

To help **church leaders and Pastors** understand how churches operate at **different sizes** and implement required changes to transition to a **desirable future**.



Church Sizes

AND Dynamics

Church Size Dynamics

Through the following learning activities you will be able to:

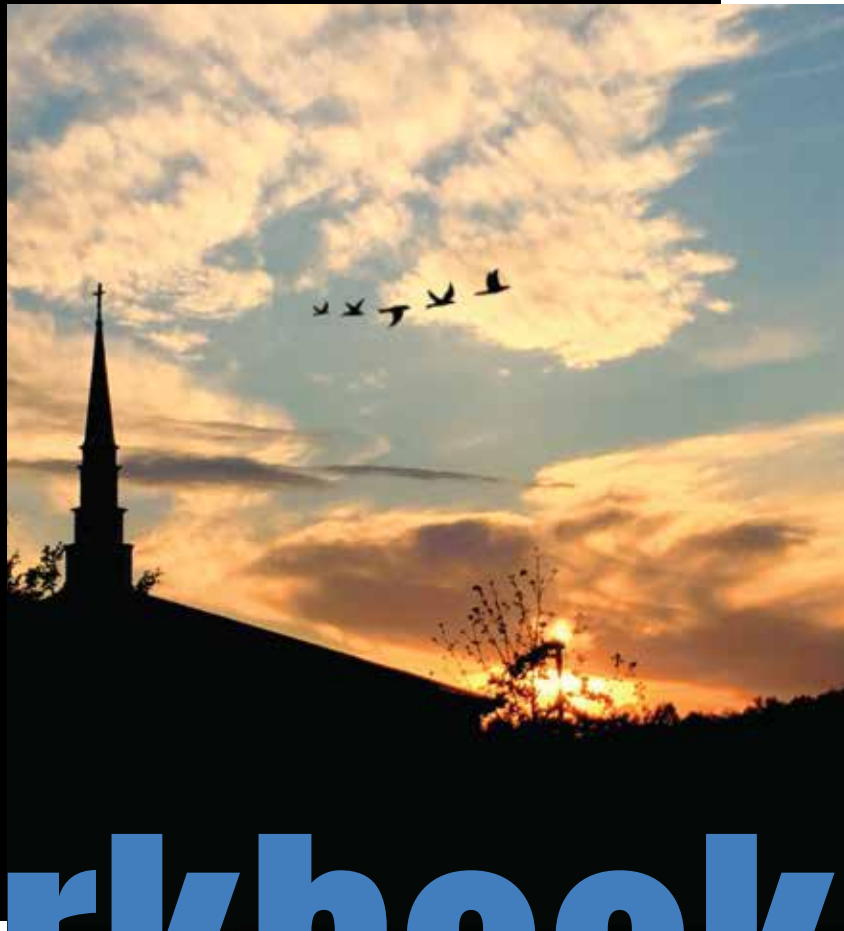
Recognize the dynamics associated with your church size

Identify the implication of your current church size upon the function of pastors, governance and congregational life

Consider the next phase of your development/growth

Agree on key transitions that would assist the church's growth into the desired future

Create an action plan for the transition



workbook

Structure

In this training booklet, you will have three main sections that will enable you to reflect on your church dynamics and plan a desirable future

reflection



imagination



action



REFLECTION

CURRENT CHURCH SITUATION

What are some of the features that describe your church at the moment?

Congregational Life: How does your congregation operate? How do people relate to one another?

Governance: How does the congregation make decisions? How do leaders lead?

Pastoral Role: What are the implications of size?

Growth: How do people join the congregation?

Transition: how does the congregation move from one size to the next?

How are your church's current characteristics or dynamics differ from the generic characteristics of a similar size church?

Having watched the video, what size church are you currently reflecting in your ministry? (e.g., You may be a program church but maybe you are functioning as a family church)

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHURCH

IMAGINATION

FUTURE HOPES & DREAMS



What hopes and dreams had God placed in your heart regarding the future of your church?

Based on the following process of imagination, can you determine any emerging themes?

- Reflect on your vision statement
- Reflect on the Word, promises, prophetic image re your church
- Create a profile for your community (if you haven't already!)
- How can you be Good News to your community?
- Analyze your strength, weaknesses, opportunities & threats
- What can you do better than others (distinctive advantage).
- What unique ministry might God be calling your congregation into?

ACTION POINTS



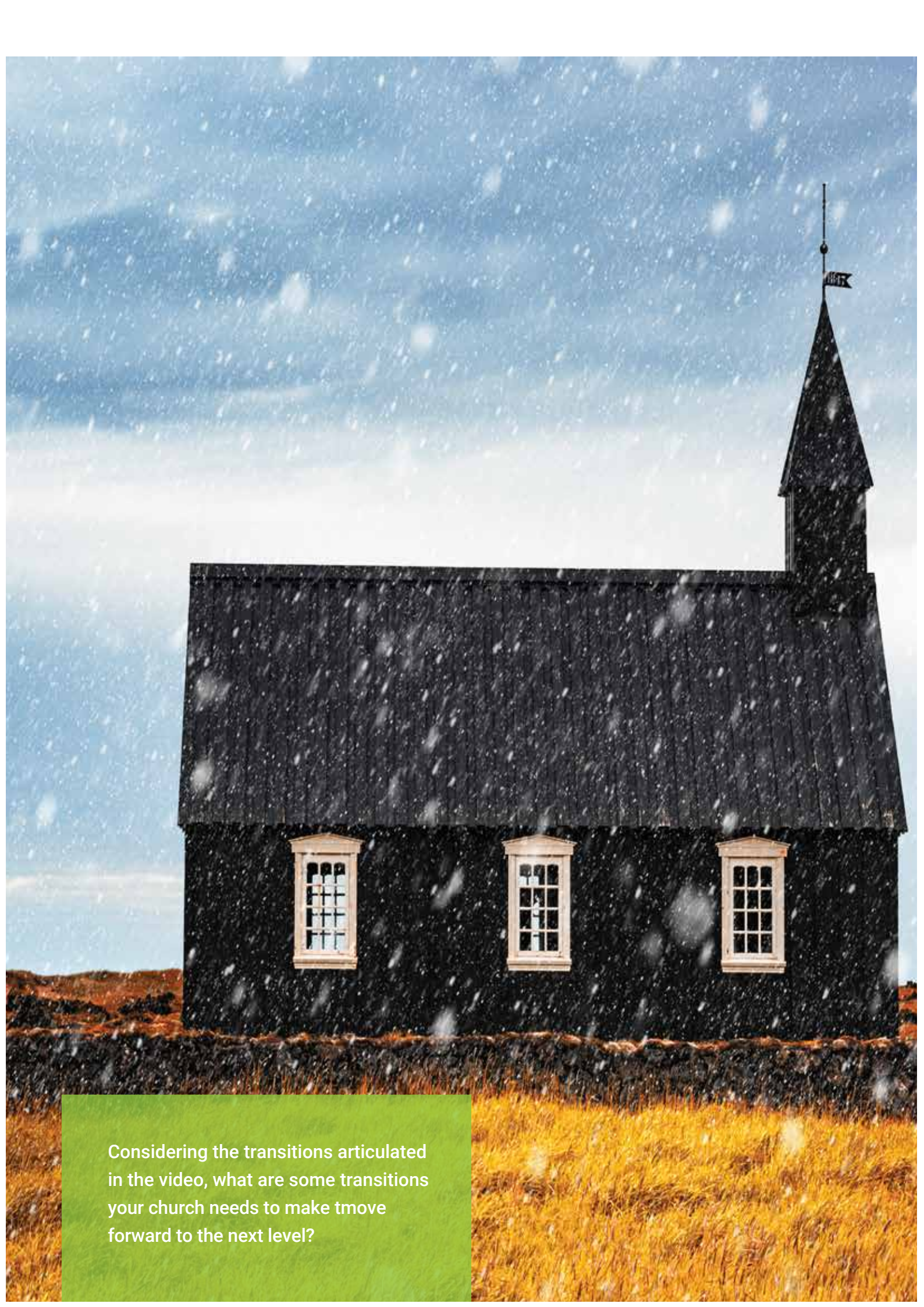
Based on your responses to the previous activities, consider a few transitions

Transitions to be made in our church structure and governance:

Transitions to be made in our pastoring roles and responsibilities:

Transitions to be made in our ministry operations to generate growth:

What are some of the barriers that could hinder the implementation of the above mentioned transitions?



Considering the transitions articulated in the video, what are some transitions your church needs to make to move forward to the next level?

McIntosh's Typology of Church Sizes

Factors	Small Church	Medium Church	Large Church
Size	15-200 worshippers	201-400 worshippers	401+ worshippers
Orientation	Relational	Programmatical	Organizational
Structure	Single cell	Stretched cell	Multiple cell
Leadership	Resides in key families	Resides in committees	Resides in select leaders
Pastor	Lover	Administrator	Leader
Decisions	Made by congregation	Made by committees	Made by staff and leaders
Staff	Bivocational or single pastor	Pastor and small staff	Multiple staff
Change	Bottom up through key people	Middle out through key committees	Top down through key leaders
Growth Patterns	Attraction model through relationships	Program model through key ministry	Proclamation model through word of mouth
Growth Obstacles	Small-church image; Ineffective evangelism; Inadequate programming; Downward momentum; Ingrown fellowship	Inadequate facilities; Inadequate staff; Inadequate finances; Poor administration; Increasing complexity	Poor assimilation; Increased bureaucracy; Poor communication; Loss of vision; Lack of member care
Growth Strategies	Renew a sense of purpose; Begin new ministries; Cultivate evangelism; Celebrate victories; Start new groups/classes; Involve new people	Develop distinct identity; Add additional staff; Use facilities multiple times; Offer multiple worship services; Write a long-range plan; Improve quality of ministry	Renew the vision; Design assimilation plan; Streamline procedures; Offer need-based events; Adjust leadership roles; Increase the number of small groups

Reprinted with permission from Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*.

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INTRODUCTION

Who has not been seduced by the fantasy of a perfect program that will solve the problems of all churches everywhere? Our experience tells us that such an idea leads to frustration. Why? The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how one important factor, the size of congregations, prevents us from using one program and one style of leadership for all church situations.

The size of a congregation acts as a key variable in those factors that determine the structure, functions, and style of relationships in its group life. For ease of analysis we will assign four categories of size to differentiate a pattern: small, medium, large, and extra large.

The small church will have up to 50 members active and attending worship with some regularity. This size we will call the FAMILY CHURCH.

The medium size church will have from 50-150 active members and will be identified as the PASTORAL CHURCH.

The large church will have 150-350 active members and it becomes the PROGRAM CHURCH.

The extra large church, called the CORPORATION CHURCH, includes an active membership of 350-500 and over.

One gauge of active membership is the average attendance at worship over a one-year period. We are not interested here in the number of communicants or baptized persons on the record. The following analysis assumes that each numerical range represents a membership that demonstrates a commitment and maintains a vitality in both their worship and work.

There is no intent in this presentation to attach any stigma or respectability to size as such. On the contrary, it is assumed that any size church is the right size, and any size church can attract and assimilate new members. However, the basic hypothesis is that *the most effective means of carrying out a new member ministry varies with the size of the congregation*. The hypothesis does not mean to deny the importance of other variables, such as context, available resources, local history, institutional and systemic cycles, etc. In the real situation no one variable can be isolated.

