

Yes it grew, but where did you start?

By [John Nash](#)

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One of the bishops recently elected in our jurisdiction has been touted for his skills in growing a church, which currently has more than 1,100 people in worship. The problem is that when he started at the church they were already at more than 700 in worship. Now I am not trying to dismiss his growth, because it is impressive, but he already had a huge start. So how much do we attribute to him and how much to what was already taking place?

Adam Hamilton likes to say, or at least his church does, that the church started with just the four members of his family and now they are at more than 18,000 members. But that too is not the full truth, because while his family might be the "charter" members it's not like at their first worship service it was just he and his family. Instead, at their first service they had more than 100 members and they have built from there.

Maybe a better growth story is that of Ginghamburg UMC where Mike Slaughter grew the church from attendance of around 90 people to more than 4000. But Mike has been there since 1979. How many UMC pastors serve the same church for more than 33 years, or are even given the possibility of staying that long?

We do the same thing in other areas. Donald Trump did not start his real estate company, he took it over from his father, who had a personal net worth of \$400 million, at least \$35 million of which was left to Donald. Frederick Smith, founder of FedEx, for whom I used to work, started the company from scratch but began with his own personal \$4 million and the \$28 million he borrowed from other family members. In other words they already had tremendous starts before they ever began, even though they want to make it seem like a rags to riches story that is all about them and their work.

Again, I am not diminishing in any way the hard work done by any of these people, except maybe Donald Trump who is a pompous fool, but I would love to have a congregation of even 90 in attendance at the moment, let alone 700. Most of these

churches also have lots of other factors that contributed significantly to their growth. The Church of the Resurrection is located in an area that has boomed in population, and continues to boom, which greatly helps them, although without Adam Hamilton's leadership, they probably don't become who they are.

I, on the other hand, am serving congregations that are in towns declining in demographics and with very little hope for future growth, let alone booming in population. I am working hard, struggling to grow my churches by teaching them to be faithful disciples of Christ, and I'm a little tired of hearing people who want to tell me all the answers because they "grew their church."

I have the same feeling about some of these people that Governor Ann Richards had about George W Bush when she said "he was born on third base and he thinks he hit a triple." Can you help me? Maybe you can, but please do not try and pass off on me how great you are and how much you did without also recognizing what you had when you began.

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