

SGI



STRENGTHEN · GROW · INCREASE

No
22



July-August 2024

RURAL
AND
URBAN
REVIVAL

THE SGI
JOURNAL
OF LEADERSHIP

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MISSION STATEMENT

Leading the United Pentecostal Church International to think strategically about future growth.

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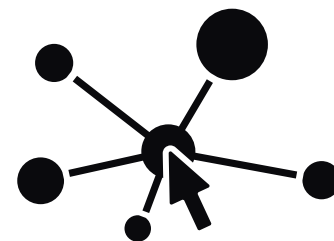
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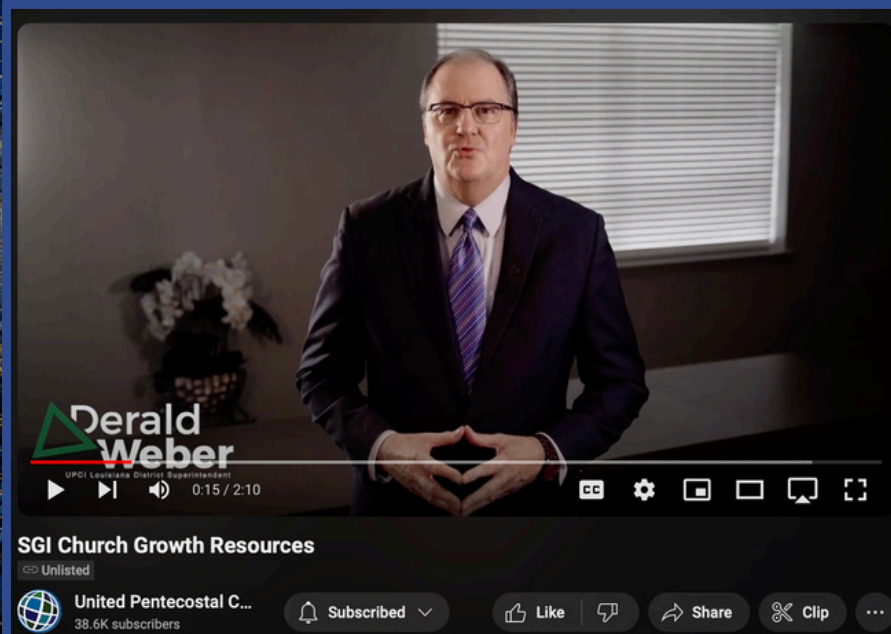
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This resource is interactive. Click the items in the Table of Contents to move around and explore each issue.

FIND HELP TO GROW
ON MINISTRY CENTRAL!
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TO FIND OUT MORE.



Strategic Growth Initiative

The mission of SGI is to create a culture of health that produces spiritual and numerical growth in ministers, churches, and districts in the UPCI.

Church Health Check-Up

Welcome to the *Church Health Check-Up*. This evaluation is designed to give you a more clearly defined understanding of your church's overall health. With a better understanding, you, as a pastor, can move forward to make the proper changes necessary to either continue the growth process, begin to grow again after a period of non-growth, or restructure for growth after a period of decline. Click below to access the Church Health Check-Up.

[Click Here](#)

A Church Growth Track

Now available for ALL! View this tremendous resource for pastors, districts, church leadership teams and those involved in the local church. This Church Growth Track will consist of eleven lessons, each taught by Apostolic leaders on the front lines of revival and growth. Please click VIEW COURSE for this free resource.

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SGI RESOURCES! CLICK THIS PAGE TO VISIT PENTECOSTAL PUBLISHING HOUSE



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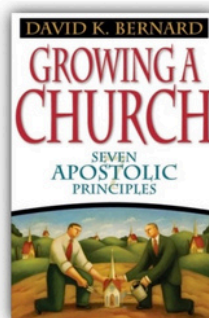
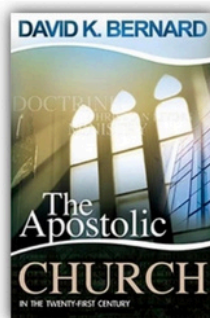
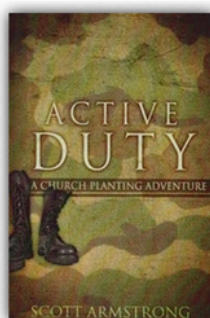
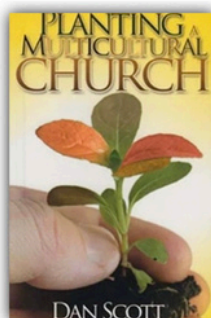
Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) Resources



The Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) was born in the heart of General Superintendent David K. Bernard as God gave him a vision for growing the North American church. The General Board of the UPCI approved the forming of SGI for the purpose of highlighting growth in the areas of the number of churches and ministers in North America. The four focus points of SGI are outlined below along with resources available through the Pentecostal Resources Group.

Multiply the number of churches

SGI will assist districts by providing promotion, planning, and training with the goal of enabling every district to at least double the number of churches (including preaching points, daughter works, autonomous church plants, multicultural church plants, integrate independent Apostolic churches, etc.) in one decade.





