

CHURCH GROWTH SURVEY

CONDUCTED BY CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – 2012

In the summer of 2012, a survey was conducted by Chippawa Presbyterian Church to discover the common features of growing churches in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Data from the Acts & Proceedings of the PCC for 2008 to 2011¹ were used to collect the Attendance in Worship for all PCC churches over that period. This figure represents the average attendance in worship Sunday, and therefore most accurately represents the active participation in the worship life of the church over the course of the year.

Congregations that grew consistently by 5% or more over the 3 year period, and had at least 50 in worship at the end of that period, were selected for the study (below 50 in worship, a 5% change was deemed statistically insignificant).

There were 36 congregations that fit these criteria (plus Chippawa Presbyterian). Emails were sent to these 36 congregations requesting their participation in the survey. Of these churches, 17 completed the survey.

The survey is comprised of two parts:

Part 1 is a *quantitative* study, in which participants were given a list of 23 ministries, which they were asked to score in terms of importance to church growth (from “virtually none” to “vital”). This list was created using criteria from a similar study conducted by Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor on church plants², as well as from categories selected from Natural Church Development.³

Part 2 is a *narrative* study, in which participants were asked to describe and tell stories related to factors that they believe have been important in their growth.

The results from these surveys were collected and tabulated, and the results are summarized on the following pages. For more details about this study, please contact the Rev. David Moody at david@chippawapc.ca.

¹ Presbyterian Church in Canada, “Acts and Proceedings”, 2008-2011.

² Stetzer, Ed and Phillip Connor, “Church Planting Survivability and Health Study,” Center for Missional Research, North American Mission Board, 2007.

³ Christian A. Schwarz, “Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches”, ChurchSmart Resources, 1996.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

IMPORTANT MINISTRIES IN GROWING CHURCHES (NUMERIC)

“Primary” Ministries

- Relevant preaching
- Inspiring music in worship
- Sunday morning children’s programming
- Local mission
- Corporate prayer (outside of Sunday morning worship)
- Pastoral care

“Secondary” Ministries

- Global mission
- Vacation Bible School
- Intentional leadership development
- Adult spiritual education
- Adult small groups
- Offering New Members classes
- Educating the congregation on Stewardship
- Teaching and encouraging personal evangelism & outreach
- Inspiring worship elements (dramas, videos, etc)

IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF GROWING CHURCHES (NARRATIVE)

- Visionary leadership
- Credibility and integrity of the leadership
- Willingness to deal frankly and directly with church conflict
- Willingness to change in order to reach the local community
- Open and friendly people who simply, naturally invite others to church
- Intentional hospitality to new and old alike
- Including long time and first time worshippers in every part of church life
- Joy, laughter and celebration
- Relevant, engaging preaching
- Inspiring music (vital, engaging & diverse)
- Excellence in worship
- Patience and momentum-building
- Outreach, local mission, and serving tangible community needs
- Compassion, mutual support and pastoral care
- Trusting in God’s guidance through the Holy Spirit
- Deep trust in scripture and the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON THE MINISTRY (NUMERIC) SURVEY RESULTS

“Primary” Ministries

In total, 23 ministry options were presented to participants to identify their importance to church growth. Of these 23 choices, 5 are identified by a majority of churches as either “very important” or “vital” to their church growth, and have therefore been labelled as of “primary” importance to church growth. These 5 are: “Relevant preaching”, “Inspiring music in worship”, “Sunday morning children’s programming”, “Local mission” and “Corporate prayer outside of worship”. In addition, one category that was not included in the survey, “Pastoral care,” is identified by enough churches in the narrative portions that we have added it as a sixth “primary” category.

In further dividing the churches by size (those under 100 in worship, and those over 100 in worship), we find that these categories are equally important in churches of all sizes. That suggests that each of these categories plays an important part in retaining and drawing new worshippers.

Each of these “primary” ministries is explored further below, drawing from the commentary in the narrative portion of the study.

1. **Relevant preaching:** From the narrative study, we learn that “relevant preaching” is interpreted to mean Biblically-based teaching that trusts in scripture, and that uniquely recognizes Jesus Christ as the foundation of our faith, hope and purpose. Participants identify the importance of preaching that makes the text equally relevant and meaningful to both long-time believers as well as first time worshippers.
2. **Inspiring music in worship:** From the narrative study, we find that all but 1 of the growing churches feature a “blend” of diverse music, including traditional hymns, contemporary praise music, world music, jazz, gospel, etc. Many of the churches emphasize a trend towards more contemporary worship music that aligns with local musical tastes.
3. **Sunday morning children’s programming:** In reaching out to young families, many churches emphasize the need to make the church friendly and

accessible to parents with young children. This translates into putting time and energy into developing a strong Sunday morning children's ministry.

