

## THE DYNAMICS OF SMALL CHURCH MINISTRY

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*Small churches in the United States and Canada are a large proportion of the total number of churches and therefore deserve closer attention. A small church's perception of itself is good in that it helps maintain a family atmosphere, but it can lend itself to pessimism in both pastor and people. Lay influence tends to be greater in a small church, a feature that can be cultivated to advantage through wise leadership. A small-church pastor must accept his administrative responsibilities as well as his relational ones. He must know how to involve his people and impart his vision to them. Small churches that want to grow must ask themselves several probing questions in order to succeed in doing so. Service in a small church can be very rewarding.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Is the small church really necessary? More than half of the Christians who worship in the United States and Canada do so in just 1/7 of the churches in these two countries. In view of this preference

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for larger churches, one might think that the day of the small church has passed. However, Lyle Schaller, noted analyst of American churches, reports that despite this phenomenon, the majority of churches in North America are small.

The small church is the normative institutional expression of the worshipping congregation among the Protestant denominations on the North American continent. One fourth of all Protestant congregations on this continent have fewer than thirty-five people in attendance at the principal weekly worship service, and one half average less than seventy-five.<sup>2</sup>

The small church is seemingly a continuing institution in our culture. According to Schaller's statistics, the majority of those entering pastoral ministry will serve a small congregation. Yet most training programs appear to gear themselves for the larger church.<sup>3</sup> The role models placed before seminary and Bible college students are usually "successful" graduates who serve in larger churches. In some cases they are pastors of today's mega-churches.

Such role models can be inspiring, but the operating principles that have enabled them to succeed in the large church are often inappropriate for their smaller counterparts. As Schaller observes, the small church is *different*. The pastor who wants to succeed in a small context must understand the dynamics of small church ministry.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Lyle Schaller, *The Small Church is Different* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 11. The definition of "small" is a matter of disagreement. Some identify a small church by its attendance. In the 1960's, for example, the New York State Council of Churches attempted to establish a numerical minimum as a mark of congregational viability. Another approach has tried to identify the small church in terms of the number of pastors who serve the church; a small church is one served by a single pastor. For the purposes of this essay, "small" is defined in terms of certain shared characteristics that affect the church's identity, leadership dynamics, and patterns of growth or non-growth. See Anthony G. Pappas, "Let's Talk SMALL," *American Baptist Quarterly* 9/2 (June 1990):87-90.

<sup>3</sup>Editor's Note: Though The Master's Seminary is on the campus of Grace Community Church, which usually ministers to over 8,000 people each Sunday, TMS is one of the few seminaries in America to devote an entire course to "Pastoring the Small Church."

<sup>4</sup>The differing dynamics in a small church should not obscure the broader consideration that the biblical principles according to which Christ has built and continues to build His church (Matt 16:18) have not changed with time and remain

## PERCEPTION DYNAMIC

Perhaps the most significant human factor affecting the small church's ministry is the congregation's own self-perception. Large churches tend to see themselves as an institution. They often look to the business world for their role models. The pastor's ability to be an administrator is an important gauge of his effectiveness.

In contrast to this "corporation" mentality, a small church is more likely to see itself as a family. Relational skills are valued more highly than business skills.<sup>5</sup> In these churches the pastor is normally a "father" figure rather than a CEO. This kind of image can pose a problem for pastors whose training has primarily emphasized skills applicable in an office setting such as management and administration. This is especially true of pastors who serve in small towns and rural communities where the relational dynamic is a community as well as a congregational trait.

*Positive Features*

The tendency of a small church to operate as a family is the basis for many of its strengths. It naturally produces a sense of intimacy that larger churches must make a special effort to achieve, usually through the use of special interest groups. This is an area where a small church enjoys a more easily achieved advantage over a large church. In his study of 100 successful churches, Salter observed that those who were part of a large congregation were often anonymous and unaccountable. He contrasted this with the experience of the small-town church of 100 people where the attender probably feels personally comforted by God's Word and scrutinized by God's

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equally applicable to both smaller and larger churches. This essay will focus on the dynamics of the small church, but the writer presupposes that these foundational principles apply here as they do in larger churches. For a good summary of the principles, see John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 25.

people.<sup>6</sup>

Because the small church sees itself as a family, the feeling of personal responsibility is more intense among its members. This produces a strong sense of ownership for the church's ministries. This sense of responsibility combined with the lack of resources and the short tenure of many small-church pastors results in a high degree of lay involvement.

