

38

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

SPIRITUALLY and NUMERICALLY

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www.revivalseminar.org
13 patriotic online lessons
www.chwinwv.org
Christian Heritage Week in West Virginia
www.nativityhelp.org
Right to display Nativity scenes on public property
www.gospelhope.info
“Dear Muslim Neighbors”
www.churchtags.info
evangelistic license plates
www.christianacres.camp
Christian service camp in Brushfork, WV
www.rickmathena.com
no secret rapture

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#1: Lighted Sign by the Road

It does not have to be super fancy or very expensive but it should be two sided if on a two way road and large enough to attract the attention of the community. It makes the church appear alive and active, drawing the passerbys to the message on the sign. It can be offered to the community for birthday, anniversary, wedding and other announcements. This builds goodwill. Google “lighted signs with changeable letters” to view the many choices. It will be worth the money spent and should be considered an investment in souls and not an expense. The message needs to be changed weekly to stay fresh. It is a way to share God’s love with the community without them even coming inside the building.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#2: NRA Youth Shooting Club

Activities need to be offered that motivates non-churched youth in the community to get involved and eventually begin to attend services; as well as something that their Christian friends will want to invite them to. When I ministered with the Church of Christ at Pettry (WV), a local NRA shooting instructor volunteered his time and we started a youth shooting club. The participants earned certificates and patches for marksmanship. Parents who never attended church services at Pettry came to the awards program which included refreshments afterwards. It provided an evangelistic opportunity. The boys who went shooting every week also came on Wednesday nights and learned Bible lessons. It really became interesting and competitive when two girls joined in the weekly shooting of the .22 caliber single shot bolt action rifles at the indoor range; because one of them was the best shot. Contact the NRA at www.nra.org for more information.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#3: Children’s Church Service

What do you do when a church goes from zero children to 16 (as a result of visitation), most of whom did not know how to “sit still and be quiet” as some of the adults preferred? The answer was to start a separate children’s church service. It works because the service is on the child’s level, they feel more comfortable and the adults are happy. It also works because children are not afraid to invite their friends. Don’t make them sit with the grownups until communion time as this can discourage them from coming. Let them be children. They will grow up soon enough, hopefully as young Christians because someone cared enough to start a children’s church service.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#4: Spring Cleaning and Saturday Open House

It bothers me when I visit a church and see grass and bushes that need trimming, the outside of the building in need of repair and trash blowing in the wind across the parking lot. Once inside I sense that neatness is not a priority as books and magazines are not in order in the vestibule, chairs are not pushed back under the table in the classrooms and toys in the nursery are left lying on the floor. The main auditorium is not much better as it could use a fresh coat of paint, the song books in the pews are not in the same order in the holders and the piano area looks like no one ever thought that a filing cabinet might not be a bad idea. Is the way we take care of the building and grounds a reflection of our commitment to the Lord? What would visitors think? I suggest a thorough sprucing up of the entire building and grounds that says this local congregation cares enough to continually do what is needed to keep everything in top shape. Add a sign over the main exit door that says, "...go therefore and make disciples...." A photo wall of those currently serving and who have served in the United States military, reproductions of America's founding documents prominently displayed, historical photos depicting America's Christian heritage and the history of the local church all add uniqueness. A Bible verse on the pulpit and over the baptistry can also be a powerful influence. Once this fresh look has been completed, invite the community to a Saturday Open House. Announce it on a lighted sign by the road, with public service radio ads, discounted bulk mail and of course by personal invitation. No preaching, no being pushy and no phoniness; just a sincere welcome by greeters at the front door who offer to give the visitors a tour of the facility. The last stop is the fellowship hall where refreshments and snacks will be served. It can be hot dogs, hamburgers, pizza, finger sandwiches or fried chicken; doesn't really matter. The important thing is that people begin to realize that this group of church folk genuinely care about them. Before the visitors leave, the preacher should let them know they are always welcome and if they ever have any questions or concerns they should always feel at ease to ask him, day or night. One more thing, give each person some sort of gift for coming. Perhaps a pocket size monthly planner with a picture of the church building on the front cover, contact information and times of services. Sounds good to me. What do you think?

