. Their work contributes to and is a form of evangelism.
- **Testimonial Evangelism** – The story of the demoniac in Luke 8 is an example of this. After he was healed the Lord sent this man back to his home region with instructions to tell others what had happened to him. When the Lord returned to this place later on, He was greeted by large crowds who doubtless had been told of His healing power by the demoniac. Telling others what Jesus has done for us continues to be one of the most powerful evangelism methods even to this day!
- **Interpersonal Evangelism** – We see an example of this in Matthew 5 where Jesus agrees to eat at Matthew's (the tax collector) house. Jesus became involved in Matthew's life in order to win him over as a disciple and then later as one of the Twelve. Today we call this "friendship" evangelism. The name is different now but the spirit remains the same. We take a sincere interest in people in order to know them and share with them the message of life.
- **Invitational Evangelism** – In John's gospel we see the Samaritan woman inviting the people in her village to come and hear what Jesus had to say because she herself had been

touched by the interaction she had had with Him (John 4:4-26). We practice this invitational evangelism when we invite family, friends and neighbors to Bible class, devotionals or worship services so they can hear the gospel and be with Christians. This is the most common and successful method of evangelism.

- **Benevolent Evangelism** – Dorcas was a good example of one who practiced benevolent evangelism (Acts 9). She impressed her community for Christ with acts of charity and service in the name of Jesus. There are all kinds of opportunities for good works in our own communities that, if done with humility and faith, become effective evangelistic outreach and witness for the gospel.

Not everyone can preach from the pulpit or befriend strangers, but each can find a way to share the gospel with the lost in order to bring the saving blood of Christ to individuals as they enter the waters of baptism. The first area of ministry, therefore, is the work of evangelism. Its objective is clear, to share the gospel with the lost with a view that they believe the message, repent of their sins and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

The first question to ask a congregation that wants to grow is, "Are you knowingly proclaiming the gospel to your community in some way?" If your congregation cannot name and describe the specific ways that it is consciously proclaiming the gospel to the lost in your community, then the evangelism "plate" is not yet up and spinning in your congregation.

There has to be a conscious effort to actually communicate the information of the gospel to people who don't know it, and if you are not doing this in some way then you don't really have an effective ministry of evangelism. If, for example, you are doing it only once a year at a gospel meeting, you can "say" that you have a ministry of evangelism, but in reality that plate up there is not spinning very fast and needs definite attention.

2. The Education Ministry

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching
- Acts 2:42a

Once people become Christians, the work of instructing them to know and obey Jesus' teachings begins. The education ministry of the church can be accomplished in a variety of ways because we see a variety of teaching methods in the New Testament. For example:

- They taught the disciples throughout the week in the temple area and in homes (Acts 2:42; 46).
- They taught on the Lord's Day when the members of the church gathered for communion (Acts 24:7).
- They taught in public meeting places. Again, Paul, in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19).

There was no specific command as to where or how they were to be taught, only that they were to be taught the teachings of Christ (Matthew 28:20). The Bible, therefore, is the primary subject for learning in the church.

In normal circumstances we, as teachers, only have access to our students once or twice per week, and then for only a 40-minute class and one or two 30-minute sermons. This is not much time to thoroughly teach someone the material contained in the Bible. For this reason I encourage teachers and education coordinators in the church to focus on teaching the content and application of Bible material to their students and not pop psychology or "how to" books from the Christian bookstore.

People in Bible class ought to be learning the Bible: what it is, what it says, what it demands, what it promises, etc. I also remind teachers that the overarching purpose of our teaching is to equip our students

with the information and desire to obey the things that the Bible teaches so that they not only be "hearers" of the Word, but enthusiastic "doers" of the Word of God (James 1:22-25). Finally, we must also train our students in such a way that they will be equipped and eager to teach others what they themselves have been taught so that the cycle of restoring New Testament Christianity continues into the next generation (II Timothy 2:2).

It is worth noting that while the essential ministry of education remains the same from generation to generation, the methods and the tools change as new technologies enable teachers to be more effective in their roles. Jesus used the technology and methods of His time. Things like parables, word pictures, the teaching of crowds in open spaces as well as the established opportunities afforded Him as a Jewish rabbi to teach in local synagogues and certain areas in the Temple complex in Jerusalem.

Today, in addition to the traditional Bible class format, we can teach people God's word using the worldwide reach of the Internet. Not only can we use this electronic platform to connect with large numbers of people each day (e.g. in 2017 my own teaching website - BibleTalk.tv - had 50,000 visitors per month watching Bible teaching videos or downloading books), we can now offer this material in almost any language through the automatic translation services provided online for free.

Churches have also learned how to use different approaches in order to teach different age groups and people who are at different levels of spiritual maturity. For example, we use music and puppets to teach children, plays to interest and emphasize various ideas with teens, special classes for new Christians, young marrieds or seniors. These things were not in use by the Apostles when the church was originally established. Each generation produces different tools and approaches but the objectives are always the same: 1) Teach Christians to obey the words of Christ. 2) Equip and encourage them to do the same for others. New methods and tools for teaching are permitted because the New Testament doesn't tell us how, when or where to teach, this is left to our judgment.

When it comes to the education ministry, the Bible gives us the who, what and why, and we supply the how, where and when.

3. The Fellowship Ministry

There is such a logical progression here. Luke writes:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship,
- Acts 2:42b

People are converted through the preaching of the gospel, and these converts are taught the teachings and commands of Christ. Another important aspect of the conversion process is their integration into the body of believers. As it does with many other important concepts, the New Testament uses a special word to describe this integration: the word fellowship or communion. This term means more than simply becoming part of a group. It means that each member shares what the other persons in the group have.

Let us say that I have invited six people over to my house and ordered pizza to feed everyone. The word fellowship explains the difference between the pizza delivery guy and my guests. The pizza man is present inside my house as are my guests. However, the pizza guy is only there for a moment and leaves. My guests, however, are there to share the pizza with me and because of that sharing what we have is fellowship, unlike the pizza guy with whom I only have a business transaction. My guests and I share love as well as pizza.

