

Top 10 Observations About Growing Churches

Written by Chuck Gaines

Recently while speaking at a Sunday School leadership event I was asked, “What are some characteristics of growing, exciting churches that you are coming across in your work?” For the first time in 32 years of ministry I could not quote the experts of research – somebody wanted to know what I see in churches today! I am thankful the question was asked at a scheduled break! I had at least 15 minutes to construct a response.

I first thought about ignoring the question and “shifting gears” after the break – maybe everyone would forget the question. However, the talk around the coffee pot was, “I can’t wait to hear what he’s going to say to that question!” I grabbed my coffee and started jotting notes which quickly resembled a “Top Ten” list. I share the list with you and remind you: these are ten of my observations.

Characteristics of growing, exciting churches:

1. Positive spirit of excitement.

People demonstrate in various ways they are glad they are at church. I catch their excitement and I’m glad to be there, too!

2. Spirit of expectation.

God is expected to act today like He has always acted toward His people based on who He is and not on what we have done.

3. Celebrative worship service.

Style is not as important as the expression of the heart in worship. The “worship war” is not fought every time the church gathers in worship.

4. Opportunities to build meaningful relationships through small groups.

This is primarily accomplished through Sunday School – sometimes known by other names. What these small groups are called and when they meet are not as important as the intentional investing their lives in others.

5. Focus on giving away the faith through lifestyle evangelism.

This would support the authentic relationships through the small groups resulting in people coming to Christ and the number of small groups multiplying.

6. No sentence ever begins with “I.”

No spirit of entitlement or ownership from any group within the fellowship. There is a feeling of, “I don’t win if you lose.”

7. “What can I do?” and “What can I give?” are expressed not only with meaning, but also with action.

Nothing is considered an impossibility with God.

8. Missions involvement.

Small groups of all ages are encouraged to be involved locally and globally.

9. Pastor/staff who lead and congregations who follow.

No battles between individuals or groups for power. There is a great respect and trust that permeates leadership on all levels.

10. Church is a safe place to come to God - Grace rules!

There seems to be an acceptance of Romans 8:1: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

My “Top Ten” list is based only on observations and experiences and does not suggest a group of principles to be copied. Nothing on that list can be copied, simulated, or even manufactured – it’s too authentic. Only the presence and power of the Holy Spirit can produce a growing, exciting church with a “Top Ten” list.

There is an additional issue I have discovered from “Top Ten” producing churches: they don’t look for answers – they look for questions. Specifically,

questions related to identifying and formulating a discipleship process. Questions such as:

1. How does our church define discipleship?
2. What does a disciple look like?
3. Do we have an intentional process of discipleship?
4. Does our church know this process?
5. How does this process relate to the purpose of the church?
6. Has our church prioritized distinct practices that relate to the discipleship process?
7. Does our church practice the principle of abandonment based on the idea that activity doesn't always mean productivity?
8. How does our church measure maturity?
9. How does our community describe our church?
10. Do our church families spend more planned time in a week at church with each other or in the community with non-believers?

Tough questions – even tougher to seek the answers, but growing, exciting churches wrestle with the challenge.

Does your church ask tough questions? There is growth and excitement in the process of seeking answers. Just an observation . . .

Recommended reading:

- Leading at a Higher Level by Ken Blanchard
- Confessions of a Pastor by Craig Groeschel
- The Discipline of Grace by Jerry Bridges
- Authentic Faith by Gary Thomas
- Furious Pursuit by Tim King and Frank Martin
- The Speed of Trust by Stephen M.R. Covey

Dr. Charles W. Gaines is a **Church Consultant** for LifeWay Christian Resources contact him at Chuck.Gaines@Lifeway.com or visit [LifeWay Church Consulting](http://LifeWayChurchConsulting.com).