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MS 615 Foundations of Church Growth; ME 700 Principles of Church Growth

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I. Course Description:

“The foundational principles and strategies of the Church Growth movement pioneered by Donald McGavran, seen as one informed approach to strategy development in mission and evangelism and as a means to inform congregational and denominational outreach and expansion. Focus upon North American and Third World cases.”

II. Course Objectives:

1. To raise consciousness regarding the "strategy" dimensions of the practice of Christian evangelism and mission.
2. To orient the student to the Church Growth approach to informing mission strategy and Christian evangelization.
3. To equip the student with the key, proven, universal, reproducible principles discovered by Church Growth research.
4. To develop the capacity to critique ministries and approaches to evangelism and mission, and thereby advance the practice.
5. To facilitate the student's beginning contribution to Church Growth research, reflection, and literature.

III. Textbooks:

The following textbooks are required reading for all students, 600 and 700 level. The literature, especially McGavran's Understanding Church Growth, should be perceived as the heart of the course. Class sessions will stimulate deeper reading, provide perspective, headline some themes and expand upon others, fill gaps, suggest implications and applications, and facilitate learning and strategic thinking. Class sessions may involve varied technologies, such as lectures, experiential lectures, case studies, visiting speakers, films, maps, data generation, simulations, pencil and paper instruments, reports, processing of assigned readings, etc.

1. Donovan, Vincent J. Christianity Rediscovered. Orbis, 1979. This autobiographical case study, one of the most engaging and moving books in all of missiological literature, focuses on the planting of indigenous Catholic Christianity among Masai people in East Africa. It dramatizes the central issue of starting a Christian movement from scratch among an unreached people.


5. Schaller, Lyle E. *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau*. Abingdon, 1993. Schaller knows more about local church health, growth, and effectiveness in a North American context than anyone. This book summarizes many of his insights--focused on overcoming the numerical barriers that churches typically experience in their growth history.

6. Winter, Ralph D. and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Third Edition. William Carey Library, 1999. In this course, we assign only a "bakers dozen" articles (primarily from the "Strategic Perspective" section) from this widely used collection, but every serious mission student will own this book.

In addition, the following four articles will be given to you as handouts.
   a) Hunter, "The Legacy of Donald McGavran"
   b) McGavran, "Discipling Urban Populations"
   c) Paul Hiebert, "Conversion, Culture, and Cognitive Categories."
   d) Ralph Winter, "Quality or Quantity?"
   e) Rodney Stark, "Effort to Christianize Europe, 400-2000"

Course sessions will feature a number of additional handouts which, alas, the students need to help cover financially. **Please pay $10.00 to Pat Richmond in the ESJ School office**, to cover the cost of necessary photocopying. Ms. Richmond will monitor the account. Any unexpended funds will be reimbursed on the last day of class, but you will not be assessed for any expenditure above $10.00 per student.

The following additional books are required for students taking the 700 level course.


*9. Read one of the field studies in which McGavran was a principal writer, such as the following: *Multiplying Churches in the Philippines*; *Church Growth in Jamaica*; *Ethnic Realities and the Church: Lessons from India*; *Church Growth in Mexico*; *Zaire: Midday in Missions*. (The student may choose some other field study if he or she is particularly interested in the field.)

IV. Writing Assignment Options for the Course:
The instructor expects the student to accept responsibility for his/her own learning. This responsibility will normally be exercised through regular and involved class attendance, the thorough reading of the assigned textbooks and readings, a final examination, and the completion of one writing assignment.

All students will need to submit to the instructor, by the class session on **December 7th**, a (say) 12 to 15 page **research paper**, which should be based upon some appropriate blend of **library research and field research**. Consider the following options for the paper:

1. The story and analysis of the growth history of a **local church**, emphasizing the causes of the growth that might be reproducible or adaptable for other churches. In most cases, the student would normally focus on the recent growth of the church, say within the past decade, but a more historical study would also be welcome.

2. The story and analysis of the growth history of a **unit** of a (presumably large) local church, emphasizing the causes of the growth that might be reproducible or adaptable for other churches. "Unit" here refers to, say, a specific worship service, or the Sunday School, or even a specific Sunday School class, or the youth ministry, or the recovery ministry, or some other organized part of the church.

3. The story and analysis of the local spread of the gospel among some distinct target population, such as "builders" or "boomers" or "busters," or unchurched men, or youth, or single adults, or retarded adults, or deaf people, or addictive people, or a distinctive ethnic population or socio-economic class.

4. One may submit a more traditional term paper, on a Church Growth topic, instead of one of the field research assignments. Students so inclined may see the instructor to get feedback on a proposed topic. The supplementary bibliography at the end of this syllabus will be especially useful to students doing a traditional term paper.

For any of the first three options, the student needs to identify, early in the course, the local church (or churches) in which to do the field research. The student will negotiate and do on-site "field research" (interviews, observation, and focused historical analysis) to determine causes for the growth. Base the paper upon the most insightful and promising data that you collect -- much of which will illustrate some established church growth principles, some of which may lead you to suggest new hypotheses. The paper may include anecdotal, and even inspirational, material derived from the field research.

