

Process-Managing – Church Size

By Tim Keller

A. Church Size

1. The Importance of the concept. One of the most common reasons for pastoral leadership mistakes and missteps is blindness to the significance of church size. Size has an enormous impact on how a church functions. There is a "size culture" that profoundly affects how decisions are made, how relationships flow, how effectiveness is evaluated, what its ministers, staff, and lay leaders do. We tend to think of the chief differences between churches mainly in denominational or theological terms, but that under-estimates the impact of size on how a church operates.

- The difference between how PCA churches of 100 and 1,000 function may be much greater than the difference between a PCA and a Baptist church of the same size.
- The staff person who goes from a church of 400 to a church of 2,000 is making a far greater change than if he or she moved from one denomination to another.
- When Lyle Schaller gives names to the different church-size categories he deliberately chooses completely different 'orders of being.' He calls a church of 0-35 members a "cat" and a church of 100-175 a "garden", but a church of 225-450 a "mansion." Why? Because a larger church is not simply a larger version of a smaller church. The differences in communication, community-formation, decision-making, etc. are so great that the leadership skills required in each are almost of a completely different order.
- Every church has a 'size culture' that goes with its size that has to be accepted.
 - Most people probably have a size-culture that they prefer. However, many people 'moralize' their favorite size culture and treat other size-categories as spiritually and morally inferior. They may insist that the only Biblical way to do church is to practice a different size-culture despite the fact that the church itself is much bigger or smaller than they desire it to be.
 - For example, if some members of a church of 2,000 feel they should be able to get the Sr. Pastor personally on the phone without much difficulty, they are insisting on getting the kind of pastoral care that a 'under 200-size culture' provides. Of course, the pastor will soon be overwhelmed. The members may, however, insist that if he can't be reached he is failing in his Biblical duty to be their shepherd.
 - Another example--a new senior pastor of a church of 1,500 may insist that virtually all decisions be made by consensus by the whole Session and staff. Soon the Elders are meeting every week for 6 hours each time! But the pastor may insist that for staff members to be making their own decisions means they are acting 'un-accountably' or that the staff 'lacks community.' But to impose a 'size culture practice' on a church that does not have that size will wreak havoc on it and eventually force the church back into the size with which the practices are compatible.
 - This means a wise pastor may have to sympathetically confront people who are just not able to handle and live in the church's size-culture (just like many people cannot live in cultures different than the one they are used to.) Some people are 'organizationally suspicious' (often for valid reasons from their experience). Others can't handle not having the preacher as their pastor. We must suggest to them they are asking for the impossible in a church our size. We must not imply that it would be immaturity on their part to seek a different church, though we should not actively encourage anyone to leave either.

2. Flexibility in the categories. Reading books on church sizes can be confusing because everyone breaks down the size-categories somewhat differently. This is because there are many variables in a church's culture and history that determine exactly when a congregation gets to a new size-"barrier." For example, everyone knows that at some point a church becomes too large for one pastor to handle. People begin to complain that they are not getting adequate pastoral

care and so on. The time has come to add staff. But when does that happen? In some communities that may happen when attendance rises to 120, while in others it does not happen until the church has nearly 300 coming. It depends a great deal on expectations, on the mobility of the city, on how fast the church has grown, and so on. Despite the variables, the point at which another pastoral-staff member must be added is usually called 'the 200 barrier.' That is a good average figure--but you must keep in mind when reading that when books discuss the '200 barrier' your own church might come up against that threshold at some different attendance-figure.

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

- ***Increasing complexity.*** The larger the church the less members have in common. There is more diversity (such as age, family status, etc.) and thus a church of 400 needs 4-5 times more programs than a church of 200 (not 2 times more.) Therefore
 - Larger churches are disproportionately more complex than their smaller counter-parts. They have multiple services, multiple classes, multiple groups, multiple tracks, and eventually they really are multiple congregations.
 - Also, the larger the church the *more* staff per capita needs to be added. Often the first ministry staff persons are added for every increase of 150-200 in attendance. (Thus a church of 500 may have 2-3 full-time ministry staff.) But eventually ministry staff may be added for every 75-100 new persons. (Thus a church of 2,000 may have 25 staff.)
- ***Shifting lay-staff responsibilities.***
 - On the one hand, the larger the church the more decision-making falls to the staff rather than to the whole membership or even to the lay leaders.
 - On the other hand, the larger the church the more the basic pastoral ministry (hospital visits, discipling, oversight of Christian growth, counsel) is done by lay leaders rather than by the professional ministers.
 - In general: in small churches, policy is decided by many and ministry is done by a few. In the large church, ministry is done by many and policy is decided by a few. (See below under "Increasing openness to change".)
- ***Increasing intentionality.*** The larger the church--
 - --the more systematic and redundant the communication needs to be. Without multiple forms and repeated messages, people will feel 'left out' and 'I wasn't told about it.' The larger the church the less informal, word-of-mouth communication works.
 - --the more systematic and deliberate assimilation needs to be. The larger the church the less newcomers are visible to the congregation's members. Thus new people are not spontaneously and informally welcomed and invited in. Assimilation must become systemic, and "pathways" identified or established by asking: "how will newcomers get here?" "how will they be identified by the church?" "where will unbelievers learn Christianity's a) relevance, b) content, c) credibility?" "who will move them along the path?" "where will believers get plugged in?" "who will help them?" And so on.
 - --the more extremely well-organized volunteer recruitment has to be. The larger the church, the harder it is to recruit volunteers. Why?
 - First, it is much easier to say 'no' to someone who you do not know than to someone you know well. The larger the church the more likely you are to have someone try to recruit you that you don't know well.
 - Second, it is easier to feel less personally responsible for the ministries of a larger church and think 'they have lots of people here--they don't need me.' Therefore, the larger the church the more well-organized and formal the recruitment of volunteers must be.
- ***Increasing quality of production.*** The larger the church--
 - --the more planning and organization must go into events. More lead time is necessary to communicate well. A higher quality of production in general is expected in a larger

