**5 Post-Pandemic Church Growth Accelerators**



**Change Can Spur Growth — If the Church is Ready**

*Churches have an opportunity to demonstrate resilience and innovation as they focus on the mission, build community, and pivot as God directs. The result is health and church growth. |*by **Carey Nieuwhof**

What will drive future church growth in the post-pandemic era?

It’s an important question to ask, because for most church leaders, the pandemic has been a question of adaptation and survival, both personal and organizational.

The pandemic has been both discouraging and frustrating for many church leaders.

Not only are the return-to-church numbers remarkably low, but there’s evidence as many as 1 in 5 people dropped out of church in 2020.

There’s no question that many habits and patterns are being reset right now, but with every obstacle comes opportunity.

So, what’s going to accelerate the growth of the future church?

Time, of course, will tell, but here are five things that will in all likelihood help churches accelerate growth into the future.

1. **A Focus on the Core Mission**

Before the global crisis hit in 2020, most churches were struggling, but so was church. Liberal and conservative churches were transfixed on politics and ideas (more than the core message of Christianity) and were often struggling to reach new people.

Even attractional churches, which made up the majority of growing churches in the last two decades, were finding growth much harder than it used to be.

If there’s one trend to watch moving forward, it’s that America likely accelerated its journey into becoming a post-modern, post-Christian culture.

What that means is that the future church will have to stand as an alternative to the culture, not an echo of it.

As a result, in the future church:

Cool won’t cut it.

Hype won’t cut it.

Fun won’t cut it.

**Real will.**

A focus on the core purpose of church: introducing people to a relationship with Christ, with each other, and life-changing discipleship will be the one thing that church can offer that the world doesn’t.

Churches that focus on this will grow. Churches that get lost in politics, ideology, hype, or anything off mission won’t — at least not the long term.

1. **An Actual Experience**

So, what kind of experience will help people move into an authentic faith?

For years, churches have grown through delivering great content. And trust me, excellent preaching still matters.

The problem is that great content is no longer scarce.

What used to drive church attendance — join us in the building at 10 a.m. for a brand new series — will no longer do so, because everyone now knows whatever message you’re preaching will be live-streamed or available later on demand.

And if your message isn’t, no worries. They can choose from a million others that are. For free.

Our culture is *drowning* in a sea of information.

When people come to church, they’re not just looking for information — they’re looking for transformation.

Sure, people definitely need some information, but fewer are looking for information *about*God; they’re looking for an experience *of*God.

Today, *information* is everywhere. *Transformation* is scarce.

What does this mean?

Churches that focus on something more than head knowledge in their services or a “fun” experience will likely see greater traction than those that don’t. Even pre-pandemic, churches that had a more charismatic, emotional experience were growing when many other churches weren’t.

In addition, churches that have a clear path into discipleship — getting people to engage their faith or at least experience it — will see greater success than churches that invite you to merely attend.

1. **Community and Connection**

Content used to be a competitive advantage. For the most part, it isn’t any more.

What is deeply scarce right now are community and connection.

People are more isolated than ever. That’s playing out the crisis in mental health, rising addictions, and the fractionalized tribes we’ve seen form in our culture.

Authentic, loving, and genuine communities are more scarce than they have ever been in our lifetime.

Every church should be running to fill that hole.

Community means connecting people to each other in groups, serving, friendship, and relationships.

Nobody should be able to out-community the local church.

Connection means that even for those joining online or attending in person for the first time, the primary job becomes connecting with them and then helping them find connection with each other.

In the same way, the purpose of a dating app isn’t to get people to connect with the app, but with each other, the goal of the church should be to get people to connect with one another, not just the senior leader. I realize that’s not a great analogy, but you get the point, right?

Moving forward, the competitive advantage of the local church isn’t content, it’s community and connection.

1. **Church Online**

What happens to online church once we’re move into a post-pandemic world?

Simple…it becomes your front door and side door, and as a result, becomes the greatest opportunity for you to reach new people (front door) and keep people in your church connected (side door).

In the pre-digital era, it took a lot to get someone to come to your church for the first time.

They had to gather the family, dress up (at least out of their PJs), show up, and set aside hours for a first-time experience. In a Christian culture, that was far easier and less intimidating than it is in a post-Christian culture.

The good news about church online is that the cost of entry is almost nothing to a first-time guest. Just one click and they’re with you.

In the future, wise leaders will realize that this is the best way to reach people, and if you develop a great way to meet people, connect with them, and move them into relationship and a discipleship path, you’ll see significant growth.

The other opportunity for church online is its ability to act as a side door for people who are away for the weekend (or a season).

Again, in the pre-digital era if you were gone…you missed everything. Now you don’t have to miss a thing.

So, a robust digital presence moving forward can result in both greater growth and deeper engagement.

Plus, digital church scales in a way that physical church doesn’t.

The old thinking was (and still is in many cases) that you’re competing with your in-person services by having a great online experience. That’s scarcity thinking at its finest.

You’re not *competing* with yourself by investing in a digital future, you’re expanding your mission.

1. **Agility**

One of the biggest temptations for all of us when the post-pandemic era arrives will be to take our foot off the accelerator, find a method that works, and lock it in.

That might be a fatal mistake.

The era of set-it-and-forget it strategy is over.

In all likelihood, culture will continue to morph and change quickly. The pace of change will continue unabated, and that will create the need to stay agile.

The gap between how quickly you change and how quickly the culture changes is called irrelevance.

Too many leaders sacrifice the mission in the name of finding predictable methods. Agile leaders are willing to continually sacrifice methods to advance the mission.

By remaining agile, open, and ready to change, you can move forward.

And ultimately, agility is far less exhausting than decline is.