
5 Reasons People Are Leaving Your Church

No one likes rejection.

It's one of those deep-seeded wounds for many of us. A by-product of a fallen and sinful world. And it happens much more often than we would like it to, especially within our churches.

We're talking about people, your "key" people even, calling it quits.

It may come out of nowhere, or you could've called it a ways away. Either way, you're left thinking....

What happened?

What did we do wrong?

And we're here to tell you—sometimes, you probably could've handled something better. And sometimes, absolutely nothing.

Why People Are Leaving Your Church

There are all kinds of different reasons people could decide to leave a church. Here are just five of them.

1. You make a staff change.

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, author of the horrifying *Frankenstein* tale, said "Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change."

We'd beg to differ.

If we could track change that, it would say *any* change.

Let's be real, we all have our favorite restaurants. We usually order the same thing when we go. And we like routine. It's comfortable.

Change is uncomfortable for all of us. Even those of us that are more okay with it than others. Change causes growth, which is what the goal is! We want healthy, growing churches, but in order to do that, we can't remain the same.

So we hire new staff. Or maybe get rid of a staff member that is not the best fit for their role.

This is going to cause tension.

People are relational beings. If someone comes in and begins to change how things are done, we tend to feel frustrated towards that person. But that's what they were hired to do!

And inevitably, when so many have formed close relationships with a staff member that leaves, it can cause some hurt or confusion, either with the church or the departed staff member.

2. You've stopped or started a ministry area.

What you may, or may not, realize is that many people may have started coming to your church because of a particular ministry area.

They may have been desperately searching for a place their child or teen could fit in. Maybe they were seeking a small group they could connect with. Or maybe they wanted to serve in the music ministry.

What happens when the ministry or program that made them connect to your church changes?

You can't stop making changes in your church. There are plenty of valid reasons to stop or start a ministry.

Most people who have a healthy view of the local church and [understand your vision](#) will be okay with these changes. But for some, this will be enough for them to leave.

3. The size of your church is too big or small.

Are you beginning to notice a theme here? People don't like change.

More often than not, what we notice from working with so many churches is that when church growth happens (specifically in numbers), *many* churchgoers fight this. Or they leave.

"Sorry, the church is just getting too big for us."

Style is one thing, but if a church is genuinely friendly and cares about connecting with people, numbers shouldn't be an issue. Church members don't all need to know each other, they just need to connect.

On the flipside, for some people, a church may be too small or it isn't growing quickly enough. This is important to look at if growth isn't happening for a long period of time, but growth isn't always rapid and it often takes some time and the hard work of streamlining.

4. There are hurts or conflicts that aren't resolved.

You would think that a bunch of adults that are all followers of Christ would have little to no disputes (or could at least deal with them like adults).

If you've worked (or even volunteered) in a church for a week, you'd know this is far from the truth.

This isn't to rag on anyone. This is why we need Jesus. We are selfish and prideful. No one likes to admit they are wrong.

It could be a serious moral failing or a small misunderstanding. It could even be something going on with a particular member/family that has nothing to do with the church. Hurts are hurts. And they will drive people to stop coming around and eventually fizzle out of your church.

5. You are practicing poor leadership skills.

Every church has problems.

What are you, as church leadership, doing about it?

Things won't always be perfect, but people will notice when you are being good stewards of what God has given you. They'll notice how you handle church conflict or disputes. People see how you live your life off stage. If something goes wrong, the first person your church will look to is to the senior pastor.

It is natural. We look to who is in charge.

Leadership is often the #1 growth barrier many churches face. And there is absolutely something you can do about it!

Getting better as a leader doesn't require a new building, a new ministry, or a ton of money. It's about the focus of the leader.

What to do when people leave your church

You can't stop people from leaving your church just like you can't stop your high school girlfriend from breaking up with you. I joke, but coming and going is a natural part of life. The ebb and flow.

So, rather than tighten your grip and forcing your people to stay, what can you be doing to make sure you are the best leader you can be and to prevent your church members from heading out the door?

1. *Pray.*

Prayer can seem antiquated.

Like it's "just" prayer.

We can forget so often to take everything to Christ. The good, the bad, and the ugly. But bringing ourselves to the feet of Jesus is the only way we will continue to remain good leaders. Leaders that might hope to reflect Christ and his fruits.

Pray for the big stuff and the silly stuff.

Pray for your church's health and growth. Pray for your church as a whole. Pray for your church member's hearts and their generosity. Pray that you'll be able to turn the lights on next week. Pray that God will continue to grow you as a leader.

Pray he'll continue to grow your staff. Pray for boldness for your people. Pray that a middle schooler would start to enjoy your youth program this week. Pray for the single dad who looks burdened every time he walks into the men's group. Pray for your music ministry.

Just *pray*.

2. *Come up with a communication plan.*

We know that change can cause a lot of pain, insecurity, and downright discomfort for people. We also know that changes are necessary if we want to see church growth.

Making staff changes, or any other changes, can be largely minimized by creating a good communication plan. This should include a strong mission and vision statement as well as a detailed plan to make sure your people know what's going on.

You'll want to start with actually sitting down and creating a communications calendar. This is something we do here at Church Fuel. Every e-mail, post, and meeting is written down and planned, and scheduled ahead of time. If you're a member of Church Fuel, you can grab a communication calendar from the Resource Library and send us an e-mail if you need some help putting it together for the first time (or if you want to improve it).

3. Be transparent.

Information is a form of appreciation.

Your church members, especially those who are more involved in the inner workings of your church, want to know what's going on. They want to feel important enough to find something out from you instead of an e-mail. When you are making staffing, program, or any other kind of changes, it isn't possible to over-communicate.

Be open about why your youth pastor is moving to another church. Answer questions that come up. In some cases, you may want to practice a certain level of discretion so as to not gossip or slander, but remember there are always people and emotions involved when changes happen. Be sensitive to that.

4. Be patient.

Remember, people pour their lives into ministry. What may start as a cheerful heart and easygoingness can become serving for the wrong reasons. When stopping a ministry, or dealing with staffing changes, take care to redirect a volunteer's energy to something else.

Our priority is not to make volunteers happy, but there is value in making your volunteers feel important. In reminding them of your church's purpose.

Ask them how they're doing with the changes, share numbers and stories about how these changes are producing fruit, and give your volunteers a new job that fits their gifts and skills.

Just try not to lose your cool with people who aren't warmly receptive to new changes.

Church Fuel Can Help

If you're looking for more help leading your church to growth, come join the Church Fuel Community.

We are a group of pastors and leaders who value practical coaching and resources and encourage one another to grow healthy. Reaching new guests and helping them get involved in the life of the church is a regular topic among our members.

Every month, we release a brand-new master class, covering topics like volunteers, connecting people, preaching, finances, and more.

Members also get access to a resource library full of documents, spreadsheets and templates, including lots of church growth resources. There are members-only office hours and round tables where you can get personal help when needed.

There's no long-term contract and a money-back guarantee, so you can check it out without pressure. [Learn more here.](#)