Case Study

How do we get our church to grow to its full potential? The question kept growing through the mind of Pastor Clark as he sat down to prepare for the upcoming leadership retreat.

It seems like we've tried everything, he reflected, *but when you look at the number of new people coming into the life of our church, we're just barely staying even. In fact,* he continued, *when you consider the rapid population growth in our community and the increasingly large number of unchurched people, we're actually losing ground.*

I need some fresh insight or challenge to share with our leadership at the upcoming retreat. Maybe if I systematically reviewed our efforts over the past year something would come to mind. With that Pastor Clark took out his pen and began to write:

> First we began with a prayer seminar. All new ventures of the church need to be preceded by prayer. Prayer reflects our dependence upon God. We had 35 attend a Saturday prayer seminar. Most were pretty enthusiastic about the training on prayer. We had hoped the seminar would spawn several continuing prayer groups, but everybody was already so overcommitted that the groups never really got going.
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> Next we started a weekly visitation evangelism program. The idea was to train a small number of people to share their faith with visitors. These people would then train others to do the same thing. Eventually we projected that most of the adults in the church would be involved. Unfortunately, it didn't work that way. Practically all of our visitors were already Christians so we really didn't have many opportunities to share our faith. Secondly, the leaders had a hard time recruiting others into the program (I guess people are just too busy), and now we actually have less involved than when we started.
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> Someone then suggested that what we really needed was a way for all our members to get involved in inviting people in the neighborhood to church. Instead of trying to evangelize people, let's just be friendly and invite them to church. So we planned a "Howdy Neighbor" Saturday. Our community was divided into assignment areas to visit. We had a great turnout by our people — over 50 percent of the adults in our Sunday School classes participated. The results were mixed. A few people did visit our church. But when we suggested a "Howdy Neighbor-II" few members were interested in participating. (It also took a lot of time and effort by our church staff.)

Pastor Clark put his pen down. He began to think, *I wonder how other churches grow? Are there some principles we're overlooking? What role does my preaching ministry play? Should our Christian education program be involved in reaching out? It seems like I've got more questions now than when I started,* he reflected.

Discussion Questions

1. What advice would you give Pastor Clark?

2. What makes a growing church?