

Leadership requirements in enabling growth in local churches

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Introduction

In 1989 even under the collapsing communist government and after many years of attempts for official registration, the Czech Pentecostal Movement was finally legalized and officially registered as the Apostolic Church in the Czech Republic¹. Numbering around 800 members in the whole country, the movement began to work hard and has been growing since then up to today. In 2010 the Apostolic Church embraced 3087 official members² and numbered around 7500 people total, including children, in 43 local congregations.

Despite this growth, it can be observed from the same statistics that the largest congregations in the movement have around 200 members³ and have been stagnating around this number for several years. It seems that this limit is very difficult to surpass.⁴

In English literature, several books dealing with the topic of church growth and its barriers can be found. Unfortunately in the Czech context such literature is almost completely missing. This is the reason the author has chosen this theme for this essay. The aim of this work is to bring brief reflections of the important points of the discussion concerning church growth barriers and also suggestions for how leadership can help in overcoming these potential barriers. Thus, if translated, this essay could add important information which is missing in the Czech context.

¹ The Apostolic Church is the only Pentecostal movement officially registered in the Czech Republic.

² According to the official statistics issued in January 2011 by the Apostolic Church headquarters; a member is considered a person who is baptized in water and is affiliated with the movement by a written agreement.

³ Only one congregation exceeded 200 members.

⁴ The situation is quite similar among the Evangelical denominations in the Czech Republic.

Church Growth and its Barriers

Natural Tendency to Grow

It is generally understood from Scripture that growth is an integral part of God's kingdom⁵. When Jesus described the diverse characteristics of this kingdom, he also spoke about its natural tendency to grow.⁶ After finishing his mission on earth, Jesus sent his disciples into the whole world and expected them to be successful in the Commission he gave them⁷. The Book of Acts testifies about the world being reached step by step for Christ and the Church being established in many places. New people and new territories were touched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. The growth of the Church embodied both spiritual and numerical vitality⁸.

Despite the fact that growth is an essential part of God's expectations regarding the life of the church, it seems that currently local congregations often struggle to continue to grow numerically. Statistics can help us see this fact more clearly.⁹ According to J. Jackson, the population growth is far outpacing the church's growth rate. Eighty-seven percent of Protestant churches are stagnant or declining, and 50 percent of all churches in 2000 did not add even one new member through conversion.¹⁰ A similar picture can be drawn from other statistics.¹¹

⁵ C.F. George, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 44.

⁶ See for example Matthew 13 – the Kingdom of God is like good seed, a mustard seed, and yeast.

⁷ Matt 28:18-20

⁸ Scripture challenges Christians to grow spiritually (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18), but at the same time, there are records of numerical growth (e.g., Acts 2:47; 6:7).

⁹ The literature about church growth barriers generally reflects the situation in North America. Numbers may vary from country to country; however, as it has been already mentioned in the Introduction, the situation in Czech is quite similar to the U.S.

¹⁰ J. Jackson, *God-Size Your Church: Beyond Growth for Growth Sake*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), p. IX.

¹¹ D.T. Olson, 'Turning the Church Crisis Into a Spiritual Revolution', *Enrichment Journal*, 15/1 (2010), p. 32: "To keep up with population growth, 2,900 more churches need to be started every year; The growth rate of evangelical, mainline, and Catholic churches has been declining throughout the last decade."

God-Sized Local Church

It seems almost impossible to say what size congregation is the best one. Many factors should be considered when evaluating whether the size of a church is appropriate and whether such a church should try to grow beyond its current boundaries. Some of those factors may be internal (the age and history of the church, the specific calling of the pastor, the level of leadership, available resources), while some are external (demographic situation and trends, the average-size church in the town and so on).

C. George does not believe that it would be appropriate to impose a particular growth rate or church size on any church. Still he believes that it is necessary to encourage pastors and leaders to seek God and ask God whether He wants to do more than what has been previously done or imagined. It is not a matter of growth or particular church size. It is a matter of our willingness to obey God.