- church and therefore events cannot simply be just 'thrown together.' Spontaneous, last-minute events do not work.
- --the more high quality aesthetics must be present.
 - In smaller churches worship is based mainly on horizontal relationships with the other people present. The musical offerings of singers who are un-gifted are nonetheless appreciated because "we all know them" and they are members of our fellowship.
 - But the larger the church the more worship is based on the 'vertical' relationship--on a sense of transcendence. If an outsider comes in who doesn't know the musicians, then mediocre quality of production is distracting from their worship of God. (They don't have a relationship with the musicians which off-sets the lack of giftedness.) So, the larger the church, the more the music becomes an attractor on its own--an assimilation measure on its own.
 - ***Increasing openness to change.*** The larger the church the more the church is subject to constant and sudden changes. Why?
 - Smaller churches do not change rapidly and have less turnover because individual members feel more powerful and necessary and so they stay put.
 - The larger the church the more power for decision-making moves away from the whole congregation to the leaders and staff. Why? Too much is going on for the congregation or the board or (eventually) even the staff to make all the decisions in a group. Power moves toward individual staff or volunteer leaders and so change happens more quickly. As that happen decisions can be made more easily without 'everyone signing on.' Changes then come more rapidly.
 - As we saw above, the larger the church the more complex it is and therefore the more schedules, events, programs there are to change.
 - ***Losing members because of changes.*** The larger the church the more it loses members because of changes. Why?
 - Smaller churches seek to avoid losing member/adherents at all costs. This allows individuals and smaller groups to exercise power far greater than their numbers. Someone always experiences change as loss, and since the smaller church has a great fear of conflict, it usually will not institute a change that may result in lost members. Thus smaller churches do not lose members very often.
 - But in larger churches individual members or smaller groups have far less ability to exert power or resist changes they dislike. And (as noted above) since larger churches experience constant change, they regularly lose members who feel "it's too big now" or "I can't see the pastor any more" or "we don't pray spontaneously any more in church." resists much change. Leaders of churches that grow large are more willing to lose members who disagree with procedures or philosophy of ministry.
 - ***Shifting role of the ministers.*** The larger the church--
 - --the less available the main preacher is to do pastoral work. In smaller churches the pastor is available at all times, for most all occasions and needs, to any member or unchurched person. In the large church, there are as more lay ministers, staff, and leaders than the small church has people! So the pastors must recognize their limits, and spend more time with staff and lay shepherds, and in prayer and time with God.
 - --the more important are the minister's leadership abilities. Preaching and pastoring are sufficient skills for pastors in smaller churches, but as a church grows leadership skills become critical. And the larger the church the more important are the leadership skills of vision-casting and strategic design rather than only administration.
 - --the more the ministry staff moves from being generalists to being specialists. Everyone from the Senior Pastor on down must focus on certain ministry areas and concentrate on 2-3 main tasks. The larger the church the more the senior pastor must specialize on: a) preaching, b) vision-keeping and vision-casting, c) identifying problems ahead of time before they become disasters.

