

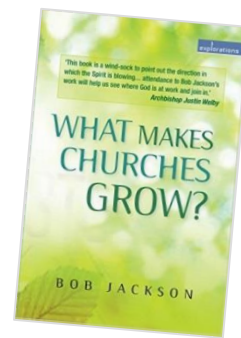
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What Makes Churches Grow?

Vision and practice in effective mission

CHP 2015

Notes by Alison Morgan November 2015



Part I : How is the growth project getting on?

1. Growth in numbers – what is church growth and how do you measure it?

Growth in a church should be assessed by numbers, depth of faith, and power of ministry.

Church is a community not an attendance event. So we no longer measure growth by counting numbers at particular attendance events. We now look for a list of all the effective participants in the worshipping community of the local church, compiled by the local leadership and kept up to date. From 2012 the 'Statistics for Mission' form asks for this split by age group. It also asks for numbers of joiners and leavers, so we can see what the trends are.

2. Measuring growth in depth and vitality

Summary of approaches.

- The National Church Life Survey (NCLS, Australia) – measures core qualities
- Natural Church Development (Christian Schwarz) – 8 quality characteristics, focussed on activities (but participation does not necessarily create growth)
- Healthy Churches Handbook (Robert Warren)
- 'Reveal' from Willow Creek – discovered that increased attendance in ministry programmes does not necessarily lead to spiritual growth, particularly for more mature Christians who want not spiritual parenting but mentoring. A programmatic approach does not work for mature Christians – who are the ones on whom the health of the church depends. 'Those most engaged in these activities (giving, small groups, church attendance, ministry role) were exactly the ones who tended to be dissatisfied.
- John Truscott's Church Health Review.

Principles:

1. Identify weaknesses and attend to them
2. Nurture mature Christians, not just new ones. Many of our most able people are bored by church services – interaction is key.
3. Shape church round the people, not vv.
4. Keep growing yourself

3. Growth initiatives

Looking back helps us remember the journey we are on. Review – the Decade of Evangelism, the ordination of women, employment of lay ministers, discipleship courses, spiritual renewal, attention to good practice, intentional mission planning, Fresh Expressions, Back to Church Sunday (it seems 5% of the population would consider going if asked), catering for families (eg 2500 Messy Churches registered, mostly with monthly attendance), MAP, following the Spirit (there has been no master plan, just loads of grass roots initiatives).

'Anyone wishing to compare central planning and private enterprise as rival ways of generating growth should compare the economies of North and South Korea' – 37.

4. Growth in patterns

The decline narrative – looking at the stats. New and Pentecostal denominations are growing, Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic declining most, with Baptist, Anglican and Independent in the middle. In London, ethnic minorities are more likely to be in church on an average Sunday.

Church growth in London is due not to bigger congregations but to more churches. Smaller churches are more likely to be growing. Cathedrals are growing – but they are much better resourced so that is expected.

Strategies leading to growth: planting a new congregation or fresh expression (mostly not transfer growth, as only 25% are previously churchgoing); making changes to church life or services; having a missional intention. Taken together, the growing segments of the CofE are balancing the shrinking segments. So if those with a decline profile emulated those with a growth profile, we would see overall growth.

5. Growth in total?

Late C20th decline stats from his previous books. In 2003 we had 16,196 churches in the CofE; in 2013 we had 15,799. But we have many new FEx congregations.

In 2013, more churches grew their child attendance than saw declines.

Between 2002 and 2012 numbers of stipendiary clergy fell by 14%, but numbers of self supporting and active retired clergy rose. We now have 16,800 active clergy, of whom 7,900 are full time equivalent. This leads to a net increase. From 2003 to 2013, infant baptisms declined to 122K; adult baptisms rose to 10,900 – perhaps partly because fewer people are now baptised as infants; but showing a 13% growth over 10 years. Marriages, funerals and confirmations all declined. PCC income remained the same. Christmas and Easter (non eucharistic) attendance declined. Usual Sunday attendance declined by 12% (17% in the 90s), but the decline in 2013 was only 0.4%. October counts showed much less decline, with none over the last 2 years. Comparison between electoral roll numbers and attendance numbers suggests that one third of adult attendance decline is due to people coming less often, and two thirds because there are fewer members. One large church discovered that most people came once or twice in 4 weeks. Joiners exceed leavers in almost all dioceses. If you lose 1% of weekly churchgoers and gain 4% of monthly ones (eg Messy Church) then you find that attendance falls but membership rises.

