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My Pilgrimage in Church Growth

Charles Arn

The seven church board members eventually took their seats around the large circular table. The chairperson reached into his coat pocket, removed a stack of cards, and shuffled them as the conversation died down. Taking a card from the middle of the deck, he glanced at those seated around the table, then turned back to the card and read it aloud:

“Question: *The church picnic is coming up next month. In the past, the picnic has been for church members and their families. Someone has suggested that guests and neighbors be invited this year. The cost to the church will double for additional food and materials. Do you support the suggestion?”*

The chair paused momentarily. “All those in favor?” With no comments four of the members extended their arms and raised their thumbs skyward. “Those opposed?” The remaining three around the table turned their thumbs down as a sign of disagreement. The seven looked to the chair in anticipation as he read the bottom half of the card, **“Answer:** *This could be an excellent opportunity to meet friends and neighbors who might otherwise never visit the church. ‘YES’ – add 10 members; ‘NO’ – lose 5 members.”* A cheer rose from the group, particularly the four whose correct votes had led to new members.

“Question #2” said the chairman as he pulled out another card, *“The church high school department needs \$2,000 for a retreat in the mountains this winter. The church has been asked*

for a donation. Should you vote for the gift?" The chairman turned to the group. "Those in favor?" This time the vote was a unanimous thumbs up as the board members confidently anticipated the additional members from an obviously correct answer.

"Answer:" read the chairperson, *"It would be important to clarify the purpose of the retreat. Will the event contribute to the outreach of the church? Or will it be only for high school kids who are already in the church? There is nothing wrong with a high school retreat. But all the departments in a church should be moving in the same direction. YES – add 2 members NO – add 5 members."* A murmur of disappointment rose from the group for not receiving the additional members.

And so the game continued for the next 15 minutes as participants slowly but surely learned how decisions they make as church leaders often affect the outreach and growth of a church.

The "Church Growth Eyes" card game was only one of a number of learning experiences I had the pleasure of creating over my years of involvement in the field of Church Growth. The name of this game came from Donald McGavran's expression *church growth eyes* meaning "A characteristic of Christians who have achieved an ability to see the possibilities of growth and to apply appropriate strategies to gain maximum results for Christ and His Church" (McGavran & Arn, 1977, p. 127).

But before I recollect my own pilgrimage in Church Growth, I want to point out that my footsteps closely follow those of my father, Win Arn, who many consider the "Father of the *American Church Growth Movement*." Win passed away in 2003 at the age of 83. Here is his story in his own words from the book *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (McGavran & Arn, 1977, pp.10-14):

I came to Church Growth from a background in evangelism. As the director of a large evangelistic organization aimed primarily at winning youth, we had what we thought was an effective approach to a very winnable segment of society. A distinctive of the ministry was a youth rally where attendance of over 2000 per meeting was common. This rally included a variety of activities to attract youth, and

concluded with a message of salvation. Week after week, with few exceptions, 5 to 50 young people would come forward at the invitation to make a “decision.” This appeared, at the time, to be very effective evangelism. Those who made “decisions” were counseled, given literature, and encouraged to attend a church. We kept in touch with them and followed their spiritual progress as much as possible.

While much good was accomplished in this ministry, I sensed problems. What happened to those who made “decisions”? Did they become growing, reproducing Christians? Did they become actively involved in a church? Some did, of course, and those individuals became the public illustrations used to validate this method of evangelism. But what about the others? What were the long-term results? What were the actual facts? I determined to find the answer.

I researched, collected data, interviewed, and analyzed until I had a body of significant facts. The results were startling! The “fruit that remained” was seriously lacking! The evangelistic effort included prayer, a fine staff, and proclamation of the gospel; yet much fruit seemed to fall to the ground, decay and die.

At this same time, I served as leader for an area-wide evangelistic crusade that brought to Portland, Oregon, a leading evangelist. He was preceded by a highly organized and efficient staff anticipating a two-week evangelistic campaign. Hundreds of prayer groups were formed. Billboards covered the city. Daily newspaper ads on television commercials foretold the event. Counselors were trained. Finances were raised. The crusade was held, decisions were made, and all acclaimed it a success.

When it was over and the team had gone, I again researched the “fruit”. To my dismay, it was seriously lacking. What was wrong?

Friends gave me counsel: “Don’t worry,” said one, “if just one soul was saved it was worth it all.” That didn’t satisfy me. Another reassured me, “God keeps the records. Our job

is to preach the Gospel.” I couldn’t fully accept that either. A third person said, “Some seeds fall on good ground; some fall on bad ground. You take what you get.” But that wasn’t enough truth for me. There had to be a better answer.

