

1-1-2005

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Presented at the Pentecostals, Power and Empowerment EPCRA/EPTA Conference in Schloss Beuggen, Rheinfelden, Germany, 29 March – 2 April 2005. This is an electronic version of an article that was first published in the Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association. The journal website is available at <http://www.eptaonline.com/>

## Recommended Citation

Kay, W. K., & Dyer, A. E. (2005) 'Apostolic Networks in the UK: the dynamics of growth'. Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association, 25, 25-38

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# **Apostolic Networks in the UK: the dynamics of growth**

William K Kay and Anne E Dyer

Pentecostals, Power and Empowerment  
EPCRA/EPTA Conference  
Schloss Beuggen, Rheinfelden, Germany, 29 March – 2 April 2005

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## **Abstract**

Apostolic or New Churches came into existence in the UK as a result of a complicated set of historical and theological factors in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s these new churches, with their restorationist doctrines, were beginning to set trends within the wider evangelical scene and by the 1980s they had formed apostolic networks which functioned in some respects like conventional Pentecostal denominations and, in other respects, quite differently from them. In respect of the dynamics of church growth, as this empirical study shows, they appear to be similar.

## **Introduction**

During the 1950s Arthur Wallis, an independent bible teacher, began to think and pray about the structure of a renewed church that could instigate and perpetuate a revival of Christianity (Wallis, 1956; 1961). Wallis, with Cecil Cousen who had come out of the Pentecostal movement in Canada and David Lillie who had been in the Brethren, put on a series of small but influential conferences at which neo-Brethren patterns of church life and government were developed (Walker, 1998: 53; Wallis, 1991). All three men were Pentecostal by experience – they had experienced a post-conversion spiritual empowerment. As a result, by the 1960s Wallis and others began to see the outlines of an ecclesiological vision that combined simplified church structures and anti-denominationalism with a Pentecostal understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit within the body of the church.

In 1964 the Fountain Trust was set up by Michael Harper, then the curate at the prestigious Anglican evangelical church of All Souls, Langham Place, London. Harper was a Cambridge theology graduate and his own experience of the baptism of the Spirit with glossolalia led him into conflict with John Stott, the senior minister of the church where he served. Stott (1964) took what came to be a standard evangelical line against the Pentecostal baptism, namely that everything the Christian required from God was already received at conversion and wrapped up in this experience. There was no subsequent empowerment for service.

Harper disagreed and used the Fountain Trust to disseminate Pentecostal/charismatic doctrine and life across numerous denominations. Harper, like Wallis, wanted revival and hoped that the Pentecostal baptism would help to bring this about. The Fountain Trust arranged a large number of inter-denominational conferences in the decade up to about 1975 so that, during the 1970s, analysts began to see three streams running in parallel.

The first stream comprised the classical Pentecostal churches that continued more or less unchanged from the period after 1915 (Elim) and 1924 (Assemblies of God) when they were founded. Partly because of early ostracism, they had largely retreated from interchange with other evangelical churches and were theologically isolated and potentially sectarian in their outlook. The second stream was the charismatic movement that resulted in large numbers of Christians from a range of Protestant traditions, but also from Roman Catholicism, enjoying the essential Pentecostal experience. Every large denomination was touched to a greater or lesser extent by the charismatic movement so that, even those that resisted the doctrines connected with speaking in tongues, began to accept a more relaxed and participatory form of worship. If there was one tenet that was implicit within the charismatic movement, it was that denominational loyalty should be maintained and that Spirit-baptised Christians should remain within the denominational structures where they found themselves. This was a movement of renewal rather than of radicalism. The third stream was to be found within the 'house churches', as they were originally called. These were new fellowships that sprang up with a strong commitment to Pentecostal and charismatic doctrine. They met in the first

instance in small groups in homes or hired school halls and they were inclined to radicalism. These were newcomers on the scene, and many of their preachers attacked what they saw to be the deadness of denominationalism, whether it was renewed or not, and the legalism of what they saw to be Pentecostalism.