The student who chooses the fourth option will need to identify the topic early, especially in regard to a topic that might require inter-library loan or data to be sent from some field. The project could research and summarize the main insights of some specific writer in, or near, the field of Church Growth.

Whichever option you choose, write the paper so that it can be understood by someone who has not taken a Church Growth course.

**V. Final Exam:**

All students will need to complete, **December 12th**, at 6:00 PM, a **final examination** covering the assigned readings, class sessions, and other course resources. The instructor expects the exam to call for short essays--for which the student should bring several blue books for the exam.

Those taking the 700 level version of the course will want to prepare for an "extra" question on the final exam: "Trace the development of Church Growth insight in the mind of Donald McGavran, and delineate some of the major strategic conclusions of Church Growth research, with some regard to a particular field of mission."

Students taking the 600 level version of the course will have 1 and 1/2 hours to complete the exam. Students taking the 700 version will have 2 hours. In each version of the exam, international students (for whom English is a second language) may take an additional half hour to complete the exam.
About one-half of the student's grade for the course will be based upon performance on the examination, and about half on the research paper, with secondary weight given to class attendance, involvement, and contribution.

**Course Outline**
(Subject to Modification)

September 5: Introduction to Church Growth Lore

1. Origins, Distinctives, and Relevance of the Church Growth tradition.

2. Representative Strategic Insights from Church Growth lore.

   Film: "How to Grow a Church"


Come to class having read Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered*, and having written a **one-page paper**:

a. Students in the 600 version of the course: Submit to the instructor, **by Thursday at noon**, on **one page**, your answers to these questions:

   1) What was THE MAJOR PROBLEM that Donovan perceived, early, relating to the mission station's relationship and ministries to the Masai? Succinctly state and describe.

   2) Where else have you observed some form of this problem? Describe briefly.

   Be prepared to present these insights to the class (3 minutes maximum).

b. Students in the 700 version of the course: Submit to the instructor, **by Thursday at noon**, on **one page**, your understanding of the steps that Donovan took to reach the Masai people—expressed as generic steps. (For example, Donovan learned the Masai language. A generic version of that step might be "Learn the language of the receptor population.") Do not copy Donovan's own (partial) internal summaries of his principles, such as the material on pp. 162-3. Do your own summary of, say, the 10 to 20 generic principles involved in planting Christianity among an unreached people. Feel free to add, with an asterisk*, any essential steps that are not prominent in Donovan's case study. Be prepared to present these insights to the class (3 minutes). A one page handout for each class member is encouraged.

   1. Several student presentations on THE PROBLEM Donovan identified.

   2. Several student presentations on "Generic Steps in Reaching a People."

   3. Presentation: The Stages in the History of a Mission

September 19: Characteristics of Growing Churches.


1. Presentation: Several Perspectives on the Characteristics of Healthy Growing Churches.

   a. Lyle Schaller  b. Peter Wagner  c. Christian Schwarz

2. Win Arn's Characteristics of Growing Churches.

   Film: "But I'm Just a Layman"
September 26: Church Growth Strategies for Expansion Growth—part one.  
Come to class having read Hunter, To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit. 
Come prepared for a three minute report in which you: 
   a. State one of the five major Church Growth strategies featured in To Spread the Power. 
   b. From your church experience or observation, present a case illustrating the principle. 
   c. Suggest the principle’s implication(s) for a congregation’s growth strategy. 

1. Presentation: Essential Questions, Historical Landmarks, and Pivotal Decisions in Mission Strategy 
2. Class presentations (three minutes): 
   a. Moving Toward Receptivity 
   b. Reaching Across Social Networks 
   c. Multiplying Units 
   d. Multiplying Ministries. 
   e. Employing Indigenous Forms 

Video: "The Great Commission Sunday School." 

October 3: Church Growth Strategies for Expansion Growth—part two.  

1. Presentation: The Complex and Varied Patterns of Church Growth 
2. Presentation: "How We Help Spread the Gospel; How We Help People Become Christians" 
   Video: "Europe: The Lost Continent" 

October 10: No class; instructor out of town. 

October 17: The Role of Congregational Studies in Informing Church Growth.  
Come to class having read the following articles in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: 35, 37, 44, 75, 76, 86, 88, and 91. 

1. Presentation: How Church “Typology” Can Inform Church Growth 
2. Presentation: The "Stages" in the History of a Congregation 
   (Saarinen's "Life Cycle" Theory 

October 24: The Role of Sociology of Religion Studies in Informing Church Growth 
Come to class having read Stark, “Effort to Christianize Europe, 400-2000.” 

1. Presentation: Recent Studies in Church and Denominational Growth and Decline
2. The Distinctive Views of Rodney Stark

   Video: “Europe: the Lost Continent.”