4. **Local mission:** A variety of different types of local mission are identified in the narrative (including running support groups in the church, volunteering in local community shelters and food banks, one-off projects involving the entire congregation, etc.) These missional activities are identified as both a tangible way of loving and witnessing to the community, as well as a way of making the church visible to the world around it.
5. **Corporate prayer** (outside of worship): In the narrative, participants identify the importance of trusting in the guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit in setting the vision and direction for the church. Intentional corporate prayer outside of worship (e.g. at church meetings, in small groups, by prayer teams, by musicians, at mission events, etc) is identified as key in relying on God's power first and foremost in every facet of church life.
6. **Pastoral care:** Pastoral care was not originally included in the list of ministry choices. However, an overwhelming number of participants identify pastoral care as a ministry of primary importance to church growth. Participants note that the ability for their congregations to offer care and tangible love to those people connected to the church is critical to the health and welfare of the growing church.

“Secondary” Ministries

Of the remaining 18 ministry options, an additional 9 are identified by between one third and half of growing churches as “very important” or “vital” to church growth, and are found in various combinations in participating churches. These “secondary” categories are: “Global Mission”, “Vacation Bible School”, “Intentional leadership development”, “Adult spiritual education”, “Adult small groups”, “Offering New Members classes”, “Educating the congregation on Stewardship”, “Teaching and encouraging personal evangelism & outreach” and “Inspiring worship elements (drama, video, etc).”

The implication is that these 9 ministries are all found to have a positive effect on church growth and health, but can be adopted and grown in any order.

1. **Global mission:** Developing a global mission strategy by partnering with a mission organization offers tangible love to impoverished and struggling

communities around the world, and gives the church a global perspective and local visibility.

2. **Vacation Bible School:** For churches growing their family ministries, VBS is a powerful way of offering both mission, outreach and children's ministries together in one concentrated activity. Based on the study results, VBS tends to be of greater importance in larger (100+ member) churches, and is given almost equal importance to Sunday morning ministries.
3. **Intentional leadership development:** Increasing leadership at all levels of church life is vital to church growth.⁴ A number of growing churches have developed an intentional leadership development strategy to grow church staff and lay leaders.
4. **Adult spiritual education:** Encouraging and equipping adult worshippers to continue to grow in their faith outside of worship grows more deeply committed and rooted believers.
5. **Adult small groups:** Small groups provide an opportunity for connection, personal care, accountability and spiritual growth, as well as another inroad to the church community.
6. **New members classes:** Many participants note the difficulty in helping new worshippers to find connections and become incorporated into the life of the church outside of Sunday worship. New members classes provide a tangible and programmatic way of helping this process.
7. **Educating the congregation on stewardship:** Discussions about finances and stewardship are often thought of as discouraging and off-putting to new worshippers, resulting in a negative pressure on church growth. The results of this study, however, suggest that teaching stewardship and a Biblical view of handling finances actually has an overall positive effect on church growth.
8. **Teaching and encouraging personal evangelism:** Evangelism is a word often dreaded and avoided in Presbyterian churches. However, growing churches identify the ability of a congregation to be invitational and

⁴ Arn, Win, Elmer Towns, and Peter Wagner, "Church Growth: State of the Art", Wheaton: Tyndale, 1989, p.88

hospitable as key in church growth, and therefore teaching churches to be more invitational strengthens church growth.

9. **Inspiring worship elements** (dramas, videos, etc): A number of the participants identified additional elements in worship as a way of engaging both first time and long time worshippers in the worship service. An emphasis is made on presenting these elements with excellence, and on ensuring they serve to engage participants in worship, rather than distract or detract.

Other Ministries

Of the remaining 9 ministries, 7 were identified by a minority of churches as important to church growth (“Family events / Family ministry”, “Sunday morning youth programming”, “Volunteer training”, “Mid-week youth programming”, “Relationship with Christian camps”, “Marketing and media” and “Outreach events”. The remaining 2 categories (“Mid-week children’s programming” and “Young adult / College / University programming”) were not identified as “very important” or “critical” to any of the participants. This does *not* suggest these categories are not of importance to church growth; however, it is likely that they are more specialized ministries that depend upon the local community demographics.

Conclusion of Ministries Survey for Churches Seeking Growth

The conclusion drawn from these results is that churches that are seeking church growth would be advised to look first to building up the 6 “primary” ministries in their church: “Relevant preaching”, “Inspiring music in worship”, “Sunday morning children’s programming”, “Local mission” and “Corporate prayer outside of worship”. Once these ministries are firmly established, churches are encouraged to select the next ministry to grow based on their local demographic community, passions and skills present in the congregation, and most importantly through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY ON THE MINISTRY (NUMERIC) SURVEY RESULTS

Although ministries and programs are important to numeric church growth, no ministry will have a kingdom impact unless the church is also growing in faith, growing in health, and growing in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, churches seeking to grow and reach out are also encouraged to work simultaneously to develop the characteristics of growing churches.

Below is a list of important characteristics of growing churches, along with quotes drawn from the narrative surveys.

