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The Impact of Size on the Growth and Development of a Church

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Over the years my wife and I have attended several different churches. In every one of them the welcoming process was quite different. Right after we were married, we began attending a small church. The church averaged about fifty people at its Sunday morning worship service. People greeted us warmly before and after the worship service, and the pastor's wife invited us to lunch at her house. Only later did we discover that this was a normal practice for the pastor and his family. Each week they planned on having someone over for lunch. If a guest came to church, which was not often in their small congregation, the guest was invited. When no guests were present at the service, they invited one of the church families. The second time we attended, one of the leader's families asked us to go to dinner. All of these lunches and dinners provided a personal welcome that we appreciated, and which eventually helped us join the church.

A few years later my wife and I moved to a new city and began looking for a church home. One of the churches we visited was quite large, averaging over 1,000 people at worship each week. We never met the pastor face-to-face, nor spent any time at lunch or dinner with his family. Greeters met us at the entrance to the church, and then escorted us down the church hallways to Sunday school classes and into the expansive worship auditorium. An information table provided brochures on several church ministries, and we received a letter from the pastor later in the week thanking us for our visit, as well as inviting us to return. Getting involved in the church took place through a formal membership class that newcomers were expected to attend. The organized process for welcoming visitors was quite impressive.

The church we finally settled into was a medium size church averaging about 200 people each Sunday. Two worship services allowed the church to squeeze more people into the rather small facility. Even though the church had no formal welcoming process, we were invited to attend a bowling and pizza night with a class of younger married couples. As we developed friendships with people in the class through other social events, we gradually found ourselves involved in church activities and ministry.

Our experience of being welcomed in these three churches illustrates the fact that churches operate differently depending on the size of the congregation. "Right sizing" the various ministries and processes of communicating, welcoming, training, involving, and a host of other activities is crucial for smooth operation, as well as increased growth, of a church. As a church grows, it cannot simply employ business as usual practices. Larger churches are not simply bigger versions of smaller churches, but in reality an entirely different structure that requires different operational procedures.

Impact of Size on Organizations

The impact of size on organizations and organisms is recognized in several disciplines. Various researchers in such diverse fields as economics, business management, sociology, biology, and missiology have all acknowledged the impact of size on organizational development. For example, studies in biology speak of "power scaling relationships," which are mathematical determinations of how characteristics change with size in different species. Geoffrey B. West, writes,

> ...metabolic rate increases as the ¾ power of mass. Put simply, the scaling law says that if an organism's mass increases by a factor of 10,000 (four orders of magnitude), its metabolic rate will increase by a factor of only 1,000 (three orders of magnitude). This represents an enormous economy of scale: the bigger the creature, the less energy per pound it requires to stay alive. This increase of efficiency with size – manifested by the scaling exponent ¾, which we say is "sublinear" because it's less than one – permeates biology (2007: 34).

The following are brief summations of the research from the arenas of management, sociology, and church growth on the impact of size in organizations.

Business Management

Research in modern management theory reflects on the significance of size in managing a business. Larry Greiner, Professor of Management and Organization at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business writes, "A company's problems and solutions tend to change markedly as the number of its employees and its sales volume increase. Problems of coordination and communication magnify, new functions emerge, levels in the management hierarchy multiply, and jobs become interrelated" (Greiner 1998:56). Anyone who has been involved in small and large companies can resonate with Greiner. The ease with which one communicates with five employees is very different than trying to communicate with fifty employees or with 500.

Henry Mintzberg, Bronfman Professor of Management at McGill University, also acknowledges the importance of understanding the impact of organizational size on management practices. "The size of the overall organization appears to have a considerable effect on what senior managers do," writes Mintzberg. "Specifically, we find that chief executives of smaller organizations engage in fewer formal activities but are much more concerned with the operating work of their organization" (Mintzberg 1973:104). Mintzberg observes that in business enterprises senior executives of smaller companies tend to focus on 1) operating the organization, 2) internal issues, 3) maintaining workflow, 4) real-time concerns, and 5) informal-connections. In contrast executives of larger companies tend to focus on 1) directing the organization, 2) external issues, 3) maintaining wide perspective, 4) future-time concerns, and 5) formal-connections. In a later book Mintzberg suggests three hypotheses concerning effects of size on organizational structure.