The problem, I soon discovered, extended beyond evangelistic crusades. The evangelistic dropout problem affected the church itself. The Home Mission Secretary of a large denomination described it within his own church community: “There is what we must describe as an obedience gap. Statistics show mortality rate of 75% of our new converts. Why is it that only one convert in four ever make it to the point of church membership?”

Struggling with the problem of the fruit that remains, I began to find answers. For example, I discovered that evangelistic efforts can be well advertised, financed, promoted, prayed for, and able to evoke decisions, yet be relatively fruitless if they are not a vital part of a local church ministry. In fact, the closer evangelism is integrated into a local church, the greater will be the “fruit that remains.”

A second discovery was the need to change the goal from *decisions* to *disciples*. What a difference this made! A *decision* suggests a moment in time, a single event. A *disciple* suggests a way of life, incorporation into the body. The concept of *decision* has outlived its usefulness. The word is unbiblical and inadequate to describe the life commitment called for in Scripture.

A third discovery was that evangelism is more effective, not as a special once-a-year emphasis, but when it is built into the fabric of the church. When evangelism is an integral part of the continued program of every church, when Christians are meaningfully involved in outreach, two things happen: (1) those involved will grow and mature as they learn to witness, study the Word and learn to pray, and their numbers will grow; (2) there will be more “fruit that remains.” When a new convert has found Christ through the efforts of the members of the local congregation, relationships have been established. A natural follow-up

solves the problem that plagues most professional evangelist efforts — the “follow-up gap.” The closer the sociological, psychological, relational bond between the new converts and established Christians in a local church, the greater the yield of fruit.

My pilgrimage to Church Growth really started in frustration and dissatisfaction with evangelistic methods I had seen and been a part of in America. My search led me to the local church. The church is God’s plan for making disciples and for winning the world.

To acquire more expertise, I visited the School of World Mission and Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary. When I inquired about resources for American Church Growth, I found that Dr. Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner were team-teaching a course applying world principles of Church Growth to the American scene. I immediately enrolled. As I listened and learned, I realized here was the effective approach to evangelism for which I had been searching. In those hours, I experienced my third birth — “conversion” to Church Growth thinking.

As an American churchman, I saw the necessity of applying Church Growth concepts and insights to this nation. After my growth “conversion,” I began to apply the gifts and abilities God had given me to help Church Growth thinking become known in America. The first step was to co-author a book with Dr. McGavran we called *How to Grow a Church*. As I write this [1978], the book is being used to introduce Church Growth throughout North America. Next came a 16mm film by the same name, followed by other films, articles, and seminars introducing and sharing the principles of Church Growth to America with the goal of increasing His Church.

I founded the Institute for American Church Growth as a “leap of faith.” I resigned a comfortable denominational position and, without any visible means of support or even the assurance that America would receive Church Growth thinking, began the ministry. My strength was the

knowledge that God wanted His Church to grow in America. That was enough! The Institute was organized for four purposes:

- 1) To motivate and encourage evangelism and Church Growth in America.
- 2) To enable individual churches to devise strategies and bold plans for growth.
- 3) To help pastors and lay people understand their growth problem and apply reproducible principles of growth.
- 4) To serve as a resource for the church-at-large in its growth efforts.

Today there is an exciting new ferment. God is doing a new thing in and through His Church. The principles and concepts of Church Growth are being used for effective evangelism in America and around the world. It is my hope and prayer that church leaders will consider and apply the insights of Church Growth thinking. Because, as Dr. McGavran is so fond of saying, and I of repeating: “It is God’s will that His Church grow, that His lost children are found.”

Getting Started in Church Growth

In 1973 I had enrolled in a master’s program at the University of Southern California (USC) majoring in the field of Instructional Technology. At around the same time my father, Win Arn, had discovered the insights of Donald McGavran and started the Institute for American Church Growth to spread “Church Growth thinking” across North America. So, a number of the early Church Growth resources used by the Institute grew out of my class assignments at USC. For example, the “Church Growth Eyes” game was a final project for a class in simulation and gaming.

My introduction to Dr. McGavran was the result of a video production class I took at USC. Win also had an interest in media, having produced 28 films/videos, 5 seasons of Christian television shows, and a Christian radio program over the course of his career. One day Win mentioned the idea of producing a 16mm film featuring

Dr. McGavran and his Church Growth ideas. One question my dad wondered about was how this short little man with squinty eyes, graying goatee, and receding hairline (who bore a vague resemblance to Colonel Sanders) would come across on film. I suggested that we try filming McGavran for a short project related to my class at USC. Win asked Dr. McGavran if he would agree to a short video of him answering a few questions on Church Growth. “Don’t expect much,” Dr. McGavran responded, “but I’m happy to help.” I borrowed the school’s black and white reel-to-reel video recorder, and after a half hour of recording we played it back. It worked! McGavran had an engaging sparkle in his eye, conviction in his voice, and mastery of a topic that was brand new to the American Church. In the years following that first recording, Win Arn went on to produce several dozen films/videos that introduced “Church Growth Thinking” to literally tens of thousands of people in the greater Church. I remember Win saying one time that he liked making films because “...they go to places I will never be and speak to people I will never see.” Another memory that comes to my mind was a time when Win showed Dr. McGavran the first cut of the 16mm film called “How to Grow a Church.” It was a 28-minute film that did an excellent job of introducing viewers to McGavran and his Church Growth principles. After he had seen the film, McGavran turned to Win and said in characteristic humility, “Films make mountains out of mice.”

