

Is Your Church Dying? Try These 7 Keys to Nonstop Growth From AG

Perhaps you are one of the many Christians who have watched their churches stagnate or decline over the last several years. And chances are, you've seen several—perhaps many—young people leave your church. Even Pew Research affirmed that the percentage of mainline Protestants in the U.S. dipped sharply from 18.1 percent in 2007 to 14.7 percent in 2014. And yet, despite this downward trend, one denomination has been consistently growing: the Assemblies of God.

The numbers speak for themselves. The U.S. Assemblies of God (AG) has grown over the last decade by 12 percent to more than 3.2 million, according to its official website. Over 100 AG churches in the U.S. have more than 1,000 members, and five have more than 10,000. What could this Pentecostal denomination be doing to keep growing in a culture of church decline? In an exclusive interview, AG General Superintendent Doug Clay shared with me why exactly the denomination continues to expand so much. Perhaps churches across the U.S. should pay attention to his wisdom.

“I think it’s a couple of things,” Superintendent Clay responded. “First of all, it has to be attributed to the work and person of the Holy Spirit. We really do believe that the person of the Holy Spirit is not a ghost to be feared, He’s not an ‘it’ to be debated, but we see the part that He plays in personal transformation as well as in the life of a church.”

Of course, Superintendent Clay pointed out, churches also have to apply practical principles for genuine and consistent growth. For instance, Assemblies of God congregations focus

heavily on multiplication, whether in inviting more people to church or going out and planting new congregations. Another thing Superintendent Clay says maintains vibrancy in the 104-year-old denomination is what he calls the PAC model.

“PAC stands for Parent Affiliated Church,” he says. “A lot of our district leaders are looking at churches that have plateaued or declined, and we’re trying to be very intentional in trying to jump-start spiritual vitality.”

He says the AG does this through a program called Acts 2, which is designed to help churches discover their next-level potential. Superintendent Clay says the program has a 64 percent success rate, meaning 64 percent of churches that go through this program go from stagnated or declining numbers to sustained growth.

“Steve, the average age of an attender in an Assemblies of God church is 35,” he says. “That’s very exciting! Now, I have to tell you, I’m also concerned that the average age of our ordained ministers or lead pastors is in the high 50s. So I want to bring that number down. ... We’re a young movement.”

Another reason he thinks the denomination is growing that is they promote women in leadership.

“Twenty-five percent of our credentialed fraternity is female ministers,” he says. “I see that adding to the life and vitality, and then our ethnic diversity. We are 43 percent ethnically diverse in the Assemblies of God USA.”

Of course, Superintendent Clay sees these factors from his position as a leader in the Assemblies of God. But he also sees what’s causing AG’s growth on a grass-roots level. He says a passion for Scripture, the Holy Spirit and missions helps keep AG churches thriving.

He hopes to see AG churches continue emphasizing those three foci, especially biblical literacy. In our interview, he

shared a concern that began 10 years ago when many Pentecostal churches started steering their sermons away from “What do you know?” to “How do you feel?”

“I think that contributed a little bit to the biblical illiteracy that is emerging,” Superintendent Clay says. “But I’m encouraged today that even in Millennials and Gen Z that are coming into positions of lead pastor, expository preaching is sort of back on the rise—and I like that.”

But again, the Holy Spirit must be the one empowering that preaching. Each believer is a candidate for the baptism of the Spirit, Superintendent Clay says, and the more Christians understand that, the more we will see supernatural growth and perhaps even nationwide revival.

Be sure to listen to my entire interview with Superintendent Clay to hear key ways America’s churches can once again thrive. And remember to subscribe to my new podcast, “In Depth With Stephen Strang,” where I seek to ask key Christian influencers the questions no one else is asking. If you enjoy the podcast, please rate and review “In Depth With Stephen Strang” on iTunes, Google Play, Spotify or whichever medium you use to listen to podcasts.