This presentation draws on available research* and my own careful observations. It uses these to answer five questions in each category according to the variable of size.

1. What is the basic structure of each type of church: family, pastoral, program, and corporation?
2. How does each category typically attract new members?
3. What are the predominant characteristics of entry for the new member?
4. What are the basic needs of the new member in each size congregation?
5. How might a church most effectively meet those basic needs of a new member?

*Refer to the Selected and Annotated Bibliography

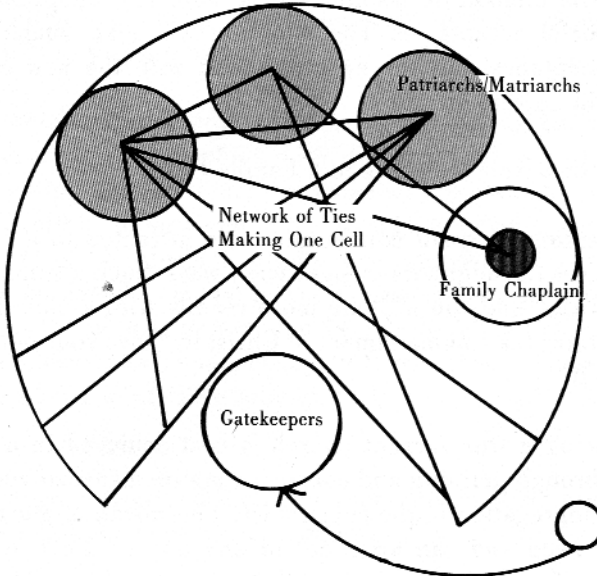
THE FAMILY CHURCH

0-50

ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Rural Areas, some
Urban Centers, and Small Towns

1. The Structure of the Family Church



The relatively recent, but classic description of the “family” church comes from the writings of Carl Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*. Dudley points out that the small church has the basic dynamics of a one-cell unit, such as a family with strong parental figures in control of the norms and changes in the family life. The priest and/or deacon in this situation will function as chaplain but not as the primal father. If this is not understood, much of the clerical ministry is spent in frustration and in conflict with the well-established patriarchs and matriarchs. A sense of mutual ministry and cooperation gives the small church an effective leadership in which each type of leader offers the appropriate gift in the church family. When this harmony exists, the small

church offers rich rewards of familial support and a profound sense of belonging.

Members who can get into the family are loved and cared for intimately, but how do newcomers make their way into this close, and sometimes closed, family? The “gatekeepers” serve the role of a cheerful, welcoming, kind person who is ready for casual conversation. A gatekeeper opens the door, but it is the patriarch and matriarch who sanction a place in the family for the newcomer. The method of assimilation is more like adoption than simple social acceptance. The adoption will take longer than social acceptance, but the eventual bond with the new church family will be very strong.

2. Attracting New Members to a Family Church

- a. Persons in small communities are attracted to a church that services its neighbors in significant ways. Such a community values, trusts, and will affiliate more readily with a church that demonstrates the commandment of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself.”
- b. Being a true servant church is best achieved in a small church through defining and concentrating on a special vocation for the congregation in the community. This vocation must meet a visible need and can arise out of any one of the five basic functions of a congregation: social service, worship, education, evangelism, and pastoral care. It is essential that the vocation be given time to emerge and form so that it will have integrity and excellence. In a small community, reputation is primary and passage of time is secondary.
- c. The requirements in money, volunteer time, and personnel for the vocation should match with the resources in the congregation. The vocation is a long-term commitment on the part of the whole congregation;

consequently a large percentage of the active membership should share in discovering and defining the vocation.

- d. When a congregation, such as one in an urban setting, dedicates itself to a social service for a socio-economic level in the community that does not attend the worship services, it may create two tensions:

- (1) The new socio-economic group will not respond by becoming members of the immediate congregation. This disconnection might be interpreted falsely as failure. The mission of the church is not, in all circumstances, demonstrated by an increase in membership.

- (2) One of the persons who is helped by the church may elect to attend a church gathering but does not feel accepted as an equal in worship and fellowship.

These two tensions require further teaching in the skills of incorporating new members with different styles of life. With such training most churches can make an intentional, even if not natural, effort to broaden their social, economic, and ethnic profile. Also, it has been found that new members are attracted to a congregation that is loving and caring in the Spirit of Christ although the newcomer may not be the direct recipient of that service. These new members say to themselves, “Those people are the kind I want to be around.”

- e. Examples of small church vocations in their relation to five basic functions of a congregation:

- (1) Service: in a seaport town a small church has established and maintained, for decades, an excellent seamen’s center. In an inner city, a small group has housed, in church property, hostels for battered women and children. Another urban church gives its time to services that help Asian immigrants adjust to their new environment.

(2) Worship: in an older suburban area two small churches offer a vocation in two different styles of worship, one charismatic and the other very “high church.” They draw people from a larger perimeter than their immediate neighborhood.

(3) Education: a small rural church offers an excellent “Vacation Bible School” for children of all denominations. A small white church joined with a small black congregation to support a remedial training program in the community for the underachieving student when the government programs were withdrawn.

(4) Evangelism: a small and new congregation in a new area of town planned a unique way of getting acquainted with newcomers in the new development. They made homemade wine and homemade bread which were taken in a welcome basket with a simple note inside explaining the meaning of bread and wine as a symbol in civilization and in the Episcopal Church.

(5) Pastoral Care: a little mission has a new hospital built near it because of the growing population of exurbia, the joining of a country town with the advance of a larger population center. They developed their congregation into hospital calling teams to assist other Episcopal parishes and often other denominations in giving a fuller visitation program to patients.

Your congregation has a special vocation, too. When found, it will give new excitement and purpose to the mission of the small church.

3. Characteristics of Entry into a Family Church

- a. New members come predominantly through the strong family and friendship ties that have existed for generations. In some small communities it is better to think about family units being the newcomer rather than simply individuals. In the social environment of many small towns, a major change in patterns of behavior, such as joining a church, is a decision that is made in unit strength—come one, come all, and all the aunts, uncles, and cousins might follow too.
- b. A newcomer will probably already be known by someone in the church and by the “gatekeeper.” If a crisis is involved, the chances are that the whole community knows it by the “grapevine.” Having grace and sensitivity in new relationships at church will be extremely important.
- c. Beyond the immediate circumstances, true adoption into the church family will be long-term, but we do not want it to become too long!

4. Basic Needs of the Newcomer in the Family Church

- a. The newcomer needs information about the heritage and particular traditions of this congregation in order to fit in comfortably and knowledgeably. Not to know what everyone else assumes is a conversational barrier, at least, and often more.
- b. Acceptance and recognition beyond the ritual of contact with the “gatekeeper” is particularly needed outside of the church gatherings. Here is perhaps the only legitimate possibility for “street corner” evangelism. When the newcomer is seen at the local grocer, service station, cafe, etc., it is necessary that the church members be warm and responsive in this normal daily contact.

- c. Church leaders need to arrange gradual and intentional association with the “patriarchs and matriarchs.”
- d. The newcomer needs safe opportunities and safe persons for discussing the “new siblings” and the new relationship in the new church family. All will not always go easily, and the newness will cause awkward moments.

5. Suggestions for Responding to the Basic Needs

- a. Plan a one-to-one visit with a “retired” patriarch and/or matriarch, who functions now as the family-lore teller, in order for the newcomer to have a good experience with the heritage of the congregation.
- b. Make available to the newcomer a brief history and membership roster.
- c. Identify the family and close friends of the newcomer who are already in the church. Help these members become aware of the way smaller churches receive, and relate to, a new person. Ask these church members explicitly to accept the ministry of being a guide for the newcomer in getting acquainted and in learning about the life of the congregation.
- d. Be interested in, and learn about, the new person. Find out by respectful listening about work responsibilities, hobbies, community contacts, family ties, association in clubs, schools, other churches, etc. In these polite probes, search for significant contact points with other church members, particularly patriarchs and matriarchs.
- e. Recruit support for encouraging and appreciating the new person at every point in community life where a church member associates with the newcomer. Specifically ask the church member to make a reasonable effort at building a

friendly and caring relationship with the newcomer. It is important that these church members on special assignment identify and seek out the new person at church gatherings.

- f. The priest and deacon in the small church have the opportunity to offer a special type of contact. Because the parishioners are giving regular friendship, the priest can be a spiritual guide and confessor when the new person wants to share something in confidence. The clergy can say clearly and appropriately, “If difficulties occur in coming into our family, please let us talk about it. I’ll be confidential and support you in working through the situation.”

6. Summary of the Category: Small Church-0-50

The family church is able to attract new members, even with limited resources, by becoming visible and distinctive in its community through the development of a vocation. This specialized ministry becomes a major mission focus and represents a particular contribution to the life of that community.

When new members are drawn to the congregation, they need the church to share its heritage, friendship circle, and public acceptance by the leadership. The clergy, patriarchs, and matriarchs can be a critical link between the newcomer and the congregation by discreetly seeking intentional commitments to befriend the new person.

The small church, whether established recently or long ago, possesses the dynamics of a family that follows the lead and temperament of a few patriarchs and matriarchs. It is difficult to gain adoption into the rather closed network of close relationships in this family. Nevertheless, well-informed “gatekeepers” and sensitive “chaplains” can provide easier entry for the newcomer.

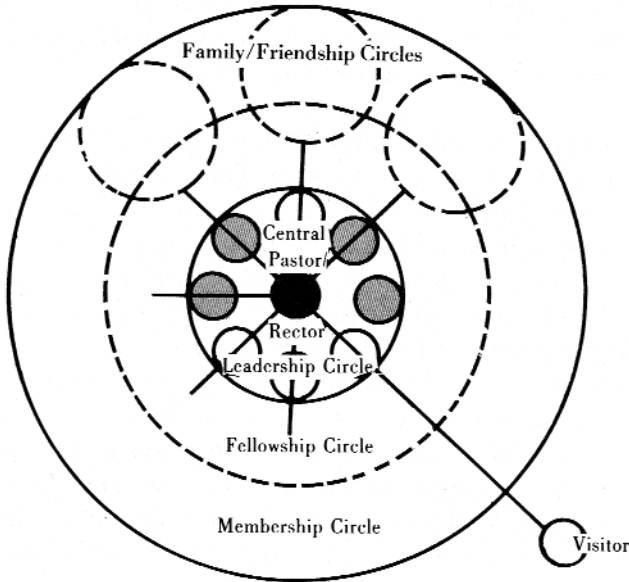
THE PASTORAL CHURCH

50-150

ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Towns and Suburbia

1. The Structure of the Pastoral Church



- a. The pastoral church finds it needs more cohesive leadership due to the increase of size over and against the more intimate one-cellular structure. This size of congregation encompasses 2 to 3 cells of quite intense relations. These cells tend to function as layers or circles which revolve around a pastoral care center. The leadership circle replaces the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family church; however, it still includes these long-time members and prominent personalities. A new structure has evolved because the leaders have needed to select a leader. Consequently, an incipient hierarchy emerges in the centralizing of authority in one patriarch/matriarch. In the congregational style of our

culture this individual is usually a paid professional with the credentials of higher education and/or ordination.