How to Grow a Church: The Book and the Film

In the passage recounting his story, Win mentioned the book *How to Grow a Church*, the first book on American Church Growth that eventually sold over 250,000 copies. The format of the book was a dialogue between Arn and McGavran. As I reflect on this style, it was genius. Not only was the dialogue more engaging to readers (many of whom would be laypersons), it allowed Win to engage with Dr. McGavran on a variety of topics while still being somewhat of a novice in Church Growth. Here is a brief excerpt from Chapter One of *How to Grow a Church*. The topic of conversation is “possibilities for growth.”

WIN ARN: So, if the potential is there, why is it that so many churches have not seen the possibilities and done something about it?

DONALD McGAVRAN: So many Christians have become accustomed to—preoccupied with—their own congregation. They like their own congregation. That's perfectly natural. They should. But unfortunately, the outsiders remain *outsiders*. There is no way of reaching these outsiders when a church is preoccupied with its own members. So, congregation after congregation is sealed off to itself, by its own language, its own culture, by its own degree of education, or wealth, or residence. The bridges to other segments of the population, across which Church Growth will occur, simply are not built (McGavran & Arn, 1973, p.3).

Many afternoons and evenings I would put a Wollensak reel-to-reel tape recorder in the trunk and my dad and I would drive to Dr. McGavran's house in Altadena, California. Mrs. McGavran always had a pot of tea prepared. He was always dressed in a suit and tie. I still remember my shock the first time I entered their living room and spotted a 30' python skin Dr. and Mrs. McGavran had brought back from their missionary work in India. On the opposite wall was a 10' tiger skin he said the locals had killed when the tiger was harassing their village. McGavran and Arn sat in the living room around a coffee table with only a few pages of notes and chatted about Church Growth. It was my job to set up the recorder and make sure the content was intelligible.

The content of the book was divided into chapters: 1) Possibilities for Growth, 2) Growing Churches of the New Testament, 3) Discovering Responsiveness, 4) Measuring Church Growth, 5) Leadership for Growing Churches, 6) Characteristics of Growing Churches, 7) First Church, 8) New Church, 9) Changing Church, 10) Suburban Church, and 11) Go and Grow. My mom's job, when we returned home, was to transcribe that evening's dialogue with an IBM Selectric typewriter. One of my mom's happiest days was when my dad brought a word processor home for her, since prior to that she had to retype the entire manuscript with each subsequent editing!

A year after its completion, *How to Grow a Church* was released. Billy Graham had written the Foreword, saying, “This is an exciting book which is at once both simple and profound. The authors challenge us to expect great things when God’s work is done in God’s way” (McGavran & Arn, 1973, pp.iii). McGavran and Arn went on to co-author three more books, all of which I had the privilege of editing. In fact, the third book (*Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School*) I co-authored with Drs. McGavran and Arn. It was a book written on the 200th anniversary of the Sunday School (1980). In the text we sought to apply a number of Church Growth principles to the institution of the Sunday School whose national enrollment was declining even more dramatically than Protestant Church membership.

When we realized that the interview and dialogue technique used in the *How to Grow a Church* book seemed to work, we decided to try it on 16mm film. The genre of 16mm film, however, was a bit more challenging. To grab and hold viewers’ attention for a half hour around a somewhat academic topic like Church Growth required more than just a talking head. We worked with a Christian film production company, Johnson/Nyquist, and identified the principles we wanted to highlight, the authorities we wanted to interview (featuring McGavran), and the case studies we wanted to use to illustrate Church Growth in action.

Gospel Films, Inc., an international Christian film distribution company, agreed to carry *How to Grow a Church* in their more than 40 local film libraries. This gave churches around the country access to the film and gave church members a chance to hear the message, “God wants your church to grow.” I remember one scene in which Win Arn was discussing the topic of small groups with Dr. McGavran. Arn posed the question, “Can small groups help a church grow?” to which McGavran responded, “Small groups do promote friendship, love, harmony, mutual support. All those things are desirable. However, if the small group consists exclusively of people who are already Christians, exclusively of the existing members of the church, then it has very little meaning for the growth of the church. On the other hand, if the small group makes it a point to include within itself those who have not accepted

Christ, then the small group is one of the most effective ways of winning people to Christ.”

