



Rector's Essay - To Grow

By Jarrett Kerbel (08/21/26)

The CAT survey results were loud and clear. The first priority of St. John's is membership growth. The next question, asked by Vestry member Robert Ford at our last meeting, is; How do we grow the church?

During my vacation, Robert's excellent question caused me to think and pray. After 30 years of priesthood in growing churches, what have I learned and how do I communicate it? Well, let this essay be a start.

Below, I will lay out what I believe to be the essentials of church growth. In this essay I will comment briefly on each item and then expand my thoughts as a series in upcoming newsletters.

- **Trust God:** God will direct us and God will provide for us. Our role is to be responsive to what God is already doing for us. We do this by listening and discerning together the will of God for our church community.
- **Petition God:** Are you praying for God to send us the next person, couple, or family who would benefit from and add to our ministry? Pray for that next person to find all the blessings of a with-God life in our community. What if the whole congregation committed to praying for growth?
- **Collaborate with the Holy Spirit:** Churches that grow are full of people who are growing in the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4 - 11 and Galatians 5: 22 - 23. The active power of the Holy Spirit animates us with every gift we need for communion with God and each other. Nothing is more attractive than a church that is fully plugged into the Holy Spirit. Showing what we believe in our personal transformation is a great testimony to a faith that is more than words.

- **Pray for Clarity about your role in congregational growth:** How is God calling me to open the riches of the with-God life to newcomers and neighbors? How is God provisioning me for this mission? How is God calling me to grow personally to support the growth I want to see in my church? How will I open my heart and life to love the next neighbor God sends my way?
- **Love of neighbor means loving actual people:** Jesus gave us the great commandment to love God and neighbor. Love - as Jesus embodied it - is not abstract or aloof. Learning to love, growing in love, requires actually knowing our neighbors. Are you ready not just to offer a cursory welcome but to get to know new neighbors in the pews and to offer them your love and care?

Now, you may be surprised at my starting place for church growth. I could give you a list of techniques. I could give you a demographic or sociological analysis. Instead, I am offering you the spiritual foundation of growth, because, at the end of the day, people want to come to a church where a vital relationship with God is known and offered. We begin with God otherwise we mess up the logic of faith by putting our activity at the center rather than our living God.

We must grow from our integrity as followers of Jesus. Growth with integrity is my rallying cry! We could grow by pleasing people, or through gimmicks for sure. We could give away a free car to each newcomer, but there is no integrity in that, no honoring of who we are and whose we are.

Follow Up Essays:

The “Grace Rule of Welcome”

All Welcome means; “All Welcome to Meet God in Jesus.”

Growth with Integrity

Trust God

Pray for the next Person, Make Room in your life for the Next Person

Spiritual Growth and Membership Growth

-Jarrett