- --the more important it is for ministers, especially the Senior minister, to stay put for a long time. As noted above, smaller churches do not change rapidly and have less turnover. The innate stability of smaller churches can thus absorb the change of minister every few years if necessary. But the larger the church the more the staff in general and the senior pastor in particular are the main source of continuity and stability. Rapid turnover of staff is therefore much more detrimental the larger the church.
- **Structuring smaller.** The larger the church the smaller the basic pastoral span of care.
 - In smaller churches the classes and groups can be larger, because virtually everyone in the church is cared for directly by full-time trained ministry staff, each of whom can care for 50-200 people.
 - In larger churches, however, the internal groupings need to be smaller, because people are cared for more by lay shepherds, who can care for 10-20 people if he/she has proper supervision and support. Thus, in a larger church, the more groups you have per 100 people in attendance, the better cared for people are and the faster the church grows.
- **Emphasis on vision and strengths.** The larger the church--
 - --the more the church tends to concentrate of doing fewer things well. Smaller churches are generalist and feel the need to do everything. This comes from the power of the individual in a small church. If any member wants the church to "speak to" some issue, the church makes its effort in order to please them. The larger church, however, identifies and concentrates on approximately 3-4 major things and works to do them extremely well, despite calls for new emphases.
 - --the more distinctive vision becomes important to the members of the church. The reason for being in a smaller church is relationships. The reason for putting up with all the changes and difficulties of a larger church is to get mission done. Therefore people join the church because of the vision--so the particular mission needs to be clear.
 - --the more the church develops its own mission outreach rather than supporting already existing programs. Smaller churches tend to: 1) support denominational mission causes and/or 2) contribute to other existing para-church ministries. Larger churches feel more personally accountable to God for the kingdom mandate and seek to either to start their own mission-ministries or to form partnerships in which there is more direct accountability of the mission agency to the church.
 - --the more lay leaders need to be screened for agreement on vision and philosophy of ministry, not simply for doctrinal and moral standards. In smaller churches, people are eligible for leadership on the basis of membership and tenure and faithfulness. In larger churches (as we noted just above) the distinctive mission and vision of the church becomes more important. Therefore it is important to enlist (without apology) leader who share common philosophy of ministry with the staff/other leaders.

4. Specific Size-categories.

a. House-church - 0-40 attendance

- **Character.** The 'house church' is often (in urban areas) called a 'storefront church' or (in rural areas) called the 'country church.'
 - It operates essentially as an extended small group. It is a highly relational church in which everyone knows everyone else intimately.
 - Lay leaders are extremely powerful and they emerge relationally--they are not appointed or elected. They are usually the people who have been at the church the longest and have put in the most time and money to the work.
 - Decision-making is democratic, informal, and requires complete consensus. Decisions are made by informal relational process. If any member is unhappy with a course of action it is not taken by the church.
 - Communication is word-of-mouth and information moves very swiftly through the whole membership.

- The pastor often is a 'tent-maker' and part-time though a church of 10 families who tithe can support a full-time minister. The minister's main job is shepherding, not leading or preaching.
- **How it grows.** House-churches grow in the most organic possible way--through attraction to its warmth, relationships, and people. New people are simply invited and continue to come because they are befriended. There is no 'program' of outreach.
- **Crossing the threshold to the next size-category.** The house-church, like any small group, gets to 'saturation' rather quickly. Once it gets to 40+ people the intense face-to-face relationships become impossible to maintain. It then faces a choice: either a) multiplying off another house-church or b) growing out of the 'house-church' dynamics into the next size-category of being a small-church.
 - If it does not do either:
 - Evangelism becomes essentially impossible.
 - The fellowship itself then can easily become ingrown and 'stagnant'--somewhat stifling, sometimes legalistic.
 - An ongoing problem for the stand-alone church of this size is the low quality of ministry to specific groups like children, youth, singles and so on.
 - If it opts for "a" above--and multiplies itself into another house-church, the two (and eventually several) house-churches can form an association which does things like youth ministry together. They could also meet for joint worship services periodically.
 - If it opts for "b" above--and grows out of the 'house-church' size into a 'small church,' it needs to prepare its people to do this by admitting the losses (of intimacy, spontaneity, informality) and agreeing to bear these as a cost of mission, of opening their ranks to new people. This has to be a consensus group decision to honor the dynamics of the house church even as it opts to change those dynamics.

b. Small church - 40-200 attendance

- **Character.** This category includes churches that are just barely out of the 'house-church' stage up to churches that are ready for multiple staff. But they all share the same basic characteristics.
 - While the relational dynamics are now less intense, there is still a strong expectation that every member must have a face-to-face relationship with every other member.
 - While there are now appointed and elected leaders, the informal leadership system remains extremely strong. There are several laypersons--regardless of their official status--who are "opinion leaders." If they don't approve of new measures the rest of the members will not support them.
 - Communication is still informal, word-of-mouth, and still relatively swift.
 - The pastor is still primarily a shepherd.
 - While in a larger church the people will let you pastor them if you are a good preacher, in a smaller church people will listen to your sermons if you are a good pastor.
 - Effective, loving shepherding of every member is the 'driving force' of ministry--not leadership or even speaking ability. (A pastor who says, "I shouldn't have to shepherd every member--I've delegated that to my elders" is trying to practice large-church dynamics in a small church environment.)
 - However, the pastor of a small church will (as the church grows) feel more and more need for administrative leadership skills. Small churches do not require much in the way of vision-casting or strategizing but they do eventually present a need for program planning, mobilization of volunteers, and other administrative skills.
 - Changes are still processed relationally and informally by the whole congregation, not just the leaders. But since the congregation is larger, decisions take a longer time than in either the house-church or the medium-size church. Ultimately, however, change in a small church happens 'from the bottom up' through key lay people who are central to the