Almost flaunting their new-found freedom the new churches would deliberately meet in pubs, play football on Sundays and drive fashionable cars.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s the preacher who turned up in the most fashionable clothes and with a well coiffured wife would almost certainly belonged to the restorationist movement, and this lifestyle choice was not simply reached by copying American prosperity teaching. It was a reaction against the drabness of evangelicalism in Britain and the legalism, or perceived legalism, of its congregations. Restorationism also stressed the role of the man within the family and the church and, as a result, male preoccupations with football and sport became perfectly acceptable in the ethos of the new churches. In some strands of restorationism, most notably New Frontiers and Salt and Light, the ministry of women was restricted but, in others like Ichthus, it was welcomed. In any event, restorationism was counter-cultural in its embrace of supernaturalism but cultural in its affinity with sport and fashion. Christians who joined the new churches found the experience liberating. Non-Christians who joined them were not subject to quite the disjunction in lifestyle that would have been the case had they joined Pentecostal congregations.

By the mid-1970s these 'house churches' had begun to acquire property. Ichthus was formed in 1974 in south London. Pioneer probably began in about 1970. House groups in the Romsey area began to constellate around emerging leadership in the early 1970s while, in the northern part of England, the Harvest Time ministries began. At first these 'new churches', as they were eventually called, were most notable because of the large Bible weeks they hosted in the summer months from about 1975 onwards. These summer camps gave a platform to new church preachers who began to speak of the scandal of denominationalism<sup>2</sup>, in general terms about 'the kingdom' and the power, political as well as spiritual, of the world-wide church in preparation for Christ's return. Most particularly, these new groups offered a restorationist theology, a theology that presumed the reacquisition of the life, power, operation and structure of the church of the New Testament, and they took much of their doctrine from the preparatory work of Wallis, Lillie and Cousen two decades earlier. This meant that not only did they hold to a belief in charismatic gifts, as the Pentecostals did, but they also held to a belief in the gift-ministries including especially the ministry of the apostle.

By the mid-1980s the new churches began to cluster themselves around various powerful ministers who, with minimal infrastructural links, transformed sets of congregations into apostolic networks. Each network would vary in size and operation but, in essence, the pattern was similar. Local congregations governed by elders would be subdivided into home groups that could come together in various permutations of size and frequency. The local elders were submissive to the apostolic figure who, himself, functioned within an apostolic team although always as a first among equals. The emphasis upon the authority of apostles as well as the authority of other ministry gifts stood in stark contrast to the more constitutional mind-set that permeated many Pentecostal denominations. This ministerial authority was also in contrast to the typically more ineffective and liturgical ministerial role

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<sup>1</sup> Personal observation!

<sup>2</sup> John Noble's (1971) booklet *Forgive us our Denominations* (no publisher) captures the mood here. The date is estimated by Andrew Walker (1998).

to be found within non-Pentecostal churches. Consequently, the apostolic networks began to offer attractive certainties and confident direction that made them, at first, envied by ministers in more conventional settings. As a result the networks had an impact on the rest of the church within Great Britain out of proportion to their numbers.

The exact relationship between the new restorationist churches functioning within apostolic networks and the Toronto blessing of the 1990s is hard to pin down in the sense that it is unclear whether the Toronto movement should be seen as a species of restorationism. The apostolic networks largely welcomed the Toronto blessing and accepted its benefits for refreshment and rejuvenation. Their relational style of ministry and their informal meetings could cope with unusual spiritual phenomena and, because of the apostolic form of government, they were able to make decisions quickly about accompanying developments on the Christian scene in Britain. The Kansas City Prophets in conjunction with John Wimber were influential in the 1990s but, once the Kansas City Prophets appeared to be over-claiming in their predictions of end-time revival, the apostolic networks could distance themselves quite quickly and minimise damage to their own credibility.

By the end of the 1990s apostolic networks had themselves passed through several phases. The Harvest Time group in the north of England had grown very rapidly and with an authoritarian reputation in the mid-1980s but then, after internal disagreements, split into a number of mini-networks by the end of that decade.<sup>3</sup> Coastlands in the south of England, became New Frontiers, and had grown steadily and unspectacularly through the 1970s and 1980s. But by the 1990s it stood head and shoulders above the others and could be seen to be the largest of all the networks. It had benefited from the accession of significant numbers of Baptist churches and had avoided scandals and other negative events so that by the end of the century, it could count on about 180 congregations in the UK and many more overseas (Millward, 2003).

