

CHURCH PLANTING AND CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH
RESEARCH REVIEW FOR 2008
By the Rev. Ken Howard

Introduction

One of the main problems in church planting and church growth practices today is that the majority of these practices are based on untested assumptions about what is required for success which have little or no basis in research. Those who are leaders in the Church should base their decisions, plans, and strategies based on information that has been tested and found true, rather than untested popular assumptions.

The follow is a review of relatively recent research (mostly within the last ten years) on church planting and congregational growth. I have included research on both of these areas because there is a great overlap between them. Most of what works for planting and growing new churches also works for growing existing churches (not to mention the fact that existing churches need to be “replanted”). In each case I will indicate the type of research on which is being summarized using the follow symbols:

- CP Based on Church Planting Research
- CG Based on Church Growth Research
- CP/CG Based on both Church Planting and Church Growth Research

The categories used to summarize the research results are adapted from Facts on Episcopal Church Growth (Hadaway, 2007). They are:

- Congregational Context and Composition
- Congregational Identity and Orientation
- Character of Congregational Worship
- Congregational Program and Recruitment
- Leadership – Clergy and Congregational
- Leadership – Diocesan/Mother Church/Sponsoring Organization

One caveat: The vast majority of church growth research has been conducted within denominations or including congregations that are Evangelical Protestant in their orientation toward church growth. Fewer have been done within denominations or including churches which are more eucharistically centered. This does not invalidate the findings, but it may (or may not) limit their applicability outside those kinds of churches not targeted by the research. The reader should exercise thoughtful (and prayerful) discernment in the use of the various findings.

Positive Correlates of New Church Success¹ and Church Growth

Congregational Context and Composition

1. **Location, Location, Location (and Demographic Research)**^{CP/CG}. Churches located in population growth areas are most likely to grow (Hadaway, 2007). Congregations located in areas whose demographics are in transition may be able to grow if they are willing to absorb the newer members of the community (Hadaway & Marler, 2001). Greater growth occurs in areas that are farther from existing churches and their “come-oriented” activities (Culbertson, 2005). New plants located in cities with a population of more than 30,000 are more likely to achieve self-sufficiency than those planted in areas with lower population.
2. **Match-Maker, Match Maker, Make Me a (Demographic) Match**^{CP}. Congregations which at the outset reflect the full demographic range of their communities grow fastest for the longest time (Culbertson, 2005). Churches whose location is based on careful demographic study are much more likely to grow than those that are not (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
3. **Younger Churches Grow Faster, New Churches Grow Fastest**^{CP/CG}. Newer congregations (under 15 years old) have faster growth than more established churches. New church plants grow faster than established churches. Existing, established churches have normal plateau and ministry limits. (Hadaway, 2007, Culbertson, 2005)
4. **Diverse Churches Grow Faster**^{CG}. Multi-racial/multi-ethnic/gender-balanced churches are somewhat more likely to grow than those with homogeneous congregations, in large part because they make congregational life and worship more dynamic (Hadaway, 2007). Demographically homogenous congregations grow fast at first but plateau quickly and ultimately decline (Culbertson, 2005).
5. **Churches with More Young Adults & Children Grow Faster**^{CG}. Churches with significant numbers of young families with children at home, and significant numbers of young adults grow faster those churches with aging congregations. Unfortunately, this is the exception rather than the rule. (Hadaway, 2007)
6. **Initial Size**^{CP}. Congregations that had 75+ in worship attendance at the outset (by the third month) grew to be the largest and strongest. Those that began with few than 40 remained small. (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; cf. Stetzer, 2003a)

¹ In Hadaway & Marler (2001) New Church Development, success is defined as achieving self-sufficiency.