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#5: Business Cards

Not only should the preacher have church business cards, the church members should keep some with them as well to give out. The nicest ones I have seen include a picture of the church building on the front; with the preacher's name, days and times of meeting and contact information on the back. Including Bible verses on to how to get saved is also a wise thing to do. Giving someone the church business card when evangelizing or inviting them to an activity, event, seminar or a support group makes sense as the card serves as a reminder of the invite. VistaPrint (www.vistaprint.com) offers styles to choose from or you can custom design one to your liking.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#6: Weekly Calling Program

I remember learning that the main way someone started going to “church” was because a family member or friend invited them. However, a fair question to ask is does the local church where you are a member have a weekly calling program to encourage inviting others to attend? Although the preacher should be emphasizing evangelism from the pulpit, a weekly class can be offered to help each Christian fulfill Matthew 28:18-20. The class can cover basic doctrine, ways to evangelize, false doctrines, cults, “dos and don’ts” and how to speak the truth in love. Each person can make their list of prospects and have one week until the next class to “make a call” whether by phone, text, greeting card or with the prospect’s permission a house visit. It isn’t rocket science. Just have to care enough to be a doer rather than be lukewarm. Each class will also include prayer and follow-up discussion. Remember, too, that Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 1Corinthians 3:6

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#7: Community Youth Choir

Elementary, secondary school and youth choirs at local churches are common; but what about starting an area wide community youth choir as an evangelistic outreach program? Students of all ages would be welcome to participate, regardless of which congregation they come from or whether or not they even attend worship service anywhere. I think it is safe to say that there are many students with untapped talent that, with the right encouragement and direction, might have their life changed for the better because someone cared enough to invite them to participate. Now some of you might not agree with the fact that when I was preaching full time and also worked as a janitor at Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, I would invite college students who had singing and musical instrument talent to come do specials in song. I told the church folks not to get upset or overly concerned if one of them said something “different” because I was the one who gave the invitation at the end. What is needed is a willingness by the elders to support a community youth choir, members who will commit themselves to taking on the responsibilities of organizing and directing and the church youth making an effort to invite their friends to join. Once established this new community youth choir should be welcomed to perform at other brotherhood churches. Relationships can be developed where denominational differences can be brought to light in a kind and loving way with potential for church growth.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#8: Evangelistic License Plates

Evangelistic license plates (www.churchtags.info) are a simple and effective way to share God's Word with others and you do not even have to be there to do so. I have been offering them for free for a number of years mainly at the National Preaching Summit and Winter Worship and Workshop. If you have been there during this time you probably have seen them and maybe even taken some. For those of you who live in a state requiring only a rear license plate (tag) putting one on the front of the vehicle you drive opens a door for personal evangelism. Some people seeing the ACTS 2:38 tag have asked, "What does that mean?" The plates can also be put in the rear window of a truck, on a rural route mailbox post, the side of a barn, the back of a tractor, a wall in a garage, etc.... One fella I met at the NPS took a bunch and offers them to strangers as he travels. When I see someone with an IN GOD WE TRUST sticker on the back of their vehicle, I offer them the NATIONAL MOTTO or the JESUSAVES tag. I basically use tithe money to pay for them. I also sell in bulk at my cost to churches or anyone else. Minimum order is 125 pieces. The next amount is 250 pieces. They are made by Dixie Seal & Stamp in Tucker, GA. Cost averages from \$3.00 to \$4.00 per plate. There are 26 choices should you be interested.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#9: Warm Water in the Baptistry

I remember asking why there was not any water in the baptistry at the first church where I was hired to preach full time. The answer I was given was, "...because we don't have many baptisms." I thought, "No wonder why!" So I cleaned it and filled it to be ready. How can any church, who believes that baptism (immersion) is part of becoming a Christian and gives an invitation at every service, have an empty baptistry? I have also filled-in preached at four additional churches where there is no water in the baptistry at the time of this writing. This is not only wrong, it will be very embarrassing and lead to unscriptural waiting to be immersed. Please also realize that having to do so in cold water takes away from the special moment, too. The baptistry needs to be full with clean warm water by having a heater and filter; and the changing rooms neatly organized with baptismal robes, clothes hangers, hooks, plenty of towels, blow dryers, grooming amenities and plastic bags for wet clothes. Anything less shows a lack of concern. It would be a disgrace for someone to come forward and ask, "What prevents me from being immersed?" and be told, "Uh, we don't have any water in the baptistry."

