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James W. Moss, Sr.
Church Consultant

People Spot Missile: What is the impact of demographics?

Over the years, I have been told, “Jim, you don’t get it. A church will grow if the demographics of the community are right.” I just chuckle. I can take you to churches in communities where significant growth is occurring and the churches are not. I can take you to communities where there is significant population decline and where there are churches that are growing.

Growing a church is not a simple matter. First, and foremost it takes a quality pastor with gifts who has reasonable people skills. Secondly, it takes a people who are open to the arrival of new people. Thirdly, it takes the development of a ministry of caring and an understanding of the barriers to growth in a local church.

The ideal setting is when the culture of the pastor matches the culture of the people and they match the culture of the people around the building.

The following are four stories. Each of them is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent.

Gerald Henson showed up at Grace Church fifteen years ago. Fortunately he matched the demographics of the people in the church. The people matched the demographics of the community around the building. The church was averaging 30 at the time and now is running 180. There was a higher end development a few blocks away from Grace. They got no one out of that development. Grace was located in an area where the population was stable.

Hilltop was a small church that had begun in the 1940’s. The church had 8 Anglos in attendance. The building existed in a community that had become a Hispanic area. John Smithson became the pastor. The 8 Anglos along with the pastor came to the conclusion they had no future and decided to reach into the Hispanic community. The remnant provided the financial base and the work continued and exceeded 100 in attendance and continued for a number of years.

Faith Church had grown to 180 in average attendance. It was at that time a rural community. Over the years the suburbs of a small city grew out around the church. There were thousands of homes. The attendance shrunk to 50 in spite of the growth around the building. Not a single one of the new families in the community made it into the church. The church still had a rural culture though it was now surrounded by the suburbs.

First Church was downtown in a modest-sized city. Churches all around were in decline and decay. Some of the churches were closing. In one five year period they had a growth of 30% in worship attendance. The eight churches closest to them had lost an average of 30% in attendance. One of those eight which at one time had been much larger later closed and offered their building to First Church at no cost because the church had developed a reputation for its ministry to the community.

I'm not naïve. I understand that some demographic conditions will permit a church to grow quicker than others. Some other areas are more difficult.

There are some very consistent conditions that exist when a church in any given demographic area grows. There is one indispensable given. A quality pastor must be in place.

A Thought: "...That pastor must have a passion for the gospel and have reasonable people skills" Jim Moss, Sr.

I am now available to present "The Role of the Church in the Civil War", "Starting a New Service", "Churches Have Personalities", "People Spots", "Does Your Church Really Care About People?" and "A Christian Perspective on Leadership Skills." "Stewardship and Managing Debt" jm

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