



Seeds For Church Growth: A Handbook for Episcopal Rectors

*Norman F. Some*s

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Christian clergy and laypeople frequently urge their churches to adapt to changing times, to be flexible for all settings and seasons. They rally practicing Christians to spread the Gospel in ways readily understood and accepted in today's circumstances. Despite these efforts, active church membership is declining in the United States, Canada, and much of Europe, especially for mainline denominations. Nonetheless, confronting an overall rise in secularism in the West, an encouraging number of congregations have experienced growth and development in attendance and diversity. Addressing this paradox is of major concern to Christians, especially to pastors and their lay leadership. Pastor Norman Somes has addressed this paradox directly. In *Seeds for Church Growth*, he documents over eighty growth initiatives that work, most based on his own experience as rector of an Episcopal congregation on the Central Coast of California that more than doubled its Sunday attendance. Most initiatives are augmented with commentary and specific tips. Although his scholarship is targeted to Episcopal clergy, pastors of all denominations will benefit, and his work is extensively peer reviewed. As one Lutheran pastor indicates: The handbook is brief enough that it can be digested and referred to often, yet comprehensive enough to cover all the areas of ministry-growth concern.....makes a solid contribution in clear language that the vestry person and member can read as well as the pastor. Those of us in other denominational cultures still receive much practical insight. Another, an Episcopal priest, comments: I can easily imagine church leaders and committee members being able to discuss, inwardly digest, and use the abundant suggestions. It is very clear....tone is so hopeful and optimistic....taken the scary stuff out of evangelism and brought it down to a practical and imminently do-able level. I thoroughly enjoyed it and believe there is a real need for it. *Seeds* contains a packet of insights vital to all those wanting to see their congregation grow. The themes address: ---Ways to sustain and magnify the key leadership role of the pastor in church growing ---Lessons and inspiration to be gained from the successes of other congregations ---Techniques to gauge the preparedness and adaptability of one's congregation ---Ideas to promote the church within the community while adjusting to new challenges ---Actions to welcome, inspire, and nurture newcomers, seekers, church shoppers ---Benefits from building a children-youth-and family ministry ---Strategies to acquire necessary physical and monetary resources In addition, *Seeds* addresses two vital issues that may arise as growth is contemplated. The first is the ever-growing diversity and complexity of communities in North America. Pastor and congregation are challenged to adapt in order to meet new needs, notably in regard to communications, fellowship, and worship forms. The second issue concerns the adequacy of the church premises to support the goal of growth. Consideration of remedial options is presented complete with two case histories. To quote the old quip: everyone talks about the weather but no one does anything about it! In this regard, Pastor Somes has witnessed the decline of church membership. He was instrumental in forging growth at the parish level, however, and is eager to share how this was achieved. This lively, comprehensive work is concisely written in point form, and should be part of every pastor's library. *Seeds for Church Growth* lives up to its subtitle: it is indeed a practical handbook, and as such is a valuable contribution to the contemporary Christian garden.

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