1. The larger the organization, the more elaborate its structure—that is, the more specialized its tasks, the more differentiated its units, and the more developed its administrative component.
2. The larger the organization, the larger the average size of its units.
3. The larger the organization, the more formalized its behavior (Mintzberg 1983:124-126).

An additional example from the business field comes from Theodore Caplow. Writing in *How to Run Any Organization*, Caplow introduces the concept of "discontinuities of scale." He notes,

> The diminution of consensus about organization values and goals is a normal consequence of growth, attributable in part to the inherent difficulty of getting a larger number of people who know each other less well to

> agree about anything, in part to the importation of new people and ideas, but mostly to the brute fact that as an organization grows, its relationships to its members and to the environment necessarily change, so that its original values and goals become somewhat incongruent with its current program. These problems are magnified by discontinuities of scale. An organization cannot grow indefinitely in small increments. Sooner or later it makes a quantum leap that transforms its whole character: the company acquires a second factory in another state; the family has its first child; a summer camp adds a winter program. Often the people involved do not realize that anything significant has occurred until they discover by hard experience that their familiar procedures no longer work and that their familiar routines have been bizarrely transformed (Caplow 1976:178).

As organizations grow, Caplow submits that one can expect theft to rise, original members to become obsolete, and an increased dependence on outsiders. He offers five standard methods for coping with organizational growth: team management, decentralization of operations, standardization of procedures, centralization of financial control, and expansion of communication (179).

Sociology

Early insight on the impact of numbers in social life comes from Georg Simmel (1858-1918). A translation of his work by Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, published in 1950 contains a large section on "Quantitative Aspects of the Group" (Wolff 1950:87-177). In this work Simmel acknowledges that larger groups must develop new forms, forms that smaller groups do not need. He comments, "It will immediately be conceded on the basis of everyday experiences, that a group upon reaching a certain size must develop forms and organs which serve its maintenance and promotion, but which a smaller group does not need" (Wolff 1950:87). Additionally, Simmel recognizes that some groups have sociological structures that make it impossible for them to increase in size. For instance, he mentions "the sects of the Waldenses, Mennonites, and Herrnhuter" (89-90). The social structure of such groups demands a tight solidarity that cannot be experienced in larger group structure. Simmel notes that the larger an organization becomes the less inclined it is to radicalism, the more important simple ideas become, and the greater the decrease it experiences in inner cohesion (93-95).

One insight Simmel mentions that I have not found in other

works is the relationship of absolute and relative numbers. For instance, he asserts that the relative impact of key individuals increases as the group grows even if the number of key people remains proportionally the same. Thus, "it is easier for an army of 100,000 to keep a population of ten million under control than it is for a hundred soldiers to hold a city of [10,000] in check, or for one soldier, a village of 100...in spite of the fact that the numerical ratio remains the same" (97-98).

Simmel also introduces the concept of the intermediate structure, which is neither small nor large. "The character of the numerically intermediate structure, therefore, can be explained as a mixture of both: so that each of the features of both the small and the large group appears, in the intermediate group, as a fragmentary trait, now emerging, now disappearing or becoming latent" (Wolff 1950:116). According to Simmel, the intermediate structure shares the essential character of both the smaller and larger structures. The amount of sharing, however, alternates between the smaller and larger characteristics (i.e., the intermediate structure moves back and forth between small and large aspects).

David O. Moberg reviews several aspects related directly to church size in *The Church as a Social Institution* (1962). Regarding church conflict he remarks, "Some evidence indicates that petty jealousies, bickering, back-biting, spites, and personal or factional quarrels are the most prevalent in small congregations which stress intensely emotional types of religious experience (Moberg 1962:270). Speaking about people's commitment he writes, "Increasing size of a church congregation appears to be accompanied by a diminution of the average member's sense of obligation to work, give, and participate" (41). Addressing the importance of evaluation he reports that one study found four factors of church vitality: youthful vigor, financial giving, increased membership and baptism, and consistent growth. He then notes that, "the larger churches outstripped smaller ones on all four measures" (219-220).

