



The Small Church:  
Strong, Healthy, Focused, Faithful

Bill Easum & Bill Tenny-Brittian

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554 Bayside Drive Port Aransas, TX 78373

888-470-2456

email: [info@churchconsultations.net](mailto:info@churchconsultations.net)

[www.churchconsultations.com](http://www.churchconsultations.com)

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## A Note from the Authors

One of the common mistakes of our time is to assume that bigger is better. Size has nothing to do with the health, vitality, or the effectiveness of a church. Small churches can be strong, vital, congregations and large churches can be weak and ineffective. In this workbook “small” is defined as churches with 100 or fewer in worship, a number that represents the vast majority of congregations in the North America.

The key to congregational health, vitality, and effectiveness has to do with the mission of the church. Does it intentionally, and with passion, reach out to the unchurched around it or does it focus primarily on itself? Churches that focus only on themselves are no longer churches. They are clubs. Jesus reminded us over and over that those who give life away find it and those who seek to save life will lose it. By definition then, a church, like all Christians, exists to give life away. Following Jesus means “being a witness.” The word witness literally means “martyr.” The church of any size exists for others, not itself.

For the purposes of this workbook, an effective church of any size is measured by how passionately ministry is focused on the unchurched – without neglecting the sheep in the fold. Only a miniscule fraction of existing churches can justify their existence merely as a place to care for the membership – and these churches care for members who are dis-abled in some significant way.

Pastors and lay leaders often fail to realize that all large churches were once small churches. They will hear something that is working in a larger church and conclude it won’t work in a small church. *Everything* in this workbook can be used in the small church. Do not make the mistake and say, “That won’t work in our small church.”

When I (Bill Easum) came to Colonial Hills in 1969, it averaged less than fifty in worship. After growing it down to 17, I watched it grow over the next twenty-four years to over a 1,000 in worship. During this period, I discovered that ministries established in the early days, remained strong over the entire period. I also realized that biblical principles did not change. The only changes I notice were in the style of leadership. My style of leadership had to change dramatically as the church grew.

Every church that I (Bill T-B) led grew significantly, and yet each one remained a “small” church. In some cases, the church remained small because it helped start new churches. In others, the church remained small because of its commitment to discipleship. And yet, every church experienced growth, conversions, baptisms, and effective ministries into the community.

We hope the material in this workbook will help guide you through the distinctive elements of the small church as well as give you some guidelines for decision making. You have to make two basic decisions as you work through this workbook: Do you want the small church to grow? and Does the population around the small church exclude growth? How you answer these two questions should guide your actions as a leader of the congregation.

Bill Easum & Bill Tenny-Brittian

## The Cat Sized Church: A Small Church Overview

Lyle Schaller compared the small church to a cat – he called them “cat-sized churches.” He suggested there were many similarities between a small church and cats. For instance, like cats, small churches behave toward their ministers the way cats do toward their owners.

- They are very independent.
- Except for food and an occasional sacrament or burial, they do not need their caregivers.
- If need be, they can manage totally on their own.

But it’s not all about cats. Small churches are marked by other characteristics. In the small church, the pastor is a generalist. S/he may be expected to preach; do the pastoral care; sing in the choir – or lead the choir; sit on any named committee; lead the adult Sunday School class; teach the Bible study; attend the men’s and the women’s meetings; chauffeur the seniors in the church van; answer the phone; create and print and fold the bulletin – and the same with the newsletter; unlock the church on Sunday mornings (and Tuesday evening for AA, Wednesdays for Board Meetings, etc.); lock the church when the services are over; plunge toilets; cut the grass; and other tasks as needed.

Small congregations tend to function as one huge committee. Decisions may officially come to a vote, but ultimately, everyone has a say. Partly that’s because a small church is usually composed of less than ten families – and seven families may well be the average. Indeed, the majority of those in the church may be related to each other, if not by blood and marriage, then by “adoption” into the fold. It is this interrelatedness that can make it painfully difficult for “new members” to become a *member* of the church and they may feel like an outsider for literally years (it’s not unusual for a member of a small church to confess they’ve “only” been a member for fifteen years, so they’re still on the “outside”).

One of the key issues in the small church is that breaking the fifty barrier can be the most difficult hurdle of all. Indeed, in my (Bill T-B) first church, I facilitated a growth spurt that more than doubled the size of the church from thirty-five to seventy-eight. At that point, however, conflict broke out and literally within a month the congregation was back down to thirty-five. It’s one thing to break the fifty barrier – it’s another thing to remain there.

Finally, decision-making in the small church can seem like a mystery to the uninitiated. Many of the main decisions are made by the parking lot group, or Sunday afternoon by the after-church restaurant group, or in the living rooms of the matriarch or patriarch. These may be spontaneous meetings or carefully scheduled to ensure the right people are available.

With all that said, you may suspect that the small church is necessarily a hotbed of conflict and mischief, but that need not be the case. The key to the successful, healthy, mission-aligned small church is knowing how things work and putting that knowledge to work. Leadership in a small church takes a particular skill set that understands how to work with cats ... without being catty.

## Decisions Facing the Small Church

Before you can move forward, the first decision to make is whether the goal of the church is to become an effective small church or to become a large church. Being a small, member-only focused church is not an option.

By definition, an effective church is one that passionately reaches out to the unchurched around it. These churches follow the example of Christ and give life away. The ultimate marker of an effective small church is its attitude and commitment to those who “are not here yet.” When a congregation is more concerned about reaching those beyond its walls than it is about its own traditions, history, preferences, and yes ... even its own members, then it is ready to step into the mission field of its own community. The church exists in order to give life away.

With that in mind, the small church is faced with a choice: Will we be a strong small church? Or will we be a strong larger church? The answer, however, must be weighed against a demographic reality. If a congregation has fewer than 2000 people within five miles of the church, it will be difficult to grow beyond 200. It’s not impossible to grow larger than that, it’s just difficult (Phil 4:13 comes to mind).

Let’s be frank. If you’re determined to have a strong, healthy, focused, faithful church then you’re going to be reaching new people. The only question is whether you will corral and disciple them to fullness or release them to start new churches or strengthen weaker churches. Remember that faithful churches cannot exist only for themselves.

You can choose to remain a small church, but you cannot choose to focus on meeting the needs, preferences, and proclivities of your membership. In other words, reaching beyond your walls and into your community is not an option. What you do with those whose lives you touch is the only option you have before you.

If you decide to remain a small church, then you’ll need to develop a plan for moving the fruit of your outreach into other churches. In the current climate, there are four viable options.

1. You can help them find a place in other local churches that are committed to discipleship and to growth.
2. You can help them start a new church.\*
3. You can start a multi-site church.\*
4. You can start multiple house churches.\*

Regardless of which option you choose, you have some work to do. If you will be intentional in strengthening other churches, you’ll need to be intimately familiar with each church in the vicinity. For instance, you’ll need to know what each church specializes in. One church may have excellent children’s programming, whereas another might focus on Bible study and biblical familiarity. Then, as your congregation reaches the unchurched there will be a plan on where to direct them for the next phase of their discipleship.

If you chose one of the other options, please see the resources in the Recommended Reading section. Each option comes with its own set of challenge, but the results for the Kingdom of

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\* For more information, see the Recommended Reading section.

God can be astounding. An example comes to mind. In a small county seat town in the rural Midwest, a traditional, older Methodist congregation chose to remain a small church; however, they were committed to being a strong, healthy, focused and faithful church for their community. They opted for the multi-site alternative. Today the original congregation continues to enjoy a thoroughly traditional worship service in their original downtown church building and they have remained a small church. On the other hand, the second site now sees upwards of 1000 people attending the alternative styled worship service each week. The situation has been distinctly win-win for everyone.

If your congregation chooses to become a larger church, it faces a different set of questions that are based on the congregation's current situation and why it is currently a small church.

1. The congregation has never been larger than 200 and no one in the church has ever been active in a church of over 200.
2. The culture has experienced a significant paradigm shift and the church has not.
3. The ministry area has experienced significant decline.
4. The congregation has lost members and has not replaced them.
5. The seating or parking capacity has already reached 80 percent.
6. The ministry area has experienced significant transition and those "inside" the church are not like those "outside" the church.

Each of these situations carries unique challenges and necessitates specific solutions for church growth. The scope of this workbook addresses most of these over the course of the contents. However, the last two issues beg the question "Should we move or should we stay?"

If your facilities have reached 80 percent of capacity, whether seating or parking, growth will not be forthcoming. There are at least four solutions.

- First, adding additional services allows for growth without expending significant financial resources. We'll speak more of multiple services throughout this workbook.
- Second, starting an additional service at a second site (the multi-site option) provides for significant growth, and is relatively affordable in many situations.
- Third, you may be able to remodel or add on to your existing facilities to increase capacity. This has the potential to be the most expensive option, since remodeling almost always has a higher cost per square foot than new construction. In addition, many municipalities are becoming increasingly hostile towards the church and are only granting permits under stringent, and too often binding, regulation and agreement. Recently, I (Bill T-B) have worked with two churches – one in the Bible Belt and one in the Pacific Northwest – that were granted building permits only with the proviso that the church would not "grow" beyond its current capacity (which pretty much defeats the purpose).
- Finally, you could relocate. There are good reasons to relocate. Remaining in a transitioning area seldom makes sense if all the church members are commuting from outside the church's ministry area. Having a witness in the area has little to do with having worship facilities in the area. However, if your facilities are located in an urban core and the membership is commuting in from the suburbs or the exurbs, you are faced with an ethical dilemma. Although relocating the worshipping congregation to a

more relevant and convenient locale makes good sense, abandoning the urbanites does not. The typical solution is to “parachute” ministries into the urban core from the outside. However, this is generally received as patronizing at best, and unwanted interference at worst, by resident urbanites. A more ethical and sustainable solution is to develop ministries in the name and for the sake of the church with those who reside in the area. But commuting leaders “into” the area to lead these ministries is almost always doomed to failure.

Nehemiah was faced with similar circumstances when the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt. Those with wealth had no great desire to live or minister in the downtown corridor. The solution was both ingenious and instructional. The community chose to tithe.

Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. (Neh 11:1–2)

If one out of ten members in a relocating urban church remained to work and minister *with* the “indigenous” peoples then these local ministries are more likely to succeed. These leaders gain the trust and respect of the locals because they have invested in the community. By living, shopping, interacting, and ministering among their neighbors, the vestiges of patronizing quickly vanish. In any event, if you find yourselves considering the relocation option, please prayerfully consider tithing your membership into the community so that the witness of faith doesn’t depart by the abandonment of the urban core.

On the other hand, relocating away from the area may not be the best response. This is especially for an aging congregation where it could be more faithful and effective to intentionally designing ministries to reach those in the immediate area. On the other hand, relocating within the same area in order to acquire more property for larger ministry may make the most sense. These kinds of decisions are especially difficult and fraught with both pros and cons. In these situations, it is generally worth the investment to acquire an outside source to help identify the options and to make recommendations based on your situation. Too often those close to the situation are unable to discern viable alternatives, whereas fresh eyes with significant experience can uncover a multiplicity of options.

As difficult as all these decisions may seem to be, the most critical decision is whether or not the congregation is willing to do what it takes to be a growing church. Growth means change and change means discomfort, at least for some. Rarely does a small congregation achieve faithfulness without facing a harsh reality: not everyone in the congregation is willing to be obedient to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. It’s one thing to verbalize assent, but it’s another thing altogether when the idea of faithfulness collides with the practices of faithfulness. Before you go much further, we suggest reading the following passages in their larger context and weigh these against the reality the congregation will have to face.