A Big Vision for Small Towns

Darrell Johns, SGI Committee Chair

Thank God for the men and women who respond to the call to our vast metro areas. The challenges are enormous—like the cities that hold them. I was raised in a big city and pastor in a metropolitan area. I love the country but admit to being a “city boy.” At the same time, I have great respect for those who answer the call to small towns. I’ve learned the potential of small towns from studying big business.

In the early 1990’s, I read the autobiography of Sam Walton. Walmart changed the face of retail business. (Of course, exponential changes have occurred in the industry since then.) Sam Walton had a big vision for small towns. While other competitors avoided smaller communities, Walmart thrived in them. K-Mart, for example, would not invest in a town with a population of less than 50,000. Walmart knew their model would work in towns of less than 5,000. It is obvious that their concept worked. They also developed the resources to reach into big cities by starting in small towns.

In the nine years I served as district superintendent of Georgia, my wife and I traveled all over the state. We saw Super Walmart locations in smaller communities, like Eastman, Georgia, which has a population of just over 5,000. (I also saw Dollar General stores popping up everywhere.) We can learn a few things from the business acumen of the “children of this world” (Luke 16:8).

It is imperative to go where God calls us. The masses are in the cities, and we must not neglect them. My goal is not to deride those with a big vision for a big city. That’s where I serve. With that said, I appreciate the emphasis the UPCI North American Missions team has placed on reaching “The Next Town.”

Big city or small town, our vision should always be big. If big businesses know there is profit in going into small towns, perhaps we should learn from their example.

God can give us urban and rural revival.

We should not despise the day of small beginnings or the opportunities in small towns.

Let’s ask God to give us a big vision for small towns as well as our massive metro areas. We should not think small just because we may be in a small community, and we should not be intimidated because we are in a booming metropolis. It’s the vision for what God can do that matters.

Darrell Johns serves as pastor of Atlanta West Pentecostal Church, assistant general superintendent of the Eastern Zone, UPCI, and chair of the Strategic Growth Initiative Committee of the General Board.



Attracting, Winning, and Retaining People

Dr. David K. Bernard, General Superintendent

Three practical steps that are essential to church growth at every level.

1. We must attract a significant number of people.
2. We must convert a significant number of visitors.
3. We must retain a significant number of converts.

For the first ten years, I recorded information for everyone who received the Holy Ghost at New Life Church in Austin, including backsliders who were renewed but excluding people who were not candidates for church membership such as out-of-town visitors, visitors from other Apostolic churches, and converts in jail. The net number was about three hundred, about 80 percent of the total. The following study is simply the experience of one church, not a true statistical analysis, but the purpose is to help other churches examine what is effective for them. (For further discussion and statistics, see my book *Growing a Church*.)

Attracting Visitors

I first looked at how people were attracted to the church. I analyzed the visitors who ultimately received the Holy Ghost, for they were the ones we reached most effectively. I identified three main sources of visitors.

- **Advertising:** sign, newspaper, radio, door hangers, direct mail, Yellow Pages, Internet. In the early years, our best form of advertising was the Yellow Pages; later it was our website. This was true not only for those who sought a Pentecostal church but also for those who sought any church that seemed appealing. All forms of advertising accounted for 10 percent of our converts. This number is significant and worthwhile. In addition, advertising has another benefit beyond directly bringing people to church. It creates positive public relations, goodwill, and name recognition to assist when someone receives a personal invitation.
- **Cold Contacts:** personal invitations to strangers, such as canvassing, door knocking, street services, ministry in halfway houses, and nursing home services. These methods resulted in 5 percent of our converts.
- **Personal Relationships.** Invitations based on personal relationships accounted for 85 percent of converts: family (44 percent); friends (34 percent, including coworkers, neighbors, and acquaintances); referrals from other UPCI churches (7 percent).

My conclusion is that we should employ a variety of methods to contact people. Different methods are effective in different situations. The combination of methods brings success. Advertising is beneficial, especially when it highlights the distinctive Pentecostal belief in miracles, healing, deliverance, and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Belonging to an organization and using Pentecostal identification provides tangible benefits. At the same time, by far the most effective methods of evangelism are those that rely on existing personal relationships. The best way to attract visitors is to mobilize church members to become soulwinners. We can impart a burden, inspire, and provide practical training. We can teach how to live as a witness, build and maintain relationships, approach acquaintances, share a testimony, explain the scriptural plan of salvation, and conduct simple Bible studies. We should use the strong ties that exist in certain neighborhoods, ethnicities, and immigrant groups. Once we make good contacts or converts who are connected to larger groups, they can be a key to reaching others. After people are in the church for several years, their relationships tend to focus on the church. We should encourage them to reach outside their comfort zone, make new friends, meet new people in their neighborhood, participate in community events, and connect with service providers and customers.

Winning Converts

It isn't enough to have many visitors or to break attendance records. We must find ways to lead people to repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Our converts received the Holy Ghost in the following ways.

