

Is this Church Growing?

By Rick Brumback

It is exciting to be a part of a congregation that is growing in the work of the Lord! Rats jump sinking ships, but everyone wants to be a part of a success story.

It is important that we understand how to measure the growth of a congregation as we assess how we are progressing in our labors for the Master. Many times one will judge growth by the number of people who are attending services. While it is encouraging to have a growing number meeting to study and worship, a headcount is not the true assessment of church growth. The Scriptures are replete with thoughts regarding numbers, one of the most familiar being Jesus' words with regard to the broad and narrow paths (Mat. 7:13-14). The attendance may not reflect how many people are, or are not, living as a child of God on the other days of the week.

Some might suggest that growth can be evaluated in terms of the number of projects which the church is promoting, or the number of fulltime evangelists employed by the congregation. While the body needs to be active, it can be the case that all projects and works of the church are being supported by the same few members and not the body as a whole, or perhaps an increase in preachers will mean that they can manage to do the work for all members.

A glance at the weekly contribution might seemingly indicate that the congregation is growing because the Sunday collections are up. While the members should cheerfully and generously give to help the church abound to every good work (2 Cor. 9:6-8; 1 Cor. 16:1-2), it can be the case that the dollar figures are high because a few members give liberally, or else the membership does not mind paying someone else to do the work of the church.

We should evaluate church growth according to the entirety of New Testament teachings on maturity. Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). In a similar vein, Paul said to the elders of the Ephesian congregation, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Growing should incorporate the idea of maturing, and the mature congregation will be feasting regularly on the Word of God. The mature Christian will know and understand God's teachings and not be tossed about by different spiritual views (Eph. 4:15-16). The members are then prepared to live the life they profess (1 Tim. 6:11-12).

As a result of increasing in knowledge of God's will, the growing congregation will have increased attendance and contribution, but also increased participation in the activities of the church. The mature Christian should not say, "What do I have to do now?" but "What can I do to help?"

Soon, the work of the body is being done by all members, not just the same few repeatedly.

Also, the growing congregation sees its members present to support the body and worship God at all service times. How sad for a visitor to come and see that the members do not attend! Consistency is a part of maturity and growth. The number of visitors, those whom we can teach and convert, will also increase because growing members invite others to be a part of God's plan.

Growth involves more than just numbers, it involves a conscious decision on the part of every member to mature in knowledge and help accomplish the duties assigned the church by God. Do you want this church to grow?