- b. The power and effectiveness of the leadership circle will depend largely on good communication with the congregation and the ability of the central leader to delegate authority, assign responsibility, and recognize the accomplishments of others. Without such skills, the central pastoral function weakens the entire structure. The clergy person becomes exhausted, overworked, isolated, attacked by other leaders, and harmony in the fellowship circle degenerates. Also, the potential for expansion in the membership circle depreciates rapidly.
- c. The membership looks first to the central leader for direction, inspiration, and pastoral care. This place of high honor for the central pastor provides dangers and opportunities at the same time. The demand upon the pastor can become oppressive. However, most members will respond with loyalty to a reasonable level of attention and guidance from this central figure. Conversely, often the leadership circle offers the central pastor little latitude for error and poor judgment. One moment the leader is treated as a peer and the next as a pontiff. This central leader must be skillful in acquiring and using power with wisdom and grace. Meek as a lamb and wise as a fox. Normally, the pastor at the center is like the noble shepherd in charge of the flock. On occasion, one of the sheep turns out to be a wolf in wool.
- d. The leadership required is predominantly pastoral because there are so many relationships to watch over in this very large family. Conflict management means survival. If this congregation becomes larger in size, the internal dynamics will change because it will no longer be possible to operate as a super-family with a “big daddy.”

2. The Characteristics of Entry into a Pastoral Church

- a. Newcomers in this type of pastor-centered church will expect attention from the clergy person because this is the common pattern in the existing membership. A new person naturally acquires this pervasive attitude. Consequently, new member ministry could become limited to the central pastor.
- b. In the pastoral church most newcomers find their way into the membership circle through the pastoral work of the clergy person. In this type of church, few visitors stay who cannot relate to the priest in charge. The study, Profile of Episcopalians-1982, found that 54% of the respondents said they chose their parish because they “like the rector.” This percentile probably correctly indicates the influence that the central pastor or rector has in the entry process of newcomers in many medium size and larger suburban churches.
- c. Inevitably, one problem results that stifles growth: namely, the number of newcomers that can be managed within this system is quite limited. If the rector is the key evangelist, who is working alone, then only 6 to 10 persons will be assimilated fully into the membership per year. Also, the priest has the perpetual problem of making friends with the newcomers only to be faced with the necessity of moving on to others. The newcomer may become sensitive to this decrease in attention and misinterpret this withdrawal as rejection.
- d. Most likely the visitor will not be greeted by a “gatekeeper.” The members might be quite casual about, perhaps even uninterested in, the new person. The members think of themselves as a friendly group, but they may be friendly mainly to each other. Membership will be granted easily, but actual inclusion in the fellowship circle

and the inner core of leadership will prove difficult. The priest is expected to serve as shepherd in guiding the new person through the stages of visitor to membership to fellowship and to leadership. However, one shepherd will be able to do little more than maintain a level of growth that creates a plateau in size.

3. The Basic Needs of a Newcomer

- a. The new person will need recognition and support during the “screening process.” Screening is not necessarily an overtly hostile act on the part of the congregation, but it may hurt. It is a natural mannerism through which any group works out an adequate matching device for prospective members. Groups have norms and purposes that are fundamental to their identity. Screening is the way a group signals to new persons whether or not they will be compatible in the new social environment. The result may be incorporation or rejection. The testing process is difficult and not always pleasant. In the Christian community we practice screening, but must protect newcomers from an experience that is inconsistent with the Christian principles of respect for all human beings and love of our neighbors. Further, there is a difference between group life and gospel life. The gospel is for all; not every group is for all. As the bearer of the gospel, the church must become a place for all. Perhaps it would be more realistic to say that the church must become a place where everyone can find a place.

- b. In preparation for the newcomer the leadership needs to provide for, and be aware of, multi-entry points into the fellowship circle of the congregation. Each entry point will be governed and facilitated by a separate group, perhaps a study class, a men’s, or women’s, or youth fellowship, a service project, a choir, etc. Whatever the group, each one offers another opportunity for

newcomers to make contact, to find people with similar interests and values, to participate in satisfying activities, and to build new relationships.

- c. The visitor does not need to know the names of all the members. It is adequate to know 8 to 10 people by their first name. Two or three of these acquaintances should share some common interest with the newcomer.

4. Suggestions for Response to the Basic Needs

- a. Identify members who have exceptional gifts in being a host/hostess and in pastoral care. Such a person can remember names, give warmth without the preliminary foundation stage of friendship, carry on conversation easily with new acquaintances, and have the ability to accept graciously a wide range of people without feeling nervous and judgmental. This person should be fully accepted in the leadership circle and have extensive contacts in the fellowship circle.
- b. The candidate for this responsibility is commissioned to the ministry of hospitality in some public way that is appropriate in the congregation, perhaps at the offertory in the Eucharist. The hospitality minister (other titles may be used) is more than a greeter although he or she will serve with the priest in the narthex and coffee hour.
- c. It is the task of the hospitality minister to learn about newcomers and assume responsibility for their being welcomed at the church during the first six months. Such duties are
 - (1) to match the newcomer with suitable members and groups,
 - (2) to make the appropriate introductions, and repeated introductions, at church gatherings,

- (3) to give the newcomer and group leader the necessary orientation and information in order to facilitate a comfortable entry.
- d. The hospitality minister will host situations that provide one-to-one contact with the clergy, and help the clergy make home, or hospital, calls when the newcomer desires visitation. The priest should take care not to overload the hospitality minister with other congregational responsibilities and with too many cases.
 - e. It will be necessary for the hospitality minister and clergy to confer with each other regularly to provide in-service training and an exchange of information that is pertinent to the new member ministry.

In The Master Plan, Colman points out that Jesus, as a teacher and trainer, selected a few persons for close and continuous supervision. Clergy will find that the method of Jesus is an effective model for enabling mutual ministry and greater trust between the laity and the ordained ministry. Such an approach is particularly useful in congregations of up to 150 active members, that is, the family and the pastoral churches.

5. Summary and Evaluation

There are substantial reasons for not suggesting that the priest organize a new-member committee in the congregations that fit the first and second categories. One study discovered that churches with new-member committees do not grow any faster than the churches without such groups. Why? They may be used as a substitute for the membership-wide responsibility of inviting and integrating others. Such committees may represent a recognition that the character of the community has changed and that efforts to contact prospective members must become more focused and

intentional. However, new-member committees may appear counterproductive because they are often found in congregations where the social context makes church growth almost impossible, or in congregations where the larger membership has lost its enthusiasm about the ministry it shares. In such instances, new-member committees are symptomatic of deeper difficulties which the congregation needs to face head on.

Finally, we have observed in looking at congregations of an active membership up to 150 that organization is not a key issue in their life. Strong family ties and an effective pastoral leader stand out in vital churches of this size. The organization is usually low-key and very flexible, perhaps changing with each task. Major attention is given, not to organization as such, but to building trust between the key leaders and the priest and to training in a one-to-one supervisory style.

It will prove helpful to have a support group for new-member ministry that may be called a committee, task force, working group, or something else. The name and the organizational style are not significant, but this commitment to evangelistic ministries will provide for the pastor and the hospitality ministers a group where concerns, dreams, problems and achievements can be shared. The function is much more than administration.

The Evangelism Committee, or a New Member Commission, as a distinctively administrative group, is not without impact in the appropriate setting. In the next section on the program church we will begin to see the role of such a group.

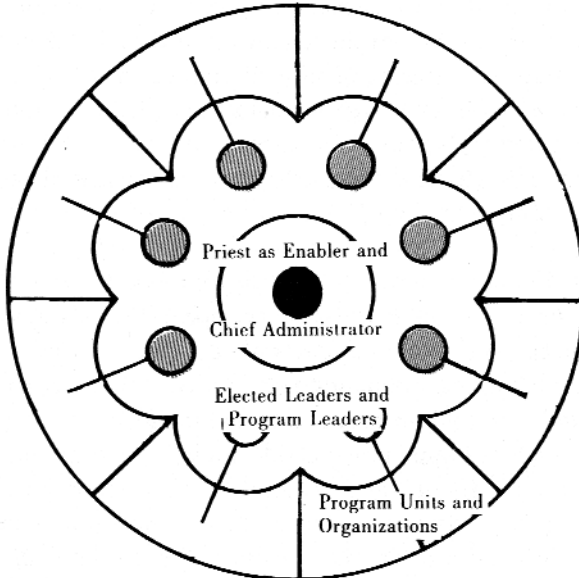
THE PROGRAM CHURCH

150-350

ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Larger Towns, Urban
and Growing Suburban Areas

1. The Structure of the Program Church



- a. Democratic organization and leadership by the laity are the keys to effective ministry in the program church. Due to the increase in size it will no longer be possible for the central leader to maintain pastoral contact with the whole congregation. The priest and church staff will be delegating more responsibility and authority to the laity. Team leadership will replace centralized leadership. The church staff and lay leadership will require more training and pastoral support for their expanded ministry. The central pastor becomes a pastor to the lay pastors.
- b. The congregation will need to make a further transition from dependency upon the priest in basic ministry

functions, such as counselling, teaching, administration, membership development, and worship. To use titles for expressing this change: the “father” becomes facilitator. The patriarchs and matriarchs come into full power again, but this time the environment is more democratic than autocratic. The best leaders are comfortable with the interdependency of teamwork, and they are responsive to the dictates and directions that arise from the church community. The major decisions are made in representative governing bodies, such as the vestry and program councils.

- c. As the number of parish programs and program leaders grow, the priest finds that more and more time is taken up with the formation of dreams and new directions, with the coordination of many different ministries, and the administration of goal setting, strategy planning, resourcing, training, and perpetual evaluation. The pastoral work of the clergy is carried out in the setting of administration.
- d. The life of the parish progressively tends to center around separate programs and worship services. Friendships cluster around these centers of activity. This development can create a twofold problem: communication and unity. The many friendship clusters and manifold programs can give members the impression that too much is happening outside their immediate circle that they don’t know about-and it might be true. Anxiety about this lack of awareness expresses itself in the common complaint about “a break in communication.” Further, the increase in activity demands much more coordination in order that there might be one thrust rather than a situation in which everyone is “doing their own thing” with little interest in the rest of the parish.

The priest and program leadership succeed in avoiding such problems through an adequate means of sharing information about events and insuring an integration of program areas. In a sense, the congregation becomes a “public” and the leadership needs good public relations. Many methods of communication are available to us, but the program church must give itself permission to spend considerable time and money in their employment. It is not a waste; rather, it is good stewardship.

- e. In an effective program church, the whole congregation affirms a clear statement of the purpose of the parish. Annual goals and all activities throughout the year reflect the purpose statement. The entire leadership assumes accountability for supporting the purpose as a guideline. The program church will suffer if its purpose is not intentionally articulated and reviewed publicly. This purpose statement serves also as a conservator of time and energy. If a proposed activity, or existing program, does not conform with the purpose, then there is good reason to give no further staffing and money in that direction. Using a purpose statement well is like pruning a plant for its maximum growth potential.

2. Attracting New Members to the Program Church

- a. The program church frequently draws persons by the visibility and quality of its programs. Consequently, every leader should be aware of this potential in every area of programming. For example, always encourage participants to share their enthusiasm for the program with someone else. Provide easy ways that a new person can be introduced to a program and made part of a friendship circle that is associated with the program.
- b. The maxim, “Find a hurt and heal it,” characterizes a good strategy for reaching out to the community. The

expansion of leadership and the wider range of caring services in the program church give many resources for responding to human needs in a variety of critical experiences, such as illness, surgery, births, baptisms, graduations, marriages, divorces, deaths, financial crises, major transitions in life, recent arrivals in a neighborhood, need for spiritual direction, etc.