Another sociologist, Paul E. Mott, addressed the impact of population size on organizational development. In *The Organization of Society* (1965) Mott outlines thirteen propositions regarding population size and social structure. In the interest of space, just a sampling of his ideas will be mentioned. Mott attests that as organizations increase arithmetically, "the number of possible channels of interaction increases geometrically" (Mott 1965:49). Or, put another way, as the size of a group increases by addition the number of communication pathways multiplies. Thus, the larger the organization the more difficult the communication

process. Furthermore, as the organization grows larger the number of roles increase and become more formalized. While one leader may be sufficient for small organizations, it will take more leaders fulfilling more formal, specialized roles as the organization becomes larger. Lastly, Mott states that as the organization enlarges, the authority structures become decentralized, which in turn creates increased levels of influence and rank in the organization (Mott 1965:38-70).

Sociologist Ronald L. Johnstone builds on Mott's analysis in *Religion and Society In Interaction* (1975). Summarizing Mott's major thesis, Johnstone comments,

> As groups increase in size, the degree of consensus among members concerning goals and especially norms decline. In great part a basic problem of communication and interaction is involved here. As groups grow, a point is reached when not everyone can interact with everyone else; nor can any one person interact with all the others. Levels of understanding and commitment to goals and norms cannot be maintained. Not only can't people share as fully with one another and reach truly common understandings by involving everyone in decision and policy making, but also problems of increasing diversity arise as more members come in. In fact, each new person is a potential disrupter, if not a potential revolutionary, inasmuch as the ideas he brings with him or that he may develop may challenge fundamental tenets of the group. Obviously, the tight-knit, integrated, primary-group-like relationship that may have existed at a group's inception and during its early development begins to submit to increasing diversity and more specialized interests as different elements enter (Johnstone 1975:106-107).

Johnstone discusses several additional issues that organizations face as their size increases: declining norms, increasing deviance, development of specialized roles, greater role autonomy and coordination, and increasing bureaucracy (107-108).

Church Growth

No one in the church growth field has addressed the issues related to congregational size as widely as Lyle E. Schaller. As early as 1973, Schaller differentiated his advice on the basis of small, medium, and large church categories. In *The Pastor and the People* (1973, 1986) he defined a small church as one with fewer than 100 people at worship, a medium church with 100-200 worshipers, and a large church with over 200 worshipers (Schaller 1973/1986:145-147). Two years later he observed in *Hey, That's Our Church!* that churches tend to group at four size levels or plateaus: 30-35, 70-85, 115-135, and 175-200 (1975:39-50). This appears to have been the first time that the natural gathering of churches around certain size measures was recognized in church growth literature.

In most of his books Schaller discusses the impact of size as almost a side issue. For example, in *Effective Church Planning* (1979), it is within the context of a discussion of small and large groups that he introduces some of the same findings noted by several sociologists. He writes, "In the well-managed small group the internal communication system usually is informal, unstructured, and highly effective. In the large group the internal communication system must be intentional, systematized, structured, and redundant (1979:29).

Schaller wrote three books in the 1980s specifically targeted to different sized churches. The first was *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church* (1980). This was followed by *The Small Church IS Different* (1982) and *The Middle Sized Church* (1985). Not only did these three books signal a new approach to church growth (i.e., one based on size), but they also communicated new definitions of small, medium, and large. Schaller classified churches into seven categories: fellowship (35), small (75), middle-sized (140), awkward size (200), large (350), huge (600), and minidenomination (700) (1980:27-35). This division eventually developed into the following widely used analogy of church sizes.

Average Attendance	Type	Analogy
<35	Fellowship	Cat
35-100	Small church	Collie
10-175	Middle-Sized	Garden
175-225	Awkward Size	House
225-450	Large	Mansion
450-700	Huge	Ranch
700+	Mini-denomination	Nation

Schaller presented basic church size strategies to increase church membership in *Growing Plans* (1983). This book is built around three major questions: How do small churches grow? How do middle-sized churches grow? How do large churches grow? Each of the chapters presents ideas for growth founded on size theory. Finally, writing in *The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders*, Schaller claims, "...next to the congregational culture, size is the most revealing and useful frame of reference for examining the differences among congregations in American

Protestantism" (2000:27).