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#10: Nursery and Classes for all Ages

When fill-in preaching at very small churches the members tell me that they would like to grow in attendance, which is good. However, my concern is what happens if visitors do come and with children of different ages? Is the church ready to accommodate them during Sunday school, worship service and mid-week prayer meeting/Bible study? A lack of preparedness will give the visitors a bad impression and might just cause them not to return? Classrooms needs to be furnished, teaching materials need to be on hand and reliable qualified teachers need to be ready at a moment's notice. There should also be a nursery. Everything should be clean and organized. If the church is so small in number it just might be time to join with another brotherhood church in the area and pool resources. The money saved on utilities and upkeep is good stewardship. In all honesty, though, I would not want to sell the building to anyone preaching false doctrine. An option is to sell it to someone wanting to convert the former church building into a house. Perhaps the biggest holdback is that individuals and families do not want to leave "their" building. While sentimentality is understandable, Jesus said, "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#11: Visitors Follow-up

It can be kind of scary for visitors to come the first time. A welcome center with friendly greeters helps. New faces and trying to remember names is difficult. While visitor follow-up should be part of a weekly calling program, the point here is the effect on the visitor if there is no follow-up. Suppose someone visits a few consecutive Sundays, is welcomed by the preacher and church members but for whatever reason stops coming. What will this person think if no one follows up with them to show concern that they no longer attend? Seems that they might get the impression that no one cares. Perhaps a better way to say this is that no one cared enough to follow up. I realize that people come and go but it would be wise to find out why they do not stay and see if something can be done about it. Perhaps doing so will result in new members. A yearly new member recognition dinner is also a good idea. I believe that speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) is most important; but as you have probably heard before, people do not care about how much you know until they know how much you care.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#12: Elders who do their Job

I question why have elders if they do not teach, preach and shepherd the flock; or if they try to lord their authority over the church members rather than be an example of a humble servant willing to stand up for what is right regardless of the outcome. An evangelist starts a new work, in due time is able to recommend qualified men for a congregational show of support, then moves on and the minimum of two elders continue the work. Seems simple enough. What I do not hear much about is elders having a list of church members to shepherd and doing so. For example, if there are 20 people and two elders, each elder has 10 people to spiritually care for. It can be decided if over time if the elders exchange lists. I agree it is not easy for an elder with a full time job to do all the preaching and teaching, so part time or full time ministers/preachers are hired to help; and in time they might become an elder. However, hiring someone does not mean the current elders are relieved of their responsibilities. It must be a team effort and this includes all the church members, too; for the body is not one member but many, each with an important purpose to keep the body of Christ functioning properly. 1Corinthians 12:12-27

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#13: Paying Christian Camp Tuition

Christian Acres (www.christianacres.camp) may be located in southern West Virginia but it serves children and young adults from many states. It also attracts and serves many of them who have no church affiliation nor the financial means to attend. The camp is another way to "...go therefore and make disciples...." Some of the local churches pay the tuition for the children of the members and for anyone else who cannot afford to attend. Doing so is an evangelistic outreach. No one is turned away for lack of money and this is how it should be. Think of it as an investment in a child's soul. Jesus paid the ultimate price for ours. We should follow in His steps by paying the local Christian camp tuition for those who do not have the means. Truthfully, we cannot afford not to do so.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#14: Daycare, K-12 and after-school Program

I agree that starting and maintaining a daycare, Christian school (K-12) and an after-school program is a major undertaking. All I know is being born and raised in Chicago there were and still are many private religious schools that unite a community and where families worship together in large numbers.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#15: Singles Ministries

If you have not considered college age students, adult singles and widows and widowers attending the local church as separate ministry opportunity, then you should. They are as important of an age group as all others. The church can grow because these individuals will invite their friends to attend activities, events and seminars. It is made clear in advance that this is a ministry, not a dating service; although holy matrimony has resulted at times. Jesus understands the needs and wants of those who live alone and/or are lonesome, although for some it is a Biblical choice. However, for others it is like a sickness that needs a cure. The cure includes the Words of Christ, "I was a stranger, and you invited Me in."