This film was one of the most effective tools in the early days for introducing people to Church Growth thinking. A few years later, Win produced a sequel entitled “Reach Out and Grow” which included more authorities, case studies, and, of course, more of the little gray-haired, balding man telling viewers that “It is God’s will that His Church grow, that His lost children are found.”

The Institute for American Church Growth

When Win took the class at Fuller Seminary and discovered Church Growth, he was a regional executive with the Evangelical Covenant Church headquartered in Pasadena. With all that went with such work, he soon became frustrated with the “administrivia” that drew him away from his new passion of Church Growth. He determined to take a leap of faith and start a new ministry—the Institute for American Church Growth. As I look back on those early years, with a wife, four kids, house and car payments, and no identifiable means of income, Win had more faith than I could have mustered.

One of the early business items for the new company, after selecting a board (McGavran was chair, Peter Wagner was vice-chair), was to identify possible sources of funding to pay the bills. There were two sources of income, “products” and “services”. The first category included books, films, posters, and a newsletter/magazine. The second included consulting with local and denominational church bodies, public speaking, and research. It sounded daunting. But we set out on the pilgrimage.

The first product the Institute produced was my little card game, “Church Growth Eyes.” We also rented out copies of the film *How to Grow a Church* to churches. Gospel Light Publishers had printed and was distributing the book by the same name. To kick off the release of the book, Gospel Light asked Win and Dr. McGavran to present a leadership seminar. Attendance was greater than expected; it looked like several hundred from the photos I took. This experience gave us the idea that perhaps seminars could be another vehicle for spreading the insights of Church Growth. A few months later, Drs. Arn and McGavran led a second seminar in Portland, Oregon.

Coming home on the plane, we debriefed the experience and, out of that discussion, the “Basic Growth Seminar” was born.

Basic Growth Seminar

The resource of 16mm film (and later video tape) proved to be a tremendous tool to “go to places we’ll never be, and speak to people we’ll never see.” At the same time, 30 minutes of watching a 16mm film was hardly enough to redirect the paradigms of church members from inward to outward. A 10-hour experience of thinking, laughing, sharing, and learning about Church Growth had greater potential.

The Basic Growth Seminar workbook cover read, “Envision your church exploding with life and vitality...reaching out and winning people...making disciples and responsible members...expanding new horizons...Christians enthusiastically involved in the ministry and outreach of your church...that’s Church Growth!” Win and I worked together on designing the Friday night/Saturday seminar, creating a variety of teaching activities that kept participants (mostly laypersons) enjoying themselves and learning in the process. One of the teaching techniques I had learned at USC was to have participants take a quiz and then debrief it together. In the Basic Seminar, participants were divided into smaller groups and instructed to identify the correct answer to each of ten questions (with a “grand prize” going to the winning team). Once the groups had (hopefully) selected the right answers, the seminar leader would review each question along with an explanation and the correct answer. (The grand prize would turn out to be a free trip to the Hawaiian Islands, assuming the winning team could convince their pastor to cover the expenses!) Here are a few questions from the quiz. Can you get them right?

1. A local church has the best opportunity for growth when
 - a. there are relatively few churches in the community
 - b. there are many non-Christians in the community
 - c. the members of the church have different demographic characteristics than the community
 - d. there are many young people actively participating in the church and its activities

- e. it has established a “name for itself” in the community
2. Prior to dynamic church growth, it is most important to have an understanding
 - a. of successful and unsuccessful methods used by other churches
 - b. that it is God’s will that His Church grow and His lost children are found
 - c. of the church’s theological position and doctrine
 - d. of the community around the church
 - e. of the church’s growth goal and that members have an active part in achieving that goal
3. An early church in the New Testament was the first to cross the culture barrier of Jew and Gentile. The church was located in
 - a. Laodicea
 - b. Philippi
 - c. Antioch
 - d. Jerusalem
 - e. Thessalonica

Another activity in the Basic Seminar was teaching participants new Church Growth terms such as “classes of leaders,” “great commission goal,” “non-growth excuses,” and “removing the fog.” Using a page in their seminar workbook titled Church Growth Glossary, participants were to write a super-sentence that included as many vocabulary words as possible. They then read the sentence to their neighbor who, if the sentence was exceptional, volunteered that person to read it to the group. The readings were inevitably followed by appreciative applause. It was a great learning experience... disguised as fun!

Still another learning experience was a session on “Growth-Restricting Obstacles” and “Non-Growth Excuses.” Participants were first introduced to the definitions:

Growth-restricting obstacle – an internal or external barrier that keeps a church from growing.

Non-growth excuse — a rationalization of failure to grow, often used as justification for non-growth.

