

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS MOST

NUMBER-CRUNCHING FOR
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

FUZZY CHURCH MATH

In the 2000 U.S. presidential debates, future president George W. Bush coined the term fuzzy math to dismiss the figures used by his opponent Al Gore. With his new phrase, Bush hit on this truth: *Whether intentional or not, number-crunching lends itself to not only faulty manipulation, but also to mildly useless or wildly inaccurate assumptions and conclusions.*

Churches have been counting people in the pews for a while now, and dutifully recording those numbers somewhere. The problem is, tallies tell a story about right now and often reveal nothing more than what you could see by just looking out over the crowd (or lack thereof). They tell a version of the *what*, but not the *why*. More significantly, those numbers don't reflect spiritual growth or—ironically—even true numeric growth, unless someone is also factoring in how many are leaving (a.k.a. the “back door rate”).

Even if you could capture accurate numeric growth, what do you really accomplish, in terms of Kingdom purposes and lives changed? Perhaps something as meaningful as New Cuyama's math:

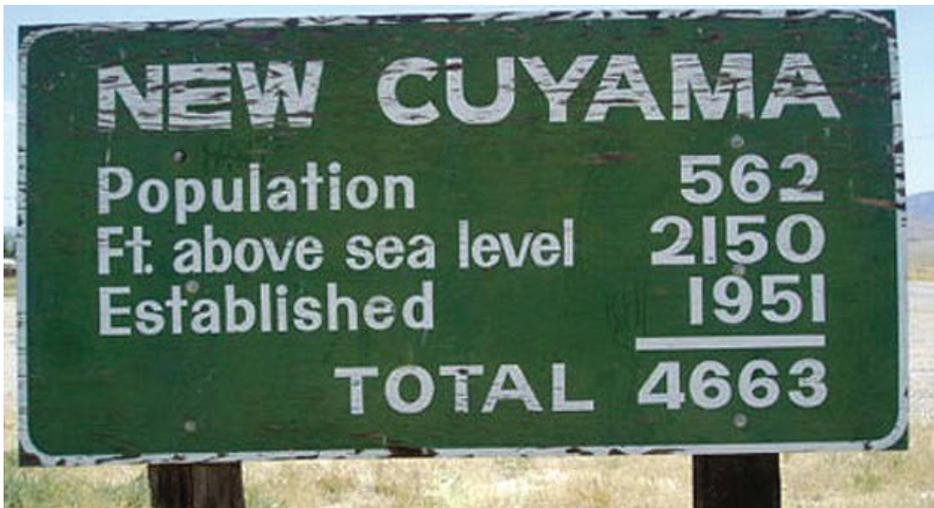


Image source: [J-Walk Blog](#)



Image source: [Growing Up in Waldron](#)

BETTER CHURCH NUMBER-CRUNCHING

The best reasons for churches today to crunch numbers is to assess how they are operating and leading against their goals and mission to grow people spiritually, and discover where and how improvements need to be made. They need to discover information that isn't immediately noticeable. They need reliable data on which to make predictive decisions for the health and true growth of not only the church, but also of every soul within their charge.

But, first, they need accurate numbers.

CART & HORSE PROTOCOLS

+ WHO, WHAT, AND WHEN

To start measuring, you must determine what it is you're going to want to know. The typical first inquiry is attendance. You probably already have those numbers, so that's a good place to go deeper.

+ WHY

Next, ask yourself why that number interests you. Typically, attendance data is used as one factor in determining an individual's overall involvement, which is then used to estimate spiritual growth. However, if you calculate the ratio of visitors to attenders, you can explore the effectiveness of a church's outreach efforts. You can also use attendance data to determine who is no longer with you (back door rate), or who attended certain steps of a spiritual growth track or study series, but not the next in the series.