Fellowship is also the word used to describe what Christians experience when they share Christ. He is what believers share. My own natural family (parents, uncles and aunts, etc.) has not accepted Christ as Lord. I still love and have a family connection to them but I don't have fellowship with them. I only experience "fellowship" with my Christian family, no one else.

Fellowship is also the word to describe what Christians experience. It is the sharing of Christ that places our relationship and interactions as

a church on a much higher level than relationships with those who are not Christians. Let's face it, regardless of who or where they are, my relationship with other Christians is fellowship because we both share Christ and conversely regardless of who they are or how close they are, I cannot have fellowship with someone who is not a Christian. I can be friends with them. I can love them. I can even be married to them, but I cannot have fellowship with them.

43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;
- Acts 2:43-44

Here we see the joy and the extent of the sharing being expressed by these new Christians. They shared the excitement of seeing the power of God at work. They shared a new sense of community as people who had left an old life behind and begun a new one with fellow believers. They shared their time and lives together along with the joy of their newfound faith.

The pattern of fellowship established by the early church provides a good example for us to follow today as New Testament Christians. The ministry of fellowship, therefore, is the effort to facilitate and enable Christians to participate in and enjoy each other's lives and faith in Christ. It is not just about pizza parties. Church events are the vehicle, but not the destination. The destination is the sharing our faith as we share some activity together. People from different backgrounds, different cultures, different schedules need to work at sharing time, faith, service, meals and lives together in Christ. These things require an effort at planning and organization because these "events" do not happen spontaneously.

The fellowship ministry, therefore, has as its primary goal the creation of opportunities for Christians to come together and share Christ whether it be in social gatherings, service projects or times for reflection and thanksgiving. If Christians don't take the time to bond with other Christians in fellowship they become vulnerable to attack

through temptation and isolation. This is why the fellowship ministry is so important.

4. The Worship Ministry

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- Acts 2:42

The next ministry we see in sequence is the ministry of worship. Luke describes it briefly with reference to prayer and communion (the breaking of bread meant a meal or communion, depending on the context). Luke only mentions what the disciples began to do as they were initially converted, afterwards the Bible explains that Christian public worship included five basic elements.

PRIVATE WORSHIP

Private worship is much more inclusive and flexible because everything we have can be offered to God in this context (Romans 12:1-2). For example, if you are a jogger, you can run for Christ and offer that activity in worship because it is part of your being and you are offering your complete self to God for His honor and glory. There are many ways that we do this in private worship. Whatever I do that is acceptable and worthy of praise I offer to God as part of the offering of myself as a living sacrifice each day.

PUBLIC WORSHIP

Public worship is different because we have guidelines. The New Testament contains a pattern for public worship given by God and acceptable to Him:

- **We take the communion**
– Acts 2:42, I Corinthians 11:23;26
- **We offer prayer**
– Acts 2:42c
- **We sing praises**
– Act 2:47, Ephesians 5:19
- **We teach God's word**
– Acts 2:42, Acts 21:7
- **We give to support the church**
– I Corinthians 16:2, Acts 2:45

In the New Testament these are the only activities taught or practiced in Christian public worship. No parades. No special traditions. Baptism and the breaking of bread are the only "rituals" that are in the New Testament for Christians to practice. Choirs, bands, parades, candles, images and statues of saints are all human additions not supported by any teaching in God's word. The early Restorationist leaders appealed to the church to put away all of these man-made items and traditions in order to follow carefully the things that the New Testament taught concerning Christian worship. We, in the Churches of Christ, don't claim to have restored the perfect practice of New Testament Christianity but are convinced that we are aiming at the correct biblical goal that God has set in His Word for His people and their practice of worship.

As a New Testament church we follow these guidelines in preparing our public worship to God when we meet. Of course, as the church grows in numbers it requires a certain organization to make sure that the communion elements are on hand and prepared, people are selected and trained to serve as prayer leaders, worship leaders, teachers and preachers. This organization and attempt to worship God in accordance with the Bible requires the time and effort of many dedicated people who serve in the worship ministry.

For worship to be acceptable and edifying (it truly honors God and blesses the worshipper) many details have to be taken care of. These could include organizing a nursery to providing listening devices for the hearing impaired, and everything in between. There is much more to worship than simply picking the songs and assigning the men to serve communion. It is the most visible part of our church life seen by visitors and invited guests (including those watching at home if you live-stream your services online), therefore, it needs to witness the fact that we are not only enthusiastically worshipping God, but that we are doing so in a decent and orderly fashion following carefully the guidelines for public worship given to us by God Himself in His Word. After all, He is present when we gather (Matthew 18:20).

5. The Service Ministry

and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.
- Acts 2:45

In this verse, we see the natural outcome of the cycle: sinners, who receive forgiveness and are taught Christ's word, begin sharing their new life in Christ with other believers in fellowship and worship to God. The natural product of this is love for God and one another. An example of this love is seen as they begin to serve one another using the resources that they have.

Luke doesn't mention specifics, he simply says that they pooled their resources in order to take care of any needs that came up. This activity

pleased God (Matthew 5:16) but it impressed the community as well. Once people hear about the love of Christ through the gospel and respond to it in obedience, they begin to experience the love of their Christian brethren. This leads them to share in thankful worship and praise to God which in turn moves them to return that love by serving others in the name of Christ.

The service ministry is quite varied but is motivated by the same spirit of love that moved early Christians to pool their resources in the service of other people, in and out of the church.

This ministry is broken down into various sections in order to facilitate the management of the many areas of work that the church is involved in, and I will explain these later on when we examine how to organize the church's ministry system. For now, I have given you a brief description of each biblical ministry as it appears in the book of Acts: evangelism, education, fellowship, worship and service. One last point remains.

I've also told you that this passage explained the relationship between ministry and church growth:

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.
- Acts 2:47b

"When the church is active in ministry the Lord will cause it to grow."

