

## **Subject: Church Growth & Management**

Submitted by: Rev. Marty Bacher

[revmartybacher@hotmail.com](mailto:revmartybacher@hotmail.com)

### **Closing the Back Door**

When I was in full time ministry I too became aware of this leveling off that takes place. I believe that much of the cause is from the systems we have in place. There has been volumes of material written about this, the sizes of churches - family, pastoral, programs and corporate. To my knowledge, New Thought churches generally have not taken advantage of this information.

Here is a little article I wrote to help understand the systems:

#### **UNDERSTANDING CHURCHES AS SYSTEMS**

There is an example that I use often that helps us understand the dynamics of systems. At my house I have three different types of bikes: a stationary bike, a mountain bike and a road bike. Each is designed with a different purpose in mind. If all I want is to do is get some good cardiovascular exercise, then my exercise bike works great. If I want to go up one of the trails in the mountains where I live, then I get out my mountain bike because it is designed specifically for this terrain. If I want to go a long distance rather quickly over smooth terrain then the road bike is the appropriate choice.

Now here is the thing: No matter how hard I ride my stationary bike, no matter how hard I pedal, no matter how hard I pray, no matter how elevated my consciousness it ain't gonna move! Why? Because it is designed to stay still: hence the name, stationary bike. Each bike is designed for a specific task.

Interestingly, if you look at the activity involved with each bike they look basically the same. At an activity level, it looks like sitting on a seat and pedaling. However, because of the "system" you get different results. In order to maximize your efforts, it is important to match the system and the type of bike with the task at hand.

This is so obvious that we wouldn't give it a second thought.

So, let's turn our attention to church organizational development. There are systems in place within churches, but because they are not visible no one recognizes them as such.

There is a system in place in the small church (average of 50 and under) often referred to as the family church. I like to refer to these as the “Cheers” church because everyone knows your name. Likewise there are systems in place in the “pastoral” church (average attendance of 50-100/150), the “programs” church (average attendance of 100/150 to 350/500), and the “corporate” church (average attendance of 350/500 and above).

Just as we must adapt the type of bike to the conditions we face, so too do we need to adapt our leadership style to the type of church we are leading. If systems were visible, it would make it so much easier. If we saw our friend at the gym riding a stationary bike, complaining all the while about how s/he wasn't getting anywhere, we would lovingly suggest s/he get on a different type of vehicle if s/he wants to move.

I have come to discover that it is not only consciousness, but also appropriate systems that lead to healthy and vital ministries. Unfortunately, too often I see ministers examining their consciousness because their congregations aren't growing, when what they really need to be doing is looking at the systems that are in place that are limiting growth.

Too often burnout occurs, churches stop growing or become dysfunctional, not because of their consciousness, but because of systems that have not evolved to meet the needs of a larger congregation. In order for the church to continue to grow, evolve and remain healthy, the leadership must adapt to the new requirements of the organization. Not only must the minister adapt, but the congregation must make adjustments as well. They must understand that the type of demands they place upon the minister(s) must also evolve in order for the church to remain healthy.

Secondly, I think as an organization we have much to learn about marketing. One example I often use this: If you owned a store of some kind, you might be considered somewhat foolish to have someone visit your store 13 times and never ask for the sale. Yet we invite people into our Foundational Studies class for 13 weeks and never teach them about church membership, etc.

It seems we do a great job of training people in the principles of SOM, but a pretty lousy job of training people how to be active members of our churches.

Just some thoughts - By the way, an excellent resource is Alban Institute.  
[www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org)