Congregational Identity and Orientation

1. **Gift-Oriented, Incarnational Ministry**^{CP/CG}. The ministries individual members perform are primarily determined by their God-given gifts, rather than primarily determined by the needs of the organization. Preaching and teaching helps members to recognize their gifts. Discontinues ministries that no longer energize those who carry them out (Winseman, 2007; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Stetzer 2003b).
2. **Clear and Shared Vision, Mission, Intentionality, and Purpose**^{CP/CG}. The more clearly defined and mutually shared the churches vision, mission, and purpose, and the greater its intentionality about achieving them, the stronger will be its growth (Hadaway, 2007; Winseman, 2007; Butler Bass, 2006; Roozen, 2004; Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Hughes, 1998).
3. **Spiritual Vitality, Adaptability, and Willingness to Change**^{CP/CG}. Churches with a clear sense that they are actualizing their unique purpose are more likely to grow than those without (Hadaway, 2007), as are those with leaders who model passionate spirituality (speaking about and acting on their faith) and members who are individually passionate about their spirituality (Schwarz, 1996; cf. Stetzer, 2003b; Hughes, 1998). Those willing to adapt their approaches as necessary to achieve their vision and mission are more likely to continue to grow over the long term (Hadaway, 2007; Culbertson, 2005). Churches that encourage intentional individual spiritual practices and care about each other's spiritual development tend to grow more than those who don't (Winseman, 2007; Butler Bass, 2006; Roozen, 2001).
4. **Desire to Grow**^{CG}. Churches whose congregations have a desire to grow are more likely to grow than those whose congregations feel resistance to or fear of growing (Hadaway, 2007).
5. **Desire to Start Daughter Churches**^{CP}. Those churches which helped start daughter churches within 3 years showed stronger growth than those which did not (Stetzer & Conner, 2007).
6. **Standards for Membership/Encouragement of Committed Relationships**^{CP/CG}. New church plants and existing churches which have some requirement for membership grow faster than those who do not. Membership covenants, newcomer classes, and ministry involvement requirements have the strongest impact on growth. People want to know what is expected of them. Requirements for tithing or small-group involvement have a lesser impact (Winseman, 2007; Stetzer, 2003a; cf. Barna, 1999).
7. **Outward-Looking Orientation**^{CP/CG}. Those churches which are focused outward, with strong focus on evangelism and outreach, and members who are willing to share their faith by word and action, tend to grow significantly faster than those which are more inwardly focused (Culbertson, 2005; Stetzer, 2003b; Barna, 1999; Hughes, 1998; Schwarz, 1996).
8. **Proactive/Holistic Stewardship Orientation**^{CP/CG}. Those churches who view stewardship as involving all aspects of life, as opposed to just about financial resources, tend to grow faster and have more cohesion (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Barna, 1999; Schwarz, 1996).
9. **Program-Based and Purpose-Based Models Show Highest Long-Term Growth**^{CP/CG}. Program-based and Purpose-based church plants tend to be the fastest growing, followed by

Seeker-based and Relation-based plants. Affinity-based (ethnic, language, lifestyle-centered) plants show the least growth (Stetzer, 2003a).²

10. **Training for Lay Leadership**^{CP}. Those churches whose lay leaders receive intentional training in theology, ministry, outreach development, and conflict resolution show the greatest long-term growth (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Stetzer, 2003a; Culbertson, 2005; Schwarz, 1996).
11. **Absence of “Serious” Conflict/Orientation to Conflict**^{CP/CG}. Churches which view conflict as a natural phenomenon to be managed, and are thus able to contain conflict or channel it toward constructive purposes tend to grow while those who do not know how to manage conflict tend to decline. (Roozen, 2004). Churches whose leadership has received conflict resolution training are less likely to decline due to conflict (Stetzer, 2003a).
12. **Relationship Orientation/Living Out Community/Small Groups**^{CP}. Living out community by developing deeper, authentic and loving relationships is essential to growth. The need to structure effective small groups is essential to growth and increases with the size of the organizations. Contrary to much popular evangelism assumptions, people move from belonging to belief, not from belief to belonging (Winseman, 2007; Stetzer, 2003b; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Hughes, 1998).

² Program-based church plants are organized around the programs and services they provide (e.g., children’s, youth, women’s, and men’s ministries, men’s music ministries, social ministries). Purposed-based church plants are organized around the main purposes of the church (e.g., worship, outreach, fellowship, discipleship/spirituality, service). Seeker-based church plants specifically target of seeker populations and focus on their needs. Relation-based church plants focus on those people who tend to reject institutional forms of church. Affinity-based church plants targets specific people, ethnic, language, or lifestyle groups.