Through growth, fragmentation and affiliation the networks proliferated in the 1990s and, counting ones with more than a dozen churches, there are at least twelve. Andrew Walker in the preface to the fourth edition of his excellent book *Restoring the Kingdom* (1998) wrote 'Restorationism has become engulfed in a whole stream of new events of such plurality and complexity that I doubt whether I could have controlled the material in a satisfactory way'.

The pneumatology of the apostolic churches was largely Pentecostal while their eschatology was amillennial. The question addressed in this paper concerns the spiritual power of apostolic churches and the relationship between this power and their growth. We have taken the model developed by Margaret Poloma (1989) in *Assemblies of God at the Crossroads* and tested by Kay (2000) in the *Pentecostals in Britain* and applied it to these new congregations. In essence the model is constructed on the premise that charismatic experience leads to evangelistic activity so that those churches which are most charismatically active will also be most evangelistically active and, as a result of this, will grow. That is, the charismatic activity of church is essential to its health and expansion. If charismatic churches only pursue evangelistic activity, they may grow to some extent, but will eventually relapse. What this also means is that Pentecostal and charismatic churches should be true to themselves and not allow the allure of respectability to seduce them away from their characteristic path. They would be deeply mistaken if they assume that, by dropping the potential embarrassment

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<sup>3</sup> Personal observation. There were meetings between classical Pentecostals and restorationists because the latter feared they would, and in fact did, lose churches to the restorationist movement.

associated with charismatic gifts, they will secure their future and the continued upward graph of membership. Nothing could be further from the truth.

### **Method**

This research project focused on networked ‘new churches’ only, that is, congregations that are part of an apostolic network rather than congregations that are free-standing and independent. The standard statistical texts enumerating church groups in the UK are published by Christian Research and authored by Peter Brierley (e.g. 2001). In these he indicates that there are approximately 2094 New Churches in the UK with 2385 ministers. Closer inspection and emailed correspondence both with him and with church leaders suggest that these figures are either overestimated or else include churches that stand outside the apostolic sphere and are therefore not relevant to this project.<sup>4</sup> There are various websites available by which fuller information can be gathered but these also do not give accurate or complete pictures<sup>5</sup>. A more detailed analysis indicates that there are some 12 relevant networks with 675 congregations.

Once the main groups had been identified we set about asking the main administrative officers of each network for their permission to write to their churches’ leaders with a questionnaire. While not all were willing to send us their address list, some volunteered to send questionnaires out in their own general mailings and we thank Ichthus, Groundlevel and C.net for doing that. We are also thankful that others at least asked their members to fill the questionnaire in, and made the research known. Table 1 indicates distribution and response rate.

The 18 page questionnaire was made up of 6 sections. The first asked questions about age, gender, training, church size, annual rates of births, baptism, deaths, marriages, church structure, growth, decline and congregational charismata. The second section dealt with the frequency of ministerial charismatic and evangelistic activities. A third section gave 150 statements on doctrinal issues and offered respondents five options from agree strongly to disagree strongly on each issue; these varied from Christology to ecclesiology, from cell church to belief in ‘apostolic ministry’. Three other sections not relevant to this paper were also included. The questionnaire as a whole was designed to allow comparison between the leaders of apostolic network and the Pentecostal leaders surveyed by Kay (2000).

Table 1 gives details of distribution and returns and of the overall response rate of 35.5%. However, these quantitative data have been supplemented by more than a fifteen formal interviews which are not reported in this paper.

Questionnaire results were analysed by SPSS 8.0 (SPSS, 1998)

### **Results**

Although the sample is drawn from 12 different apostolic networks, the analysis here presents findings for all 237 respondents in one group. This is because in many crucial respects they were very similar and because, on the defining issue, more than two thirds (66.1%) believe that ‘apostolic networks are more important than denominational structures’, a huge

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<sup>4</sup> 5520 churches resulted from a google search for ‘community church’ based on the <http://www.findachurch.co.uk/> site (28/01/2005). There is no way of knowing if they are network churches, denominational or independent without detailed closer inspection.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Evangelical Alliance’s Website, <http://www.upmystreet.com> <http://www.churchesuk.co.uk>, <http://www.findachurch.co.uk/>

proportion (84.5%) believe that ‘apostolic leadership is vital to the 21st-century’ and an even larger number (88.8%) agreed with the statement ‘I believe in the authority of apostles today’. Nearly all respondents (95%) were able to say ‘I believe in the ministry of apostles’. The sample, then, clearly coheres around the notion of apostolic ministry.

