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## Thoughts On A Movement

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## **Thoughts On A Movement**

**Gary L. McIntosh**

**Presidential Address to The American Society  
for Church Growth Annual Meeting  
Houston, TX November 1994**

### *Introduction*

"Movement" has become a household word in the United States since the 1950s. The "Civil Rights" movement, the "Women's Liberation" movement, the "Pro-Life" movement and others are well known social forces. The Church Growth Movement likewise traces its roots from the 1950s and has become a force to be reckoned with during its first forty years.

### *Definition of A Movement*

For the purposes of this article a movement will be defined as "A self-perpetuating company of people who are united by a common cause and committed to having a significant impact on their social environment."

This definition assigns three dimensions to a movement. First, a movement must have people. Any viable movement will have a leader who sets forth the beliefs of the movement, heroes who embody the values of the movement and, of course, followers. Second, a movement must have a common cause. An effective movement will have a cause with a capital "C" which creates a unity of purpose and direction. Third, a movement must have a commitment to impact the social environment in a strategic way, which includes the means to communicate the cause in a

significant manner. If any of these three dimensions are missing, a viable movement will not exist. To the extent that any of these three dimensions are confusing, a movement will be hampered.

*It Began With A Man*

Movements throughout history have progressed through a predictable cycle. The normal cycle of a movement may be characterized by five words: MAN, MOVEMENT, MINISTRY, MACHINE and MONUMENT.

The MAN behind the Church Growth Movement is without question Donald A. McGavran. The Father of Church Growth was a third-generation missionary in India serving there for 30 years. In 1932, after receiving his Ph.D. at Columbia University, he was elected executive secretary-treasurer of his mission in India. His responsibilities included administrating an extensive mission of eighty missionaries, schools, a leprosy home, hospitals and evangelistic outreach. Upon reading *Christian Mass Movements in India* (Pickett 1933), he began to study his own mission's success in the mid-India area. Frustrated to find only ten growing churches out of a total 145 mission stations, McGavran requested the Mid-India Christian Council to recruit J. Waskom Pickett to conduct a survey. He assisted Pickett in conducting the research and eventually their work was published under the title, *The Mass Movement Survey of Mid-India* (c. 1936) revised in 1958 to *Church Growth and Group Conversion*.

Becoming convinced that effective evangelism was needed by all the missions in his area, McGavran left his executive position to devote the next 18 years to evangelistic work (1936-1954). While testing his ideas in the real world of missionary endeavor, he saw around 1,000 individuals won to Christ and about 15 churches established. In 1951 he began writing his ideas resulting in publication of the *Bridges of God* (1955 rev. ed. 1981). Seen as the Magna Carta of the Church Growth Movement, the movement traces its beginning officially from the publication of this book.

*It Became A Movement*

A number of key events brought the Church Growth Movement into prominence. The first was the establishment of the Institute of Church Growth at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon in 1961. At about that time, the Evangelical Foreign

Missions Association began sponsoring annual church growth seminars for missionaries home on furloughs. Bringing even more exposure to this new movement was the publication of *Church Growth Bulletin* (first circulated in 1964). Today the *Church Growth Bulletin* remains in print as *Global Church Growth: Strategies for Today's Leaders*.

The next key was the establishment of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1965. As the founding dean, McGavran assembled a team of professors who were to communicate church growth principles around the globe. Adding to the movement's growth, a significant vehicle for communicating church growth thinking in the early years was the William Carey Library, a publishing house devoted to producing church growth books.

The publication of McGavran's magnum opus, *Understanding Church Growth* (1970 rev. ed. 1980), played a major role in preparing America for church growth. In the Fall of 1972, Peter Wagner and Donald McGavran taught a pilot course in church growth designed specifically for American church leaders. One student, Dr. Winfield C. Arn, established the influential Institute for American Church Growth that same year with McGavran as chairman of the board.

John Wimber pioneered the new field of church growth consulting when in 1975 he became the founding director of the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. His successor, Carl F. George, has become widely recognized as the leading strategist in the movement.

#### *It Has Become A Ministry*

Today the worldwide Church Growth Movement is forty-two years old. The American Church Growth Movement is twenty-seven years old if its beginning is traced from the original publication of *Understanding Church Growth* in 1970.

As we look back from the mid point of the 1990s, it is clear that the Church Growth Movement has been a major ministry force in churches throughout the United States. Clusters of people and dozens of denominations have embraced the Church Growth Movement. Thousands of churches now give testimony to the effective growth it has brought. Church Growth is a part of our vocabulary. Local churches and denominations have added specialists in Church Growth to their staffs. Colleges and semi-

naries now teach academic courses in Church Growth both at the masters and doctorate levels. The Church Growth Movement has come into its own.

*It May Become A Machine*

Unfortunately, movements often become machines as they reach middle age. The death of the founder(s) often leaves a movement without the passion and sense of purpose that powered it in the early years. Gradually the movement provides programs, services and meetings but with less effective results. Once a vital movement for the cause of Christ, over the years it may lose its vision and understanding of the core values which energized it. The movement becomes like a machine churning out a product but not remembering *why*.

*It Could Become a Monument*

At the end of the cycle, movements often look back fondly to their "golden age." The movement becomes a monument to visionary leaders of a past era. It maintains a devotion to a program or ideal but no longer attracts followers to the cause. It stands solidly for a former way of doing things but is increasingly rigid and resistant to new forms of ministry or ways of perceiving the future. It has become a monument—cold and unmovable.

*The Church Growth Movement in the 1990s*

This predictable movement cycle is well known. As movements enter their fortieth year, they often begin to evaluate their pilgrimage and search for meaning and renewed direction. In a similar manner, the Church Growth Movement celebrated its fortieth birthday in 1995. Predictably, some people are beginning to ask if the Church Growth Movement has had its day and is now losing its influence. Others wonder if it has moved past the movement and ministry stage into the machine or monument stage. Still others believe that it continues on as a strong movement strategically impacting churches and ministry.

What seems certain is that the Church Growth Movement faces the same danger that all movements face, i.e. losing its focus and core values. Thus the purpose of this article is to provide a picture of some current perspectives on the Church Growth Movement in the United States, and to offer some thoughts on

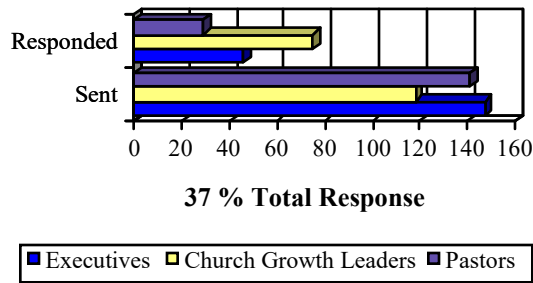
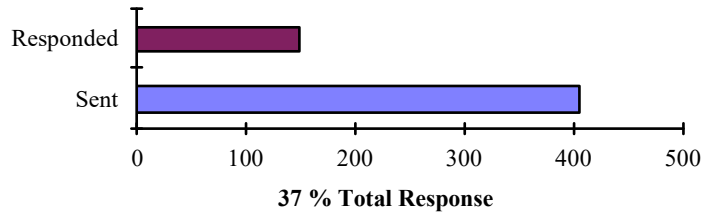
strengthening the movement for the future.

### *The Study*

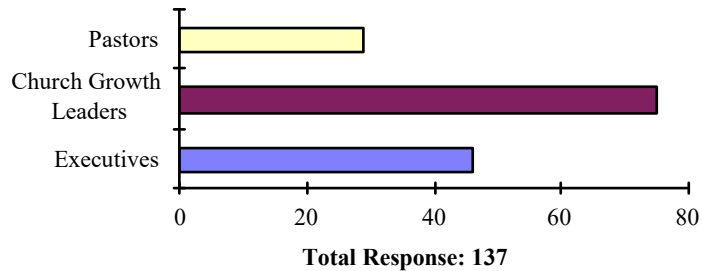
In an effort to assess current thinking about the Church Growth Movement, a survey was designed and mailed to three different groups of church leaders: Church Executives, Church Pastors and Church Growth Leaders. The category of "Executives" includes those in denominational leadership as well as professors of seminaries and colleges. A total of 147 surveys were mailed to executives with 31% responding (N=46). The category of "Pastors" includes individuals currently ministering in any pastoral role in a local church or parish. A total of 141 surveys were mailed to pastors with 21% responding (N=29). The category of "Church Growth Leaders" includes those who are, or have been, members of the American Society for Church Growth (formerly the NASCG). This category includes some pastors, executives, consultants and professors. What makes them a separate group is that they all have identified with the Church Growth Movement by becoming a member of the ASCG at one time or another. A total of 118 surveys were mailed to church growth leaders with 64% responding (N=75). A grand total of 406 surveys were mailed to all three categories with 37% responding (N=150). Surveys were anonymous and color coordinated to maintain the integrity of each group. The survey is considered accurate to within plus or minus six percentage points.

The survey design included three sets of questions. The set labeled "Survey Information" included six items requesting basic information such as ministry position, church affiliation and age. The set labeled "Survey Questions" included 10 items requesting specific information such as identification of organizations and individuals influential in the Church Growth Movement. The set labeled "Opinion Questions" included 15 items using a Likert response form asking participants to respond on a five point scale: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree. The survey was pretested and reviewed by experts in the field of research design. Names for pastors and executives were randomly selected. Names for church growth leaders were taken from the membership lists of the American Society for Church Growth.