1. Visionary leadership – “There is nothing even close to being as important in our growth as [effective and visionary leadership]. This includes a lead pastor who is visionary in his approach, and a Session which willingly engages in the discernment of God's will for the future.”
2. Credibility and integrity of the leadership – “Credibility, (to mean what you say), is the most important ingredient for the church success. Credibility of the minister, Session and Congregation before others in the society will enable the church to reach out and grow in a healthy way.”
3. Willingness to deal frankly and directly with church conflict – “It has been my experience that how congregations deal with conflict is critical to whether the congregation can grow or not.”
4. Willingness to change in order to reach the local community – “Be willing to change your worship style to a medium through which the people of this generation will be able to connect.” “A willingness over 20 years ago to say ‘We are dying.’ which led to the freedom to allow God to work...to risk, to try new things, to learn how to be a church that loves God and loves others.”
5. Open and friendly people who simply, naturally invite others to church – “Committed members of the congregation inviting friends and welcoming newcomers has meant that people are returning after one or two visits.” “Open and friendly people who simply, naturally, invite others to church. Welcoming people from all walks of life, socio-economic backgrounds and needs.”

6. Intentional hospitality to new and old alike – “Hospitality is vital. We work at this on many levels.” “Welcome folks--practice hospitality in little ways every chance you get. Help people feel at home with one another.”
7. Including long time and first time worshippers in every aspect of church life – “Include people in the activities of the church, especially newcomers and let them feel that they are needed”
8. Joy, laughter and celebration – “Learning to laugh at ourselves has meant that we don't focus on the negative but on ways we can improve our ministry. Finding the balance of taking our ministry seriously but not too seriously has been helpful.”
9. Relevant, engaging preaching – “Positive, encouraging, easily understood & particularly relevant to the application of daily living.” “We try to connect with people who have been on this journey for some time, and also with those who are brand new to the possibility of the journey.”
10. Inspiring music (vital, engaging & diverse) – “Our style is 'blended.' We sing some praise songs and also traditional hymns.” “Blended, but leaning toward more contemporary.” “We currently have a diversity of musical styles in worship. The 1st set is contemporary (Robin Mark, Chris Tomlin, top 100 CCLI), Usually 3 songs. These are led by a band comprised of acoustic guitar, electric lead guitar, keyboard, bass and sometimes drums.”
11. Excellence in worship – “A focus on excellence in worship, leading people to be excited and 'proud' of what is happening.” “Have an entrepreneurial spirit for the Lord. Provide excellence in worship (make it worth people giving their time) and don't assume people know stuff. Respect the courage it takes newcomers to walk in the door.” “relevant worship that is led competently (i.e. good message, good sound system, expected service length, quality music) all have contributed to our growth.”
12. Patience and momentum-building – “Patience and trust are a requirement ... Look for where God is already starting to grow something new within the congregation and don't ask how to use that that "get more people in", ask how that new thing can be connected in service to a community outside the congregation.”

13. Outreach, local mission, and serving tangible community needs – “Offering support to people at their point of need, through programs like Divorce Care, DC4K, Single & Parenting, Grief Share, a financial management study, a family supper program for needy families in our community. Support for our local food bank.” “One of our current strengths is being small enough for people to rally around an event, or an idea as one whole community (which could be a fund raising for mission focus, or painting the Church, or a one-time fellowship based event)” “Connecting with local mission has been important for us because people want to be a part of that and live out their faith.”
14. Compassion, mutual support and pastoral care – “We have found that our church has grown through our community reputation for being a compassionate and reliable source of care.” “[We place a] strong emphasis on pastoral care [and] elder visitation.” “Visiting and Pastoral care: this is a priority.”
15. Trusting in God’s guidance through the Holy Spirit – “The single greatest thing has been trusting the Holy Spirit and being attentive to see where God is already at work.” “Be open to the people the Spirit will be sending your way.” “We seek to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and be led by the Holy Spirit, in worship, in daily life, and in serving God as we serve our community and beyond.”
16. Deep trust in scripture and the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ – “Embrace the unique good news of Christ.” “Preach Jesus. Help people connect with him through Scripture.” “I think that theological orthodoxy is important--it's the best message going!” “What separates us from social clubs and political action groups is a live experience of Jesus Christ that causes us individually and corporately to become extensions of His love to others. That's what we uniquely have to offer our communities. When we are faithful to that vision, the Lord will trust us with growth.”

God bless you in your ministry!

APPENDIX

LIST OF PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

Below is a list of the churches whose results were included in the study, along with their approximate Sunday morning attendance in 2011.

<u>Church Name and Location</u>	<u>Attendance (2011)</u>
Centennial Presbyterian Church, Calgary, AB	90
Dayspring Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, AB	136
Gloucester Presbyterian Church, Ottawa, ON	81
Innerkip Presbyterian Church, Innerkip, ON	455
Kensington Presbyterian Church, Kensington, PEI	55
Kings Presbyterian Church, New Minas, NS	125
Knox Presbyterian Church, Milton, ON	165
Knox Presbyterian Church, St. Thomas, ON	200
Knox Presbyterian Church, Thedford, ON	110
Malvern Presbyterian Church, Scarborough, ON	90
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Montague, PEI	59
St. James' Presbyterian Church, Forest, ON	72
St. Marys Presbyterian Church, St. Marys, ON	120
St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Kemptville, ON	60
Trinity Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg, MB	65
Westminster Presbyterian Church, Barrie, ON	90