Then, on their own, seminar participants were to 1) list growth-restricting obstacles particularly related to their church and 2) list non-growth excuses also related to their church. Finally, they were to share and discuss their list with several people next to them. It was a great exercise in, what Donald McGavran used to call “removing the fog.”

As the Church Growth movement became more and more widely known, Win and I began to ask the question, how do we *facilitate* the spread of these insights? After all, the Institute for American Church Growth was a relatively small organization, while there were thousands of churches and pastors that needed and wanted to grow. One idea was to invite denominational executives and pastors who had caught the vision of Church Growth to lead Basic Growth Seminars in their own network of churches. We packed a seminar leader’s kit with films, overhead transparencies, and leader’s notes and trained these men and women to present the seminar in their community. This idea worked to some extent. But it was my observation that there are certain communication skills and gifts that some have, and some do not. Win Arn had a special gift for leading a room full of people in the discovery and application of Church Growth that was hard to imitate.

Church Growth Films/Videos

Win felt that the greatest need in spreading Church Growth thinking was to communicate with laypeople. Of course, there is a place for training pastors, church planters, and regional and national church executives. But most pastors know that the hardest challenge they face in moving a church toward change and growth is *after* the leadership seminar that they and their staff have attended. The challenge is getting the members on board. Toward that end, we came upon the idea of creating a “typical” layperson that viewers (church members) could identify with on the journey of discovering Church Growth. Enter Chuck Bradley.

Chuck was a likable, somewhat gullible though dedicated

church member. (In reality, he was an excellent professional actor.) In his journey through 14 different 26-minute films Chuck helped viewers see that “If Chuck can do it, maybe I can do it, too.” With the help of Johnson/Nyquist film productions, Win and I created a variety of ways and means by which Chuck learned something about Church Growth. We never used the term Church Growth, and we included Dr. McGavran in only one of these films. But Chuck brought many new insights and a “Church Growth conscience” (as Dr. McGavran used to call it) to tens of thousands of viewers. Titles in the series included:

- *But, I’m Just a Layman.* Chuck learns that growth and outreach is not just the pastor’s job.
- *Discover Your Gifts.* Viewers discover the world of spiritual gifts as Chuck searches for his.
- *The Gift of Love.* Financial giving is not a duty, it’s a privilege.
- *The Great Commission Sunday School.* What is the real purpose of the Sunday School?
- *The Possibility Sunday School.* Can a Sunday School reach new people and grow?
- *For the Love of Pete.* Chuck learns that God reaches people through relationships.
- *Who Cares About Love? (Parts 1 & 2)* The motive of reaching lost people is love; as is the message and the method.
- *A Matter of Urgency.* We all have priorities...what is yours and your church’s?
- *The Ministers.* Chuck trades places with his twin brother (Rev. Bill Bradley) and discovers that pastors are not the only ministers.
- *In His Steps...What Would Jesus Do?* Chuck tries asking—and acting on—the question “What would Jesus do?”
- *See You Sunday.* An engaging film on assimilating newcomers into the life of the church.

Church Growth Magazine

One of the resources we developed in the early days of the Institute was a newsletter called *Church Growth: America*. Initially it was a

simple 4-page, 2-color circular with a few odds and ends on Church Growth, along with several short articles. Ten years later, the publication had grown to a 24-page, color magazine with several in-depth articles. Lyle Schaller accepted my invitation to be a regular contributor. Win had a regular column. Cutting edge research was often included. One study on mass evangelism generated so much interest it was reported in *Time* magazine. As editor, I was proud to provide this resource to church leaders for a number of years.

Speaking about *Church Growth: America* reminds me of a “God moment” related to the magazine. Those familiar with Church Growth, and even those who are not, probably know the name Dr. Gary McIntosh. Gary is a prolific writer, with I-don’t-know-how-many book titles to his credit. I later enjoyed co-authoring a book with Gary (*What Every Pastor Should Know*) that received *Outreach* magazine’s Book of the Year award. A fun story about Gary’s entry into the world of Church Growth comes through Win Arn’s invitation to Gary, then a pastor of a small Baptist church in San Bernardino, California. *Christianity Today* had recently published an article proposing the importance of being a *faithful* pastor and congregation rather than being a *successful* one. The article did not sit well with me, as it seemed to be a non-growth excuse for any church leader who wanted to justify their ineffectiveness in evangelism and outreach. Gary had just submitted an article to *Church Growth: America* making a good case for the idea that faithfulness *brings* success. And if your church is not growing, it is usually a lame excuse to say that the reason is your faithfulness. I showed Win the article and we ran it the following month. This article put Gary on our radar, and before long we invited him to join the staff of the Institute. During his time with the Institute, Gary led numerous Basic Growth Seminars and conducted many church consultations. As a result of this association, Gary has (and continues to be) a prized friend in my life. His subsequent publishing, speaking, research, and leadership in the field is one of my proudest achievements!