I Corinthians 9:22: To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all [people], that I might by all means save some. (KJV)

II Timothy 2:10: Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (ESV)

Romans 12:10: Love each other like brothers and sisters. Give each other more honor than you want for yourselves. (NCV)

In other words, the biggest question facing your congregation is this:

***Are you willing to:***

***... make the changes***

***... to take the risks***

***... and pay the price***

***... to be a strong, healthy, focused, and faithful small church?***



## Varieties of Small Churches

If you studied ten congregations with 800+ in worship in ten different denominations and ten congregations with 75 or less in worship in the same denomination, you would find more differences among the ten small churches in the same denomination than among the ten large congregations in ten different denominations. The small church has many faces. Each of the following small churches are different. If you are pastor whose been called or sent to a small church, discerning the premise on which the church operates can help you navigate your transition into the community and the congregation.

- The ethnic church
- The multicultural church
- The rural church
- The inner city church
- The cooperative church
- The federated church
- The endowed church
- The prosperous agribusiness church
- The immigrant church
- The kinship church
- The subsidized church
- The survival church
- The thriving church
- The church plant
- The multiple charge church
- The house church
- The emerging church
- The lifestyle church
- The marketplace church
- The niche church
- The mission church
- The seminary church
- The small town, long pastorate church
- The rural becoming suburban church
- The exurb church
- The Sunday school only church

Some small churches may have multiple facets from this list. For instance, we're aware of small churches that are multicultural–lifestyle–emerging churches. Indeed, many of these designations could be grouped beneath the niche church banner, since they appeal to and serve limited demographics. For a small congregation to become a larger congregation may mean that it will need to redefine itself. A survival church that grows must lose its survivalist mentality. A seminary church that “trains” new pastors will likely have to revision and re-provision itself, since a congregation that hosts a new pastor every two or three years rarely experiences continuing growth and vitality. Once again, growing a church requires significant

change and exacts a toll from the congregation, but especially from those who have basked in the tradition and culture of the church as it was and is, because it cannot remain so if it is to become the church it can be.

## Understanding the Small Church

As we stated in the opening paragraphs, it is unfortunate that church leaders in small churches are so quick to forget that large churches were all small churches once-upon-a-time. There is much to be learned from large churches – not because small churches ought to become large churches, but because these leaders have successfully navigated the transition small church to medium church.

With that in mind, this section makes a comparison of some of the characteristics and proclivities between the small church and the large church. The comparisons aren't to show how large churches are better than small churches. Indeed, large churches have more than their fair share of issues, problems, and headaches. The comparisons are offered to provide a frame of reference to understand how different practices may provide different results. As Albert Einstein surmised, insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, yet expecting different results. If you're committed to leading the church to a different future, it will probably be helpful to see how churches that have successfully made the transition behave.

Church Size	Attitudinal Indicators	Key Church Process	Cultural Change Activity	Pastoral Skills Needed for Transition
<b>Small Church 0–200 AWA*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom &amp; Pop Store</li> <li>• Survival</li> <li>• “Water Testers”</li> <li>• “We Can’t Do That”</li> </ul>	Recruiting Leaders	Enlarging Ministry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalyst</li> <li>• Change Agent</li> <li>• Risk Taker</li> <li>• Coalition Building</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Church 200–500 AWA*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resistance to Change</li> <li>• “We Have Arrived!”</li> </ul>	Training Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty Assimilating Change</li> <li>• Pastoral Staff Overworked</li> <li>• Ministry Understaffed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipates, Adjusts To, and Interprets Change</li> <li>• Chief Operating Officer</li> <li>• Prioritization</li> </ul>

**\*Average Worship Attendance**

**Attitudinal Indicators:** These help “define” the church’s real size, regardless of attendance. The fact is, there are a number of medium sized and even large churches, in terms of AWA, that bear the marks and demonstrate the attitudes of a small church. Progression to the “next level” is achieved only when the church size and the attitudinal indicators are matched.

- The small church is much like a "Mom and Pop" store. Mom and Pop know everything about each other and the business. They're committed to personally knowing each customer and want to ensure each is given individual attention. Over the years, the small church realizes this is perhaps the key distinction between them and larger churches.
- Often the small church is survival oriented. Usually this is lived out the most in the area of finance. Paying the bills and conserving capital is more important than enlarging ministry.
- The small church is a water tester because it may attempt a new project and then stop it if it is not immediately successful.

**Key Church Process:** When it comes to moving to the next level, there is always a particular key to unlocking the future. This is the single most important process that must be mastered and implemented.

- “We can't do that we're just a small church” is often heard in small churches. Small churches often feel overwhelmed and under equipped. This is a self-esteem issue that will be addressed later.
- The largest people-issue in a small church is how to recruit enough people to fill all of the offices in the church much less to teach Sunday School and work with the few youth. You might want to reduce the number of committees if you decide to move forward.

**Cultural Change Activity:** As suggested by the attitudinal indicators above, moving to the next level takes more than putting people into pews. Sustainable, transformational growth only comes when the congregational culture experiences a shift in the right direction.

- In small churches, membership ministry is often the primary focus. The “what about us?” syndrome of personal preference and maintaining the status quo will kill a church’s growth. In order to move beyond “us,” a cultural change that embraces an increasingly enlarging ministry to those outside the walls of the church will be necessary.

**Pastoral Skills Necessary for Transition:** There’s more to church size transitions than just being a great recruiter, preacher, and pastor. There are specific skills that must be mastered and practiced in order to reach the next level. Indeed, one of the key reasons church size transitions fail is because they were led by leaders who not only lacked the skills to take the church to the next level, they didn’t have the skills to continue to lead at that new level.

- In many small churches, the pastor is seen as a chaplain or an employee who is expected to be present at every event, at every meeting, and to be available at the congregation’s beck and call (we call this behavior *Pastor Fetch*). However, if a small church is to transition successfully, the pastor must be more adept at building *coalitions* than in playing pastor fetch and trying to please everyone in the congregation (or everyone in church leadership, for that matter). Indeed, the pastor must become a catalyst that creates an environment for change – and this cannot be done without significant support. Thus, the pastor must also be entrepreneurial enough to “sell” his/her vision and goals, often in exceptionally imaginative and creative ways. This almost always means the pastor, the church’s leadership, and the congregation will need to step out and take risks. Ultimately, though, none of the above is a welcomed by a significant number in the congregation ... which is all the more reason why the pastor has to be well-skilled in order to lead through this transition.

## Small and Large Comparisons

As we mentioned earlier, it's a pity that so few leaders of small and mid-sized churches recognize that there is actually much to be learned by studying large churches. Every large church was once a small church, and though your congregation may not want to become a large church, let alone a mega church, there is still much we can learn, adopt, and adapt from those who are "differently-abled." Pay careful attention to the following comparison list between small and large churches.

Small Church	Large Church
Who is absent*	What's God up to in the community
Individuals' health*	Congregational health
Worry about absent persons*	Worry about empty pews
Kinship determines office	Have to earn office*
Short program planning	Long program planning*
Relational pastor*	Functional pastor
Resilient*	Fragile
Begin when ready	Begin by the clock*
Laity led*	Pastor/staff led
Emphasize people*	Emphasize performance
Reward generalists	Reward Specialists*
Work through individuals*	Work through committees
Participatory democracy	Representative government*
Simple*	Complex
Attractional evangelism	Missional evangelism*
Less structure*	Redundant structure
Homogenous	Multi-faceted
Intergenerational*	Generational
Grapevine communication	Communication difficulties
Membership has privileges	Membership has little power
Low membership accountability	High membership accountability*
Single cell acquaintance group	Multiple cell acquaintance groups*

*\*Denotes essential characteristics for a healthy church of any size*

## Small Churches Have a Cast of Characters

If you're new to small church, you'll want to get to know who's who from the very beginning, since building alliances, loyalty, and simply knowing who the "go to" folks are will be important as you put your ministry plans into place. If you've been a part of this church for some time, you'll probably recognize the cast.

### **Gatekeepers**

These are often (but not exclusively) older men who stand at the edges of ministry and events and seldom get involved. They want to know everything about everyone. They enjoy greeting new people and explaining to them what is going on at the church, even if they do not approve of it. New members are allowed in the inner circle only if they pass their approval.

### **Patriarchs/Matriarchs**

These are at the center of the church. They carry the church identity because they have lived through many of the major events. They may not have an official title, but little happens that they do not approve. New members are allowed in the inner circle only if they pass their approval. They share the church's story with the new members.

### **Storyteller/Church Historian**

This person is the official or unofficial keeper of history. Sometimes the history is oral, sometimes it's kept meticulously in writing, in pictures, and in mementoes. This will likely be the one who reminds the board at the most inconvenient time that it was Great Aunt Bess who hand stitched the now threadbare pulpit chair cushions that are desperately in need of replacement – and so should *not* be replaced.

### **Robert Rules of Order**

This person will remind people that s/he is not really in charge, but will stand in for the moment since God is not available. And, by the way, that motion is out of order.

### **The Early Bird**

This is that lady or gentleman who is always the first one to arrive for every gathering. This person usually opens the doors or turns on the coffee. Too often, this person is also the pastor.

### **The Scorekeeper**

This is that detail-fanatic who always reminds the pastor that the attendance isn't what it used to be or that the pastor has taken more vacation days than allowed.

### **The Peacemaker**

They may be blessed, but they're not always a blessing. The Peacemaker can always be relied upon to try to keep the conflict under control ... even at the expense of decision-making.

### **Super Max/Maxine**

There are late adopters and then there's Super Max. These are those matriarchs and patriarchs who are against anything and everything new and will do whatever they can to ensure *nothing* changes. They can be mean-spirited.

- They are the Elder Brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son;
- Must be dealt with for growth to occur;
- Their friends are the best ones to try to convert them or neutralize their power.

## A Word of Warning – Caution: The Following Is Reality

The US is closing about 3500 churches each year and virtually all of them are small churches. In 2010 it was reported that over 94 percent of churches in the US are classified as “small” churches. However, only 11 percent of the population attend these smaller churches while over 50 percent attend the largest churches in the US.

The fact is, small churches seldom grow. Unfortunately, most are content to embrace the twin values of personal comfort and status quo and won't tolerate a rocking boat. Those that do grow, do so:

- Reluctantly.
- Only with the pain of accepting significant changes.
- When a flood of newcomers move into the area, join the church, and “take control.”
- When the congregation has committed themselves to serious Bible study emphasizing evangelism and discipleship (and has actually engaged in it).
- Or when the pastor gives up any personal life.

The fact is, if you are serving Christ in a small church, the odds are that it isn't growing and that it probably never will.

BUT ... if you're committed to reaching your community for Jesus Christ and to growing the congregation, then you have but one question to ask yourself:

***ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE?***

If you are, then the rest of this workbook is for you.



## Leading Transformation In the Small Church

First, let's set the record straight. If you're committed to leading a transformation in a small church, the odds are against you from start to finish. We're not trying to discourage you, really we're not. We're telling you this so you are aware that if you fail in leading a successful transition you won't beat yourself up about it (unless you've ignored all our recommendations and sabotaged the attempt).

The sobering facts are that 80 percent of all size transition transformations fail ... and the number creeps up to 90 percent and higher in mainline churches. A successful transformation demands Job's patience, Paul's leadership, Nehemiah's negotiating skills, Esther's courage, Solomon's wisdom, Jael's cunning, and perhaps Timothy's youth (it's been said that church planting professor Aubrey Malphurs claimed no one was "young enough" to effect a church turnaround). Given those qualities, and a five to ten year tenure, a small church turnaround has a fair chance of success. Failing that, though, having the strategic, tactical, and alliance-building skills of David and the courage of Thomas (the apostle who adjured his companions "Let us go to Jerusalem that we might die with him" –John 11:16) might be enough if you have the stomach for it.

With that in mind, consider the following as Basic Training for leading a small church into sustainable transformation.

