

GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Engaging Your Community

The first century church was in a very unwelcoming culture. And yet, the church thrived. How? The church infiltrated the culture as yeast does to dough. This is how the Kingdom of God works. Jesus pointed this out when he asked, "What else is the Kingdom of God like? It is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough" (Luke 13:20-21 NLT).

It is through community engagement a church becomes yeast. When a church inserts itself in the culture as Christ's representative, things begin to change. How does this actually take place? There are three basic approaches to community engagement:

Come and See

This approach focuses on bringing people through the church doors. Its emphasis is on attracting people. It is event-oriented and program-driven. The *come and see* approach is exemplified by:

- The church viewing itself as a purveyor of religious goods and services.
- The church bringing people out of the culture into the church.

- The church prioritizing resources (time, energy, funds) on programs and property.
- The church focusing on increasing week-end participation and gaining members.

Go and Be

This approach to community engagement focuses on sending people into the community. One pastor reported, "Our goal is not to get people into our church, our goal is to equip people to go out from our church." A church invests beyond itself.

The *go and be* approach actively serves in the community. This service dynamic is not designed to get those served into the church building. Instead it is about getting the church out. The simple approach of serving people in practical ways in the community is the most effective means of

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connecting your church with the community God has placed you.

The *go & be* approach is exemplified by:

- Sending people out of the church into the community
- Equipping people as missionaries for the culture in which they reside
- Engaging people where they are, not where it is preferred they will be

Go and Bring

As it is with most things in life, seldom do extremes fully satisfy. And, when it comes to community engagement, it is no different. The key to community engagement is often found in balance. It is finding that blend of coming in and going out.

James Clear in his article, *The Goldilocks Rule: How to Stay Motivated in Life and Business*, states: “Humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities. Not too hard. Not too easy. Just right.” The *go and bring* approach is exemplified by:

- Mobilizing to be sent
- Going into culture/community
- Bringing people in
- Building people up
- Sending people out

In Chapter One of the Gospel of John there is a wonderful story that exemplifies the *go and bring* process of community engagement. Philip’s life was drastically impacted by his encounter with Jesus. As a result of this encounter, “Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth. ‘Nazareth!’ exclaimed Nathanael. ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ ‘Come and see for yourself,’ Philip replied” (John 1:45-46 NLT).

Philip went to look for Nathanael. He did not extend an invite to meet him someplace. He went to him. This is **going**. He engaged Nathanael where he was. He shared his story using a common ground connection. It was only after this that he invited Nathanael to join him. This is **bringing**.

The *go & bring* approach views the location of the faith community as a hub of strengthening Christ followers to be sent out. The church is both gathered and scattered. Let’s start living out and being the gathered community of God’s people, sent out into the world. Let the church engage the community!

Adapted from Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church by Gary L. McIntosh and Phil Stevenson. Available now from your favorite store.

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Building the Body *12 Characteristics* *of a Fit Church*

Just as physically, healthy people might not actually be fit enough to run a 5K, so churches can appear healthy—with no obvious issues, maintaining a healthy size—but not exhibit fitness.

A fit church is one that is not satisfied with merely coasting along with no problems. A fit church is actively making disciples, maturing in faith, developing strong leaders, reaching out to the community, and more.

Building the Body unveils the twelve characteristics of fit churches and shows pastors and church leaders how to move their church through five levels of fitness, from beginner all the way to elite.

Here's what others are saying

“Building the Body powerfully draws on the biblical imagery of the church while taking the concept of church health to a whole new level. Becoming fit is presented in a way that motivates rather than produces guilt, and the combination of principles and practices applies to churches at all levels of development.” — Wayne Schmidt, general superintendent, the Wesleyan Church

“Practical steps to the next level—that’s what this book offers. Wherever your church lies along a continuum of twelve factors (e.g., outreach, stewardship, worship, disciple making), McIntosh and Stevenson give concrete strategies for advancing to the next level . . . and then the next level . . . and then the next level.”

—Donald R. Sunukjian, chair, department of Christian ministry and leadership, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“A practical, informative, doable resource for leaders and churches who want not only to get better but also to get as strong or fit as possible for the good of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.”

—Jim Dunn, vice president of church relations, Wesleyan Investment Foundation

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“All fit churches are healthy, but not all healthy churches are fit.”

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