

16%

**Shifting from Sunday-Centricity
to Harvest Forward**



The Search for the Secret Sauce

Every year, pastors travel to conferences searching for what might finally move their churches forward.

They listen to leaders of growing churches describe what is working. They hear about the latest cultural trends, leadership strategies, discipleship systems, outreach models, and methods for increasing engagement. They fill notebooks with ideas and return home carrying a new program, process, or pathway.

For a moment, everything feels possible.

The pastor gathers the leadership team and shares the vision. Sermons are planned. Materials are purchased. Volunteers are recruited. Calendars are rearranged. A launch date is announced. Everyone is told that this is more than another initiative. This is a new direction for the church.

Excitement builds. Participation increases. The first few weeks feel promising.

Then, six months later, the church has quietly returned to the status quo.

The new language may remain. A few elements of the program may survive. Another activity may have been added to the calendar. But the congregation continues to organize its spiritual life primarily around attending, serving, and participating in what happens at the church.

Sunday remains the center of gravity.

The pastor begins to wonder what went wrong. Perhaps the program was not implemented correctly. Perhaps the leaders failed to communicate the vision clearly enough. Perhaps the congregation was resistant to change. Perhaps a different model would work better.

So the search begins again.

Another conference. Another book. Another consultant. Another program, process, or pathway. Another season of excitement followed by another gradual return to the familiar.

The problem is not that the pastor lacks sincerity, courage, or commitment. Most pastors genuinely long to see their people become disciples who carry the life of Jesus into the world. They are working within a paradigm that continually pulls everything back toward the gathering.

A program built within a Sunday-centric paradigm will eventually reinforce Sunday-centricity. Even when the program is designed to move people outward, it is usually organized, staffed, promoted, measured, and controlled from within the church. People are invited to participate in

another activity created for them rather than recognize the Kingdom possibilities already present in their everyday lives.

The form may change, but the center of gravity remains the same.

This is why so many attempts at transformation eventually become additional programs. They try to produce a new kind of disciple without changing the paradigm through which discipleship is understood.

A church cannot program its way out of a paradigm built around programs.

The shift from Sunday-centricity to Harvest Forward does not begin with finding a better model. It begins with a different way of seeing the Church, the Kingdom, and the plentiful harvest.

But even a new paradigm does not need to be introduced to the entire congregation at once.

Within almost every church is a small percentage of people who are already restless with the status quo. They are curious enough to question inherited assumptions, relational enough to enter the lives of people beyond the gathering, and adventurous enough to follow Jesus without knowing where the journey will lead.

They do not need another program.

They need a new paradigm and permission to explore it.

They are the 16%.

The Mistake of Trying to Move Everyone

Church leaders naturally think about the entire congregation. They are responsible for shepherding everyone, so when they envision a new direction, they often assume everyone must understand it, accept it, and move toward it together.

This sounds responsible, but it creates an impossible expectation.

People do not encounter new ideas at the same speed. Some immediately recognize possibility. Others need to see evidence. Some require considerable time and reassurance. Others resist change regardless of how carefully it is explained.

When leaders insist upon moving everyone together, the pace of the church is eventually determined by the people least prepared to move.

The result is often a diluted vision. The language becomes safer. The challenge becomes smaller. The unknown is replaced with predetermined steps. What began as a new paradigm gradually becomes another program that can be explained, controlled, and offered to everyone.

Harvest Forward cannot be reduced to something more familiar simply to make it immediately acceptable to the majority. It invites people to leave the security of predetermined outcomes and enter the harvest attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and willing to discover what expression of His Kingdom might emerge among them.

Not everyone will be ready for that at the same time.

They do not need to be.

The shift from Sunday-centricity does not begin by persuading the entire congregation. It begins by recognizing the people who are already leaning forward.