Character of Congregational Worship

1. **Number and Variety of Worship Services** ^{CP/CG}. Churches with multiple services and a variety of styles grow faster than churches with a single “one size fits all” service (Hadaway, 2007; Hughes, 1998).
2. **Joyful, Experiential, Inspirational, Intentional Worship** ^{CP/CG}. Those churches whose congregations find worship services joyful (as opposed to “exciting”) and open to the Spirit of God (though not necessarily “charismatic”) are more likely to grow than those whose liturgies are predominantly contemplative, formal, predictable or disorganized (Hadaway, 2007; Butler Bass, 2006; Roozen, 2004; Schwarz, 1996). Inspiring experiences have something to do with fun and enjoyment, expressing and shaping the life of the congregation, responding to peoples real needs and issues, engaging them experientially in the worship, helping them experience Christ’s love and the Spirit of God, and sending people home with more hope and less burdens than when they came (Schwarz, 1996; Stetzer, 2003b). Worship teams are utilized to design and implement worship. All parts of the worship experience are designed to help people experience Christ’s love and the Spirit of God came (Schwarz, 1996).
3. **Engaging Preaching, Music, and Worship** ^{CP/CG}. New church plants with engaging preaching and music tend to grow faster than those which do not (Stetzer, 2003a; cf. Barna, 1999). Narrative preaching tends to contribute somewhat more to growth than to simply didactic preaching (Stetzer, 2003b).
4. **Contemporary? Seeker-Sensitive? Traditional? The Answer is “Yes”** ^{CP/CG}. Contemporary and seeker-sensitive worship are slightly more associated with growth than traditional, yet all three can show significant growth if other growth factors are present (Stetzer, 2003a; Roozen, 2004; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Hughes, 1998). Interestingly, when a churches only service is contemporary they are less likely to grow than other forms. Also, when elements of contemporary worship are individual analyzed only the use of percussion instruments is significantly associated with growth. The same cannot be said for other elements associated with “contemporary worship,” such as electric guitars and overhead projection. Neither can it be said for churches whose only service is contemporary (Hadaway, 2007). Meanwhile, ancient practices are becoming much more attractive to prospective visitors (Stetzer, 2003b).

Congregational Program and Recruitment

1. **Recruiting New Members is Everyone's Job**^{CP/CG}. Churches whose congregations whose membership is heavily involved in new member recruitment are much more likely to grow than those in which few members participated in recruitment (Hadaway, 2007; Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hughes, 1998). Preaching and teaching makes actual congregation members aware of the needs of the "potential" congregation (Schwarz, 1996).
2. **Evangelism is Relationship Focused and Need-Oriented**^{CG}. Evangelism flows out of members existing relationships and is oriented on their needs and questions (Schwarz, 1996; cf. Hughes, 1998). Recent research has indicated that the three top factors influencing the selection of a church are: what the church says it believes (89%), the quality of preaching (87%), and the authenticity of the members and clergy (86%) (Lifeway, 2008).
3. **Strategic, Targeted Evangelism**^{CP/CG}. Evangelistic efforts targeted toward specific populations are more effective than a shotgun approach. Targeting seekers populations is most effective (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Stetzer, 2003a, cf. Barna, 1999; Hughes, 1998).
4. **Websites and other Internet Technology**^{CP/CG}. Congregations with websites are far more likely to grow than those without. Other advertizing approaches (e.g., radio/TV spots, newspaper ads, flyers, etc.) are only slightly associated with growth, except as a way to drive people to the website (Hadaway, 2007). Websites are extremely important for growth in new plant churches (Hadaway, 2001). Internet social networking technology is becoming increasingly effective in church growth generally and church plants specifically (Stetzer, 2003b)
5. **Systematic and Varied Visitor Tracking, Follow-Up, and Integration**^{CP/CG}. A strategic and systematic system to track and facilitate visitors' incorporation is crucial to growth (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Stetzer & Conner, 2007). The more different kinds of follow-up, the greater the growth. Examples include: mail, phone, email, personal visit, sending materials. Phone calls appear to be the most effective method. The more follow-up calls made by church leaders (lay and clergy), the higher the rate of growth (Hadaway, 2007). New member classes are also crucial for growth (Stetzer & Conner, 2007).
6. **Variety of Programming, Well Matched to Community Needs**^{CG}. A broad selection of programs, targeted to carefully identified community needs, leads to growth. Programs associated with growth are: Sunday school, Bible study, prayer groups, spiritual retreats, youth ministry, and various kinds of support groups (Hadaway, 2007; Roozen, 2004). Recent research suggests that the top three issues of concern nationwide are: poverty (78%), the personal debt of individual Americans (78%), and HIV/AIDS (76%) (Barna, 2008).
7. **Parenting and Marriage Enrichment Programs**^{CG}. Of all program offerings parenting and marriage enrichment programs show the greatest impact on growth (Hadaway, 2007).
8. **Midweek Programs and Special Events for Children and Community At Large**^{CG}. Churches which offer mid-week programs and special events, especially those aimed at children and the community at large, show stronger growth (Stetzer & Conner, 2007).
9. **Mailing Invitations for Services and Programs**^{CG}. Direct-mailings to the community about services, programs, and events strongly encourage growth (Stetzer & Conner, 2007).