As a rule, a pastor will need to spend the first five to seven years gaining the trust of the gatekeepers, matriarchs, and patriarchs. There's really no good shortcut to this task. Every successful transformation is based on a foundation of trust in the leadership, beginning with the pastor. When the congregational leaders believe the pastor can deliver what's been promised (in terms of mission and vision), they are more likely to follow. However, you must also be aware that:

- This is their church – and you had better not forget it.
- They are accustomed to making all the decisions.
- They are accustomed to pastors coming and going and using the church as a stepping-stone to something better.

Step one, therefore, is to spend the first year visiting in every home as often as possible. But you should know that you will not be able to continue this when the church reaches 150 in worship. By visiting in each home you accomplish several things. First, it allows you to get to know your congregation. But more than that, it helps you to get a lay of the land. Don't just plan on making just a nice, friendly, chit-chat visit. Your visit needs to have a point.

Ultimately, all growth starts with the pastor. You'll need to either become a catalyst or be content with the status quo. In some cases, leaving things alone may be the best option. All churches have a life cycle and ultimately, all churches close up shop, so to speak. Not a single church mentioned in the New Testament exists today. Whether a small church thrives, survives, or reaches demise largely depends on the calling of the pastor, the pastor's ability and willingness to live into that calling, and the willingness of the key leaders to welcome, or at least

endure, the pain of change – or the larger congregation’s willingness to stage a successful coup that dissipates the power from those key leaders.

In general, numerical growth begins when the pastor begins reaching out into the community and making connections with those who are beyond the current reach of the congregation. As s/he gets to know the unchurched and brings them into the congregation, the first few will likely be welcome additions to the church. However, as growth continues discomfort and anxiety will rise. This is a normal part of size transitions and the success or failure of sustainable growth will depend on how the leadership responds.

From the beginning, the pastor should be busy raising the expectation level of the members. It may have been a long time since they have seen a victory in the church and the congregational self-esteem is likely pretty low. They likely perceive that the church is small and weak and could not be any more than it is. Others prefer the status quo and will chafe as “their” church grows. You should expect complaints that the pastor is spending too much time with “outsiders” and neglecting the members. The *What about us?* chorus is a common refrain as the church grows.

You should be aware that the congregation’s low self-esteem and hesitance at following the current pastor into the mission field is because of their experiences with former pastors. Too often, small churches have called (hired) pastors who have caused great damage. Pastor-trust in many small churches has been eroded to critical levels. The reasons for the lack of trust are myriad, but may include former pastors who have pressed for change without preparing and guiding the congregation; retired pastors who took the job to supplement income, but didn’t invest in the ministries of the church (the “retired and not working even when paid to work” syndrome); pastors who took advantage of parishioners; and so on. These “skeletons” in the closet often haunt congregations for decades, especially in congregations that skipped the interim process (as many small congregations do).

In order to begin the transformation process, identify four to five key allies whose eyes light up when you cast a vision of a stronger church. Take the first two to four years to gather this group around you and equip them for spiritual warfare! Always have them up front between you and those who would do anything possible to keep the church dependent on them for their survival.

During your second or third year multiply single cells of the church into two cells. The jump between one adult class or one worship service is far larger and more difficult than the jump from two to three. This effort is not going to be a walk in the park. Small congregations are used to having “everyone” attending “everything” virtually “every time.” The fear that those in the congregation “won’t know everybody” is extremely strong in small churches, so you’ll have to finesse these changes – hence the reason we recommend waiting for at least two years before you begin this part of the process. Impatience will curtail your vision. Remember, the likelihood of success is pretty low, so don’t rush the foundation building. To do so will only sabotage the work.

## Obstacles to Growth

One of the most devastating experiences a leader can have is to be blindsided without warning. Just when you thought everything was going fine, WAP!!! and your ministry is suddenly in jeopardy. Knowing what obstacles are before you is the prelude to doing something about them. The following obstacles **must** be addressed if the church wants to grow.

1. An inward focused attitude is one of the biggest obstacles to growth.
  - Find ways to focus attention on the world outside.
2. The present satisfaction level is too good for change to occur. There is a correlation between discontent and the ability to cause change.
  - Look for people whose eyes light up when you talk about bringing more people into the Kingdom.
3. The more emphasis placed on participatory democracy the less likely the church is to grow. Decisions take too long and are rarely strategic.
  - The fewer people making decisions the better – large churches often have a decision-making team with as few as five members.
  - Avoid voting whenever possible. Remember, there were only two votes in the New Testament. In one case, it put the Messiah on the cross and in the other, the boat sank (Acts 28).
  - It is better to do something and say "I'm sorry, I didn't know that wasn't permitted" than to ask for permission. The saying "It's easier to get forgiveness than permission" is axiomatic for a reason.
4. The desire to know everyone gets in the way of attempting to reach more people.
  - Talk about the importance of everyone in the area knowing Christ.
5. Unified budgets keep the small church penniless.
  - Lead an all-church study of Lyle Schaller's book, *44 Ways to Increase the Financial Base of Your Church*.
  - Help them understand that young adults are accustomed to "user fees."
6. The savings syndrome keeps many small churches from using what money they have to establish new ministries. Many small churches will close over the next twenty years with money in the bank.
  - This is a difficult habit to break, especially with the Builder and Silent generations who experienced deprivation.
  - Jokingly ask those with whom you have a very good relationship to write out a Will describing who will receive what money is left.
7. Small Churches are a single-cell type of body. They are usually more of a group or family than an organization and thus are more closed than organizations. Indeed, in many

small churches it's been said that to get "into" the group is like having to commit felony breaking-and-entering. In addition, groups and families have fewer opportunities and positions of leadership for new members than an organization. All of this leads to an attitude that the health of the group or family is more important than adding new members.

- Begin to multiply anything that you can. If you have one adult Sunday School Class start two. If you have one worship service start two.
  - Starting a small group seldom causes any trouble.
8. Turf issues creates conflict or avoidance. It's not uncommon to hear "This is our church" or "our class" and a dichotomy is drawn between "us" and "them."
- Some congregations move adult classes around several times a year to avoid such a problem.
  - Introduce short-term, topic-based classes – and always offer at least two or three at a time to encourage a mixture of participants.
  - Talk about the issue in sermons.
9. The idols of the 20th century are our buildings. Even rearranging furniture can become problematic.
- The more in love with Christ they are the less they will be in love with their buildings.
  - Studies on the nature of the Church may also help.
  - Avoiding the use of memorial plaques makes it easier to move or change rooms or furniture.
10. Leaders of small churches have difficulty with goal-setting because it requires a different level of skills and it threatens them more than relationships do.
- Provide books for your leaders to read. Staff-Parish Relationship, Personnel, Finance, and all decision-making groups will benefit from reading Lyle Schaller's *The Larger Church and The Multiple Staff*. Many church leaders do not know how to function in a large church.
  - Ask your leaders to attend a strong, larger congregation and talk with some of the leadership.
  - Have your leaders read, *Unfreezing Moves*, by Bill Easum and see where your fall on the systems scale.
11. In general, the identity of a small churches comes from its past. Often decisions are made on new ministries based on past experiences rather than on present realities.
- Since history has both strength and weakness, look for ways to use the memory of the past to spur ministry in the present.
  - Help to see the past as it really was, not as it's romanticized to be. There has never been a "Golden Age" of the church – there have always been significant issues.

12. The advanced age of worshipers stifles growth. My experience is that once more than 50 percent of the worshipping congregation exceeds the age of sixty it becomes much harder to effect the changes needed to grow a church.<sup>1</sup>
  - Look for ways to help your leadership understand people born after 1980.
  - Lead the congregational leadership (board, council, session, vestry, etc.) through a study of *Grown Up Digital* by Don Tapscott, *How To Reach Secular People*, by George Hunter, and *Dancing With Dinosaurs*, by William Easum.
  
13. Many small church leaders have not assimilated the changes that have occurred in North America over the past thirty years. When they do think of growth they visualize recreating the 1950s.
  - Help them realize they now live on a new mission field.
  - Lead an all-church study on *Lost in America* by Tom Clegg and *Missional Church* by Reggie McNeal.
  
14. Gatekeepers welcome just enough people to keep the membership stable and to control what happens within the group. In addition, Patriarchs & Matriarchs adopt only a few like-minded people, keeping the church very homogenous.
  - As you introduce new people to the congregation, be sure to involve them in a small group that includes other “new” people. The pastor will likely be the leader of this small group.
  
15. The pastor is not really seen as one of the group and therefore has little leadership opportunity without a long tenure (this does not apply if the church is either on its back or has already made the decision to grow).
  - Are you willing to stay long enough to become one of the group?
  
16. The type and quality of music is often a hindrance. Too often the choir leader and organist have been doing their thing for thirty years.
  - This can be overcome by starting a new service with different people. Often new musicians will come out of the woodwork if you are persistent.
  - Look for musicians among the younger people within and outside of the church.
  
17. The choir often does its own thing without any regard for what is needed to grow the church. Often there is no connection between the choir and the pastor.
  - Seek to establish a close relationship with the choir director and do not let any opportunity go by without offering the choir leader retirement. Often they would like to retire but do not feel the church could survive without them.
  
18. Procedure is more sacred than experimentation. Reading and perfecting the minutes usually takes up a large block of time at meetings.
  - Encourage groups to focus on future events instead of past events.

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<sup>1</sup> The age and dates are current as of 2010. Please adjust accordingly.

- Encourage sharing committee reports in advance of general meeting and ask they be accepted “as presented” rather than taking time for reading or discussion. Do this for other business items as well, whenever possible.
19. Social agendas dominate meetings instead of decision making. The smaller the church the longer the meetings and the fewer the decisions.
- Take advantage of the time to develop relationships.
20. Quality programs are often not expected. Relationships count more. Moving from a small church to a larger church requires quality programs and relationships.
- Raise the expectation level. More on this later.
21. Individuals who may or may not be official leaders often make major decisions without any communication with the official leadership.
- Learn who the decision makers are and talk with them privately before and between meetings.
  - Build relationships with these unofficial leaders and cast your vision with them carefully ... these are the ones who can get “official” nods for changes if and when they see the need.
22. Everyone comes to every program. Small churches are used to few events with none of them occurring at the same time so that everyone can attend everything. Yet the only way to grow a small church is by diversifying and offering choices which result in too many events for everyone to go to everything.
- Help the long-term members realize it is okay not to go to everything.
  - Introduce them to the emerging world of choices – again, multiple groups and/or worship services will help in this area.
23. Power people surface at the first sight of change to ensure that established procedures and community values are not changed.
- Identify these people early ... and build relationships with as many of the keystone leaders as possible in order to smooth the way for future changes.
24. The top six problems are:
- Leadership/Congregational Spiritual Bankruptcy
  - Unresolved Conflict
  - Lack of Money
  - Low Morale
  - Lack of members
  - Pastoral tenure.
25. The four most common adversaries or road-blocks are:
- The choir and/or choir director
  - The trustees

- The key non-official decision maker
- The church treasurer

26. Unresolved corporate pain is usually present. Unresolved corporate pain has to do with problems in the past that have been swept under the rug and never dealt with.

- Preach, teach, and practice Matthew 18:15–17. See Church-Talk.com and BillTennyBrittian.com for resources in this regard.

27. The nursery has not been taken care of and/or often is non-existent.

- Consistency is paramount in who greets the children.
- Read and distribute the workbook *A Nursery for Our Times* (available at ChurchConsultations.com/cart)
- Read and distribute “The Three S’s of a Rockin’ Nursery” in the Mar-Apr issue of Net Results magazine (NetResults.org).

28. Generational conflicts often keep young adults from joining.

- Learn to be a non-anxious presence ... and help mend fences when possible. (This is a dicey proposition, so longevity and caution will be absolutely necessary.)