Note that the very last sentence in the passage ties everything together. They were busy preaching to the lost and baptizing repentant believers. They focused on teaching the disciples to obey all the words of Christ. They provided encouragement and opportunity for fellowship and worship, and this led to the natural outpouring of love seen in Christian service. What, then, was the outcome? Jesus added to their number. This is why the objective in church growth is ministry, not growth. We minister and the Lord adds. Don't worry about the adding part, just focus on the ministry part.

Conclusion: If you want your congregation to grow, you must effectively minister in every single area of biblical ministry. The more effective and integrated the ministry, the more dynamic the growth.

Organized ministry equals unlimited growth.

There is nothing radically new about this approach. It is easy to understand that there are five ministries in the book of Acts and if we execute them well, the Lord will add to the church. I can tell you from experience, however, that it is not as easy to do as it is to explain or understand. In other words, it is very difficult to get all five biblical ministries functioning effectively and simultaneously. It requires time, effort and patience, but the constant encouragement is the fact that you know that you are aiming at the correct biblical goal. As you improve and begin to feel the "liftoff" of unlimited church growth in your congregation, I guarantee that the spiritual joy and excitement experienced will be worth the effort.

4.

Implementing the New Testament Plan for Growth

Here are some key ideas that we've discussed already:

1. When it comes to church growth, the goal is unlimited growth. Unlimited growth means that the church is ready and able to receive as many as the Lord will add; three, three hundred, three thousand or thirty thousand, and multiply congregations indefinitely.
2. Organization precedes growth in any enterprise. A New Testament organizational pattern will permit (not automatically produce) growth because God is the One who adds.
 - There are many strategies for church organization but only one pattern. Having a New Testament pattern will prepare a church for the unlimited growth that God has promised.
3. The New Testament pattern for organization requires us to identify, implement and integrate the ministries of the church described in the New Testament.

In the book of Acts chapter 2, Luke briefly describes the five ministries of the church: evangelism, education, fellowship, worship and service. Every activity of the church can be placed into one of these five areas of ministry. Unless a church is fully aware of the existence and nature of these ministries it cannot aspire to unlimited growth. If, for example, a congregation is not aware that fellowship is as important as evangelism or education, service and worship, then the plan to grow cannot be implemented successfully. Leaders in the church need to be aware of this teaching so they can train the church to function effectively using this biblical approach to ministry and growth.

Building a congregation is like building a house, each part needs to be installed in its proper order. Building a church, therefore, begins with evangelism and then framed with teaching, fellowship, worship and service. These are added to complete the structure and prepare it to repeat the cycle. This is how the kingdom grows. First you have to identify the ministries, then you have to implement them and, finally, work at integrating them into a unified system which reproduces itself.

The questions at church meetings should be, "How do these ministries work together? How do the elders, ministers, deacons, staff and saints serve in a cohesive system that exercises these ministries effectively and biblically?" The ministry management system that I will explain in this chapter demonstrates how to integrate these five ministries in such a manner as to provide effective leadership and ministry in an organized system that will facilitate and promote unlimited growth.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Without a plan to manage ministry, it becomes difficult to analyze strengths and weaknesses, and assign tasks. Churches without a ministry system usually find that their growth levels off at a certain point. They begin doing what is familiar, safe and easy. They attempt only what they know instead of learning what they need to know. This situation is not caused by bad faith or intentions; it is usually the result of not knowing the biblical mechanics of church growth.

Step 1 – Identify

The first place to start is to identify the five areas of biblical ministry and how your congregation is active in each. The congregation needs to know what these five areas are, what their goals should be and how they need to function. The ministers, elders, deacons and support staff need to know this and be in agreement. Once this is done they need to teach the rest of the congregation how the ministries of the church will be identified and carried out.

There are both sample and blank flow charts in Appendix A at the end of this book to help you identify and list the activities in your congregation and what ministry they should be assigned to (e.g. gospel meetings under Evangelism; prepping communion elements under Worship; men's retreat under Fellowship; maintenance of the building under Service). This is an important first step in the effort to establish and integrate the five biblical areas of ministry. You have to identify and list the things you are actually doing and where they fit in the overall system.

Take the Education Ministry, for example. If there is a question or problem with a class, teacher or topic, do we have to convene an elders' meeting to deal with this? In the system that I propose, the shepherds have already assigned an elder responsible for that area of ministry along with ministers, teachers and deacons who will serve with him. When something comes up, this group can deal with the question or problem among themselves. For those issues that may affect the entire congregation, the "Education" elder can add this to the agenda for discussion at a meeting where all the elders are present. In this way the education area is primarily serviced by a team that includes not only experienced teachers but also a representative of the elders so that most decisions and problems can be dealt with at that level and not create a bottleneck of pending matters and decisions that over-burden the eldership as a whole.

Another feature of this ministry system, shown in the ministry flow chart, is that each ministry has the name of the person responsible for that area as well as the amount of money budgeted for items in that

ministry and a corresponding budget identification number (e.g. Education Ministry - Ed.200). When the budget is determined, the various items purchased or leased for education purposes are identified with a budget number (e.g. Ed.200-01-Preschool class workbooks - \$250). Budgeted purchases, therefore, don't require an elders' meeting to make a decision.

Each ministry has a budget (prepared and proposed in advance by those working in the various ministry areas and approved by the elders). For example, if preschool workbooks are needed, a purchase order with the proper budget number is prepped and if it is within the budget guidelines it goes to the bookkeeper for purchase, no need to have every single purchase become an item on the elders' agenda (part of the bookkeeper's duties is to be a kind of "financial traffic-cop" making sure that there is enough cash on hand to provide for the various expenses and purchases made by the different ministry areas). For special purchases or large expenses, there is an elder working in each area of ministry to facilitate and expedite decision making. He can choose to confer with the bookkeeper or bring the matter to the meeting of all the elders. Either way, there is a method in place to get things done in a reasonable amount of time. The purpose of a ministry system is to facilitate the delivery of ministry to the congregation. The system is supposed to enable elders, ministers, deacons and saints to minister effectively in the five areas of ministry and manage the growth that comes as a result of this.

Therefore, when creating the ministry flowchart there needs to be a name assigned to each ministry indicating who is accountable for that particular area. The flow chart will clearly show who is doing what in every area and how many people are actually involved in ministry in your congregation. The flow chart needs to be updated regularly as new activities or projects are formed in each area and different people are added or removed in the management of these.