Of the 237 respondents who completed the questionnaire, 92.8% were male. Their mean age was 48 years and the mean length of time in the ministry was 14 years. As many as 22% of respondents were unpaid by their congregations and 51% were in paid secular employment. Only 8.5% were in sole charge of a congregation although 40.9% were in charge as senior ministers and 27.4% as part of a team. The median annual number of baptisms conducted by each respondent was three, the median number of marriages one and the median number of funerals one. As many as 63.2% of these ministers looked after a congregation of less than 100 adults but 9% looked after a congregation of more than 200 adults; 8.5% cared for church congregations of less than 25. Just 17% were cell churches of one type or another, but a third of the churches were definitely not cell churches (32.2%). A further 46.1% were churches with cells without being cell churches. Just over half (52.3%) of the churches functioned with house groups as opposed to cell groups.

As many as 95.3% of these respondents believed that ‘the baptism in the Spirit is a distinct experience’ though only 17% believe that tongues (glossolalia) are the ‘initial evidence’ for Spirit-baptism. About a third (36%) were creationists and believed the world was made in six 24 hour days. Over half these respondents (51%) believe that women should have the same opportunities as men for ministry. 100% of respondents believe that Jesus died for their sins and 99.9% believe that he rose again physically from the dead.

Table 2 provides percentages of the lifestyle judgements of respondents and shows a generally liberal orientation.

Table 3 gives figures for the percentage of the congregation exercising spiritual gifts, for congregational growth and decline. It shows, for instance, that more than half of ministers (54.5%) thought that 30% of their congregation exercised spiritual gifts. Estimated growth rates are also good because over a fifth (22.3%) of ministers thought their congregations had increased by more than 30% in the previous year. Decline is correspondingly rarer as only about 10% of ministers estimated that their congregations had decreased by more than 6%.

Table 4 shows the frequency with which ministers exercised spiritual gifts and engaged in evangelistic activities. It indicates that the most frequently used spiritual gift is prophecy and the most frequently engaged in evangelistic activity is to talk with friends and neighbours about the church. These two sets of items were converted into scales by coding responses (1 for none and 5 for 19+ times in three months) and adding them together. The properties of the scales were then tested by using an alpha coefficient (Cronbach 1951). The result was highly satisfactory for both the charismatic activity scale (alpha .7179) and the evangelistic activity scale (alpha .7824). Both these scales were similar to those used by Poloma (1989) and Kay (2000)<sup>6</sup>.

Table 5 shows the relationship between the activity of the minister and the life of the congregation. Ministerial evangelistic activities correlate significantly with congregational

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<sup>6</sup> Each scale was one item shorter than those used by Kay (2000), though the alpha coefficients remained almost the same. The item dropped from the charismatic activity scale related to singing in glossolalia and the item dropped from the evangelistic activity scale related to talking with friends and neighbours about Christ.

growth. Ministerial charismatic activities also correlate significantly with congregational growth and with the prevalence of spiritual gifts within the congregation.

A further computation showed that the prevalence of spiritual gifts within a congregation correlated significantly with congregational growth ( $r = .183$ ,  $p > .005$ ) but not with congregational decline ( $r = .032$ , NS). Lastly, one way analysis of variance was carried out to see whether growth rates in congregations could be attributed to the presence or absence of cell structures but there was no significant relationship between these variables ( $F = 0.274$ , NS). Cells neither encouraged nor inhibited growth or the prevalence of spiritual gifts.

### **Discussion**

This is the first piece of quantitative research into apostolic networks in Britain. The importance of apostolic ministry to the respondents is satisfyingly in line with expectations. Although it might be argued that apostolic ministry would of necessity be foundational to apostolic networks, this is by no means inevitable. In the same way that Pentecostal distinctives or Baptist distinctives are not always to be found within the ministerial cohorts belonging to those groups, it would be possible to suggest that apostolic ministry had become something of a fad or fashion that might now fail to inspire the commitment of its members. The findings show that this is not so. These ministers believe in the importance of apostolic ministry not only for themselves but for the church at large. They think that apostolic networks are more important than denominational structures and vital to the 21st century.

