

104 Ways to Grow a Church

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Forty percent of Americans are unchurched.

For every 5 you might invite, two probably do not have a church home.

Even in a small community, there are many people who do not have a church they consider “theirs.”

Mandatory Processes and Information

1. If anyone says to you “We’ve never done it that way before” smile and say, “Thank you!”
2. Prospect Lists—all the time! Includes: a) Church members’ spouses who may not belong to your church b) people who have visited in the last 18 months c) people who have demonstrated any interest in your congregation d) parents of children who attend your Sunday School e) leaders of groups who use your building f) ANYBODY
3. Possibles List (different from Prospect List)—can include the whole phone book (but not people who are on other church’s rolls)!
4. Two times a year, put a blank sheet of paper in the bulletin and ask people to write down names of anyone they think might be open to contact. (In ‘77-‘78, I asked people to do this once a month! It netted us over 40 new members over the next 3 years and at least 10 later members.)
5. Obtain a copy of the city plat. Divide it into sections, and number each house. (Hint—use pencil!) Note where your church people live, and train them that if somebody new moves into their neighborhood, they should ask them to church. (Statistically, 3 of every 4 people join a church because they were initially asked by a friend)
6. Review the plat anytime the address of a prospect is gained. Check who is living near there who might help in the process.
7. Make changes on the plat as you know people move. Work at keeping up with the demographic flow (ex. 1 house has had 5 families in the last 20 years—we’ve had 4 of them in our church. Another house: we’re 3 for 3)
8. Talk to people at school functions—especially people you don’t recognize. Pastors—if you’re worried about people labeling you one of “those kind”, please comfort yourself with the faith-belief that when you win a few over, they will be better off listening to you on Sunday than not being in church!
9. Signs—one at every entrance into town.
10. Take a minute during announcement time to lift up something positive the church has done in the community. By lifting up something each week, the laity begins to put together what’s special about their church—and they’re more likely to lift it up to others. Maybe tell a cute story or joke also, if that’s your thing.
11. Signs for parking, etc. (Would a first-time visitor know what door to take their children to for Sunday School?)

12. The pastor needs to set as a goal that there will be more members in than out. Period.
13. The pastor must have time to do the ministry of evangelism and church growth. The church board must affirm this time.
14. Memorize the phone number of your Christian Education Director.
15. Train your key people in the church on the abiding differences between the three basic generations in the church and make sure that you understand how to attract and keep them. (i.e., “Keys for reaching people born since 1965—use humor, understand their economic pessimism, emphasize relationships, ask for shorter time commitments, emphasize service to others, use technology, understand their entrepreneurial spirit, emphasize opportunities for adventure, accept their dress code. “From *Net Results*)

Suggested Processes and Information

16. When you get organized, consider doing a phone survey in your community regarding religious preference/ church membership. (When we did this in 1983, we came away with a possible list of about 250. Once we knew who was unchurched, our task force focused on those people for the next 5 years. We think we’ve gained about 75 members (including confirmands) as a result of this survey.)
17. If you’re fortunate enough to have a city clerk or water crew member in your church, ask them for a list of new water hook-ups (4 times a year is more than adequate).
18. Know where your people work—new workers in a community want to become acquainted. What a blessing to be asked to church by a co-worker!
19. Know where your people play—teammates make great church members, too!
20. Look into a radio or TV ministry (your message is as good as most of the ones that are on the air now)
21. Radio/TV and newspaper advertising
22. Longevity counts: A pastor needs to stay in place for at least 10 years in order to be effective. Keep yours. The first five years of a pastorate is the time it takes to build trust. From 5-10 years, ministry begins to build. After 10 years, you can really make a difference.
23. Budget a minimum of \$500/year for evangelism (Bibles, signs, brochures, church directories, etc.)
24. Create your Evangelism and Church Growth Task Force (hand-picked).
25. Commit to reading 3 books on evangelism and church growth this year and discussing them with your task force members.
26. Subscribe to *Net Results*. Read it. Do it.
27. Get your Women’s Fellowship officers on board—Men, too!
28. Begin the process of sharing your new vision for church music with your choir director (careful here!)
29. Set up a New Members Integration committee or Guardian Angel program.

30. Start a parish nurse program.
31. Look into the possibility of having a community nursery or pre-school located in your church. How about an after-school program?
32. Offer specific-needs kinds of mission projects: Habitat for Humanity, Heifer Project, etc. (Our VCS kids have gone from raising money for chicks to this year's project of 2 llamas...each year they go beyond their goal!)
33. Encourage congregational input—have an annual take-stock-of-the-situation time, not “business-as-usual” time.
34. Try planning some out-of-church fun events. Invite everyone! Many might pick up on having fun with brothers and sisters in the faith. (ex. Iowa Cubs games, concerts, movies, etc.)

