
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Reaching Secular People

For over sixty years, George G. Hunter, III, has studied how to reach secular people with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The following is a summary of his major discoveries.

Churches that reach secular people...

1. Know that people who are not disciples are lost.

People who are not following Christ cannot find abundant life by themselves. They are lost and need to be found. As Donald McGavran said, "It's God's will that his lost children be found and enfolded into local churches."

2. Know that lost people matter to God.

"Authentic evangelism," notes one pastor, "flows from a mindset that acknowledges the ultimate value of people—forgotten people, lost people, wondering people. The highest value is to love them, serve them, and reach them."

3. See their church as a mission to lost people rather than a gathered colony of the faithful.

The local church's main business is mission rather than maintenance; not nurturing Christians but discipling non-Christians. The local church is not called to renewal before reaching out but reaches out in obedience to begin renewal.

4. Have high expectations of their members.

Churches that reach secular people expect their people to worship regularly, give generously, study scripture diligently participate in small groups, ministry with their gifts, and share their faith among family and friends.

5. Know what to change and what to preserve.

Churches that reach secular people are slow to change their theology, but they are quick to change the cultural forms and styles that communicate their theology.

6. Understand unchurched people.

The congregation is taught how non-Christians think. People are encouraged to engage in conversation with non-christian friends, family, and associates. They know they must understand unchurched people in order to reach them.

7. Accept unchurched people.

People understand that, just as they were once accepted in their own sinfulness, the church is called to reflect God's posture toward sinners— acceptance and compassion. Acceptance is often a prerequisite before unchurched people will consider a new lifestyle. Secular people desire to belong before they believe.

8. Use music that is S.L.A.M.

Effective evangelistic churches know what music their secular target audience appreciates. They make celebratuvw worship a priority by focusing on making a S.L.A.M. dunk, that is, in the Style, Language, Aesthetics, and Music of the non-Christians they desire to reach.

9. Start new ministries.

No one church or ministry can reach everyone. It takes different churches and different ministries to reach different people. Thus, churches that reach secular people start new programs, groups, and ministries on a regular basis.

10. Are focused on sending their people out in mission.

The church is concerned for people beyond its own ministry area. They support missions and missionaries, send their people on short-term mission trips, and give generously to take the gospel to non-Christian people's around the world.

Questions to Ask and Answer

In which of these ten insights does your church excel?

In which do you find your church struggling?

What is one step you can take this year to position your church to better reach secular people?

Growth Points is published twelve times a year. Individual subscription is \$29 (US Funds) per year. Permission is granted for use in a local church. Executive subscripsts for wide distribution available for \$150 (US Fundsper year.

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