Step 2 - Educate

The next step in the process is training the congregation to use and refer to this system so that everyone is speaking the same "language"

when it comes to ministry. Ultimately the role of ministers in a growing church will be to train assigned people to ministry and manage the system itself so that the body can grow.

The first step is to create the ministry flowchart so you can see, at a glance, the ministries and people responsible for these. This will help you better manage the five areas of ministry and provide a way to transform ideas and suggestions into actual productive services benefitting the church and those served by her.

In the work of the church I've noticed that people often have great ideas but never follow through because they don't know the mechanics of how to take an idea in the abstract and turn it into a workable reality. This is one of the valuable uses of the ministry flowchart. It provides a way for an idea to be analyzed and worked out in the "system" by putting it down on paper in order to see where it fits in relation to the whole, if it is redundant, who will be responsible for it, what it will cost and what its primary goal is supposed to be.

Once you have identified the different activities within each of your five general areas of ministry, and have designated those responsible for each activity as well as those who will oversee each of the five areas, the next step is to start the process. In other words, once you have your ministry system down on paper you need to encourage and empower those responsible to come up with plans and projects for their own particular activity and area of ministry. Use the **Idea Worksheet** found in Appendix B to break up into five groups (each representing one of the ministry types) and come up with three new ideas for each area. Once you've got the three ideas, get together at a general meeting and vote for/select only the best idea for each area. Once this has been decided, add that activity/idea to each area of the flow chart and implement them in the church.

With your flowchart, you know what your ministries are and you also know the goal of each of these ministries. Now you have a new idea for each area of ministry. Put those into play and observe what happens. If these begin to gather some momentum and produce positive results

then consider implementing some of the other ideas that were suggested.

Not all ideas and projects are successful or successful right away. However, using the method described above, a church has a method with which ideas can be analyzed, launched and managed. Those that prove successful can be retained and those that don't work or are too expensive, etc. can be removed, reconstructed or replaced. The ministry system helps us do this in an organized way using the people available. Elders retire, deacons come and go, preachers move on to other works but the way the church operates its ministries remains the same regardless of the turnover in leadership and volunteers. This reduces the stress and wasted time that a constantly changing volunteer and leadership group produces.

Step 3 – Manage

Church leaders need to understand that for growth to take place, they not only need to have a way to manage ministry (Ministry System) but they also need to encourage and empower the people who are willing to serve and not afraid to propose new ideas or ways of doing things (the elders' main task is to make sure that these ideas and methods do not violate or compromise our obedience to God's word). Elders need to encourage the congregation to come up with ideas and then empower those willing to serve so they can put these ideas into play. To help this process, you have to have two types of meetings.

MINISTRY MEETINGS

An elder and/or deacon along with activity coordinators (these are members who have volunteered to be responsible for one activity in a certain area of ministry (e.g. the person responsible for organizing the church picnic - which is one of the activities in the Fellowship Ministry) meet to plan and organize activities in their area of ministry. In the example just cited this would include the elder/deacon and coordinators who serve in the Fellowship Ministry meet to discuss not only the church picnic but other activities and plans for the area of ministry under fellowship. Their meeting agenda includes a discussion

and report on how various activities are progressing, need for additional volunteers, review of the budget for each activity and the area as a whole, report on any problems or complaints, and some brainstorming for improvement on existing programs or ideas for new ones. Most of the decision making for this area of ministry is made at this meeting.

ELDERS' MEETINGS

One of the problems that many elders describe is the "bottleneck" for decision making that often takes place at their meetings because their agenda is overloaded with issues that require their decision. This occurs because there is no built-in decision making process in the church's ministry system and all decisions, from the color of the new carpet in the fellowship hall to the hiring of a youth minister have to go through the elders. This bottleneck is tiring for the elders themselves and discouraging for those members who are willing to serve but have to wait so long to get their projects, purchases or programs green-lighted.

The five ministry system approach that I have described eases this bottleneck situation by placing the majority of the day-to-day decision making in the hands of the leaders of each ministry area. Since each ministry area has an elder and deacon working with volunteers, and each group already has access to an approved budget for their area, most decisions can be handled at this level.

I do have a suggestion, however, for a more effective and productive way to conduct elders' meetings. This meeting should be divided into two parts:

Part 1. Ministry - During this part of the meeting the elders should be discussing ministry matters. Things like the color of the carpet, should we buy a new church van, what will be the theme for VBS, how is the new Sunday afternoon ministry to bring communion to the shut-ins going. Since each elder is responsible for one or more of the five ministry areas (I realize that not every congregation has a minimum of five elders, so in smaller churches the elders may have to double up)

the discussion can be expedited because the working out of details, final costs, problems, etc. have largely been taken care of at the ministry level meeting with the deacon(s) and volunteers. This part of the elders' meeting is more a reporting and feedback on each ministry so that if a decision by all elders is needed, the actual information and recommendations have already been worked out and prepared at the ministry meeting beforehand.

Part 2. Shepherding - This part of the meeting is about the sheep! There is no discussion about the budget, repairs, vacation time for the staff, only discussion and prayer for the members. When all decisions run through the elders' meetings, most of the time is spent discussing things and money with precious little energy invested in how the shepherds are taking care of the flock which is one of their two primary responsibilities (the other being guarding the church against false teaching and teachers - Acts 20:25-30).

When this method is used, a great burden is lifted from the elders freeing them to do the work which they originally aspired to do (care for the sheep), and the deacons, ministers and saints are empowered to take ownership of the ministry of the church. When the leadership works in cooperation with each other using the New Testament system for ministry, unlimited growth becomes possible to God's glory and the joy of His church.

WHAT IS IT GOING TO TAKE TO MAKE IT WORK?

1. Commitment

The entire church needs to be committed to making it work. The ministry system needs to become our way of doing things because this is taught in the New Testament, not because I learned about it from a book or seminar. If the leaders demonstrate that they are willing to learn and change in order to better follow the New Testament's guidance on this matter, the church will follow.