Kids and Youth

The biggest single drawing card in our church is kids. Jesus says “Where your money is there shall your heart also be. Verily, we speaketh to thee: Where the kids are happy, there shall their parents pitch their tent.

35. Get your Christian Education Director on board with your goals.
36. Get your Sunday School teachers on board with your goals—train them all!
37. Train youth leaders on how to incorporate new kids.
38. Children and youth inviting their friends is the fastest way to grow.
39. Sunday School has to be fun to grow! (Kids are more honest than adults—they won't invite their friends if they're not having a good time!) Use a quality curriculum and make it fun. (Learning still takes place—just with fun incorporated!) Weekly treats, birthdays, dress-up at holidays, etc.
40. Make sure your Sunday School teachers understand how important they are to the process! Their most important ministry is to see that each child who comes into their class feels loved and accepted, especially visitors and new ones.
41. Make music a part of your Sunday School program (it has to have a message, not just be cute—but you have to have fun songs each week, too!) Both Bible Quest and Seasons of the Spirit include music CDs, so even if you don't have a “trained” musician, you can still have quality music.
42. Our most powerful tool for getting kids: in late July or early August, obtain a class roster from your school (a teacher can get it for you if the school doesn't want to give it out. The new privacy laws make this tougher!). Sit down with your committee, identify known church people (yours and others), and color-code them. The first time is the toughest—there will be many you don't know—but you will soon! *You probably cannot do the entire list in the first year...you will have success, but don't add too many kids at once or you'll lose Sunday School teachers! Adding 2-3 per year per class is about it.
*Watch out that you don't contact too many at once— the other pastors in town will get upset if they figure out what you're doing!
*Always remember—you are just trying to connect people with God.

43. If your church gives Bibles to 3rd graders, start with the third grade class list. Call all unknown kids and ask their parent if their child has a church which will be giving them a Bible. If they say yes, thank them for their time. If they say no—kick into gear! We invite them to Sunday School at 9:00, and worship at 10:30 on the second Sunday in September, and we will have a Bible for them. (Get ready to spend a lot of money on Bibles!) Our church of 383 members has given out 136 Bibles in the last 8 years (17 per year).
44. Second target group: Kindergarten. You would be amazed how many children have never been to Sunday School. Starting public school is a good time to start Sunday School, too.
45. Third target group: Confirmation age. I invite every child in our school district who does not have a church to attend to come to our confirmation program. Three of 11 in this year's program have parents who were not evangelized into the church.
46. Fourth target group: Seventh grade (or whenever you start youth group) (Notes: Your highest success rates will probably be in the lower grades. We occasionally snag a high schooler, but not very often.
47. VCS—we have 'em all! Every kid in town is invited. We have a quality program—everyone is trained. Our program includes up to 110 kids and over 40 adult. We run our program in August (second or third week), Monday through Friday from 6:30-8:30 p.m.
48. Offer the use of your building to Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, etc.—free, of course.
49. Have Sunday School kids invite their friends to participate in the Christmas program, especially kids without church affiliation. Give them a part, let them sing in the choir, give everyone treats afterwards.
50. When you have your annual Christmas program, have a fellowship time afterwards. Have cookies, hot chocolate, and sing Christmas carols together.
51. Have short-term study groups/ project groups. (One month, six weeks, etc.)
52. Try using movies, VHS, DVDs as a Lenten study guide or on-goingly. We have Sunday night at the Movies. People gather at 6 p.m., watch til 7:30 or 8:00, discussion after for those who want to stay. Popcorn, soft drinks.

Basic Procedural Changes

53. Don't listen to anyone who says: "It was good enough for my...(fill in the blank—father, grandfather, mother, etc.) Ask them if they're still driving the car they had in 1950 and if their home contains a microwave, computer, or a VCR.
54. Eliminate or lighten any constitutional rules regarding the use of your building by non-church members or outside groups. Let them use it for free, and pray that it is often! Good luck on wearing out your carpet!
55. Do a "virtual reality" check of your building: Outside: neat, inviting; trees, shrubs neat; sidewalks in good repair, no peeling paint, etc.
56. Do you have adequate parking?

57. How does your church smell inside? (Many churches smell old—young people notice!—and they don't like it!)
58. Adequate lighting is a must in every room! There are charts showing wattage/sq. ft. for reading. The older we get, the more we need.

