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PART ONE



fundamentals for a growing church

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preface



So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

—Acts 2:41, NRSV

Many reasons have been given for how and why a church should grow. Typically, powerful preaching, teaching, worship, evangelism, discipleship, witnessing, fellowship, and service all are attributed to the embodiment of the gospel. Along with these normative practices, some include complex multimedia marketing, national conferences, community development, state and federal funding, corporate partnership, health and financial services, school chartering, demographic research, publishing, aesthetics, and more as being among the major or minor contributors to church growth.

While scholars agree that the study of congregations is like a dance between ecclesiology and the social-cultural reality in which each church is fixed, many find difficulty in locating the accounts, artifacts, and activities that undergird the church-growth phenomenon. In other words, if we, the church, merely administrate treasures deposited in earthen vessels, to what extent should we claim credit for what God has done when the church grows, especially if the gospel is always deposited in clay?

Certainly in the African American context, the gospel is the central focus and the “generator” of the church. When it is preached with a high sense of commitment and integrity, the church grows, not just numerically, but spiritually. Moreover, growing churches—who hear the gospel preached with integrity—have a godly sense of vision and purpose; they reach, sow, and send. They tell you why they do what they do, and not just how.

Growing churches typically have a particular leadership style, one that reflects authority. Good leaders focus on reaching people in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not merely on developing temporal institutions. In growing churches, preachers recognize that they do not have all of the spiritual gifts the Bible proclaims. So they delegate—share the responsibility of growing the vineyard in which they have been planted.

Most important, growing churches recognize that Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of the work. Any approach to understanding church growth must start with the will of God. Vision, the centrality of Christ, biblical preaching, purposeful prayer, dynamic worship, sound doctrine, comprehensive Christian education, holy living, tithing, and an orientation toward loving people all undergird the intentions of the pastor who desires to participate in the growth of the Lord's church. However, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who authenticates the pastor's intent.

The author of these chapters, Bishop Donald Hilliard Jr., has served as pastor to the Cathedral International—the historic Second Baptist Church of Perth Amboy, New Jersey—for more than twenty-two years. A man of integrity, Bishop Hilliard's tenure at the Cathedral International has been marked by triumph and tragedy, praise and perseverance, holy hands and handcuffs, anointing and adversity. In the midst of life's trials and tribulations, Bishop Hilliard has managed to unapologetically "say yes" to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bishop Hilliard has served as adjunct professor at various theological seminaries, including The School of Theology, Boston University; Princeton Theological Seminary; and New Brunswick Theological Seminary. He has also served as group convener and mentor to the Donald Hilliard Fellows Doctor of Ministry Program at The School of Theology, Drew University.

Bishop Hilliard has served widely in conferences and lectureships for ministers, including the Hampton University Ministers' Conference; The Oxford Round Table, Harris Manchester

College; and The National Working Group at Yale Divinity School. In this volume Bishop Hilliard offers his reflections and advice as they pertain to the purpose and the pursuit of church growth in the African American context. Although the subject at hand cannot possibly be exhausted in a single volume, both pastor and laity should be able to bear witness to a measurable increase in understanding why and how the church should grow.

—Christopher M. Jones,
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