## Changes Needed to Grow a Church

Although it seems counterintuitive, it's infinitely easier to introduce change to a large church than it is to a small church. However, to bring a small church to strength and health always means bringing significant change. Making changes, even seemingly minor ones, will raise the angst of the congregation so it is generally best to move cautiously after building longevity and establishing alliances.

### *The Small Church and the Pastor*

The relationship between the small church and its pastor is unlike any other organization. In general, most small churches expect their pastor to be at their beck and call 24/7 – we often call this the Pastor-Fetch syndrome. Most small church pastors serve as personal chaplains for the church members, and the only leadership they actually provide can be likened to Britain's royal family: a figurehead that presides over official events, but has no power beyond their relationships. This is problematic for a pastor called to grow and strengthen the small church.

Like the previous section, the following section explores issues and possible solutions.

1. Relationships take precedence over performance. The small church is more interested in having a good relationship with the pastor than how well the pastor functions.
  - The small church needs both relationship and performance from the pastor in order to grow.
2. The pastor is often viewed as the "Servant of the servants of the Lord." Many lay people view the pastor as their servant. This leads to the personal chaplaincy model and results in pastors spending enormous amounts of time with a handful of people.
  - Remind the people that you serve Christ in their midst. Resist spending large blocks of time with a few people.
  - If you want to grow the church, you will have to have a wide range of solid relationships instead of a narrow range of deep relationships.
3. The pastor performs the tribal rites of all the kinfolk. The small church expects the pastor to take responsibility for all the relatives of the members no matter where they live.
  - The more you can avoid this and survive the better.
  - Never forget that everyone may be related.
4. The more programs a pastor starts the shorter the pastor usually stays.
  - New programs rarely fuel sustainable growth.
  - Be strategic in what programs you begin.
  - Relationships, relationships, relationships ... both with the key leaders in the church and with those beyond the walls and reach of the church.
5. Small Churches do not financially support pastor's programs.



- Your vision must become a shared vision. Talk about it every opportunity you get.
  - Consider starting the Five Percent Club. Invite a group of twenty dedicated members who are willing to give 5 percent of the cost of a special project no more than twice a year. They will receive an explanation of the need and vote on it. If at least thirteen approve the project, all twenty are expected to contribute an equal share of the cost, not to exceed \$250 per person per proposal. The maximum gift in a year would be \$500. Potential members of the Five Percent Club should be invited to participate via a letter.
  - In addition, invite members to be Angels. These are individuals who are willing to be approached individually once a year about a special need. Each angel would determine in advance the maximum amount of the gift. It may be as little as \$1,000 or as much as \$100,000. After hearing the proposal, the donor may decide whether or not to contribute and how much. Angel participants would be invited using the same letter as the Five Percent Club.
  - One reason so few small churches are transformed is because the pastor is unprepared to make significant asks. Don't presume the church's membership is impoverished just because the church coffers are. Learn to become comfortable making significant asks. Creating the Five Percent Club and recruiting Angels can help your comfort level.
  - Lead a study in J. Clif Christopher's *Not Your Parents' Offering Plate*.
6. Face to face ministries are essential. Home visitation is one of the main ways this is achieved. However, you do not want to do this as the church grows.
- See "Transformational Leadership at the Margins. Part 1: Good Beginnings Beget Transformation Possibilities" in the July-August 2010 issue of *Net Results* magazine (NetResults.org).
7. An open door policy is expected, even at home.
- Slowly work toward setting aside blocks of time for study, prayer, and strategy.
  - Talk in terms of the more open your door the fewer people you can see.
  - Never forget that small church pastors live in glass houses – behave and speak carefully.
8. The pastor is expected to be omnipresent.
- You will have to make time for the unchurched. The church will not help you.
  - Consider which meetings you can miss and not hurt your ministry.
  - Don't prop up ministries or committees that are failing; just let them die if they aren't important.
9. Small churches do not want the Christmas Eve format changed. This is a very special time for the family and newcomers are not easily assimilated.

- When possible, host two Christmas Eve services to provide alternatives for the community.
10. Small churches often pay as little as will get someone. This guarantees a revolving door of transitional pastors.
    - If you're called to the transformational pastor, be ready to make a commitment for the long haul. Consider your financial well-being *before* accepting a call to a small church. And, keep in mind that if you're successful you will be rewarded in the future.
  11. The pastor is a pilgrim passing through, who is never really one of "them."
    - The only way to change this is to build long-lasting relationships and to build trust. This takes time – typically five to seven years. If you're not going to stay for the long run, you'll need to consider alternatives to leading as an insider – or else be content with the status quo.
  12. The pastor is only one of several leaders. Rarely can a pastor alone lead change in a small church.
    - Who are the change agents in your church? Discover them, nurture them, and help them be the flying wedge between you and those who resist change.
  13. The pastor's family is treated special.
    - Leaders on pedestals aren't leaders ... they're figureheads at best and idols at worst.
    - The more you foster being treated special the less effective you will be. Build honest and transparent relationships. Servants do not accept special treatment. It makes you a slave instead of a servant of Christ.
  14. The pastor's spouse is likely considered part of the package.
    - Spouses should be free to develop as they choose.
    - The spouse should volunteer of their own volition and according to their personal calling, rather than filling in "where needed."
  15. Long-term pastorates are viewed by laity in one of two ways. Either the pastor is staying so long because of incompetency or the pastor is staying so long that her/his presence is becoming threatening.
    - From the beginning teach and preach about long-term leadership. Cite Moses, David, Elijah, and others as biblical models.
  16. The church treasurer is often an adversary. The treasurer may be the one who gives or withholds permission for new ideas because of how the person interprets the financial picture to the congregation.
    - Become familiar with solid business practices and entrepreneurship.
    - Learn to speak the language of risk balanced with investment.

- Paint the funding of the vision in terms of investment and ROI (return on investments).
17. The pastor is expected to be a "hugger."
- If you're not a hugger, don't accept a call to a small church or else learn to "get over it."
18. Professional skills are a barrier. The smaller the church the more likely the congregation is unskilled and blue collar. This places a barrier between them and the seminary-trained pastor. One-third of the largest churches in North America have non-seminary trained pastors.
- Don't mistake unskilled with ignorant or stupid. Many, if not most, small church parishioners are sharp cookies who can smell phony, patronizing, or subterfuge long before it steps into the pulpit.
  - Don't dumb down anything ... but do speak the language of the community. If you don't know agribusiness, learn it if you're in a rural setting; learn manufacturing in an industrial parish; learn to speak in their metaphor if you plan on communicating the vision effectively.
19. Often the pastor is a sprinter, and the church is a long distance runner. The pastor wants to make changes before the congregation is ready.
- Purchase a figurine or painting of the tortoise and the hare fable and keep it in sight. Always.
20. Small churches seldom provide adequate continuing education for pastor.
- Start with what you can get and work to increase it each year.
  - Make use of the many free and low cost resources associated with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies, Net Results, Church-Talk, and FlipYourChurch.com.
21. The primary role of the pastor in church growth is to cast a vision of a new Canaan.
- What can be is better than what is or what has been.
  - New life comes to each of us on its way to someone else. If we pass it on, we blossom. If we keep it too ourselves, we lose it.
  - The primary task is to focus the leadership on the world outside the windows of the church. One way to focus on this is to introduce them to the Ever-Widening Circle in Acts 1:8. For more, see *The Church Growth Handbook*, by William Easum.
  - As you ready the congregation for growth, preach through the book of Acts. See the preaching series recommendation in "Transformational Leadership at the Margins. Part 1: Good Beginnings Beget Transformation Possibilities" in the July–August 2010 issue of *Net Results* magazine (NetResults.org).
  - Read Bill Easum's book *Preaching for Church Transformation* from Abingdon Press.

## *Things to Watch Out For as the Church Grows*

The old saying “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans” is often mirrored in the transition of the small church. No matter how careful you are something is going to go awry. Indeed, there’s yet to be a truly “textbook” church transformation – every congregation and every transformation attempt is as different as one snowflake from another. However, there are some textbook issues that are likely to leap out at you as the congregation experiences growth. Forewarned is forearmed.

1. As the church grows, the pastor will run out of discretionary time. Either the pastor works with the older members and ignores the newer people or the pastor works with the newer people and ignores the older members. There are two solutions.
  - Add staff.
  - Equip the laity to do much of the pastoral care work.
2. Be ready to change your pastoral style when the church approaches 150 in worship.
  - In relation to hospital visitation. If you’re in an aging community this task alone can quickly monopolize your time. Hand this task off and minimize your involvement (you’ll likely be unable to completely end your participation).
  - Time spent with baptism, weddings, etc. As you gain staff, hand this off. In addition, if you insist on pre-marital counseling, contract with a professional counselor to take over this task.
  - Developing deep relationships with a few members. These should be your key leaders.
  - Be ready to hand off many of the ministries you’re expected to do.
3. Watch for the inevitable rift between the long-term members and the newer, active members. Be prepared to be characterized as uncaring and neglectful by long-term members.
  - Expect this when the control of the older members begins to crumble. This will be inevitable as worship attendance approaches “double” the “normal” attendance.
  - As the pastor’s time is redirected to the tasks of transition and growth, the personal chaplaincy model will begin to erode. This will fuel the claims of neglect.
  - Remember that most of the older members just want to be assured they will not lose their "place" within the family.
  - Involve as many of the long-timers as possible in the assimilation of the new members. Creating a culture of “adoption” where long-timers take a new member family under their wing will go a long ways towards integration.
4. Don't be surprised if some of the pillars of the church become disenchanted with the pastor about the fourth or fifth year.
  - Remember, they are not mad at you. They are mad about change.

- Engage in due diligence and know your congregational history. Generally your recent pastoral predecessors will have similar tenure (from eighteen months to four years or so). As your tenure approaches that “magic” number expect an increase in discomfort and conflict. Remaining as the pastor beyond the average tenure is difficult at best. Don’t be shy about preparing both leadership and the congregation well in advance of that date so you can remind them of those conversations when the tension builds. The expectation of the issue may be enough to carry your ministry through these critical months.
5. New members are likely to be more committed to the pastor than to the church for the first two to four years of their membership.
    - Encourage them to relate to the congregation instead of the pastor.
    - Help foster relationships with others in the congregation. New folks will more naturally develop an affinity with other new folks than with the long-timers. However, without a transfer of loyalty to the church – including to the long-timers – they are likely to flee when the pastor leaves.
  6. New members are unlikely to “stand up” to long-time members when conflict arises.
    - This is one of the key reasons small church rarely become middle-sized churches.
    - Before the magic “double attendance” number is in view, and the inevitable conflict begins brewing, develop a small covenant group with your new members (and long-term spiritually grounded members who fully support the vision, the changes, and the growth). Create a covenant of loyalty to the church, to the vision, to spiritual practices, and to the transformational process. This group will need to meet regularly, preferably weekly, for prayer, study, and sharing life together (see Acts 2:42–47). This group will be the core and hope of the congregation’s future if it remains true to the covenant through the difficult transition time.

### *Small Church and Morale*

1. Most small churches grossly underestimate their size. For example, a church with 75 in worship is larger than 69.1 percent of all protestant churches. See page 136 of *The Church Growth Handbook*, by William Easum, for a complete list of the sizes of churches. The percentages are close enough for all protestant churches to be accurate.
  - Show them the list on page 136 and ask them to discuss how it makes them feel.
  - Remind them of what Amos and Jesus said: "To whom much has been given of them will much be required."
  - Raise the expectation level they have for one another and those who take responsibility within the church.
  - Work toward beginning a system of accountability.