- 'informal leadership system.' No major changes can be made unless you get at least one of these people to be an ally and an advocate for the change.
- **How it grows.** Small churches also grow through attraction by newcomers to the relationships of the congregation. However, in the small church it is the personal *relationship to the pastor* that is the primary attraction to a new person. The pastor is therefore key to beginning two or three new ministries and/or classes/groups that bring in new people. He can do this by securing the backing or participation of one key 'informal leader.' Together they can begin a new group, class, or ministry that will bring in many new people who were not previously attending the church.
 - **Crossing the threshold to the next size-category.** This church may eventually face the famous '200 barrier.' To make room for more than 200 people in a church takes a significant commitment to some or all of the following changes.
 - First change--**multiple options.** There must be a willingness to question the unwritten policy that every voting member should have a face-to-face relationship with every other member.
 - When a church gets to the place where the older members begin to realize there are members that who they barely know or don't know at all, the complaint may come with a tone of moral authority: "this church is getting too big." (Another form of this is the complaint that the church is getting "impersonal.") Essentially, this attitude must change.
 - Often the key change that a congregation must allow is the move to 'multiple options'--such as more than one Sunday service, or putting more emphasis on small group ministry than coming to the one, unified, corporate prayer meeting, and so on.
 - As a general rule, multiplying options creates a 'growth spurt'. The single best way to increase attendance is to multiply Sunday services. Two services will immediately draw more people than the one service did. Four Sunday school electives will generally draw more people than two Sunday school electives. Why? Because when you give people more options, more people opt!
 - Second change--a willingness to pay the cost of an **additional primary ministry staff** person.
 - It is a sociological fact that a full-time minister cannot personally shepherd more than about 150-200 people. At some point any human being loses the ability to personally visit, stay-in-touch, and be reasonably available to all the people.
 - The minister's 'span-of-pastoral care' can be stretched with part-time or full-time specialty or administrative staff, such as children's workers, secretaries, administrators, musicians, etc. There are variations to this figure depending on a) the minister's personality and energy level, and b) the local culture. For example, the more white-collar community tends to demand far more specialized programs and therefore you may find in such a place that you need a full-time ministry staff for every 100-150 in attendance.
 - But eventually a second "ministry staff" person must be hired. This is commonly another ordained pastor, but it could be a lay person who is a counselor, overseer of small groups, supervisor of programs who does lots of shepherding work and teaching, etc. It is important to be sure that this second staff person really can grow the church and thus 'pay for him/herself.' So, for example, it may not be best to have the second ministry staff person to be a youth minister. It would be better if the first ministry staff person was a small group minister or a minister of evangelism and outreach. Or, if the senior minister is excellent with outreach, the second staff person could be more of a pastor/counselor who complements the gifts of the first minister and works with those inside. Initial staffing must be 'for growth.'
 - The tension that often occurs in a church this size is that the church is big enough so the pastor begins to feel burned out but is not big enough to financially support a second minister.

- Third change--a willingness to let **power shift away from the laity and even lay leaders** to the staff.
 - As you get to this size barrier the old 'everybody-must-come-to-consensus' approach to decision-making becomes far too slow and unwieldy. Why? 1) In the small church approach to decision-making it is considered impossible to proceed with a change if any member is strongly opposed or especially if it appears that a change will actually result in some people leaving the church. 2) As a church nears the 200 barrier, there now is almost always *someone* who experiences a change as a loss. So 3) therefore no changes ever can occur unless many decisions that used to involve the whole membership shift to the leaders and staff.
 - But it is not just that the laity must cede power to the leaders. The lay leaders must also cede power to the staff and volunteer leaders.
 - In a smaller church it is usually the lay leaders who know more about the members than the pastor. The lay leaders have been there longer and thus have more knowledge of the past, more trust from the members, and more knowledge of the member's abilities, capacities, interests, opinions, etc.
 - But once a church gets beyond 200 it is the staff that knows more about the church members than the lay leaders and increasingly the new members (in particular) take cues from the pastor(s) rather than from the lay leaders.
 - Increasingly the lay officer board (elders, etc.) will not be able to sign off on absolutely everything and will have to let the staff and individual volunteer leaders make decisions on their own.
- Fourth change--a willingness to **become more formal and deliberate in assimilation and communication**. For a church to move beyond this barrier it usually must stop relying on communication and the assimilation of newcomers to happen 'naturally' without any planning. Communication will have to become more deliberate and redundant instead of 'word-of-mouth.' Newcomers will have to be 'folded in' more intentionally. (For example, every new family could be assigned a 'sponsor' for six months--a member family who invites the new family over to their home, sits with them in the new members' class, and so on.)
- Fifth change--the ability and willingness of both the pastor and the people for **the pastor to do shepherding a bit less and leading a bit more**.
 - The next size-church requires: a) a bit more vision-casting and strategizing, and b) a lot more administrative know-how. The pastor of the medium size church will have to spend much more time recruiting and supervising volunteers and programs to do ministry that in the smaller church the professional minister would have done directly. This takes administrative skills of planning, delegating, supervising, organizing.
 - In the next-size church the pastor simply is less available and accessible to every member. Even with the hiring of additional ministry staff, every member will not be able to have the same access to the senior pastor as they did before. Both the people and the senior minister need to acknowledge this 'cost'.
- Sixth change--will moving to new space and facilities be crucial to breaking this growth barrier? Sometimes, but not usually. Usually the key is going to multiple options/services, staffing for growth, and making the other attitudinal changes mentioned above.