Broaden your view to encompass children. For example, which parents attended the new parenting class, but whose child is not in the baby class a year later? Which Membership Class graduates haven't attended Next Steps? For curriculum and facilities planning, you'd want to know current numbers to be able to forecast for next year. You'd also want to determine the number of teachers you'd need to recruit. In other words, your end goals determine the information you need to collect much earlier.

+ HOW

Now you need to set up processes that enable you to accurately collect this data in all the touch points that are relevant to that inquiry, and determine how that data will be stored and managed.

Now What?

Numbers are meaningless alone. If you're just starting out, the goal of your first sets of numbers is to create a baseline, but you'll eventually need to compare your statistics to *something*, such as your baseline, your goal numbers, other church's benchmarks (if available), or suggested standards.

For example, as a starting point for numeric growth rates, Gary Macintosh at the [Good Book Blog](#) suggests the following:

- + Poor Growth: 2% per year
- + Fair Growth: 3 - 5% per year
- + Good Growth: 6 - 8% per year
- + Excellent Growth: 9 - 11% per year
- + Outstanding Growth: 12 - 15% per year
- + Incredible Growth: 16 - 20% per year

The best way to crunch numbers is with well-conceived processes and reliable church management software that ensures the numbers are meaningful. But with or without technology, churches can get a good snapshot of overall spiritual development and growth in the church by collecting and analyzing data in the following realms, which we will break down for you step by step.

[Involvement](#)

[Volunteers](#)

[Groups](#)

[Giving](#)

[Spiritual Growth](#)

INVOLVEMENT

Understanding who is *active* within your church is key to tailoring initiatives and discovering who needs ministering to. “Active” is too fluid and too broad a category to be meaningful, so you will need to break it down.

To calculate involvement, we recommend the following guidelines:

- + **DEFINE YOUR GOALS FOR ANALYZING INVOLVEMENT, SUCH AS:**
 - Discover timeframes when visitors drop-out, or fail to move to next steps, in order to address needs at those stages.
 - Increase connection to the Body and improve member engagement.
- + **DEFINE THE STATUS OF EACH INDIVIDUAL (MEMBER/ATTENDING) AND PERFORM ANALYSIS OF EACH STATUS SEPARATELY.**
 - You expect different actions from these groups and combining them would skew your results.
- + **DEFINE “ACTIVE” CRITERIA, SUCH AS:**
 - Giving (what will constitute “regular” giving?)
 - Attendance (which events, what percentage of the time?)
 - Participation in tracked growth steps (i.e. Membership Class, Next Steps, Volunteering, Service, Leading)
- + **DETERMINE DESIRED GOAL NUMBERS FOR EACH CRITERIA.**
(i.e. 75% attend Sunday worship at least 50% of the time or 50% have volunteered at least two times in the past year.)
- + **FIND TOTAL NUMBER OF MEMBERS MEETING YOUR “ACTIVE” CRITERIA.**
(i.e. serving/participating/giving) in a date range and compare to total number of members.

Now What?

Now you have data about your members and their levels of activities but you don’t know the reasons for these numbers. To learn more, also measure:

- + **Percentage of seating capacity**
If your space is too empty or too full, it may be artificially inhibiting your growth. General rule of thumb:
<60% = Uncomfortably empty
60-70% = Comfortably empty
70-80% = Comfortably full
>80% = Uncomfortably full
- + **Patterns of communication**
Evaluating your deliberate patterns of communication—to whom, how often, how targeted—can identify disproportionate messaging rate to certain target audiences, or a need for improved content.
- + **Percentage of full parking spaces**
Parking is a ministry. If a first-time guest leaves because she can’t find a parking place, every other ministry opportunity fails with it. Monitoring the ease with which your attenders and guests can find a parking place will alert you to needed ministry processes and roles.
- + **Teacher/Student ratio**
This ratio indicates volunteer involvement and management responsibility in maintaining proper ratios. If overall attendance rates are up, but class numbers are down, it could also expose a possible growth inhibitor, as an unhealthy ratio could keep guests from returning.