2. Small churches often have low self-esteem for a variety of reasons. We're convinced the major reason is they have not had any victories to celebrate in so long, they have convinced themselves they are "just a small church."
  - Identify, create, or manufacture some victories and then celebrate them. This was the most important thing I (Bill E) did in turning Colonial Hills around from a small, dying church to a strong, large church.
  - Ask them to read the Acts of the Apostles to see what happens to a church when God's Spirit works in and through it.
  - Encourage them to pray for God's power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to work in their church.
3. Most small churches focus on their problems when planning. Thus, they are deflated before they start.
  - Start the planning process by concentrating on the positive issues. Make a list of the strengths of the church.
  - Move to focusing on the most obvious needs of the area around the church.
4. Many small churches receive financial subsidies. Several studies have shown, over the years, that long-term subsidies ruin almost everything. Churches should not receive subsidies for more than three years.
  - Encourage the church to pray for ways to get off any subsidies.
5. Many small churches have mixed feelings about their pastors. Because they are small they usually get pastors just starting, about to retire, or those who can not make it anywhere else. Rarely do they have a pastor who has decided that the small church is where she/he wants to be for life.
  - Make a decision to "bloom where you are planted" or move on as soon as possible.
  - Approach each day as if you were going to be the pastor of this church until you die.
  - Never look at the church as if it were only a stepping stone to a "real" field of service.
  - Help them believe in the future.
6. They remember the past. Often small churches were once larger churches. For many members of small churches the culture has changed far too much to suit their tastes.
  - Focus them on the future. Ask them to dream of a better day.

## Getting Started

Everything we've said up until this point has been to help you face the reality that leading a small church to strength, health, focus, and faithfulness is a ministry fraught with heart aches and difficulty for even the best prepared pastor and congregation. However, it's not an impossible task, as Paul reminds us in Philippians, we can do anything through Christ ... and we would add "to those who are called." If you're not called specifically to engage in the ministry of transforming a small church, it's possible to do more harm than good – indeed, we see this far too often.

So, if you're called to be a catalyst, or if you're a congregational leader considering the possibility of engaging this work, the rest of this workbook will help you get started. Heed the words carefully. Return here often. And do not lose hope. Transformation isn't a sprint. And it isn't even a marathon. It's a labor of love and the journey of a lifetime.

1. Embrace the Pareto Principle, AKA the 80–20 rule.
  - Eighty percent of what you need to accomplish is achieved by 20 percent of what you do. This means you'll need to prioritize your commitments. If you can do this from the beginning of your ministry, you'll be well ahead. If you're mid-course, you'll have to ease into this a little at a time.
  - Twenty percent of the people do 80 percent of the work. The converse of this is that a very different 20 percent segment of the congregation will demand 100 percent of your time engaging in unproductive ministry. Ultimately, where, how, and with whom you choose to spend your time will play a large part in determining the success or failure of the congregation's transformation.
  - Burn out is an ever-present specter in the small church. If the working 20-percenters invest their time on busywork and/or non-producing ministry and mission, burnout can be expected. Help the 20-percenters divest of more than one leadership position and limit the number of ministries/events/missions they assist or support.
2. List every activity that the church is involved in. Be sure to include everything.
  - When your list is complete, evaluate the spiritual and numerical fruit that each activity is producing. This fruit must be specific, observable, and measureable. Just because six people attend a weekly luncheon that offers a time of prayer requests does not mean that it is increasing the spiritual fruit of the participants. (Are they markedly more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, gentle, faithful, and/or self-controlled than last year because of their participation in the group?)
  - Try to invest your time only in those activities that bear fruit. This means you will need to stop supporting a sacred cow or two (just try telling the Quilt for Fun or Fish on Fridays group that you have to limit your participation). This may take some time, but it is absolutely critical that you invest your leadership resources

wisely.

3. Create two lists: On one, list every conceivable growth potential ministry and mission for your church that the church currently is engaged in. On the second, list every conceivable growth potential ministry and mission that the church isn't doing. Be certain each of these ideas would result in measurable spiritual and/or numerical growth. Once you've completed the lists, rank each item in terms of maximum measurable results.
4. Select the top three candidates from each list and evaluate them from a contextual standpoint. Ask yourself, "Which of these would work best in this congregation and this community at this time ..."
  - ... without engaging in a building campaign;
  - ... within the congregation's resource potential. Consider money, personnel, and skills; and
  - ... without counting on projected resources from new members.
5. Synthesize your best ideas into no more than two core ministries. Core ministries are those ministries that are as important to continue as worship. These ministries are passed on from lay person to lay person, clergy to clergy. A core ministry is anything that is considered so important that no matter who the pastor is or what the skill level of the laity is, the program continues. The most helpful tool available to determine the viability of which new ministries to begin and which ones to drop is the MissionInsite or Percept demo- and psycho- graphic reports. See the Resource List at the back of this workbook.
6. At this point, you should have no more than four core ministries to contend with: (1) Worship; (2) Sunday School or small groups; (3–4) Two Potential Ministries. From here on out, 80 percent of the congregation and your time and resource allocations should be spent on these.
7. Do not dilute these efforts. The church's tendency is for the prevailing system to thwart attempts to change the way it functions. Only if you intentionally resist will the system not divert your efforts into doing things that will perpetuate the status quo.
8. Evaluate each of these core ministries monthly, quarterly, and annually. Strengthen those showing the most promise and end those that fail to produce significant, measurable results.
9. Presuming that the church is experiencing at or near the expected growth, the congregation should develop a new core ministry every three years and/or prior to each significant growth barrier (50, 100, 200, 350) unless you have decided to focused only on worship, small groups, and outreach.



10. Give core projects time to work and mature. It is not unusual for this to take two years or more. One way to ensure that a core ministry has the opportunity to reach its potential is to get “buy-in” permission for a specific trial period of no less than one year. There are two reasons for the one-year rule. First, at the end of one year, you should have enough data and experience to make an educated guess whether or not the ministry will provide the measurable results necessary to maintain core-ministry status. Second, a one year trial virtually ensures that the project will have been embedded by a core segment of the congregation and is thus unlikely to be a candidate for spontaneous elimination (the adage “Do it once, it’s an innovation; do it twice, it’s normal; do it three times, and it’s become a tradition” comes into play here).

## Workable Programs

1. Multiply all cells possible. This is mentioned again because it is the most important issue facing the small church. A single cell church cannot and will not experience significant growth.
2. Christian Day Care is still one of the most significant opportunities for reaching the community. It is also easy for many churches to begin.
  - Is there a need for Christian Day Care? It doesn't matter if there are other day cares in the area. If they are not run by churches, they are no competition to a Church Day Care.
  - Do the demographics suggest a Day Care? They do if there is a high concentration of parents working outside the home and the number of children under five is close to the national average.
  - The church can start the Day Care by hiring a director/teacher combination. This core ministry *must* be run by paid staff. It should pay for itself except in missional situations.
  - Make the Day Care Director should be accountable to the pastor or the person in charge of education. Do *not* give the hiring and firing responsibilities to a Day Care Board.
  - Alternatives to Day Care include a Parents Day Out or Pre-school.
  - Work toward 7 percent of these parents joining the church during the time they have their children enrolled. Make sure that at least once a year the children do a musical in worship and their parents are invited.
  - Provide Chapel for the children once a week. Many of them will never have been in a church. This service should be 100 percent age appropriate – this is not your opportunity to indoctrinate the children into the “traditions” of the church. Children should sing music relevant to their age and understanding, learn applicable Christian principles appropriate to their development stages, and engage in Christian practices that are life transforming in order of hands–heart–head.
  - The Day Care should send home a weekly flier/newsletter than lets the parents know what's going on at “school” and how it connects to the church. Design sermon series and events that would be of interest to these parents and invite them. Parents should receive some sort of notice/invitation every week.
3. Consider an extended vacation bible school. Conduct VBS as often as possible. If the church has money, it can have VBS all summer in the form of an all-day Summer Camp on the property. It can charge for this, and will recoup much if not all of the cost.
4. Two or three weeks before VBS, parade through an area you wish to draw from. Use old cars, convertibles, trucks, balloons, free passes to VBS, clowns, and so on. Be sure to include children, youth, and adults.

5. Small group ministries cost the church very little and are rarely seen as a threat to the balance of power. Develop these small groups in both homes the workplace, when possible. Embed the expectation that each group will replicate every six to nine months. For the materials needed to begin such a ministry see L.I.F.E. Groups Workbook, the Small Group Training Webinars from 21st Century Strategies, and Go Big with Small Groups, by Easum and Atkinson.
6. Prayer ministries are essential and do not cost anything. Shut-ins and elderly members can participate. Work toward people gathering before Sunday morning worship to pray for God's Spirit to be felt during worship. Train people to be available for prayer after the worship service and have these people come to the front at the end of the service and let the people know they are available.
7. Bible studies are always possible. Studies such as *Disciple Bible*, *Trinity Bible*, *Bethel Bible*, *Serendipity*, and *Krygma* should be considered. The *Disciple Bible* and *Serendipity* studies depend on a facilitator rather than a leader and requires minimal preparation.
8. A Gift Ministry provides a personal touch. This is where laity deliver a plant, bread, or some gift made or grown by the congregation to first-time guests within twenty-four hours of their visit. They are requested not to go inside. These are Door Step Visits.
9. A Magi Ministry. This is similar to the Gift Ministry, but is a Christmas Eve event. Be sure to register attendance during the Christmas Eve service/s and take them a gift following the service. If Wise Men and Wise Women can do the drop off in costume and in character, all the better.
10. Bring a Friend Sunday or Double-Day can be done twice a year. Visit 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies for these programs. A Double Day campaign can be found in our store. The goal of the Double Day is to double the first time visitors and retain them.
11. Strengthen the Sunday School by beginning new classes any time.
  - Ask members who have computers they are no longer using to donate them to the Sunday School for the children's classes.
  - Ask each class to recruit a "shepherd" to contact any guests visiting the class.
12. Youth Ministries can be achieved with either money or lots of youth. If you don't have one or the other, do not try to start a youth program. Allocate your resources wisely (see the Getting Started section).
  - Enlist youth as Sunday School teachers. Small churches often do not have enough youth for a Sunday School class. In these cases, encourage the youth to teach younger children in the Sunday School. They will learn and grow even more this way.
    - Each youth will need a mentor to help disciple them. Note, the mentor must not be a micromanager. Younger children will learn eagerly from

youth, but in general the youth have a natural understanding of the learning style and developmental stages of their charges. Allow and encourage innovative teaching practices.

- Develop the youth into small groups rather than Sunday School. These small groups should be organized similarly, but not identical, to adult small groups.
- Strengthen adult participation in the youth experiences and foster mentoring opportunities. Youth respond well to young adults (college age) and often to folks their grandparents' age (if the seniors are open, non-judgmental, listening-learners).
- Adults should speak to youth during fellowship times and show their interest by listening more than talking.
- Encourage youth fund raisers.
  - It is income outside the unified budget.
  - Often fund raisers are entry points for new youth.
- Equip the older youth to mentor the younger youth members, i.e. 12th mentor the 10th grade and 7th grade, 11th mentor the 9th grade, 10th mentor the 8th grade.

13. When a Sunday School is a viable core ministry, any improvements will benefit the small church.

- The teacher is the curriculum.
- Inter-generational works.
- It is okay to have several children's grades together when the church is less than 150 in worship.
- Consider using fast-paced VBS materials rather than the "sit in a circle and read a story" kind of curriculum in order to keep children focused and engaged.
- Even better is to go to a children's worship where you have songs, a video, story-telling and then small groups to discuss what they learned.

14. Begin an Evangelism Team of eight to ten people.

- Choose the members carefully. Do not have them appointed or elected.
- Only those interested in reaching people, not in helping the church survive.
- The primary purpose of the team is to model and champion practical evangelism throughout the congregation.
- Meetings should be only for training and encouragement, not business.
- Use the Hitchhikers' Guide to Evangelism Training modules available from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies to train the team and expand their influence in the congregation.
- Try to get everyone in the congregation signed up to the Daily Motivational (available at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies and [HitchhikersGuideToEvangelism.com](http://HitchhikersGuideToEvangelism.com)).