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#16: Activities, Events and Seminars

While "rightly dividing God's Word" is most important and should be the main concern for anyone wanting to join a local church; there is nothing wrong with having activities, events and seminars which might become the initial reason someone decided to attend for the first time. Having such can also make it easier for the members to invite a neighbor, friend, coworker, relative or even someone they just met. A few examples of church sponsored activities are bus tours, attending sporting events, a golf outing, scout programs such as Trail Life and American Heritage Girls, Bible Bowl, monthly Saturday men's breakfast and a movie or game night from time to time. Events such as revival meetings, VBS, Homecoming, brotherhood pulpit exchange, Ladies Day, fifth Sunday singspirations, church picnics and holiday dinners are additional "reasons" to invite others. Seminars ideas include marriage and family, evangelism, patriotic (www.revivalseminar.org) and "Know your Rights" in the public school and workplace.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#17: Community Support Groups

A friend of mine likes to end his emails with, "Live simply, love generously and be kinder than necessary. Everyone you meet is fighting some battle." Yes, people yearn for help and compassion with their battles. The type of support needed most at times is emotional, encouragement and hope. Sometimes it is more than just making it through the day, it is making it through the moment. Community support groups include divorce recovery, AA, abortion healing, grief care and others. With a qualified moderator, there exists an opportunity for those in personal "battles" to learn about and experience the love, forgiveness and peace offered by Christ.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#18: First Responders Appreciation Dinner

We have a lot to be thankful for when it comes to the services provided by our local police department, fire department and rescue squad. These men and women put their life on the line for us and need to be shown appreciation. One way is to have an annual First Responders Appreciation Dinner sponsored by the local church. The who, what and why have already been mentioned. The when, where and how can be figured out so every first responder has a chance to either attend or have a meal brought to them. Recognition of each person and prayer for God's watch care over each of them and their family needs to be an important part of the event.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#19: "What we Believe" Newspaper Column

There are different ways to go and make disciples (learners). One way is for a local church to sponsor a "What we Believe" column in the local newspaper. It needs to be a weekly feature to gain attention and interest. The column topics can include a particular doctrinal statement, social issue position or answers to common questions. It is to be written by the preacher. Speaking the truth in love is the best method. Contact information needs to be provided, too. Future columns can address questions asked by the readers. Depending upon the amount of space reserved, a photo of the local church building and the minister can be included along with an invitation to come visit on Sunday. The location and times of services must also be shown. Another way to advertise the local church is through bulk mailing, a daily radio spot, TV, Facebook and a website that includes the sermons. Bulk mailing is relatively inexpensive and can be structured to reach the local community mail routes and post office boxes.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#20: Pick-up and Drop-off

If the adults and children have no transportation it is unreasonable to expect them to attend. That is common sense. Now common courtesy would be to offer to pick them up and take them back home afterwards. Back in the late '80s and early 90s my wife and I needed both vehicles to pick up the all the kids. A 12 or 15 passenger van would have been handy but the church bank account was minimal. I got paid \$50 a week if the money was available. One day I got tired and thought about taking a break; but it was then that I realized that if we did not go get everyone, then they would not come. Perhaps another reason why Jesus said to, "...go therefore and make disciples...." Does the church where you are a member do pick-up and drop-off? If not, why not?

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#21: Relocate?

A preacher friend of mine, along with the church members, made the decision to relocate from an old facility with lots of history but with limited space. They purchased a former restaurant building on a main highway and put on an addition. It was the right move based on growth, both numerically and spiritually. Feelings and sentiments did not take precedence over the concern to reach more souls. Yes, it required members to give of their time, talent and money; and they continue to do so. Relocating may be something for which to give prayerful consideration when it comes to church growth.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#22: Consolidate?

