

The Myth of the 200 Barrier

by Kevin E. Martin

Discussion Guide

The Myth of the 200 Barrier, by Kevin E. Martin (Abingdon Press, copyright 2005), looks at why some churches grow while others do not. It explores the reality of the 200 Barrier of average Sunday attendance of 200 and how it often becomes a self-fulfilling expectation that blocks church growth. Reverend Martin shows church leaders how to lead through transitional growth, the mistakes to avoid, factors to consider in church growth, and strategies for transformation.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

Large or Small?

This chapter examines factors driving congregational size.

1. Share why you have selected this book to read and what you hope to gain from it.
2. Compare and list the benefits of membership in a large congregation to that of a small one.
3. Discuss why the number 150 is an important measure of church attendance.
4. Why is ASA the best measurement of congregational size?
5. Name some of the characteristics of a large congregation.
6. Name some of the characteristics of a small congregation.
7. List and discuss some of the baby boomer trends that directly affect congregational life.
8. Why is it harder for a smaller congregation to be dynamic and healthy?
9. Discuss the factors that drive congregational size.
10. What fact in this chapter surprised you and why?

Activities

As a group: Divide your small group in half. Have one group create a list of strengths of your church. Ask the other group to list its weaknesses. Share your list with the opposite group.

At home: Reflect on the potential for your church this week.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for opening our eyes to new insights about church growth. Help us to see your vision for our church and work together to find the answers we seek. Amen.

Chapter 2

Hitting the 200 Barrier?

This chapter examines the story of a pastor who attempted to increase the average Sunday attendance at his church above the 200 mark.

1. Do you believe that there is a 200 Barrier? Give your reason why or why not.
2. In what ways is First Church like your own church? How is it different?
3. Discuss what Pastor James did right and what he did wrong.
4. List some factors that affect Sunday morning church attendance.
5. Discuss the strategies that Pastor James used to try to break the 200 Barrier.
6. Is the size of a congregation mainly determined by its pastor? Explain your reasoning.
7. Is it possible for ANY church to break the 200 Barrier? Why or why not?
8. What do you admire about Pastor James?
9. Name a new insight you received from this chapter or this discussion.
10. List some lessons that can be learned from the story of First Church and Pastor James.

Activities

As a group: Based on what you have read so far, create a list of some of the tools and the resources that a congregation would need to break the 200 Barrier.

At home: Use your Bible to look at and reflect upon the ministry of one of Jesus' disciples.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for bringing us together again for a discussion about church growth. Help us to prayerfully consider the various aspects and issues of this complex subject. Grant us wisdom to see your will. Amen.

Chapter 3

The Myth of the 200 Barrier

This chapter shows why the author believes the 200 Barrier is a myth and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

1. Why is the 200 Barrier a myth, according to the author? Do you agree?
2. Do you think seminars can be of help in increasing average Sunday attendance? Explain your reasoning.
3. Explain the author's statement that the 200 Barrier is a myth that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.
4. Discuss the shepherd-to-rancher strategy for breaking the 200 Barrier.
5. How is the rancher different from the shepherd?
6. Explain the second strategy that goes from relationships to programs.
7. Name some of the benefits of having a small group ministry within a church.
8. According to the author, what two questions need to be asked when considering church growth? (page 27)
9. Discuss the traits of a healthy system as opposed to an unhealthy one.
10. What did you learn about church size and congregational development from this discussion and from reading this chapter?

Activities

As a group: Break into two groups. Ask one group to create a list of words and phrases that describe your church now. Ask the second group to create a list of words that describe a vision for the future of your church. Compare lists.

At home: Reflect on the barriers that may be holding back your church.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for helping us separate myth from reality. Help us to remember the importance of seeking the truth, listening to others, and having a steadfast faith that you will guide our thoughts and decisions. Amen.

Chapter 4

The Rule of 150

This chapter looks at the Rule of 12 and the Rule of 150 as they relate to church stability.

1. Explain the Rule of 150. Do you believe it is a valid rule? Explain your reasoning.
2. Discuss how the Rule of 150 applies to congregational culture and size.
3. Define the meaning of the term *transitional church*.
4. What is needed in order for a church to become large, according to the author?
5. What is the significance of the number 50? Why is it important?
6. List some different size groups within your church, going from smallest to largest.
7. Briefly discuss the current health of your church, rating it from one to ten, with ten being the best.
8. Discuss common ways a church determines the amount of staff it needs.
9. What new insight did you gain from reading this chapter?
10. What practical application does this chapter have to the present situation of your church?

Activities

As a group: Create a list of little things that make a big difference within the church.

