

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



*5 Dangerous Ways
Churches Convince
THEMSELVES THEY'RE GROWING*

RICH BIRCH

94% of churches are losing ground against the population growth of their communities.

In 2050 the percentage of the US population attending church will be half of 1990. [\[ref\]](#)

I'm crazy enough to think that your church should be growing. I think healthy things grow. I am obsessed about seeing the gospel of Jesus expanding in our day. I believe that the best is yet to come in the local church. I see signs of life all over the place. But I also see church leaders kidding themselves and their community by saying that their church is growing when, in fact, it isn't.

I know that counting weekend service attendance isn't a comprehensive metric for discerning the impact and effectiveness of your church but it is a starting point. If we can't get people into our weekend services we are unlikely to see them in any other environment.

The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. By making it clear what is really happening in your church with your leaders is the first step to making an impact in your community. **I've seen many church leaders try to convince themselves and their people that they are growing which is dangerous because then you won't be motivated to change or do what is needed to reach the people God is calling you towards.** Let's be honest...do you sense that you're trying to convince yourself you're growing when you really aren't?



- **What It Feels Like** // We stand on the platform and it looks like there are more people attending than there was last year. We never had parking lot issues but now it seems as if we're running out of space all the time out there. The church used to clear out in 5 minutes after the service but now people are still trying to get out after 20 minutes. All of these "metrics" can be explained by something other than actual attendance growth. Often, we look at the evidence which helps us feel like we're making a bigger impact than we actually are. Church growth isn't a feeling; instead, it's a metric.

- **Funny Attendance Math** // There is a popular trend within many church leadership circles to count attendance in some funny ways to make us feel like our ministry is having a bigger impact than it actually is. Here are a few examples:

- People are coming to church 30% less than they were 10 years ago so our church is really 30% larger than the number of people who attend on any given weekend. We look the other way when we know that our system is double counting volunteers, effectively boosting our numbers by 10-15%.
- We change the way we count so things look better now than they did a previously. For instance, we never used to include the student ministry events in our attendance but now we put those numbers in to boost our overall attendance picture.

- **"Big Days" Attendance** // Three or four times a year most churches have unusually high attendance. Sometimes, we use the attendance numbers on these "big days" as the benchmark for our attendance. Boosting attendance on Christmas Eve or Easter is an effective part of church growth strategy but it's not a valid number for when you talk about how large your church is. The dynamics at play to get a lot of people to show up for a single special event are different than what it takes to build a long-term impact in a community.

- **Tallest of the 7 Dwarfs** // We often look at other churches in town and are happy that we're bigger than "them". Rather than understanding why people don't attend any church in our town, we look down our noses at those churches that have the same struggles as ours. All this does is breed division among the churches in your community.
- **Plateaued Growth by Increasing Revenue** // This is the most dangerous of all these trends. Believe it or not, there are churches which are plateaued in attendance or even in decline but their revenue is growing. This is a super alarming trend because it will empower the church to shift from being a dynamic volunteer-driven organization to a staff-heavy enterprise. The money generated will negatively reinforce behaviors that will cause the church to have a diminished impact. This church can be referred to as a "zombie church" because it has lost its life but can go on for a long time appearing to be alive.

Start Reaching... not just keeping.

Start Listening to the Culture to Find Points of Connection with the Gospel.

Start Making Friends with "Outsiders".

Start Learning From Growing Churches and Applying What You Think You Can.

Start Praying for Revival in our Country.

I'm on your side. I want to help your church grow. It's at the core of what we do around here at unSeminary. Here are some resources to help you kick-start the growth of your church:

- [5 Church Growth Hacks That Most Churches Ignore \(But Shouldn't!\)](#)
 - A collection of resources to point you in the direction of what you can work on in your church this season to help with growth.
- [Kent Jacobs on Demystifying Church Growth in a Culture Where Churches Don't Grow](#)
 - People don't plant growing churches where an EPIC Church is. Their story is inspiring ... you should follow Kent and his church.
- [Church Governance that Helps Fuel Growth](#)
 - We often do not think about the structure of growing churches but check out some practical help for aligning your organization so it can have an impact in the community.
- [Shaun Nepstad on Plateaued to 10x Church Growth](#)
 - His church was stuck at 300 and then changed a bunch of stuff and saw explosive growth to over 3,000. Listen carefully.

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