**Survey Response**



**Response by Type**

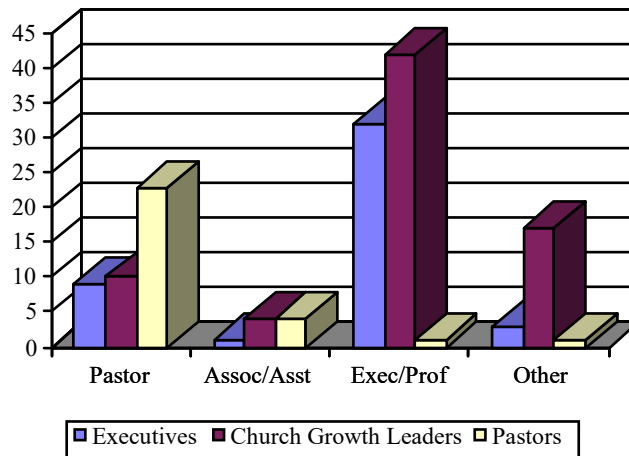
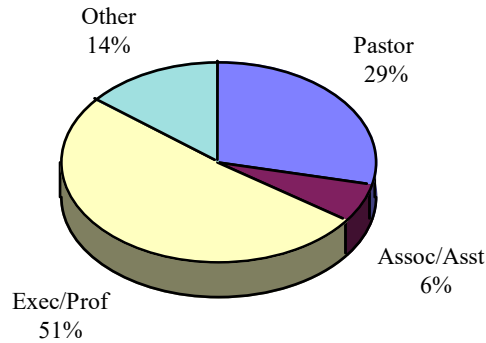


*The Results*

The results presented in this article include surveys received as of December 31, 1994. Only a simple analysis of percentages with appropriate graphs has been employed. Not all numbers equal the totals noted above since some people did not answer every question.

General Information

**1. What is your current position?**



Over half of those in the category of church growth leaders identify themselves as executives or professors (58%). The rest list themselves as other (23%), pastor (14%) and associate/assistant (5%). The notations following "other" included several positions such as consultant, missionary, retired and president.

Most of those in the category of pastor predictably identify



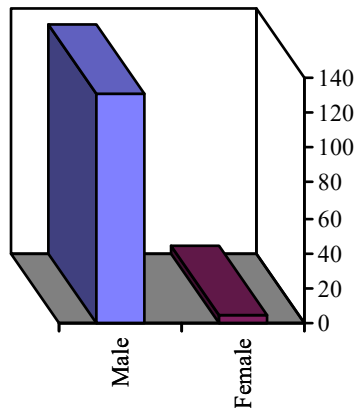
their position as a pastor (79%). Fourteen percent are an associate/assistant with the remainder evenly split between executive (3%) and other (3%).

As expected, 71% of those in the category of executive list themselves as executives. The remainder are pastors (20%), other (7%) and associate/assistant (2%).

**2. Response by Age**

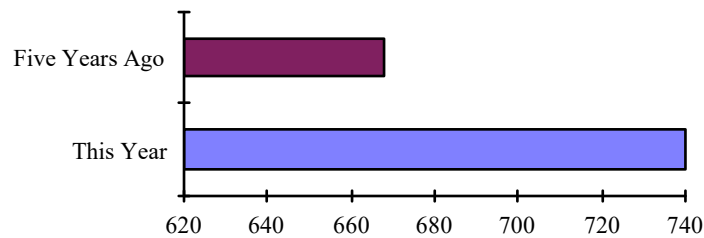
The average age of all those completing the survey is 52 with church executives being 54, church growth leaders 52 and pastors 48.

**3. Response by Gender**



Only four respondents are female. Three are church growth leaders (5%) and the other an executive (2%).

**4. Average Church Attendance**



Only those in the category of church growth leader noted an increase in the attendance of their church from five years ago

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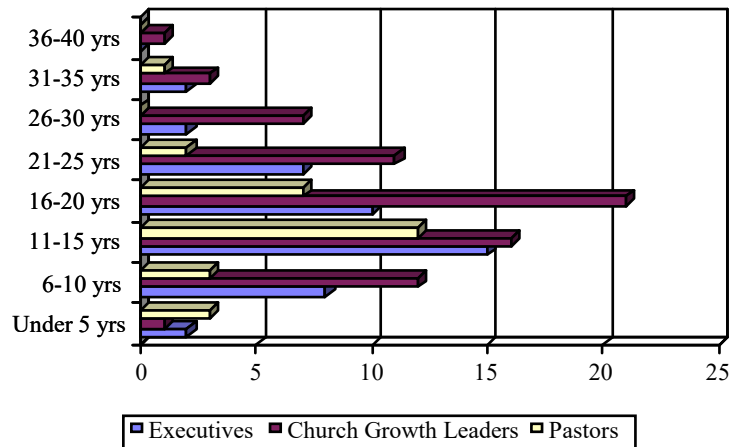
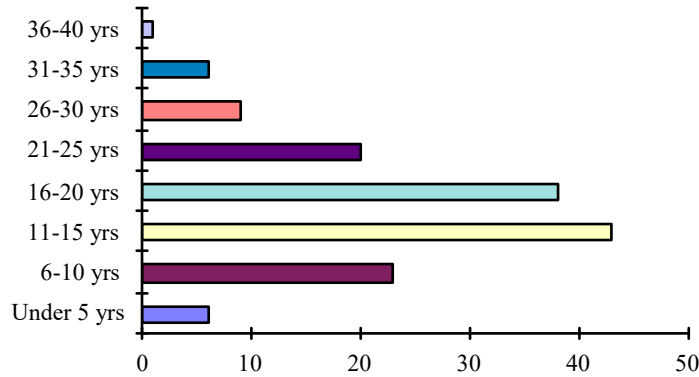
with an average increase of +22%. Those in both of the other categories indicated a decrease in attendance at their churches with executives showing a -8% decrease and pastors a -6% decrease.

#### **5. Average years in current position**

All those responding averaged 10 years in their current ministry position. Those in the category of pastor had the longest average tenure of 15 years followed by 8 years for executives and 8 years for church growth leaders.

Survey Questions

**1. How long ago did you first become aware of the Church Growth Movement?**



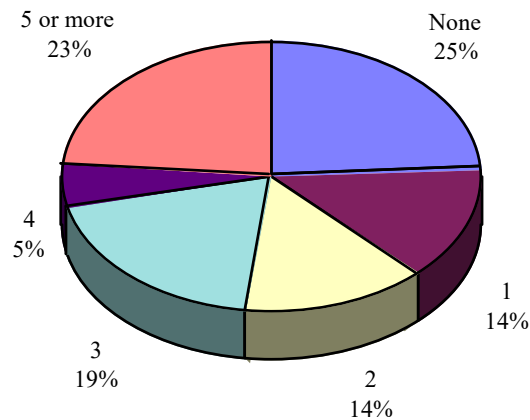
The average church growth leader first became aware of the Church Growth Movement 18 years ago with the largest percentage (29%) listing 16-20 years ago. Executives first heard of the movement an average of 16 years ago with their largest percentage (33%) in the 11-15 years field. Pastors had the most recent exposure to the Church Growth Movement averaging 14 years ago with their largest percentage (43%) falling in the 11-15 years ago field.

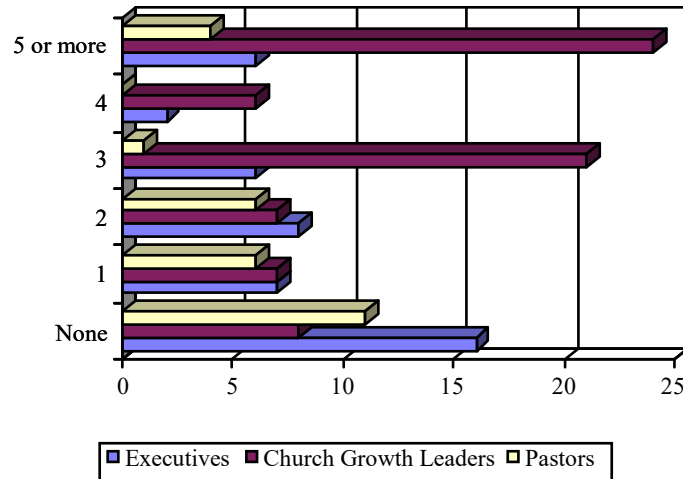
**2. Thinking back to when you were first introduced to the Church Growth Movement, what three people were the most influential church growth leaders in the United States at that time?**

A total of 59 names were listed with Donald McGavran, C. Peter Wagner and Win Arn mentioned 60% of the time. The following list of 16 names is in order of times mentioned.

- Donald McGavran (72)
- C. Peter Wagner (73)
- Win Arn (68)
- Lyle Schaller (28)
- Carl George (22)
- Elmer Towns (17)
- Robert Schuller (8)
- Kent Hunter (5)
- John Wimber (3)
- Ralph Winter (3)
- Bill Hybels (3)
- John Maxwell (3)
- M. Wendell Belew (2)
- Alan Tippet (2)
- Medford Jones (2)
- Paul Benjamin (2)

**3. Over the past 3 years, how many church growth seminars or workshops have you attended?**





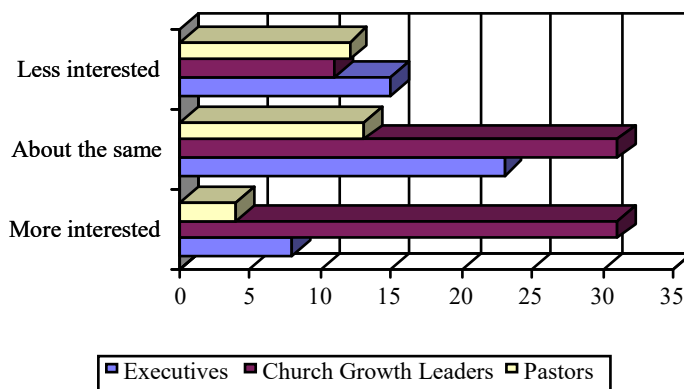
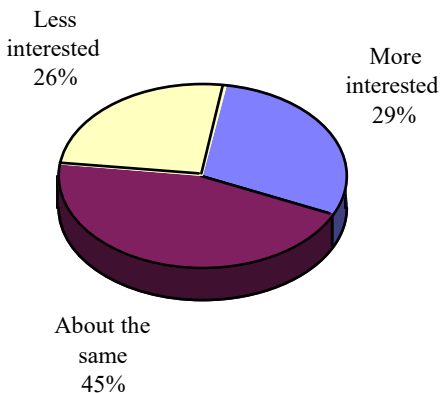
The survey revealed that 70% of church growth leaders have attended three or more seminars in the past three years. This is double the executives (31%) and almost four times the pastors (18%). Over one-third of the pastors (39%) and executives (36%) indicate they have not attended any church growth seminars in the last three years.