People who cause trouble are usually in the minority. Most people in the church love and respect their elders and they want them to grow in their ability to lead. If the congregation sees that the elders are united in going forward using this approach to church organization and ministry, they will want to follow.

2. Continuity

All of the plans, ministries and communications need to key off of this ministry model. For example, the budget needs to be broken down along the five areas of ministry so that when it comes to the discussion of money, we do it in terms of the money allotted to each of the five ministry areas. It's like a language that we in this congregation speak in order to communicate clearly and effectively concerning church and ministry matters. Of course, the ideas and language of ministry we are using come from the Bible, we are simply adapting these to our situation and needs today.

3. Christ

The most important person it needs, of course, is our Lord Himself. Let's remember that the power comes from Christ and the glory goes to Him as well. This system is only a tool He has provided us to work with. Hopefully, it will enable everyone to glorify Him by promoting the unlimited growth of His church.

5.

8 Universal Principles for Natural Church Growth

Church growth and development is a field of study that has produced many theories, books and seminars. Unfortunately, much of what has been written comes from ministers of large "mega churches" who have packaged their various growth formulas into books and systems which propose to help other, usually much smaller churches, reproduce in themselves the success that the mega churches have had. The problem, in my opinion, with this is that trying to reproduce a growth model by simply copying the system or the approach of another church rarely works. This is why, for example, there is only one Saddleback Church (20,000 in attendance) or one Willow Creek Church (36,000 attendance). They export their system to all kinds of churches but rarely reproduce their size in other locations because these huge churches are unique to their time and place, and cannot be multiplied simply by copying their structure or implementing their programs. They do provide helpful information on how to improve existing ministries and manage large church groups, but rarely duplicate their success and numbers in other places.

There is one book, however, that is the result of an exhaustive research project about church growth around the world that I think is very valuable. It was written by researcher, Christian Schwarz, and contains many worthwhile ideas on the topic of church growth. Schwarz conducted the most extensive survey of churches around the world studying a thousand different congregations of every type and size in 32 countries with over 4 million responses analyzed. The

purpose of this study was to determine the principle characteristics shared by growing churches, and thus he titled his work, "Natural Church Development: Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches."¹

There was another book that came out by a man named Stephen Covey a couple of years back entitled, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People."² In his research, Covey poured over two hundred years' worth of success-type literature in the form of biographies, systems and profiles of successful people from every walk of life. He then distilled all of this information down to seven key character traits that all successful people he had studied shared, regardless of time or culture. His findings confirmed the important idea that success is not about how much you acquire or how great your success but rather what kind of person you are.

I mention Mr. Covey's book because Christian Schwarz has done a similar thing with the subject of church growth. His research has revealed that all growing churches, regardless of country or position on doctrinal issues, share eight specific quality characteristics, and possess these at a level far above that of non-growing churches. Although his survey included information from churches from every denomination, size and culture, the final result was specific about two points:

1. No matter what the church, if it was growing it possessed these eight characteristics.
2. These growing churches had a high level or degree of these characteristics.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GROWING CHURCHES

Before I describe these characteristics, I want to explain the difference between models for church growth and principles for church growth. These are not the same.

A model is an existing congregation that for whatever reason has experienced success and church growth. The systems that are used in

the model are then copied in other places in order to apply them to churches hoping to experience the same growth. In other words, the Saddleback church (20,000 members) will export its system to another church for them to copy and implement. That's a model.

A principle is something that applies to every church at all times. It's generic. It's biblical. It's universal in its application. Church models are usually seen in a few very successful and innovative churches that have high profiles and export their model for others to copy. Church principles are seen in many churches of all sizes and shapes, and they promote a more natural approach to church growth.

My point is the following: instead of copying a successful model, we should implement principles and characteristics that all growing churches have and share in the natural growth that they experience. Natural church growth is about principles not models.

One last explanation before I share the list with you. The researchers also discovered that growing churches not only shared eight similar characteristics and experienced them to a certain high level, they also learned that each characteristic had a particular quality. For example, a person is not just a skater, she's a figure skater or a speed skater, or a man is not just intelligent, he's intelligent in math or he's a genius in physics. Therefore, each characteristic that they found had a specific quality to it that contributed directly to the growth of that church. Let's remember this idea as we go through the eight quality characteristics shared by all growing churches.

1. Empowering Leadership

Not just leadership, all churches have leadership in one way or another, but growing churches had empowering leadership. In other words, leaders of growing churches concentrated on empowering other Christians for ministry. Empowering leaders don't simply enlist members to help them achieve their personal ministry goal or vision; they assist members in developing their own giftedness and mentor them in reaching their own spiritual goals.

- Leaders visit members, but empowering leaders bring a member with them to visit other members and train them in personal work.
- Leaders teach and evangelize, but empowering leaders are always on the lookout to find and disciple members who have spiritual gifts and provide opportunities for them to use these gifts.

See the difference? Empowering leaders invest most of their time in discipleship, delegation and multiplication. In my experience, empowering leaders are not the superstars of mega churches. One of the problems with having a superstar, whether it be the dynamic preacher or youth minister, is that when the superstar leaves, much of what he has built deteriorates. That's what happens with a superstar who has built a ministry powered by his own dynamism. However, if you have an empowering leadership, even if that leader leaves, he or she (because women in the church serve as well, and in many instances they also exercise leadership in a particular ministry area - e.g. children's ministry, benevolence ministry, etc.) have empowered others to continue the work after they leave.

Empowering leaders, therefore, are not the superstars of mega churches but rather people who know how to cultivate spiritual qualities in others. Speaking of superstars, Jesus only had 12 apostles. He was the Son of God and He had only 12 apostles, and we know that one of them betrayed Him. He certainly would not be considered successful as a mega-church minister today with such a small devoted following, but when we consider how He prepared these men for service we recognize that quality mentoring is far more effective than the quantity of people you attract.

Here are a few other interesting findings based on the research in the area of leadership: formal theological training had a negative effect on church growth. In other words, the more theological training the leaders possessed, the less growth the church experienced. This is not to be confused with knowledge of the Bible which is absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. The theological training mentioned was

that which is offered at mostly liberal universities that reject the inspiration of the Bible and treat Christianity as simply one of the major religions to be studied and classified.