G. Wood strongly emphasizes that productivity is part of a healthy church. He distinguishes between two types of productivity: righteous character and fruit from conversion. Both are needed.¹²

Jackson connects the ideal size of the church with the definition of pastoral success:

Pastoral success is about rightly understanding, pursuing, and achieving what God's vision for your ministry is all about.¹³

However, numerical growth should matter. George is convinced that God's will for his Kingdom involve numerical growth.¹⁴ This author sees numerous growth opportunities present in churches of whatever size. Unfortunately many

¹² G. Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, (St. Charles: Church Smart Resources, 2001), p. 26.

¹³ Jackson, *God Size Your Church*, p. 15.

¹⁴ George, *How to Break Growth Barriers*, p. 73.

times these opportunities tend to be overlooked.¹⁵ It may be part of the reason why so many churches are stagnating or even declining.

Barriers to Church Growth

Specialists in church growth often recognize potential barriers in such a process. There are the predictable numerical plateaus most local churches have to face. Usually they are identified with an average worship attendance of 75, 200, 400, 800 and 1200 “caps”.¹⁶ Similarly some speak about *small churches* (15 – 200 attendance), *medium churches* (201 – 400 attendance) and *large churches* (401+).¹⁷ It seems that 200 is the most notable cap, at least in U.S., because 85 percent of churches in North America stay below it¹⁸.

This “standard belief”¹⁹ among many church leaders concerning growth barriers (especially the 200 barrier) is challenged by some writers²⁰. Nevertheless even these opponents admit that there is a difference between small churches and large churches. They agree with the idea that a small church is not a microcosm of a large church but a totally different kind of organization.²¹ However, they believe the barrier idea causes churches to use the wrong model for congregational development and apply short-sighted strategies while overlooking a more systematic approach.²²

The same advocates of growth barriers are aware that church growth is a complex process with multiple causes, and some of these causes may not even

¹⁵ George, *How to Break Growth Barriers*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 15.

¹⁷ G.L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), p. 98.

¹⁸ Jackson, *God Size Your Church*, p. 63. Similarly also McIntosh, *One Size doesn't fit all*, p. 18; he speaks about 80% of small churches.

¹⁹ K.E. Martin, *The Myth of The 200 barrier: How to Lead Through Transitional Growth*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 7.

²⁰ B.M. Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), p. 46; Sullivan points out that statistics do not reveal a growth barrier in the range of 200. “Rich Houseal has juxtaposed the statistical reports of churches in a variety of ways and found no indication of a statistical 200 barrier. Yet many church growth advocates remain convinced of a severe growth restriction in the 150 to 350 range. It is perhaps more accurate to speak of the barrier as a range, although most church growth authorities refer to it simply as the 200 barrier.”

²¹ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 45.

²² Martin, *The Myth of the 200 Barrier*, p. 7.

be understood.²³ They admit that human and congregational dynamics and their complexities are reasons why transformational leadership can never be fully mastered.²⁴ Neither particular figure of 200, 400, 800 or 1200 is considered an exact or magical number.²⁵ Still it seems that stages in the numerical development of the local church do exist, whereby something has to be overcome which allows for future growth of the church. It is similar to the experience of athletes; they often speak about hitting a wall during their performance. The question is whether they are able to overcome such a moment or if they will surrender to it.

²³ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 9

²⁴ J. Herrington, M. Bonem, J.H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformation Journey*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Company, 2000), chapter 11.

²⁵ Sullivan speaks more about the range of 150 – 350 than the exact number of 200, George of 50 – 350 and so on.

Fundamental Personal Qualities of a Growth Leader

Ideal Set of Personal Qualities

Literature about leadership offers a wide set of qualities and gifts that leaders generally have to have. The question arises as to which of these qualities are most important for a leader who wants to provide continuous or significant growth in a local church or overcome church growth barriers. Generally it could be said that certain qualities common to such a successful leader can be found in the writings of church growth specialists; however, it is difficult to establish any ideal.