GROUPS

You've no doubt heard that "small is the new big." The catchphrase is used in the church world to promote small groups as *the* way to help people connect in large churches. In truth, small groups are vital for churches of all sizes.

Most churches have them, and most churches want to know what percentage of their members and attendees are part of a small group. But is that enough?

Scott Boren, author of *The Relational Way: From Small-Group Structures to Holistic Life Connections*, writes at Smallgroups.com that small group statistics are dissatisfying except as a way to learn how people are experiencing God, increasing spiritual connections and growth, being led to minister spontaneously outside church-planned service opportunities, producing disciples, and changing lives and marriages. But, he admits, **you still have to start with the numbers.**

To explore small group metrics:

+ DEFINE YOUR GOALS FOR ANALYZING SMALL GROUP NUMBERS, SUCH AS:

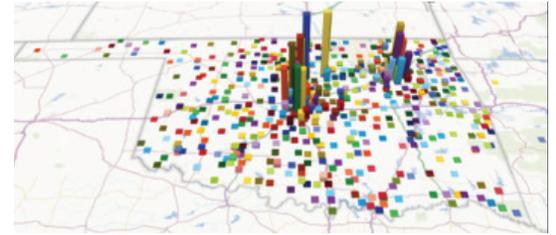
- Learn percentage of members in small groups. (Divide total number of small group members attending in a specific date range into total number of members)
- Discover geographic areas where groups are needed
- Determine existing leadership training and support needs
- Know how many small group leaders to recruit and train for next year
- Determine types of groups to discontinue or add
- Explore spiritual goals and success of small groups towards these goals

+ MAP OUT THREE COMPONENTS:

- Where and when all existing groups meet (including recovery groups, Bible studies, financial groups, etc.)
- Where all members/attendees live
- Where all small group attenders live—using a product like Batch Geo, ScanUS, or Microsoft's Power Map, along with your church's data, you can enter city or perhaps zip codes of members, and whatever other criteria you wish to include, to generate a 3D map that shows concentration of people by the specified area.

+ GATHER INDIVIDUAL GROUP DATA, SUCH AS:

- Number of members, regularity of members' attendance, number of visitors, life stages, and current ministry needs.



Now What?

- + Analyze geographical data for clusters or gaps to determine where and when new locations might be warranted.
Bonus: This information will be useful in multi-site discussions, as well.
- + Broaden the comparison. A low rate of member participation may correlate to high back door rates and low spiritual growth velocity.
- + If small group attendance is growing, but the number of groups is not, it might indicate a weakness in the development of new leaders or that groups are becoming too large for effective community.
- + Develop strategy for leadership, including:
 - Recruit leaders (more on this topic in the Volunteer and Spiritual Growth sections.)
 - Explore tools to support leaders and simplify communicating group needs and updates to church staff.
 - Provide spiritual support and training for leaders.

GIVING

Beyond the obvious benefits of tracking financial trends for budgetary and proactive planning reasons, giving practices can also be very telling about members' spiritual growth levels. Decreases sometimes reflect changes in attendees' lives (such as a job loss, spiritual decline, or dissatisfaction with the church) that can alert staff to the need for ministry focus.

The use of online giving makes gathering financial data easier and more specific. However that data must still be incorporated with giving by check. (Obviously, cash donations not placed into labeled offering envelopes are untrackable, except by totals per service.)

To explore giving metrics:

+ DEFINE YOUR GOALS FOR ANALYZING GIVING, SUCH AS:

- Discover the church's baseline for givers
- Determine need for biblical teaching on giving and generosity or financial groups (such as Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University)
- Consider expansion of giving options to include generational preferences of giving modes and ways to promote new modes
- Identify giving changes in individuals for purpose of ministry
- Project future donation rates for budgetary purposes

+ DEFINE GOALS FOR GIVING, SUCH AS:

- Total amount of donations by month, going back 2-3 years
- Total number of givers by year, going back 2-3 years
- Percentage of new givers by month and year, going back 2-3 years, to total giving units. (If the number of first-time givers is going up, it could mean that newcomers are beginning to own the vision. When measured over time, though, it could also indicate that the commitment of long-time members is fading.)
- New givers donation amounts
- Donations by giving modes (cash, checks, online giving, scheduled giving, donations to specific subfunds.)