- **Sectional and District Meetings**, including rallies, camps, and conferences: 13 percent. This method is significant. It was especially important when our church was small. By taking people to various meetings we were able to expose them to nationally known ministries, large crowds, exciting worship, and an atmosphere of faith and revival. Even after we became a big church, it was still an effective strategy to bring people to children's camps, youth camps and conferences, ladies' conferences, men's conferences, Spanish rallies, and revival camps and conferences. The mother church now fills this role in part for present and former daughter works.
- **Non-Church Settings**, such as home, work, and car: 5 percent. When the local church conducts evangelism outside the church building, including Bible studies, some people will receive the Holy Ghost in these settings.
- **Special Services** (special speakers): 35 percent. Here we see the importance of the evangelist. We brought in speakers for Holy Spirit Sundays, children's revivals, youth revivals, and general revivals; and we focused on repentance, water baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost. It's worthwhile to set aside money in the budget or to raise money for such meetings. They are effective in inspiring faith, mobilizing people to invite guests, and leading visitors and regular attendees to the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- **Regular Church Services**: 47 percent. As the church grew, this method became the most significant of all. In the long run, the best tool for bringing people to the new birth is regular church services that feature heartfelt worship, anointed preaching, evangelistic appeal, prayer, and the move of the Holy Spirit. Instead of relying primarily on special meetings several times per year, the church should cultivate an expectation that people can receive the Holy Ghost in any service and that people will be added to the church weekly. One service of the week should be primarily evangelistic. In our church, Sunday morning was the best evangelistic time because that is when we had the most visitors. My message always included an evangelistic appeal. Sunday night became more of a ministry to regular attendees and returning visitors. We had more time for worship, special recognitions, the choir, and prayer at the end. If a church has only one service on Sunday, then this service needs to minister effectively to both visitors and members.
- **Home Bible studies** can be an important component of an evangelistic strategy. Typically we teach a Bible study to someone who has been introduced to the church through a personal relationship. Bible studies are effective in building a relationship with the teacher and preparing people to be baptized and to receive the Holy Ghost. Not only do they assist in making converts, but they can be the first step in discipleship, which involves retaining converts.

Retaining Converts

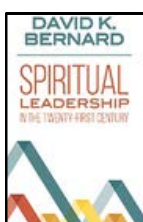
It isn't enough to have wonderful revival services and to see many people receive the Holy Ghost. For a church to grow, it must retain a significant number of contacts, and retention must exceed overall attrition. This is probably our greatest challenge. Most churches keep track of attendance, numbers baptized, and numbers receiving the Holy Ghost, but most probably don't have a good idea of their retention rate after one year. It may be as low as 10 or 20 percent. To illustrate the significance of the retention rate, consider a church that wins fifty souls in one year, a good revival. If its retention rate is 10 percent, then a year later it would have only five new people, probably not enough to offset normal attrition overall. If the retention rate is 50 percent, however, it will grow significantly. Moreover, this retention rate will produce good results if the church wins only half as many converts. One church can have a large revival but show little or no growth, while another church can have only a moderate revival but show significant growth, all because of the retention rate.

At New Life Church we found that the best way to retain converts was to urge them to make three commitments.

- **Discipleship Class.** We used different methods over the years, but eventually we developed four modules of four to six weeks each. We offered the first during Sunday school and the others during our midweek service (so converts could soon join their age group in Sunday school). This method allowed them to make smaller commitments and celebrate measurable progress. Moreover, we designed the classes for everyone who had not taken them, not just converts. The first module focused on basic Christian living, including faith, overcoming temptation, prayer, Bible study, church attendance, giving, and witnessing. Subsequent modules focused on practical Christian living such as relationships, marriage, communication, commitment, accountability, following authority, finances, self-discipline, anger management, and fruit of the Spirit. We dealt with doctrine toward the end, because we found the most immediate challenges for our converts were not doctrinal controversies but issues of daily life. Often they had come to church because of a personal crisis. If we did not give them practical tools for dealing with their problems, they often succumbed to them again. To cover basic doctrines, including holiness, we used my four *Essentials* booklets. Another good resource is my book with Robin Johnston, *On Being Pentecostal*.
- **Sunday School and Worship.** We had Sunday school for all ages including adults. As we grew we added adult classes based on age and marital status that in effect functioned as small groups.
- **Midweek Bible Study.** Here we emphasized the study of the Word, and sometimes we offered breakout classes, including the discipleship modules.

These three commitments helped people form relationships in the church and gave them practical tools to be successful in their new spiritual life. We retained only 30 percent of those who did not make them initially, but we retained 90 percent of those who did, with an overall rate of 55 percent. Eventually, I would tell the church, somewhat tongue-in-cheek: "If you really love what God has done in your life, make the three commitments, and statistically I promise you can live for God and go to Heaven. If you don't make these commitments, then flip a coin to see if you are likely to make it or not." In addition to these three commitments, we tried to connect converts to mentors, whether officially or unofficially. Sometimes the mentors were the people who had brought them, but sometimes we used others who were more suitable because of similar situation in life or spiritual maturity. I also examined our retention rate based on how people had first come to church. Our retention rate for converts who had come through advertising was 20 percent, for cold contacts it was 46 percent, and for personal relationships it was 60 percent. Although 85 percent of our converts came through personal relationships, the percentage of retained converts who came through personal relationships was 92 percent. Thus, personal relationships were not only by far the best way to attract people to church, but they also resulted in a higher retention rate than other methods.