c. Medium church - 200-450 attendance

- **Character.**
 - In smaller churches each member faces the entire membership of the church. The primary 'circle of belonging' is the church as a whole. But in the medium size church the primary 'circle of belonging' is usually a specific affinity-class or program. Men's and Women's ministries, the choir, the couples class, the evening worship-team, the 12-step program, the local prison-ministry, the meals-on-wheels ministry--all of these are

- possible circles-of-belonging that make the church fly. These are all approximately the size of the 'house-church', that is 10-40 or so persons.
- Leadership functions differently in the medium size church.
 - First, since the medium-size church has far more complexity the leaders must represent the different constituencies in the church (e.g. 'the older people', 'the young families', etc.)
 - Second, there is too much work to be handled by a small board. There are now influential leadership teams or committees such as the missions committee or the music/worship committee that have significant power.
 - Third, because of the two factors above leaders begin to be chosen less on the basis of length of tenure and strength of personality--and more on the basis of skills and giftedness.
 - Fourth, the role of the lay-officers or board begins to change:
 - In the smaller church the officers basically oversee the pastor and staff, giving or withholding permission on various proposals. Then the pastor and staff do the ministry.
 - In the medium size church the officers begin to do more of the ministry themselves in partnership with the staff. Volunteer ministry leaders often rise up and become the decision-making leaders. Chairs of influential committees sit on the official board.
 - As we noted above, the pastor shifts somewhat from being a shepherd toward becoming a 'rancher.' Rather than doing ministry with every member himself, he becomes more of a trainer and organizer of laypeople doing ministry. At the medium-size church level this requires significant administrative skills. Also, at this level, the senior minister must be adept at training, supporting, and supervising ministry and administrative staff.
 - While in the smaller church change and decisions happen 'from the bottom up' through key lay-people, in the medium-size church change happens through key committees and teams. Ordinarily the official board or Session in the medium-size church is inherently conservative. They feel very responsible and do not want to offend any constituents they feel they 'represent.' Therefore change usually is driven by forward-looking committees such as the missions committee or the evangelism committee. They can be very effective in persuading the congregation to try new things.
 - **How it grows.** We said that smaller churches grow mainly through pastor-initiated new groups, classes, and ministries. The medium-size church of course will also only grow as it multiplies classes, groups, services, and ministries. But the key to medium-size growth is improving the quality of the ministries and their effectiveness to meet real needs. The small church 'gets away' with amateurish quality because the key driving force is its intimacy, family-like warmth, and relationships. But the medium-size church's ministries must be different. Classes must really be great learning experiences. Music must meet aesthetic needs. Preaching must really inform and inspire.
 - **Crossing the threshold to the next size-category.**
 - We said that the small church crosses the 200 barrier through 1) multiplying options, 2) going to a multiple staff, 3) shifting decision-making power away from the whole membership, 4) becoming more formal and deliberate in assimilation, and 5) moving the pastor away from shepherding everyone to being more of an organizer/administrator.
 - You can grow beyond 200 without all the five above changes. In fact, most churches do. Often churches grow past 200 'holding on' to one or more of the smaller-church attitudes. For example, if the minister is multi-gifted and energetic he can get the organizational/administrative work done and still get to visit every member as possible in a smaller church. Sometimes the staff is added but decision-making still stays whole-congregational. But to break 400 you must firmly break the old habits in all five areas.
 - Sixth change--will moving to new space and facilities be crucial to breaking this growth barrier? Usually this is true for a medium-size church, but not always.

