

# Four keys to planning for church health

Based on both research and anecdotal evidence, I estimate that nine out of every 10 churches in America are growing at a slower pace than their community—if they are growing at all. That is not a good sign for the church in America.

Through the feedback I’ve received on this blog in recent years, it has become overwhelmingly evident that the spiritual health of churches and pastors is of great concern. Many have asked how to transform the churches in the 90 percent that are not growing into ones like the 10 percent that are.

This is no easy task, but it can be done.

## Accepting responsibility

First, pastors have to accept their responsibilities as leaders. Pastors are not in their roles simply because of giftedness or desire—though both of those things are important. First and foremost, pastors exist in their roles because God has ordained they be there. Their role as a leader is a commission and an assignment from the God of the universe. We will not see transformation in local churches until pastors recognize their crucial role in leading the church to transformation.

God doesn’t give us church leaders so that they alone will do the work of the church. He gives us leaders to equip the body to do ministry. Pastors say they want to equip the saints for the work of ministry, but do they really accomplish this?

Our research says no. And it’s not even close.

## Knowing where to go

More than half of all pastors we surveyed have no intentional plan for discipling all ages in their church. Even more distressing is that the number is smallest when researchers ask about children and youth. So not only are we not involving our adults in ministry, we are failing to train the next generation.

So how does the body of Christ remedy this? Here are four ways to start:

**1. Create a plan.** Pastors are planners. It’s what they do. They lay out in-depth and intentional plans for so many things done in the lives of our churches. But, pastors, does your church have a plan to encourage the spiritual growth of members?

**2. Create buy-in from the congregation.** One of the most effective ways to create buy-in is to walk through this plan using collective input. Create informed, effective and involved advocates out of church members, not followers.



**3. Create a culture of disciple-making.** Every church has a culture. Unfortunately, too many give too little thought to the culture of their church. Culture creation happens as churches and their leaders constantly repeat, in both word and deed, the desired behaviors intended to be primary in the new culture.

**4. Stay faithful to the plan.** As the leader of the church, a pastor must believe in and champion the church above everyone else. I say this to each pastor reading this: More than anyone else you are the gatekeeper of your church's culture and intended destination. Don't develop a plan or process that you are not committed to; once you have developed it, sell out to it.

### **A plan for growth**

Churches need a plan for growth. They need to know how to get from where they are to where God intends for them to be. But the problem is most churches don't know where they currently are. Not only does a plan not exist, many churches haven't assessed their current situation. That's why assessments are vital.

We love to measure in the church. In my denomination, we have long said that the typical measurements are "budgets, baptisms and buildings." But I'm not convinced those are the best measurements for us to be concerned with. I would suggest that, while measuring worship attendance is important, measuring group attendance and service engagement are possibly even more important.

Your barometers may be different. Regardless of what you see as significant, the question is: How will you get to where you want to go?

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