Leadership – Clergy and Congregational

1. **Vision/Goal/Purpose-Driven Clergy/Strategic Leadership** ^{CP/CG}. Founding clergy driven by a clear purpose as opposed to a need to please people (Hadaway, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Ridley, 2000; cf. Barna, 1999; Hughes, 1998). Ability of the clergy leader generate enthusiasm (though not necessarily to be seen as a charismatic leader) is also associated with growth (Hadaway, 2007). Clergy and lay leaders set clear goals and evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, and progress toward those goals (Schwarz, 1996).
2. **Leading by Transparency and Team** ^{CP}. Church plants whose leadership operates transparently and as a team tended to grow faster (Stetzer, 2003b).
3. **Outward-Focused Clergy/Lay Leadership** ^{CP}. Focused outward on the unchurched and those not yet members rather than inward toward institutional and programmatic maintenance. Committed to church growth. Responsive to community needs (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Ridley, 2000; Schwarz, 1996).
4. **Entrepreneurial/Flexible/Adaptable Clergy** ^{CP}. Skilled at starting groups “from scratch.” Self-starter. Committed to excellence through long and hard work. Able to adjust to change and ambiguity, shift priorities when necessary, and handle multiple tasks at once (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Ridley 2000).
5. **Relationship-Oriented Leadership** ^{CP}. Takes initiative in getting to know people and deepening relationships as the basis for more effective ministry. Enables the group to work collaboratively toward a common goal and skillfully handles divisiveness and disunifying elements (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Ridley, 2000; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Winseman, 2007).
6. **Younger Founding Clergy** ^{CP}. Younger clergy (age 24-35) are more associated with growth than older clergy (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
7. **Church Planter Mentors** ^{CP}. Church starts whose clergy meet regularly with a mentor grow almost twice as fast as those without (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Stetzer, 2003a; Stetzer, 2003b; cf. Rowley, 2005; Powell, 2000).
8. **Clergy Who Set Healthy Boundaries** ^{CP}. Clergy who set appropriate boundaries are more associated with growth than those without. **Specific factors include:** spending time with family, maintaining a good relationship with spouse/partner, spending time in prayer, taking continuing education, and the ability to sustain oneself emotionally and physically through setbacks, losses, disappointments and failures (Stetzer, 2003a; Ridley, 2000; Schwarz, 1996).
9. **Cooperative Leadership/Shared Ownership of Ministry** ^{CP/CG}. Congregations which instill sense of shared leadership and shared responsibility for the growth and success of ministry, which train leaders to reproduce leaders, and which equip and release people to do ministry according to their spiritual gifts show stronger growth than those which leave leadership to the clergy or whose clergy do not share their leadership (Hadaway, 2007; Ridley, 2000; Schwarz, 1996; cf. Winseman, 2007).
10. **Faith-Oriented, Dream-oriented, Suggestion-oriented, Task-oriented Leadership** ^{CP}. Leads by knowledge and dreams, while keeping the central task in mind. Demonstrates how one's convictions are translated into personal and ministry decisions (Stetzer, 2003a).

11. **Partnership-Orientated Leadership**^{CP}. Clergy and lay leadership show a willingness to collaborate other churches, organizations, and professions, and a willingness to seek outside help and practical training when needed (Schwarz, 1996; Powell, 2000).
12. **Functional Leadership Structures (Form Follows Function)**^{CP}. Organizational structure increases/releases the spiritual and numeric growth of the congregation. All programs and ministries are evaluated as to whether or not they contribute to this goal. Formal structure is clear, intuitively understandable, and based on function rather than tradition (Schwarz, 1996).
13. **Leaders of Unabashed Spirituality**^{CP}. Leaders who model passionate spirituality (speaking about and acting on their faith) and members who are individually passionate about their spirituality (Schwarz, 1996; cf. Winseman, 2007; Stetzer, 2003b).

