As a rural church pastor, I find growth factors fascinating. Where they are growing, why are rural churches growing?

Scott Moore a Baptist pastor and researcher (I don't mind taking a good thought where I can find it) did some serious research on growing rural congregations of various faiths. With this caveat, Paul reminds us: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" Moore found.

Surprising as it may seem, things like Sunday school, youth ministry, location, and evangelistic programs did not have a great impact.

Most shocking of all, apparently worship style is immaterial to the growth of a rural church So what are the significant factors that seem to have attracted the unchurched to growing rural congregations? Moore listed four:

**Growth Factor One** - God's Presence: People want to sense and experience the presence of God in worship and the life of the congregation. Namely, people wanted to sense God's presence in prayer, singing, and preaching.

**Growth Factor Two** - Friendliness: Simply put, people want friendly churches and not to come in set alone and be ignored. They want a place where people know, care, and talk to them. This is especially important for rural churches as they often "serve as a fellowship center and the base of many community activities and initiatives."

**Growth Factor Three** - Doctrinal Commitment: The unchurched indicated a greater interest in doctrine than longer-term Christians. Statistically, it seems many of the unchurched who respond to invitations and the church's outreach are looking for a community that knows what they believe and why they believe it. They may not always agree, but research indicated they admire sincerity and conviction and detest a lack of stabile positions.

**Growth Factor Four** - Pastor and Preaching: Preaching played an important role in the way people experience the presence of God. Moore also found that the pastor is seen as a vital part of reaching the community and, in some cases, was the one to provide the necessary vision that was adopted by a congregation that then began to have success with the unchurched.

It seems to me growing rural churches are growing exactly because they are being faithful to what God in the Bible has called us to be.

1. They are committed to the preaching of the Word and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:13 “Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.” Romans 10:14 “But how are they to call on one in whom they have never heard? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?”

2. They are committed to the truth, Jude 1:3, “Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” Titus 1:9 “He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.” 2 Timothy 1:13-14 “Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”

3. They are committed to one another, 2 John 12 “Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete,” Ephesians 4:15-16 “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.”

4. They are committed to a sense of God's presence among his people, Ephesians 2:20-22 “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God,” 1 Corinthians 14:25 “After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, ‘God is really among you.’”

That's what the church is supposed to be. I know it's not the thing on television, or what we are told we must do to attract the biggest crowd. But that is not what we are called to. We are called to bring them to Christ and this seems to be the way God reaches the unchurched through his rural church and I wouldn't be surprised if city folks aren't also looking for this same simple sincerity.

Tim
UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 6th  11:00  Sunshine Club - Speaker: Dale Atkinson, Sumter County Chief of Probate Judge

Feb 8th  6-8  Children’s movie night in FLC with supper

Feb 10th  11:00  Children’s Valentine party

Feb 22nd  Deadline for submitting to items for Crossroads.

Feb 26th  11:00  Emanuel Soup Kitchen

Children’s Corner

Feb 8th:  Movie night at the church with supper at 6-8 pm in FLC
Feb 10th:  Valentine’s Party during children’s church
April 13th:  Easter Extravaganza

BYG NEWS

Feb 3rd  6:00  meet in FLC
Feb 10th  6:00  meet in FLC
Feb 17th  6:00  meet in FLC
Feb 24th  6:00  meet in FLC

Sunshine Club

The next meeting of the Sunshine Club will be on Wednesday, Feb 6th. Our speaker will be Dale Atkinson, Sumter County Chief Judge of Probate. Soup will be provided so bring a side, desert, drink and come join us for food, fun and fellowship.

Missions

Kairos Prison Ministry will be March 6-10 at Camille Griffin Graham Correctional facility for women. Please begin praying for the team, officers and the women at the prison to see and receive the love of Christ. Prayers, cookies and green agape $$$ are needed. I will pick up all the donations from Bethel on Tuesday, March 5th.

“I was in prison and you visited me.” Matthew 15:36. Thank you for your generous support of this ministry.

Linda Barnard
803-436-5896

THANK YOU

Dear Committee:

The sanctuary of Bethel Church was absolutely beautiful during the Christmas Season. Thank you for sharing a portion of that beauty with me. The Poinsettia is still very pretty.

“In God We Trust”
June W. Snead

Thank you for your generous food donation to Christ Charities. Your thoughtfulness will provide food for those in need in our community. Our clients benefit from your caring and sharing. Thank you again.

In His Service
Carey Player, Volunteer
Christian Charities of Sumter

We want to thank everyone for all your love and support for our family during our time of loss. Thanks to everyone who supplied a meal, sent flowers or prayed for us. It is so much appreciated. We love you all.

The Mack Robinson family
Chili 5 pans (see instructions below)

Hash Brown Casserole 5 (9 x 13) pans (recipe below)

Orange Congealed Salad 5 (9 x 13) pans (recipe below)

Cornbread 5, (9 x 13) pans
(2 boxes of Jiffy mix per pan)

Lemon Sheet cake 6, (9 x 13) pans
(lemon cake mix and lemon icing)

Chili
Please use 4 pounds of ground beef per pot, 4 cans of kidney beans, 3 or 4 large (28 oz) can diced tomatoes. Please use the Carrol Shelby Kit to season the chili. It will take two of these boxes. Please do not use all of the salt that is included and do not use the flour that is included.

Hash Brown Casserole
1- 30 oz bag of hash browns
1 cup chopped onion
2 cups grated sharp cheddar
2 cans cream of chicken soup
1- 8 oz sour cream
1 cup of milk
1/4 tsp black pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 9 x 13 deep pan. Mix all ingredients and pour into pan. Bake for 50 min or until the top is golden brown.

Orange Congealed Salad (PLEASE MAKE THIS SALAD THE DAY BEFORE)
1- 6 oz package of orange Jello
1 large can frozen orange juice undiluted
2 large cans mandarin oranges (drained)
1 large can crushed pineapple (drained)
1 1/2 cup hot water.

Stir Jello in hot water until dissolved. Add frozen orange juice, oranges and pineapple. Mix well. Pour into lightly oiled 9 x 13 pan and place in fridge to congeal. After this has congealed, cover with the following topping.

Mix 2 cups of milk with a 6 oz package of instant lemon pudding, then add one 8 oz container of cool whip.

"YOUR LIFE IS A GIFT FROM GOD. MAY YOU SO LIVE THAT YOUR LIFE BECOMES YOUR GIFT TO GOD."