



Lewis Center
for Church Leadership

Leading Ideas

Ten Misconceptions about Church Vitality and Growth

By **Eugene A. Blair**

The [Lewis Center's reporting on American Congregations 2008](#) (a report about congregational vitality and growth based on the Faith Communities Today Project at Hartford Seminary) brought to mind ten myths that prevent congregations from moving forward. In each case, the research findings reveal a different truth and suggest a new question to reshape your congregational agenda in ways that will position your church for growth. Each myth is followed by the research findings and then a provocative question for you to consider.



Blair

Myth Ten: Let's just keep doing the same worship we've done since 1960, and people will surely come. The truth is there is a relationship between adding a new service and/or contemporary worship and growth. However, the quality of the worship seems to matter the most to newcomers and the unchurched.

When was the last time you changed, revamped, upgraded, or evaluated your worship or added a new worship service?

Myth Nine: We've always done it that way before so let's keep doing it that way. The truth is congregations, whether liberal or conservative, with a clear identity and purpose tend to grow in attendance and spiritual vitality.

Do you have a mission and purpose statement with goals attached?

Myth Eight: Pastor, if you would just get more youth in here, everything will be all right. The truth is that a strong youth ministry, while important, is not in and of itself strongly associated with attendance growth. There is, however, a strong association between youth ministry and spiritual vitality in any congregation.

No matter how many youth you have, what is your plan for youth ministry?

Myth Seven: We're a friendly church, and visitors should know we want them to come back. The truth is it is important to respond systematically to visitors and newcomers using a variety of different methods. The number of different methods used to connect with visitors and newcomers is associated with attendance growth.

What is your plan to connect with newcomers once they arrive on your parking lot until they come home later that day?

Myth Six: It's the pastor's job to get new members. The truth is the more lay members are involved in reaching new people, the greater the attendance growth. Spiritual vitality goes up the more members see themselves as personal evangelists and act like it.

What is your plan to train members to reach out to others?

Myth Five: Our members know we care, so we do not have to call on them or reach out if they are absent. The truth is contacting those who have stopped coming is directly related to attendance growth and spiritual vitality. This is especially true for churches with over 300 in worship.

What is your plan for training lay people to nurture and care for members?

Myth Four: Where two or three are gathered together, there will be conflict and fights, so live with it. The truth is that clear organizational direction and purpose coupled with strong interpersonal relationships will decrease the likelihood of conflict. When purpose and relationships are present, conflict is more easily resolved.

Have you had an open conversation about conflict and how your church will resolve it?

Myth Three: It's all about money; we just need more money and all our problems will go away. The truth is there is a clear relationship between spiritual vitality and financial health. Before you can increase financial health, you have to elevate the spiritual climate.

What is your plan to increase the spiritual health of the congregation in the next twelve months?

Myth Two: The world is our parish, so we are going to save everyone for Jesus. The truth is attendance growth and spiritual vitality are directly related to being clear and specific about whom you want to reach and why.

Who are our neighbors, what are their needs, and how can we help them?

Myth One: Church growth is a matter of having the ideal pastor. The truth is a team of spirit-led, accountable, and committed lay people always trumps whoever the pastor is at any time.

What is your plan to raise-up and train a team for the future of your ministry?

Share these truths with your church's leadership team, ask these key questions, and pray about what God is calling you to do next.

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