**4. Thinking back to when you were first introduced to the Church Growth Movement, what three organizations led the way in church growth thinking in the United States at that time?**

A total of 26 organizations were mentioned with the top three being the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, the Institute for American Church Growth (Arn) and Fuller Theological Seminary. The following organizations are listed in descending order with the number of times they were mentioned.

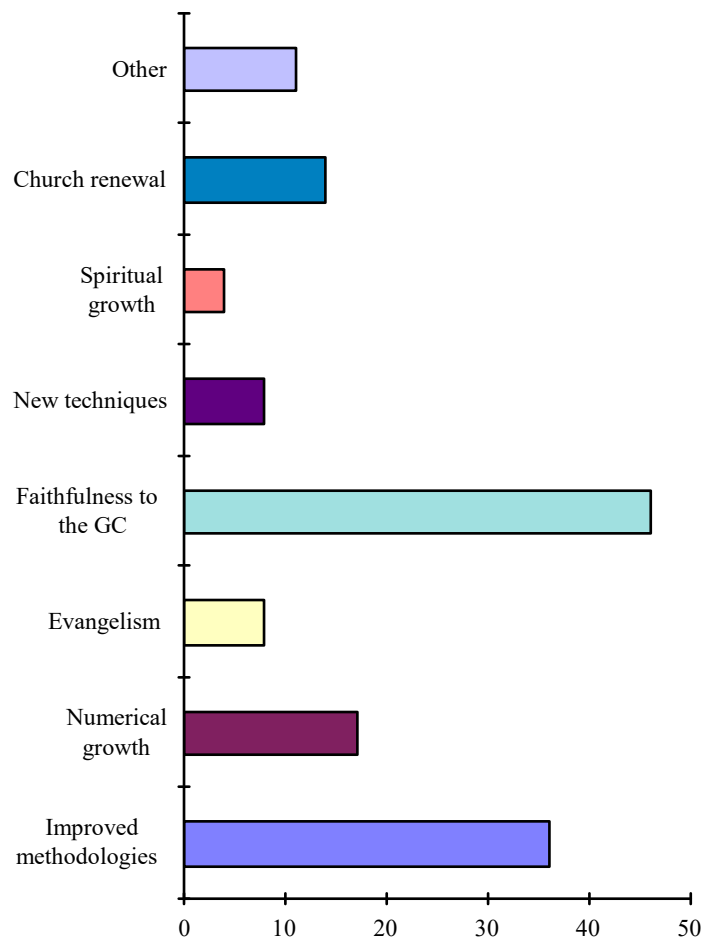
- Fuller Institute (69)
- Institute for American Church Growth (57)
- Fuller School of Theology (55)
- Denominations (20)
- Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg (13)
- Yokefellow Institute (9)
- Large Churches (9)

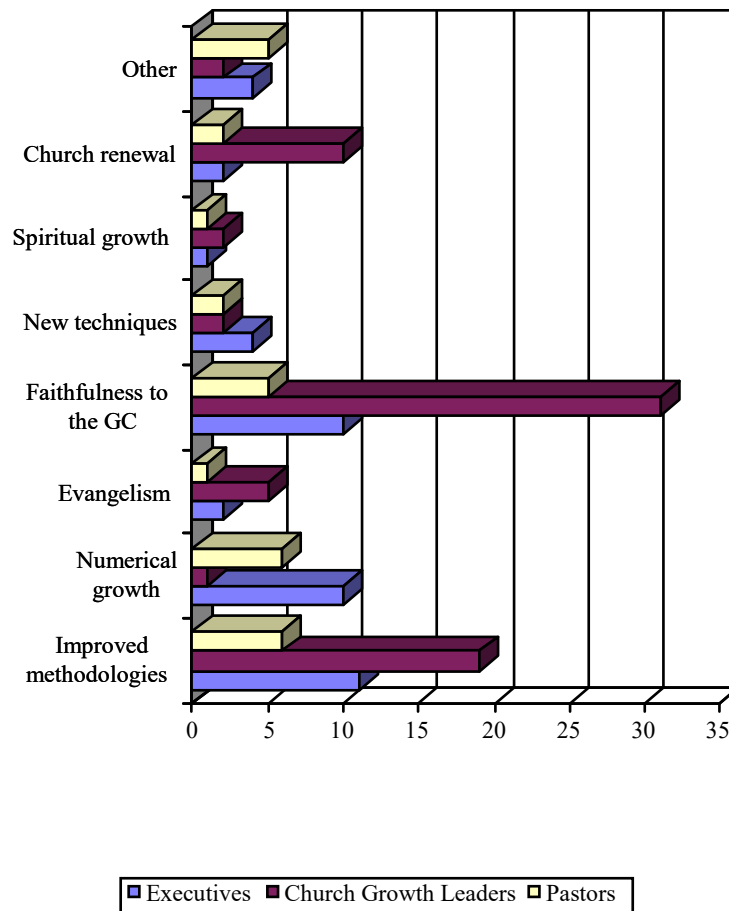
5. Would you say you are more interested or less interested in the Church Growth Movement today than five years ago?



Only church growth leaders say they have a higher degree of interest in church growth over five years ago with 42% checking more interested. Pastors are almost exactly opposite with 41% checking less interested. Church executives also appear less interested with 50% checking same and 33% checking less interested.

6. In your opinion, the Church Growth Movement is best defined as:





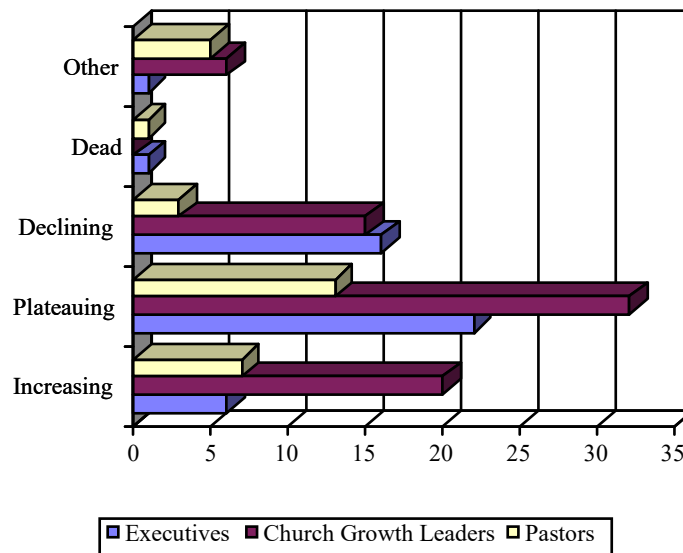
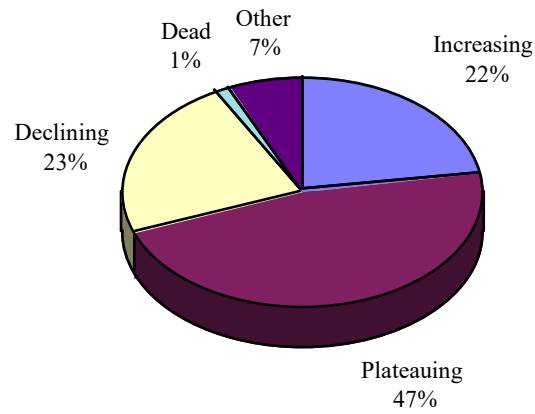
Pastors tend to define church growth as improved methods (21%), numerical growth (21%) and faithfulness to the Great Commission (18%).

Church executives paralleled the pastors with 25% saying improved methods, 23% choosing numerical growth and 23% selecting faithfulness to the Great Commission.

In contrast, church growth leaders overwhelmingly see church growth as faithfulness to the Great Commission (43%) with 26% selecting improved methods.



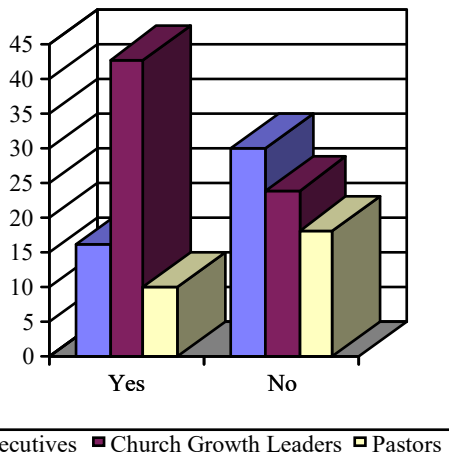
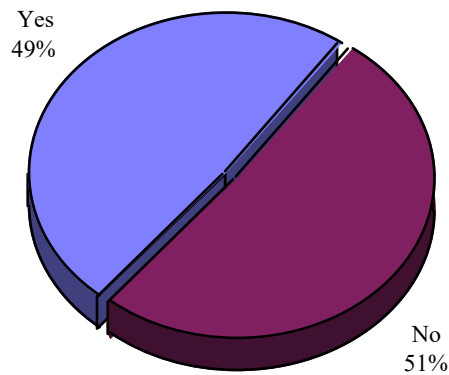
7. As you see it, the Church Growth Movement in the 1990s is:



Most people in each category feel the Church Growth Movement is plateauing. Fifty percent of the executives, 48% of the church growth leaders and 57% of the pastors selected this option. Not surprisingly, 30% of the church growth leaders sense

the movement is increasing, as do 30% of the pastors. Executives seem to be the most pessimistic with 36% feeling that the movement is declining.