In sum, we should motivate and train members to evangelize through existing personal relationships. We should connect, disciple, and involve new converts in multiple ways as soon as possible. Through personal care and personal involvement we can increase our rate of retention and facilitate church growth.



Recommended Resource
Article adapted from *Spiritual Leadership in the Twenty-first Century* by David K. Bernard (Word of Fire Press, 2015).

Dr. David K. Bernard is the general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International.



Ministry Versus Marketing

Charles Carr

Let me begin by admitting that I do not consider myself to be an expert on the subject of church growth. I am certainly not against conferences, workshops, and available resources that explore creative ways to promote your church or increase your visibility within your community. My bookshelf is full of resources that have given me helpful advice as well as provided creative ideas and effective tools to evangelize the lost and attract people to our assembly.

However, it wasn't until I realized that church growth could not be purchased by money and required more than just owning property in a great location, creating the perfect church logo and website, or renting the most visible billboards in town that we began to experience exponential increase. I'm not suggesting that any of those things are necessarily wrong or not beneficial, but they alone will never be effective in gathering the harvest.

I was reading the promise to Abram in Genesis 12:2, when suddenly I saw it! "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." This simple verse revealed to me a profound principle that continues to guide our efforts.

It was God's job to increase our numbers and make our name great, and it was our job to be a blessing.

As I quickly evaluated what we were doing, I realized that the two things God said that He would do were the two areas that we were continually focusing all our time and energy trying to accomplish, but we had ignored our responsibility to be a blessing.

We were looking for ways to boost our attendance and increase our name recognition, but we were not meeting the real needs of our community. At that time, we were giving away free hamburgers, hot dogs, and bottles of water with our church name printed on the side at strategic locations and planning other similar "ministry" events. But God challenged me by asking the question, "Don't you realize that when you give away hamburgers to people who aren't really hungry and water to people who aren't even thirsty, the only real need you are meeting is your own?"

I felt like God told me that if I'd just start truly ministering to real needs and leave the marketing to Him, then He would increase our numbers and make our name great.

Prior to this God-moment, it had always struck me as odd that Jesus would deliberately seek to minister in secrecy when he cleansed the leper in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Jesus told him not to tell anyone! I never understood why He would instruct him to remain silent. Surely, he would want to market His ministry and establish name recognition within the communities He visited. But I believe Jesus was modeling a principle.

Could it be that if we can't get a crowd without marketing that we really have nothing worth advertising and if it takes a public spectacle to attract the multitude then maybe we aren't really ministering?

Interestingly enough, the scripture says, "but so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him of their infirmities" (Luke 5:15). Mark said that by the end of the week, the house was too little to hold the crowd trying to get to Jesus. In fact, they tore off the roof to get to where He was.

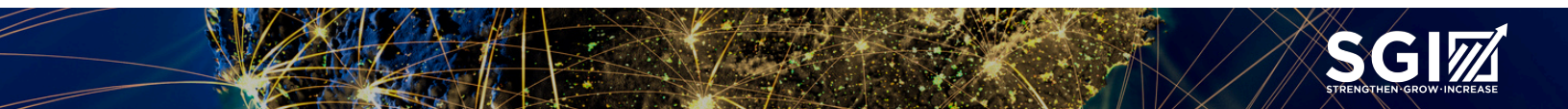
I will admit that marketing is much easier and less costly than ministry. Marketing doesn't require that you touch the leper or get personally involved with the poor and needy. It doesn't involve bearing the burdens and baggage of the broken and help them recover from hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

But marketing will never produce the results of real ministry or release God to do what He promised when we choose to focus on being a blessing.

God has to continually remind me of this truth, but I can testify that for us it has made all the difference!

Chuck Carr

In April 2002, God called Chuck and Misty Carr to pastor in Ripley County and the Doniphan community. Chuck, his beautiful wife, Misty, and their three children—Reagan, Krystian, and Zaine—make up the Carr Family Ministry Team. They love the West Point Church family of faith and their wonderful community and feel so blessed to have been given the privilege of “doing life” together throughout the years. Chuck and Misty believe they are planted by divine appointment, and God has given them great vision and passion to serve and minister to the people of their community and beyond! He was elected In November 2018 as the Missouri District secretary.





WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT RURAL MISSIONS

Mark Brown

NEXT TOWN

1 [CLICK HERE TO FILL OUT THE NEXT TOWN CARD OR GIVE](#)

2 [CLICK HERE FOR OUR NEW ONE BUTTON TRAINING](#)

3 [CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT LAUNCH](#)

4 [CLICK HERE TO EMAIL SCOTT SISTRUNK OR THE NAM TEAM](#)

I was born and raised in Chicago. When I moved to Indianapolis to attend Indiana Bible College, I thought, “This is a small city.” After attending four years of Bible college in that “small city,” my wife and I experienced culture shock when we became church planters in South Dakota. We had never been to South Dakota and were simply obeying God’s call to minister in that area.

For the record, the Chicago metro population is 9.4 million, while the Indianapolis metro is 2.1 million. The entire state of South Dakota doesn’t have 1 million people! Here is a glimpse of our state’s population:

- 422 towns have less than 10,000 people
- 357 towns have less than 1,000 people
- 91 towns have less than 100 people
- 11 towns have less than 10 people
- 13 towns have more than 10,000 people
- 4 towns have over 20,000 people
- 1 town has over 100,000 people
- 0 towns have over 200,000 people

Rural missions created adjustments in how we approached evangelism. I was accustomed to street-event evangelism, tent revivals, urban outreach, and ministry to the homeless. South Dakota doesn’t have a homeless population because they would freeze to death. Old timers in this state have a saying, “The cold keeps out the riffraff.”

The pace of life and mentality are totally different here. Busy streets, traffic, night life, and 24-hour establishments are nonexistent in rural missions. The sidewalks roll up at dusk. Initially, I attempted this outreach approach: offer a mass event gathering with quick conversions and then focus on discipleship. I soon learned there are advantages to small town evangelism. You can make a big splash without much effort. You can literally knock on every door of your entire “city” within a few hours.

While I cannot speak for all of rural America, I learned South Dakota's pace of life is slow—and changing one's way of life is even slower.

The Lord showed me how to slow down and grow. I learned to build trust and form relationships with people—both are actions that take time and patience.

Initially, I was frustrated with this approach. I desired to see more conversions at a faster pace and reach more people because I know that brings more souls into the Kingdom. Going to a metro area makes more sense because that is where most people are, I thought.

The Lord had to teach me the value of rural missions. I realized people would be lost if no one reached rural areas.

There is a rural revival available to those who will go to these areas.

Allow me to share what I learned in rural missions:

- **Be willing to slow down and grow.** Revival can happen overnight, but it tends to happen over time in rural areas. We have lived here for eighteen years. We've seen more fruit in the past two years than we saw in our almost two decades of pastoring. The seed that was sown when we arrived is now ready for harvest.
- **Rural regions need more workers to establish new church locations.** This reduces the distance people must travel to find truth. We had multiple families traveling sixty to eighty miles. Prior to planting three new churches, we had to travel ninety-six miles for Apostolic fellowship. We are amazed at the number of backslidden people living in small towns across our state. The Lord continues to send laborers as witnesses in these towns.
- **The smaller the town, the bigger the stronghold that needs to break.** Small towns tend to be tribal and cliquish. Change is not welcome. It is not impossible, but it is difficult. The devil recognizes how strategic and valuable each town is in God's Kingdom. He fights hard to establish strongholds and does not want to give up the territory.
- **Geography equals influence.** The more rural works there are, the more liberty the region experiences. It is easy to scoff at a town where the population is less than 100 people. The more communities with churches, the more spiritual influence the church has in a region. A church plant establishes spiritual influence in a small community where there has been little or no spiritual influence.
- **Rural missions have no anonymity.** A conversion from a traditional church to an Apostolic church is a major deal in rural missions. Larger cities allow residents to go anywhere, do anything, and be surrounded by strangers. No one knows where an individual has been or what he has done in a large city. But everyone knows these details in a small town. Reputation, business, influence, and role in the community are all affected by conversion. Countless people have found truth and the new birth experience, but later left their experience because of community peer pressure. To address this issue, we established a quality livestream of our services. We believed some of those people are like Nicodemus: ready to listen in the privacy of their homes where no one knows what happens. We hoped the livestream would impact such people, offering them the courage to return to church. Thankfully, we have seen that happen.

Every area needs the gospel regardless of its large or small population. I am persuaded that, before the Lord returns, a rural revival will sweep across this nation in Jesus' Name. My prayer for South Dakota is that all sixty-six counties will have an Apostolic witness before I die or Jesus returns. In four years, our district increased from six to fourteen counties having UPCI churches and from fifteen to thirty UPCI ministers.

He is a God of the hills and the valleys, the metro and the rural.

Mark Brown



Mark Brown and his wife, Jordan, have been married for nineteen years and have three children: Noah, Grace, and Eden. They have been pastoring for 17 years and planted four churches. Currently, they serve as district superintendent and rural missionary in South Dakota.



Recommended Resources

Click THE NEXT TOWN icon above or see Toolbox at the end of this issue for church planting resources.



Ascend Church in Metro Detroit

Joumeel McLaurine

Ascend Church was founded in 2018 and is located in a county in Metro Detroit with over 1 million people. Over the years since starting our church, we have had intentional team discussions about our “strategic growth” distinctions. In other words, what do we do uniquely as a church that helps drive growth in our community?