Along with Schaller, an early church growth writer who influenced church size thinking was David A. Womack. In *The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth* (1977) Womack introduced the concept that churches tend to cluster at certain sizes. Building on earlier research by statistician George Edgerly, Womack wrote that churches tend to cluster at 35, 85, 125, 180, 240, 280, 400, 600, 800, and 1,200 average worshipers (1977:17). The growth problem, according to Womack, is that churches do not expand their organization to fit the needs of the next size of church, and they plateau at predictable size levels. Thus, he writes, "If a church wishes to serve more people, it must first expand its base of organization and ministry (1977:15).

While completing his study of the Church of the Nazarene for his doctoral program at Fuller Theological Seminary, Bill Sullivan became interested in the challenge of assisting churches to break the 200 barrier. A statistical analysis of Nazarene Churches in 1983 discovered that "nearly 90 percent have fewer than 200 members. Indeed over half of the churches have fewer than 75 members" (Sullivan 1984:15). After conducting further research to see what factors caused churches to remain below two hundred in size, as well as how churches effectively broke the 200 barrier, he published *Ten Steps to Breaking the 200 Barrier* (1988). This book provided practical insights on how church leaders could manage the growth of a church beyond two hundred in size. It was later revised as *New Perspectives On Breaking the 200 Barrier*.

During the 1990s church consultant, Carl George, wrote two books based on the hypothesis that as churches grow they must change their organizational structure. *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (1991) focused on answering the question "How can a church be large enough to make a difference in the world while remaining small enough to care about people?" George shares, "Almost every growing church I've encountered faces insurmountable limits on its ability to expand its structure without serious disruption in quality" (1991:43). He further attests, "Churches find that each time they grow a little, their quality lessens, so they must scramble to implement a new organizational system geared to their current size" (1991:42). The answer to this organizational dilemma, according to George, is to become a meta-church.

> The name Meta-Church, then, is quite distinct from megachurch. This new label allows for greater numbers, but its deepest focus is on change: pastors' changing their minds about how ministry is to be done, and churches' changing their organizational form in order to be free from size constraints. A Meta-Church pastor understands how a church can be structured so that its most fundamental spiritual and emotional support centers never become obsolete, no matter how large it becomes (1991:51-52).

Meta-Church theory calls for a new social architecture that is people-centered, ministry-centered, and care-centered. It builds on the analogy of yeasts (geometric growth of small groups over time), which allows for continual growth and personal care regardless of how large a church becomes. George says, "The Meta-Church can grow to any size without revising its social architecture for ministry or sacrificing quality of discipleship (1991:177).

Building on Schaller's analogy, George offers the following breakdown of churches by size.

Worship Attendance	Analogy
<35	Mouse-Size Church
35-50	Cat-Size Church
100-200	Lap-Dog-Size Church
200-1,000	Yard-Dog-Size Church
800-1,000	Horse-Size Church
3,000-6,000	Elephant-Size Church
30,000+	Metropolis-of-Mice Meta Church

At the time George wrote this book, less than fifteen churches had grown larger than 6,000 worshipers in the United States. He predicted, however, that "one day soon, North American churches of 25,000 to 50,000" would appear in every metropolitan area, a prophecy that has come true in part. Leadership Network reported in January 2007 that there are 1,170 churches with worship attendances between 2,000 and 9,999, as well as forty churches averaging over 10,000 in worship attendance (Leadership Network 2007:35).

In a follow-up book, *How to Break Growth Barriers* (1993), Carl George specifically deals with the 200, 400, and 800 size barriers. He declares that, "Churches have more in common by their size than by their denomination, tradition, location, age, or any other single, isolatable factor" (1993:129). After demonstrating the predictable barriers, or sizes, around which churches cluster, he addresses several issues of organizational capacity necessary to break the 200 barrier: parking availability, space for classes and seating, and expansion/relocation. To pass the 400 barrier, George recommends changes in the roles of the board and staff. Essentially, operational functions must begin to be shifted to the

staff, while policy-setting functions remain with the board. Growing beyond 800 requires changes in marketing, facilities usage, and organizational design. In part leaders must establish reasonable spans of care, use niche marketing to reach new people, focus on life-stage ministry, and offer multiple worship services (see 1993:129-164).