Leadership is more than science. It requires sound thinking, sensitive feelings, and profound spirituality.²⁶

The challenge is how these ingredients should be mixed to get a successful leader. George Barna is rather pessimistic concerning any attempt to describe an ideal set of qualities. His conclusion is that the gifts and strengths of successful leaders are so unique that they can be observed to some extent, but probably not transferred.²⁷ He thinks that it is not sufficient to be a visionary leader, and that it is difficult to find a turnaround leader because there are only a few of them in the churches.

Peter Wagner points out that many pastors of growing churches have only vague insights into the reasons why their churches are growing.²⁸ This does not mean they are unaware of their strong personal characteristics or of the strategies which are fundamental for success in church growth; however, they would perhaps not be able to specify well the key elements of their own success.

Barna also warns that those remarkable leaders in most cases are not able or willing to attempt another breakthrough or significant growth at another

²⁶ Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, chapter 11

²⁷ G. Barna, *Turnaround Churches: How to Overcome Barriers to Growth and Bring New Life to an Established Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1993), pp. 108-109.

²⁸ This conclusion, made by Peter Wagner, is quoted by C. George, *How To Break Growth Barriers*, p. 62.

place or another church.²⁹ This conclusion is based upon interviews with dozens of pastors.

Wood disagrees with Barna's conclusions. He believes that even though some skills or personal qualities are important for a particular congregation or church, success is repeatable at other locations and contexts, too. He brings several examples to support this. He is also more optimistic concerning the question of whether or not skills can be transferred or learnt.

We may conclude then that success involves more than methodologies and that personal qualities are an important part of such successes. Maybe the ideal mix of these qualities cannot be discerned; however, some essential personal characteristics or spiritual endowments are often mentioned in church growth literature. Among those belong the following:³⁰

Passion - Heart in the Centre

Many authors agree that church growth is more a matter of the heart first and then a certain level of technique.³¹ If a leader (and leadership) is full of passion to see the church become all God wants it to be, there is a great plausibility that growth will become an integral part of the life of that church. Wood expresses it this way: "'Want-to' comes before the 'how-to'".³²

²⁹ G. Barna, *Turnaround Churches*, pp. 108-109.

³⁰ There could be more characteristics mentioned in this chapter. Suggestions and observations of different authors vary. I tried to find those characteristics common to most authors.

³¹ George, *How To Break Growth Barriers*, p. 74; see also K. Catlin, J. Matthews, *Leading at the Speed Growth: Journey from Entrepreneur to CEO* (New York: Hungry Minds, 2001), chapter 5; similarly T.S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), chapter 1. The author speaks about the most important factors for vision to be found: "The researchers found that the leaders discovered vision through intersection of three factors: the passion of the leader; the need of the community; and the gifts, abilities, talents, and passions of the congregation."

³² Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 21

According to T. Rainer, passion is not a personality trait. It can be found in both quiet leaders and gregarious leaders. It is something which is hard to define, but it is evident when someone is full of passion.³³

Wood argues that the majority of America's 350,000 congregations are experiencing less than 25% decadal growth and that pastors are unconcerned about the lack of growth in their churches.³⁴ This is a startling discovering. He calls those leaders *maintenance-oriented* pastors.

Still many examples can be found in literature and in the Christian world today of leaders who desperately long to see God act in their lives and congregations more.³⁵

For Wood no church is too small to accept the challenge of being healthy and growing, but a passionate leader with a fire in his heart for the redemption of the lost is desperately needed.³⁶ Technical proficiencies are part of what is needed, but the heart issue cannot be underestimated. Unless leaders have a burning desire to see God's plan realized through them, there is little hope that something will happen. In this sense, it is not so much about being large, but rather about being full of passion to see what God can do.³⁷

Faith

It is easy to be suspicious of claims concerning extraordinary faith. A number of examples of unfulfilled dreams and visions could be introduced. However, another fundamental factor for a successful leader who wants to turn around a church or lead it to growth is faith. Sullivan claims that although it cannot be said that every pastor must have the gift of faith, church growth

³³ Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, chapter 2. He asserts that only 6% of pastors show the characteristic of a passionate leader who exudes a contagious enthusiasm for ministry.