d. Large church - 400-800 attendance

▪ **Character.**

- In the small church the primary 'circle-of-belonging' is the entire church body. In the medium church the primary circle is the affinity-class or ministry which is usually 10-40 in size. However, in the large church the primary 'circle-of-belonging' becomes the small group fellowship. This is different than the affinity-class or ministry in that:
 - It is usually smaller--often as small as 4 and no bigger than 15.
 - It is more of a 'miniature church' than the affinity-class or ministry. It does Bible study, fellowship, worship, and ministry. Affinity-classes or ministries are specialty programs, either doing just learning, or just worship-music, or just ministry to the poor, and so on.
- Leadership functions differently again in the large church.
 - In the small church leaders were selected for their tenure, in the medium church for their skills and maturity. (Both of these are still very desirable!) But now in the large church these qualities must be combined with a commitment to the church's distinct vision and mission. The larger the church the more it develops certain key ministries and strengths that it emphasizes, and the more common vision is an important reason that members join. So leaders need to be screened for vision as well as other qualifications.
 - In the small church the official board gave/withheld permission to the pastor(s) who did the ministry. In the medium church the official board is made up more of lay-leaders and committee chairs who share the ministry with the pastors and staff. But in the large church the board must work with the senior minister to set overall vision and goals and then to evaluate the overall ministry. Unlike the small church board, they don't oversee all the staff--they let the senior minister do that. Unlike the medium church board, they may not necessarily be the lay-leaders of ministry. Instead they oversee the whole.
 - In the large church the role of the staff becomes increasingly specialized and that also goes for the role of the senior minister. He must concentrate more and more on a) preaching, and b) vision-casting and strategizing. He must let go of many or most administrative tasks or he becomes a 'bottle-neck.'
 - While in the small church change and decisions happen from the 'bottom up' through powerful lay individuals, and in the medium church they come from the boards and committees, in the large church they happen 'top down' from staff and key lay leaders.
- **How it grows.** The small-church grows mainly through new groups, classes, and ministries initiated by the pastor-with-an ally. (I call it the 'backyard approach', since it keys on informal new fellowship circles.) The medium-church grows mainly through ministries that effectively target 'felt needs' of various groups such as youth, seniors, young married couples, 'seekers', and so on. (I call it the 'side-door approach', since it keys on particular felt-need ministries to various people groups in your city or neighborhood.) The large church, however, grows through a 'front-door' approach. The key to its growth is what happens in the Sunday services--the quality of the speaking, the transcendence of the worship experience, and so on.
- **Crossing the threshold to the next size-category.** The same 5 changes mentioned before need to be 'ratcheted up' again:
 - Multiple options: Up to the '800 barrier' churches can still get away with having a mediocre or poor small group system. The people may still be getting shepherded mainly through larger programs, affinity-classes and groups, run by staff people directly. But to break the 800 barrier you must have the majority of your members and adherents in small groups which are run very well and which do pastoral care, not only Bible study. Multiple services were more important to breaking the 200 or 400 barrier, but it is group life that is the key to this barrier.

- Multiple staff: Up to the '800 barrier' churches can still get away with a small staff of generalists, but after the 800 barrier there must be much more specialization. Staff members also must be increasingly gifted and able to not simply be 'workers' nor even 'leaders of workers' but 'leaders of leaders.' They must not need lots of mentoring themselves and must be able to attract and supervise others.
- Shifting-decision-making power: Up to the '800 barrier' decision-making power was becoming more centralized--migrating from the periphery (the whole membership or the whole lay board) to the center (the staff and eventually the senior staff.) Now the decision-making power must become more de-centralized--migrating out away from the senior staff and minister to the individual staff and their leadership teams. As noted above, the staff must become increasingly competent and they must be given more authority to make decisions in their area without having to run everything through the senior staff or lay board.
- More formal and deliberate in assimilation: Once again, assimilation, discipline, and incorporation must be come even more well-oiled, highly detailed and supervised.
- Changing the senior pastor's role. The changes here simply continue on in the same way. The minister becomes less accessible and concentrates more on preaching and large group teaching, on vision and strategizing.

e. Very Large church - I: 800-1,800 attendance; II: 1,800+ attendance

- **Character.**
 - **Advantages:**
 - *Missional Focus*. In general, the smaller size churches give members a greater voice (see below) and thus concerns of members and insiders tend to trump the concerns and interests of outsiders. On the other hand, the larger church gives the staff and executive leaders a greater voice. The more a church is staff-driven, the more likely it will be able to concentrate on factors which reach non-members and which don't directly benefit its own constituents--i.e. church planting, mercy/justice ministries, constant adding new services and programs.
 - *Seeker and Younger Adult Attraction*. A disproportionate percent of 1) persons on a self-identified religious pilgrimage, 2) persons born after 1965 are found in very large churches. Why? **a) Excellence**. Those with no obligation to go to church (from kinship, tradition, ethnicity, local history) are more likely to attend where the quality of arts, teaching, children's programs is very high. **b) Choices**. Contemporary people are used to choices with regard to time/type of worship, learning, personal support services, and so on. **c) Openness to change**. Generally, newcomers and younger people have a much greater tolerance for the constant changes and fluidity of a large church, while older people, longer term members, and families are more desirous of stability. **d) Low pressure**. Seekers are glad to come into a church and not have their presence noticed immediately. It is almost impossible for successful and well-known non-Christians to come into a normal size church. The great majority of inquirers and seekers are grateful for how easy it is to visit the large church without notice. Christians are much less excited about how long it takes to become recognized.
 - *Greater potential for:*
 - Being *multi-cultural*. A multiple staff can be multi-ethnic (while a single-staff/pastor usually can not). A larger church with multiple services, classes, 'congregations' can also encompass a greater variety of interests and sensibilities.
 - Creating a full service *family support system*. Families often need a variety of age-related classes, groups, counseling services, recreational opportunities and so on. Larger churches often attract families for that reason.
 - Doing church planting. Larger churches, in general, are better at church planting than either (1) denominational agencies or (2) smaller churches