The Bible, however, teaches that Christianity is the only true religion and Jesus the only Savior,

there is no other name under heaven that has been given
among men by which we must be saved.
- Acts 4:12

Churches that espouse the liberal view that all religions are valid have many admirers but don't make converts, and you don't grow the church of the Lord by denying the fact that He is the Son of God and His word is not the Word of God.

Research also showed that leaders who sought help from outside the congregation, outside their normal circle, were usually the ones who were leading growing churches. Leaders who recognized that they needed help did better at growing their churches than those who thought they knew it all, proving once again that humility is a key ingredient for successful, empowering leadership.

2. Gift-Oriented Ministry

The research demonstrated that it was not simply people serving in ministry, but people serving in their area of giftedness, their area of strength who had success in growing the church. When people serve according to their giftedness, they are more likely to be serving in the power of the Lord and not according to their own strength.

For professional ministers, identifying and training members in the use of their gifts should be a major part of their actual work. The minister is like a baseball scout looking for talent. The minister helps Christians identify and use their gifts, and this contributes to church growth more than any other activity. Building each other up builds the church.

3. Passionate Spirituality

Passionate spirituality is not about "speaking in tongues" or rock & roll worship services with lights flashing and people jumping up and down in excitement. The research showed that growing churches had members who cared deeply about spiritual things. They cared about Christ and their lives as Christians. It was important to them. Their passion was in pleasing and serving the Lord. That kind of passion.

Churches whose focus was only getting the forms right, meaning that they focused mostly on the correct way of doing things (especially in the area of public worship) like one cup or 16 cups for communion, or exactly two prayers and then a song during worship, were not growing and had little enthusiasm. And I dare say that this is one of the main problems in the Churches of Christ. We have focused for so long on the externals, we have forgotten about the meaning and purpose of our worship. This is why the very first chapter in this book about church growth was not based on the book of Acts but on Ephesians because if we can be the church that Paul describes in Ephesians, we will be a loving church and have the true pattern for a New Testament church well established. Churches, therefore, where the focus was on getting their lives in sync with Christ found that their enthusiasm for all things, including the proper forms, promoted growth. When people become enthusiastic about being Christians and how they treat each other in Christ, they begin experiencing the passion for their faith that naturally produces personal as well as corporate growth in the church.

4. Functional Structures

Every church has some kind of structure and organization, but not all structures promote growth. Functional structures are those that promote church life, effective ministry and clear communication. What is especially interesting about this research is that it confirms statistically what I've been teaching about church organization and structure for many years and have included in this book.

For example, the most effective structure for the church is the one that is outlined for church organization in Acts 2 (ministry system with the

five biblical ministries working together). It is encouraging to have the conclusions originally drawn only from the study of God's word confirmed statistically and scientifically by someone else's research. Schwarz's studies concluded that the closer to this organizational model the church was, the greater the growth; and the further away you strayed, the less success you had in growing the church.

5. Inspiring Worship Service

I need to make a distinction between style of worship and inspiring worship. There are many styles of worship: high church with imagery and ceremony - Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox churches; high impact worship with music, performance and emotional participation by members - charismatic churches; millennial worship with multi platform presentations including instrumental music, singular performances, charismatic evangelist, all streamed to multiple locations - Church.tv; seeker services geared to introduce worship to nonbelievers - evangelical churches; traditional non-denominational a cappella style (no instruments) worship which is the practice in New Testament churches - Churches of Christ.

The research showed that the style did not impact growth one way or another. Unfortunately many church groups experiment with different styles of worship trying to get the right "mix" of elements that will attract the greatest number of people, and as a result alienate their core members who are usually the ones who do most of the work and contribute most of the funds.

Inspiring worship is that worship where the Holy Spirit of God is truly at work in the worshipers' lives and they are inspired by His presence among them. You cannot manipulate the Spirit of God with your style of worship. Doing so is akin to practicing magic, for this is the basic definition of the occult: trying to influence the spirit world by practicing certain activities in the physical world.

The only factor that style in worship plays is if the worshipers are offering their worship to God in an acceptable manner (which He dictates, not man), and with a believing heart. This is true about

worship both in the Old and New Testaments. The "styles" of worship between the two periods are very different but what remains exactly the same is that in both instances God established the acceptable manner in which He was to be worshiped, and required worship from those whose faith was sincere. In both Old and New Testament times worship is always about what God wants, not what we want.

The inspiration for worship, however, does not come from externals like the type of building the worshipers meet in or the talent of the worship leaders and the particular style they use to worship God. Inspiration for sincere worship is produced by an ongoing dynamic played out between the worshiper and God throughout the week (usually referred to as the process of sanctification) and shared with others on the Lord's day. The spin-off benefit of this kind of inspired worship, produced as a result of the sanctification process generated by the worshiper's continual submission to the Holy Spirit is the overall growth of members who worship because of inspiration and not duty.

6. Holistic Small Groups

The researchers found that this characteristic truly separated growing from declining churches. Many churches have small groups or they have a "program" but don't experience any significant growth as a result because the small groups are just one among many programs the ministry staff operates. However, holistic small groups are different.

These small groups are designed to help members use their gifts, share their lives, minister to each other, pray and support each other, and not simply eat together. Fellowship is not about food, it's about sharing Christ.

Schwarz says, *"...There's an enormous difference between church leaders discussing evangelism, and loving relationships, or gift oriented ministry in its staff meetings, and having Christians integrated into a small group and go through a process in which he or she actually experiences the meaning of these things in real terms within the confines of the group."*

If the group is meeting simply to eat together, this is pleasant socializing and edifying to a point. However, if the small group is meeting together to think about how to best evangelize the local community and someone comes up with a great idea, and everyone gets excited with different people sharing their insights and volunteering their skills, that's growth in fellowship...and by the way there's pizza and Dr. Pepper if anyone is hungry.

As I said, small groups are nothing new. The research simply points out that when these are used to mentor and minister to the saints, the overall church grows.