Of course, we know Jesus is building His church, but we do believe it’s our responsibility to steward our opportunities to be the most effective with what He’s given us. We have identified five of these “growth drivers.” I will share three of them with you in this article.

Apostolic Preaching and Worship

The first concept we have found that drives growth is Apostolic preaching and worship. In a metro area, there are so many different denominations and affiliations that have a strong presence in the community. Many of them promote ideologies that are clearly antithetical to a biblical worldview, often obvious even to someone with an elementary understanding. We find that in this context, the contrast of a church that boldly preaches the truth in love is a large draw to people in our community who are hungry for God.

One of the most common nuggets of feedback we receive is that people are drawn to the “type” of preaching promoted in our pulpit. We believe our steadfastness to biblical preaching and practice are an increasingly unique advantage to our outreach efforts, especially considering that even mainline denominations in our area have abandoned basic biblical truths.



Intentional Community

Secondly, we have found that “intentional community” is a growth driver for us in a metro area. I use the word intentional because, in a metro area, organic relationships are hard for many people to develop. We utilize the system of small groups to facilitate intentional community building among those who are engaged with our church. The system of small groups serves a dual purpose in our context. First, it helps us equip our church to care for one another, but it also helps us engage unreached people in our community.

It is common for people in our community to attend one of our small groups for months before they attend a Sunday worship experience. This dynamic often allows us to have a higher quality of relationship with new believers as they begin their discipleship journey. I would also note that the capacity for care in our ministry is significantly multiplied beyond our pastoral leadership through the usage of the small groups system. The church is systematically empowered to “bear one another’s burdens.”



Team-Based Leadership

Lastly, I’ll briefly mention that a “team-based” leadership approach is essential in our eyes to effectively grow a church in a metro area. We started our church with a small team of leaders who have collectively worked as a unit from the beginning to dream, deliberate, and decide on most of our key strategic growth initiatives. To this day, a core team of leaders meets weekly to guide the day-to-day vision of Ascend Church.

We truly believe that team ministry is an Apostolic model, and all it costs us is to put down our preferences and pride for a greater result. With the broad subset of people that a metro area church attracts, a broader leadership infield structure helps us be the most effective.

In the famed words of Harold Hoffman in his 1992 BOTT message, “The day of the Lone Ranger is over.”

Joumeel McLaurine

Joumeel McLaurine is a church planter in Metro Detroit (Royal Oak). He and his wife, Vivian, started Ascend Church in 2018 with their launch team. They have four beautiful children: Jakin, Lilly, Judah, and Ellie. Joumeel is passionate about church planting and has been a part of UPCI’s “Launch” initiatives and conferences since its inception. Before starting the church, Joumeel was blessed to be on the ministry staff at First Church of Sterling Heights for six years. He was born and raised in Columbus, Indiana, and is the proud son of Reggie and Gwen McLaurine.



Interview with Pastor Greg Steele in Johnson City, Texas

Interview by Seth Noble Simmons



In this SGI Journal of Leadership issue, we focused on approaches to growing churches in metro and rural areas. SGI interviewed Pastor Greg Steele to discover more about his theological perspective and personal experience of pastoring in a rural community in the Texas Hill Country about an hour west of Austin, Texas. (This interview was edited for clarity and length.)

SGI: *Pastor Steele, thank you for taking the time to do this interview today. My wife and I had the privilege of attending your thirtieth Pastoral Anniversary at HOME Church in Johnson City last year. Tell us a little about how you became the pastor in Johnson City.*

GS: Sis. Fluitt pioneered the work in Johnson City. She poured doctrine into me and modeled strength and how to “stick to it” and be faithful. She retired after twenty-six years.

After she retired, she handed it over to an evangelist who pastored for six months. Then Bro. Bailey, who was a worship machine, pastored for four and a half years. He taught the church how to worship. He had fallen into a 72-foot pier hole when he was young, and the accident disabled him. So, he knew how to worship God. After Bro. Bailey, Bro. Aldridge came and pastored for another four and a half years. He never met a stranger. He taught us how to get outside of the four walls of the church. When he moved on, we went through the process of electing a new pastor, and no one was nominated. So, the presbyter asked the church what they wanted to do. Then one of our new converts spoke up and said, “We need to let Bro. Greg try this.”

That was in 1993, and I was not credentialed. Bro. Holley, the Texas District superintendent, allowed me to preach until I got credentialed.

SGI: *How were you able to persevere for 30 years?*

GS: I had a major call. About four to five years earlier, I was on a plane with a brother-in-law, and he said, “You need to get ready to pastor this church.” Then, a spiritual lady I respect told my wife LaKay, “Get ready to be a pastor’s wife.” I had been teaching Bible studies. God developed an incredible desire in me to see people come to Him. My focus was all about winning the lost. Over the years, any time I got discouraged, I went back to that call.

Another reason is faithful people. Even though we had a small church, we had some very good, faithful people. They just encouraged me. So I’ll do this until God asks me to do something else.