Physical Settings for Worship

59. Look at your sanctuary. Is it open and inviting? If not, how can you make it that way? Do what you need to do (within reason) to make your chancel an open area.
60. Are your pews padded? If not, why not? (If cost is the issue, today's church goers are going to be comfortable sitting—if they're not comfortable sitting in your church, they'll find somewhere else to sit!)
61. Are your altar vestments up-to-date? They don't have to be fancy, but they need to look nice. Have you seen the ones at Cokesbury that have children all over them? Try blue, variegated, try none at all. Try different color combinations and fabric textures.
62. Use green plants to brighten the sanctuary. They also help filter the air!
63. Greeters: not essential at the beginning or the service, but with fellowship time following the service, they are necessary.
64. We do not use visitor's badges, but many churches do. If you use name tags, everybody should wear them (members and visitors!)
65. No one likes to be singled out—do not welcome visitors separate from welcoming the congregation, and for their sake, don't make them stand and introduce themselves!
66. Bulletins: error-free, no in-house abbreviations, large type and easy to read.
67. Provide children's bulletins.
68. Provide large-print bulletins.
69. Nursery: If you don't have one, start one! Be sure it is clean, well-staffed (don't turn your teen-agers loose in there without adults!), have toys in good repair, and a bathroom close by.
70. Have a bulletin board with community events on it...not just your church stuff. Change it at least every 14 days. Use bright colors. Let your visitors know that you care about what's going on in your community!
71. How about an easel with a small whiteboard in the narthex (vestibule, foyer) to highlight two events each week? One church-related, one community-related. (Do this for two months and you will do it forever!)

Attitude Adjustments for Worship

72. Congregations need to understand that if a visitor takes someone's "sacred seat" the member should grin and bear it and give thanks to God that somebody else wants it!
73. Consider having fellowship time every week.

74. Have a minimum of 2 or 3 people who will introduce themselves to newcomers each week and invite them to fellowship time. Worship brings people in—fellowship time is one of the things that keeps them!
75. At fellowship time, get the visitor's name, phone number and address. Get them on your mailing list right away. (Fellowship books are okay, too, but be sure you match up faces with what's in the book!)
76. Sing Happy Birthday and Happy Anniversary at coffee hour.
77. Celebrate each 50th anniversary with a special coffee hour. Why not celebrate all 50th anniversaries and above on Valentine's Sunday one year?
78. People like to laugh sometimes—don't take yourself too seriously! Poke fun at yourself or one of yours who knows you're going to.
79. Celebrate some big event with 4 or 5 Sundays of "required attendance" and make fun with it---give certificates, hold a reception, give hugs, cash prizes, whatever it takes to make it a fun time.
80. The use of applause has always been a bit controversial. When it comes to the dialogue of whether or not applauding in church takes away from the solemnity of the service vs. showing appreciation for our musical performers, especially our young ones, we advocate strongly showing appreciation for everyone who sings/plays/or shares a special gift in worship. Clap away!
81. Worship leaders must enlighten and entertain. Even if the Good News is preached rightly and in order, it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

Music in the Context of Worship

82. Music: Get it up-to-date and up to tempo! Nothing turns young people off as much as draggy, boring music! Either train your musicians, find new ones, or at least try to find a compromise.
83. Get the New Century Hymnal in your office—if your church isn't sold on this hymnal yet, here's a bonus: Pilgrim Press has granted churches in the denomination the privilege of photocopying hymns for which they hold the copyright one time for congregational use.
84. Introduce new hymns gradually—but introduce them! Sing them at least two or three weeks in a row.
85. Have one musical number each week that's a real barn-burner.
86. Use different responses. There is nothing unholy about replacing the Doxology as the response after the offering! We use "Take My Gifts", "Many Gifts," "I Am a Child of God," "Halle, halle, halle" and several others on a rotating basis.
87. Choir selections—many styles, different choirs, different instrumental accompaniments
88. Use of in-house instrumentalists
89. Guest musicians (we try for twice a year)

The Word and Sacrament

90. Open communion
91. Do communion more than 4 times a year, at least once a month.
92. Keep your communion service simple—for many young people, the long liturgy is a turn-off. If you use the full liturgy, consider doing it simply at least half the time.
93. Variety in communion services
94. Pastors: Use language your parishioners understand. Avoid theological mumbo-jumbo (*i.e. righteousness, contrition, transcendence*).
95. Explain scriptures; tell stories.
96. Remember that the television industry has geared programming for a 6-minute attention span. Keep your service moving...change the focus periodically (don't stand in one place too long!) Every 6-10 seconds, TV cameras change angles.
97. The use of laity in worship is important—be creative. Think about more than just scripture reading---how about drama, readers' theater, mission moments, one big announcement each week, etc.
98. More participatory worship—involving the whole congregations. (ex: 3rd grade Bibles, congregation quotes John 3:16)
99. Occasional use of video (MLK speech), and how about PowerPoint?
100. Bring in guest speakers, have members speak (ex. Disabilities Awareness Sunday)
101. Non-traditional approaches to settings, service (Native American service, God Is, Weave)
102. Consider adding another service

In Closing

103. Know what your strengths are and build on those. These are our ideas built from our strengths.
104. Enjoy your ministry and your people—and just keep striving.
Remember this anonymous rhyme:

*Don't be concerned nor be surprised if what you do is criticized.
For there are always those who usually can
find fault with every different plan.
Mistakes are made, we don't deny,
but only made by folks who try.*

God bless you in your trying.

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