The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples

One of the ways Win and I produced new Church Growth resources

was to read Dr. McGavran's writings and then identify the growth principles that could be contextualized for the American Church. One of McGavran's first books was *Bridges of God* (1955). In it, he introduces the powerful idea of "people movements." Here is how he opens the book: "A great deal of study has been devoted to Christian missions. We have come to know the answers to many questions about mission work. But what is perhaps the most important question of all still waits an answer. The question is: 'How do Peoples become Christian?'" (p.1).

The missionary McGavran continues, "This book asks how clans, tribes, castes, in short how Peoples become Christian. How do chain reactions in these strata of society begin? This is an inquiry which is of enormous concern to both younger and older churches as they carry out the great commission" (1955, p.1). McGavran uses the rest of the book to present his answer to this question. He writes of how *relationships within networks of people* are the bridges of God over which the Gospel travels. Whether it is within immediate family members, extended families, villages, or communities, the good news of the Christian faith moves and grows among common kinship, common friendships, and common associates.

This idea of People Movements led Win and me to research the ideas of "networks," "webs," and the Greek word *oikos* ("household"). Throughout the New Testament, the word "household" appears repeatedly in describing how the Gospel traveled and how people came to Christ (Acts 16:15, Acts 26:31, Luke 8:39, Luke 19:10, John 4:52, Acts 10:2,24, Acts 18:8, I Co. 1:16). This idea led to a book Win and I co-authored entitled *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (1982). We first printed the book ourselves and later it was later picked up and distributed by Baker Books. We partnered with Johnson/Nyquist Film Productions and created the 28-minute film, "For the Love of Pete," to illustrate the principles of identifying and reaching one's *oikos* of non-Christian friends, neighbors, and relatives.

While the book and film were in production, I was hard at work on a Master's Plan kit with a *Leader's Manual* for a layperson to lead a study. The kit also included a participant workbook, small group leader's guide, and additional material to discover and apply

the *oikos* process in their church. One of my favorite examples of a church that took the *oikos* process seriously is High Desert Church in Victorville, California. Rev. Tom Mercer, pastor of this 12,000+ member church, writes about his *oikos* discovery in his own book, *8 to 15: The World is Smaller Than You Think*:

Back in 1979, my senior pastor asked me to attend a seminar with him, one led by Dr. Win Arn. Until that time neither of us had heard much about the word “oikos,” let alone the principle behind it. The church had hired me because the youth ministry needed a boost. (The first Bible Study I led had a grand total of four students.) It was at Dr. Arn’s seminar that I was introduced to the basic principle of *oikos* that I’m going to share with you. Of course time and experience have refined its implementation. But its efficiency lies in its pure simplicity.

That seminar lit a fire under me! For the first time I began feeling like I could be a part of the great commission in a natural, authentic way. My pastor said “go for it.” I felt like a youth pastor unleashed! Three years later the youth group was on the verge of outgrowing the church. Over 300 students had taken this simple idea seriously and had literally turned our community on its ear (2017, p.13).

Tom later became pastor of High Desert Church. He once told me, “Oikos is not *one* of the things we do, it’s the *only thing* we do!” Of all the principles of Church Growth I have encountered in my 45 years of ministry in the field, I am convinced that the *oikos* principle is the most significant and holds the greatest potential for pivoting a declining church around toward new outreach and growth.

Church Growth Books

Over the years Win and I have written or co-authored a variety of books in the field of Church Growth:

- *How to Grow a Church* (Win Arn & Donald McGavran)
- *Ten Steps for Church Growth* (Win Arn & Donald McGavran)

- *Back to Basics in Church Growth* (Win Arn & Donald McGavran)
- *Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School* (Charles Arn, Donald McGavran, Win Arn)
- *Who Cares About Love?* (Win Arn & Charles Arn)
- *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Win Arn & Charles Arn)
- *The Pastor's Church Growth Handbook (Vol. I & 2)* (Win Arn)
- *The Church Growth Ratio Book* (Win Arn)
- *How to Start a New Service* (Charles Arn)
- *Side Door* (Charles Arn)
- *What Every Pastor Should Know* (Gary McIntosh & Charles Arn)

Other Church Growth Endeavors

In preparing this article, I dug into my old files and pulled out a 48-page catalog listing products and services available through the Institute for American Church Growth in 1983. Here are a few of the resources we had a part in developing.

Advanced Church Growth Seminar. A 4-day leadership training conference held in Pasadena, California, once a year. We averaged several hundred pastors and denominational executives, including a regular contingent of Korean pastors who would fly over from Seoul. A fun fact: A free scholarship to this Advanced Growth Seminar was the grand prize each year in a class at Southwestern Seminary for the student who read the most Church Growth books. The winner, one year, was Rick Warren.