Leadership – Diocesan/Mother Church/Sponsoring Organization

1. **Careful Selection of Church Planters**^{CP}. Church plants whose founding clergy who are assessed for characteristics of effective church planters (Hadaway & Marler, 2001, Stetzer, 2003a; Powell, 2000).
2. **Strong Relationship with Supportive Bishop and Diocese**^{CP}. Those new plants with strong support from Bishop and Diocese grow the largest and strongest. Significant numbers of founding clergy without such support clergy leave the Episcopal Church after establishing the new congregation (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; cf. Stetzer, 2003a).
3. **Fully-Staffed, Adequately-Compensated, Experienced Staff Team**^{CP}. Church plants who started with an adequately-sized (clergy, administrator, and music minister), fully funded staff team showed stronger growth than those without an adequate team or compensation. Adequate funding allows for staff with experience in church planting, which is also associated with stronger growth (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Powell, 2000). New starts with full-time church planters grow faster and larger than those with part-time (Stetzer, 2003a).
4. **Regular Mentoring and Supervision**^{CP}. Diocesan leadership supports, encourages, and develops mechanisms for church planting clergy have mentors with whom they met regularly, as well as regular supervision (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Rowley, 2005; Stetzer, 2003a; Stetzer, 2003b).
5. **Supportive Relationships with Other Church Planters**^{CP}. A network of support consisting of other church planters positively affects growth (Stetzer, 2003a).
6. **Core Group from a Mother Church or Surrounding Churches**^{CP}. Those church plants which start with an existing core group from a mother church grow fastest, followed closely by those started by an existing core group without a mother church. Just having a mother church has little impact in itself (Stetzer, 2003a). Even if the Mother-Daughter church model is not used, a core group of individuals from surrounding churches increases the likelihood of a new plant church growing to self-sufficiency (Powell, 2000).
7. **Functional Theological Education for Clergy**^{CP/CG}. Graduates of seminary programs which are more functional than academic tend to have greater success in growing congregations. Unfortunately, training in most theological programs has become more academic than functional (Culbertson, 2005).

Negative Correlates of New Church Success and Church Growth

Congregational Context and Composition

1. **No Connection of Vision to Demographics**^{CP}. Determining the type of church being planted without checking out reality of vision to demographics and vision of God slows church growth (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
2. **Visibility**^{CP}. Locating a new plant in a low visibility site because of cheap land or for any other reason is never a good idea (Hadaway, 2001).
3. **Illiteracy and Poverty**^{CG}. Communities with high illiteracy and poverty are less likely to respond to evangelistic activities. Education and poverty reduction must come before evangelism (Culbertson, 2005).
4. **Meeting in Temporary Space for an Extended Period**^{CP}. The longer a church operates out of non-permanent space, the less growth it will experience (Stetzer & Conner, 2007).

Congregational Identity and Orientation

1. **Age of Church**^{CP}. The longer the church has been in existence the less it grows. The longer a church is in a community, the less like that community the church becomes (Hadaway, 2007; Culbertson, 2005).
2. **Age of Congregation**^{CP/CG}. The higher the average age of the congregation the less it grows. Older members become more “come-oriented” and less “go-centered” in ministry (Hadaway, 2007; Culbertson, 2005).
3. **Size of Church**^{CP/CG}. Contrary to common assumption, a generally inverse relationship exists between church size and growth. Churches of less than 100 ASA have the highest growth rate of all categories. The two exceptions to this rule are small rural churches, which do tend to grow smaller along with the rural population in general, and very large churches (800 ASA or above), which tend to grow somewhat overall, but also tend to split more often. The apparent larger growth of this category is from two sources: new large church plants and smaller churches becoming larger, thus feeding this category (Hadaway, 2002).
4. **Homogeneity (Affinity and Ethnically Based Congregations)**^{CP/CG}. The less diversity in a congregation, the lower the church’s long-term grow potential. Affinity and ethnically-based churches tend to grow quickly in the first few years, and then stagnate (Stetzer, 2003a).
5. **Women Outnumber Men**^{CP/CG}. The more women outnumber men in the congregation, the less it will grow (Hadaway, 2007).
6. **Conflicted Congregations Decline**^{CP/CG}. The greater the level of conflict in the congregation, the more likely the church is to grow. Conflicts about power and leadership style (as opposed to social issues) are the most significant contributors to decline (Hadaway, 2007). However, church’s whose leadership has received conflict resolution training are less likely to decline (Stetzer, 2003a).

Character of Congregational Worship

1. **Predictability of Worship Slows Growth**^{CP/CG}. The less variation in worship style, the less growth (Hadaway, 2007).
2. **Children Seen but Not Heard**^{CP/CG}. The less often a church's children take an active role in the worship services (e.g., speak, read, sing, etc.) the more likely membership will decline (Hadaway, 2007; cf. Stetzer & Conner, 2007)

Congregational Program and Recruitment

1. **Publicity over Personal Recruiting**^{CP}. Planters who prefer publicity to doing personal recruiting are less successful than those who aren't. 85% of visitors come from friends inviting friends. (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; cf. Stetzer & Conner, 2007).
2. **Non-Relational Evangelism**^{CP}. Evangelism is always based in relationships (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
3. **Christendom Approach to Evangelism**^{CP}. Acting as if Christendom is still where the culture is. Not adapting the approach to the culture. (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
4. **"Evangelical" Church Plants Losing Ground**^{CG}. Evangelical church plants start fast, in large part because of uniformity of message, but plateau as that uniformity becomes enforced inwardly (Hadaway, 2007; Barna, 2004).

