

The Pastor's CHURCH GROWTH HANDBOOK

Volume II

**America's leading
authorities on
church growth share
the keys to building
a dynamic church**

EDITED BY DR. WIN ARN

limited. Staff and budget for Christian Education, Youth Ministries, Counseling, *first*. Staff and budget for growth *after* these priorities are met.

13. Insist on using evangelistic methods that were used in the past.

Don't consider contemporary methods that God may be using today.

14. Don't set goals for growth.

Say that goals produce frustration. Discourage measurement of any kind. Label statistical analysis inaccurate or worldly. If that fails, label it "demonic and destructive." Though that may be unfair, it will certainly discourage goal-setting and statistical analysis as a diagnostic tool!

15. Say that God doesn't want the church to grow.

Though this statement may be false, you could dig up enough "proof-texts" to make it seem believable.

16. Don't advertise your church.

Any advertising should be avoided. Especially don't let newcomers to your community know where your church is, when services are held, and what ministries might be most helpful to them. If you must advertise, put the ad on the church page and put a picture of the pastor or the building on it, not of people enjoying fellowship together in Christ.

17. Don't pray for growth.

Pray for people in hospitals. Pray for spiritual power. Pray for missions. Pray for the people who you will never be held responsible for. Don't pray for evangelism and growth in your church. Definitely don't pray for individual people outside of Christ and the church.

A Profile of the New Convert: Patterns of Dissatisfaction

BY FLAVIL YEAKLEY

Church growth authorities have defined "evangelism" as: proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and *persuading* people to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church.

Effective persuasion starts with motives that are already in an individual. It follows that an awareness to patterns of dissatisfaction in the prospective church member should be developed prior to efforts of evangelistic persuasion.

Each person in the study was classified into one of three categories: "converts"—those presently active as responsible church members; "drop-outs"—those who became church members but have since become inactive; and "non-converts"—those who never responded to a church's evangelistic approaches.

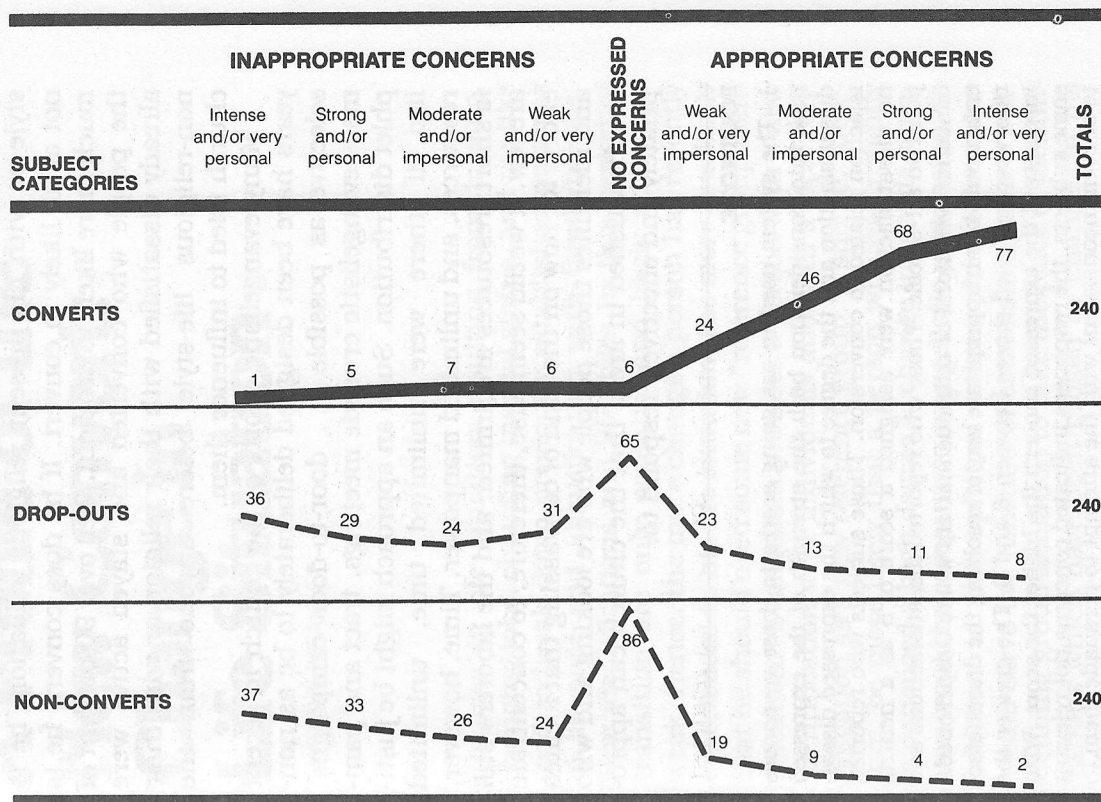
Subjects in this survey were asked whether or not they were satisfied with their life-style before anyone from the church attempted to influence them. If they said that they were dissatisfied, they were asked to explain why they were dissatisfied. In addition, dis-