- c. It is advisable for a program church to have specific programs for achieving visibility in the community, for attracting prospects, and building “bridges of trust” between the membership and the unchurched population. Research teams and a task force can be assigned to exploring the possibilities for programs that might achieve such goals.

3. The Basic Needs of a Newcomer in a Program Church

- a. A directory that gives a composite picture of the life and functions of the parish. This information serves as a “road map,” guiding the new persons to groups that share their interests and to programs that will meet their own needs,
- b. A process of incorporation that makes provision for each step a newcomer must make in order to find a place, in the structures and systems of the church organization. That potential “new friend,” good spiritual nurture, and a satisfying expression of lay ministry will be hidden in the organizational layers of the program church. An incorporation procedure should help new members find their way. It is easy to get lost and drift out the back door.
- c. Recognition and respect for the newcomer as an individual, rather than merely another potential member. If the available resources of the present membership are strained, that is, if they are trying to do too many

programs, the program church could project anxiety about needing recruits for committees and tasks. The newcomers will feel needed but used unless there is an evident concern for their own circumstances. Giving the impression of exploiting new people is a perpetual danger in larger organizations.

4. Response to the Basic Human Needs through an Incorporation Process

The essential functions of an incorporation program are:

a. *A Warm Welcome*

We can start by identifying and training greeters for Sunday morning. This group can also conduct small group sessions to discuss and train the whole membership in being open and sensitive to visitors. These sessions, perhaps as informal gatherings in homes, stress fuller awareness of

- (1) the needs and feelings of newcomers,
- (2) the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in groups,
- (3) the steps in the parish program for assimilating new members.

b. *Visitor Information*

To make follow-up possible, it is essential to devise some polite method of securing the name, address, and phone number of visitors. Then, use the method consistently.

c. *Follow Up Response*

Respond to a visitor in the first through the second week by mail, phone, or a home visit. It is minimal hospitality to say "Thank you for your visit" in some manner. Of course, the content and form of the response will be determined by the intentions and circumstances of the visitor. For example, a close relative is in the hospital and the person is frightened. Act fast! An active Episcopalian

moves into town and expresses the desire for a new church affiliation. A home call in the first week after the visit is certainly appropriate. However, if a non-Episcopalian stops by for worship while visiting a relative in the congregation, a cordial letter of appreciation is adequate.

Any visitation program must be carried out by well-qualified persons, who are in possession of needed background information on those to be visited, in order that the initial contact will be handled correctly and sensitively. That first impression is crucial.

d. *Opportunities for Orientation and Education*

More churches are conducting perpetual Inquirers' Classes for new members and confirmation preparation. Weekend retreats can also serve the function of providing regular orientation and exploration of the Christian faith.

It is helpful to offer special learning experiences for adults who are seeking baptism and for parents who are seeking baptism for infants. Further, children need specially designed instruction to understand their baptism. Lay leaders should participate in conducting all the above opportunities for teaching our faith.

Some visitors will need a short-term situation that gives them elementary information about how we worship and what the different parts of the service mean to us. This instruction can become a way of sharing Christian views in a low-key way with the unchurched person. The teacher can apply to our daily 'needs some of the Christian values we celebrate in the Eucharist, such as love for others, freedom from guilt by confession, having a sense of being in a larger family at communion, getting ideas for working out problems from the reading and expounding of scripture, etc.

e. *Finding a Place to Belong*

The program church has so many entry points for a newcomer that it may be difficult to find a place to begin. Some orientation about the options available is helpful to new members before they attend meetings or accept committee assignments. Some churches ask members to serve as “shepherds” for new members. They literally help them down the path to the “right pasture” and “best water.” This function is a specialization in the hospitality ministry that was mentioned in the previous section. The greater portion of the hospitality of the new church home will be experienced once the “shepherds” have done their work in helping the newcomer find a good place to belong, that is, a cluster of members that share the interests of that new person.

f. *Self Discovery and New Challenges*

Make available to recent members an opportunity to engage in some methods of gifts identification and a review of their opportunities for ministry.

g. *Monitoring Progress and Satisfaction*

The most astute church will train experienced leaders to be “guards at the back door.” The members of the program church may move in and out of the committees and friendship clusters without notice. In fact, they may even move to the back door and leave without notice as the church grows larger. Often, recently incorporated members are not watched carefully enough for signals of discontent, disappointment, unresolved conflict, faith crisis, etc.

Many losses in membership can be prevented if the most mature and experienced members keep eyes and ears open for any danger signals. This is an excellent ministry for past adult class teachers, past Senior Wardens, and past Junior Wardens. These leaders bring their observations of

early signs of trouble to the attention of the church staff in confidential consultations. This ministry assumes and strengthens a high level of trust between the priest and the well-established leadership.

Another function of monitoring can be handled at a secretarial level. For the first year, at least, it is wise to monitor the progress of the newcomer, with careful notations being recorded in the membership file. The assimilation process does not take place accidentally. The priest and leaders who are responsible for newmember ministry must be deliberate, reflective, and methodical in their work.

h. *Ministry of the Laity*

As the program church advances into a fuller mutuality of ministry between clergy and laity, it will be possible to train “Member Care Teams” to work with four categories of membership development: transfer members, new members, lapsed members, and the baptized infants and their families. The Care Teams offer a pastoral ministry which, in a smaller church, might be provided by the clergy. The pastoral ministry of the laity provides general supportive relationships, home visitation, one-to-one education and spiritual guidance, and reconciliation in conflict situations. The Care Teams will specialize in one or two of the four categories. The team will require intensive training and supervision by the clergy at first. However, with experience, advanced trainees will become trainers and supervisors.

i. *Administration of the Process*

Due to the characteristics of a program church, it will be natural to establish a commission and/or assign a staff person to membership development in order to coordinate the planning, resourcing, and training that will be required in the program for attracting and assimilating

new members.

The members of this commission should be committed to membership development and evangelistic outreach. Their gifts should give them special competency as planners, educators, and managers.

5. Summary and Evaluation

At this point in our study we can see a pattern in which each size of church can claim advantages that would not be present in the other sizes. The family church enjoys very close ties in the congregation. In fact, everyone in the church probably knows the other members quite well. The pastoral church benefits from the consistent care of a central pastor who is well trained. Further, such a congregation benefits from a multi-cellular structure which is able to provide more diversity of talents and association than the one-cell character of the family church. In the program church it would be impossible to know everyone in the congregation well, and the priest is not able to give close attention to every member as might be expected in the pastoral church. Because of size, in the program church many members do not know each other beyond a casual and somewhat superficial level. However, the program church has the resources to provide for its members a wide variety of programs and more facilities. In contrast, it is best for the family church to specialize in its program because of limited resources. On the other hand, no other size congregation could offer such lasting bonds between its members.

These advantages and limitations are important to consider when we think through the new-member ministry that might be expected in the family, pastoral, and program churches. In particular, we want to use the strengths that are inherent in each category.

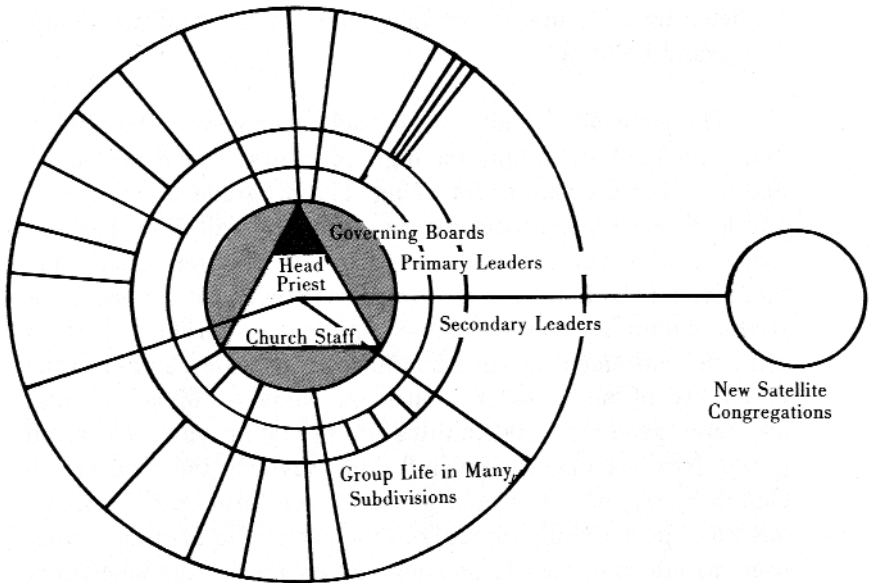
THE CORPORATION CHURCH

300-500+

ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Cities and Metropolitan Areas

1. The Structure of the Corporation Church



- a. The corporation church is characterized by more complexity and diversity. It includes many characteristics of the other categories, but in a more extreme form. The patriarchs and matriarchs return, but now as the governing boards who formally, not just informally, control the life of and the future of the congregation. The central pastor reappears as the head pastor who now has so much prominence that the personage acquires a legendary quality over a long pastorate. Perhaps few know this person closely, but the function does not require it. The head pastor becomes a symbol of unity and stability in a very complicated congregational life. The leadership

of the laity now takes a multi-level form in which there is opportunity for working up the ladder of influence in the large community. We see the outline of the program church, but with more divisions of activity and more layers of leadership ranks.

- b. There is a sense of belonging to something awesome when the community gathers in worship; the head priest is seen as presiding over the massive family. Much of the pride and loyalty in the congregation comes from being part of the majesty that is created by the large proportions of the church, the numbers, and the authority of the visible leadership. Newcomers might be attracted by an impressive worship service, powerful preaching, or a grand building.

- c. The personal relationships between members of the congregation tend to form around small groups. These take many shapes and have various reasons for being. The programs are extensive and may reach into aspects of the members' daily life. Perhaps there is a private school, day care for children, recreation facilities for the family, music programs and social occasions for youth, choirs for two or three age levels; perhaps there is affiliated retirement housing and hospital facilities, and even the possibility of many helpful business contacts. Most of these programs generate opportunities for becoming part of a small group. New persons usually find their way into the corporation church by way of the cellular groups which form both spontaneously and purposefully throughout the parish. On the other hand, some members of very large congregations enjoy the anonymity that is possible.

2. An Interesting Historical Note

It is possible to see the pattern of the corporation church in the dioceses; and the historical evolution of the diocese seems to include the characteristics of change in the early church from a family church, to a pastoral church, to a program church, to a corporation church.

In our present system we could see the bishop as the head pastor over a complex coalition of units under governing boards, immediate staff, and primary leaders—in this case, the clergy who are responsible to the bishop as well as their own subdivision of diocesan life. It might be new for us to think of the dioceses as a congregation, but the historical record makes it a feasible perspective.

Family: in the post-resurrection church we find a family church firmly centered around patriarchs, the apostles, and notable matriarchs such as the mother of our Lord and the women referred to in the Pauline Letters. The new converts lived with goods and assets in common, as a family would. Their homes seemed a natural place for their assembly.