Leadership – Clergy and Congregational

1. **Detail Orientation**^{CP}. New plant churches whose leaders get caught up in administrivia tend to be less successful than those who target their attention to activities with the most impact on church growth (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
2. **No Core Group/Core Group Unrehearsed**^{CP}. Church starts without a rehearsed committed team don't know one another, have not built relationships and trust, and aren't prepared work together as a team, or welcome others are less likely to grow and to be successful (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
3. **Clergy without the Appropriate Skills and Qualities**^{CP}. Not just anybody can plant a church (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
4. **Non-Resident Planter**^{CP}. Because of finances or other reasons, allowing (or forcing) the planter to live outside the community decreases the likelihood for new church plant growth and success (Hadaway & Marler, (2001)

Leadership – Diocesan/Mother Church/Sponsoring Organization

1. **No Assessment of Church Planter Character/Team Readiness**^{CP}. Results in founding clergy without requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities, and contributes to lack of growth and success in new church plants (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
2. **Pressure to Plant Too Soon**^{CP}. Churches that are started too quickly, without adequate planning, resourcing, or training, are less likely to be successful (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).

3. **Uncritically Adopting Approaches from Other Traditions or Other Settings** ^{CP}. Adopting strategies from other denominations (or even dioceses) without asking if it is compatible with existing tradition, theology, and polity, can lead to failure of new church plants, and may stop future church planting in the diocese as well. (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
4. **Leave Land Selection to the Planter** ^{CP}. This causes the planter to spend too much time chasing land rather than developing the community. Instead, the diocese should locate the land and should have land ready when the congregation. Rather than having a limited leadership chasing land, the diocese should put money into program and staff in early years so that they have the resources to develop the community (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
5. **Emphasis on Short-Term Results** ^{CP}. Expecting the planter and the congregation to achieve everything "this week" both demotivates and results in inadequate long-term commitment and planning (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
6. **Understaffing/Inadequate Compensation** ^{CP}. Allowing the planter to stay a "one-person band" keeps the planter too busy for church councils and collegiality (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
7. **Lack of Support from Surrounding Clergy and Congregations** ^{CP}. Failing to involve area clergy in planning and coordination lessens support and increases competition, reducing everyone's growth (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
8. **No Back-Up** ^{CP}. Bending the vision to please others in the diocese. Not standing up for and by the church planter (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
9. **Underplanning/Undervisioning** ^{CP}. No planning or comprehensive vision by bishop or diocese decreases new church plant growth (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
10. **Under-funding** ^{CP}. Under-funding the strategy and not appreciating financial realities. Church planting done "on the cheap" is bound to fail (or it will cost more later) (Stetzer & Conner, 2007; Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
11. **Unclear Diocesan-Level Responsibility** ^{CP/CG}. Having no one in particular responsible for overseeing church planting or making the bishop have full responsibility for it decreases the likelihood new church plants will grow and succeed (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
12. **Under-Educating Diocesan Governing Bodies and the Diocese as a Whole** ^{CP/CG}. Allowing people to think that church planting is simple and a no-brainer decreases the likelihood for new church plant success (Hadaway & Marler, 2001).
13. **Unrealistic, Unstated or Conflicting Expectations** ^{CP}. Allowing the Diocesan leadership or governing bodies to hold unrealistic, unstated or conflicting expectations of what plant will look like decreases the likelihood for new church plant success (Hadaway & Marler, 2001; Stetzer, 2003a).
14. **Not Listening to the Church Planters Expressed Needs** ^{CP}. Leads to demotivation, burnout, and decreased congregational growth in church plants (Stetzer, 2003a)

Myths and Facts about Church Size and Growth

From Hadaway (2002): Congregation Size and Church Growth in the Episcopal Church and Thuma, Travis, & Bird (2006). Mega-Churches Today 2005.