³⁴ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 127.

³⁵ I have been personally following the revival in Argentine churches, especially in the congregation of Rey de Reyes, Buenos Aires, which has grown from zero in 1986 to more than 20,000 people in 2010. The personal story of Pastor Claudio Freidzon of seeking God and asking for more can be found in his book C. Freidzon, *Holy Spirit, I Hunger for You*, (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 1997).

³⁶ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 24

³⁷ Jackson, *God Size Your Church*, p. 40.

pastors tend to have it.³⁸ This strong and unwavering conviction that God is calling a leader to reach the lost in great numbers is fundamental. Without such faith, no methodology will help and no opportunity will be adequate.³⁹

Sullivan reminds pastors of the “mountain-moving faith”⁴⁰ principle, putting emphasis on the fact that despite many negative experiences, this is a biblical concept.⁴¹ He suggests several ways in which faith can be encouraged and increased,⁴² because the matter of increasing faith is, according to him, the essential factor for effective church growth leadership.⁴³

Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is seen as another critical element of an effective turnaround leader. This characteristic should not be confused with arrogance. It is developed through winning experiences, success and achievement,⁴⁴ and it starts in our private lives.

S. R. Covey describes several important habits of effective leaders, and one of them is called the habit of Private Victory. Through this habit, self-confidence is significantly increased, and leaders can come to know themselves in a deeper and more meaningful way.⁴⁵ At the same time, it allows them to be aware of their personal weaknesses and limits. The point is that in those weaknesses they have experienced the greatness and power of God, and they feel a constant need for God.

Rainer speaks in this context about *confident humility*, which, at first, seems to be an oxymoron, and he adds that leaders with this humility

³⁸ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 66.

³⁹ However there are stories of pastors who already lost their hope in being able to breakthrough some kind of church barrier, and still God used them (to their great amazement), and it happened. See again the example in Freidzon, C. *Holy Spirit, I Hunger for You*, pp. 29 - 35.

⁴⁰ Matt. 17:20

⁴¹ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 61.

⁴² For example, reading about faith in the Bible, in faith-inspiring books, listening to people of great faith, praying to God for increased faith and so on.

⁴³ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ S.R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic*, (New York: Free Press, 2004), chapter 2.

concentrate their confidence more on what God is doing in their lives and less on their inherent abilities.⁴⁶ He brings some interesting findings that many successful leaders did not even plan to lead great churches; they simply planned to serve in their current leadership role at some point in their lives.⁴⁷ This does not contradict what has already been said about passion. These leaders were passionate about fulfilling God's plan in every situation they went through. The position of a growth leader became a natural consequence of their passionate, self-confident but still humble attitude.

Properly developed, self-confidence allows a leader to take risks which others would shun and still remain willing to listen and have the attitude of learning from others.

Patience and persistence

Some observations lead to the conclusion that rapid church growth is the best way to break through church growth (especially the 200) barriers. It seems that explosive growth comes from short periods of inspiration and diligent effort.⁴⁸ Still it is also true that growth or change takes time and requires patience and persistence:

While we see many common characteristics of breakout church leaders, one trait that manifests itself repeatedly is persistence. These leaders see a clear goal, and thought it may take years to reach the goal, they do not see giving up as an option.⁴⁹

One of the key questions a leader attempting a breakthrough or significant growth has to ask is how long he is planning to stay in the church. According to the statistics, it typically takes five years to break the barrier.⁵⁰

Rainer observes that there is a strong correlation between pastoral tenure and evangelistic effectiveness in churches. He mentions examples of breakout

⁴⁶ Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, chapter 3

⁴⁷ Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, chapter 2

⁴⁸ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 75

⁴⁹ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, chapter 2.

⁵⁰ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 70.

churches and then examines the tenure of the senior pastors in those congregations. His conclusion is that the average tenure of a breakout church leader exceeds twenty-one years, which is in sharp contrast with the current trend of short-term pastoral ministry.⁵¹

Thus, he says, breakout church leaders are aware of the fact that, generally, there is a long journey to a breakthrough. They must be not only willing, but in many cases also wanting to make slow progress, if needed, to reach their goals.