**8. Have you ever used a church growth consultant?**



This question resulted in a near perfect split with 49% of all respondents noting they have used a consultant and 51% not having used one. Only one third of executives have used a church growth consultant presumably because they serve as the consultant in most cases. Church growth leaders have used the

largest number of consultants with two-thirds (64%) having used a consultant at sometime in the past. Thirty-six percent of the pastors have used a church growth consultant.

A total of 23 individuals and 8 organizations were named as consultants which respondents had used in the past. The first five individuals and organizations mentioned are listed below with the number of times they were mentioned.

Individuals

- Carl George (6)
- Dan Reeves (4)
- Lyle Schaller (3)
- John Maxwell (3)
- Win Arn (3)

Organizations

- Fuller Institute (15)
- Denominational office (12)
- Denver Seminary (2)
- Ch. Growth Center, Hunter (2)
- Five mentioned once each

**9. What organizations are setting the agenda in the Church Growth Movement today?**

A total of 29 different organizations were listed. Of them Fuller Institute was the leader. The first ten organizations are listed below with the number of times mentioned.

- Fuller Institute (67)
- Willow Creek (24)
- Fuller Seminary (20)
- Denominations (17)
- INJOY (13)
- Church Growth Institute, Lynchburg (12)
- Barna Research (11)
- Large Churches (10)
- American Society for Ch. Growth (6)
- Alban Institute (5)

**10. Who are the three most influential church growth leaders in the United States today?**

A total of 44 different individuals were listed by all the respondents.

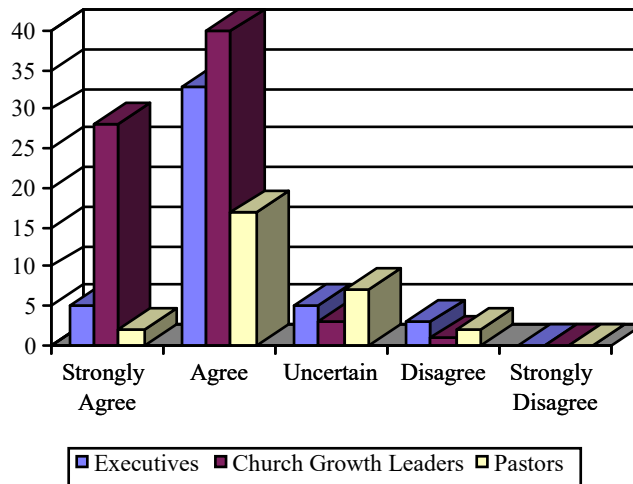
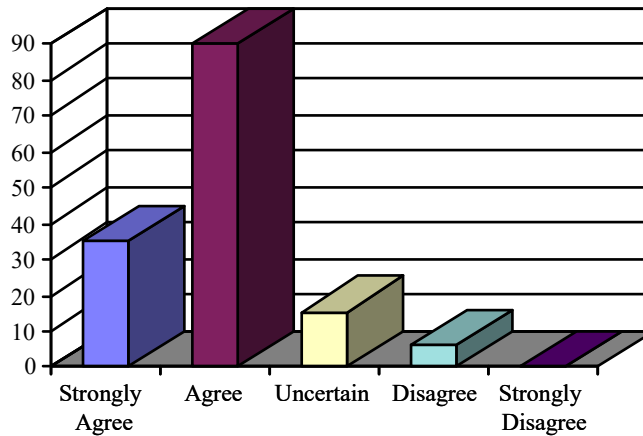
Of those listed, Carl George and C. Peter Wager were mentioned the most followed by Bill Hybels, Lyle Schaller, George Barna and John Maxwell. The first 15 are listed below with the number of times they were mentioned.

- Carl F. George (62)

- 
- C. Peter Wagner (46)
  - Bill Hybels (38)
  - John Maxwell (24)
  - Lyle Schaller (23)
  - George Barna (22)
  - Elmer Towns (13)
  - Rick Warren (13)
  - Robert Logan (10)
  - Leith Anderson (7)
  - George Hunter III (6)
  - Gary L. McIntosh (6)
  - Win Arn (5)
  - Robert Schuller (4)
  - John Vaughan (3)

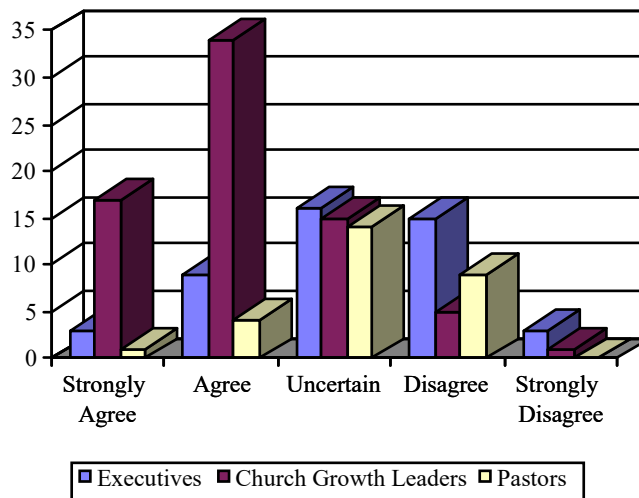
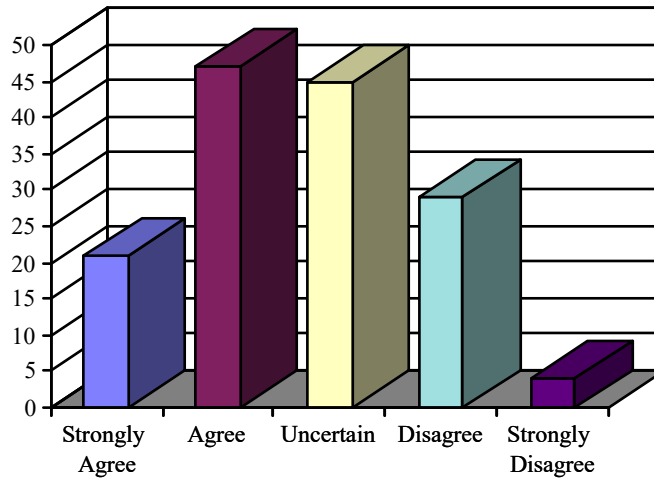
*Opinion Questions*

- Churches which use church growth principles experience greater numerical growth than those which do not use church growth principles.**



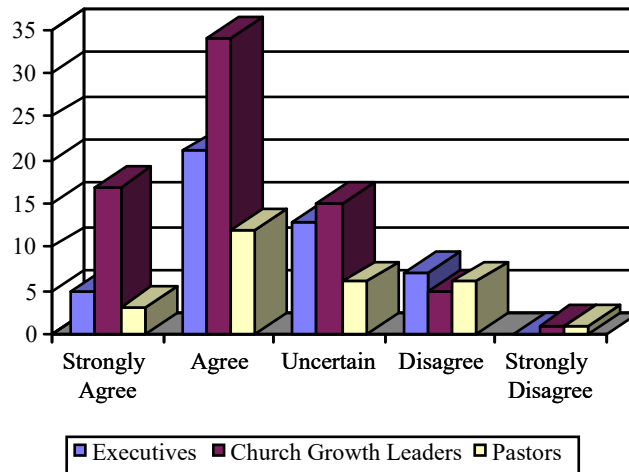
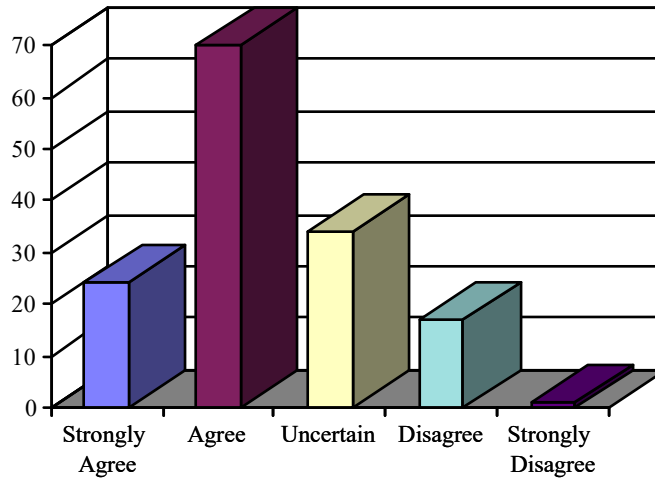
A total of 86% of all respondents strongly agree or agree with this statement. Apparently most feel that using church growth principles does directly affect a church's growth potential. This question had the highest percentage of agreement among all the opinion questions.

2. Churches which use church growth principles experience greater spiritual growth than those which do not use church growth principles.