SGI: Tell us about the place you pastor, Johnson City, Texas. Population around 2,000, right? What's unique about Johnson City?

GS: It's a rural community, a cowboy community. Friendly, open, and accepting of people, though. When I became pastor, everybody accepted me as pastor.

The negative side is there is a stigma in the community. Because it's a small community, if someone comes to church, the "old-timers" in the community will still persecute people who come to a Pentecostal church. But there are many hungry people in our area, and they still come.

SGI: I'd like to start by helping people understand the unique opportunities and challenges of a church in a rural community. How would you educate someone from an urban area about rural society? What is important in a small-town community? How do you think perceptions of small towns are misrepresented?



GS: There aren't many amenities in a small town. We've got a Dairy Queen and that's about it. That can be an issue when people look at pastoring in a small town. They have to drive to get groceries.

But you know so many people. It's a close-knit community.

SGI: For a person who grew up in an urban or suburban environment, if they accepted a pastoral call to a rural environment, what adjustments would they need to make to pastor in a small-town community? What would you want them to understand about pastoring in a small town?

GS: They have to be out in the community. Be seen. Go to the restaurants. Shop here. In an urban area, that's a little foreign. Here, it's a must. People need to see you and trust you. Work with people in the community and do whatever you need to do to connect. Take care of the needs of people. Build relationships.

SGI: What have been some of the biggest challenges you faced as a rural pastor?

GS: The biggest one has been persecution. Because of what I mentioned earlier, we can win people outside of the Johnson City community more easily than those who are local.

Another thing is that the people you win may not have the same skill set (music, leadership, gifting) as when you have a bigger pool of people to pull from. God supplies the need, but that can be a big challenge. It's tough to find adequate help.

SGI: What have been some of the greatest reasons for the successes you experienced at the HOME Church?

GS: Bible studies have made the difference between growing and not growing.

Also, the people here initially were very strong. They were gifted. The original founding group is an important part of the growth and success of the church.

And bringing in specialized ministries that could mentor us has helped. I've always been hungry and still am for anyone who can help me develop. People come in and mentor our church. What we couldn't get here locally, I would bring them in, and they would help us in a special way. Not just revivals but strategizing, training, and praying.

We understand that God's grace sustains us, and He is the source of all our success in His Kingdom.

SGI: What other factors would you attribute to the success of HOME Church in your community over the years?

GS: Our church has always had a sweet Spirit of God. When people come in, the Spirit of God is there. I attribute that to the prayer that is prayed in our church. It's all about the power of prayer. We still feel the influence of Sis. Fluitt's prayers from long ago.



SGI: What are you excited about for the future in Johnson City? What are some of your long-term goals?

GS: Several years ago, we had three different people I trust prophesy that God was going to give us a great revival. On a Tuesday, Bro. Weever came over the hill here on Highway 281 going south. When he topped the hill, he saw an egg and it was cracking. God spoke to him, "This is the revival getting ready to happen." On a Thursday, Sis. Fluitt said, "I saw an egg with peck marks coming out of the egg. That's the egg of revival!" Then, about fifteen years ago, Sis. Shinault, my mother's friend, said, "Bro. Greg, I see 500 here."

I believe God's going to do something great! Our part is being prepared for the future that is going to come—and it is going to come!

More recently, Bro. Childs said, "I see this church in the next two years being a Kingdom training center." So, starting this September 1, instead of a traditional Sunday School environment, we'll be training people for Kingdom work with courses like Discipleship 101, and on handling money. We want to be an ongoing training center. Sometimes our weak point is we don't train well enough. We want to train people! We also initiated small group prayer meetings in different areas of our community.

I know God is moving. We've had more and more people receive the Spirit and be baptized recently.

SGI: Thank you again for allowing me to interview you today. Is there anything else you would like to add before we wrap up?

GS: I have done so many funerals in this community, over 100 for people outside of our church. Thankfully, I've done very few for our church. If a person is going to go to a small community, minister to people in their hurts and needs. They will seek you out and find you.

For instance, I was outside of the church with an A/C guy showing him the problem we need to fix. A man driving by stopped, jumped out of his car, and said, "I'm a Pentecostal! I feel like God's calling me." I told him he needed to get ahold of someone who would lead him, a mentor. The next morning, I met him at 8 am, and we have been meeting ever since. That man was at a funeral where I ministered with about 400 people in attendance. People will seek you out and find you when you meet their needs.

Also, know that everyone is going to go through trials. As a pastor in a small town, they can seem like they are exaggerated. One of the things that has kept me solid is that my devotional time is so rigid. Every morning, I spend time with the Lord. I can't stand not to do it. You've got to have a personal devotion to make it through the trials.

One more thing, the only major reason for anything good that has happened or will happen in the HOME Church is all because of His grace and mercy working through us. To God be all Glory!