15. Concentrate on first time guests. If first time visitors are showing up, responding to them is the most important thing a pastor can do. The pastor should visit each visiting household within twenty-four hours ... and best results are experienced when the pastor

spends his/her Sunday afternoon making the door-step visit (see Gift Ministry above to increase effectiveness).

- Contact all first time guests 4 to 6 times in the first two weeks. Studies show that friendly, brief calls on first time visitors within thirty-six hours after they attend will cause 85 percent of them to return the following week. If this home visit is made within seventy-two hours, 60 percent of return. If it is made more than seven days later, 15 percent return. If the pastor makes this call, each result is cut in half. A phone call by a layperson or the pastor instead of a personal visit cuts results by 80 percent. This immediate response is the most important factor in reaching first time visitors.
- When you have enough guests, hold a guest party in the parsonage so they can get to know the pastor.
- Provide coffee, juice, and water close enough to where people come in and out of worship so they can see it. Today's hospitality practices expects beverage and snack services to extend into the worship space ... the "No Food or Drinks in the Sanctuary" signs need to come down and be replaced with "Your Comfort Is Our First Priority."
- Give guests a personal invitation to all church dinners and events.
- Put the guests on the mailing list the first time they visit – and keep them on at least three to four months if they don't return.

16. Whenever there's a new addition to a family, put a picture of the baby on a prominent bulletin board that reads, "The newest member of First Church."

17. Provide an attractive, up-to-date Guest Packet to give to each guest.

18. Make sure you have an up-to-date, attractive website. In today's world, over 85 percent of all first-time visitors view a church's website before they visit. Your home page should prominently display the address of the church (and link it to a map on Google, Yahoo, etc.) and the day and times of services. If you will not have time to keep up with changing events, such as Vacation Bible School, etc., do not put them on the website. It is better to have no information than to have outdated information.

- Get a Domain Name (URL) that makes sense. OSBCCOTX.org (Our Savior's Baptist Church, Columbia, Texas) is little more than alphabet soup. Also, refrain from dashes and underscores. In addition, when possible, purchase the .org, .com, and .net domains in order to keep yourself from being embarrassed ... as the White House was when it relied on WhiteHouse.gov and opted to "save money" by not purchasing WhiteHouse.com (and someone put a porn site on the domain ... that has since been removed).

19. Free up the pastor from so many meetings and give him/her permission to spend 70% of his/her time evangelism including advertising and demographic study, and contacting those who visit.

20. At least ten to twenty people should be trained and practicing personal evangelism within a year (see the Beginning an Evangelism Team for more information).
21. Discontinue the practice of individually acknowledging new guests in worship. For additional hospitality ideas, see the FlipYourChurch.com Hospitality training series (available through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies).
22. Greeters can either be a boon or bane for the growth of a church. If all of the greeters are long term members born before 1960, young adults tend not to return. If all the Greeters do is hand out bulletins, they are helpful, but largely ineffective in providing a positive first-impression. It would be better if the Ushers and Greeters were part of the worship team and understood that this is their ministry and it does not stop until well after the service is over and the last guest/member has left the parking lot. They monitor things like the temperature of the room, latecomers, special furniture needs for the various services, the candies, helping people find their way from or to Sunday School or the parking lot before or after worship, etc. It is also good if the Ushers and Greeters meet before the service for prayer and perhaps a short Bible lesson. For additional hospitality ideas, including Greeter, Usher, and Host training see the FlipYourChurch.com Hospitality training series (available through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies).

## Modeling the Larger Church

1. There's a maxim that suggests if you want to become wealthy, hang out with wealthy people (because their values and behaviors will rub off on you). The same is true of church growth. If you're committed to growing your church, you'll have to model the next size church *before* you get to that size.
  - First, find a healthy, growing church of the next size you're working towards. It is not at all important if it's in the same denomination as you ... good church growth practices are cross-denominational. Then either convince the pastor to mentor you, or at least be intentional about hanging out with him/her. Pay particular attention to how they spend their time and what their priorities are.
  - Visualize what things will be like when the congregation is twice its current size. Ask yourself what you would have to start doing and stop doing at that size – and then make those shifts now. Consider the following:
    - If you are inviting announcements and prayer requests from the congregation during worship, quit doing it.
    - If you are spending significant time visiting in the hospital, with shut-ins, and in-home member calling, find ways to hand that off to someone else.
    - If you are requiring three counseling sessions before marrying someone, quit. You can't do that when you grow to 200.
  - As you reach around one hundred in worship, shift your leadership practices to accommodate the new paradigm in one of these two ways (depending on how you've led up until this point).
    - If you have been coordinating with individual "doers" of ministry in order to launch and maintain programs and projects, begin developing teams and working with the group in order to include more people and to develop new leaders.
    - If you have been coordinating with effective ministry teams, begin removing yourself from team meetings in order to mentor and coach the team leaders one-on-one, helping them to increase their leadership effectiveness.
2. Begin planning events two years in advance. Most small churches respond to things as they happen, leaving them unable to explore new and innovative ministries, as well as leaving them at the mercy of the urgent rather than the important. Begin by calendaring, but before you do, get the school system's calendar, the community calendar, your middle judicatory calendar, your denominational calendar, and of course a national and Christian holiday calendar. Refer to these calendars before you schedule anything ... there's nothing like scheduling your Family Camp the same weekend the schools hold graduation. Begin by scheduling important services such as Christmas Eve, Easter, VBS Show Day, or whatever you and your congregation consider the annual "key" worship services. Then schedule events designed to reach the community such as block parties, etc. Once these events are on the calendar, develop teams to embark on

planning in earnest.

3. Begin to pay your pastor enough to stay long enough to grow the church. This is an investment in the congregation's future, not a frivolous waste of emergency "rainy day" funds.
4. If it is impossible to increase the salary as the church grows, consider calling a lay pastor. Many lay pastors are exceptionally competent and are both willing and able to stay longer. (Recent research indicates that lay pastors are as likely, and in many cases more likely, to grow a church than their ordained colleagues.)
5. Free up the pastor from meetings and personal chaplaincy duties to have time to strategize and work with the unchurched. The pastor of churches under 200 should be spending 70 percent of their time following up with prospective members and networking with the unchurched.
6. Concentrate on building upon the strengths of the congregation and spend less than 20 percent of your energy trying to shore-up the weaknesses (the sole exception to this is conflict – conflict must be dealt with as soon as possible).
  - Avoid talking about the shortage of money in worship. Strong, healthy, focused, faithful churches look for ways to increase the income streams rather than becoming more efficient and cutting expenditures. Small churches are often more concerned about saving money than reaching people – this attitude guarantees the church will not grow.
7. Constantly ask "Who are the people out there?" However, do not rely on the congregation's perceptions ... or your own, for that matter. People "see" their community through lenses that are tinted by experience. Invest in demographics and psychographics from either MissionInsite or Percept and rely on the data rather than what you "see."
8. Start new core ministries as suggested earlier.
9. Start new small groups as often as possible. This is easily facilitated by starting limited-duration small groups of six to thirteen weeks, taking a two to four week break, and then reconfiguring. However, the church should also encourage long-term groups as well. The goal is to provide multiple options, as well as to offer multiple entrance opportunities by new people into the church.
10. Spend instead of save. Keep track of the people more than the money.



## Ponderables for Becoming a Middle Size Church

Becoming a middle sized church isn't simply a matter of putting a couple of programs into place and waiting for the unchurched in the community to line up for Sunday services. Making the shift to a mid-sized church demands an intentional paradigm shift that not only includes adopting a new attitude towards attracting and retaining guests, but a whole new way of "doing" church, especially in terms of how decisions are made, programming is planned and executed, and how the church allocates its resources of time, talent, treasure, and testimony. The list below are points for smaller church leaders to ponder as they consider "what it will take" to move from a small church mentality to a practicing strong, healthy, focused, faithful mid-sized church

- Is our church known for something within the community beyond our denominational ties?
- Do we offer ministries that have special and specific appeal to people who are not active in the life of *any* church?
- Are we clear about who we are trying to reach as new members?
- How would we rate the quality and the role of music in worship? More importantly, how would the average unchurched person in the community rate the quality and role of the music program?
- What kinds of first impressions do our guests receive? If you don't know, engage the services of a "Secret Shopper" (see the Secret Shopper at 21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategies).
- How do we specifically welcome guests and how do we respond to their ideas?
- Do we have a regular team of greeters?
- Is our pastor leading the parade in church growth?
- How many worship choices do we offer people on Sunday morning?
- Does our staff equal one program staff for every 100-125 in worship?
- Do we have a list of potential new members and does this list equal at least fifty for every one hundred members?
- Are important decisions made by leaders who are involved and intimately familiar with the ministry in question, or does a centralized leadership group (the board/council/session/vestry) get involved in most decision-making?

## Staffing the Small Church

1. Should we have an ordained or lay pastor? Churches with seventy-five or less in worship located in sparsely populated areas often do better with a lay pastor.
  - Be as diligent calling a lay pastor as you would an ordained person. Many small churches suffer from low self-worth and believe that “no one would want to be our pastor” and so they leap into a pastoral relationship with the first person who shows any interest in them. We have seen too many churches call ill-equipped and even immoral men and women because they wanted to have “someone” be their pastor.
  - Check references. Check the candidate’s track record ... if they haven’t led someone to Jesus in the last year, they’re not likely to start just because you call them as pastor. If they’ve been in ministry for awhile, how long is their average tenure – if they move every two years, there’s probably a reason.
  - Ask them what they have built in the past- a business, a youth program, etc.
2. The total salaries need to remain under 60 percent of the budget. Many small churches make the mistake of engaging pastors they can’t afford. It is totally okay (fine, good, smart) to invest in a catalytic pastor, but do so by funding the salary for a minimum of three years. If the salary package will exceed the 60 percent mark, then fund the excess from savings, endowments, additional pledges, etc.
3. If you are left with the choice of hiring a bi-vocational pastor or entering into a multiple charge (yoked congregations) option, choose the bi-vocational option. Studies have shown that when congregations are yoked, the weaker church drains the stronger church and both churches suffer. (See *The Alternatives* for more information on yoked congregations.) There are good reasons to opt for a bi-vocational minister.
  - They are available all day Sunday. This is the most important relational time.
  - They are closer to lay people in their thinking and life experience.
  - If they will live and work locally, they will develop relationships with the unchurched in the community.
  - They stay longer.
  - They cost less than an ordained pastor.
7. Do not hire a pastor for less than twenty-five hours a week. For a church to experience growth, the pastor will need to spend at least that much time in the community working for the church. Again, at least 75 percent of that time must be spent in evangelism and unchurched-networking.
8. If a congregation is committed to growth, members of the congregation will need to step-up to handle most administrative details as servant leaders, rather than as compensated hirelings. Until the average worship attendance is over one-hundred the church should only have one paid staff person –the pastor. Congregational volunteers will need to staff the office, produce the bulletins, play the piano, lead the choir, count

the money, track contributions, pay bills, update the website, clean the building, cut the grass, and so on. The money saved from salaries and wages should be used for community connections.