Pastoral: the rapid growth of the Jerusalem church soon required a council of patriarchs who followed the lead of central figures, such as St. Peter and St. James. Larger numbers caused the complaint that pastoral care was not handled adequately any longer. The response was the first expression of a program awareness.

Program: it was necessary to appoint some leaders, called deacons, to be pastoral servants who would attend the needy in the congregation. Other programs arose. In education, the sacred teachings were recorded, put in libraries, and itinerant teachers toured various church houses. In evangelism, missionaries were commissioned to go beyond the walls of Jerusalem to other cities and lands. In worship, new buildings were designed, especially for the new forms of Christian ceremony.

Corporation: before the end of the first century, the Christian faith was protected, nurtured, and propagated by a maze of both one-cell and multi-cellular gatherings. Later on, due to continued expansion, it became impossible for the patriarchs and central pastors of a city to assemble the faithful as a single congregation. The elders, or presbyters, then took charge of the smaller neighborhood units as deputies of the central pastor. Here we see the beginnings of the system we have now: a diocese which is pastored by a bishop who is represented locally by the other ranks of holy orders, the deacon and the priest.

3. Major New-Member Ministry Opportunities for a Corporation Church

- a. Whether we are thinking of a local congregation of considerable size, or a diocese, the significant changes in membership are often not under the immediate control of the leadership. Many external factors are at work that parallel trends in the corporation church. Some factors might not be easily identified: such as the sudden appeal of a leader with charisma, the openness of a culture or sub-culture to the religious ethos of Christianity, the shift in values in a society from a secular orientation to concern for spiritual ideals, and the general curiosity in a public over some highly visible feature of a congregation, or a religious movement.
- b. One cause of rapid growth in new members is easily determined and analyzed demographically, the population trend. In an area that has a significant increase in population a congregation must be established, and normal growth is nearly inevitable up to the level of the pastoral church. It is the major responsibility of the corporation church and the diocese to provide for new missions in new population centers. A corporation church without satellite congregations, and a diocese without a

program for establishing new congregations, loses a major opportunity for evangelism. Without the greater resources and contacts that the corporation church and the diocese enjoy, the new-member ministry of the Christian effort, in general, would be reduced to very slow expansion.

Historically, the greater number of new Christians were made through establishing new units at the level of the family church in neighborhoods with the potential of sustaining a mission venture. A plateau of membership is common in pastoral and program churches which are located in areas that have stabilized economically and socially. In fact, an energetic new-member ministry might be necessary to maintain a plateau.

- c. Another opportunity for mission confronts the corporation church and the diocese in congregations that are experiencing a decline in membership. A clear demarcation should be made in a diocese between missions that are established for the purpose of a new-member ministry and missions that have become perpetually dependent on other congregations who have more resources. The proportion of resources that should be invested in such dependent missions can be determined by a clear mission strategy for the corporation church and the diocese. Without such a strategy, we could easily get trapped by the survival syndrome. Every social entity will seek to survive for the sake of survival, and a Christian mission is no exception. The survival syndrome, however, generates only frustration, futility, and failure. A small group should know who they are and why they exist. They should know without hesitation answers to the following questions. Are we a family church in an area that has a potential for growth, and do we have the support of a larger group to insure the resources? Are we a small band of missionaries who are commissioned to furnish a Christian presence in a declining neighborhood? Do we have a plan for the number of years that we can

sustain the effort, and clarity about the goals that are expected of us? And are the goals related to the reality of the situation?

4. The Basic Needs of, and Suggested Response to, the New Member in a Corporation Church

I will propose that the needs and responses that form a newmember ministry in the corporation church are found in what we have already said about the family, pastoral, and program churches. The corporation church could be viewed as a proliferation of family churches, a division of the pastoral church into more levels of leadership, and an expansion of the program church into an even fuller range of benefits and services for its membership. If this perception is true, the corporation church gives us opportunity to draw the presentation to a summation.

New Member Ministry in the Corporation Church

The NEED of the New Member	The RESPONSE in the Church
Family Church Feature: ADOPTION into a one-cell unit	Personally ask members of a one-cell unit to accept the new person.
Pastoral Church Feature: ORIENTATION and guidance in a new social context.	Train members in the art of facilitating the inclusion of a new person.
Program Church Features: FORMATION of a new commitment to the new congregation.	Provide a step-by-step process that clearly presents for the new person the benefits and expectations of the congregation.

5. Conclusion

Three words have been selected to give a final conciseness to our analysis: *adoption, orientation, and formation*. Of course, every congregation will need to be aware of these three functions of new member ministry. What, then, does size determine in the end? *The greater the size of the congregation, the more intentional effort will be required for each function*. In a small church, the adoption procedure will include orientation quite naturally. The larger church will find it necessary to engineer all three steps more carefully. Attracting and assimilating new members becomes more a question of management than impulse.

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LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH SIZE DYNAMICS

HOW STRATEGY CHANGES WITH GROWTH

[DR. TIMOTHY KELLER]

A church's functional style, its strengths and weaknesses, and the roles of its lay and staff leaders will change dramatically as its size changes.

One of the most common reasons for pastoral leadership mistakes is blindness to the significance of church size. Size has an enormous impact on how a church functions. There is a “size culture” that profoundly affects how decisions are made, how relationships flow, how effectiveness is evaluated, and what ministers, staff, and lay leaders do.

We tend to think of the chief differences between churches mainly in denominational or theological terms, but that underestimates the impact of size on how a church operates. The difference between how churches of 100 and 1,000 function may be much greater than the difference between a Presbyterian and a Baptist church of the same size. The staff person who goes from a church of 400 to a church of 2,000 is in many ways making a far greater change than if he or she moved from one denomination to another.

A large church is not simply a bigger version of a small church. The difference in communication, community formation, and decision-making processes are so great that the leadership skills required in each are of almost completely different orders.

SIZE CULTURES

Every church has a culture that goes with its size and which must be accepted. Most people tend to prefer a certain size culture, and unfortunately, many give their favorite size culture a moral status and treat other size categories as spiritually and morally inferior. They may insist that the only biblical way to do church is to practice a certain size culture despite the fact that the congregation they attend is much too big or too small to fit that culture.

For example, if some members of a church of 2,000 feel they should be able to get the senior pastor personally on the phone without much difficulty, they are insisting on getting a kind of pastoral care that a church of under 200 provides. Of course the pastor would soon be overwhelmed. Yet the members may insist that if he can't be reached he is failing his biblical duty to be their shepherd.

Another example: the new senior pastor of a church of 1,500 may insist that virtually all decisions be made by consensus among the whole board and staff. Soon the board is meeting every week for six hours each time! Still the pastor may insist that for staff members to be making their own decisions would mean they are acting unaccountably or failing to build community. To impose a size-culture practice on a church that does not have that size will wreak havoc on it and eventually force the church back into the size with which the practices are compatible.

A further example: New members who have just joined a smaller church after years of attending a much larger one may begin complaining about the lack of professional quality in the church's ministries and insisting

that this shows a lack of spiritual excellence. The real problem, however, is that in the smaller church volunteers do things that in the larger church are done by full-time staff. Similarly, new members of the smaller church might complain that the pastor's sermons are not as polished and well researched as they had come to expect in the larger church. While a large-church pastor with multiple staff can afford to put twenty hours a week into sermon preparation, however, the solo pastor of a smaller church can devote less than half of that time each week.

This means a wise pastor may have to sympathetically confront people who are just not able to handle the church's size culture—just like many people cannot adapt to life in geographic cultures different from the one they were used to. Some people are organizationally suspicious, often for valid reasons from their experience. Others can't handle not having the preacher as their pastor. We must suggest to them they are asking for the impossible in a church that size. We must not imply that it would be immaturity on their part to seek a different church, though we should not actively encourage anyone to leave, either.

HEALTHY RESISTANCE

Every church has aspects of its natural size culture that must be resisted.

Larger churches have a great deal of difficulty keeping track of members who drop out or fall away from the faith. This should never be accepted as inevitable. Rather, the large church must continually struggle to improve pastoral care and discipleship.

Out of necessity, the large church must use organizational techniques from the business world, but the danger is that ministry may become too results-oriented and focused on quantifiable outcomes (attendance, membership, giving) rather than the goals of holiness and character growth. Again, this tendency should not be accepted as inevitable; rather, new strategies for focusing on love and virtue must always be generated.

The smaller church by its nature gives immature, outspoken, opinionated, and broken members a significant degree of power over the whole body. Since everyone knows everyone else, when members of a family or small group express strong opposition to the direction set by the pastor and leaders, their misery can hold the whole congregation hostage. If they threaten to leave, the majority of people will urge the leaders to desist in their project. It is extremely difficult to get complete consensus about programs and direction in a group of 50–150 people, especially in today's diverse, fragmented society, and yet smaller churches have an unwritten rule that for any new initiative to be implemented nearly everyone must be happy with it. Leaders of small churches must be brave enough to lead and to confront immature members, in spite of the unpleasantness involved.

There is no "best size" for a church. Each size presents great difficulties and also many opportunities for ministry that churches of other sizes cannot undertake (at least not as well). Only together can churches of all sizes be all that Christ wants the church to be.

PRINCIPLES OF SIZE DYNAMICS

Reading books on church size can be confusing, as everyone breaks down the size categories somewhat differently. This is because there are many variables in a church's culture and history that determine exactly when a congregation gets to a new size barrier. For example, everyone knows that at some point a church becomes too large for one pastor to handle. People begin to complain that they are not getting adequate pastoral care. The time has come to add staff. But when does that happen? In some communities it may happen when attendance rises to 120, while in others it does not happen until the church has nearly 300 in regular attendance. It depends a great deal on expectations, the mobility of the city's population, how fast the church has grown, and so on. Despite the variables, the point at which a second pastoral staff member must be added is usually called "the

200 barrier.” That is a good average figure, but keep in mind that your own church might reach that threshold at some different attendance figure.

Here are the general trends or changes that come as a church grows larger.

INCREASING COMPLEXITY

The larger the church, the less its members have in common. There is more diversity in factors such as age, family status, ethnicity, and so on, and thus a church of 400 needs four to five times more programs than a church of 200—not two times more. Larger churches are much more complex than their smaller counterparts. They have multiple services, multiple groups, and multiple tracks, and eventually they really are multiple congregations.

Also, the larger the church, the more staff per capita needs to be added. Often the first ministry staff persons are added for every increase of 150–200 in attendance. A church of 500 may have two or three full-time ministry staff, but eventually ministry staff may need to be added for every 75–100 new persons. Thus a church of 2,000 may have twenty-five staff.

SHIFTING LAY-STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

On the one hand, the larger the church the more decision making falls to the staff rather than to the whole membership or even the lay leaders. The elders or board must increasingly deal with only top-level, big-picture issues. This means the larger the church, the more decision making is *pushed up* toward the staff and away from the congregation and lay leaders. Needless to say, many laypeople feel extremely uncomfortable with this.

On the other hand, the larger the church, the more the basic pastoral ministry such as hospital visits, discipling, oversight of Christian growth, and counseling is done by lay leaders rather than by the professional ministers.

Generally, in small churches policy is decided by many and ministry is done by a few, while in the large church ministry is done by many and policy is decided by a few.