- Carrying out faith-based holistic ministries. Larger churches have a bigger pool of volunteers and finances and expertise for carrying these out.
- "Research and Development" for the broader church. Again, the larger church is usually a better place for new curriculum, ministry structures, etc. to be formed and 'tested'. They can all be done more effectively than by either denominations or smaller churches or para-church ministries.
- **Disadvantages:**
 - Distance-Commuting can *undermine* mission. Very large churches become 'famous' and attract Christians from longer and longer distances who then cannot bring non-Christians from their neighborhoods. Soon the congregation doesn't look like the neighbors and it can't reach its own geographic community. Mega-churches increasingly become 'evangelical sub-culture'. This is somewhat offset by the mission *advantages* and can be further offset by (a) church planting and (b) staying relentlessly oriented toward evangelism and outreach.
 - Distance-commuting undermines community/fellowship, and discipleship. Christians coming long distances generally are less likely to be discipled and plugged in to real Christian community. The person you meet in a Sunday service is less and less likely to be someone who lives near you, so natural connections and friendships do not develop. This can be offset somewhat by a great small group system that unites people by interest or region.
 - *Communication-Involvement.* "A common pattern is for a large church to outgrow its internal communication system and plateau...as many people feel a loss of the sense of belonging, and eventually decline numerically." (L. Schaller, *The Very Large Church* p.174) People feel that they don't know who to talk to about things. In a smaller church, the staff and elders know everything. But in a very large church, one staff member may know nothing at all about what is going on elsewhere. The long directory of staff is overwhelming. No one feels they can get information quickly; no one feels they know where to begin to get involved. This can be offset by continually upgrading our internal communication system. This becomes extraordinarily important in a very large congregation.
 - *Displacement.* People who joined when a church was a lot smaller feel a great sense of loss and can't adjust to new 'size culture' (see below)--for example, accessibility of pastor. Many who joined the church when it was 500-size or less cannot handle the sense of loss (of feeling they "knew what was going on"; of feeling that their opinion and service really was needed and "counted"; of feeling that they knew the minister(s) well.) Many of these "old-timers" leave sadly and their leaving saddens those who stay. This can be offset by giving the old-timers some extra deference, just out of consideration for the changes they've seen, by not making anyone feel guilty for wanting a new or smaller church. But fortunately, this problem eventually lessens! People who joined a church of 1,500 will not find a church of 4,000 that much different.
 - *Complexity/Formality/Change.* Largeness brings (a) complexity instead of simplicity, (b) change instead of predictability, and (c) the need for formal rather than informal communication and decision-making. Long-time Christians and families value simplicity/predictability/informality much, much more and even see them as more 'spiritual'. The larger the church the more these three factors grow and many people simply won't stand for them.
 - *Succession.* The bigger a church, the more the church is identified with the Senior Pastor. Why? (a) He becomes the only identifiable leader among a very large number of other staff and leaders that the average person cannot keep track of. (b) Churches don't get large without a leader who is unusually good in articulating vision. This articulation then becomes the key to the whole church. That is much less replaceable and distinct even than good preaching. This leads to the 'Achilles

heel' of the church--continuity and succession. How does the pastor retire without people feeling the church has died? Our solution at Redeemer--to divide the church and have each site call new pastors--is as good an idea as I know. Schaller believes, however, that the successor(s) need to be people who have been on staff for a good while, not an 'outsider'.