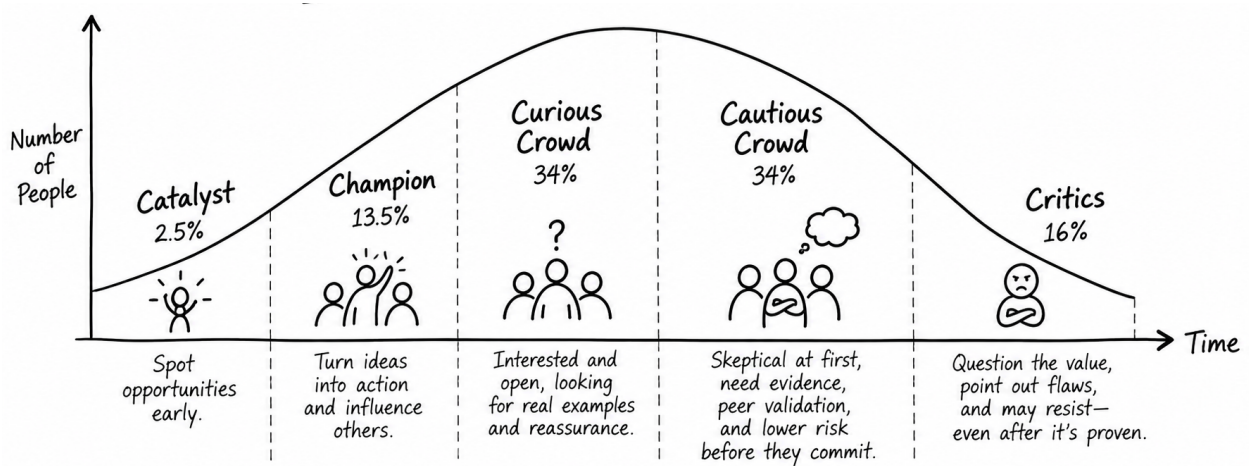
Understanding the 16%

Everett Rogers' work on the diffusion of innovations helps explain how people respond when they encounter a new idea. His adoption curve divides people into five groups according to how quickly they embrace change.

For the Harvest Forward conversation, those five groups can be understood as Catalysts, Champions, the Curious Crowd, the Cautious Crowd, and Critics.

Catalysts represent approximately 2.5% of a community. They recognize possibilities before almost anyone else. They are energized by discovery, willing to question assumptions, and prepared to experiment without needing proof that everything will work. They do not require a complete map because they are drawn toward unexplored territory.

Champions represent approximately 13.5%. They recognize the significance of what the Catalysts are discovering and are willing to join them early. They give emerging possibilities relational credibility. Catalysts often begin the exploration, while Champions help others recognize that something important is happening.



Together, Catalysts and Champions make up the first 16%.

The Curious Crowd represents approximately 34%. They are open to change, but they are rarely the first to move. They want to see what happens. When they observe genuine fruit and hear credible stories from people they trust, their curiosity begins to overcome their uncertainty.

The Cautious Crowd represents another 34%. They need more time, evidence, reassurance, and social confidence. They usually embrace change only after it has become familiar and its value has been demonstrated.

Critics represent the final 16%. They are the most resistant to change and may remain unconvinced even after most others have moved.

These categories do not measure anyone's spiritual maturity, faithfulness, or value. They describe different responses to the unfamiliar. A person can be a Catalyst in one area and cautious in another.

But the pattern reveals something important for leaders. Resistance does not suddenly appear with the final 16%. It increases as we move across the curve.

Catalysts and Champions are prepared to explore before the outcome is known.

The Curious Crowd begins moving when they see credible evidence that something meaningful is happening.

The Cautious Crowd needs far more reassurance and is unlikely to move until the change feels established, familiar, and safe.

Critics remain the most resistant and may never embrace the change at all.

The influence of the Critics can also extend beyond their percentage. They are often louder than the rest of the congregation, more persistent in expressing their objections, and highly influential among those who are already hesitant. Their resistance can make the entire church appear less ready than it actually is.

The leadership mistake is not listening to criticism. It is allowing the loudest resistance to determine the pace of everyone else.

When leaders wait until the Critics are comfortable, the Catalysts and Champions are restrained. The people most prepared to enter the future are asked to remain in the present until the people most committed to the past give their permission.

Find the People Already Leaning Forward

The 16% are not always the most visible people in a congregation. They may not hold formal leadership positions. They may not be the most consistent volunteers, the largest financial contributors, or the people most deeply involved in church activities.