There are three brotherhood churches, all within a short driving distance of each other. All three have seen better days regarding attendance. In fairness, a number of the members at each church have passed on and some of the children have moved out of the area for jobs. Should they consolidate or should the members, along with the preacher, make a better effort to evangelize the surrounding community? Good questions. There are two other brotherhood churches within two miles of each other but in another state than the three just mentioned. Members at the one have to drive pass the other when meeting. There was a split some 40 years ago. One church averages about 16 people and the other about 8 people. One building is older and very small. The other is fairly new and very impressive. There seems to be willingness to talk about the possibility of getting back together. It is worth trying. Two churches in the same state as the first three mentioned above (but in a different county) saw their attendance decline significantly since splitting many years ago. Truthfully, both could not even remember the reason for the split, so they sold one of the buildings and joined fellowships. The accounts above are true. The idea to join fellowships might sound easier than it actually is considering some of the people have a strong bond to the buildings. Also, in two cases the property was donated many years ago and is supposed to be given back to the immediate families if the churches close. Despite taking this into account, other reasons to consolidate are the cost to operate will be significantly reduced and there will be more members to share the work load. It becomes a matter of stewardship and what is more important.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#23: Dealing with Trouble Makers

Churches should welcome troubled people. After all, we are all sinners and saved by grace. Salvation is a gift from God. However, there is a big difference between a troubled person and a person who seems to cause trouble wherever they attend. The Bible is clear about how to deal with such people. Even though they are to be continually shown love in the Lord, they are not to be allowed to disrupt the congregation. If this happens, church growth will suffer both spiritually and numerically. If so, the church is also to blame. It takes a strong eldership and/or members with the fortitude and courage to stand up for what is right.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#24: Membership Mistakes

I have heard it said during the invitation and seen it written in Sunday bulletins, “If you are an immersed believer we invite you to become a member.” Really? Might sound friendly but the end result can be anything but friendly. There are others who immerse. The concern is why do they immerse? Was it “eis” the remission of one’s sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? If not, it is very important to realize that if enough of the others become members, they could take over and begin to preach something other than what the Bible says about how to get saved. Another very important concern is that they could take over the property, too. Please check the church bylaws and restrictions in the property deed. If you do not, you just might regret having made membership mistakes.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#25: Wednesday Evening Family Meal

It is tiring enough at home for the mom and dad to help their children with homework, get dinner ready, clean up afterwards and still try to make it to Wednesday evening prayer meeting/Bible study and youth groups on time. To reduce the stress and give the parents (or single parent) a break, some churches prepare and serve a Wednesday evening family meal before meeting starts. One local congregation I know has a paid hostess who makes sure everything is prepared and organized. Meals are also delivered to shut-ins. A Wednesday evening meal can be a draw, increase attendance, provide a needed welcome relief and help folks be in the right frame of mind before the prayer meeting and Bible study begins.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#26: Gymnasium

Given a choice, would you prefer a church building that is used two days a week or a multi-purpose facility that has the potential to be used seven days a week? When starting with a blank sheet of paper for a new build, why not consider building a gymnasium instead that can be used for worship, dinners, meetings and recreation? Although some churches have the money to add on a gym to the existing structure; for those who do not, consider whether it is better stewardship to build a multi-purpose facility first. I had a “Wow!” moment while visiting a preacher friend when he showed me the separate gym on the church property. I was truly impressed and thought what a way to reach out to the community by offering youth leagues, adult activities and making it available for community use, too.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#27: Ambulance Substation and Playground