Measuring the worshipping community – a new record, but it looks as if it was 1.010m in 2012 and 1.056m in 2013: a rise of 5%.

So is the CofE shrinking or growing? Depends what you measure – table on p69. Between 2008 and 2013 we had growth in number of congregations, active clergy, adult baptisms, marriages and membership surveys; decline in funerals, confirmations, PCC income, uSa measures, Xmas and Easter attendance; and status quo in number of churches, infant baptisms, and weekday counts.

Conclusions:

- Christendom measures have stopped going down
- Attendance measures are going down but more slowly
- Membership measures are going up

If we measure active membership rather than attendance, the CofE is growing. If we maintain a growth agenda we will find our prospects brighter.

Part II : What is working on the ground today?

6. Intending to grow

It is those who intend to grow the church who tend to grow the church, 73.

Is your church a magic roundabout (round and round a seasonal liturgy) or a gospel train? David Vaos found that 64% of churches with a clear mission and purpose were growing, but only 26% of those without one were. But in order to grow you don't aim at growth, you aim to produce the conditions in which God is able to grow the church – quality and relevance. So it's not one-off gimmicks, but a focus on the range and quality of church life you need. MAP – history, effectiveness. Introducing MAP led to growth in London and Blackburn. In Lichfield churches which used MAP grew more than those which didn't. Same in St David's. MAP is associated with improving numerical growth trends.

Churches are not businesses – but they are not less than businesses, they are more than businesses...

How to use MAP in a diocese – persuade rather than demand, offer training, provide mentoring, facilitate sharing of good practice, coordinate, offer grants, make it about quality too, monitor and learn, be honest.

How to use MAP in a church – make a corporate decision, involve everyone, pray, start with vision not strategy, have a broad understanding of mission (eg 5 marks), have a few mission priorities, make sure the MAP is about mission and action, do the plan as well as write it, make sure it's SMART, allocate tasks and responsibilities, subtract activities as well as add them, review annually, think long term.

7. Leading to grow

We can only dream of one incumbent per church. We now have 2.1 churches per full time minister; and the average age of clergy is rising faster than new ordinations – so it will increase. Asking clergy to lead more churches never leads to growth, *unless* the model of ministry changes. London hasn't cut clergy numbers, and it's the best growing diocese in the CofE. The figures show that the bigger the reduction in clergy numbers, the bigger the attendance loss.

Leadership is key to the growth of churches. If you are on a cruise and learn that the captain is actually skipper of seven ships and he is on a different one today, your confidence might begin to wobble as you round Cape Horn. There is nothing wrong with a paid leadership model; the problem arises when you stick with the paid-leader model but don't provide one. If you have fewer clergy but retain a clergy-centric model, lay leaders feel disempowered in the face of obvious need.

Alternative responses to shrinking clergy numbers:

- The team – ministry teams. One full time minister in every place has been replaced by one full time and several spare time ministers across the benefice; this is not a move to every member ministry. Pastoral care and leadership both suffer.
- Longer vacancies – which lead inexorably to rapid decline in congregation numbers
- Fewer churches (the RC solution) – but when churches close, half their members just stop going to church. If we want to grow we need more churches, not fewer.
- More clergy – a policy of active recruitment might lead to an increase in ordinations. But we actually have more active clergy than churches. Dioceses need to deploy volunteer clergy more strategically; not just as gap fillers for the incumbent.