9. When you reach one hundred in worship, the following staff positions should be added. The pastor should be tasked with finding these hires and s/he should be their supervisor. If the board feels the need to be involved beyond developing the salary package, it should be limited to providing an approval of the hire. The pastor should have the sole responsibility for the performance of these hires ... and should have the authority to remove an employee without board interference. However, the pastor must be held responsible for his/her leadership and supervision. The following positions should be added in the order presented – and the first is critical for the growth of the congregation.
  - A part-time worship leader. This hire is not a choir director, pianist, or organist. The worship leader should be hired to help put together and lead the first contemporary worship service.
  - A part-time administrative assistant. The primary job of this person is to help ensure the ministry details are taken care of, but by coordinating rather than by doing. Do not make the mistake of hiring “doers.” Doers “do” ministry, but rarely multiply anything. From the beginning only hire leaders who know how to recruit, mentor, coach, and encourage<sup>2</sup> those who “do” ministry. The last thing this person should be doing is creating the bulletin, printing it, and folding it. When working with a catalytic pastor, the assistant should also help him/her keep organized – from the one hundred level, the pastor will have to juggle more details than one person can effectively manage.
  - Resist the temptation to hire an age-graded specialist. The biggest mistake most small churches make is hiring a youth leader. This almost always cripples a church’s potential. If you must hire an age-graded specialist, hire a children’s minister who has demonstrated ability to develop a dynamic (not just adequate or good) growing children’s ministry. Again, this person must not be a doer but a leader who is able to cast vision, recruit, mentor, coach, and encourage those who will “do” the ministry.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the word “encourage” in the biblical sense that it’s not just an “atta-boy or atta-gal.” Encouragement includes inviting and facilitating spiritual maturity, personal growth, and “job” productivity and performance.

## Finances

Finances in a small church can be one of the causes of the most hideous headaches. Some small churches have multiple bank accounts that are managed by various ministries (especially the women, men, and youth ministries). In some churches, the board can only make financial recommendations and the trustees, typically comprising a very small number of long-time members, manage the money ... and ultimately can approve or disapprove almost any ministry. We know of churches where the treasurer has refused to write the pastor's paycheck, who treat the money as if it was their personal treasure trove that must be guarded at all costs. Many small churches have financial gatekeepers who were raised with a paucity mindset, often because they either remember the Great Depression or whose parents instilled that fear within them. However, if a small church is going to become strong, healthy, focused, and faithful, it will have to shift its financial paradigm from poverty to prosperity, from save to invest, from safety to risk. To do otherwise is to embrace a lingering slide into irrelevance and decline – often with plenty of money in the bank.

1. Move away from line item budgets and into a ministry budget. This has become common practice in the larger non-profit and even for-profit world. In a small church, begin with five core ministry pools: Worship, Discipleship, Relationship Building (assimilation, integration, fellowship), Outreach-Evangelism, and Strategy (capital improvement/expansion, training, coaching, consulting). Funds are “budgeted” into each pool based on the congregational core values. By opting for a ministry budget, the leadership and the congregation as a whole can instantly understand what's important to the church ... plus no one gets upset at the funds spent on any particular line item (we've seen conflict break out following a successful outreach ministry because someone overspent the stamps budget).
  - Divide salaries by the percentage the staff member spends in each area. For instance, a small church's catalytic pastor's salary would look similar to this:
    - Worship: 20 percent
    - Discipleship: 5 percent
    - Relationship Building: 5 percent
    - Outreach-Evangelism: 70 percent
  - Divide utilities, insurance, and other bills similarly ... divide the expenditures by the percentage used in each core ministry. For instance, in a church with a bi-vocational pastor without a staffed office and few on-site activities, the division might look like this:
    - Worship: 65 percent
    - Discipleship: 25 percent
    - Relationship Building: 10 percent
  - Remind people regularly that they can designate any portion of their tithes and offerings to help support specific ministries.
2. Encourage designated giving. This recommendation always gets pushback because of the fear that there won't be enough money to pay salaries, utilities, and other less-than-

glamorous ministries. However, research and experience has shown this is not the case. General offerings typically remain at current levels, but many will give over-and-above to their pet-projects. For instance, someone may have a commitment to children's ministry and will give extra to support this ministry. Studies show that the more opportunities people have to give money the more they will give.

Growing churches have three groups of people they must reach – those over sixty raised in the church, those under sixty not raised in the church, and those under thirty-five with little or no Christian memory. No one generic stewardship program can effectively meet all these needs. You must develop a targeted program that reaches all three. Small churches will need to recognize this as they grow.

3. Forget the myth that most giving will continue to come from the offering plates. Few people carry significant cash with them these days. Fewer carry checkbooks; in fact, many banks have curtailed issuing checks to their "checking" customers. We live in a world of online banking and debit cards. And yet, many churches still depend on the weekly offering plate for their chief fund raising efforts ... and complain that the younger folks aren't as committed as they were in the old glory days. Never mind that the church hasn't provided them any effective way to give.
  - Set up online banking and auto-debiting options for your members. Stress that no one *has* to use the service, but that you're creating another option. However, remind any opponents to the initiative that during the summer slump auto-debit giving will continue, even while people are on vacation.
  - Create a donation on your website. You can use PayPal, EZ Giving, or other online giving software without upfront costs ... and the transaction fees are a lot less than not getting an offering at all.
  - Remind the congregation about these giving options regularly (as in, every week).
4. Encourage fund raisers that are community focused, such as family movie nights, concerts (with artists and music that would be of interest to the unchurched in your community), and so on.
  - They are entry points.
  - They are opportunities for non-verbal expressions of commitment. Not everyone can make verbal expressions of faith.
  - They encourage sacrifice.
  - They provide attainable, rewarding and unifying goals.
5. Talk about money often, and especially from the pulpit. Jesus spoke about wealth and possessions more than any topic besides the Kingdom. Encourage tithing. Do not be afraid to talk about tithing. If you do not talk about tithing, then talk about how grace requires much more than the law requires.
  - Preaching about money isn't the same as nagging about giving. Make it easy to give ... and easier to talk about money. The majority of Americans are dealing

with debt and many are devastated by it. Consumerism is probably the most prevalent idol in our nation.

- Remind people that the Old Testament minimum was the tithe; Jesus' minimum was everything (cf., Luke 14:33, Luke 12:33–34). In fact, note that in Acts 4:34 the church ensured every person in the faith was fully taken care of.
6. Offer Financial Peace or some other get-out-of-debt-and-live-sanelly financial program for the church and for the community. Repeat it often.
  7. Do not show in the bulletin how far behind the church is in its giving if you want new people to join. No one joins a church in order to bail it out of its financial woes.
  8. Either do an annual stewardship drive or have a very strong teaching program centered on tithing and grace-giving. Churches that develop good stewards of their money do so not by emphasizing giving to a budget, but by helping people experience the joy of giving. The goal of biblical stewardship is achieved when people reach the point where their standard of giving determines their standard of living instead of their standard of living determining their standard of giving.
  9. Connect your offering time with ministry effectiveness. Have people share how the church has benefitted them in less than two minutes before the offering and then remind people that their support provides these kinds of life-changes.

## Church Growth Alternatives

Not every church is going to grow. It's not the way it's supposed to be, but that's a reality. If you're in one of those churches, we've provided you with a smorgasbord of options to choose from. Remember the goal of all this is to reach your community for Jesus Christ. Sometimes that means a congregation is required to make significant sacrifices.

### Create a Federated or United Congregation

1. Some churches in small communities explore the option of merging with another church of a different denomination. The rationale is that they will be a community, interdenominational church that shares resources.
  - This option virtually always creates conflict in the merging process. Whose building will we use? Who will be the first pastor ... or successive pastors?
  - Federated churches lose their identity. This is true both to members and prospective members. Is the church Methodist? Presbyterian? Baptist? And though there is little value today in denominationalism (at least from the unchurched perspective), there is *no* perceived value in being a "mutt." Polity, traditions, theology, and structure gets muddy when denominationally affiliated congregations intermarry.
  - Federated churches require extra meetings – just what everyone wants.
  - See Yoked Congregations for additional reasons these unions are untenable.

### Yoked Congregations (Multiple Charges)

Another option favored by many denominations is to "join" congregations beneath the leadership of a single pastor. The fact is, though, this option rarely (if ever) results in two healthy, growing congregations. In fact, at best, yoking congregations is a ploy by the denomination to forestall the inevitable ... and to either avoid making the difficult decision of closing a congregation (and raising the ire of the congregational members) or to put off 'til tomorrow what isn't comfortable today (let somebody else deal with it). Here is a bevy of reasons why this hurts, rather than helps, congregations.

1. The pastor is not available all day Sunday and so ...
  - ... cannot teach in Sunday School.
  - ... cannot start a second worship service.
  - ... is not available to form relationships before or after the service.
2. The pastor has to travel too much.
  - This wastes time that the pastor could be spending with people.
  - Teaches pastors poor time management habits.
3. The weaker churches either gets ignored or requires too much time.
  - Either way, the pastor is left in an untenable position.

- This alone ensures neither church will be able to grow.
4. The churches and leadership often do not have any affinity with each other and the lifestyles are often very different.
    - Requires different strategies.
    - Requires different sermons.
    - Requires different thought patterns from the pastor.
    - Requires different gifts and skills from the pastor.
  5. Discourages self-sufficiency on the part of the weaker churches.
    - Decision-making opportunities are effectively removed, since the stronger congregation/s tend to carry the lion's share of the authority.
  6. Fosters shorter pastorates because of the impossible nature of the task.
  7. Often the theological divergence is too much for one pastor to handle.
  8. Congregations are usually yoked for convenience rather than to foster effective ministry.
    - To provide a salary for pastors.
    - To help struggling churches survive.
  9. Fosters the "pastor is never around" syndrome.
  10. The yoked system allows too many pastors to "slip through the cracks" and engage in ineffective ministry.
    - It is far too tempting and easy for the pastor to be "away" from both parishes without detection.
    - Because all parties involved realize the near-hopelessness of the situation, little effort is expended in turnaround. Indeed, the situation encourages sloth ... where little is expected, little is accomplished.

## Mergers

Mergers come in three flavors ... two work and one does not. Unfortunately, it's the unworkable option that is most often embraced by the churches because it is the "least painful" and requires the least sacrifice, at least by a majority of the "new" congregation. However, the easy option virtually always poisons both congregations and a long, slow, agonizing, and costly demise is inevitable.



## *Near Painless Mergers*

The near painless merger is the most common merger plan ... the one that virtually guarantees the ultimate end of the churches. Here are some of the marks of the untenable merger.

1. The merge is proposed because of the general weakness of multiple congregations.
2. The stronger church, or the one with the most desirable building, becomes the “host” congregation ... the congregation “gives up” its building for the sake of the merger. The problem is, the building will always belong to the originating congregation and the merged congregation will be the interlopers.
3. One of the pastors becomes the lead pastor and the other becomes an associate or they become co-pastors.
  - In the first instance, one congregation’s pastor is elevated as the leader du jour, whereas the other pastor is relegated as a lesser leader. This not only plays with the leaders’ egos, but sends a strong and inappropriate message to the congregations.
  - In the second instance, the pastor of Church A will remain the pastor of their former congregation and the same will be the case for the pastor of Church B.
4. Leadership teams are merged and the boards are merged. Except that there will be no merging ... it will “look good” for a while, but when a real crisis of decision is upon them lines will be drawn and the “team” will split into factions.

## *Reinvention*

This is one of the two successful merger models. Reinvention can almost be likened to a new church start because in almost every way, the two merging churches abandon their current identities and turn their backs on their history and traditions in order to leave an enduring legacy. Successful reinvention mergers carry these marks.

1. The merger is proposed for the sake of the mission rather than as a way of survival. A healthy example would be when the churches have come to realize that they are no longer effective in reaching the community and so opt to merge and become a “new creation” in order to offer the tangible touch of Jesus to the community.
2. Each church sells their property and pools their resources in order to create something new

3. Each church agrees to move from their current locations in order to locate in a neutral and missionally effective location.
4. The new church takes on a new name. Names are important because they brand you and communicate your purpose. In today's culture, it's generally a mistake to name your church based on location, but it's worse to give it a coded church language name (Holy Apostolic Tabernacle of the Immanent Parousia would not be a good name).
5. In general, the new church should call a new pastor who should be assessed, trained, and coached in new church development.

