

Growing an Engaged Church

Overloaded? At a recent gathering of pastors, I asked those who often feel burdened and overloaded to put their hand up. The vast majority of the pastors put their hands up.

Why? Why are most pastors overloaded? Could it be because in most churches 10% of the congregations do 90% of the work?

Why? Why is it that few do so much while the majority do so little? Could it be, as research indicates, that congregational engagement is declining and the church is losing its relevance in the lives of its people?

Growing congregational engagement will not only reduce the burden on overloaded pastors and leaders but will also help parishioners enjoy the abundant life promised by Jesus Christ. How do we enhance congregational engagement in a manner that pleases the heart of God?

Towards fulfilling this objective, in this paper, we take advantage of the work by Gallup researchers and Dr. Al Winsman's book, *Growing an Engaged Church: Stop Doing Church and Start Being the Church Again.*ⁱ

The Myths: Dr. Winsman lists three myths that Church leaders must confront before discovering the road to enhanced congregational engagement:

1. **Faith leads to belonging:** Coming to faith in Christ does not automatically lead to the sense of belonging and commitment to active service. Just as a newborn baby cannot be expected to play active family roles, belonging and engagement in the life of the church require a disciplined of discipleship process.
2. **Faith leads to action:** There are many non-Christian organizations that boast very high levels of volunteer engagement without any faith or spiritual motivation. How do they do it? Maybe we can learn from their example.
3. **An active member is a faithful member:** If we examine the lives of the 10% who carry the majority of church ministry, we often find signs of resentment, overload, and even burnout. This is not consistent with the abundant life Christ promises His followers.

What is the church?

The church is not the building, its financial assets or its many programs. The church is its people and their relationships. Based on extensive Gallup research, Dr.

Winseman suggests that there are three distinct groups in the church family: **engaged, dis-engaged, and actively disengaged.**



1. **Engaged People:** Engaged people prioritize their faith and personal relationship with God. They exhibit a genuine emotional and spiritual commitment to the church family. This commitment goes beyond the normal attendance and financial support. Based on Gallup research engaged parishioners are:
 - a. three times more likely to be satisfied with their personal, work, and family life
 - b. ten times more likely to invite others to the church at least once a month
 - c. giving more than 2.5 hours per week serving the church or community
 - d. giving on average 5% of their income to church ministries
2. **Disengaged People:** These are the nice people in the church. While they identify with the church and may consider themselves members, they are less likely to exhibit more than regular attendance and limited financial support. We believe that many of these people can to be more engaged in the church life with the right mix of discipleship and ministry opportunities.
3. **Actively Disengaged:** Dissatisfied, critical, and even adversarial may be some of the qualities that describe this group of

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parishioners. By their conduct and attitude, they attract a lot of attention and consume a disproportionate amount of pastoral time and energy. It is suggested that the negative impact of one actively disengaged person destroys the positive influence of four engaged parishioners.

Steps to Member Engagement

Researching many churches Gallup paints a four stage model that leads to optimum engagement called the **Member Engagement Hierarchy**:

1. **Receiving: Can my needs be met?**

Complaining, one pastor said that people come to church with a consumer mentality, “**What’s in it for me?**” This is accurate and true. People seek the church for two interrelated and specific needs:

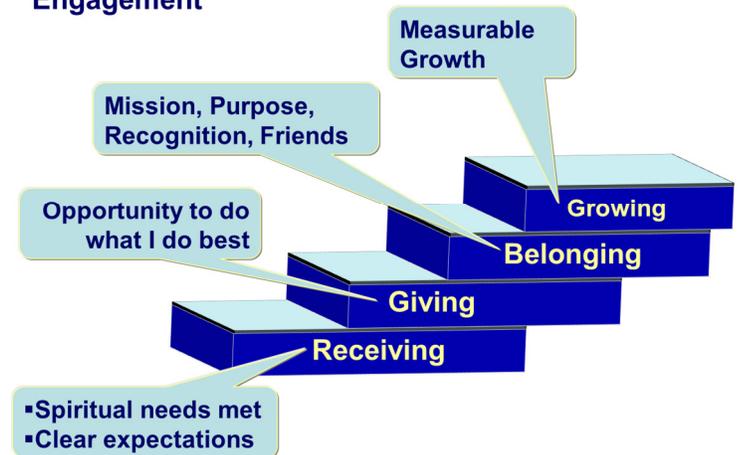
- a. **Spiritual needs:** This is one basic need which people seek when they come to church. Blaise Pascal, the renowned scientist philosopher, said that, “**There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man.**” All other needs can be filled by other sources outside the church; the church is the natural source of meeting the spiritual hunger in the world today.
- b. **Clear Expectations:** In return for meeting our spiritual needs, we all have a need for well-defined expectations. **Healthy relationships are reciprocal relationships** Ambiguity is a most destructive cause in any relationship. Having clearly communicated expectations enhances personal and corporate commitment. For fear of losing people, the church often fails in setting reasonable expectations of its members. It is interesting to note that the fastest growing church, the Mormon Church, sets very clear expectations of their members. Setting high standards of conduct and commitment on its followers, Islam is often called the fastest growing religion.