⁵¹ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, chapter 3.

Fundamental Tasks of Growth Leadership

Much more could be said in this section. Leadership literature presents many key issues important for successful leadership;⁵² however, there are some specific issues directly related to overcoming church growth barriers, and these will be presented in this chapter.

Implementing a systemic approach to pastoral care

It seems that one of the most important causes of failure of churches to accomplish what God requires is the way that pastors manage themselves as church leaders.

According to Wood the pastor-people relationship is the leading (if not the pre-eminent) factor in determining whether a body of Christ will be effective.⁵³

Sullivan points out that there is not much evidence that the organizational strategy has been largely effective in helping churches overcome growth barriers, and he stresses the fundamental importance of the relationship between the pastor and the people.⁵⁴

There is quite a strong agreement among church growth experts that for the church to be growing, the pastor-people relationship must be modified. It seems this change is required if the congregation wants to grow beyond 200 in attendance. In Macintosh typology of church size, this is the point where a small church attempts to become a medium church.⁵⁵ He believes that fundamental change from relational orientation to a program-based one in such a congregation is necessary. Sullivan speaks about this change as moving away from being a fellowship to being more like a corporate-type organization. The modification of the relationship between pastor and people is part of this transformation.

⁵² For example J. Jackson brings out four fundamental jobs of great leaders: casting a vision, creating environments, developing systems and equipping other leaders; see Jackson, *God Size Your Church*, pp. 33 – 36.

⁵³ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, p. 38

In this context George introduces the concept of the rancher.⁵⁶ He declares that 90-95% of pastors begin their ministry as shepherders. He mentions caregiving and availability as being significant characteristics of a shepherd. According to George, a typical shepherd tries to meet the needs of as many people as possible and make himself available for a maximum number of people. This model, however, has its natural, biological limits. From the perspective of sociology, a typical person can know only approximately 100 – 150 people⁵⁷. Similarly a pastor cannot attend to the needs of a limitless number of people nor can give himself to the disposition to all.

If there is aspiration for significant and continuous growth, the paradigm must be changed from doing the caring to seeing that people get cared for.⁵⁸ This is exactly the concept of the rancher. A rancher gives greater and more careful attention to organizational needs than to personal needs. His aim is to accomplish the work (including pastoral care) through others because the task is too great for one person. This is a shift from the one-on-one relationship to establishing group relationships.

George calls for a fuller and broader definition of the concept of pastor. He warns that the apostle Paul uses the image of a shepherd only once (in Eph 4:11) and instead employs a wide range of terminology such as steward of Christ, teacher, example, priest, helmsman, overseer and leader. The gift of leadership (Rom 12:8) and gifts of administration (1 Cor 12:28) should also be considered.

Thus a rancher is not judged by what he himself can do, but by what he can accomplish through others. He is not appreciated because of his good sermons, but because of the number of ministries he is able to develop in the congregation.

⁵⁶ George, *How To Break Growth Barriers*, pp. 89 – 108.

⁵⁷ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 47 Sullivan speaks about the “rule of 150”.

⁵⁸ He admits that even shepherding can help produce growth over 200 people, but still there will be a stop point sooner or later, and the paradigm will have to be changed if this growth is supposed to continue.

This change will always bring some level of pain. Personal relationship is an important part of people's lives, and many times they assume that it is the pastor personally who should meet their spiritual or emotional needs.

The critics point out that there is too much pragmatism in the concept of rancher.⁵⁹ Also appeal of Heb. 13:17 that pastors should give account for the souls in their flock could be hardly accomplished in the rancher model because rancher does not even know the people by name.

Still if the church aspires to grow or overcome (especially the 200) growth barrier, one of the most fundamental tasks of the leadership seems to be introducing the concept of the rancher.

