

The 200 barrier

The 150 dividing line. Why? Churches above typically grow, those below decline.

"Congregations are social communities that exist in the wider culture. What happens in the culture happens to congregations."

Boomer Trends:

Do things in large numbers.

First TV generation - visually oriented.

Eclectic taste in music, want high quality.

Participatory Democracy.

Breaking with institutional loyalty.

Strategies for breaking the barrier:

1. From Shepherd to Rancher.

2. Relationships to Programs.

Questions: What has made this a successful and growing pastoral church? How will I need to transform the present culture to allow the congregation to grow to a larger size?

Statistics show that congregational attendance numbers (ASA) tend to cluster around certain predictable numbers.

- strong cluster of congregations with ASA of 20-45 people. Family churches, very predictable nature and style.

- cluster of congregations with ASA around 110 (76-140). Usually 60-80 households support the church. Pastoral size.

- smaller cluster of 225-400 ASA. Small Program Churches.

Whereas the largest numbers of churches are found in the first two clusters, the most members are found in the clusters above 225.

"I believe it is natural for human beings to bring to our systems and organizations predictability. It is this culture or predictability that makes transforming a small congregation into a larger one so difficult. The longer a congregation has operated within a particular size, the more established in the DNA of the congregation is this expectation."

"How large can a small church be and still retain the culture of a small church?". The author believes 125-150, with the possibility that certain factors could push it beyond for a period of time.

Is the system healthy or unhealthy? An unhealthy system can still work, though it functions for its own self-preservation.

Two types of Growth:

Congruent Growth - growth within the boundaries of a system. It is consistent with the community's self-perception and culture.

Transformational Growth - growth beyond the boundaries of a system. It is growth that is not consistent with the present system.

Congruent growth often happens when a church becomes better at being the type of church (size) they already are.

Rule of 150 illustrates how at a certain level the complexity of social relationships becomes unbearable.

Part 2: Three Types of Congregations

The Pastoral Size Congregation

Noting the relationship of the pastor to the number of households (60-80 she/he is able to track), we learn:

- * If the congregation has large families (typically rural or suburban), the congregation could number more than 150.
- * If the congregation is in the inner city and has small or single-parent families, the congregation could number in the 70s.
- * If too many families experience stress, the pastor's ability to provide emotional attention is diminished.
- * If the pastor or his family experience emotional distress, the pastor's ability to provide emotional attention to all the families is limited.
- * If the energetic pastor comes to a low-number congregation and grows it by recruiting new families, this system will predictably reach its upper level.
- * When that energetic pastor leaves, the congregation will predictably decline for a period of time.

Characteristics:

- * Attendance ranging 76-140 ASA
- * Membership ranging 200-400
- * A mailing list ranging 100-150
- * 40-60 households who regularly give, another 10-20 who occasionally give
- * Leadership core of 12-20 roles
- * When healthy, its two strongest generations will be parents and their children
- * Most ministries exist to support the needs of the community with pastor as their leader
- * Pastor's calendar and congregation's calendar are essentially the same thing
- * tend to be very stable; ASA remains fairly constant
- * Most at risk during pastoral changes
- * Good tenure for pastor is 7-15 years, after which transition becomes more difficult

The Program Size Congregation - Key Components:

- * The congregation has developed several ministries or programs aimed at human needs.
- * The congregation has an organized paid and volunteer staff. (When the program church is healthy, the function of staff is to raise up and empower lay leadership in their ministry area.)
- * Multiple Matrix - the program church has learned the skill of being many congregations under one roof.
- * Excellence is a critical factor in all of the ministries.

Churches in Transition

Between 140 & 225 ASA. There is no system in this size that reinforces a congregational culture. They are too small to be a large church and too large to be a small church.

Predictable Qualities:

- * High stress for clergy because of conflicting expectations (small church vs. large church dynamics).
- * Tendency to overuse and burn out lay leaders due to shortage of real leaders in the church.
- * Tendency to need new Programs, staff and facilities all at the same time, which produces confusion and frustration.
- * Often experience tension and conflict as the congregation develops.

Three types of Transitional Churches:

- The Overgrown Pastoral Church
- The Hybrid Church
- The Declining Program Church

Three Organizing Principles of Pastoral Churches:

- the church is organized around the village (everybody knows everybody).
- the church is organized around the pastor.
- the church is organized around the church year.

Transformational Elements:

1. Start with the end in mind.
2. A vision in three parts.
 - a. A staffing plan
 - b. A program plan
 - c. A facility plan
3. Act like a large church.
4. Expand the role of the pastor (through laity).
5. Extend the Board.

What the Large Church Knows

Seven Essential Skills:

1. A new style of organizing.
2. A new system for pastoral care.
3. Staff to meet the future.
4. Excellence in all we do.
5. A new role for the "non-generic organization or ministry."
6. A new role for the church board.
7. Sensitivity to the seeker in everything.