Celebration of Friendship. A planning kit to organize and promote a "Friendship Sunday" where members were encouraged to bring a friend to church. Included in the kit were posters, bulletin covers, booklets, and more. The Church Growth principle behind the idea of bringing a friend was that 75% – 90% of all new believers came to faith through a friend, neighbor, or relative. "Our attendance was up by 150 people," said a pastor in Bradenton, Florida, after using this resource, "with a total of 750 present. We had fifty-one first-time visitors."

Lifestyle Evangelism Growth-Focus Module. A 10-month special emphasis which a church could sponsor, including a one-day lay seminar on lifestyle evangelism, The Master's Plan for Making Disciples resource kit, the Celebration of Friendship planning kit, and unlimited consultation with Institute staff throughout the year.

Calling in Love. A comprehensive planning kit to lead a church in organizing and conducting a community-wide telemarketing strategy promoting an upcoming outreach event in the church.

A Shepherd's Guide to Caring and Keeping. A planning and training kit to help a church implement a strategy for integrating new believers into the church. It included a 26-minute video "See You Sunday," teaching notes with overhead transparency slides, and participant handouts to lead six training sessions in the church.

Celebrating God's Family. A comprehensive guide for planning a party to celebrate the joy of Christian community in a church. Bulletin covers, "We are a family" booklets, posters, balloons, and more.

The Caring System. A planning kit for a church to organize a personal follow-up system for visitors and other new member prospects. The essence of this kit was later integrated into a computer database after personal computers came along.

Member Assimilation Growth-Focus Module. Materials and guidance for a church to conduct a 10-month emphasis on incorporating members into active involvement and using their spiritual gifts. It included materials for a local church lay seminar, a 16-mm film "See You Sunday," and a planning kit for a celebration of God's family.

Church Growth Library. Current books related to Church Growth.

Growing in Love. A 13-week adult study of steps to become a more loving person and church, particularly to those outside of the Christian community. It featured complete leader's notes, overhead transparency slides, student workbooks, a video "Who

Cares About Love?”, and the book *Who Cares About Love* by Win and Charles Arn.

In His Steps...with Love. A planning kit for a church to sponsor a one-week emphasis where members ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” It included a task force planning guide, an application booklet, bulletin covers, 7-day diaries, and the 16mm film “In His Steps...”.

Intentional Love 10-Month Growth-Focus Module. A church-wide emphasis on becoming a more loving church. This included a one-day local church seminar led by Institute staff, a 16mm film, member planning booklets, a taskforce leader’s guide, and unlimited consultation with the Institute staff.

Celebration of Service. A taskforce planning guide to organize and promote a special Sunday celebration of lay ministry and service opportunities in the church.

Mobilizing Laity for Ministry. Material to lead a Ministry Discovery Seminar in a local church, including presentation notes and overhead transparency slides, participants’ workbook, and a 16mm film “The Ministers.”

10-Month Laity in Ministry Growth-Focus Module. An emphasis in a local church on the topic of lay ministry. It included a one-day church seminar led by the Institute staff, a planning kit to conduct a Celebration of Service Sunday, teaching materials to lead a Discover Your Ministry seminar, and unlimited consultation with the Institute staff.

Spiritual Gifts for Building the Body. A self- or group-study course exploring the spiritual gifts: what they are, how to discover them, and how to use them.

How to Build a Growing Sunday School. A six-week study for youth through senior adults. It included workbooks, a leader’s guide, the

videos “The Great Commission Sunday School” and “The Possibility Sunday School,” the textbook *Growth: A New Vision for the Sunday School*, and a Sunday School growth game “Sunday School Growth Diagnostic Manual.”

Exploring the Churches of the Revelation. Eight 5-minute films to complement a sermon series on the seven churches of Asia Minor.

Disciples in the Making. A 12-week adult study integrating six of the most popular “Chuck Bradley” videos. Complete leader’s and student notes.

Sunday School Growth Seminar. A one-day seminar led in the local church or denominational region on the principles of Church Growth applied to the educational ministry of the church.

Sunday School Growth Game. A fun educational game that teaches Church Growth principles and their application for a church’s Sunday School.

Love in Action 30-Month Church Growth Partnership. A long-term relationship between the Institute for American Church Growth and a regional group of churches. It included three on-site seminars, a variety of growth planning resources, Church Growth films, and unlimited consultation.

Church Growth Associate Training. Certification for pastors and denominational executives to present the seminars and training sessions developed by the Institute for American Church Growth.

Let the Church Grow. A 12-week adult study on Church Growth principles and how to apply them. It included complete leader’s notes and student handouts.