Now What?

Explore the new giving tools available today. Churches that use online giving report higher, more consistent giving rates. Text-to-give is popular with younger generations and is used by all age groups to respond to immediate congregational or disaster needs. Highly visible messaging around online giving, plus the inclusion of giving or registration/payment links in digital communications and social media are also proven to increase donor responses.

Consider working with a company such as Partners in Church Consulting to create a campaign to increase generosity.

Follow-up with any individuals or families whose regular giving habits have drastically changed to see what's going on in their lives and offer assistance, if needed.

VOLUNTEERS

Staff can't do everything. But volunteerism doesn't serve simply to fill congregational jobs for free. It helps the church by increasing connections among members and attendees, which is an important component of church growth. Of course, it helps those who are served, but the greatest benefit may be to the server. A Harvard Health study reported that volunteerism even affects happiness and that "giving time to religious organizations had the greatest impact."

Willingness to serve is also an indicator of involvement, commitment, and even spiritual growth, when combined with other factors. In short, volunteerism is healthy for the church, the individual serving, and those they serve.

To explore volunteer metrics:

+ DEFINE YOUR GOALS FOR ANALYZING VOLUNTEERING, SUCH AS:

- Determine (and improve) member health and connection through service
- Determine (and increase) visitor assimilation through service
- Increase event and program offerings to congregation
- Reduce staff burden

+ DEFINE GOALS FOR VOLUNTEERING, SUCH AS:

- Guest services/hospitality
- Worship leading/assisting
- Teaching/assisting
- Administrative assistance
- Event assistance
- Community assistance
- Missions

+ DETERMINE PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS SERVING IN THESE ASSIGNMENTS.

+ DETERMINE VOLUNTEER SERVICE HOURS.

Tracking community service hours measures missional involvement of both individuals and the church.

+ DETERMINE VOLUNTEER PIPELINE VELOCITY.

Volunteer pipeline velocity is the time from new attender to first volunteer role. Determining this can help identify obstacles to involvement, weaknesses in leadership, or the depth of buy-in to the church's stated mission or vision.



Now What?

Research shows that volunteerism rates often suffer due to the way churches handle volunteers, including lack of:

- + Communication of role types and procedures for getting involved
- + Training
- + Release from roles
- + Role/giftedness matching
- + Value of volunteer input/suggestions
- + Efficient processes that maximize volunteer contributions and time
- + High-capacity opportunities (authority, leadership, and coordinator roles vs. busy or manual work)

If your volunteer rates are lower than you'd like, then survey non-volunteers to find out what's happening in your church.

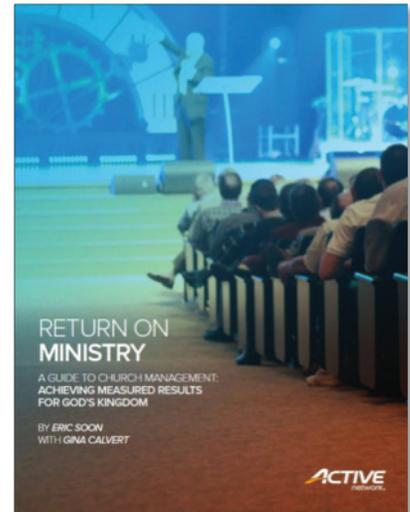
Create projects that matter and promote the community impact of the mission in order to increase involvement. Determine interest before creating new opportunities.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Of course, it's impossible to put a number on actual spiritual growth. The best churches can hope to do is to put progressive steps in place that give individuals opportunities to move toward biblical traits of maturation. Monitoring progress on these tracks can give a picture of overall church growth and provide touch points for ministry oversight of individuals.