At home: Pray for the members and leadership of your church.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for opening our eyes again to new aspects of how to grow a healthy church. Help us to each be a part of the solution to challenges faced by our church. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 5

The Pastoral Size Congregation

This chapter looks at the characteristics of smaller churches and their pastors.

1. Give a brief description of the pastoral size congregation.
2. Define a pastoral generalist and list the main responsibilities of the position.

3. List some of the characteristics of the pastoral church.
4. Why do pastoral churches tend to be very stable?
5. Discuss the traits of membership within a typical pastoral church.
6. Discuss some of the difficulties faced by a pastor who follows one who had been pastor of the church for more than fifteen years.
7. What new insights about church growth did you learn from this chapter?
8. How does today's economy work against the pastoral size congregation?
9. How have demands upon the church generalist changed over the years?
10. Share your views concerning the future of the pastoral church.

Activities

As a group: Create a list of reasons why people are comfortable as members of a pastoral size church.

At home: Talk to someone who does not have a church home and invite them to your church. Ask them to evaluate their experience with you.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving us the church. Help us to be a part of the solution when it faces difficult times. May we remember the mission before us as we share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter 6

The Program Size Congregation

This chapter looks at the traits of congregations with an ASA of 226 to 400.

1. How is the program size congregation similar to the pastoral size congregation?
2. What type of pastoral leadership is needed for the program size church?
3. Why do program size congregations often focus on offering programs that meet human needs? Name some of these programs.
4. Name some of the challenges involved in offering human need programs.
5. Discuss some ways that pastors can deal with volunteers who perform poorly.
6. Name some of the issues faced with having both paid staff and volunteers.

7. Discuss the dangers of ministries fueled by nostalgia.
8. What is a multiple matrix congregation? Give an example of it and say how it differs from other churches.
9. Discuss the trait of excellence within a program size congregation.
10. What new insight did you gain about the program size church from reading this chapter?

Activities

As a group: Select a program that might be offered by a program size church (like a weekly free meal for the poor), then list the finances, staff, volunteers, resources, etc. needed to offer this program.

At home: Reflect on the needs within your community that could be addressed by your congregation.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the many types of churches and ministry that exist in our nation today. Help us to always remember those in need and to act upon those needs by joining hands with others. Amen.

Chapter 7

Congregations in Transition

This chapter examines the characteristics of churches between program size and pastoral.

1. Name some of the difficulties faced by congregations in transition.
2. List and discuss the four characteristics of congregations in transition.
3. Discuss some of the causes of congregational stress.
4. List and discuss the three types of transitional churches.
5. What is the impact from stress within a congregation?
6. Name some of the elements of a hybrid church, one that is part pastoral and part program size.
7. How does a church capitalize on a change in ministry direction?
8. Discuss the impact of a high energy level within a transitional church.
9. Discuss the origin and challenge of conflicting expectations within a congregation.

10. Why do transitional churches have a high potential for growth?

Activities

As a group: Create a top ten list of elements of a healthy transitional church.

At home: Pray for your congregational leaders this week.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for congregations that blossom and grow. Grant us the wisdom and the tools to plant more seeds for congregational growth. Amen.

Chapter 8

Living with the Realities

This chapter examines the story of Pastor Bob Bethea and the challenges he faced in trying to grow his congregation.

1. Discuss how Bob demonstrated his talent as a pastor through his children's sermons.
2. Describe Bob's style as a storyteller and preacher.
3. How did Bob's commentary enhance intercessions during Sunday services?
4. Discuss Bob's ministry at Mill Creek and name some achievements.
5. What advice about growth was Bob given about St. Francis?
6. What was the situation of Resurrection congregation when they called Bob to be their pastor? What were they seeking?
7. Share your opinion of the seven points of advice (page 77) that Bob was given.
8. What was Bob advised to focus on instead of the 200 Barrier?
9. From what you read, what were Bob's priorities in his ministry?
10. Discuss what it means to live with the realities of a growing church.

Activities

As a group: Go around the group and have each member say what they admire most about Bob and his ministry.

At home: Reflect upon the struggles that pastors face as their churches decline or grow.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for pastors like Bob Bethea who struggle to reach more people with your Word. Help us to join in the challenge and opportunities to be better witnesses. Amen.

Chapter 9

Living with the Transition

This chapter examines how one pastor coped with transition within his church.

1. What issues did John face when he arrived at Calvary Church?
2. Discuss the potential of Calvary Church.
3. Why did Calvary decide against relocation?
4. What made John a good fit for meeting the needs of Calvary?
5. Why did the congregation need reorganization?
6. What steps were taken to strengthen Calvary?
7. Some church issues and problems are not always apparent to the general membership. Why is this? Is this good or bad?
8. What was positive and negative about having Calvary remain downtown?
9. List some of the stress factors for a pastor in a transitional church.
10. What new insights about living with transition did you gain from reading this chapter?