Flavil Yeakley is chairman of the Interpersonal Communication Program in the Faculty of Communication at the University of Tulsa.

satisfied subjects were asked what things worried them, what things troubled them, and what things they were looking for in life at the time before anyone from the church tried to influence them.¹

Some of the people interviewed in this survey reported no dissatisfactions at all. Few of these were found as active church members. Most such responses were non-converts or drop-outs. Others listed various concerns or dissatisfactions—some personal, some impersonal, some weak, and some intense. Not all concerns expressed were relevant to evangelistic persuasion. Subjects who had inappropriate patterns of dissatisfaction were less likely to be in the convert category—especially if their concerns were intense and personal.

In the table on page 29, converts, drop-outs, and non-converts are compared according to how they fit into categories representing their pattern of dissatisfaction. Only 8 percent of the converts had inappropriate concerns—irrelevant to evangelistic persuasion, while 50 percent of the drop-outs and non-converts had an inappropriate pattern of concerns. Less than 3 percent of the converts reported no dissatisfaction while 27 percent of the drop-outs and 36 percent of the non-converts reported no dissatisfaction. 89 percent of the converts reported appropriate concerns, while 23 percent of the drop-outs and 14 percent of the non-converts reported appropriate concerns. On the basis of these data it is possible to conclude that people who have an appropriate pattern of dissatisfaction, to which the church can directly respond, are much more likely prospects for conversion and church membership. Those who have no dissatisfactions or who have dissatisfaction inappropriate to evangelistic persuasion are much less likely prospects and much more likely to drop out if they do convert.



If a person is satisfied with his non-religious life-style or with his present religious affiliation, he is not at all likely to convert. If he does convert, he is much more likely to drop out. Well over 90 percent of the people who converted and stayed active were already dissatisfied with their religion or with their non-religious life-style before anyone from the church tried to influence them.

Many evangelistic efforts of the church in recent years have been designed deliberately to be as non-selective as possible . . . door-to-door campaigns, mass evangelistic crusade meetings, tract and pamphlet distribution. Such an approach might be justified if there were unlimited time, unlimited resources, and unlimited manpower. Time, however, is short; resources are limited; and the laborers still are few. It would seem wise, therefore, to concentrate efforts for now on the kind of canvassing that locates and identifies those people who are looking and who are dissatisfied in areas that the church can appropriately and effectively respond to.

FOOTNOTE

1. The system used in assigning scores to these responses took into consideration both the strength of the expressed dissatisfaction and the degree to which the expressed dissatisfaction related to conversion. Those subjects who reported no dissatisfaction were assigned a score of 5 as a neutral point on a 1-9 scale. Those who reported dissatisfactions and concerns over moral or religious matters where Gospel obedience would be an appropriate way of resolving the dissatisfaction were assigned scores between 6 and 9. The greater the intensity of the expressed concern the higher the score. With some subjects, the responses indicated concerns not relevant to or even inconsistent with the attempt to persuade them to obey the Gospel. When the pattern of responses were judged to be inappropriate or irrelevant, the subject was assigned a score on this item from 1 to 4.

A Profile of the New Convert: Change in Life Situation

BY FLAVIL YEAKLEY

Changes in life situation resulting from moving, changing jobs, changing marital status, and the like tend to break down previously established patterns of life-style and identification with family/friends. New identifications and life-styles in this period of transition are only potential and likely still quite weak. Hence, the more change a person has recently experienced in his life situation, the more it is likely that he should need some new "reference group identification." Evangelism provides a person with a new identification with individuals and with a local congregation as a new reference group. It should, therefore, be more likely that a person who has recently experienced a high degree of change in his life situation would be receptive to evangelistic persuasion. In addition to the spiritual values, his conversion would serve the function of establishing a new self-defining group affiliation to take the place of identifications which have been broken by changes in his life situation.