7. Need-Oriented Evangelism

Research in this area revealed a lot of interesting facts, one of which was that only about 10 percent of members have a gift for this particular ministry. This runs counter to the idea that 100 percent of the church should be involved in evangelism. This is like saying that 100 percent of the men in the congregation should be involved in song leading. Most understand that this would be unrealistic because not everyone has the ability to lead singing, even if they receive instruction. We are ready to accept this reasoning concerning the ministry of song leading in public worship but have difficulty believing that the same could be true about the ministry of evangelism.

The important point to note, however, is that as Christians we are all responsible to share our faith, but only a few (and according to the research the few account for about 10 percent of us) have a natural gift for evangelism, just as only a few have a gift for song leading, teaching a class or writing books, etc. However, when all the members work together and pool their respective gifts in the service of the church, we produce a fully functioning whole able to exercise a variety of gifts that ultimately meet the needs of all five areas of biblical ministry.

Another statistic that revealed how even those with little ability in the area of evangelism could be productive was that each member (regardless of their area of talent) had about eight contacts in their family and social circle. These contacts included people who were not

members of the church or believers who were not committed disciples. This meant that even though a member was not known to be a natural "soul winner" they still had access to people in their immediate circle of family and friends who were candidates for teaching and preaching of the gospel.

Growing churches were those that capitalized on this number by creating opportunities for these candidates to be exposed to the gospel and come in contact with those in the church that did have the skill in developing a relationship with someone with the primary goal of teaching them the gospel. The leaders in these churches (especially those tasked with leading and managing the evangelism ministry) understood that it was easier to approach and develop the eight contacts that everybody already had than trying to create contacts with total strangers through mail solicitation or a door-knocking campaign. Add to this a variety of practical services (e.g. free eye clinic for kids; free classroom supplies for back to school days; mom's day out program; men's "power" breakfast; summer youth camp/activity) that the church could provide as a way for each member (gifted or not) to link their contacts to someone or some service of the church.

In this way, need-oriented evangelism encourages each Christian to use their gifts and resources to serve non-Christians with whom they have a relationship and see to it that they hear the Gospel and create that all important connection to the local church.

8. Loving Relationships

Growing churches have a high love quotient and declining churches have a low love quotient. Does this seem strange to us that the God of love would be worshiped by a church of love? The research repeatedly demonstrated that a loving church was more powerful than one whose only ministry was that of evangelism, or a church that prided itself on the number of programs that it offered, or a church that saw itself as the last bastion of truth.

If a church claims to be evangelistic or busy, and the pillar of the truth, but is deficient in love then there is something missing. There is some

teaching or attitude that is incorrect, because where the Spirit of Christ is, there is love. People come to Christ and His church because of the gospel, and ministry, and teaching, but they stay in the body because of love.

Forgive me as I share a personal witness here to make my point:

When I was a 30-year-old who had been "on the road" for several years in order to find myself and what to do with my life, I saw an article in the local paper that was entitled, "Sinners are Welcome at the Church of Christ." It spoke of Christ seeking and saving the lost and had an open invitation to worship at a small congregation near my apartment in Montreal. The title and invitation intrigued me so I attended their Sunday service.

I walked in, not too sure of what to expect, and this smiling Jamaican lady invited me to sit next to her. She helped me with the song book and explained what to do with the communion elements (having the bread and wine brought to you in the pew was a new experience for me since I was raised in the Catholic Church where the people went to the front to receive only the bread from the priest). She handed me a bulletin and quietly answered my questions as the service moved along. She treated me like her favorite nephew. When the service was over she gave me a hug and said, to what must have seemed like a most unlikely candidate for conversion wearing black jeans and a black shirt sporting sun glasses and a bulging package of cigarettes in his pocket, "Will you come back?" I said, "Maybe," and she said, "I'll be here." And she was when I returned the following Sunday. She was my first contact in the Church of Christ, a divorced mother of three studying to be a nurse with this nice singsong way of talking. I saw her recently at a funeral I was conducting for a mutual friend of ours. There she sat in the pew, now 88 years old, still my aunt in the Lord, still faithful, still that Jamaican lilt in her voice.

NO LOVE = NO GROWTH

When people come to you, they are not looking for theology, they are looking for love. That young mom who is alone with two little kids because her husband decided he didn't want to be married anymore, and now she's got to make ends meet, and she's tired all the time and then somebody invites her to church. Do you think she cares for one minute that we don't use instruments in our worship? Do you think she cares about that? Do you think she cares about male spiritual leadership, or how we serve communion, or if it's ok to eat in the building? Really, do you think any of that is important to her as she walks in to your church building? The only thing she cares about is, "Are these people going to love me? Are they going to accept me? I have a broken marriage, two kids and I'm not sure how I am going to make it. Can I find a place here for me?" No research necessary here. She'll be able to tell by your faces. She'll know.

There will be time to teach her the Word, absolutely, and there will be time to explain why we do things the way we do them, and there will be time to answer the question, "You know, I've noticed that it's just men that go up there to pray, why is that?" There will be time for that, but if there's no love, I guarantee you there will be no time to teach her anything including the gospel of forgiveness.

Growing churches are churches of love.

LAST WORD

There they are, the eight essential characteristics for growing churches, principles that can be applied to any church, anywhere. They are biblically based and have been statistically proven through the most extensive survey ever conducted on church growth. Most churches have some or all of these characteristics to a lesser or greater degree. The point of the research was that growing churches had all of these and had them in abundance.

Allow me to close both this chapter and book with a question: "Do you want to be a growing congregation?" If you do, then these are the

principles that you must cultivate and this is the pattern or structure that you need to follow and implement. Combine these two things and add fervent prayer, and nothing will stop your congregation from becoming a leadership church. People will come to your church to learn how to grow and this will honor God and bless your church beyond measure. God bless you and your efforts at producing Unlimited Growth.

¹Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 1996).

²Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1989).