A Church is Born. A 22-minute dramatic 16mm film featuring a church family who takes up the challenge to start a new church.

Planned Parenthood for Churches. A 26-minute documentary film on church planting strategy and why more churches should get involved in starting a new church.

The Great Commission Church Planting Kit. A planning kit for denominational and regional church bodies to plant seeds among local congregation leaders to consider planting a new church.

Building the Church. A series of six 5-minute films to be integrated into a sermon series on the early churches.

Growth Opportunity Check-up. A do-it-yourself research tool for a local church to gather data, analyze, and then present the findings to the congregation in a State of the Church day.

The Next Decade

We continued to seek out new ways to communicate Church Growth thinking for the next ten years or so. The Institute and Win Arn became fairly well-known among church leaders. My claim to fame was “Oh, you’re Win Arn’s son!” I remember the first time I spoke in front of a group of pastors ten years after I began my career in Church Growth research and writing (and only then because Win came down sick at the last minute). The thought of speaking as an authority on Church Growth to these men and women of God nearly paralyzed me, until Win said to me, “Remember, in the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king.” I used to recite that to myself for years each time I would stand up to speak.

Then one night I was at my mom and dad’s place. Just before I was about to leave, my mom came into the living room and said, “I think something’s wrong with Win.” We went into their bedroom and Win was lying on top of the bed. He was conscious but speaking and moving very slowly. “I think we should call 911,” my mom said, and we did. Win had had an aneurism. We spent the night at the Arcadia Methodist Hospital, and Win stayed in the hospital and later the rehab unit for several months. Thankfully, we had recently hired a Chief Operating Officer to help with the logistics of running the company. Win had once said to me, regarding his distaste for

administrative details, “You start out with a vision, and wind up running a business.”

Win’s genius was his visionary thinking. He spoke of his “stomach aches” when a new “baby elephant” (i.e., a Church Growth idea) was about to be born. My genius, if one could call it that, was to turn his ideas into reality. It was a good combination of gifts and it was a joy working in that role.

To the COO’s credit, we kept the Institute alive for several years. But as the Church Growth movement peaked, it became more and more apparent that times were changing. Win recovered to some degree from his aneurism. Interestingly he retained a good deal of his passion for finding and meeting needs. But his passion narrowed from “Church Growth” to “senior adults.” His focus was not on taking care of old people, but on *reaching* unchurched older adults and applying the principles of Church Growth to this new target audience. The Institute promoted this new focus of helping churches develop a growth consciousness for reaching older adults. From the time Win recovered from his stroke to the time he retired ten years later, he and I became authorities in the field of growing an older adult ministry. (There was that one-eyed king again.) Just as Win had taken the principles of Church Growth and applied them to the American church, and later applied them to Sunday School, we began applying Church Growth principles to older adult ministry. This new focus included:

Books

- *Catch the Age Wave*
- *White Unto Harvest*
- *Live Long and Love It*
- *The New Senior*

Films/Video

- “How to Grow a Senior Adult Ministry”
- “Finding Your Ministry in the Age Wave”
- “New Life in the Age Wave
- “In His Steps in the Age Wave”

- “Finding the Right Friendships in the Age Wave”

Curriculum

- The Grand Way
- Starting a L.I.F.E. Club in Your Church

In Conclusion

While doing research for this article, I ran across a short essay Win Arn submitted to a contest sponsored by the U.S. Post Office. He wrote it several years after his aneurism and it is a good reminder to us of defining our priorities past, present, and future...

Travel Lightly by Win Arn

Have you ever seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer? No, you can't take it with you!

It's so easy to become attached to things. But living abundantly does not mean accumulating extravagantly. The book of Ecclesiastes says: “To everything there is a season...a time to be born, a time to die...a time to keep and a time to cast aside...” Healthy aging means entering the season of casting aside.

In the six years following a stroke I have learned much about what to keep and what to cast aside:

- *People are more important than things.* Given a choice of accumulating friends or accumulating objects, people win out every time.
- *Giving is more important than receiving.* The joy of helping others far exceeds the novelty of new acquisitions.
- *Productivity is more important than activity.* I am spending my time in ways that will leave something behind when I'm gone.
- *Health is more important than gratification.* It's easier for me to say “no” to a double banana split. Although it still takes effort!

So, what do I keep...and what do I toss? I keep what helps me practice these priorities, and helps me travel lightly.

I continued to oversee the work of the Institute for a few more years until it seemed prudent to close its doors. I was invited to serve on the faculty at Wesley Seminary (Marion, Indiana) as Visiting Professor of Outreach. I was encouraged, though not surprised, to see that even after the passing of McGavran, Arn, and other early pioneers, 21st century students continue to gain wisdom and insights from the Church Growth movement and Donald McGavran's mantra, "It's God's will that His Church grow, that His lost children are found."

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