In fact, some of them may appear restless, underused, or difficult to categorize. They ask questions that do not fit neatly within existing conversations. They imagine possibilities beyond current forms. They care deeply about people who would never attend the church, but they have little interest in creating another attraction designed to bring those people inside.

They are not necessarily dissatisfied with the Church. They simply see possibilities beyond the way it currently organizes itself.

Three characteristics help identify them.

They are curious. They notice what others overlook. They ask why, why not, and what if. They are more interested in discovering what Jesus is already doing than reproducing what worked somewhere else.

They are relational. They value people beyond projects. They understand that trust cannot be accelerated and that presence often matters before persuasion. They would rather know a few people deeply than gather a crowd of people superficially.

They are adventurous. They are willing to follow Jesus into the unknown, unexplored, and unexpected. They do not require a guaranteed outcome before taking a faithful step.

These are the people most likely to become Kingdom éclaireurs: people who enter the harvest, help discover what Jesus is doing, and nurture what emerges.

They do not need to be convinced that there is more to following Jesus than attending and supporting church activities. They already sense it. What they often lack is language for what they are experiencing, a paradigm through which to understand it, and permission to follow where Jesus is leading.

Do Not Recruit Them

When churches recognize imaginative, energetic, and relationally gifted people, they often recruit them.

They ask them to lead a program, join a committee, improve Sunday, organize an event, fill a volunteer position, or help the existing church structure operate more effectively.

Their potential is recognized, but it is redirected inward.

This is one of the ways Sunday-centricity protects itself. The people most capable of imagining life beyond the gathering are given more responsibility within it. Their curiosity becomes planning. Their relationships become recruitment. Their appetite for adventure becomes another assignment on the church calendar.

The 16% are not the secret to making the accumulating church work better. They are the people most likely to discover what exists beyond it.

The goal is not to get the 16% more involved in the church. The goal is to release the 16% more fully into the harvest.

That requires leaders to resist the instinct to turn every possibility into an official ministry. The 16% do not need a predetermined role, a ministry name, a launch date, or a list of expected outcomes.

They need a different way to see.

Provide a New Paradigm

A paradigm is more than an idea. It shapes what people notice, how they interpret what they see, and which possibilities they believe are available to them.

Within a Sunday-centric paradigm, the church gathering becomes the primary location of ministry. Success is measured by how many people attend, participate, volunteer, and return. The everyday lives of the congregation are often treated as the space between church activities.

Harvest Forward begins somewhere else.

It begins with Jesus' declaration that the Kingdom of God has come near and His observation that the harvest is plentiful. When we learn to see the Kingdom and the harvest at the same time, ordinary life takes on a whole new depth.

The hospital becomes more than the place where someone works. The classroom becomes more than the place where someone teaches. The neighborhood becomes more than the place where someone lives. The café, office, gym, airport, restaurant, university, and Disney park become places where Jesus is already present and active.

The Church is already everywhere because followers of Jesus are already everywhere.

This changes the question. Instead of asking, "How do we bring these people to church?" the 16% begin asking, "What is Jesus already doing among these people, and how can we join Him?"

They do not enter the harvest knowing what they are going to build. They enter attentive to Jesus, curious about people, and willing to discover what expression of His Kingdom might emerge among them.

The paradigm does not tell the 16% what to do.

It changes what they can see.

Release Them to Explore, Express, and Experiment

Once the 16% begin seeing differently, release them.

Invite them to explore. Encourage them to pay attention to the people already around them. Help them notice questions, tensions, relationships, patterns, pain, openness, and possibility. Curiosity comes before creativity. They do not begin by designing a ministry response. They begin by understanding the harvest.

Invite them to express. Help them understand the sacred work of relationship. Express value. Form trust. Plant Jesus. The expression follows the relationship. People are not projects, and relationships are not strategies for accomplishing a predetermined result.

Give them permission to experiment. Let them take small, faithful steps and learn from what happens. Encourage them to assess, adjust, and advance. An experiment can fail without the mission failing. They are not implementing a finished model. They are discovering what faithfulness looks like within their particular harvest.

This means leaders must become comfortable with outcomes they did not design.