## *Acquisition*

When a small church has a commitment to reaching their community for Jesus Christ, but has not been able to become effective in their endeavor, an increasing number of these churches are making the radical decision to “do whatever it takes.” Of all the merger options, this one is by far the most successful. But it is also the most sacrificial for the membership of the small church.

In this scenario, a larger, healthy church “acquires” the small church as a multi-site option. That is, the small church becomes an extension of the larger church. The building and the resources are generally transferred to the larger church who literally takes ownership of the facilities. The remaining resources of the church are typically given to the larger church as well. Once the transfer takes place, the members of the small church become members at large of the larger church and anyone who holds office, serves on a committee, and so on resigns from their positions. In addition, staff members of the church are relieved of their positions in order for the new “site” to be launched as a completely new church. The governance of the site and all decisions, including the future worship style, times, educational programming, missional outreach, and so on are made by the acquiring church.

Many former members of the small church will engage in the new church and play a vital role in reaching the community. Some, however, will choose to find another congregation where they are more comfortable with the style of worship and the more traditional governance.

Those small churches who make this supreme sacrifice have found that the combination of their resources matched with the leadership of a healthy large church brings new life to the future of the congregation. Indeed, many small churches that would have been closed and the buildings converted into craft shops, bed and breakfasts, bars, and even residential homes have been “resurrected” to new life, new purpose, and missional effectiveness in the community because of their sacrifice.

## How to Grow a Small Church Part One

If you're a pastor of a small church, this is a must read article for you.

Pastors and lay people in small churches are always asking me what they can do to grow their church. From their questions it's clear most are looking for some magical formula or program when all the while they have everything they need to grow their church is right under their nose.

So, I'm going to let the cat out of the bag right now. You want to know the most important ingredient for growing a small church? ***It's a pastor who has one-on-one conversations with non-Christians that leads to their conversion to Christ.*** I've been saying this for decades based on my personal experience as well as my observations of pastors who grow small churches. However, now this insight is backed up by a 2005 study of 700 church plants funded by The Lilly Foundation and the Lutheran Brotherhood titled "New Church Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". The study included churches from seven mainline denominations (You can read about the complete findings in the book *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times*, ed. By H. Stanley Wood, and published by Errdmans).

The study compares church plants that grow beyond a small church with those that either failed or succeed and then hit a plateau and didn't grow beyond a small church.

Here are a few of the key findings of the study:

- The amount of funding has no correlation to membership size.
- Demographics and location are critical to church size.
- As the church grows, the pastor begins handing-off most of the pastoral care to the members.
- As the church grows, the quality and style of worship improves dramatically.
- The more focused the pastor is on evangelism the larger the church becomes.

This last point is where I want to focus this article. If you are in a church under 500 in worship the most important thing you can do to grow that church is to practice personal, one-on-one evangelism. In a church this size you can grow the church all by yourself. Just bring in fifty to seventy-five new Christians and/or new members and everything changes. You are the solution, not another program!

Here is an excerpt from the book

*"Larger membership pastors ranked higher in the priority they placed on time for evangelism; they tended to devote a 'great deal of time to evangelism calling.' They were more likely to be participants in the Spirit's*

*regenerative work in a person's making a first-time commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. In fact, the evangelism practices of the larger-membership developers showed that they led all other new church developers in this particular kind of evangelism. Larger-membership pastors more frequently assisted in the making of a first-time faith commitment; indeed, many had assisted in such a commitment with twenty or more individuals in the previous six months."*

### **So what's a Person to Do?**

Pastor and lay person, if you want to grow a small membership church spend most of your time out among the public meeting people, knocking on doors, doing whatever is necessary to come into contact with people who don't go to church or who aren't Christians. In a church your size growing the church is that simple. Even if worship isn't the best, if you lead someone to Christ they will worship with you no matter what. So here are some tips.

- Pastor, personally respond to anyone who visits the church within 24 hours. I used to teach that lay people should make the first visit with newcomers. I was wrong. I knew in my gut I was wrong but everyone seemed to believe it to be true and even backed it up with studies. But it wasn't true in my history. It wasn't true in pastors like Adam Hamilton or Michael Slaughter, or Randy Frazee, or.... I can go on and on with a list of pastors who grew their small church by personal one-on-one evangelism with visitors who showed up at church.

So you can begin, pastor, by making in-person calls on first-time visitors within twenty-four hours after they attend and 85 percent of them will return the following week. If this home visit is made within seventy-two hours, 60 percent of them return. If it is made more than seven days later, 15 percent return. You see, the average person today visits several churches before deciding on a church home. This means they may not come back for six weeks. By then, they decide which church to return to by the friendliness and helpfulness of the members. If you wait until they return the second time, you lose 85% of your visitors.

- Next, spend time dreaming up ways for you and your congregation to interact with unchurched people. Start making a list and as the week goes by begin doing anything on the list that feels right. You can find a great list of such possibilities at [http://easumbandy.com/resources/faqs/u/unchurched/ways\\_to\\_connect/](http://easumbandy.com/resources/faqs/u/unchurched/ways_to_connect/).
- Make personal evangelism the highest priority on your "to do" list. Set aside time every day to interact with the public. In the early years I spent four nights a week responding to visitors and at least two hours a day going to places where I would find unchurched people. At one of my churches I spent the morning at the local drugstore (most of you are too young to remember soda fountains). At another

church I spent my time playing shuffle board; at another I sheared sheep; at another I spent time in the local watering hole. The key is to find ways to be among people who don't go to church instead of being in your office. I have one pastor friend who road his Harley to Starbucks to do his sermon preparation.

- Keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to share your faith. You never know where you will run into an opportunity to share your faith in a non-threatening way. In order to be able to accomplish this you need to be freed up from as much of the following as possible- visiting shut-ins, hospital visits, and going to more than one or two meetings a month.
- Lay person, you have natural networks with unchurched people. Use those networks to spread the Good News!

Remember – the higher the priority you place on evangelism and make personal time for it the larger you small church will grow (once the church grows beyond 500 in worship the pastor's involvement in personal evangelism has much less impact on the growth of the church).

So what are you waiting for? Get out of the office and into the world!

## How to Grow a Small Church Part Two

In part one of this series on How to Grow A Small Church I said the following: “You want to know the most important ingredient for growing a small church? *It’s a pastor who has one-on-one conversations with non-Christians that leads to their conversion to Christ.*” In part two I want to elaborate on these conversations.

When I began my ministry in 1957 (I was 17) I could lead a person to Christ on our initial conversation. I could cold turkey meet someone, talk with them about their relationship with Christ, and lead them to Christ on the spot. These spiritual conversations were mostly a monologue where I did most of the speaking and they listened. Not only that, most of the conversions I witnessed were immediate and dramatic, much like the conversion of the Apostle Paul.

Boy, has that changed over the years.

In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s I began to notice more and more people who didn’t know enough about Christianity to make a decision regarding Christ. Some of the children in our Sunday School had never even heard a Bible story before attending our church. So my conversations had to start at the beginning and the actual conversion didn’t always happen on the spot.

In the late 1980’s I began to notice more and more adults were skeptical about any form of personal evangelism and required me to spend more time developing a relationship with them before ever talking about their spiritual condition.

Since I left the local church ministry in 1993 all of these changes have evolved exponentially. Now most conversions require a great deal more time developing relationships before much spiritual conversation. Changes in a person’s spiritual condition seem to evolve to the point that it’s often hard for a person to say when they became a Christian. It’s almost like they look back over a period of time when they incrementally moved from a skeptic to a convert.

These observations are not limited to my experiences. Brian McLaren poked around at these changes in his book *More Ready than You Realize*. Rick Richardson shared similar conclusions in his book *Evangelism Outside the Box*. “The times, they are a chagegin” even when it comes to the most important issue a Christian faces – how does conversion take place.

So, if the primary way to grow a church under 500 in worship is by the pastor personally calling on all the first time visitors, how does one lead someone to Christ these days?

First, we must make evangelism a personal priority not only for us but for our church. This means we must be open and sensitive to the many opportunities that come our way each day. Every one of us, especially laypeople, come in contact with dozens of people every day who either do not go to church or who are non-Christians. Bill Hybels puts it this way in his new book - *Just Walk Across the Room*. All that many of us have to do to begin spiritual conversations is just walk across the room. But we have to make time for these conversations.

The more time you spend in your office the less likely you are to have opportunities to develop the relationships that lead to conversion. I never led a person to Christ in my office or at a church meeting. You have to make it a priority to spend as much time in the non-churched community as you do with those within the church.

In the early years of restarting the church I was at for 24 years, I spent as much as 80% of my time in the community, visiting newcomers to the church and the community, talking with realtors, going to community affairs, speaking at civic groups such as the Lions Club, participating at school functions, etc. For a number of years I spent most late Friday nights at one of the local watering holes.

Second, we must understand that evangelism is an honest dialogue between two friends. For this to happen, trust has to develop between the Christian and the non-Christian. It has been my experience this can take two to four years. And to top that off the actual recognition of the actual conversion might not happen in your presence. It might happen in ones bedroom, or on the golf course, or in a worship experience. But the relational experiences developed over a number of months cause the light to go on in the non-believers heart. The end result began months ago when you screwed up your courage and walked across the room to attempt the beginning of a relationship.

One of the problems you must guard against is spending years developing relationships and never getting around to real issue. Tom Bandy makes a great point about this in one of his posts to our [advanced leadership forum](#) - we must never forget the urgency of our intervention, especially when dealing with someone in danger from their addiction. [Click here for more.](#)

Third, the goal of your conversations is to get into their life story, to get them to share themselves, not sell them the Gospel. So the best conversation is filled with questions, not answers. You must frame questions designed to get them talking about themselves. That way you can find the places where God has been at work in their life. You will find, like Peter, that God has already been at work in their life and you can make that the center of the conversation. Your role is to help them see what God has already accomplished in their life. Randy Newman in his book *Questioning Evangelism* writes, "By asking questions in our evangelism, our conversations can lead to conversions, rather than presentations that lead to preconceptions.

So, here are some example questions but it is best if you come up with your own:

*What is your main goal in life?*

*What will make you feel fulfilled in life?*

*What is your number one need at the moment?*

*When you think of God what images come to mind?*

*What place does faith have in your life?*

*What brings you the most joy in life?*

*If you could change one thing about your life what would it be?*

*Did your parents go to church or talk with you about God?*

Often people will respond to your questions by asking for clarification. This response is great because it's a sign that God's at work in their life and it's your opportunity to go deeper into the conversation.

Also, when they show up for a small group or worship, realize this is God at work in their life because of the seeds you have planted. God's calling them and your role is to interpret what is happening. We must never forget that God's always at work in a person's life long before we show up: *The Father is drawing people to himself (John 6:44). The Son is seeking the lost (Luke 19:10). The Holy Spirit is convicting the world (John 16:8).*

Next, keep in mind that not all such conversations have to take place out in the public. Most outward focused churches regularly plan events that entice non-Christians to ["taste and see"](#) what Christianity is all about. In these settings it's good to have your spiritual giants trained and ready to enter into conversations with these seekers. By showing up to one of your events they are telling you God's at work in their lives and they are open to spiritual conversations. Even then, soft approaches are always better than the old fashion confrontation models such as the Four Spiritual Laws.

Finally, as your relationship with the non-Christian deepens feel around for whether or not they are ready to hear how God has worked in your life. When the time is ripe share your story of transformation and how it has changed your life. But never preach or leave the impression you have all the answers, or are superior to where they are in life. Just share your joy.

If you're new to relational evangelism you might want to check out the following resources on our website under FAQs in the free resource section.

[Taste and See events](#)

[Say Yes Booths](#)

[Ways to Connect with the Unchurched](#)

[Why People Don't Invite their Friends](#)

[The Pastor's Role](#)



## Recommended Reading

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