APPENDIX A MINISTRY FLOW CHARTS

DIGITAL VERSIONS OF THESE CHARTS ARE
AVAILABLE ON BIBLETALK.TV

Example Chart:

<https://bibletalk.tv/example-flow-chart>

Blank Flow Chart:

<https://bibletalk.tv/flow-chart>

Quick List of Ministry Structure

Evangelism

Steve Harrison/Harold Weaver
(Local/Dom.)

Dayton Keesee
International

- **Local Outreach—Steve Harrison/Harold Weaver**
- Visitor Follow Up—Elders/Mike Coghill
- Pers. Bible Studies—Marty Kessler/Mike Coghill
- New Converts—Marty Kessler/Mike Coghill
- **Domestic Outreach:**
- BibleTalk.tv—Mike Mazzalongo
- TV Studio—Mike Mazzalongo
- Hal Gatewood

International Outreach:

- **Contact Elder—Dayton Keesee**
- Haiti—Mike Mazzalongo
- Kenya—Mike Mazzalongo
- Missionary Requests
- Mission Trips
- Special Collections
- WBS—Steve Harrison

Education

Bob Chilton

- **Bible School Classes:**
- *Adult*—Mike Mazzalongo
- *Teen*—Mike Coghill
- *EPIC/LTC*—Mike Coghill
- *Junior*—Don Furchie
- *Preschool*—Nuecie Henderson
- **Time Travelers**—Jane Weaver
- **Teacher's Workroom**—Keri Perkins
- Juice Shires
- **Youth Ministry:**
- Mike Coghill
- **Agree to Disagree**—Keri Perkins
- **Children's Bible Time**—Allen & Prati Maxwell, Gary & Juice Shires
- **Camp**—Mike Coghill
- **PBS**—Mike Coghill

Fellowship

- **Ministry Flow Chart/Involvement**—Mike Coghill
- **Event Calendar**—Celestia Bennett/Mike Coghill
- **Special Events**—Mike Coghill
- **Women's Ministry Coordinators**—Laura
- **Golden Travelers**—Ron Rowland
- **Crochet Class**—Wilma Walters
- **Mommy & Me**—Carolyn Christensen
- **Shoppers**—Jeannie Aldridge
- **Praddings**—Lorrie Carpenter

Service

Bob Aldridge

- **Administration:** Marty Kessler
- **Office Managers:** Marty Kessler
- Secretary/Bullein—Celestia Bennett
- Bookkeeper—Sarah Kriwanak
- Custodian—Gail Morgan
- Church Directory—Celestia Bennett/Website—Celestia Bennett
- **Finance**
- **Contact—Harold Weaver/Bob Chilton**
- Finance Committee—Sarah Kriwanak

Computer Maintenance—Kim Wall

- **Benevolence, Marty Kessler**
- **Contact Deacon—Lloyd Smith**
- Response—Office
- Food Pantry—Brian & Linda Cupps
- Food Distribution—Brian & Linda Cupps
- Benevolence Requests—Marty Kessler
- Food for the Hungry—Doris
- Benevolence Sewing—Judy Smith
- Card Ministry—Maybell Bailey
- Komsomolsk Orphan Home—TBA
- Prepared With Love—Office
- **Stamps**—Phyllis
- **Singles/Widows Support**—Phyllis Wood/Ceclene Copeland
- With Love From Choctaw—Niecie Henderson/Jeanie Aldridge/Lise Mazzalongo

Worship

Johnny Henderson

- **Preaching:**
- Pulpit—Marty Kessler
- Mike Mazzalongo
- Mike Coghill
- **Worship Leaders—Don Alsup & Roy Beatty**
- **Contact Deacon—Deacon Alan Cook**
- Preschool Time—Deacon Alan Cook
- Coordinating Men to Serve—Don Alsup, Roy Beatty, Chuck Eckert
- Count Offering—TBA
- **Prayers:**
- Nursery—Bobbie Poindexter
- Communion for sick & shut-ins—Jason Smith
- Media Coordinator—Hal Gatewood
- Sound Booth—Will Mazzalongo
 - Roy Beatty
 - Tech
- Joe Weaver—Tech
- Security—James Punneo

Visitor Services:

- **Mike Coghill**
- **Announcements—Ron Eager**
- Announcements—Mike Coghill or Mike Mazzalongo
- Information Desk—Deacon Ron Eager
- Greeters—Deacon Ron Eager
- Ushers—Deacon Ron Eager

Maintenance—Interior: Bob Aldridge

- **Contact Deacon—Alan Cook**
- Lighting—Joe Bailey
- Carpets—Gail Morgan
- Order Supplies—Gail Morgan
- Kitchen—Diane Eager
- Renovations/Repairs—Deacon Alan Cook
- Plumbing—Joe Bailey
- Baptnery Maintenance—Tom Detherage

Maintenance—Exterior: Steve Harrison

- Grounds keeping/Mowing—Joe Weaver
- Volunteers
- General Repairs—Deacon Alan Cook
- Van Maintenance—Jim Poindexter
- Sign—Larry Tabor

Unlimited Growth
A N.T. Pattern for Church Org. & Growth
Flow Chart

EVANGELISM	EDUCATION	FELLOWSHIP	WORSHIP	SERVICE

APPENDIX B

IDEA WORKSHEET

Digital Version Available:

<https://bibletalk.tv/idea-worksheet>



IDEA WORKSHEET

EVANGELISM

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

EDUCATION

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

FELLOWSHIP

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

WORSHIP

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

SERVICE

Idea #1 _____

Idea #2 _____

Idea #3 _____

BibleTalk.tv is an Internet Mission Work.

We provide video and textual Bible teaching material on our website and mobile apps for free. We enable churches and individuals all over the world to have access to high quality Bible materials for personal growth, group study or for teaching in their classes.

The goal of this mission work is to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people using the latest technology available. For the first time in history it is becoming possible to preach the gospel to the entire world at once. BibleTalk.tv is an effort to preach the gospel to all nations every day until Jesus returns.

The Choctaw Church of Christ in Oklahoma City is the sponsoring congregation for this work and provides the oversight for the BibleTalk ministry team. If you would like information on how you can support this ministry, please go to the link provided below.

bibletalk.tv/support