Activities

As a group: Brainstorm some creative ways to reduce burnout and stress among a pastor and church staff.

At home: Share with someone this week about the ministry of your church.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for churches like Calvary that continue their ministry in face of all difficulties and challenges. Help us to discover new and creative ways to minister to others. Amen.

Chapter 10

Leading through the Transition

This chapter examines the transformation of Pastor Ted Nelson as he struggled to lead a church in transition.

1. List some common mistakes that pastors make in leading through a transition.
2. What do you admire about Ted Nelson?
3. Discuss the major issues that most transitional pastors face.
4. Discuss how success in ministry often creates demands of its own. Give an example of this.
5. What did Moses and Pastor Nelson have in common?
6. Complete this sentence: Ted grew his church by...
7. What was Ted's solution to his problem and why was it a good choice?
8. Discuss the merits of a pastor working "through" others rather than "with" others. Explain the difference.
9. What is a "transformational leader" and why are they so rare?
10. What lessons about what makes a successful church leader are found in this chapter?

Activities

As a group: Use the Bible to locate examples of Jesus' leadership style.

At home: Pray about the issues that are on your mind and in your heart.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for pastors who struggle to do what is right. Help us to stand by them and assist them in their struggles. Amen.

Chapter 11

Resistance

This chapter examines the congregational culture and the status quo that often hinder growth and progress.

1. List and discuss the three basic organizing principles of a pastoral size church.

2. If a church were organized around reaching out to the poor, what organizing ministries and strategies would it have?
3. What strategies did Pastor Sally use to grow her church?
4. What impressed you about Pastor Sally's story?
5. Discuss the different forms of resistance.
6. List and discuss the five critical points of change as given by the author on page 98.
7. List the benefits of organizing a church around felt needs or a passion.
8. Name some reasons why church members and leaders resist change.
9. Discuss what the author says about the number of leaders and leadership roles within the church.
10. What lessons about resistance are found in this chapter? Give a summary of the topic and of your discussion.

Activities

As a group: Your church leader wants to change Sunday worship from 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Form two groups to come up with reasons for and against this idea.

At home: Reflect on what you personally are resisting and why.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for this discussion on resistance. Help us to see both sides of a story. Sometimes resistance is needed, and sometimes it holds back your ministry. Open our eyes and give us wisdom! Amen.

Chapter 12

Transformation

This chapter looks at the transformational elements that allow a church to change and grow.

1. Discuss the wisdom of starting with the end in mind.
2. Why is passion essential to success?
3. What type of environment is needed for transformation to occur?
4. List and discuss the elements of a staffing plan.
5. Discuss the importance of the developmental nature of a church staff position.

6. Define congregational calling.
7. What wisdom does the author share about a successful church program plan?
8. What elements are important about a church facilities plan?
9. How does a transitional church start behaving like a large congregation? Why is this important?
10. Give a summary of the keys to transformation as contained in this chapter.

Activities

As a group: Plan a special Sunday for your church. Select one of the five suggestions on page 114 and then brainstorm and write down the details.

At home: Reflect upon what you have learned so far.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for change. Change can be good, but it can also be difficult. Grant us grace to accept change and new ideas. Amen.

Chapter 13

Hunching Your Way to the Promised Land

This chapter examines the two main mistakes that churches make in the growth process.

1. What works well for the pastoral size congregation does not work well for a program size congregation. Why is that?
2. Name some counterintuitive things that make a larger church distinctive.
3. What is meant by “expanding the pastor” and what warning does the author have about it?
4. Why does it seem logical that adding a second pastor will help a church grow?
5. List and briefly discuss each of the seven reasons why adding a second position seldom works.
6. Discuss what a pastor really needs during a transition.
7. How does a board’s function change as a church grows?
8. Discuss the three reasons that extending the board often does not work.
9. Becoming a larger church involves transformation, not extension. Discuss the wisdom of this.

10. What lessons did you learn from this chapter and this discussion?

Activities

As a group: Create a list of some things the average member of a church can do to aid in transformation.

At home: Reflect on the meaning of transformation.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for helping us reach the promised land, both individually and as a church. Help us to savor the life you have given us as we continue life's journey. Amen.

Chapter 14

What the Large Church Knows

This chapter looks at the seven skills that a transitional church needs to learn.