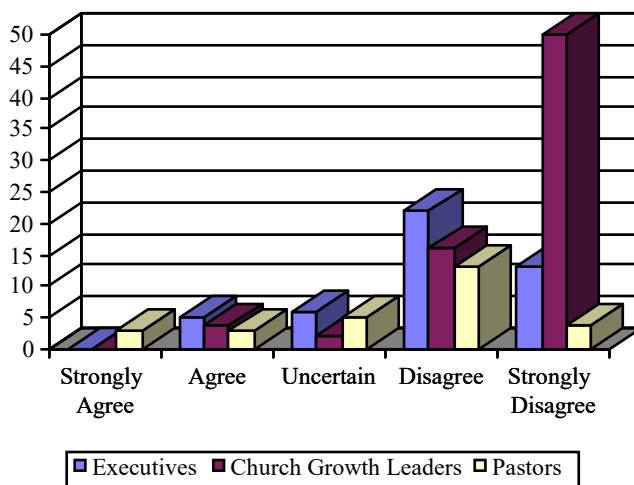
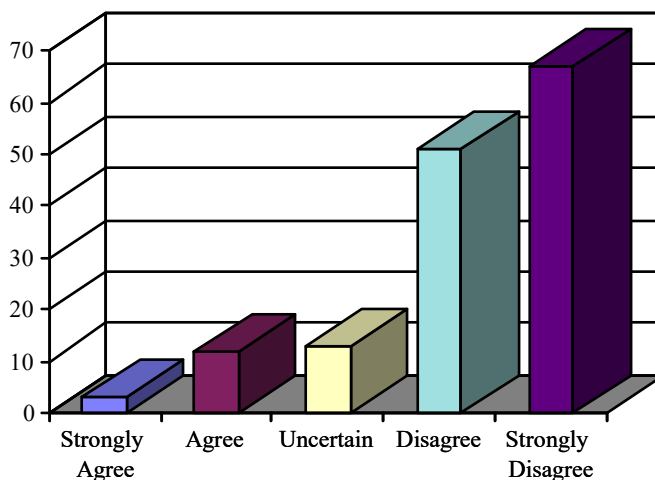
As one might expect, church growth leaders (71%) feel that churches not only experience greater numerical growth but also greater spiritual growth when they use church growth principles. However, pastors and executives are much more ambivalent about the issue and lean toward disagreement.

**3. Church leaders who attend church growth seminars and workshops are more effective than those who do not attend such training events.**



Each group tends to agree that leaders who attend church growth training seminars and workshops are more effective than those who do not. Over half of each group—Executives (59%), Church Growth Leaders (73%) and Pastors (54%)—strongly agree or agree with this statement.

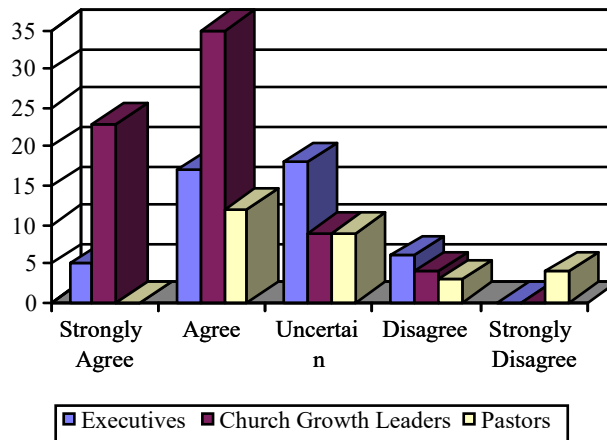
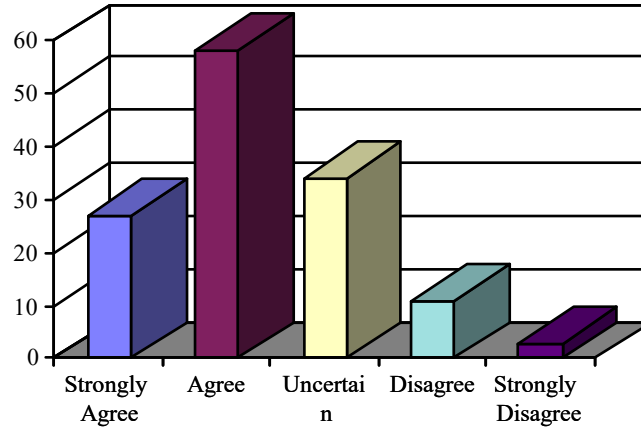
**4. The Church Growth Movement is an unbiblical accommodation to our secular culture.**



Almost all respondents (81%) disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Most believe that the Church Growth Movement is biblically based and **NOT** an accommodation to secular culture. This question was one of only four which received a percentage agreement among all groups above the 80 percentile.

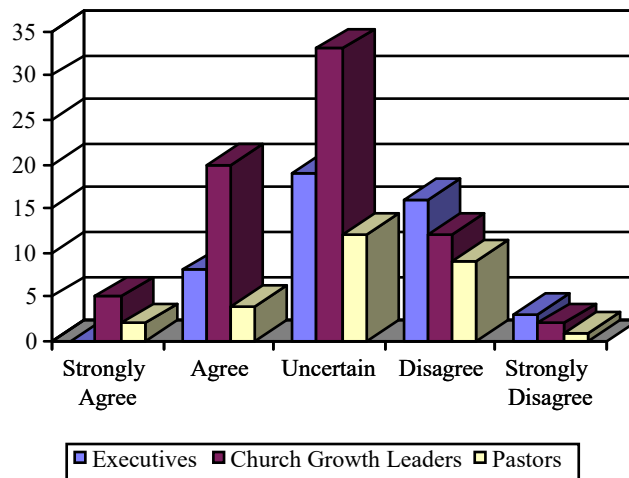
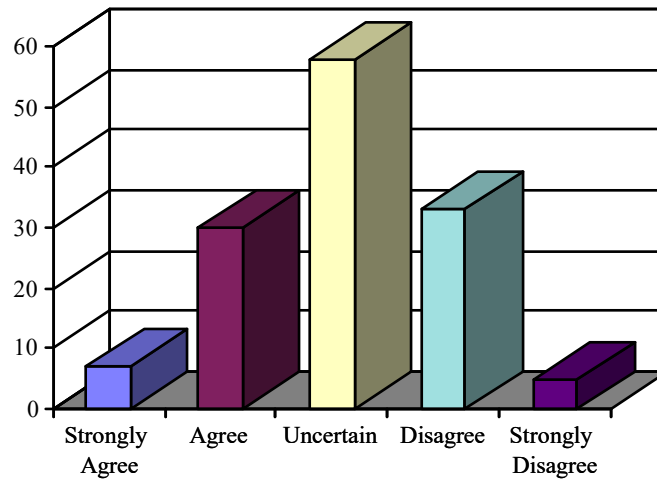


**5. Obtaining the services of a church growth consultant is a worthwhile investment for a local church or parish.**



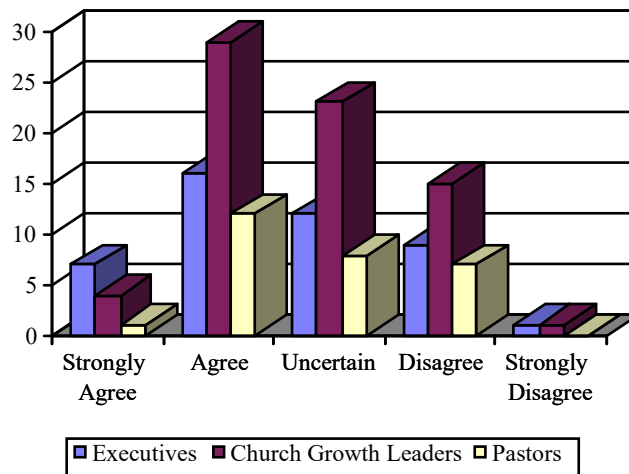
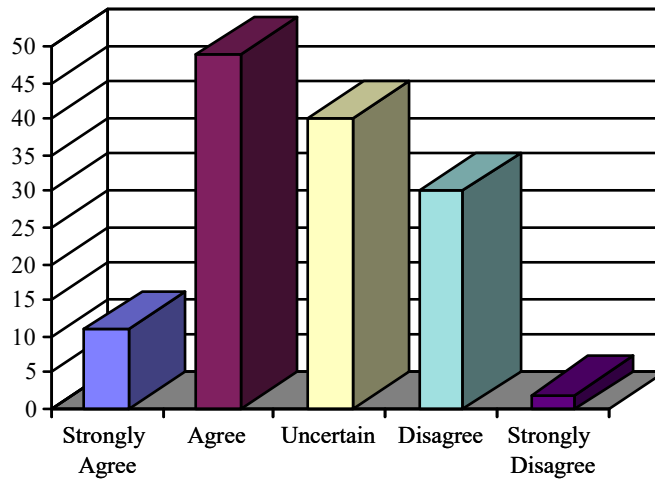
There is a generally high agreement (63%) from all three groups that obtaining the services of a church growth consultant is a worthwhile investment. Church growth leaders are totally convinced of this fact (81%). Executives are more uncertain (39%) but still show strong agreement (48%). Just less than half of the pastors are in agreement (43%) but continue to be the most doubtful group with 25% in the disagree categories.

6. The Church Growth Movement will be more influential in five years than it is today.



There is significant doubt surrounding this question. Church leaders from all three groups are unsure as to the future influence of the Church Growth Movement. Executives appear to have the most doubts (42%) with church growth leaders being the most positive (35%).