I preached for two years at a small rural church located near the end of a county line. Very nice folks. Maybe 12 if everyone showed up. A sincere concern of mine is that the nearest ambulance is at least a half hour away in good weather. Snow and traffic are another matter. I talked with the manager of the rescue squad. He expressed an interest in having an ambulance substation on the church property. In years past there was a single wide trailer on the property which was the parsonage, so another building could be put in the same spot to use as an office and for housing. The rescue squad said they would cover all the expenses and pay monthly rent. I believe this would make a wonderful statement to the community. Here is a church that cares not only about your soul but your physical well-being, too. The other idea and suggestion is for a community playground and picnic shelter at the same church mentioned above. A long time member remembered the church in his will. Some of the money could be used towards this project and be named after him. A nice way to once again show the community we care. Perhaps families might come visit sometime and result in church growth. May God’s will be done.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#28: Home Bible Studies

Meeting in homes of Christians certainly worked during the days of the early church and can work again today if someone wants to make the effort to start one. Topics are unlimited. Doors for personal evangelism will be opened when friends from different backgrounds and different religious upbringing meet to discuss and learn.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#29: Youth Revival Meetings by the Youth

Church revivals are very common but what about having area wide youth revival meetings conducted by the youth? The revival would be hosted by a local church working in harmony with brotherhood youth groups from the area. The message and special music would all be done by serious minded youth from elementary school age up to those in college. It leaves a lasting impression when seeing and hearing a young man preach a sermon or a boy or girl share a testimony. It can motivate other boys to preach, especially important because of the shortage of preachers. There are also many young people with excellent musical talent to do specials. Combining both of these with a topic of current relevance to these age groups is a recipe for a successful evangelistic meeting, especially when other school age friends are invited. Serious thought should be given and acted upon in providing scholarships to boys and girls alike to attend Christian colleges where these talents can be further developed and used for the Lord's work.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#30: Practicing what is Preached

Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Therefore, we must put into practice what we hear preached from the pulpit. Heard a message on Mt. 25:31-46? Open a soup kitchen in the fellowship hall, donate time and money to homeless shelters, organize a clothing drive to stock a community clothes closet, have a food pantry and fund a communion table baptistry from ARM Prison Outreach International (www.arm.org) which will be placed in a correctional facility requesting one. A greeting card ministry is another way to send some comfort, encouragement and hope to shut-ins; as are frequent personal visits. Heard a message on Luke 14:13-14? At the next church fellowship meal invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. This can also be a separate event from time to time. Heard a message on Matthew 5:13-16? Start a "salt and light" committee. Run for political office. Volunteer at a pro-life crisis pregnancy resource center. Host a Red Cross blood drive in the fellowship hall. Everyone can do something, especially pray. Realize that there is a big difference between warm pews and pew warming.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#31: M.O.P.S....

...is an acronym for mothers of preschoolers and an idea my wife shared with me. This group provides a unique opportunity for church growth when having activities, events, seminars and community support groups geared towards their needs and wants. Getting one started might be as simple as asking the mothers of preschoolers what they think about having such and if they would like to help get one started and organized.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#32: Prayer Service for Public Officials

1 Timothy 2:1-2 says we are to pray for those in public office. Makes sense realizing these individuals make decisions and pass laws that affect our daily lives. Whether it is the local mayor, city or town council, school board members, dog catcher, tax assessor, state legislator or federal office holder; these people need God's guidance because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without such, decisions are made contrary to the Word of God; and both the office holder and those who voted for them will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement. A Saturday or Sunday evening would be a good day to schedule this type of prayer service because it would not take anyone away from Sunday morning services elsewhere. The event can include a brief message by the preacher, recognition in front of the congregation of each office holder and prayer respectfully personalized for each one attending the gathering. Refreshments can be served afterwards. Also, if we are to live a tranquil and quiet life in all Godliness and purity, I pray that the government will be made up of Christians who are not afraid to stand up for what is right, knowing that our Rights come from God and that God does not give anyone the Right to do something wrong according to His Word.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#33: He was their worst preacher, but...