1. Name some common assumptions about organizing.
2. What does the large church know about organization?
3. How is pastoral care different in transitional churches compared to large churches?
4. List and discuss alternatives to pastoral care.
5. What does it mean to hire staff for the future and not the past?
6. Name some of the ways the large church serves as an example of excellence.
7. What do large congregations know and act upon regarding meeting human need?
8. In what ways does the church board need to change as a church grows?
9. How can a church be more sensitive to the seeker?
10. Discuss the ways your church can gain the knowledge of the large church.

Activities

As a group: Create a list of some of the keys to excellence in programs that serve needs. Name some action steps to go from talking about church excellence to achieving it.

At home: Reflect upon what you have learned about leadership and how you can personally apply it.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for those who lead our church. Grant them wisdom to do what is necessary to further your church. Amen.

Chapter 15

What Is Your Next Step?

This final chapter encourages you to apply what you have learned about church growth.

1. Discuss ways that the information contained in this book can be shared with the general membership.
2. What steps do pastors need to take for growth and what assessments need to be made?
3. Why is the use of a mentor valuable in engineering transition?
4. How do you determine what the next step is?
5. Why is it important to understand churches as systems and not merely organizations?
6. If you were to interview pastors who broke the 200 Barrier, what would you ask them?
7. Define the meaning of “deep change” within a church.
8. Ask each member of the group to share one major insight gained from this book or your discussions.
9. What is needed for the re-Christianization of North America, according to the author?
10. What tools for the journey has this book provided your group?

Activities

As a group: Have a graduation time for members of your small group. Create personalized completion certificates; then exchange them and write messages of gratitude and encouragement.

At home: Use the suggested reading list at the end of this book to continue your education.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for bringing this group together to examine the issues involved in church growth. Help us to apply what we have learned and be better servants to you and others. Amen.

Suggestions for leading a study of *The Myth of the 200 Barrier*

This book by Kevin E. Martin shows church leaders how to grow a church and lead through transitional growth. To assist you in facilitating a discussion group, this study guide was created to help make this experience beneficial for both you and members of your group. Here are some thoughts on how you can help your group:

1. Distribute the book to participants before your first meeting and request that they arrive having read the first chapter. You may want to limit the size of your group to increase participation.
2. Begin your sessions on time. Your participants will appreciate your promptness. You may wish to begin your first session with introductions and a brief get-acquainted time. Start each session by reading aloud the snap summary of the chapter for the day.
3. Select discussion questions and activities in advance. Note that the first question is often a general or easy question designed to get discussion going. The last question often is designed to summarize the discussion. Feel free to change the order of the listed questions and to create your own questions. Allow a set amount of time for the questions and activities.
4. Remind your participants that all questions are valid as part of the learning process. Encourage their participation in discussion by saying there are no “wrong” answers and that all input will be appreciated. Invite them to share their thoughts, personal stories, and ideas as their comfort level allows.
5. Some questions may be more difficult to answer than others. If you ask a question and no one responds, begin the discussion by venturing an answer yourself. Then ask for comments and other answers. Remember that some questions may have multiple answers.
6. Ask the question “Why?” or “Why do you believe that?” to help continue a discussion and give it greater depth.
7. Give everyone a chance to talk. Keep the conversation moving. Occasionally you may want to direct a question to a specific person who has been quiet. “Do you have anything to add?” is a good follow-up question to another person. If the topic of conversation gets off track, move ahead by asking the next question in your study guide.
8. Before moving from questions to activities, ask group members if they have any questions that have not been answered. Remember that as a leader, you do not have to know all the answers. Some answers may come from group members. Other answers may even need a bit of research. Your job is to keep the discussion moving and to encourage participation.
9. Review the activity in advance. Feel free to modify it or to create your own activity. Encourage participants to try the “At home” activity.

10. Following the conclusion of the activity, close with a brief prayer, praying either the printed prayer from the study guide or a prayer of your own. If your group desires, pause for individual prayer petitions.
11. Be grateful and supportive. Thank group members for their ideas and participation.
12. You are not expected to be a “perfect” leader. Just do the best you can by focusing on the participants and the lesson. God will help you lead this group.
13. Enjoy your time together!

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

1. What you will receive from this study will be in direct proportion to your involvement. Be an active participant!
2. Please make it a point to attend all sessions and to arrive on time so that you can receive the greatest benefit.
3. Read the chapter and review the study guide questions prior to the meeting. You may want to jot down questions you have from the reading, and also answers to some of the study guide questions.
4. Be supportive and appreciative of your group leader as well as the other members of your group. You are on a journey together.
5. Your participation is encouraged. Feel free to share your thoughts about the material being discussed.
6. Pray for your group and your leader.