In his book, *Return on Ministry*, Eric Soon recommends measuring—in addition to the categories we've already discussed—the number of:

- + **PROFESSIONS OF FAITH**
Conversions, commitments, decisions, salvations
- + **BAPTISMS OR NEXT STEPS**
A measure of willingness to make a commitment and take next steps of obedience.
- + **RECOVERY INVOLVEMENT**
Participation indicates deeper journey to wholeness.
- + **DISCIPLESHIP/SPIRITUAL FORMATIONS CLASS OR PATH**
Indicates submission to discipleship journey.
- + **LEADER TO PARTICIPANT RATIO**
Shows the ratio of attendees who are advancing to leadership.
- + **SPIRITUAL GROWTH VELOCITY**
Trending time between milestones, can be used to establish realistic timelines for step-ups and related events.
- + **ASSIMILATION VELOCITY**
Timeframe from guest to disciple, sometimes measured by first-time visitor to consistent giver. May indicate rhythm for class frequency, seasonality trends, or other dependencies.
- + **KEEP CAREFUL RECORDS OF THESE TOUCH POINTS TO REVIEW:**
 - Individual growth steps across various date ranges
 - Corporate progress across various date ranges



Now What?

Determine where individuals have dropped off spiritual tracks. Reach out directly to discover reasons and/or encourage taking next steps.

Implement missing steps to the church's offerings.

Increase awareness of available tracks and opportunities to newcomers, attendees, and members with:

- + Targeted email messaging
- + Well-placed signage
- + Website and social media
- + Direct announcements
- + Video announcements
- + Worship guide announcements

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you explore the various metrics and analytics that relate to your church's goals, remember that gaps always represent your ministry targets and a need for further research.

+ IF YOU DISCOVER A DRASTIC OR SUDDEN CHANGE IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S OR FAMILY'S ATTENDANCE, GIVING, OR SERVING PATTERNS, TAKE DIRECT ACTION.

Call and check on them! One church did this with a family that suddenly stopped attending after visiting consistently for several weeks, and discovered that the mother had just passed away! This provided a great opportunity to serve this family, which led to the family (and multiple extended family members) becoming members.

+ IF NUMBERS ARE LOWER THAN YOU'D LIKE IN PARTICULAR AREAS, CONSIDER DIGGING DEEPER TO FIND OUT WHY:

- Reach out to members to get a feel for what's happening both individually and in the congregation
- Send out a survey to discover the source of discontent or apathy, or get feedback and new initiatives.
- Meet with leadership to discuss findings and the best approach to rejuvenating the congregation.

+ IF YOU FOUND IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PULL TOGETHER MORE THAN BASIC ATTENDANCE AND GIVING RECORDS, WE CAN HELP.

All Church Management Software (ChMS) solutions allow record keeping, but only Fellowship One was built with in-depth reporting as the primary end goal of data collection.

With Fellowship One, each of the topics we've been discussing could have been mined in minutes with just a few clicks of a mouse, and with multiple data views available to drill down even deeper. A supplemental product cheat sheet for use of the software to determine the metrics included here is available to Fellowship One users.

Peter Drucker, famed efficiency expert, said that metrics matter because "what cannot be measured, cannot be improved."

Make sure you're measuring the right things.

“Because churches deal in spiritual matters, metrics aren't [always] clear. However, we should have an agreed upon set of standards and be able to measure our progress.

Churches can be quite willing to resist metrics in favor of more “mystical” things. But the undeniable truth is that your church's numbers are either growing or shrinking each year for conversions, baptisms, offerings, attendance and small group participation.

These numbers have an indirect correlation to the church's spiritual condition. When the numbers go down, start asking questions. Don't be afraid to quickly take corrective action.”

Rob Cizek
Executive Pastor
Northshore Christian Church

LET'S TALK!

To start a conversation with a Fellowship One specialist, reach out to us today!



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