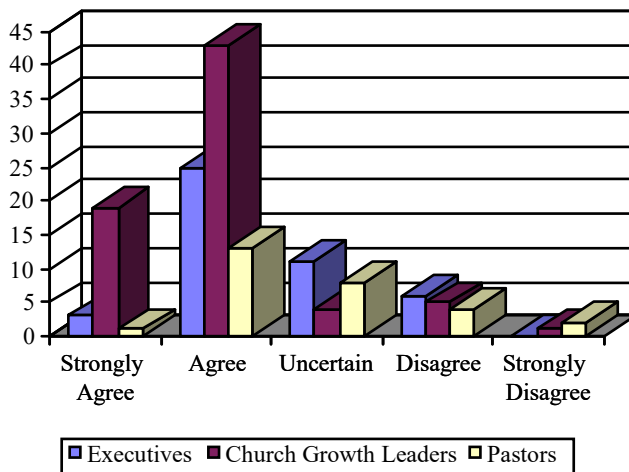
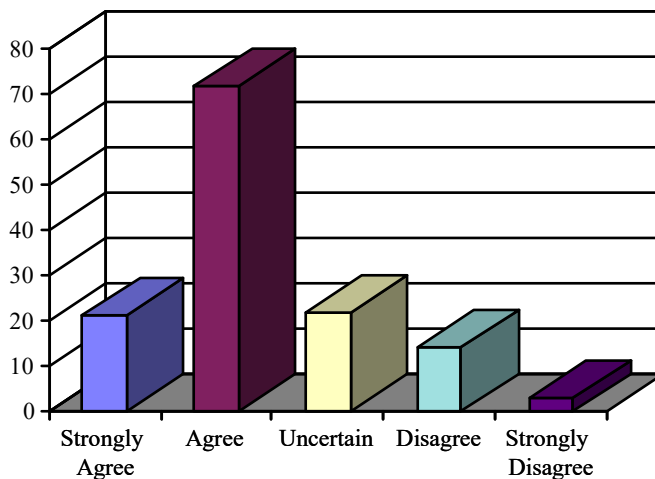
**7. Small churches feel ignored by the Church Growth Movement.**



All three groups had roughly the same percentages on this question. Essentially 47% of each group agreed that smaller churches feel ignored by the Church Growth Movement while 23% disagreed.

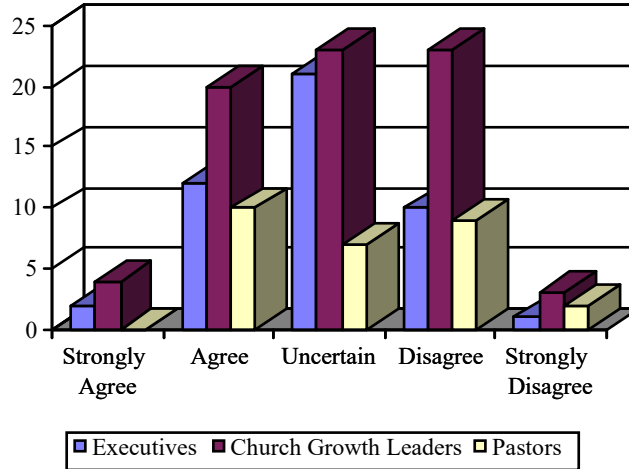
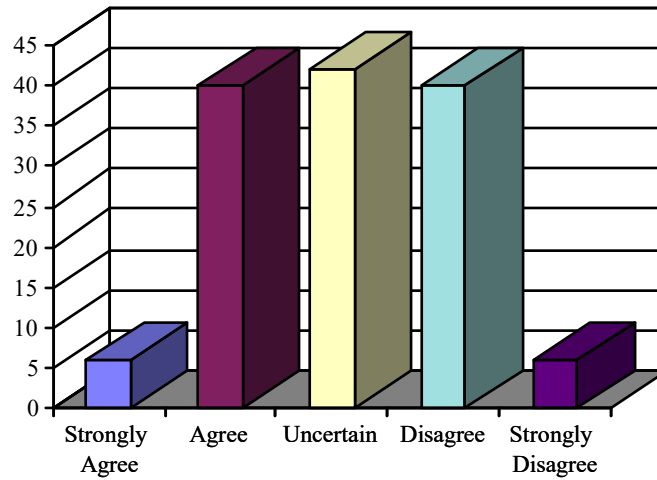
**8. The Church Growth Movement is a positive force among**

**churches in the United States.**



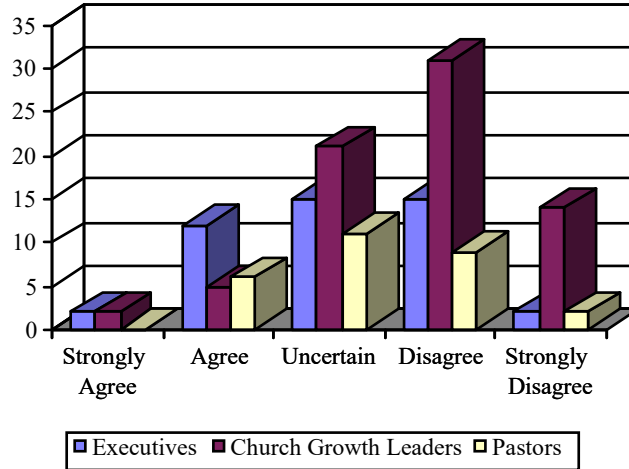
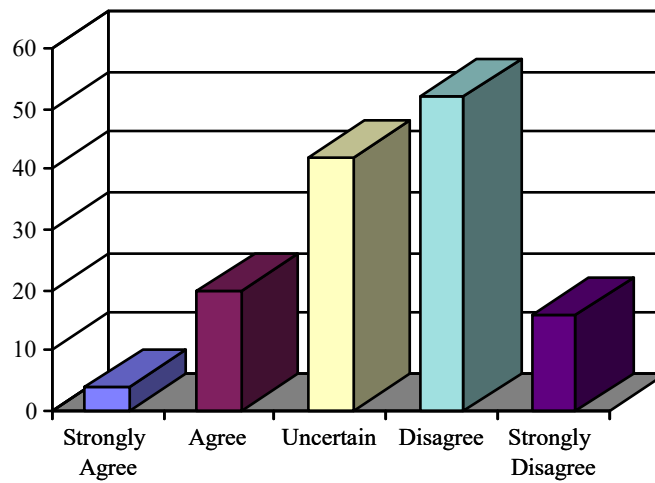
Seventy-one percent of all three groups agree that the Church Growth Movement is a positive force among churches in the United States. As usual, church growth leaders expressed the most positive view (86%) with 50% of the pastors and 62% of the executives also in agreement.

9. Fewer people will be attending church growth training events five years from now than are doing so today.



This question was the most evenly matched among all three groups surveyed. Exactly 33% of the total responders agreed, 33% disagreed with 33% uncertain. Neither group is clear on the future of church growth training events.

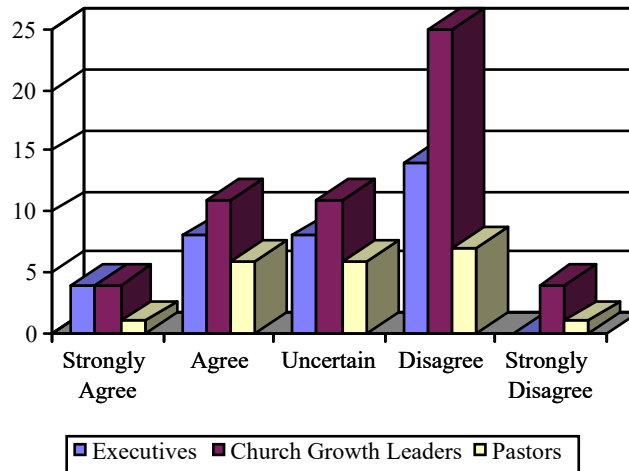
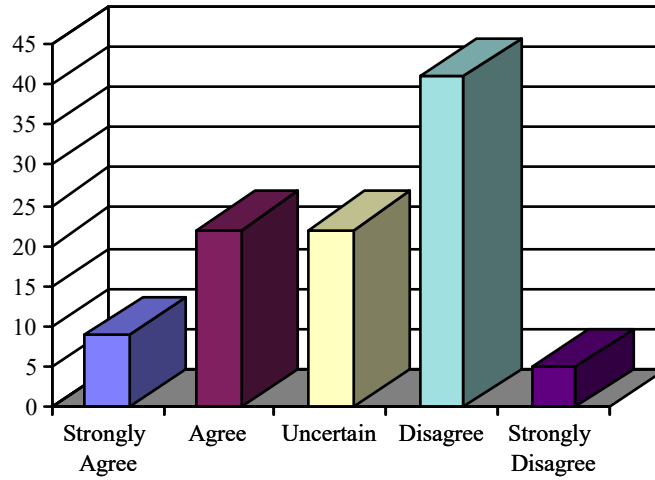
**10. The Church Growth Movement is a fad which has had its day and is now losing its influence.**



Forty-one percent of all respondents disagree with this question. However, some degree of uncertainty exists with 18% agreeing and 32% unsure if the Church Growth Movement is a passing fad. Eighty-four percent of the church growth leaders feel strongly that the Church Growth Movement is NOT simply

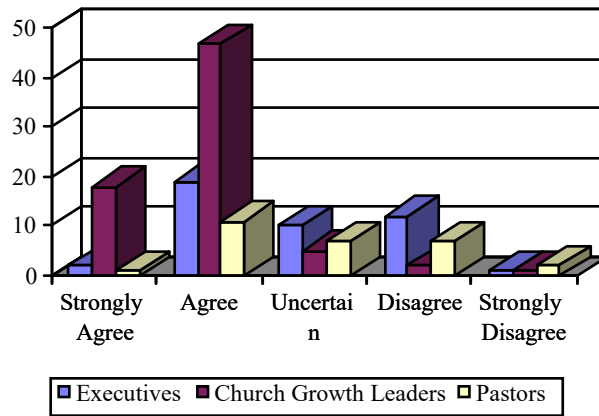
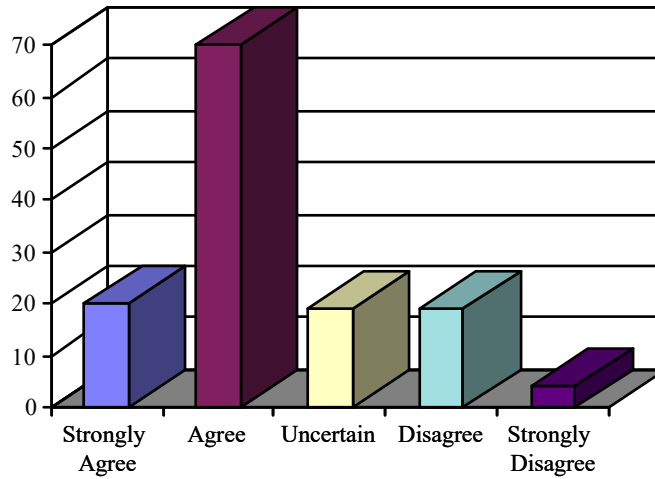
a passing fad.