Discovering unconscious decisions

The decisions most difficult to manage are the ones made without even knowing they were made.⁶⁰

In his book concerning breaking church growth barriers, Sullivan speaks about *choice point theory*. The term "choice points" is borrowed from computer programmers and indicates a point on a software decision tree.⁶¹

In the context of church growth, this theory simply means that there are decisions taken unconsciously or informally in local congregations which essentially affect the life, form and size of those congregations.

Choice points may be *points* in time when a formal or informal, and sometimes unconscious, decision is made regarding a value, preference, attitude, or response.⁶²

⁵⁹ R. Boone, *Mega-Church Movement: The Structure of the New Testament Church*, <http://www.biblebaptist-sm.com/mega-church-movement.htm> [accessed 10/3/2011]; "Before introducing the idea of ranching versus shepherding, Carl George gives an illustration of the triage system used by medical practitioners during times of emergency. The system is based on the pragmatic idea that if it works it must be right. The system attempts to help the greatest amount of people in the least amount of time. Applying this concept to the church is problematic. For the Christian it is never a question of what seems to work, but what is known to be right."

⁶⁰ Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, p. 25.

⁶¹ Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, 19.

⁶² Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover how to make the leap*, 21.

These points are sometimes marked by opportunity, sometimes by a crisis, or they may come from certain events the church has been facing. They are *instinctive responses* with long-term consequences and are a significant factor regarding congregational culture and size.

Jackson points out that it seems people choose to cluster in small churches because of some specific benefits, such as intimate community, spiritually close relationships and the fact that they know each other well.⁶³ Thus many churches stay small because of social reasons, not spiritual reasons. This is an example of an unconscious decision – people just feel good and subconsciously make the decision to remain small.

According to Sullivan one of the most important tasks of a growth or breakout leader is to re-evaluate these unconscious decisions which may cause a growth-restricting congregational culture.⁶⁴ At the same time, it is necessary to involve people in this process, educate them about choice-point theory and train them on facing choice points effectively. Thus the chance that the congregational culture will be modified and the necessary changes introduced grows. The leadership of the congregation is responsible to help the congregation acknowledge, confront, and make new decisions regarding corresponding issues.

Managing congregational transition

Transition is composed of two components: change and human beings. Openness to change seems necessary for a congregation to grow into a larger church. Every action produces some level of change and that creates discomfort and even pain. This is the reason why it is not possible to consider the process of introducing change as an individual task. It is a group task because the culture of the whole congregation will be directed into new values, thinking and practices.⁶⁵

⁶³ Jackson, *God Size Your Church*, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, p. 35.

⁶⁵ Sullivan, *New Perspectives on Breaking the 200 Barrier*, pp. 92-93

The good news is that while the changes we are facing differ from any we've experienced before, the transition process by which people get through change is well mapped.⁶⁶

It means that we could go through this process quite safely. W. Bridges distinguishes between change and transition. Change is situational (for example, the move to a new site, the reorganization of a team's roles), but transition is psychological.⁶⁷ Transition is a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and get to know the details of the new situation that the change will bring about.

According to Bridges the fundamental role of leadership is to successfully go through the transformational process with the people of the congregation.

When a change happens without people going through a transition, it is just a rearrangement of the chairs.⁶⁸

The three phases of the transformational process are: ending, neutral zone and new beginning.

Bridges warns that many leaders want to start with the last part of the process – with the new beginning. This is the reason why many times the transformational process fails.

Even in good changes, this process has to start with ending. It is necessary to let go of the old identity, but as Herrington says, it is not necessary to portray the current situation in a negative light.⁶⁹ The reason is, as it has been already stated, that transition is a psychological process. People at least psychologically lose something. Maybe many of the losses are not concrete (for example, assumptions or expectations), but they are important to them. Bridges' advice is: don't argue with what you hear.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ W. Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 3rd Edition, 2009), p. X.

⁶⁷ Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Bridges, W. *Managing Transitions*, p. 26.

