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# GROWTH POINTS

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

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## Pastoring a Growing Church

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Leading a growing church is challenging for many reasons. One of the major ones is the reality that a pastor must change roles as the church becomes larger.

### *A Two-fold Problem*

The problem is two-fold. First, many pastors do not realize they must change roles as the church grows larger. For example, smaller churches require a pastor who operates in the relational role of a caregiver. He is viewed as everyone's friend who, of course, knows everyone by name. As a church becomes medium-sized, the pastor's role must change to that of an administrator who takes care of the newly enlarged program. When a church becomes even larger, the pastor again must change roles to that of a leader who casts vision for the future, while managing an ever growing staff and complex ministry. Churches often have the potential to grow larger. However, the pastor keeps the church artificially small due to either a lack of knowledge on how to change or a lack of willingness to change roles.

Second, smaller congregations usually resist the change in a pastor's

role. They often interpret a change in role as abandoning them. For example, in a smaller church a pastor may maintain an open study policy. Members of the congregation are encouraged to drop into the pastor's office whenever they desire to talk or go to coffee. Then, as a church grows into medium-size, the pastor may change to an appointment only policy in an effort to control the demands on his time. People who have previously been able to walk into the pastor's office at any time are offended by having to make an appointment.

### *A Process for Role Change*

Prioritize the use of time. As a church grows from smaller to medium-sized to larger, a pastor must take better control of his time. To get things done this means he will have to set boundaries, such as, office hours, limited time for counseling, protected time for study, etc.

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Educate the congregation on the pastor's changing role so that the people will gain understanding. Clear communication to the people, as to why he cannot be as available as he was in the past, is crucial. This fact has to be shared in multiply ways: sermons, private conversations, small gatherings, etc. As an example, I recall hearing one pastor say to the congregation from the pulpit, "You may be thinking 'Isn't it the pastor's job to visit us in the hospital?' Folks, it's just not possible. The church is too large for me to care for everyone." The pastor said this over and over through many different means until the people began to understand.

Replace the pastor with other leaders the people in the congregation can see. People don't like the idea of not seeing the main leader. As a lead pastor changes roles, the people must have other credible leaders step into visibility so they can get a meaningful audience with a person in authority. This is a fact that pastor's often overlook when seeking to change roles.

Note the pattern found in Exodus 18:13-27 as an example of how to go about doing this.

Step #1: Identify and clarify the problem (vs. 13-18).

Moses judged the people from morning to evening. He was the visible leader that everyone wanted to talk to about their specific problems. However, the work was overwhelming and people became frustrated. The problem was identified and clarified, and Moses realized he was doing too much.

Step #2: Ask others for help (v. 14).

It took another person to point out the problem and solution to Moses. Jethro began by asking questions (What are you doing? Why do you alone sit as judge?) in order to gain perspective and involve Moses in the process of problem identification. Note the major problem was that Moses viewed himself as indispensable.

Step #3: Outline a solution and plan (19-27).

Moses found the answer was to replace himself with credible leaders who were available to the people. He determined his own priorities (You must be the people's representative before God, v. 19); He established recruiting criteria (trustworthy men who fear God and hate dishonest gain, v. 21); He trained them (Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform, v. 20); He communicated the organizational structure (thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, v. 21); and He communicated their level of authority (The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves, v. 26).

Some of the keys to the growth and maturity of the nation of Israel as illustrated in this passage were God's favor on the people, the leader's recognition of his inability to do all the work, and the leader's willingness to recruit, train, and deploy a workforce that could meet the needs of the people.

In a very similar way, for lead pastors to change roles as a church grows larger, they must recognize God's favor found in the growth of His church, accept their own inability to do everything, and empower other leaders to take proper responsibility.

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### *FACULTY-MENTORS*

**DR. GARY MCINTOSH** is Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot. He has served as a consultant for hundreds of churches in North America. Dr. McIntosh is also the Founder and President of the Church Growth Network, which provides a wide range of professional consulting services in the areas of church growth analysis, strategic planning, and generational change. He is the editor of the Growth Points newsletter. Having published over 300 articles and written over 25 books, he is a prolific writer and church growth expert.

**DR. ALAN MCMAHAN** has served in churches in North America and on the Pacific Rim. He has also taught in the areas of missiology, church growth, leadership, organizational development and evangelism. He has been active in training undergraduate and graduate students including mid-career professionals, Bible school teachers, pastors, and denominational leaders through the U.S., Canada, and much of Southeast Asia in the effective means to develop leaders and grow churches. He has served as Vice President for the Alliance Theological Seminary and as the Academic Dean at the King's College in mid-town Manhattan. He and his wife, Terri, have two sons, Billy and Jonathan, and live in La Mirada, CA.

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