The degree of change that a subject had recently experienced in his life situation was measured by the

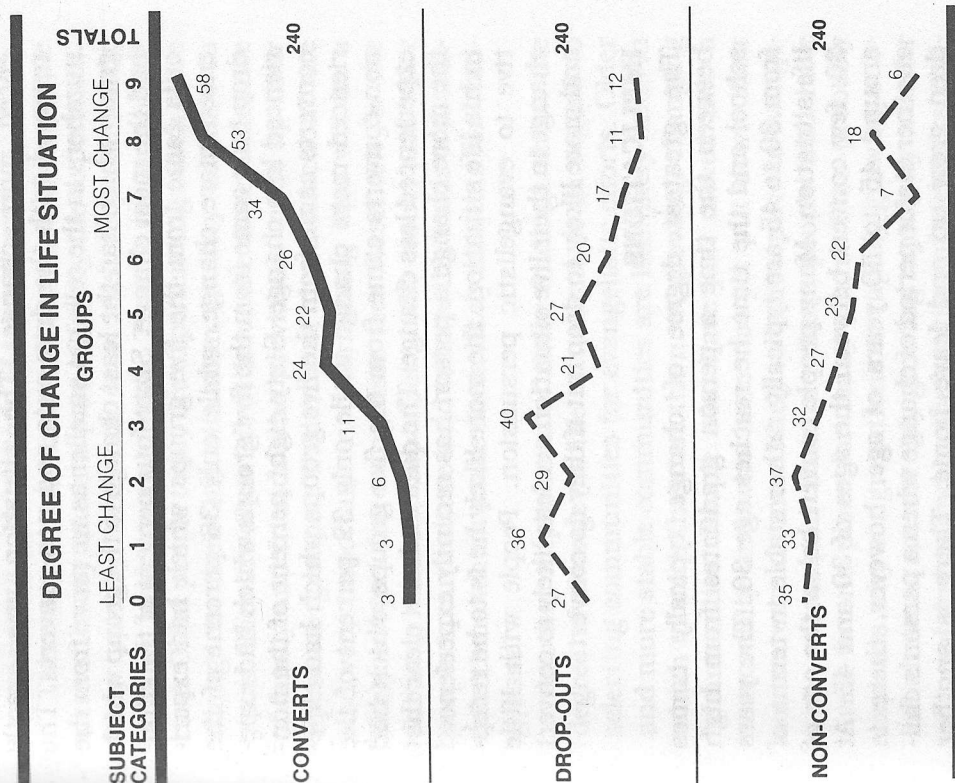
psychological stress scale developed by Thomas H. Holmes. In Holmes' procedure, a numerical value is assigned to each change that a subject has recently experienced in his life situation. The specific numerical value assigned to each reported change is as follows:

- Death of spouse • 100
- Divorce • 73
- Marital separation • 65
- Death of a close family member • 63
- Marriage • 50
- Marital reconciliation • 45
- Retirement • 45
- Gain of new family member • 39
- Change in financial status • 38
- Change in work responsibilities • 29
- Son or daughter growing up and leaving home • 26
- Wife starting or stopping work • 26
- Beginning or ending of school • 26
- Change in residence • 20

The 720 subjects of this survey were arrayed according to the reported degree of change that they had recently experienced in their life situation. At one extreme was the group with the scores in the lowest 10 percent of the range. These subjects had experienced very little change in their life situation. At the other extreme was the group with scores in the highest 10 percent of the range. These subjects had experienced the highest degree of change in their life situation.

The subjects were categorized as either "Converts"—those now active as responsible church members; "Drop-outs"—those who joined a church but have since become inactive; and "Non-Converts"—those who never responded to the Christian message or invitation to church membership.