Reaching Underserved Communities

Dr. Jamaine Johnson

The United Pentecostal Church International is moving steadily toward greater excellence. Our movement is propelled by dedicated efforts and strategic emphasis on multiplying ministers, nurturing urban-rural expansion, strengthening churches, and revitalizing ministries. Now is the time to engage in deliberate efforts to make disciples, expand the church, establish new works, and fortify existing endeavors in both urban and rural areas. These ministries are essential for reaching underserved communities.

Growth is Inclusive

The apostles relied on basic principles that proved instrumental in the remarkable expansion of the early church, as depicted in Acts 2:41-47. This growth resulted from the dynamic preaching of the apostles, the receptive hearts of the people embracing the message, baptizing three thousand souls, unwavering commitment to the apostolic teachings, fellowship, devout prayer, the manifestation of miraculous signs and wonders, and daily growth. These timeless principles brought about multiplication and revival then and remain relevant for the church today.

There is no debate that the gospel is for “whosoever will” (Revelation 22:17). Establishing new works breaks new ground, planting faith in diverse cultures. Establishing and expanding multicultural churches, preaching points, and daughter works enables us to reach all people with the gospel. These works help us fulfill the directives of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8, and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, continue to grow and thrive, welcoming people from all walks of life into the fold of Christ. Growth is inclusive.

At Hope Center Church in San Antonio, our church members, Joy Robertson, and Isidro and Nina Hernandez, inspired a year of unprecedented evangelistic success. Joy led eleven Hope Groups (small groups) and eleven Bible studies. Isidro and Nina led forty-four Hope Groups and taught forty Bible Studies, resulting in the baptisms of eleven new believers! May their examples ignite our passion to pursue intentional discipleship and innovative evangelism to collectively reap a bountiful harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God. Sow the seeds and confidently leave the reaping to Christ Jesus, the Master Harvester of souls.

Using Technology to Reach Underserved Communities

Technology can significantly enhance the efforts of ministers working in underserved communities. Ministers are often isolated and experience difficulty reaching dispersed populations needing more training access. Leveraging digital tools and platforms, ministers can overcome challenges and foster spiritual growth and community development.

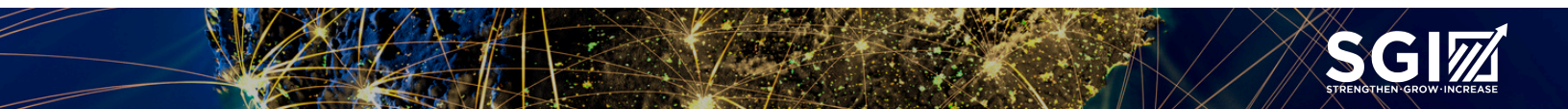
My wife, Irene, and I experienced the benefits of technology firsthand. First, we received online premarital counseling with Pastor Edward Hosmer. Despite attending different churches on different islands (I in Okinawa, Japan, and Irene in the Philippines), we were able to receive guidance and support. Then, through Palawan Apostolic Bible Institute, led by Bro. Samuel Fondevilla, and Sound of Praise, under the leadership of Bro. Hosmer, the reach of technology bridged the geographical gap and facilitated spiritual growth. My wife invited my brother-in-law, Albert Gascon, to attend a church service, which led to him being baptized in Jesus’ name in the Philippines! Since then, Albert has dedicated himself to spreading the good news in underserved areas, leveraging his service in the Philippine Coast Guard to reach remote communities and plant seeds of hope wherever he goes.

Ministers Serving the Underserved

Recognizing the early church's success provides valuable insights for contemporary ministry to reach underserved communities. Expanding upon the foundational principles that drove the early church's growth serves as a timeless guide for modern churches and ministers as we spread the gospel and train disciples through technology. As ministers of the gospel, we are called to diligently study, preach, and shepherd God's flock, trusting that the Holy Spirit will draw people from all walks of life to Christ, resulting in inclusive growth and a bountiful harvest of souls. Let's cultivate a bountiful harvest of souls for the Kingdom of God through intentional discipleship and strategic church growth!

Jamaine Johnson

Dr. Jamaine Johnson is a local licensed minister and veteran of the US Marine Corps with twenty years and seven months of honorable service. He is an active member of Hope Center Church led by Pastor Nathan Scoggins. He currently serves as the Hope Group director, an instructor at Hope University, and an usher. His wife, Irene, is a children's church teacher. They have two children, Gabriella (9) and Gabriel (3).





ISSUE 22 TOOLBOX PRACTICAL TOOLS YOU CAN USE



Church Planting Resources

NorthAmericanMissions.Faith and HealthyChurches.org provide a host of resources for aspiring church planters. Click the links below to discover more about how to plant and grow a church.

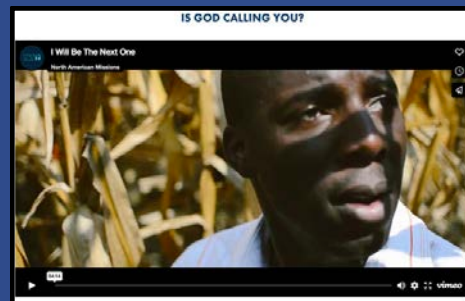
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