There will be people in the church who like the present situation exactly as it is. They may have been working hard to accomplish what now is going to be changed. Good leaders know that they have to go through the whole process with the maximum number of people. This does not mean that some people will not leave the church because of the changes, but the intention is to include most of them in the process.⁷¹

Despite this careful process, the leadership has to be aware that one of the fundamental tasks of managing transition is to convince people to leave home.

Bridges considers the neutral zone as the most difficult part of the process.⁷² He compares this part to the wilderness through which Moses led his people. It is a period of time that most languages don't have a name for. Neither the old ways nor the new ways work satisfactorily. One of the most dangerous aspects is that people don't understand it. Confusion, fear and a feeling of loneliness is normal. Bridges recommends the following in this phase: be with people and be aware of the fact that communicating in the neutral zone is more about hearing people, not about saying things.

Still it is not wasted time and the neutral zone is even more open to new ideas. The uncertainty in the neutral zone may give birth to creative thinking and makes room for untraditional ideas. Thus it can be a time of creative opportunity. Good leadership should recognize this potential and use the neutral zone creatively.

The new beginning phase, according to Bridges, must start the readiness to make the emotional commitment to do things a new way.⁷³ This cannot be forced; it can be only encouraged, supported or reinforced. Timing is a matter of the mind and heart. To make a new beginning, people need the four P's:

⁷¹ Maybe we can find some tension here. Bill Hybels, in his lecture about vision, proposes that if we want people to move "there" (meaning, to the point of our vision), we have to tell them how bad or uncomfortable the current situation is. A good leader might then be able to do both things at the same time: appreciate the present situation and previous development while explaining why we cannot *stay* "here" any longer. B. Hybels, 'From Here to There', *Global Leadership Summit on CD* (Willow Creek Association, 2010)

⁷² Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, pp. 39-56.

⁷³ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, p. 58.

purpose, a picture of how the outcome will look and feel, a step-by-step plan and an understanding of their part in the process. If the leadership is able to cover all four of these bases, there is good hope that the transformation process will work out successfully.

Congregational transformation is not an easy process. Herrington describes it as a balancing act in many different aspects.

Change leaders will be pulled between the daily demands of managing the congregation's routine and the need to devote considerable time to the long-term process.⁷⁴

Still it is worth making this effort; otherwise, "unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable".⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, chapter 11.

⁷⁵ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, p. 7.

Conclusion

The reasons why the author has chosen the theme of this essay are mentioned in the introduction. They are related to his own context, although this essay presents general reflections on the topic of church growth and overcoming church growth barriers.

In the first part, the author tries to see the place of growth in the plan of God and answer the question of whether churches should grow and to what size. He concludes that church growth is an integral part of the Great Commission and that God's will for His Kingdom involves numerical growth. It seems impossible to say what size church is appropriate, but what can be stated is that according to the statistics, the majority of churches are stagnating. Therefore the attempt to grow is one of the greatest challenges for the church today.

It also seems that there are predictable numerical plateaus in church growth. The 200 barrier is one of them. Later in the work several ways that leadership can overcome these barriers are suggested.

In the second part, the author tries to address the issue of leadership which can provide continuous growth or lead the congregation through the growth barrier. He notes that a mix of giftings and personal qualities can be drawn from the examples of successful leaders. Some scholars suggest that any attempt to draft any ideal is futile. Still it seems that some essential personal characteristics and fundamental endowments are listed in growth leadership literature. These are presented in this second part.

In the last part, the question of how leadership can contribute to breaking growth barriers is treated in more detail. First the pastor-people relationship is considered a fundamental factor, especially in attempting to break the 200 barrier, and the concept of the rancher is presented. Another important factor that is considered is the unconscious decisions made by congregations and ways they can be treated. Finally the transformational process and its three phases are introduced with recommendations regarding the leadership in each phase.

In conclusion it may be said that the author of this essay agrees with the statement made by Carl George that three institutions are designed for the welfare of humanity: government, family and church.⁷⁶ The church is vital for good and righteousness in society; there is no institution more important in that sense. This is one of the main reasons why churches should grow and fulfil their God-given mission.

⁷⁶ Wood, *Leading Turnaround Churches*, p. 7.

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