Small Church = 100 ASA or Less

Large Church = 800 or More

Myths	Facts
Small churches are in serious decline and cumulatively are not a source of growth in the Church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small churches are more volatile (more likely to die), but also much more likely to grow. • In the aggregate, small churches add more to growth than any other size category. • Rural small churches are declining (reflecting the decline in their surrounding communities).
Large churches (mega-churches) are the fastest growing type of church and cumulatively are a large source of growth in the Church.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assumption megachurches are the fastest growing comes out of a "category error" in the early analysis of church size research. Since it is the highest category, churches “graduating” into this category from smaller size categories significantly overstate growth. • The largest churches are a growth area, but in the aggregate contribute much less to growth in the Church than do smaller churches.
There exists a direct proportional relationship between size and growth rate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no direct proportional relationship. • The small churches grow significantly. Large churches grow less significantly. In between, there is no significant relationship.
Small churches are weaker than large churches.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant difference. • Best indicator is past growth.
Small churches grow smaller, while large churches grow larger.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No evidence to support this assumption • When corrected for new mega-church starts and category errors, growth in large churches is much smaller than assumed. • In fact, large churches appear to have trouble staying large (less cohesion in community as a whole, more likely to split).

What Adults Search for When Switching Churches
(Summary – Lifeway Research, 2008)

A recent study by Lifeway Research asked people what factors influenced their decision making when switching churches. The answers are summarized below:

- 89% What the church says it believes.
- 87% Quality of preaching.
- 86% Authenticity of the members.
- 86% Authenticity of the pastor.
- 80% Music.
- 76% Care for community.
- 74% Evidence of God at work and changed lives.
- 73% Church members with whom they can build relationships.
- 71% A sense of unity among church members.
- 70% Opportunities to learn about the Bible.

The study also asked about the methods people used to search for a new church. These are summarized below:

- 83% In-person visits.
- 64% Recommendations from family and friends.
- 32% Invitation from a friend or acquaintance.
- 21% Websites.
- 19% Local Advertisements.

Summary

The above research review summarized the results of 29 studies of church growth and church planting published between 1990 and 2008 (all but 3 in the last 10 years). Of these studies, nine dealt specifically with church planting, while 20 dealt with church growth and related issues generally. The majority of the church growth studies and all of the church planting studies that have been published were done within denominations that would categorize themselves as Conservative Evangelical, though there have been some have been done in more Eucharistically-centered churches, such as the Episcopal Church. To my knowledge, there have been no studies conducted on Eucharistically-centered church plants, probably because there are so few of them, even in the Episcopal Church. There are reports of such churches being planted, and anecdotal information suggests they are doing quite well. And while they do not seem to grow quite as fast as Evangelical church plants, they do seem to result in steady growth, and are much more resistant to schism. In addition, when reviewing these results one must keep in mind that there are some things a congregation can largely control and some things a congregation cannot control. Yet many of the factors an established church cannot control, a new church plant can. Location of the congregation, the growth rate of its surrounding community, and the age of its clergy and congregation are examples of factors that new plant congregations can control but established congregations cannot. So the results of the above studies must be interpreted and applied carefully and prayerfully.

Areas of Broad Research Consensus

Being in an area with *growth in households* is a key predictor of growth. Areas where the population is increasing through new households and new housing units are areas where people are moving to and putting down roots. Having more people available as possible members is an advantage for congregations in growing areas, as is the desire of most newcomers to establish community connections. This type of growth is more likely in the suburbs, but since household growth can occur anywhere, the effect is independent of suburban/non-suburban location. And even if the population growth in the area is static, but the population demographics are in transition, established congregations can take advantage of the growth of the incoming population if it is willing to allow its identity to shift.

Congregations with smaller proportions of *older members* and larger proportions of *households with children* are more likely to experience growth. Obviously, it is easier for congregations to reach younger families in growing suburbs, but the effect of age structure is strong even when controlling for the location of a congregation. However, in the planning and planting stages of a new congregation, it may well be wise to select a predominantly younger group to start with. Age will come with time.

One of the strongest correlates of growth seems to be the *absence of conflict*. Clearly, conflict cannot be completely avoided, and *a certain amount of conflict can be healthy, if understood and managed appropriately*. Even so, serious, unresolved conflict will inevitably lead to

congregational decline. The key is not avoiding or suppressing conflict but enabling communities to appreciate differences and resolve conflict in a healthy way when it does arise. This makes conflict management and resolution skills a critical skill for clergy and congregational leaders, and perhaps even more so in new plant congregations, where the work is hard and the people are passionate.

Some factors are growth limiting rather than growth promoting. Excessive formality and predictability in worship two such growth limiting factors. And while joyful, exciting, and varied liturgy has some impact on growth, it is more enhanced by the absence of the former than the presence of the latter. This may be easier for established congregations to achieve, merely because they are larger and can offer a variety of different liturgies at different service times.