Two other books appeared at the end of the 1990s by church growth authors that continued to enhance our understanding of church sizes. Elmer Towns, C. Peter Wagner, and Thom S. Rainer authored *The Everychurch Guide To Growth: How Any Plateaued Church Can Grow* (1998). Wagner offered insights on breaking the 200 barrier, Rainer ideas on breaking the middle-sized (400) barrier, and Towns thoughts on getting over the 1,000 barrier. The second book, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out The Best in Any Size Church* (1999), also addressed moving through the small, medium, and large forms of church. In this book I attempted to bring together all of the church growth thought up to that time related to small, medium, and large church sized strategies.

The most recent books to reflect on the implication of size on church growth were published in 2003, 2005, and 2006. *Overcoming Barriers to Growth* by Michael Fletcher submits that there are really only two barriers to the growth of a church: the 100/200 barrier and the 700/800 barrier (2003/2005: 20). *The Myth of the 200 Barrier*, written by Kevin E. Martin, takes a contrarian approach. He rejects the thesis of a 200 barrier, but espouses a dividing line (barrier?) at 150. However, Martin does admit that churches tend to cluster at predictable sizes (2005:11). While not strictly a study on church sizes, *Confession of a Reformission Rev.* (2006) by Mark Driscoll is a testimony of how God worked in the ministry of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. Driscoll writes, "Churches, like children, have a shoe size that they will grow into. As a church grows, it must accept it size" (2006:28). The bulk of the book is a description of the challenges and changes that Mars Hill Church went through at predictable size levels: 0-45, 45-75, 75-150, 150-350, 350-1,000, 1,000-4,000, and 4,000 to 10,000.

A summary comparison of the breakdown of church sizes according to church growth writers is as follows:

Schaller (1975)	Womack (1977)	Schaller (1980)	George (1991)	McIntosh (2007)
30-35	50	<35	35	35
70-85	90	35-100	50	85
115-135	120	100-175	100	125
175-200	200s	175-225	200	200
	300s	225-450	400	400
	600	450-700	800	800
	1,200	>700	1,000	1,200
			3,000	3,000
			6,000	6,000
			30,000	10,000

My listing above is not based on any scientifically gathered data, but a summary "best guess" based on the observations and studies I have gathered. Several researchers already mentioned above agree on the general barriers up to 800 in size. A recent D.Min. dissertation, by David B. Vasquez, confirms the existence of predictable clusters of churches at 1200-to-1500, 3000, and 5000-to-6000 in size (Vasquez 2006:122-124).

David Vasquez suggests that the points at which churches tend to cluster are not hard numerical numbers, but rather are "ranges" of numbers around which churches tend to cluster. For example, the 200 barrier is not a hard number, but is more of a range, say between 150-250. Thus a church, which plateaus at 150, is still struggling with the 200 barrier, as is the church that plateaus at 250. Martin's statement that the 200 barrier is a myth, based on his reading of *The Tipping Point* (2002), by Malcolm Gladwell, is moot. While, there clearly is no research data that supports a hard numerical barrier at 200 (as Sullivan's study of the Church of the Nazarene pointed out in 1985), there is research data that supports numerical ranges (or clusters), which can be spoken of as barriers. The same holds true for 400, 800, 1200, or any other point on the chart above.

Leadership network reports the following percentage breakdown of churches in the United States as of 2007.

Worship Attendance	Protestant Churches
1-99	177,000 (59%)
100-499	105,000 (35%)
500-999	12,000 (4%)
1,000-1,999	6,000 (2%)
2,000-9,999	1,170 (0.4%)
10,000+	40 (0.01%)

(Leadership Network. Innovation 2007).

Based on research by John Vaughan, the following chart

gives evidence that churches are continuing to grow above 2,000 in size, and at a faster pace than ever.