**11. The Church Growth Movement is more helpful to larger churches than to smaller ones.**



Approximately one-third of all respondents perceive the movement as more helpful to larger churches than to smaller ones. However, 46% believe the movement is equally helpful to all sizes of churches.

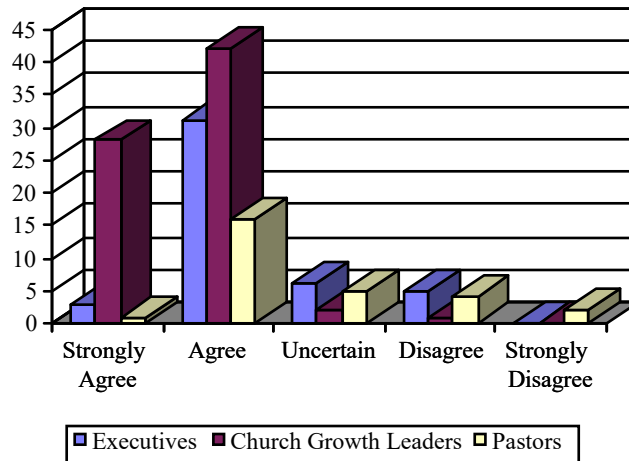
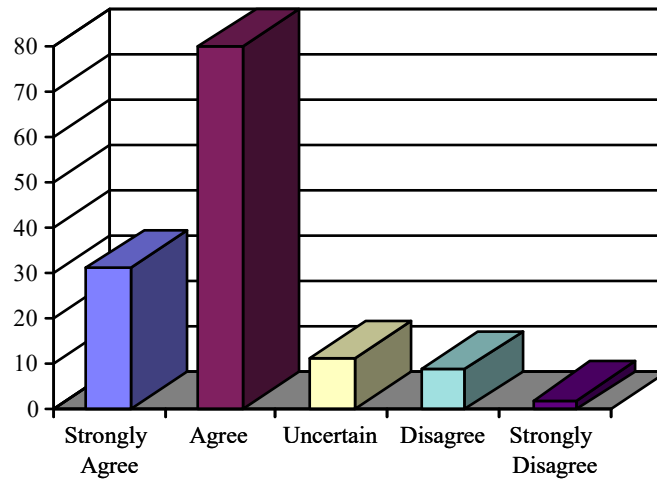
**12. The Church Growth Movement is theologically sound.**



Sixty-eight percent of all respondents believe the Church Growth Movement to be theologically sound. Church growth leaders indicate a higher agreement (89%) than either executives (48%) or pastors (43%).

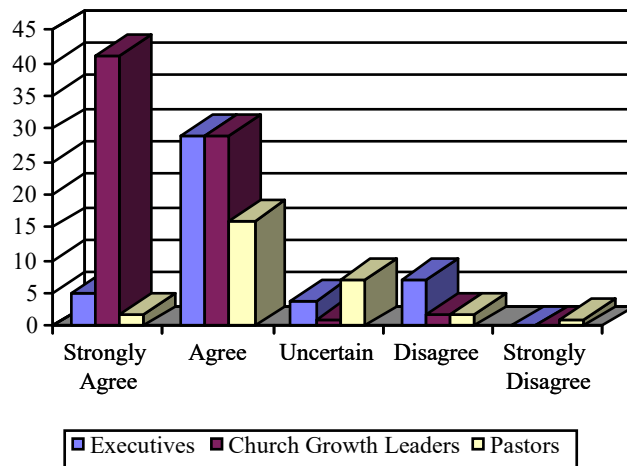
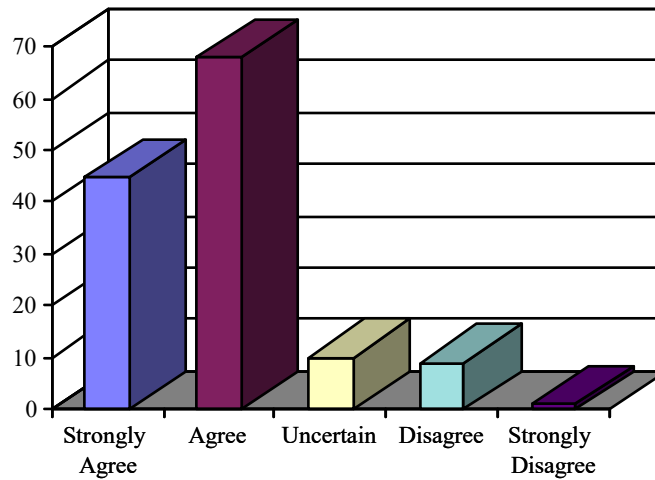


**13. Overall, the Church Growth Movement is beneficial to churches.**



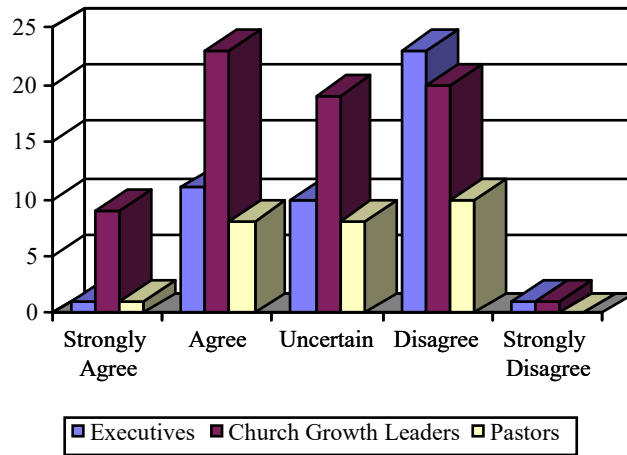
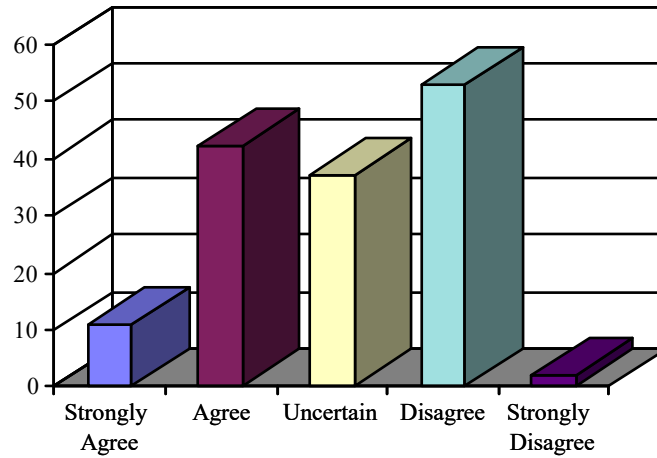
This was one of the questions with strongest agreement among all three groups. Eight-three percent of all respondents agree or strongly agree that the Church Growth Movement is beneficial to churches.

**14. Pastors and church leaders should be encouraged to study church growth principles and use them in their churches.**



Once again all three groups are in strong agreement with this question. A total of 84% of all participants in the survey agree that church leaders should be encouraged to study church growth principles.

**15. My ministry colleagues are more interested in the Church Growth Movement today than they were five years ago.**



Church executives show strong disagreement with this question and pastors are divided in their opinion. Only church growth leaders feel their colleagues are more interested in the Church Growth Movement today over five years ago. Even 29% of church growth leaders sense that colleagues are less interested in church growth. The totals of all three groups are fairly evenly divided with 37% in agreement, 25% uncertain and 38% in disagreement.

*Implications of the Study*

*Implication #1: The Church Growth Movement is a viable movement.*

The study revealed that interest in the movement remains high with three-fourths (74%) of all respondents indicating more interest or the same interest compared to five years ago. In addition there is significant agreement among all respondents that the Church Growth Movement is highly beneficial to churches and that a study of its principles increases potential for church growth. Practically no one is ready to declare the Church Growth Movement dead. Slightly more than half of all respondents registered disagreement with the thought of the movement being considered a fad which is losing influence.

*Implication #2: The Church Growth Movement is worthy of study.*

One of the main points of agreement among all respondents to the survey was that it is worthwhile to study and use church growth principles. Almost all (84%) agreed that church leaders should be encouraged to study church growth. While not obtaining the same percentage of agreement, most felt (64%) that church leaders who attend church growth workshops or seminars tend to be more effective in their ministry.

*Implication #3: The Church Growth Movement is theologically sound.*

While a few respondents to the survey noted some questions regarding certain aspects of the Church Growth Movement, one of the four prime areas of agreement was that the movement is a biblically based, theologically sound movement.

*Implication #4: The Church Growth Movement is misunderstood.*

The term "Church Growth," as coined by Donald A. McGavran, means "all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership." (Wagner 1976, rev. ed. 1984:14)

Church growth leaders understand that the primary definition of Church Growth is "fulfillment of the Great Commission." It technically is "a contemporary missiological movement stressing a scientific approach to planting, multiplying, nurturing and

renewing growth in local churches. It is based on a pragmatic analysis of existing churches and emphasizes numerical growth as an indication of church health. Its methodology advocates commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and obedience to His Great Commission to "make disciples of all the nations."