INCREASING INTENTIONALITY

The larger the church, the more systematic and deliberate the assimilation of newcomers needs to be. As a church grows, newcomers are not visible to the congregation’s members. Thus new people are not spontaneously and informally welcomed and invited in. Pathways for assimilation must be identified or established by asking questions such as these:

- + How will newcomers get here?
- + How will they be identified by the church?
- + Where will unbelievers learn Christianity’s relevance, content, and credibility?
- + Who will move them along the path?
- + Where will believers get plugged in?
- + Who will help them?

The larger the church, the harder it is to recruit volunteers and thus a more well-organized volunteer recruitment process is required. Why is this so? First, the larger the church, the more likely it is that someone you don’t know well will try to recruit you. It is much easier to say no to someone you do not know than to someone you know well. Second, it is easier to feel less personally responsible for the ministries of a large church: “They have lots of people here—they don’t need me.” Therefore, the larger the church, the more well-organized and formal the recruitment of volunteers must be.

INCREASING REDUNDANCY OF COMMUNICATION

The larger the church, the better communication has to be. Without multiple forms and repeated messages, people will feel left out and complain, “I wasn’t told about it.” You know you’ve crossed into a higher size category when such complaints become constant. Informal communication networks (pulpit announcements, newsletter notices, and word of mouth) are insufficient to reach everyone. More lead time is necessary to communicate well.

INCREASING QUALITY OF PRODUCTION

The larger the church, the more planning and organization must go into events. A higher quality of production in general is expected in a larger church and events cannot simply be thrown together. Spontaneous, last-minute events do not work.

The larger the church, the higher its aesthetic bar must be. In smaller churches the worship experience is rooted mainly in horizontal relationships among those who attend. Musical offerings from singers who are untrained and not especially talented are nonetheless appreciated because “we all know them” and they are members of the fellowship. But the larger the church, the more worship is based on the vertical relationship—on a sense of transcendence. If an outsider comes in who doesn’t know the musicians, then a mediocre quality of production will distract them from worship. They don’t have a relationship with the musicians to offset the lack of giftedness. So the larger the church, the more the music becomes an inclusion factor.

INCREASING OPENNESS TO CHANGE

The larger the church, the more it is subject to frequent and sudden change. Why?

First, smaller churches tend to have little turnover: individual members feel powerful and necessary and so they stay put.

Second, the larger the church, the more power for decision making moves away from the whole congregation to the leaders and staff. Too much is going on for the congregation or the board or eventually even the staff to make all the decisions as a group. As decision-making power comes into the hands of individual staff or volunteer leaders, change happens more quickly. Decisions can be made expeditiously without everyone signing on.

Further, as we saw above, the larger the church, the more complex it is and therefore the more schedules, events, and programs there are to change.

LOSING MEMBERS BECAUSE OF CHANGES

The larger the church, the more it loses members because of changes. Why? Smaller churches seek at all costs to avoid losing members. As a result, certain individuals and small groups often come to exercise power disproportionate to their numbers. If a change were made, someone invariably would experience it as a loss, and since the smaller church has a great fear of conflict, it usually will not institute a change that might result in lost members. Thus smaller churches tend to have a more stable membership than large churches do.

In larger churches small groups and individual members have far less ability to exert power or resist changes they dislike. And (as noted previously) since larger churches undergo constant change, they regularly lose members because “It’s too big now” or “I can’t see the pastor anymore” or “We don’t pray spontaneously anymore in church.” Leaders of churches that grow large are more willing to lose members who disagree with procedures or the philosophy of ministry.

SHIFTING ROLE OF THE MINISTERS

The larger the church, the less available the main preacher is to do pastoral work. In smaller churches the pastor is available at all times, for most occasions and needs, to any member or unchurched person. In the large

church there are sometimes more lay ministers, staff, and leaders than the small church has people! So the large church's pastors must recognize their limits and spend more time with staff and lay shepherds and in prayer and meditation.

The larger the church, the more important the minister's leadership abilities are. Preaching and pastoring are sufficient skills for pastors in smaller churches, but as a church grows other leadership skills become critical. In a large church not only administrative skills but also vision casting and strategy design are crucial gifts in the pastoral team.

The larger the church, the more the ministry staff members must move from being generalists to being specialists. Everyone from the senior pastor on down must focus on certain ministry areas and concentrate on two or three main tasks. The larger the church, the more the senior pastor must specialize in preaching, vision keeping and vision casting, and identifying problems before they become disasters.

Finally, the larger the church, the more important it is for ministers, especially the senior minister, to stay put for a long time. As noted above, smaller churches change less rapidly and have less turnover. With this innate stability, a smaller church can absorb a change of minister every few years if necessary. But the larger the church, the more the staff in general and the senior pastor in particular are the main sources of continuity and stability. Rapid turnover of staff is highly detrimental to a large church.

GENERALLY, IN SMALL CHURCHES POLICY IS DECIDED BY MANY AND MINISTRY IS DONE BY A FEW, WHILE IN THE LARGE CHURCH MINISTRY IS DONE BY MANY, AND POLICY IS DECIDED BY A FEW.

STRUCTURING SMALLER

The larger the church, the smaller the basic pastoral span of care.

In smaller churches, classes and groups can be larger because virtually everyone in the church is cared for directly by full-time trained ministry staff, each of whom can care for 50–200 people. In larger churches, however, the internal groupings need to be smaller, because people are cared for by lay shepherds, each of whom can care for 10–20 people if given proper supervision and support. Thus in a larger church, the more small groups you have per 100 people in attendance, the better cared for people are and the faster the church grows.

EMPHASIS ON VISION AND STRENGTHS

The larger the church, the more it tends to concentrate on doing fewer things well. Smaller churches are generalists and feel the need to do everything. This comes from the power of the individual in a small church. If any member wants the church to address some issue, then the church makes an effort in order to please him or her. The larger church, however, identifies and concentrates on approximately three or four major things and works to do them extremely well, despite calls for new emphases.

Further, the larger the church, the more a distinctive vision becomes important to its members. The reason for being in a smaller church is relationships. The reason for putting up with all the changes and difficulties of a larger church is to get mission done. People join a larger church because of the vision—so the particular mission needs to be clear.

The larger the church, the more it develops its own mission outreach rather than supporting already existing programs. Smaller churches tend to support denominational mission causes and contribute to existing para-church ministries. Leaders and members of larger churches feel more personally accountable to God for the

kingdom mandate and seek to either start their own mission ministries or to form partnerships in which there is more direct accountability of the mission agency to the church.

Consequently, the larger the church, the more its lay leaders need to be screened for agreement on vision and philosophy of ministry, not simply for doctrinal and moral standards. In smaller churches, people are eligible for leadership on the basis of membership tenure and faithfulness. In larger churches, where a distinctive mission and vision are more important, it is important to enlist without apology leaders who share a common philosophy of ministry with the staff and other leaders.

SPECIFIC SIZE CATEGORIES

HOUSE CHURCH: UP TO 40 ATTENDANCE

Character

- + The house church is often called a “storefront church” in urban areas and a “country church” in rural areas.
- + It operates essentially as an extended small group. It is a highly relational church in which everyone knows everyone else intimately.
- + Lay leaders are extremely powerful and they emerge relationally—they are not appointed or elected. They are usually the people who have been at the church the longest and have devoted the most time and money to the work.
- + Decision making is democratic and informal and requires complete consensus. Decisions are made by informal relational process. If any member is unhappy with a course of action, it is not taken by the church.
- + Communication is by word of mouth, and information moves very swiftly through the whole membership.
- + The pastor is often a “tentmaker” and does church ministry part time, though once a church has at least ten families who tithe, it can support a full-time minister. The minister’s main job is shepherding, not leading or preaching.

How it grows

House churches grow in the most organic possible way—through attraction to their warmth, relationships, and people. New people are simply invited and continue to come because they are befriended. There is no “program” of outreach.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

The house church, like any small group, gets to saturation rather quickly. Once it gets to 40+ people, the intense face-to-face relationships become impossible to maintain. It then faces a choice: either multiplying off another house-church or growing out of the “house-church dynamics” into the next size category, the small church.

If it does not do either, evangelism becomes essentially impossible. The fellowship itself then can easily become ingrown and stagnant—somewhat stifling, sometimes legalistic.

An ongoing problem for the stand-alone church of this size is the low quality of ministry to specific groups like children, youth, and singles. If it opts to multiply into another house church, the two (and eventually several) house churches can form an association and do things like youth ministry together. They can also meet for joint worship services periodically.

If it opts to grow out of the house-church size into a small church, it needs to prepare its people to do this by acknowledging the losses of intimacy, spontaneity, and informality and agreeing to bear these as a cost of mission, of opening its ranks to new people. This has to be a consensus group decision, to honor the dynamics of the house church even as it opts to change those dynamics.

SMALL CHURCH: 40–200 ATTENDANCE

Character

- + The range of this category goes from churches that are barely out of the house-church stage up to churches that are ready for multiple staff. But they all share the same basic characteristics.
- + While the relational dynamics are now less intense, there is still a strong expectation that every member must have a face-to-face relationship with every other member.
- + And while there are now appointed and elected leaders, the informal leadership system remains extremely strong. There are several laypeople—regardless of their official status—who are “opinion leaders.” If they don’t approve of new measures the rest of the members will not support the changes.
- + Communication is still informal, mostly word of mouth, and relatively swift.
- + The pastor is still primarily a shepherd. While in a larger church people will let you pastor them if you are a good preacher, in a smaller church the reverse is true: people will listen to your sermons if you are a good pastor.
- + Effective, loving shepherding of every member is the driving force of ministry—not leadership or even speaking ability. A pastor who says, “I shouldn’t have to shepherd every member, I’ve delegated that to my elders or small group leaders,” is trying to practice large-church dynamics in a small-church environment.
- + However, as the congregation grows the pastor of a small church will feel more and more need for administrative leadership skills. Small churches do not require much in the way of vision casting or strategizing, but they do eventually present a need for program planning, mobilization of volunteers, and other administrative tasks.
- + Changes are still processed relationally and informally by the whole congregation, not just the leaders. But since the congregation is larger, decisions take a longer time than in either the house church or the medium-sized church. Ultimately, however, change in a small church happens from the bottom up through key lay leaders. No major changes can be made unless you get at least one of these people to be an ally and an advocate for them.

How it grows

Like house churches, small churches grow through newcomers’ attraction to the relationships in the congregation. However, in the small church it can also be a personal relationship to the pastor that is the primary attraction for a new person. The pastor can begin two or three new ministries, classes, or groups, as long as he has secured the backing or participation of one key informal leader. Together they can begin a new activity that will bring many new people into the church.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

This church may eventually face the famous “200 barrier.” To make room for more than 200 people in a church takes a significant commitment to some or all of the following changes.

- + *First change—multiplication options.*
 - There must be a willingness to question the unwritten policy that every voting member should have a face-to-face relationship with every other member.
 - When a church gets to the place where the older members begin to realize that there are members whom they barely know or don’t know at all, the complaint may be voiced in a tone of moral authority: “This church is getting too big.” Another form of this complaint is that the church is getting “impersonal.” Essentially, this attitude must change if newcomers are to be welcomed.
 - Often the key change that a congregation must allow is a move to multiplying options such as more than one Sunday service, or putting more emphasis on small group ministry than on having one unified corporate prayer meeting.
 - As a general rule, multiplying options generate a growth spurt. The single best way to increase attendance is to multiply Sunday services. Two services will immediately draw more people than one service did. Four Sunday school electives will generally draw more people than two Sunday school electives. Why? Because when you give people more options, more people opt!

