

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Reopening Phase Church Growth Tactics

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There are a lot of “doomsday conversations” happening in church leadership circles about how COVID-19 and the ensuing economic crisis have brought on the end of the local church.

But I am a glass-three-quarters-full kind of leader. I believe that **this is actually an incredible season where you can see your church reach more people than ever before.**

Yes, your church can grow in this season.

Yes, your church can reach more people in your community today. Before the COVID crisis, 94% of all churches were losing ground against the growth of their local communities. That is to say only 6% of churches were growing faster than the communities that they are located in.

This season is an opportunity for you to rethink what you do as a church and to reposition your church to grow by making a bigger impact. Rather than thinking about one specific silver bullet for church growth, you should be thinking about a *collection of systems* working together to help your church reach more people.

The bottom line on church growth is this: growing churches motivate their people to invite their friends to engage with their church.

This has always been the case and will continue to be the case into the future. **Whether your people are meeting online or in-person, it's our responsibility as leaders to move and motivate our people to invite their friends.** We do this through a series of reinforcing systems that

consistently remind them of the importance of inviting their friends.

Remember when you were a kid and the park around the corner had a merry-go-round?

It was basically a large metal disc with four long handles that met in the middle. You put one foot on the disc and one foot on the ground, and you would start to push that disc around. It didn't feel like you'd be able to make that first rotation because it was so heavy for such a little kid. But then after that first rotation, the second rotation took a little less effort, and the third a little less still.

Eventually what happens is you go from pushing hard to hardly pushing at all.

That is the experience of a flywheel. **You need to be thinking about the re-entry and reopening of your physical locations like one of those merry-go-rounds, like a flywheel.** It's going to take extra effort in this season to get the church growth flywheel turning again, but the investment you make in this season will pay dividends for months and years to come.

What I describe below are five ways for you to restart the church growth flywheel in this unique season. You can read more about this in my book, [Church Growth Flywheel: 5 Practical Systems to Drive Growth at Your Church](#), or dive even deeper in our online course, the [Church Growth Flywheel Master Class](#). Here are five church growth tactics that you could apply to your church in this reopening phase.

Shorter Series Timelines

One of the most effective ways to encourage church growth is to structure your Sunday worship experience around a series.

A series is just a way to organize the message content for your Sunday morning experiences into four to six week segments. **This is an important church growth tactic because we know that one of the primary reasons people attend your church, whether that be online or in-person, is because of the teaching.** [ref] Any communication strategy that's focused on church growth needs to be centered around the teaching that happens at your church.

In this season, you should be thinking about planning for shorter, rather than longer, series.



That will give you more opportunities to get in front of your people and move them to invite their friends. **If you normally do eight-week series, I would encourage you to scale back to six. If you normally do six-week series, scale back to four.** Plan out your preaching calendar to increase the number of series so that you can change the channel faster in this season.

Whenever you move into a new series, go out of your way to strongly encourage your people

to invite their friends either online or in-person. Give them the tools (both digital and physical) to invite their friends to engage with your church.

Increased Celebration Social Media Posts

Now more than ever, your church needs to see itself as a part of the local community.

We are faced with a unique communications opportunity, as not only our churches but businesses, community groups, and schools are all entering this restart phase. Now is the perfect time for you to be celebrating the good things that are happening in your community as an effort to help those who are connected to your church through this difficult transition. **Use your social media channels to celebrate not only the good things that are happening at your church, but the things going on around you.**

What if you took time to celebrate the good things happening in your community during this season? For example:

- Take time every week to highlight a different business that is reinventing itself to better serve the community.
- Celebrate a community leader at a local school or in government that has been doing a great job during this reopening phase.
- Use your social media channels to give people helpful information about community service organizations that are reaching out and making a difference.
- Inform parents about what's happening with schools and other kids oriented environments.

Building a pattern of celebratory, positive social media posts will be helpful to your people in this season.

Avoid using your social media channels to just talk about what's happening at the church. Don't use these channels to only hype coming back to your building; rather, use your channels to build up and be helpful to your community.

Start Christmas Planning Now (Really!)

In any given normal year, my strong recommendation is that churches begin working on their Christmas services in earnest in July or August. But this isn't a normal year.

Christmas represents the largest opportunity to invite unchurched people to come to your church. This year's Christmas celebration is going to be a unique one. You're likely going to have the opportunity to do both an online and in-person experience.

How can we begin to plan now to leverage that opportunity?

Start by gathering your most creative people together maybe biweekly for a conversation about how you can leverage not only Christmas Eve, but the entire Christmas season to engage with your church to invite your community.

Work diligently to ensure that this Christmas celebration is relevant, whether it's online or in-person.



Most of our churches missed the opportunity at Easter this year to connect with our broader communities. However, we have a long ramp to get ready for this next big day! Big days are a really big deal and represent an opportunity for us to reach people who don't normally come to church. Start planning now to leverage your Christmas celebrations as an amazing follow up opportunity beyond the services and season.

Get Your People Out of Their Seats and Into The Streets

The church has never been about trying to get people into buildings.

We use buildings as a helpful tool to gather people together. **Ultimately, the church is best seen as the people of God in action making a difference in their community.** Look closely at what's happening at the fastest growing churches in the country and you'll see that so many of these churches have increased their community service.

Community service is a critical church growth tactic because it makes a tangible difference and signals to the community the kind of church you want to be. People want to be part of a church that makes a difference. Your people will tell more of their friends about your church when you are making a genuine difference in your community.

Please avoid being seen in this season as just wanting to gather people in your building. Instead, leverage this opportunity of regathering people to actually get out of your seats and into the streets to address needs.

You don't need to look far to see examples of some of the fastest growing churches in the country making a difference. Here are just a few:

- [Rock City Church | Columbus, Ohio](#) // They've gone through multiple truckloads of food and supplies and become a distribution hub for many partner organizations. They are a great example of a church mobilizing their volunteers to make a difference.
- [New Story Church | Los Angeles](#) // One of my persistent memories of this COVID season will be New Story Church and their drive-through food bank. It's been inspiring to see them serve thousands of families from the front door of their church.
- [Mercy Hill Church | Greensboro, South Carolina](#) // During this season, they donated 60 Chromebooks to help kids who were having difficulty with technology get connected online. This fall, your church

will have the same opportunity to help in this area, as many school boards will be doing at least some portion of classes and programs online.

- [Eagle Brook Church | Minnesota](#) // This church has been rallying its community to get involved with a massive food drive designed to engage people and help thousands of families in their community who have been impacted by COVID-19.

Increase Internal Communications Pipeline

Now more than ever, **you need to think very carefully about your communications pipeline.** Getting the right message to the right people at the right time is of paramount importance in this season.

As you engage with your volunteers and renegotiate their roles and positions (whether they be online or in-person), **use this opportunity to reinfuse the vision of why your church exists into your team.** Leverage the heightened awareness that people have during your volunteer training to rearticulate what the mission of the church is and how your process of reopening is reinforcing the missional drive of the church.

Leverage your communications pipeline during this season to increase engagement in your small groups, in your various mid-level events, and other community-oriented opportunities within your church.



This is a perfect season for you to rethink and reimagine how your church communicates with itself. We've been saying that in this season, churches are going to need senior communications leadership and this would be a great task for them to put high on their list as we enter phases of reopening.

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