In terms of congregational identity, the most important factor was having *a clear mission and purpose*. Growth is increased when congregations are clear about why they exist and what they should be doing. This seems to be the case whether congregations are conservative or liberal. And this factor is critical for new plant congregations.

Congregational involvement in new member recruiting is critical for both new plant and existing congregations. The vast majority of people come because friends invited them, and stay not only because of the friend that invited them but because of the new friends they have made. Person-to-person contacts between congregation members and their non-member friends or acquaintances seem to more important than visits or phone calls by clergy in this regard, though these also can help if done sensitively. But the most important factor is that people in the congregation care enough about them to reach out to them.

Another extremely important factor to both successful church planting and church growth is the effectiveness of the clergy in charge. The abilities to express a clear congregational vision, to help individuals to find enthusiasm and motivation in supporting that vision and to help people to work together in support of that vision are critical. It is also important that the congregations lay leaders have these as well. This means that for new plant congregations, the development of appropriately skilled clergy, and the development of initial lay leaders that share these skills is crucially important. Ongoing training of clergy and lay leadership is also important to growth.

This leads to one final element which is important to new plant and established congregations, but is essential to the success of new church plants. That factor is the support of the diocese, the mother church, or sponsoring organization. Careful selection of church planters, a strongly supportive relationship with the diocesan bishop and council (or equivalent governing bodies), a clear vision for church planting, and a clear, achievable, and well-funded plan for church planting, are things that only the larger church governing body can provide. The reverse is true as well. Just as a supportive larger church body can do more to ensure the success of the church plant than any other factor, a lack of such support – or the wrong kind of support, can have an even greater negative impact.

Emerging Research Findings

Some intriguing results are beginning to arise from the most recent research, which would bear further study. These include:

- **Websites and Internet Media.** While the results are mixed, the use of website and other internet media appear to have a significant impact on growth, and have the possibility of greater impact if current trends of internet use continue. Effectiveness appears to depend upon: (1) level of interactivity of the technology used, and (2) the appeal and the accuracy of the content.
- **Leadership Team Transparency.** Recent research appears to show that the transparency of the core leadership group and their ability to model a microcosm of healthy spiritual community can have a positive influence on congregational growth, not to mention keeping the leadership group from burning out.
- **Appreciating Differences.** Another emerging area of research is how congregational appreciation of differences (as opposed to avoiding conflict) can positively affect church growth.
- **Mentorship.** The research is increasingly demonstrating the importance of mentorship, especially for church planters.

Surprises in the Research

The research is also beginning to contradict some uncritically accepted assumptions about church planting and growth:

- **All Styles of Worship Can Produce Growth.** It was previously assumed that contemporary-style worship was a necessary prerequisite for growth. The research now appears to show that almost any style of worship can produce growth, so long as it is intentional, experiential, joyful, and inspirational.
- **All Sizes of Churches Can Experience Growth.** It was previously assumed that small churches were in decline, only larger churches could grow, and mega-churches were the wave of the future. In fact, research is now showing that small churches can grow rapidly, while mega-churches start large, stay large, and sometimes split and decline catastrophically.
- **Non-Evangelical Churches Can Grow.** It was previously assumed that only Evangelical churches were growing. However, the research is showing that many Evangelical churches are experiencing the same growth problems on non-Evangelical denominations. Any church that has the intention to grow and organizes and plans accordingly can grow.
- **Heterogeneous Churches Can Grow.** It was thought that homogeneity was an essential requirement for growth. However, recent research has shown that while language-

specific, ethnocentric, theologically-uniform congregations experienced extremely rapid short-term growth, they tended to stagnate after a few years, and decline over the long run. Apparently, just as the long-term viability of biological populations requires sufficient diversity in the gene-pool, churches also require a certain level of diversity in their “DNA” to ensure their long-term viability.

- **Gender Balance Necessary for Growth.** Another intriguing area of growth research is in the area of gender balance. Some recent research has shown that the greater the ratio of women to men in a congregation, the less that congregation will grow. One would assume that the reverse would also be true, but it has never been tested because it has been such an infrequent occurrence in recent times.
- **Belonging Leads to Belief, Not Belief to Belonging.** It has long been thought that movement in faith development was from belief to belonging, but in fact the opposite is true. Belonging leads to engagement, which leads to committed belief, which leads to members who are inviting, which leads to congregational growth.

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