- + *Second change—a willingness to pay the cost of an additional primary ministry staff person.*
 - It is a sociological fact that a full-time minister cannot personally shepherd more than about 150–200 people. At some point any pastor will lose the ability to personally visit, stay in touch, and be reasonably available to all the people of a growing congregation.
 - The minister’s span of pastoral care can be stretched with part-time or full-time specialty or administrative staff, such as children’s workers, secretaries, administrators, and musicians,. There are variations to this figure depending on the minister’s personality and energy level and the local culture. For example, a more white-collar community tends to demand far more specialized programs than does a working-class community, and therefore you may find in such a place that you need a full-time ministry staff person for every 100–150 in attendance.
 - Eventually that second ministry staff person must be hired. This is commonly another ordained pastor, but it could be a layperson who is a counselor, overseer of small groups, or supervisor of programs who does a lot of shepherding work and teaching. It is important to be sure that this second person really can grow the church and, practically speaking, grow the giving that will pay his or her salary. So, for example, it may not be best to have the second ministry staff person be a youth minister; it would be better to hire a small group minister or a minister of evangelism and outreach. Or, if the senior minister is excellent at outreach, the second staff worker could be a pastor/counselor who complements the gifts of the first minister and works on the church’s internal growth. *Initial staffing must be for growth.*
 - The tension that often arises in a church this size is that the church is big enough that the pastor begins to feel burned out but is not yet big enough to financially support a second minister.
- + *Third change—a willingness to let power shift away from the laity and even lay leaders to the staff.*
 - As you get to this size barrier, the old approach to decision making, which required that everyone to come to a consensus, becomes far too slow and unwieldy. In the consensus model of decision making, it is considered impossible to proceed with a change if any member is strongly opposed, especially if it appears that the change would actually result in some people’s leaving the church.
 - As a church nears the 200 barrier, there is almost always someone who experiences the concomitant changes as a loss. Therefore no changes will ever occur unless many of the decisions that used to involve the whole membership now shift to the leaders and staff. But it is not just that the laity must cede power to the leaders. Long-time lay leaders must also cede power to the staff and volunteer leaders.
 - In a smaller church the lay leaders often know more about the members than the pastor does. The lay leaders have been there longer and thus have more knowledge of the past, more trust from the members, and more knowledge of the members’ abilities, capacities, interests, and opinions.
 - Once a church gets beyond 200, however, the staff tends to know more about the church members than the lay leaders do, and increasingly the new members in particular take their cues from the pastor(s) rather than from the lay leaders.
 - The lay officers’ board or elders will no longer be able to sign off on absolutely everything and will have to let the staff and individual volunteer leaders make many decisions on their own.
- + *Fourth change—a willingness to become more formal and deliberate in assimilation and communication.*
 - For a church to move beyond this barrier it can no longer assume that communication and the assimilation of newcomers will happen “naturally,” without any planning. Communication will have to become more deliberate instead of by word of mouth alone. Newcomers will have to be folded in more intentionally. For example, every new family could be assigned a “sponsor” for six months—a member family who invites the new family over to their home, brings them to a new members’ class, and so on.

- + *Fifth change—the ability and willingness of both the pastor and the people for the pastor to do shepherding a bit less and leading a bit more.*
 - The next-size church requires a bit more vision casting and strategizing and a lot more administrative know-how. The pastor of the medium-sized church will have to spend much more time recruiting and supervising volunteers and programs to do ministry that in the smaller church he would have done himself. This takes administrative skills of planning, delegating, supervising, and organizing.
 - In this next-size church the pastor is simply less available and accessible to every member. Even with the hiring of additional ministry staff, every member will not be able to have the same access to the senior pastor as he or she did before. Both the people and the senior minister need to acknowledge and accept this cost.
- + *Sixth change—considering the option of moving to a new space and facilities.*
 - Will such a move be crucial to breaking the next growth barrier? Sometimes, but not usually. Usually what is needed is planning multiple worship services, staffing for growth, and adjusting attitudes and expectations in preparation for a new size culture.

MEDIUM-SIZED CHURCH, 200–450 ATTENDANCE

Character

- + In smaller churches, each member is acquainted with the entire membership of the church. The primary circle of belonging is the church as a whole. But in the medium-sized church, the primary circle of belonging is usually a specific affinity class or program. Men’s and women’s ministries, the choir, the couples’ class, the evening worship team, the local prison ministry, the meals-on-wheels ministry—all of these are possible circles of belonging that make the church fly. Each of these subgroups is approximately the size of the house church, 10–40 people.
- + Leadership functions differently in the medium-sized church.
 - First, since the medium-sized church has far more complexity, the leaders must represent the various constituencies in the church (e.g., the older people, the young families).
 - Second, there is too much work to be handled by a small board. There are now influential leadership teams or committees, such as the missions committee or the music/worship committee, that have significant power.
 - Third, because of the two factors above, leaders begin to be chosen less on the basis of length of tenure and strength of personality and more on the basis of skills and giftedness.
 - Fourth, the role of the lay officers or board begins to change. In the smaller church, the officers basically oversee the pastor and staff, giving or withholding permission for various proposals. The pastor and staff then do the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the officers begin to do more of the ministry themselves, in partnership with the staff. Volunteer ministry leaders often rise up and become the decision-making leaders. Chairs of influential committees sit on the official board.
- + As noted above, the senior minister shifts somewhat from being a shepherd toward becoming a “rancher.” Rather than doing all of the ministry himself, he becomes a trainer and organizer of laypeople doing ministry. He also must be adept at training, supporting, and supervising ministry and administrative staff. At the medium-sized church level, this requires significant administrative skills.
- + While in the smaller church change and decisions come from the bottom up through key laypeople, in the medium-sized church change happens through key committees and teams. Ordinarily the official board or session in the medium-sized church is inherently conservative. They feel very responsible and do not want to offend any constituents they believe they represent. Therefore change is usually driven by forward-thinking committees such as the missions committee or the evangelism committee. These can be very effective in persuading the congregation to try new things.

How it grows

As noted earlier, smaller churches grow mainly through pastor-initiated groups, classes, and ministries. The medium-sized church will also grow as it multiplies classes, groups, services, and ministries, but the key to medium-sized growth is improving the quality of the ministries and their effectiveness to meet real needs. The small church can accommodate amateurish quality because the key attraction is its intimacy and family-like warmth. But the medium-sized church's ministries must be different. Classes really must be great learning experiences. Music must meet aesthetic needs. Preaching must inform and inspire.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

I have said that the small church crosses the 200 barrier through (1) multiplying options, (2) going to multiple staff, (3) shifting decision-making power away from the whole membership, (4) becoming more formal and deliberate in assimilation, and (5) moving the pastor away from shepherding everyone to being more of an organizer/administrator. You can grow beyond 200 without making all of these five changes; in fact, most churches do. Often churches grow past 200 while holding on to one or more of the smaller-church attitudes. For example, if the senior minister is multigifted and energetic, he can take care of the organizational/administrative work and still have time to visit every member of his church. Or perhaps new staff persons are added but the decision-making is still done on a whole-congregation consensus model. But to break 400, you must firmly break the old habits in all five areas. As for the sixth change—moving to new space and facilities—this is usually needed for a medium-sized church to break the growth barrier, but not always.

LARGE CHURCH, 400–800 ATTENDANCE

Character

- + We have seen that in the small church, the primary circle of belonging is the entire church body. In the medium-sized church, the primary circle is the affinity class or ministry group, which is usually 10–40 in size. However, in the large church the primary circle of belonging becomes the small group fellowship. This is different from the affinity class or ministry in the following ways:
 - It is usually smaller—as small as 4 and no bigger than 15.
 - It is more of a “miniature church” than is the affinity class or ministry. Affinity classes or ministries are specialty programs, focusing only on learning or worship music or ministry to the poor and so on. The small group fellowship does Bible study, fellowship, worship, and ministry.
- + Leadership also functions differently in the large church. In the small church, leaders were selected for their tenure; in the medium-sized church, for their skills and maturity. Both of these are still very desirable! But in the large church, these qualities must be combined with a commitment to the church's distinct vision and mission. The larger the church becomes, the more it develops certain key ministries and strengths that it emphasizes, and the common vision is an important reason that members join. So leaders need to be screened for vision as well as other qualifications.
- + In the small church, the board gave or withheld permission to the pastor(s), who did the ministry. In the medium-sized church, the board is made up of lay leaders and committee chairs who share the ministry work with the pastors and staff. But in the large church, the board must work with the senior minister to set overall vision and goals and then to evaluate the overall ministry. Unlike the small church board, they don't oversee all the staff—they let the senior minister do that. Unlike the medium church board, they may not necessarily be the lay leaders of ministry. Instead they oversee how the church and ministries are doing as a whole.
- + In the large church, the roles of individual staff members become increasingly specialized, and that also goes for the role of the senior minister. He must concentrate more and more on (a) preaching and (b) vision casting and strategizing. He must let go of many or most administrative tasks; otherwise he becomes a bottleneck.
- + While in the small church change and decisions happen from the bottom up through powerful lay individuals, and in the medium-sized church they come from the boards and committees, in the large church they happen “top down” from staff and key lay leaders.

How it grows

The small church grows mainly through new groups, classes, and ministries initiated by the pastor, sometimes with the help of an ally. I call this the “backyard approach,” since it grows from informal new fellowship circles. The medium-sized church grows mainly through ministries that effectively target “felt needs” of various groups such as youth, seniors, young married couples, and “seekers.” I call this the “side-door approach,” since it brings in various people groups from your city or neighborhood by addressing their felt needs. The large church, however, grows through a “front-door” approach. The key to its growth is what happens in the worship services—the quality of the preaching, the transcendence of the worship experience, and so on.

Crossing the threshold to the next size category

The same five changes mentioned before need to be taken to the next level.

- + *First change—multiplying options.* Up to the “800 barrier,” churches can still get away with having a mediocre or poor small-group system. The people may still be getting shepherded mainly through larger programs, affinity classes, and groups that are run by staff people directly. But if God keeps sending you new people, so that you are bumping up against the 800 barrier, you must have the majority of your members and adherents in small groups that are very well run and that do pastoral care, not just Bible study. Multiple services were more important when addressing the 200 or 400 barrier, but small group life is the key to navigating this change.
- + *Second change—multiplying staff.* Up to the “800 barrier” churches can still get away with a small staff of generalists, but after the 800 barrier there must be much more specialization. Staff members must be increasingly gifted, and not simply workers, nor even leaders of workers, but *leaders of leaders*. They must be fairly mature, independent, and able to attract and supervise others.
- + *Third change—shifting decision-making power.* Up to the “800 barrier,” decision-making power was becoming more centralized—migrating from the periphery (the whole membership or the whole lay board) to the center (the staff and eventually the senior staff). Now the decision-making power must become more decentralized—migrating out away from the senior staff and pastor to the individual staff and their leadership teams. As noted above, the staff must become increasingly competent and must be given more authority to make decisions in their area without having to run everything through the senior staff or lay board.
- + *Fourth change—becoming more formal and deliberate in assimilation.* Assimilation, discipline, and incorporation of newcomers must become even more well organized, highly detailed, and supervised.
- + *Fifth—adapting the senior pastor’s role.* The pastor becomes even less accessible to do individual shepherding and concentrates even more on preaching, large group teaching, vision casting, and strategizing.