The future needs re-imagining. A diocese with too few paid leaders needs more unpaid ones; many F.Ex leaders are not paid, ordained or even authorised. Each church community needs its own designated 'focal' leader, perhaps with stipendiary clergy acting as overseers of Ministry areas composed of 10-20 churches with focal ministers whose role is to lead the mission of the church and galvanize the ministry of all. This means we would need threefold ministry training, much of which should be in the parish. It's happening in Bridgnorth.

- Stipendiary clergy and others for oversight and focal ministry
- Focal ministers for church community leadership
- Everybody as part of a missionary community

8. Training to grow

'Anecdote to Evidence' report by David Voas found that churches where the vicar had been on a leadership training course were no more likely to grow than others. Many F.Ex leaders have had no training. LYCIG courses do however produce growth.

Problem – just as hospitals spends money training doctors and nurses but not patients, so the church trains clergy but not laity – because ministry is understood as to be exercised by paid professionals. And yet ministry is for all – Revn 5.9-10. Diocesan lay training schemes tend to be sledgehammers to crack nuts – what's needed is not grand semi-academic courses, but some low key help to be more effective in the ministries and roles they already have as Christians in the world and as members of their local churches. Clergy are meant to be a means, not an end. We need to train whole church communities. NV vacancies are the cause of most of the CofE's recent attendance loss!

9. Inviting to grow

A Church Times survey found that only ¼ of Christians invite people to their church. Yet when we do, they come.

Paul Clarke visited all baptism contacts to tell them about a new teatime service – half of them came!

David Voas found that the most direct route to growth comes from invitations. A Tearfund phone survey found there are 3m people in the UK open to churchgoing if someone would invite them – nobody had. Flyers don't work.

St Alphege, Seasalter, Kent wrote a Welcome collect. While they used it at every service, they grew. When they stopped, they stopped.

10. Families to grow

The Church is always one generation away from extinction; and in the UK there has been a long collective failure to pass on the faith to enough of the next generation to sustain the size of the Christian community.

P142 graph shows that a smaller percentage of every age group has any religious affiliation.

In 2910, 85% of children were in Sunday Schools. P 143 chart of decline. These were mostly in the afternoon, and provided something to do. The move to mornings in the 50s and 60s accelerated the decline.

P 145 pie chart showing the age at which people become Christians – mostly as children and young people.

Children used to attend alone – now it's whole families, and this is the main area of growth for the church today.

Some suggestions for reaching families:

1. Become more intentional
2. Renew the culture – get the communication channels right
3. Love children and their parents
4. Listen to parents and children – ask about timings and provision
5. Provide good leadership

6. Join in with other churches
7. Set a budget
8. Improve the physical facilities
9. Make thoughtful provision (nappies, playmats)
10. Improve that Sunday groups
11. Take a look at the monthly family service
12. Try new service times
13. Offer all age worship
14. Introduce new styles and fresh expressions
15. Try Messy Church
16. Employ paid staff
17. Work through schools
18. Use seasonal and occasional events

11. Planting to grow

Planting is the best way to grow – that's how it's been done in London. The areas of lowest churchgoing (Jull and S Yorks) are those with fewest churches.

Fresh Expressions – criteria pp 163-64. The essentials are that a F.Ex should be missional, formational (makes disciples), contextual, ecclesial (not a bridge but church itself)>

About half the cases offered by dioceses as F.Exs were accepted as such by the CA Research Unit, including over half the Messy Churches. The leaders of F.Exs believe that 25% of their members are pre-existing Christians, 35% have come back to church, 40% are new to churchgoing. 'when it comes to growing with new people and winning new generations nothing else comes close to the planting of fresh expressions of church.' Those led by part time leaders were most likely to continue growing after the initial planting period.

Messy Church statistics p 173. In 2014 there were c. 180,000 registered members, half adults and half children, in about 6600 Messy Churches. If you take account of unregistered ones it's probably about ¼ million members.