October 31: Quality, Quantity, and Plateau Busting
Come to class having read a) Winter, “Quality or Quantity?”, b) Hiebert, "Conversion, Culture, and Cognitive Categories,” and c) Schaller, 44 Steps Up Off the Plateau. Be prepared for a 3 minute report.

1. Presentation: Finding One's Way through the “Quality vs. Quantity” Debate

2. Class presentations:
   a. State one of Schaller's strategic steps for moving off of a plateau, and
   b. Illustrate the step from your experience in, or observation of, a church

   OR

   Describe a church and show why the step might be a promising intervention for that church.

November 7: No class; instructor out of town.
Finish McGavran’s Understanding Church Growth.

November 14: The First Mega-Challenge: Reaching Peoples.
Come to class having read articles 38, 62, 72, 77, and 90 in Perspectives on the World Christian Movement.

   DAWN video.

November 21: The Second Mega-Challenge: Reaching Cities
Come to class having read McGavran, “Discipling Urban Populations.”

   Lausanne video "God is Building a City."

November 28: No class: Thanksgiving Week.

December 5: The Third Mega-Challenge: Reaching the Secular West.

1. Profiling and Reaching Secular People

2. An Invitational Faith

   Video: "A Church for the Twenty-first Century."

December 10: Research paper due.

December 12: Final Exam, 6:00 PM.

Thursday, December 14, 6:00: FINAL EXAMINATION.
Students taking the 600 level version of the course will have 1 and 1/2 hours to complete the exam. Students taking the 700 version will have 2 hours. In each version of the exam, international students (for whom English is a second language) may take an additional half hour to complete the exam.
Supplemental Selected Bibliography

(Not all of these studies are done by authors within the Church Growth missiological tradition, but they nevertheless provide helpful insight or perspective)

Themes in Church Growth (and related) Studies:

__________. The Antioch Effect: 8 Characteristics of Highly Effective Churches. 1998
Hunter, George G. III. Church for the Unchurched. Abingdon,1996.


Neighbor, Ralph W. Where Do We Go From Here?: A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church. Torch. 1990.


Spiritual Power and Church Growth: Strang Communications, 1986.


Your Church Can Be Healthy. Abingdon, 1979.


Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation is Shaking Up the Church As We Know It. Regal, 1999.


Studies relevant to Church Growth in Europe, North America, Australia:
[Many available from Church Growth Institute. ph. 1-800-423-4844


Dudley, Carl S. *Where Have All Our People Gone?* Pilgrim, 1979.


George, Carl F. *Prepare Your Church For the Future.* Revell, 1991.


__________. *What Can We Do About Church Dropouts?* Abingdon, 1990.


__________. *The Large Membership Church.* Discipleship Resources, 1989.


__________. *How To Reach Secular People.* Abingdon, 1992.

__________. *Church for the Unchurched.* Abingdon, 1996.

Leading and Managing a Growing Church. Abingdon, (scheduled for 2000)


Hunter, Kent R. Your Church Has Doors: How to Open the Front and Close the Back. Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center, 1983.


McCalep, George O. Faithful Over a Few Things: Seven Critical Church Growth Principles. 1996


McIntosh, Gary L. One Size Doesn't Fit All.


McGavran, Donald A. Back to Basics in Church Growth. Tyndale House, 1981.


Oswald, Roy M., and Speed B. Leas. *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation.* 


Schuller, Robert H. *Your Church Has Real Possibilities.* G/L Publications, 1974.

Smith, Glenn C. ed. *Evangelizing Adults*. 

Teykl, Terry. *Pray and Grow*. Discipleship Resources.

__________. *Your Church Can Be Healthy*. Abingdon, 1979.
__________. *Churchquake! How the New Apostolic Reformation is Shaking Up the Church As We Know It*. Regal, 1999.


__________. *Dare To Grow*. David C. Cook, 1993.

Notable Studies of Church Growth Among Third World and Ethnic Minority Peoples:


Gates, Alan Frederick. *Christianity and Animism in Taiwan*.


Lawrence, Carl. *The Church in China*.


McGavran, Donald A., *Church Growth in Jamaica*.


_____________. Where Do We Go From Here? Houston, TX: Touchstone Publications, 1990.


Church growth is not about competing with the ministry down the street but more about developing the people God has planted in the local church to be used by God with their unique gifts. I believe people are called to churches for a specific purpose. We are all on a journey and the church helps us develop as Christians and supports our unique calling. In his book, Purpose Driven Church, Rick Warren says, "since the church is a living organism, it is natural for it to grow if it is healthy; if a church is not growing it is dying..." This can be a scary concept for a small local church. With great change and difficulty, the denominational headquarters in Battle Creek prospered and continued to grow. New equipment was added in the publishing house. The sanitarium and the college were greatly prospered and continued to grow. Counsel was given to guard against carelessness in the erection of church edifices, as seen in some instances. Warnings were also given against lightly regarding pledges of gifts to God's cause. All these and other counsels dealing with many other problems connected with the work in these new territories occupy a prominent place in this volume.