One person may begin opening a dinner table to international students. Another may become deeply present among coworkers in a hospital. Someone else may discover a sacred rhythm of conversation with neighbors. Another may begin a small gathering that looks nothing like a conventional church service.

No two Kingdom Expressions will be identical because no two harvests are identical.

The 16% do not need to reproduce the leader's imagination. They need to develop their own attentiveness to Jesus.

Protect What Is Emerging

Release requires more than permission. It also requires protection.

New expressions are fragile. They can easily be pulled back into familiar expectations before they have time to develop. Leaders may ask for measurable outcomes too soon. Existing ministries may try to absorb them. People may insist that they become official, scalable, repeatable, or available to the entire congregation.

The leader's responsibility is to protect emerging Kingdom life from premature institutional demands.

Do not require every experiment to become a program. Do not ask the 16% to recruit enough people to justify what they are doing. Do not assume that something small must become large to become significant. Do not force what emerges in one harvest to become a model for another.

Let it remain specific.

Let it remain relational.

Let it take the time required to form trust.

The future of the Church will be shaped by those who enter the harvest before they design the ministry. Leaders must create enough freedom for them to discover what could never have been planned beforehand.

Let Fruit Create Credibility

Catalysts go first. Champions recognize what is happening and join them.

The Curious Crowd begins to pay attention.

They will not move because leadership explained the paradigm perfectly. They will move when they see real people living differently. They will notice relationships deepening, conversations becoming sacred, ordinary places becoming Kingdom territory, and new expressions of Jesus emerging beyond Sunday.

Fruit creates credibility.

The Cautious Crowd will require more time. They need to see that this is not a passing emphasis or another ministry campaign. They need evidence that ordinary followers of Jesus can enter the harvest without abandoning Jesus, Scripture, or Christian community.

Critics may never embrace the shift.

That cannot determine the pace of the entire church.

The goal is not to force every person to become a Catalyst. The goal is to allow Catalysts to be Catalysts, Champions to be Champions, and the rest of the congregation to respond as the fruit becomes visible.

Eventually, the stories of the 16% begin changing the imagination of the church. People hear about conversations they did not know were possible. They see Jesus becoming visible in places they had never considered sacred. They begin to recognize the Kingdom potential within their own relationships and routines.

The paradigm spreads, not because everyone was persuaded by a presentation, but because they witnessed what became possible when a few people were released.

A Different Role for the Leader

The shift from Sunday-centricity to Harvest Forward requires a different kind of leadership.

The leader is no longer responsible for designing everything the congregation will do. The leader provides a new way of seeing, recognizes the people who are ready, gives language to what they are sensing, releases them to explore, and protects what begins to emerge.

The leader does not need to possess every answer. Harvest Forward leadership can honestly say, “We do not know what this will become. We are going to enter the harvest, pay attention to Jesus, listen to people, and discover the next faithful step.”

That is not an absence of leadership. It is leadership shaped by trust.

It trusts Jesus to lead His people. It trusts the Holy Spirit to remain active beyond the church’s gatherings. It trusts everyday followers of Jesus to recognize and respond to His invitations. It trusts the plentiful harvest to reveal possibilities that could never have been designed from inside a conference room.

The pastor does not need to return from another conference carrying the secret sauce for church growth.

The people who can help the church discover its future may already be sitting within the congregation.

They are curious.

They are relational.

They are adventurous.

They are waiting to be recognized and released.

Begin With the 16%

A church does not shift from Sunday-centricity to Harvest Forward by announcing another initiative. It does not make the shift by adding outreach activities to an already crowded calendar. It does not make the shift by asking the entire congregation to move at the same time.

The shift begins when leaders recognize that some people are already prepared to go first.

Find the Catalysts who see possibilities before anyone else. Find the Champions who will recognize those possibilities and join them. Give them a new paradigm through which to see the Kingdom and the harvest. Release them into the relationships and places where Jesus has already sent them.

Let them explore.

Let them express.

Let them experiment.

Then pay attention to what Jesus does.

The future of your church will not be discovered by convincing the people most resistant to change. It will be discovered by releasing the people most ready to explore.

Don't build another program, process, or pathway for the 100%.

Provide a new paradigm to release the 16%, and watch what happens.