Year	Total Mega Churches
> 1970	10
> 1980	50
> 1983	74
> 1985	100
> 1990	250
> 1998	400
> 2000	500
> 2003	700
> 2004	850
> 2005	1,200
> 2007	1,400+

(Unpublished statistics from John Vaughan, 2007).

While it used to take a church from 15-50 years to grow larger than 2,000 worshipers, it now appears to be happening in a little as five to ten years in several reported cases. Given current trends, we are most likely going to see even more large churches in the future. Thus, it is pivotal that we understand the dynamics of how larger organizations, including churches, grow.

What Have We Learned?

Leaders like to talk about a church's DNA, and how it controls the growth and development of their church. In living organisms DNA is the nucleic acid that contains the genetic instructions used in the design of all known life. Some compare DNA to a set of blueprints, a recipe, or a code since it contains the directions to build organisms cells. Thus a church's DNA carries the information that quietly guides the way a church is formed.

Part of understanding a church's DNA is appreciating the rules that appear to govern the growth, decline, and fruitfulness of social organizations. Although church growth is ultimately the work of God the Father (See I Cor 3), there are general connections between a church's size, relationships, and organization that have crucial implications for its growth. The following are a dozen essential facts that we have learned about the impact of a church's size on its DNA.

First, the larger a church becomes the more numerous and complex the relationships and organizational structure. For example, in a small group consisting of ten people there are forty-five potential relationships. However, in a church of one hundred people there are 4,950 potential relationships. And, in a church of five hundred there are 124,750 potential relationships![2] This is why, as a church grows larger, the leaders sense the need to work harder at communication, long-range planning, and building unity.

Reflecting on the organizational needs of a growing church, Lyle Schaller explains, "It probably will need a more complex organizational structure" (1985:129). He goes on to suggest that as a church grows larger it needs a longer time frame for planning, a heavier emphasis on outreach, and a greater reliance on large group organizing principles.

Second, the larger a church becomes the more it must break down into midsized and smaller units to maintain care and communication. Carl George addressed this issue in this pace setting book *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. George predicts, "All churches, no matter what their size, must deal with a certain organizational issue if they're to experience the ongoing, quality growth that stems from Christ's Great Commission to 'make disciples' (Matthew 28:18-20)" (1991:42). Later George defines this certain organizational issue as "Churches find that each time they grow a little, their quality lessens, so they must scramble to implement a new organizational system geared to their current size" (1991:43). As churches increase in size, and in the number of relationships as found in the first point above, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide care for and involvement of additional people. George discovered that churches must become ever smaller as them grow ever larger. Thus, the larger a church, or any organization, becomes the more it must break down into smaller units to maintain an actable level of care for its members. Thus, an emphasis on small group ministry is absolutely necessary, as a church grows larger if it hopes to maintain a positive flow of communication and pastoral care to all of its worshipers.

Third, the larger a church becomes the more it must develop specialized roles and functions, as well as increasing the total number of roles. Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18 is the classic biblical illustration of this point. Observing the struggle of Moses caring for the concerns of the people of Israel, Jethro suggested that he break down the oversight into subdivisions of leaders. Jethro recommended that Moses select leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens (See Exodus 18:21). Minor disputes among the people of Israel were handled at the lowest level, while major disputes were pushed further up the path of leadership. Thus, not only did Moses expand the number of leaders, but also those at the different levels took on more specialized roles. Likewise as churches grow up and beyond each

step or plateau, they must increasing add additional leaders while expanding the types and functions of roles. In smaller churches evangelism, assimilation, and pastoral care all take place in one unit. However, in larger churches these elements become specialized, each functioning as separate units. This puts a premium on specialization, association, and cooperation in larger churches.