...during the two years and two months he ministered, beginning in August of 1985, average attendance increased by 20 people and there were 11 immersions "eis" the remission of sins. Having no previous formal Bible college training, his messages did not live up to what the members were used to hearing. Worst yet, the previous minister was the president of a local college of evangelism, so following that "act" was a letdown for the congregation at first. However, the new preacher simply cared about lost souls. He also worked hard at calling/visitation and was financially generous towards improving the look of the building and grounds. After all, he felt that the property's appearance shows respect for God. A children's church was started as was a youth group. Monthly birthday and anniversary celebrations along with refreshments being served were enjoyed by all. Once a month a local brotherhood preacher was invited to speak for Sunday evening service, which was a nice change of pace for everyone. Special guest concerts were also a monthly Sunday evening practice as was a monthly video lesson. Truthfully, it was all spiritually worthwhile and also fun. The one downside was the preacher's lack of Old Testament knowledge, which he blames on himself. His personality was also one where he did not like to take his job home with him. Being a minister/preacher does not end when one punches out for the day so to speak. Criticism from a few folks led to discouragement and the work load led to needing a break from burnout. Simply put, it was the best job he ever had and also the worst job he ever had. Starting pay was \$135 a week for the first six months and then \$185 a week afterwards, plus a small but very nice new parsonage. The main point is that if you have a man willing to give everything up to become your minister/preacher, please support and encourage him as best you can.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#34: Being re-baptized/immersed

You have probably heard many invitations given but have you ever heard one including Acts 19:1-5? In other words, does the preacher ever say something like, "...and if you have been immersed, was it to get forgiveness of your sins and to receive the Holy Spirit?" This is not being legalistic or judgmental. It is a similar question asked by Paul to some disciples in Ephesus. Many people are immersed but was it for the right reason? Some people are not sure and want to be sure. There is nothing wrong with doing so again to make sure. This is a personal decision. It is also very important that the person giving the invitation is clear in what is being taught and that the person making the decision knows why they are doing so. This helps avoid any confusion or questioning one's salvation later. Also, the believing seems to be easier than the repentance part, which must be explained and emphasized even more so at times. Oh, all the twelve men whom Paul asked his question were re-baptized/immersed.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#35: Staying in contact with...

...those former members who still live in the area but for some reason do not attend anymore, attend elsewhere or not at all. The friendship has not ended; but is forsaking the assembling together now a concern? If so, staying in contact shows that you have not forgotten about them and that you still care. I think about those young people who I have baptized (immersed) and have lost contact with since I resigned as the local preacher many years ago and they in turn have stopped coming for many years now. I feel like part of it is my fault and that I could and should have done more. Yes, I moved back to Chicago for almost three years before returning to West Virginia in a different area; but each person also makes their own choices regarding faithfulness. Truthfully, it is an entire church issue. Had there been a calling program with names, addresses and an annual review of the date when someone was immersed and/or placed their membership, follow-up would be easier and can continue regardless of who is the current minister/preacher. Anyway, staying in contact is important and I want to think that it is not too late to make an effort, especially when God opens a door to do so.

Colossians 4:3

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#36: Ephesians 4:15 and 1Corinthians 9:19-22

I was not raised in the independent Christian churches/churches of Christ. I was raised Roman Catholic. If you just thought or said, “I’m sorry.” then you have just insulted me whether you realize it or not. Now I am not saying I have not said things from the pulpit I regret. I have and wish I did not. Sometimes a preacher takes a strong stand because others do not. However, the pulpit does not give anyone the right to be rude. Think about it, insulting someone for what they believe does not motivate them to want to come back. We need to try and understand all people. Apologizing for God’s Word is not necessary. Apologizing for not speaking the truth in love is necessary.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#37: Are you listening to the Holy Spirit?

I cannot say that I have heard many messages about the Holy Spirit, nor have I preached many either. However, I first want to say that the Holy Spirit is a He, not it. He is God just as Jesus is God and just as the Father is God. Anyone who is a Christian has the Holy Spirit living in their heart (1Corinthians 6:19, Galatians 4:6). Romans 8:14 says that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So how are we led by the Spirit? I believe the Bible shows the following ways: Through the written Word, circumstances in our lives, other people, answers to prayer, thoughts in our minds and through His prompting, comforting and convicting. When we are born again becoming a new creature in Christ our lives will change in ways never imagined. God will take life’s “bad” and make good. He will take the talents He has given us and put them to use for His purpose and our spiritual fulfillment. All we have to do is listen and obey.