The mean age of these ministers is about the same as that found in Pentecostal denominations (Kay, 2000:207). Although the number in positions paid by the churches is slightly higher than that to be found within Pentecostal groups (Kay 2000:206), the number of ministers in paid secular employment is also higher than that found in the main Pentecostal denominations. In terms of congregational size the profile of apostolic churches is rather different from that of classical Pentecostals. Apostolic network churches have emphasised quality rather than quantity and New Frontiers, for instance, will not recognise small groups of people as 'churches'. These principles are borne out by the figures: whereas 8.5 % of ministers within apostolic networks look after churches of fewer than 25 people, the comparable figure for Assemblies of God is 19.8% and for the Church of God is 28.1% (Kay, 2000: 210).

Theologically the apostolic networks are clearly Pentecostal or charismatic. They overwhelmingly believe in a distinct experience of the baptism of Holy Spirit and nearly a fifth accepts the hard line taken by Assemblies of God that directly links glossolalia with Spirit baptism as initial evidence. About a third of apostolic network ministers are creationists which, again, suggest a counter-cultural orientation. We are correct to locate the apostolic networks within the Pentecostal and charismatic sphere. These are not liberal churches in doctrine even if, in other ways, they may be close to the surrounding culture.

Table 2 shows how the restorationist preachers are, on many matters, aligned with British urban culture. For instance, only a very small number would believe that the drinking of alcohol is wrong for Christians. Similarly, social dancing is also perfectly acceptable to nearly all these ministers, a finding that would completely contradict the evangelical culture of the 1950s (Manwaring 1985; Barclay 1997). Surprisingly given the known dangers of cigarettes, there is a relatively low response against smoking: less than a third of these ministers agree that 'Christians should not smoke'. Equally sport on Sundays is also widely accepted but perhaps the most telling lifestyle statistic relates to the acceptability of Christian



rock music where over half of these ministers agree that it 'helps young people to worship', a finding that is indicative of the low average age of these congregations and of their orientation to the subculture of British youth.

The findings presented in table 3 show healthy growth rates for these churches since more than a fifth have grown by 30% in the last 12 months and only 5.6% have stagnated. Conversely, although decline is to be found in about 10% of the churches, it is clear that the balance between growth and decline favours the former. Similarly, spiritual gifts are prevalent within these congregations. In more than half of these congregations more than 30% of the congregation exercise spiritual gifts, a figure that shows how actively charismatic they are. There is a great deal of prayer for the sick, of the giving of prophecies, of words of knowledge and wisdom, of glossolalia, in these congregations.

Table 4 shows how charismatically active most of these ministers are. Nearly all of them have prophesied within the last three months and most have prophesied frequently. Many of them have given a word of wisdom or knowledge, many have danced in the Spirit, interpreted tongues or given a public utterance in tongues. These are ministers who are exemplars of charismatic activity. They are modelling charismatic Christianity to their congregations and clearly believe that they are moving in supernatural power. It is part of their lifestyle and their expectation in worship. Equally many of these ministers are active evangelistically; they are happy to talk about their churches to friends and neighbours. Surprisingly, it is witnessing to friends and neighbours about their church rather than about Christ which is commonplace. Nearly all these ministers have also prayed to the salvation of specific people or invited a new person to an activity and their church. We may say that these are ministers who are living their Christianity in the public domain and want the people they meet to attend public worship with them.

Table 5 supports the contention that it is the evangelistic activity of the minister that drives forward congregational growth. Where ministers are evangelistic, congregations grow. Yet, even more than the ministerial evangelistic activity, the ministerial charismatic activity is important. The highest correlation within table 4 is between the growth of the congregation and the charismatic activity of the minister. And ministerial charismatic also correlates with the prevalence of spiritual gifts within the congregations so that, congregations which see or hear their ministers prophesying, praying to the sick, dancing in the spirit, speaking in tongues, and so on, are themselves more likely to find freedom to engage in these activities for themselves. We can build up a picture of charismatically productive and evangelistically active ministers who create congregations in their own likeness. Moreover, it is clear that evangelistic and charismatic activities do not scare newcomers away from church since there is no significant correlation between evangelism or charismatic activity and congregational decline, and, in any case, the correlation is negative.

