



Healthy Congregations Size Transitions

Disease: Size Strangulation

1. Congregations fall into distinctive size categories and congregations of different sizes organise in different ways.
2. Congregations do not grow or decline smoothly, but tend to plateau at certain predictable sizes.
3. In order to successfully grow past a plateau, a congregation must deliberately break with familiar patterns of behaviour and begin to act as larger congregations act.

A church's size category is a matter of attitude as much as numbers.

Size transition is a lot like standing on a fault line.

The most severe and potentially damaging tensions are those caused by pastors and individuals on the leadership team who relate to the church according to the wrong size category.

To cross over into a new stage, leaders must understand what lies ahead and make the necessary realignments before they expect to move to a new level of growth.

People who want churches to grow seldom give much thought to the fact that growing churches always change – the greater the growth the more radical the change. "Do you want growth knowing that growth will mean change?"

Vision casting is especially important in the transition phases.
Must be clearly articulated plan in regard to what, when and how.

Questions:

What changes are anticipated if our church grows significantly?

What would our church be like without significant growth?

Expected changes:

Church structure

Leadership styles

Communication

Facility

Factors To Be Worked Through:

Congregations self definition

Pastor's role

How decisions are made

Size and function of paid staff

Facility capacity

Movement toward multi-cell reality

Delegation of planning

Change management

Infrastructure for member care and involvement

Conflict prevention and management

Phases to be worked through in decline:

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

Death

"The Death and Dying of a Congregation" in *Size Transitions* 161-169

Regardless of whether the congregation chooses to become larger as one group or grow lots of smaller congregations the ways of thinking and acting at different stages are important.

Communication is vital at each level and extremely important when in a transition phase. Systems of communication are different at each level but must include ways for communication in all directions.

Education produces Liberation

Communication produces Cooperation

Expectation is Invitation

Fletcher, *Overcoming Barriers to Growth*, 96-101

Assess where you are.

Communicate with the team.

Anticipate the tension "prewire the crisis"

Get leadership team on the same page and develop a plan

Family Church: Up to 50 members

Matriarchs and patriarchs are the central figures

What members want from the pastor:

Pastoral care

Can be consultants to the matriarchs/patriarchs

Factors:

Growth threatens closeness and informal influence networks. Can the 'in' people handle not being 'in'.

Change from 'I' to 'we'

Pastoral: 50-150

Pastor is master coordinator

What members want from the pastor:

Manager of the various parental figures

Good communication with the congregation and the ability of the pastor to delegate authority, assign responsibility and recognise the accomplishments of others are important. "Without such skill the central pastoral function weakens the entire structure. The clergy person becomes overworked, isolated, exhausted and may be attacked by other leaders." *Size Transitions 35*

When congregations get 130-150 people they begin to get nervous because they are beginning to lose the intimate fellowship the prize so highly.

"If clergy have the idea firmly fixed in their head that they are ineffective as a pastor unless they can relate in a profound and personal way with every member of the parish then 150 active members (plus an even larger number of inactive members) are about all one person can manage" *Size Transitions 36*

The pastor often becomes the blocking point

Sometimes a congregation can be 700 in attendance but still function on a pastoral-size model. Where the pastor preaches and visit. The pastors perception of his job burned him out and eventually cost him his marriage and his ministry.

The transition from pastoral to program is considered the most difficult. Many churches make an unconscious decision not to make the transition and keep hovering around 150. They are not willing to lose ready access to their 'religions leader' and the feeling of oneness where everyone knows everyone else.

People must accept they will not be able to know everyone in the church

The people will have to become inclusive of others and unwritten rules will have to be supplanted with clear methods of communication

Program: 150-350

Empowered leaders who function as shepherds

What members want from the pastor:

Planning with other leaders to ensure high quality ministries

Good recruitment, training, supervision and evaluation to grow leaders
Keep the morale of the leaders high and give high priority to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the leaders.

The pastor must often step back from direct ministry with people to coordinate and support the people who offer this ministry.

Clear direction is vital

For clergy who get their primary kicks out of direct pastoral care work, ministry in a program-size church may leave them with a chronic feeling of flatness and lack of fulfilment.

Corporation: 350 plus

Multiples mini-congregations of various sizes

There is leadership on many levels

The worship service is a big deal

What members want from the pastor:

Must coordinate multiple staff in a healthy way

Must coordinate diverse groups around the mission

High level of administrative skills

Summarised From:

Michael Fletcher, *Overcoming Growth Barriers*, Bethany, 2006.

Beth Ann Gaede, ed. *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Alban, 2001

Carl George, *How To Break Growth Barriers*, Baker, 1993.

Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church, Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*, Alban, 1998.

Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, Revell, 1999.

Appendix:

Six Transitions 51-57 in *Size Transitions*

Organizational Types 62-63 *Size Transitions*

McIntosh's Typology of Church Size *One Size Doesn't Fit All* 143-144