The results of this survey are presented below:



On the row for the converts, notice how the numbers in the cells get larger as we move from the group with the least change to the group with the most change. Only three of the 240 converts came from the five groups which had experienced less change in life situation while just over 80 percent of the con-

verts came from the five groups which had experienced more change. The situation was exactly reversed with the drop-outs and non-converts. The numbers in the cells get smaller as we move from the group which had the least change to the group which had the most change. Sixty-four percent of the drop-outs came from the five groups which had experienced more change, while only 36 percent of the drop-outs came from the five groups which had experienced less change. Sixty-eight percent of the non-converts came from the five groups which had experienced more change while only 32 percent of the non-converts came from the five groups which had experienced less change. The data makes it clear that the more change a person has recently experienced in his life situation, the more likely he is to be receptive to evangelistic persuasion. People with little change in their life situation are less likely to convert and more likely to drop out if they do convert.

IMPLICATIONS

The greatest degree of change typically comes between the time a person graduates from high school and the time he reaches age 30. The years from 30 to 45 are typically rather stable in terms of life situation. Many people convert below the age of 30; few convert between the ages of 30 and 45. At around 45 to 50 years of age, however, there is another major period of change when a person's children grow up and leave home. There is another important period of change at 60 to 65 when a person retires. Later in life, there is a period of change when a person experiences the death of a spouse. Half of the stress points on the Holmes scale are assigned to events typically experienced after the age of 50. While many churches hire youth ministers or youth directors, perhaps there should also be minis-

ters who specialize in working with older people experiencing such periods of transition.

There was a time in our culture when older people were still very much a part of family life experience. They typically lived with or at least very near their children and grandchildren. That is no longer the case. Older people today are experiencing much more change in their life situation as they advance in years. They are often left without the direct influence of family and friends who previously made up their reference groups. "Patterns of dissatisfaction" are also very important in determining who will be a likely subject for evangelism (see *Research for the Growing Church*, Sept./Oct. 1980 issue) and older people in our culture tend to have the kinds of dissatisfactions which make them likely subjects for evangelism.

Another implication of these findings about the degree of change in life situations is in regard to selecting communities for evangelistic efforts. Older and more stable communities are less likely fields in which to work than are the new, growing, changing communities. People who have just moved into a community and who have not yet put down their roots are much more likely to be receptive to evangelistic persuasion than are those people who have lived in one place for many years. This probably explains why congregations in rapidly growing suburban areas are not only growing rapidly by transfer of membership and by the baptism of members' children, but are also reaching far more adult converts than are congregations in older and more stable communities.

Perhaps the most important implication from these findings about the change in life situation has to do with the method of outreach. Someone once said that the way to build a strong congregation is to

find the hurt in a community and heal it. Look at that Holmes stress scale again. Notice how many of those items—especially the major ones—have something to do with the family. The change in residence factor, which accounts for so much of the growth of our suburban congregations, is worth only 20 points. There are 29 allocated points for a son or daughter growing up and leaving home, 39 points for the addition of a new family member, 50 points for marriage, 65 points for marital separation, 75 points for divorce, 45 points for marital reconciliation, 63 points for the death of a family member, and 100 points for the death of a spouse. Seventy-five percent of the points in the Holmes scale are directly related to the family.

New Testament Christianity has the only viable answer to the family problems this nation and the people in it are experiencing. The church has something very valuable to offer the community. This is one way of finding the hurt in the community and healing it—and that makes congregations grow. If Christians can offer people in the community help in improving the quality of their family life, they can minister in a way that no one else can. People who are not yet interested in learning how to save their souls, are often interested in learning how to save their marriages and their homes. People will often attend a weekend workshop on family life when they would never attend a traditional church meeting. In such situations Christians can contact people who are likely to be receptive subjects for evangelism.

Your "Potential Congregation"

BY WIN ARN AND W.CHARLES ARN

Here is a powerful concept that will help translate "church-centered disciple-making" into a natural part of your church's planning and activities. It is a concept that should soon become a way of thinking for every church leader, officer, and staff member. The concept: your "Potential Congregation."

Let's take a closer look at the idea of your church's Potential Congregation since it has important implications to the success of every church member's plan for reaching his/her Extended Family.*

DISCIPLE-MAKING THROUGH YOUR CHURCH'S POTENTIAL CONGREGATION

The records in your church presently identify a group of individuals and families who comprise the "members of your congregation." These people are listed in the church directory, and are people about whom various information is kept. Perhaps their participation in church events is recorded. Most of the activities, programs, and classes planned by church leaders are done so with this group of mem-