2. **Giving: What can I contribute? Healthy relationships are reciprocal. In the church can I do what I do best?** We all love to do what we do best. This is what Gallup calls playing to

your strengths. Playing to your strengths is energizing and rewarding. Most of us do not have this opportunity in our work life. Ministry opportunists that are a good match to members’ talents and skills could be the most affirming and enriching human service the church can offer to its parishioners. This can be the road map to solving the 90/10 crisis facing the church.

3. **Belonging: How do I belong?** There are many factors that contribute to a clear sense of belonging:

Steps to Member Engagement



- a. **Purpose:** Jack Welch, the ex-chairman of General Electric said, “**People work for money, but would give their life for a purpose.**” Church leaders must continually communicate and reaffirm a clear purpose that ignites the passion of its members.
- b. **Mission:** Mission gives direction and helps church members define objectives and life and ministry goals that they identify with.
- c. **Recognition:** From early childhood we have a need to be recognized and appreciated for who we are not only for what we do. Leaders have a responsibility to create a culture of appreciation and recognition.
- d. **Friends:** Friendship is the comfortable space where openness, transparency, and support flourish. We all need friends. Christ identified this need and provided a wonderful model through his relationship with His disciples.

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4. **Grow: Am I developing?** Deep in the heart of each of us is a natural instinct and desire to grow. Providing a structure that supports measurable sustainable growth enhances the sense of belonging. **We value what we measure.** While it may be hard to measure spiritual growth, as church leaders are responsible to measure what we can and let God measure what we can't. This creates a culture of clear expectations as well.

It's about talent stewardship.



Most pastors find it hard to preach about tithing and giving. One pastor told me, "We do not want people to think that we are always after their money." "The church has been seen in the past as hungry for people's money." I

understand how pastors feel, money matters is one of the most awkward topics to preach about. But the need today is to preach about talent stewardship. It is not about money anymore. It is about the stewardship of life.

We each are stewards of the life and talents we are given. In Matthew 25 Jesus highlights that a good steward is responsible to know and articulate what he or she is given as well as accountable to invest that stewardship where it brings the best results. Congregational engagement follows when leaders help their people know and appropriate their talents in the service of the church.



The same sense of stewardship responsibility applies to pastors and church leaders. **We measure what we value.** Apart from the word of God and the Spirit of God, human talents are the greatest asset of the

church. Pastors and leaders have a God given responsibility to know the talents God has entrusted in their church and to create a culture where people are engaged and invested in the church by using their God given talents.

Maybe, we can help?

As a ministry of integrity + consulting we are pleased to donate too free two totally free services:

- **The Engaged Church Seminar.** This is a facilitated discussion for Pastors and leaders. It is based on John 10, Mathew 9, and 20 and John 21. This discussion seeks to build a bridge between Biblical truths, a purpose driven church, common sense principles, supported by our thirty-five years of experience in organizational change management.
- **The Living Your Strengths Workshop:** This web based free workshop is designed to help people discover their God-given talents and apply their Strengths in fulfilling life calling at home, at work and in the church. Based on the talent stewardship teaching in Mathew 25, and using the world renowned StrengthsFinder2.0 as an assessment tool, this workshop is a stewardship and leadership development tool offered to Churches, Mission Organizations and Bible Schools.. For more information please see <http://integrity-plus.com/wp/sm/sw/>

Integrity⁺
consulting*

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ⁱ Albert L. Winseman, Growing an Engaged church (New York: Gallup Press, 2006).