Ideas and Suggestions for church growth!

#38: God is the Judge, not us!

MY BACKGROUND

I was born and raised in Chicago's "Back of the Stockyards" neighborhood. My grandparents were Polish and Russian immigrants. My Dad was Russian Orthodox and my Mom was Roman Catholic. My brother, sister and I were raised Roman Catholic and all graduated from a Bohemian Catholic grammar school across the street from our two flat house where my aunt, uncle and two cousins lived upstairs. Around the corner was a Ukrainian church.

As far back as I can remember I believed in Jesus. I was taught to think of others before myself and to know the difference between right and wrong (sin). I was an altar boy but did not want to become a priest because I knew I wanted to get married someday, which I did.

A LIFE CHANGING ILLNESS

In my mid-twenties I suffered a severe depression which led to me to being very concerned about assurance of forgiveness. I talked with the priest but to make a long story short it was the ministers, David Hull and Matt Davila, at First Christian Church of Chicago who helped me above and beyond. It was the first time I had ever heard about repent and be immersed as an adult to get forgiveness of my sins. The Catholic Church teaches baptism is to get forgiveness of sins and to be born again but practice infant baptism (christening). I now believe infants are born sinless and are unable to believe nor repent, even though they have nothing to repent of.

THE QUESTION THAT NEVER ENDS

Since recovering from my life changing illness I have wondered about, prayed about and talked about, "What about those who have not been immersed "eis" the forgiveness of their sins?" In 1985 my family and I moved to West Virginia after I was convicted to apply for and was eventually hired to preach at a small country church. I wanted to tell everyone what I had learned about salvation. Although never intentionally wanting to hurt anyone's feelings; I did not always preach in a loving and understanding way. I even went so far one time to apologize a few years later to some visitors who had come on an Easter Sunday. I insulted them in a roundabout way for what they believed. Needless to say they did not come back.

WORDS HURT

Things are different when they hit home so to speak. By this I mean the passing of loved ones, who although they believe and have repented, have never been immersed as an adult "eis" the forgiveness of their sins. Some of my preacher friends say from the pulpit that my family went to Hell. Well, maybe not in those exact words, but they have repeatedly said that immersion is "essential" to salvation. In other words, if one is not immersed [for the right reasons] they do not go to Heaven. Do you know what it is like to hear this? Maybe you do?

SEARCHING FOR HOPE

I still do and always will preach that baptism means immersion and that it is to get forgiveness of sins (washing away like in Acts 22:16) providing one believes in Jesus as the Christ and is repentant. I admit, though, that if I thought there was no hope for my deceased loved ones I would either be in a psych ward or worse. My search for hope asks many questions such as is it impossible for God to forgive doctrinal errors? Can He not give others a break? Could “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” be possible today? Does He change His mind? Is it our fault and are we responsible for perhaps not telling them what we know? Although the robber on the cross was forgiven under the Old Testament he was still alive in the New Testament because Jesus died first. Was he born of water and the Spirit? What about the 70 or 72 who were told to rejoice because their names were already written in Heaven? Were they later immersed for the right reasons? Can God give the Holy Spirit to whomever and whenever He wants? Was Apollos immersed for the right reasons after he was taught the way more accurately? What happened to those who died in the 1st century trying to follow the Old Testament but not hearing the New Testament Word of God? Since some incur a stricter judgment do others incur a less strict judgment based on what they were taught? Are white robes only given to the slain souls under the altar who understood and obeyed Acts 2:38? I also think about that God causes the increase and that He is fair.

NOW WHAT?

Maybe some of you understand and agree? Maybe some of you want to excommunicate me? All I am saying is we as Christian church/church of Christ “members” not only do more harm than good when passing final judgement, it is also not our job.

Although I am not Roman Catholic in all of my doctrine beliefs anymore, I am in my childhood feelings. Although not sure how to say it, I’ll simple continue to preach the Word while trusting in God’s love, grace and mercy. Amen.