

The Mathematics of Church Growth

By Allen Ratta

Leading Growth Indicators

There are three factors, no more and no less, that determine whether a church is growing, declining or staying the same. They are the Visitor Volume Rate, the Visitor Retention Rate and the Backdoor Rate. We call these a church's Leading Growth Indicators.

Most pastors could calculate their Visitor Volume Rate by simply adding up their visitor cards for a given month. Far fewer pastors have a handle on their Visitor Retention Rate and it is a rare pastor indeed who has any idea of the value for their Backdoor Rate. The Visitor Retention Rate is the number of visiting family units, on average, who are becoming a part of the church every month. The Backdoor Rate is the number of family units, on average, who are leaving the church every month. These factors together determine whether or not a church is experiencing a net gain or loss in attendance.

A church's *Leading Growth Indicators* can also be used to forecast the future growth or decline of a church. Such forecasting is accurate so long as the *Leading Growth Indicators* remain constant over the time period. The good news is that a church can do a lot to impact and to change its Leading Growth Indicators.

ConnectionPower's *Church Growth Calculator™* provides an easy to use tool to predict the future attendance of a church, if nothing changes. It also provides the ability to run "what if" scenarios. Want to know what would happen to your church's attendance in years one through five if the Visitor Volume Rate were increased by one family per month? Simply enter the data and see the instant results. Want to know how much your Visitor Retention Rate will have to increase to reach a certain attendance goal in three years? The *Church Growth Calculator™* makes this a painless process.

Churches, large and small, rarely have the kinds of ministry systems in place to drive critical information regarding a church's *Leading Growth Indicators* into the hands of church leadership. Various systems are required to gather this kind of information. Initially, a church needs a well designed guest center with an effective strategy to drive a high percentage of visitors to it. It also requires a visitor tracking system that accurately tracks and follows visitors until their final status is determined and dutifully recorded. Finally, it requires a manager to continually run calculations on running attendance numbers against the visitor retention rate so that Backdoor Rates can be averaged and plotted. Then, if a church has any aspirations about increasing visitor retention, they will have to have a well-designed and sustainable assimilation ministry. How valuable would it be for churches and pastors to have all these systems bundled together into one easy to use and implement ministry package? These are the solutions that ConnectionPower offers in its PowerVisitor™ module.

Mathematic Essentials to Managing for Church Growth

Accurate data on a church's *Leading Growth Indicators*, as hard as it can be to come by, is, in some cases, critical information to manage for church growth. The *indicators* give leaders the fundamental diagnostic capability they need. This becomes an invaluable big-picture aid for navigating obstacles to church growth.

For example, a church might have a visitor volume problem or a visitor retention problem or a back door problem or a combination of the above. Each distinct problem requires a radically different solution. To apply a solution for low visitor volume when the real problem is low visitor retention misses the mark. It is a poor use of limited church growth resources, leads to frustration and fails to advance the church. Yet church leaders often launch church growth initiatives with little or no reliable information on their three basic *Leading Growth Indicators*.

Leading Growth Indicators are the starting point for good growth management. Once it is determined which *indicator(s)* are impacting church growth a more refined strategy can be developed to determine the best solution. If the church's major growth obstacle is visitor volume, one or more short and/or long term initiatives may be planned. The leader can move with confidence knowing that they are applying the right cure for the affliction.

One of the most powerful applications for long-term data on your *Leading Growth Indicators* is the ability to spot downward trends well before they significantly impact a church's attendance. At least one year of previous data are required to provide a baseline that will allow you to account for seasonal fluctuations. It is most helpful to see this data plotted out in line graph form with the current year and the previous year running concurrently. Early identification empowers leaders to make early interventions and to stay ahead of the power curve in managing for growth.

Leading Growth Indicators provide "all important" context. Strong visitor volume may be meaningless within the context of low visitor retention and a high back door rate. The question is often asked, how high does my Visitor Retention Rate have to be for my church to grow? The answer is, "that depends." It depends on the other *Leading Growth Indicators*. It is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about church growth without taking all three indicators into account. ConnectionPower's PowerVisitor™ solution pushes the right information to the fingertips of church leaders so they can manage for growth.