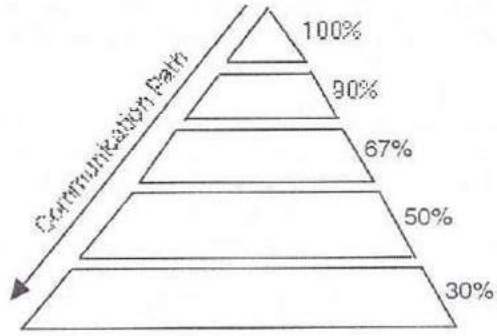
Fourth, the larger a church grows the more specialized and diverse its subgroups must become. When churches are small it is normal to find that they offer a limited number and array of small group studies. However, as churches grow larger they begin offering an ever-growing number of specialized groups—12 step groups, support groups, task groups, etc. This is tied to the issue of critical mass. A smaller church may have only one or two families with a special needs child. While the church leaders are no doubt concerned for the special needs of the two families, there will not be sufficient critical mass to offer a small support group or specialized class for them. As a church grows larger, however, it will soon amass a number of families with special needs children. With the increased critical mass it will be able to offer a support group and/or special needs class aimed directly at this need.

Fifth, the larger a church becomes the more its roles are formalized, and the number of levels of lay and staff roles increase. When small churches begin adding staff members it is quite common to use simple names like associate pastor or assistant pastor or director of children's ministry. These simplistic titles cut wide swaths of understanding the role and function of these staff members. However, as a church grows larger the titling of each staff member becomes more specific and formal, such as associate pastor of assimilation, administrative pastor, or director of preschool. The formalization of the role and title narrows down the exact function that each person does in the performance of his or her role. The same occurs with lay roles and titles. Smaller churches may have elders and deacons, but larger churches have administrative elders, ruling elders, ministering elders, shepherding elders, and a host of other more specific titles and functions.

Sixth, the larger a church becomes the more important regular communication of its vision, values, mission, and philosophy of ministry is in order to maintain common norms. Maintaining unity of purpose and direction becomes ever more difficult as a church grows larger. The increasing number or relationships means the use of the grapevine, which was used to effectively communicate when the church was smaller, no longer works. In

addition the natural process of communication creates loss a every level on the communication chain (see figure #1).

Figure 1



At the top level, a message is shared with an expectation that the people will remember 100 percent of it. But, as one can see, the second level of leadership actually catches only about 90 percent of it. As the message is communicated further down the various levels of church leadership, more and more of it is lost until fewer and fewer people understand it. At the third tier of leadership, only about 67% of the message is heard. The fourth tier receives only 50%. When the communication reaches the congregation, only about 30% of the message is received. A message in a small church only has one level to travel to reach the entire congregations, which is why the grapevine works so well. Yet, as can be seen from the figure above, the large church has numerous levels that a message must traverse before it reaches the entire congregation. Thus, growing churches find that redundant systems must be put in place to insure permeation of communication throughout the entire church.

Seventh, the larger a church becomes the more authority key influencers gain. The decision-making processes in smaller churches is often driven by the entire congregation, that is the congregation desires, and feels they must have, a say in almost all decisions made on behalf of the church. Such an organizational approach to decision-making can work very well because the church is small enough for members to have a sufficient breadth of knowledge about the entire church ministry to make wise decisions. As a church grows, however, members of the congregations begin to realize they no longer have the breadth of understanding of the church program to make good discussions. When the church becomes mid-sized many decisions are handed over to a board and various committee. But, when as a church

moves on to become a larger size, the congregation and board gradually come to understand that only the senior pastor and members of the pastoral staff have enough knowledge of the total church ministry to make day-to-day functional decisions. The larger a church grows the more the senior pastor and pastoral staff gains authority as the key influencers of ministry direction. The larger a congregation becomes the more the congregation follows the senior pastor's vision.

Eighth, the larger a church becomes the more potential exists for conflict among various parts of the organizational system. The relational character found in smaller churches allows for good communication and coordination of ministry functions. While smaller churches do experience conflict, there appears to be a greater opportunity for disharmony as the church grows due to the increased difficulty in communicating with larger groups of people. Conflict arising from the use of facilities, distribution of finances, coordination of plans, and a host of other related issues becomes more probable as a church increases in size. Therefore larger churches must focus on assisting subunits to co-relate, and function with harmony and less friction.

Ninth, the larger a church becomes, the more decentralized the ministry. It is possible for a single person to oversee, coordinate, and control a church while it is small. But, once a church mid-sized, it becomes increasingly impossible to do so. As leaders share ministry leadership with others, push care giving and decision-making down to the lowest levels of lay ministry, decentralization beckons.