These findings show the dynamics of congregational growth are similar to those suggested by Poloma in relation to American Assemblies of God in the late 1980s and replicated by Kay (2000) among four different Pentecostal groups at the end of the millennium. What allows the churches to grow is not, in the first instance, the apostolic authority under which they sit but rather the lively charismatic and evangelistic activity that the ministers inspire. We may say that spiritual power is here linked with congregational growth and is not exercised in a vacuum or for its own sake but harnessed to purposes that lead to the numerical increase of networks and networked churches.

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**Table 1: Network returns of Questionnaire**

<b>Network</b>	<b>Sent</b>	<b>Returns</b>	<b>Returned %</b>
Cornerstone	50	16	32
Groundlevel	77	29	38
Ichthus	45	13	29
Jesus Fellowship <sup>7</sup>	53	11	21
Kensington Temple	54	10	19
Kingdom Faith	13	9	69
Lifelink	6	3	50
New Frontiers	200	82	41
New Covenant Ministries	12	2	17
Spirit Connect /Pioneer	12	8	67
Salt and Light	50	21	42
Vineyard	75	26	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>647</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>36</b>

**Table 2  
Lifestyle items**

<b>Item</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>NC</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>
Christians should not drink alcoholic beverages	.8	.8	3.0	58.5	36.9
Christians should not attend the cinema		1.3	2.5	43.9	51.9
Christians should not buy or sell on Sundays unless absolutely necessary	2.5	18.1	11.8	49.8	17.7
Christians should not take part in social dancing	.4	3.8	4.2	40.9	50.6
Christians should not smoke	15.0	46.6	10.7	22.2	5.6
Christians should not engage in sporting activities on Sundays	2.1	7.6	15.2	58.2	16.9
I believe Christian rock music helps young people to worship	9.3	49.2	31.4	7.6	2.5

**Table 3  
Ministerial assessment of prevalence of spiritual gifts, congregational growth and decline**

<b>Item</b>	<b>none</b>	<b>1- 5%</b>	<b>6- 10%</b>	<b>11- 20%</b>	<b>21- 30%</b>	<b>More than 30%</b>
What percentage of people in your ministerial care publicly exercises spiritual gifts (charismata)?	.4	6.8	5.5	17.0	15.7	54.5
By what percentage would you judge the number of people in your ministerial care has grown in the past 12 months?	5.6	27.0	21.9	12.4	10.7	22.3
By what percentage would you judge the number of people in your ministerial care has declined in the past 12 months?	63.4	25.4	9.3	1.0	.5	.5

<sup>7</sup> Also called, Multiply Network

**Table 4**  
**Frequency of ministerial charismatic and evangelistic activities in past three months**

Activity	None	1-6	7-12	13-18	19+
	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Charismatic</i>					
Given public utterance in tongues	46.8	42.6	4.3	1.3	5.1
Interpreted tongues	44.6	48.8	3.9	.9	1.7
Prophesied	7.2	53.2	21.3	6.8	11.5
Danced in the Spirit	56.5	27.8	7.2	1.3	2.5
Given a 'word of wisdom/knowledge'	15.0	60.5	13.3	5.2	6.0
<i>Evangelistic</i>					
Talked with friends or neighbours about your church	3.8	58.1	21.6	6.8	9.7
Invited a new person to an activity at your church	19.7	60.3	12.0	4.3	3.8
Invited a backslider to return to your church	40.3	51.1	5.2	2.1	1.3
Offered to drive a new person to church	71.1	26.4	1.7	.4	.4
Invited children of new people to children's meetings	60.9	32.2	5.2	.9	.9
Prayed for the salvation of specific people	16.4	46.6	17.1	5.2	14.2

**Table 5**  
**Correlations between ministerial activities and congregational indicators**

	Scales	Baptisms	Marriages	Funerals	Congregational Spiritual Gifts	Growth	Decline
Scale of ministerial evangelistic activities		.125	.067	.093	.073	.216**	-.017
Scale of ministerial charismatic activities		.062	.112	-.078	.244**	.335**	-.046

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).