

# ON CHURCH GROWTH

## A RED MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH POSITION PAPER

It is not uncommon to hear Christian people speak of their dislike for large Churches. The question often asked is, "Is Red Mountain Community Church going to be a big Church?" While the exact answer to that question is only known by God, it is appropriate to wonder why anyone would imagine a healthy Church not becoming large. Though there might be fond memories of the early phases of a particular church's history when "everybody knew everybody," the desire to keep a church small argues against everything God intended a local church to be. In fact, it is not an overstatement at all to say that an obedient Church is a growing church. This is not to say that there are not seasons where numerical growth slows or even stops for a while. There might even be factors in a community that cause a church to shrink for a season. There could even be spiritual issues which cause a church to lose people. Such setbacks however will be of a temporary nature and as a healthy church is watched over a period of time it will recover, adapt and there will be numerical growth. This is as natural as it is for a healthy child to grow. We would expect nothing less.

The thing that is of particular interest about the growth of healthy churches is that it has been true of the church no matter what culture it is in and no matter how intense the opposition to it is. Where there has been health there has been growth, regardless of persecution, economics and politics.

None of this is to say that all church growth is good. Nor is it to say that numerical growth in itself should be pursued. It is certain that there have been instances where truth has been compromised in order to make churches attractive to more people. This is of course a short-sited strategy and even offensive to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ. We are to beware of the kind of popularity that comes with compromise of truth (Luke 6:26, John 15:19). To use gimmicks of various kinds just to set attendance records is to pursue the effect rather than the cause.

The fact remains however that there is a wealth of Biblical data that supports the idea that the church, the body of Christ, grows numerically when it is healthy, and therefore its local branches will do the same. This is the witness of prophecy, of logic, and of history.

Some of the least understood passages in the Old Testament are those which prophesy of a great movement of God that would come about through the Jews among non-Jews, or gentiles. Beginning with the promise to one man, Abraham, that "through you all nations of the earth will be blest," we can see God's intention to draw into His family a vast horde of people not related physically to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). In the well known story of Jonah the wonder of the man in the fish often keeps us from reflecting on the fact that thousands of non-Jews came to repent before their creator (Jonah 3:5-10; 4:11). In the writings of the prophets a great movement among the gentiles is often predicted (Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6, Acts 13:44-49). They also revealed that this would come about because of the spiritual growth of God's children and their involvement in ministry (Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 8:8-12; Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:14-33). There would be a multiplication of teachers and leaders, the subsequent promulgation of truth, and then the natural numerical growth of the movement. So the Old Testament in effect projects the numerical growth of the church. It is quite clear from the witness of the Old Testament prophets that God would act to miraculously enhance the spiritual health of His people. This spiritual growth would produce numerical growth and expansion of the faith to all the peoples of the earth. It is a movement that continues through us today.

Besides this witness of prophecy, there is the witness of logic to the fact that a healthy church will grow numerically. If we look at what Christ charged church members with, it is hard to logically imagine numerical growth not occurring unless of course, they are unhealthy—disobedient to His commands. He commanded them to make disciples of all nations, by going to them, baptizing them, and teaching them. Whether they go into their neighborhoods or half- way around the globe, numerical growth will occur. It is only logical to believe that when the people of a church obey Christ's commands, their church will grow numerically.

It is logically inconsistent to think that healthy Christians could not produce numerical growth as well when we read from the Scripture about the impact of the Holy Spirit on our lives. Jesus told His followers that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be witnesses in their cities, their nation, and around the world (Acts 1:8). Again, a Church will grow numerically because of who indwells its members, unless they are being disobedient.

The witness of prophecy and the witness of logic are compelling, but there is no more dramatic a witness to the fact that healthy Churches grow than the witness of history. Where prophecy and logic might be passed over, it is hard to read the account of the early Church in the book of Acts and imagine God being pleased with those who would keep their Church small and comfortable. Over and over again in the book of Acts we see statements about numerical growth (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:5-8). Again, numerical growth was never the focus of the effort, but it was the natural result of spiritual health and obedience to the will of God.

At Red Mountain Community Church, we expect numerical growth. To be sure, there will be seasons of decline, and seasons on the plateau, but overall there will be expansion and numerical growth. We do not aim at numerical growth. We do not use gimmicks to break records. We do aim at spiritual growth and health and we do seek to attract through a variety of means those who are being drawn by God to a deeper understanding of spiritual things. We seek to spark interest in our community. We seek to address areas of special need that people will identify with. We seek to offer contact with our church through non-threatening activities and events. None of these efforts are aimed at numerical growth. They are aimed at producing spiritual growth in needy people, and the result is that some people are attracted and enter into that spiritual growth process. The result is numerical growth. We anticipate and plan for this kind of growth because we have every intention of being obedient to our Lord.