Tenth, the larger a church becomes the more necessary it is that it learn from other churches of equal or greater size, even from churches of different theology, polity, or any number of identifiable aspects. Its size is the primary definitive characteristic. Other than a church's cultural context, its size is the main determinant of its organization. Growing churches soon discover that fewer and fewer churches are available from which they can learn. Since most denominations and church associations are made up of smaller churches, as a church grows it may find very few churches in its own theological family from which it can learn. Thus, larger churches look to churches of their same size in other church families as a place to learn how to take it to the next level.

Eleventh, the larger a church becomes the more it must focus on issues and needs further removed in time and space. A small speedboat can be turned around in a very short space. However, to turn an ocean liner around takes many miles and a longer time frame in which to do so. The same is true of churches.

Smaller churches are like speedboats in that they can turn very quickly if the pastor and people desire to do so. Larger churches, much like ocean liners, need much more time to communicate the necessity, the plan, and the procedure for turning in a new direction.

The same is true regarding a church's span of ministry impact. Smaller churches generally focus on ministry needs close to home in their neighborhood, city, or state. Larger churches look to meet ministry needs in the nation and world due in part to greater resources and vision. To reach the next level a church must solve problems in a smaller space before it can concern itself with issues in a larger space. This means that the larger the space (city, state, nation, world) and the longer the time (week, month, year, multiple years) the fewer churches will be involved in solving problems at that level. Thus, the leaders of larger churches must increasingly be more adept at strategic planning (see figure #2).

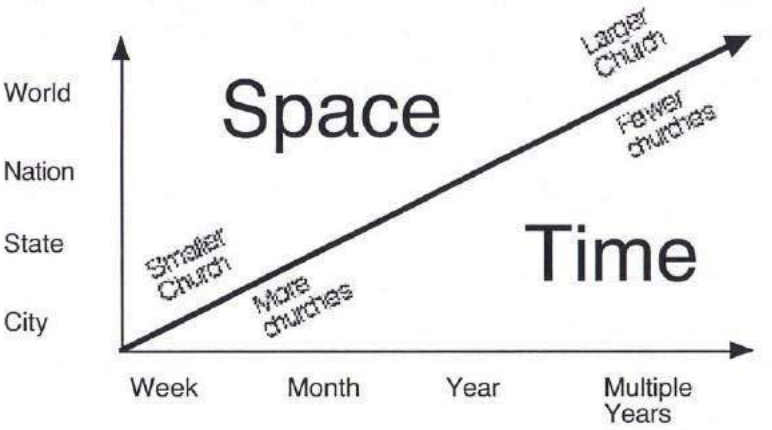


Figure #2

Twelfth, the larger a church becomes the more important it is that that it continue to innovate. As churches grow larger in size they demonstrate economy-of-scale relationships, that is, a doubling of size requires less than a doubling of resources. For example, a small church can add a second worship service, and include more people, without needing to add a second worship leader. One worship leader can lead two or three different worship services, which allows the church to double or triple without increasing its cost for paying an additional worship pastor. An opposite effective occurs regarding creative output. A phe-

nomenon called "super linear scaling" takes place regarding creativity, that is, as a church increases in size it expands its ability to innovate. Thus is it no surprise that most of the new ministry programs are designed, tested, and developed by larger churches rather than smaller ones. Not only are larger churches more innovative than smaller ones, it apparently is important that they continue to innovate. Geoffrey B. West, president of Santa Fe Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, declares, "In the absence of continual major innovations, organizations will stop growing and may even contract, leading to either stagnation or ultimate collapse. Furthermore, to prevent this, the time between innovations must decrease as the system grows" (2007: 35).

Summary

From numerous fields of research, it is apparent that the nature of all organizations and organisms is to change as they increase in size. This is no less true in the churches we love and serve. As we continue to grapple with the challenges of understanding and applying church size strategies to impact our churches, it will have far reaching effects.

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NOTES

1. Portions of this paper were presented at the Association of Nazarene Researchers and Sociologists annual meeting in 2007.

2. There is a mathematical formula that can be used to calculate how many potential relationships are possible given a certain number of people in a church. If n is the number of people, then $n(n-1)$ equals the total number of possible relationships.