However, the movement continues to suffer from the perception that its primary focus is on improving existing methods and achieving numerical growth. Pastors selected those two definitions of church growth over faithfulness to the Great Commission. Executives likewise selected improved methods over faithfulness to the Great Commission as their main definition. And, even though church growth leaders understand that faithfulness to the Great Commission is the primary definition, one-fourth of them chose improved methods as the prime definition of church growth.

*Implication #5: The Church Growth Movement is in transition.*

While there are strong positive feelings about the Church Growth Movement today, there exists a certain ambiguity regarding its future. Three opinion questions were designed specifically to reveal respondent's perspectives on the future of the movement. Each of these questions appeared to puzzle those completing the survey. Specifically, there are doubts concerning the level of influence which the movement will wield in the future. There are questions as to the future of training events such as seminars and workshops. And, there is confusion as to whether colleagues are interested in the movement. This ambiguity appears to be related to the following.

*The loss of focus*

The Church Growth Movement is diversifying into a number of different areas. During its first forty years, the movement specialized on research and application of church growth principles. Today it is diversifying into a number of subspecializations such as church planting, marketing, seeker sensitive methodologies, cell groups, meta church models, prayer, spiritual warfare, generational studies, church renewal, church leadership and management, conflict management, change agency, long-range planning and others.

Related to this diversification is the number of organizations identified as part of the Church Growth Movement. For example,

the following were mentioned in the survey as church growth organizations: Campus Crusade for Christ, Renewal Magazine, Dallas Seminary, Leadership Network, Son Life and Serendipity. Each of these ministries are no doubt helpful to the cause of Christ, but they are not directly part of the Church Growth Movement.

One person noted that "The clear focus suggested by 'movement' may have passed, but these related issues will keep interest in church growth in general alive." While, these subspecializations are compatible with the Church Growth Movement, they do represent a subtle shift away from a clear, central focus. This may lead to a diluting of the movement so that it shoots at every target and hits none. It seems apparent that the conceptual broadening of the Church Growth Movement to embrace more and more subspecializations has to some extent created an ambiguity in the movement today.

*The lack of a clear spokesperson*

Any viable movement has someone who is viewed as the main spokesperson. It is this individual's role to communicate and guard the purpose, core values and beliefs of the movement. For a majority of the first forty years of the Church Growth Movement, the key spokesperson was Donald McGavran. He was the soul of the movement who personified its values, epitomized its strength and motivated its followers.

Today, however, this role seems to be vacant which adds to the ambiguity of the movement. As one person commented, "The initial church growth movement and emphasis is dead. The new growth emphasis is alive and almost underground with some gurus but no apostle."

*The selection of new heroes*

All great movements anoint some of their peers in recognition that they embody the movement's ethic of success. These "heroes" provide role models to those inside the movement and symbolize the movement to those outside of it. They set a standard of performance, preserve the core values and motivate the followers of the movement. Of necessity, for a movement to continue strong into the future, new heroes must be anointed. This action is taking place in the Church Growth Movement and the process of transitioning from old heroes to new ones may be tied

to a certain amount of ambiguity in the meanwhile.

A comparison of the most influential church growth leaders from prior years with those today reveals some interesting factors. Seven new names currently appear on the list that were not on the original. The only names to appear on both lists are C. Peter Wagner, Win Arn, Carl George, Bill Hybels, Lyle Schaller, Elmer Towns, John Maxwell and Robert Schuller. And, a quick glance at these names points out that more heroes will need to be anointed over the next ten years or so.

The original list of 15 heroes included four pastors from mega churches. Today's list has five pastors of mega churches. The original list included eight professors. Today's list includes only five professors. Mega church pastors are being anointed to hero status in more significant numbers by the leaders of today's Church Growth Movement.

*The formation of new delivery systems*

Important to the growth of any movement is the means to communicate its message to those outside the movement. In the early years this was primarily accomplished through Fuller Theological Seminary, various institutes or centers for church growth, a few para church ministries and larger churches conducting their own seminars.

Of the original list of 15 influential organizations, nine continue to function with six new organizations coming into play. One of the most effective methodologies for communicating church growth principles during the first 15 years of the movement was local and national seminars. However, there appears to be fewer people attending seminars today forcing such organizations to look to new means of communication. The recent foray into the use of satellite communications by the former Fuller Institute is a clear example of this attempt to find a new form of communication and create visibility in an informational age.

*The lack of a coordinated organization*

In the early years a movement often runs on emotion. However, as the movement matures it must begin to develop a coordinated effort built around a strategic plan to remain effective. The Church Growth Movement has yet to develop a central strategic core remaining sort of a loose affiliation of interested parties.

Likewise, powerful movements celebrate their purpose and core values with a grand festival or extravaganza. This event provides drama, entertainment, awards and pageantry. No movement lasts very long without ceremony. The Church Growth Movement has never had a central festival where its followers have met to celebrate their unity of purpose and pride of involvement together in a great mission. In the early years of the movement's history, this sense of extravaganza was accomplished through large seminars or other similar types of events. With today's lower attendance at seminars, there is a need for some point of contact where the followers of church growth can recharge their passion for the movement.

The obvious place for this to take place is the annual American Society for Church Growth meetings. Unfortunately, the quality of the meetings in the first ten years of its existence has not always met the requirements to be a true extravaganza. If the current movement toward subspecialization continues, the Church Growth Movement will need such an event to survive.

#### *Recommendations*

*1. We need someone to step forward as the chief spokesperson for the movement.*

Who can ever forget the lectures of Dr. Donald McGavran as he reminded us of the need to fulfill the Great Commission by taking the Gospel to all the nations? He not only was the Father of the Church Growth Movement, but our priest as well. It was he who called us to our purpose and defined our core values. Without someone filling that role the Church Growth Movement is in danger of losing its sense of purpose and vision.

*2. We need to communicate the purpose of the Church Growth Movement.*

It seems painfully clear that many continue to see the Church Growth Movement in light of methods and numerical growth rather than as fulfilling the Great Commission. This will likely be an ongoing battle that needs to be fought in every message and presentation. Without this foundational, theological stance, the movement will eventually fall into the waste basket of worn and used methodologies.

*3. We need to make the American Society for Church Growth*



*annual meetings the show place of the movement.*

All vital movements have extravaganzas that provide for networking, declaration of core values and renewal of passion for the cause. This means a commitment on our behalf to be at the ASCG meetings every year. It means raising the quality of the meetings so that something significant takes place in terms of lectures and presentations. It means making our presidential banquet an exciting and attractive event.

*4. We need to assertively recruit new members into the ASCG.*

This means targeting those who are most interested in our focus—professors and church executives. Our second target group are senior pastors who are interested in networking with other leaders in the Church Growth Movement. It especially means recruiting the heroes of our movement who are setting the agenda for church growth thinking. Of the 15 names listed as the most influential in the Church Growth Movement, only one-third regularly attend the ASCG annual meeting.

*5. We need to turn the Journal of American Church Growth into a significant publication.*

This means publishing the journal on a dependable time schedule. It means moving into a quarterly periodical as quickly as possible. It means aggressive marketing to obtain new subscriptions from professors, executives, libraries and other church leaders.

*6. We need to create forms of communication that are effective in our informational society.*

This means developing computer bulletin boards, providing up-to-date videos, distributing resource articles over FAX machines and exploring other means of communications.

*7. We need to clarify the focus of the movement.*

This means defining the boundaries of what is and is not part of the Church Growth Movement. It means clarifying our mission, core values and vision. To do otherwise will cause the movement to face continual ambiguity as further specialization and subspecialization continues.

*8. We need to publish articles in magazines and journals of*

*significance.*

This means moving beyond denominational publications, in house pieces and personal newsletters into the mainstream of national periodicals. It means creating a national platform for communicating the mission, core values and passion of the Church Growth Movement. It also means a commitment to the work of publication by more members of the ASCG, perhaps with a goal of one book every five years and one article every year.

*9. We need to raise the quality of our research.*

This means entering into extensive research that is well funded, of high validity and unquestionable accuracy. It means working together on national surveys conducted by qualified researchers. It may even mean the establishment of a common center for church growth research.

*Conclusion*

The purpose of this article has been to explore current thinking about the Church Growth Movement through the use of a survey mailed to three different groups of church leaders. The Church Growth Movement was forty years old in 1995. It is clear that the movement has been a vital force in churches throughout the world and in the United States during those years. As we look back from the mid point of the 1990s, it seems obvious that the Church Growth Movement has come into its own.

Predictably, the movement is facing typical dangers encountered by similar movements. With the loss of its founder, the closing of some of its key institutions and the trend toward sub-specialization of ministry, it is in danger of losing its focus and core values.

It was found that all groups surveyed felt very positive about the movement. High percentages agreed that church growth principles do help churches grow and that the movement has been of great benefit to churches. All respondents strongly recommended that church leaders be encouraged to study the Church Growth Movement and its principles for church growth. In addition, while there were points of disagreement among all participants, there was high agreement that the movement is theologically sound.

Even with this strong level of support for the movement,

there exists an ambivalence about the movement's future. This feeling appears to be due to a number of factors such as the diversity of ministries claiming to be under the church growth banner, the loss of focus in the recent death of the founder, the lack of a strong central organizing association and the transition to new spokespersons for the movement.

It is hoped that these thoughts will launch a serious appraisal and strategic analysis of the future of the Church Growth Movement which will result in a strengthened movement helping to fulfill the Great Commission.

Writer

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