12. Changing to grow

'Postmoderns treat churches like helicopters. They keep their distance for fear of being sucked in by the rotas'! And yet people are looking for community – used not to be the case, people would go to church for other reasons. Churches still draw people, if we offer the right things.

The evidence is clear: churches making changes grow, those not doing so shrink. It's universal.

Types of change leading to growth include:

1. Planting new congregations
2. Relaxed worship with good music
3. Better provision for children and young people
4. Improving welcome and integration of newcomers
5. Small groups and pastoral care
6. Evangelism and nurture courses
7. Lay leadership
8. Improved buildings

Service times – teatime now works better for families. Leaders need to win trust before making changes. Effective MAPs include sacrifice.

13. Spending to grow

It is said that the majority of Anglican churches have a bigger budget for church flowers than for the whole of their youth and children's ministry! Spending is often determined by the attitude and worry level of the treasurer.

Every church should review its past spending to see if it's financial priorities have matched its actual priorities.

Giving has been rising even as attendance has been falling.

Money follows vision. Parish shares – the system sometimes penalises growth.

A national growth fund to go alongside diocesan ones would probably be the best contribution of carefully targeted funding the national church could make to the culture of enterprise that will grow the church of the future.

14. Cathedrals to grow

Attendance has grown, perhaps because cathedrals cater for weekday church going, partly because they are better resourced. The pattern is for lots of small crowds at lots of services, not big ones at a few. A congregational survey in

4 cathedrals found that people like the peaceful environment, the music and style of worship, the friendly community. Detailed breakdown pp 217-218.

15. Dioceses to grow

Until recently dioceses did not adopt strategies to aid the flourishing and growth of the churches. They maintained stability rather than provoked change. The first to develop a written mission and growth strategy was London in the 1990s, followed by Leicester & Lichfield in 2004/5, then others. The majority now have one or are working on one. Vision comes first, strategy follows. Vision is where you want to go, strategy is how to get there. There are 4 things dioceses can do:

1. Reform the elements that hold churches back – shortening vacancies, reforming parish share systems, reducing overheads etc
2. Add new elements – mission and growth posts, growth fund grants, helpful conferences and training opportunities
3. Improve the way the diocese supports the clergy
4. Make direct parish interventions – MAPs, LYCIG courses, Back to Church Sundays etc

There are other key elements – prayer; cultural transformation; good theology; a united approach across departments; celebration of successes; recruitment; support the whole people of God not just clergy; MAP; prioritise the young; communicate well; reshape structures; encourage church planting and F.Ex; shorten vacancies; make finance serve strategy not vice versa; be guided by research findings; measure growth. Evidence suggests a diocese with a growth strategy achieves growth.

Part III : What is working under the surface?

16. Angels and growth

Rev 2.1. The church has an angel, literal or not. Tackle the past!

17. Guidance, prayer and growth

Church growth results from listening and guidance. It's God who makes things grow; there are no blueprints, no equations, no predictability. This book offers just a toolkit, some of the things that seem to be associated with growth. Here's a checklist:

1. Plans are established by seeking advice – Prov 20.18
2. Your word is a lamp and a light – Ps 119.105
3. Prophetic words – Agabus Acts 11.28
4. Discussion – Acts 15.6-7
5. Leadership – Acts 15.13,19 summary and decision
6. Fasting and prayer – Acts 13.3
7. The Lord's purpose is the one to seek – Prov 19.21
8. Commit to the Lord – Prov 16.3

18. The Holy Spirit and Growth

Ezekiel 37 and the dry bones. Perhaps a church doing all the right things is still no more than a lifeless skeleton – we need to depend on the Spirit. We need to model ourselves not on a rowing boat but on a sailing sloop. Acts 1.8 – we must ask for power. And yet expecting God to bring revival as he did in cohesive communities like Welsh mining villages a century ago is unrealistic; we too have our part to play. We need to have confidence in the Church, and confidence in the gospel. *It is not believers in Jesus who will evangelise the world, it is lovers of Jesus – 281.*