THE VERY LARGE CHURCH

Character

- + The very large church has a missional focus. In general, smaller churches give members a greater voice (see below), and thus the concerns and interests of members and insiders tend to trump those of outsiders. On the other hand, the larger church gives the staff and executive leaders a greater voice. The more staff-driven a church is, the more likely it is to concentrate on ministries that will reach nonmembers and that don’t directly benefit its own constituents—that is, church planting, mercy and justice ministries, and other new services and programs.
- + The very large church has several traits that attract seekers and young adults in particular:
 - *Excellence.* Those with no obligation to go to church based on kinship, tradition, ethnicity, or local history are more likely to attend where the quality of arts, teaching, children’s programs, and so on is very high.
 - *Choices.* Contemporary people are used to having options when it comes to the schedule or type of worship, learning, support services, and the like.
 - *Openness to change.* Generally, newcomers and younger people have a much greater tolerance for the constant changes and fluidity of a large church, while older people, long-term members, and families are more desirous of stability.

- *Low pressure.* Seekers are glad to come into a church and not have their presence noticed immediately. The great majority of inquirers and seekers are grateful for the ease with which they can visit a large church without immediately feeling pressured to make a decision or join a group.
- + The very large church also has greater potential for developing certain qualities and ministries:
- *Being multicultural.* A larger staff can be multiethnic (while a single staff/pastor usually cannot). A larger church with multiple services, classes, or even “congregations” can encompass a greater variety of interests and sensibilities.
 - *Creating a full-service family support system.* Families often need a variety of classes or groups for children in different age groups as well as counseling services, recreational opportunities, and so on. Larger churches often attract families for that reason.
 - *Doing church planting.* Larger churches, in general, are better at church planting than are either denominational agencies or smaller churches.¹
 - *Carrying out faith-based holistic ministries.* Larger churches have a bigger pool of volunteers, finances, and expertise for carrying these out.
 - *“Research and development” for the broader church.* Again, the larger church is usually a good place for new curriculum, ministry structures, and the like to be formulated and tested. These can all be done more effectively by a large church than by denominations, smaller churches, or parachurch ministries.

ONE OF THE MOST COMMON REASONS FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP MISTAKES IS BLINDNESS TO THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHURCH SIZE.

- + Of course the very large church has disadvantages as well:
- *Commuting longer distances can undermine mission.* Very large churches can become famous and attract Christians from longer and longer distances, who cannot bring non-Christians from their neighborhoods. Soon the congregation doesn’t look like the neighborhood and can’t reach its own geographic community. However, this is somewhat offset by the mission advantages and can be further offset by (a) church planting and (b) staying relentlessly oriented toward evangelism and outreach.
 - *Commuting longer distances undermines community/fellowship and discipleship.* Christians coming from longer distances are less likely to be discipled and plugged in to real Christian community. The person you meet in a Sunday service is less and less likely to be someone who lives near you, so natural connections and friendships do not develop. This can be somewhat offset by an effective small-group system that unites people by interest or region.
 - *Diminished communication and involvement.* “A common pattern is for a large church to outgrow its internal communication system and plateau . . . as many people feel a loss of the sense of belonging, and eventually [it declines] numerically.”² People are no longer sure whom to talk to about things: in a smaller church, the staff and elders know everything, but in a very large church, a given staff member may know nothing at all about what is going on outside his or her ministry. The long list of staff and ministries is overwhelming. No one feels they can get information quickly; no one feels they know how to begin to get involved. This can be offset by continually upgrading your communication system. This becomes extraordinarily important in a very large congregation.

1. See Timothy Keller, “Why Plant Churches?” (2002), redeemercitytocty.com, for a more in-depth discussion of church planting.

2. Lyle Schaller, *The Very Large Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 174.

- *Displacement.* People who joined when the church was smaller may feel a great sense of loss and may have trouble adjusting to the new size culture. Many of them will mourn the loss of feeling personally connected to events, decision making, and the head pastor. Some of these “old-timers” will sadly leave, and their leaving will sadden those who remain in the church. This can be offset by giving old-timers extra deference and consideration, understanding the changes they’ve been through, and not making them feel guilty for wanting a different or smaller church. Fortunately, this problem eventually lessens! People who joined a church when it had 1,500 members will find that not much has changed when it reaches 4,000.
- *Complexity, change, and formality.* Largeness brings (a) complexity instead of simplicity, (b) change instead of predictability, and (c) the need for formal rather than informal communication and decision making. However, many long-time Christians and families value simplicity, predictability, and informality, and even see them as more valuable from a spiritual standpoint. The larger the church, the more the former three factors grow, and many people simply won’t stand for them.
- *Succession.* The bigger a church, the more the church is identified with the senior pastor. Why? (a) He becomes the only identifiable leader among a large number of staff and leaders of whom the average member cannot keep track. (b) Churches don’t grow large without a leader who is unusually good in articulating vision. This articulation then becomes the key to the whole church. That kind of giftedness is distinctive and is much less replaceable even than good preaching. This leads to the Achilles’ heel of the church—continuity and succession. How does the pastor retire without people feeling the church has died? One plan is to divide the church with each new site having its own senior pastor. Lyle Schaller believes, however, that the successors need to be people who have been on staff for a good while, not outsiders.

How it grows

Basically, a very large church continues to grow only if the advantages described are exploited while the disadvantages described are resisted and minimized.

A FEW MORE SUGGESTIONS REGARDING VERY LARGE CHURCHES

BE NONJUDGMENTAL

A common problem in churches is that people attach a moral significance to their ideal size culture. They don’t see a large-church size culture as “different” but as “bad.” For example, some members may feel that a very large church is an “unfriendly” or “uncaring” church because they can’t get the senior pastor on the phone personally. However, if everyone in a church of 3,000 *could* get the pastor on the phone anytime they wanted, it would not lead to a more caring church at all. He could not possibly respond to all their needs. (On the other hand, if a pastor in a church of 150 can never be gotten on the phone, he *is* imposing a larger size culture in a smaller church, and that will lead to disaster.)

Because a very large church is marked by *change*, the overall vision may stay the same, but few or no programs or practices are sacrosanct. Because it is *complex*, it is not immediately obvious whom to talk to or who needs to be in on a given decision; many new events may have unforeseen consequences for other programs. Because there is a need for greater *formality*, plans have to be written down and carefully executed, rather than worked out face to face and relationally. In a very large church, all of these traits must be considered the inevitable cost of ministry. There should be little hand-wringing and no moral significance attached to these traits (calling change “instability,” formality “being impersonal,” etc.). Different cultures are just that—different, not inferior.

FORM SMALLER DECISION-MAKING BODIES

In general, the larger the church, the fewer people should be in on each decision. Why? The larger the church, the more diversity of views. If the older processes are followed, decisions take longer and longer to be made, and they result in watered-down compromises. As a church gets larger it *must* entrust decision making to fewer and fewer people just to maintain the same level of progress, decisiveness, and intentionality it had when it was smaller. Many

Christians consider the size culture of a very large church to be by definition undemocratic or unaccountable. This is one reason that many churches never get very large, or shrink again once they do.

ALLOW THE DECENTRALIZATION OF POWER

Another mark of a very large church, especially once it surpasses about 1,800 members, is that the “hub and spokes” structure, in which the senior pastor serves as the captain or “hub” and his staff are the “spokes,” becomes obsolete. Instead of being a team under the senior pastor, the staff becomes a team of teams. The power of directors and clusters of directors grows greatly. The church has become too complex for the senior pastor to supervise directors closely, and power is shifted to specific departments. This has two consequences. On the one hand, it means that staff leaders have more decision-making power for their own area. Other staff directors and even the senior pastor have less information and ability to second-guess them or interfere. This happens increasingly as a church gets larger. On the other hand, it means staff cannot expect to receive as much mentoring, instruction, and rescuing from the executive staff as they did when the church was smaller.

BRING ON MORE SPECIALIZED, COMPETENT STAFF WORKERS WHO UNDERSTAND THE VISION

Studies show that churches of fewer than 800 members are staffed primarily with seminary-trained ministers, but the larger a church gets, the fewer trained ministers are on staff. Why is this?

First, the larger church needs specialists in counseling, music, finance, social work, and childhood development—whereas seminaries train generalists. Very large churches do not need theologically trained people to learn a specialty so much as they need specialists who can be theologically trained.

Second, the very large church cannot afford to bring on a newcomer with a steep learning curve as director of a large ministry. In a church of 500, you may have a youth ministry of 30 kids, so you can hire a young person out of seminary to be the youth pastor. But in a very large church there may be 300 youth—so the staff director has to be very competent from the start. The larger a church gets, the more competent the staff needs to be. The call to the staff changes from “Do what I tell you” to “Go out and make things happen.” Resourcefulness and creativity become more and more important. The staff often need to be able to inspire followers and to find creative ways to bring something out of nothing. They must move from being leaders to being leaders of leaders.

Third, the larger the church gets, the more distinctive its vision is. It has a highly honed and carefully balanced set of emphases and styles—its own “voice.” People who are trained theologically before coming to staff inevitably come in with attitudes and assumptions that are at variance with the church’s vision. They may also feel superior to other staff people who are not theologically trained or may underestimate their own ignorance of the church’s specific context. The larger the church, then, the more important it is to raise and train leaders from within. This means that staff coming from outside need thorough training in the very large church’s history, values, culture, and so on, and staff coming from within should be supported heavily for continued theological education.

CHANGE THE SENIOR PASTOR’S ROLE

A very key and very visible part of the large size culture is the changed role of the senior pastor. As stated earlier, in a very large church the preacher cannot be the people’s pastor. The senior pastor must move from an emphasis on doing the work of ministry (teaching, pastoring, administering) to delegating this work so that he can concentrate on vision casting and general preaching. Many churches and ministers never allow this to happen; indeed they believe it is wrong to make such a shift. While the senior pastor must not become a CEO and stop doing traditional ministry altogether, he must not try to do pastoral care or provide oversight for the church at large either. That responsibility must go to others. This is undoubtedly difficult; the senior pastor will have to live with guilt feelings over it all the time. It’s a burden he must be willing to bear, with the help of the gospel. Otherwise the pressures of trying to do it all will lead to burnout. The senior pastor, the staff and ministry leaders, and the congregation must allow this transition to happen.

BUILD TRUST

Schaller shows that the very large church is more accessible and capable of reaching young people, single people, the unchurched, and seekers than smaller churches are. He then poses a question: If the need for very large churches is so great, why are there so few? Why don't more churches (a) allow the senior pastor to become less accessible, (b) allow the staff to have more power than the board, (c) allow a small body of executive staff to have more decision-making power than the larger staff or congregation, or (d) allow directors more power to hire competent workers and release generalists? His main answer is that the key to the very large church culture is *trust*. In smaller churches, suspicious people are much happier. Every decision goes through a process of consensus that is accessible to any member. Any minority that is unhappy with something can block it. The larger the church gets, however, the more and more the congregation has to trust the staff, and especially the senior pastor. Though the staff (and the senior pastor) must do everything they can to be open to criticism, to be relationally available, and to communicate with people in a way that makes them feel included and informed, ultimately a very large church runs on trust.

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