- **How it grows.** Basically, a very large church continues to grow only if the advantages (above) are exploited while the disadvantages (above) are resisted and minimized.
 - *Be non-judgmental:* One of the main problems in churches is that people attach a lot moral significance to the features in their ideal size culture. They don't see a large-church-size culture as "different" but as "bad".
 - Is it an 'unfriendly' or 'uncaring' church because you can't get the SP personally on the phone? That may be what the members say to others. However, if everyone in a church of 3,000 *could* get the pastor on the phone easily, it would not lead to a more caring church at all. He could not possibly respond to all the needs. (Note: If a pastor in a church of 150, however, can never be gotten on the phone, *he* is imposing a larger size culture on a smaller church, and that will lead to disaster too.)
 - As we said above, a very large church is marked by *change* (while vision-policies may stay the same, few or no programs or practices are sacrosanct), *complexity* (it is not immediately obvious 'who to talk to' or 'who all needs to be in on this'; many new events have unforeseen consequences for other programs, etc.), and *formality* (plans and communication have to be redundant, written down, carefully executed, rather than done face to face relationally). In a very large church, these are considered the inevitable cost of ministry. There is little hand-wringing and no moral significance attached to the generals (i.e. change is not 'instability' and formality is not "impersonalness" etc.) Different cultures are different, not inferior.
 - *Form smaller decision-making bodies:* In general--the larger the church, the fewer people must be in on *each* decision. Why? The larger the church, the more diversity of views. If the older processes are followed: a) decisions take longer and longer to be made, and b) only watered-down compromises are the result. Sum: As a church gets larger it *must* share decision-making with fewer and fewer people just to maintain the same level of progress, decisiveness, and intentionality it had when it was smaller. Many Christians consider the size culture of a very large church by definition undemocratic or un-accountable. This is one reason why many churches don't become very large or shrink back once they do.
 - *Allow multiple de-centered power centers:* Another mark of the very large church, especially those over 1800, is that the old 'hub and spokes' structure of the staff becomes obsolete. Instead of the staff being a 'team' with the senior pastor as the 'captain', the staff becomes a team of teams. The power of directors and clusters of directors grows greatly. The church becomes too complex for the senior pastor to supervise directors closely and power within departments grows. This cuts two ways. a) On the one hand, it means that if staff leaders really do have more decision-making power for their own area. Other staff directors and even the Senior pastor have less information and ability to second-guess or nose in. This happens in increasing stages as a church gets large. b) On the other hand, it means staff cannot expect as much mentoring, instruction and 'fixing' from the executive staff. The larger a church gets the more competent staff must get. The call to the staff changes from "do your job as I tell you" to "go out and make things happen". Resourcefulness and creativity become more and more important.
 - *Bring on staff more specialized, competent, and 'with the vision'.* Studies show that churches of under 800 have mainly staff that are seminary trained ministers, but the larger a church gets, the less seminary trained ministers on are staff. Why is this? a) First, the larger church needs specialists in counseling, music, finance, social work, childhood development--while seminaries train generalists. This is the reason that the

- very large church does not need theologically trained people who learn a specialty, but specially trained people who need to be theologically trained. b) Second, the very large church cannot afford to bring on directors of ministries who 'have a lot to learn'. In a church of 500 you may have a youth ministry of 30 kids and you can bring on a young person out of seminary to be the youth pastor. But in a very large church there may be 300 youth--and so the staff director has to be very competent immediately. The larger the church, the more staff roles shift from "doing the job with guidance" to "making it happen". It becomes less valuable for staff to be able to faithfully carry out assignments given from the "hub" than it is to be able to inspire followers and to find creative ways to bring-something-out-of-nothing. This is a lot like what Dick Kaufmann called "moving from being leaders to being leaders of leaders". It means the larger the church gets, the less program staff should need mentoring and direction, and the better they should be at raising up and working with lots of new leaders. c) Third, the larger church gets the more unique its vision is. It has a highly honed and carefully balanced set of emphases and 'styles'--its own 'voice'. People who are trained theologically before coming to staff inevitably come in with many attitudes and assumptions that are at variance with the voice. (Also, pre-trained seminary staff often feel superior to other staff that are not theologically trained and under-estimate their ignorance of the context.) The larger the church, then, the more important to raise and train leaders from within. This means: a) staff coming from outside need thorough training in the very large church's history, values, etc. b) Staff coming up from within should be supported heavily for continued theological education.
- *Change the Senior Pastor's Role.* A very key and very visible part of the large 'size culture' is the changed role of the Senior Pastor. In a very large church, the preacher cannot be the people's pastor. The SP must move from an emphasis on doing the work of ministry (teaching, pastoring, administering) and give it away and concentrate on vision-casting, and general preaching. Many churches and/or ministers will not allow this to happen, indeed believing it is wrong to make such a shift. While the SP must not become a CEO and stop doing traditional ministry he must not try to do pastoral care or even oversight for the church at large. That must go to others. One major problem is the SP can live with guilt all the time. It's a cost that has to be paid by the SP--but with the gospel. Otherwise the pressures lead to burn out, etc. Both the SP and the leaders and the people must allow this change to happen.
 - *Trust.* Schaller shows how the Very Large church is more accessible and capable of reaching younger persons, single persons, the unchurched and seekers. He asks: if the need for very large churches is greater than the number, why so few? He asks: Why don't more churches a) allow the SP to become less accessible? b) allow the staff more power than the Board? c) allow the exec staff more decision-making power than the whole staff? etc.) d) allow directors more power to hire and release? And his main answer is interesting. Schaller says that the key to the very large church culture is **trust**. In smaller churches, suspicious people are much happier. Everything that happens comes through a consensus-driven center accessible to any member. Any minority that is unhappy with something can block it. The larger the church gets, however, the more and more the congregation has to trust the staff, and especially the Senior Pastor. Though the staff (and the SP) must do everything to be as open as possible (especially to criticism), and to be as relationally available as possible, and to work extremely hard on communication so people feel included and informed--ultimately the very large church runs on trust and comes crashing down when suspicion begins to grow.

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