### *Negative Features*

Smallness has disadvantages, however. In a small church the tendency to equate size with success and to view size as a measure of potential effectiveness often produces an inferiority complex that can affect both the pastor and the congregation. Because it is overly sensitive to its resource limitations, imposed because of its size, weaknesses rather than strengths tend to shape the congregation's self-evaluation. Churches of this sort are inclined to apologize for their failures instead of celebrating their victories.<sup>7</sup> A pastor's low morale and frequent changes in the pastoral staff aggravate these feelings of

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<sup>6</sup>Darius Salter, *What Really Matters in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 114. Yet this potential in a small church is not always realized. This writer has observed that an increased awareness of the intimate details of the lives of those who attend the small church may actually keep its members from holding one another accountable. This is especially true in a small town, where social pressure sometimes leads to a pattern of denial when serious problems arise. For example, leaders may sometimes be less willing to exercise church discipline when it is warranted, fearing that other members will take offense and leave the church.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Gary Harrison, "The Making of a Good Little Church," *Leadership* 7/3 (Summer 1986) 92-93, has written, "In smaller churches, I have observed what I call the 'attitudes vs. abilities' factor. Organizations that work with churches often offer resources to sharpen leaders' skill levels. Such resources, of course, are both good and needed. Rarely, however, do they address the self-image of the church. It is often that deficient attitude, not the lack of skills, that hinders a small church's development." In reality, it would be better to ask, "What does Christ think of our church?" Contemporary applications of His seven messages to first-century churches in Revelation 2-3 help answer this significant inquiry.

inferiority.<sup>8</sup>

Another hidden disadvantage of the small church's family orientation is the difficulty it poses for the assimilation of new members. Small congregations are closely knit. Their members are not only part of the same church, but also frequently belong to the same extended, physically related family. New attenders may feel that the only way to gain acceptance is to marry into one of the family clans.

These ties can produce a subtle bias that causes a small church to sabotage its own growth. Members sometimes feel threatened as they watch the congregation's size increase. As a result, they become suspicious of the motives of newcomers. Their frustration increases as attendance expands, because the church seems less familiar than before.<sup>9</sup> A pastor who encounters this mentality, especially one fresh from seminary, who has not yet had his idealism tempered by reality, reacts with outrage when he realizes that he and his congregation are actually working at cross purposes. He prays and struggles to see his church increase in numbers, but the church's members attempt to maintain the *status quo* or even decrease the size of their congregation.

This frustration can enlarge through a pastor's own hidden or not-so-hidden agenda. Whether the pastor is willing to admit it or not, his calling is also a career whose course can be determined by the performance of the church he serves. As Walrath has observed, "the favored pastoral career track leads through small congregations to a goal in larger congregations: bigger is better."<sup>10</sup> When the time comes for a change in ministry, a solid increase in attendance generally opens the door for advancement to "senior pastor" status in a multiple-staff church.

No doubt, the pastor's frustration with the congregation springs

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<sup>8</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 60.

<sup>9</sup>Loren Seibold, "Stretching Your Small-Two Church," *Leadership* 10/3 (Spring 1989):109.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas Alan Walrath, "Help for Small Churches," *The Christian Ministry* 14/3 (May 1983):15.

from a genuine fear that the church's parochialism will hinder the great commission. However, the threat that this exclusive mentality poses to his career also contributes to his feeling of futility.

Ironically, when the congregation reacts this way to newcomers, it does so in the belief that its behavior is in the best interests of the church. An awareness that their pastor regards their behavior as subversive to the spread of the gospel would shock and offend the members. Their ambivalence, or even opposition, toward the church's growth stems from their concern that the new members do not share the same common history as the long-term members of the church.

When these newcomers, one of whom is often the pastor, fail to respect the past and the authority of the patriarchal families, the "old timers" perceive a threat to the very essence of the church. In a sense, this is a threat to "family" solidarity. They conclude, perhaps with good reason, that before long the church as they have known it will cease to exist.

Often the pastor mistakenly decides that the problem with the "old guard" is that they do not care about Christ or the church. In reality, the opposite is sometimes true. Their resistance, however misguided it may be, is an outgrowth of their genuine love for the church and a reflection of their investment in it. They were around when the pastor arrived, and chances are good they will remain when he moves on.

The pastor is probably correct in his assumption that the church must move away from the past if it is to grow. But it is unlikely that he will be able to make any headway until he first affirms that past. When long-time members see that he is willing to acknowledge the investment they have made and guard their history, they will probably be ready to set their sights on the future.

### LEADERSHIP DYNAMIC

Not only is the small church's self-perception different from that of a large congregation, the dynamics of leadership are also different. In many large congregations leadership tends to be vested in the pastoral staff. In some cases one is tempted to use the word authoritarian to

describe them.

For the most part this approach to leadership is based erroneously on pragmatic considerations rather than correctly on theological principles. This can be especially true of the mega-church. A congregation that numbers ten to twelve thousand makes governing by a small board very challenging and actual congregational involvement almost impossible. The strong leadership style of many mega-church pastors may also reflect the important role that their personalities have played in the development of these churches. A church that is largely the result of the vision and energy of one man is going to listen carefully when that man speaks.

#### *Lay Involvement*

Certainly, it is possible to find small churches where the primary leadership power resides in the pastor. In general, however, small congregations tend to reflect a higher degree of lay influence. This tradition is largely due to the shortage of qualified pastors available to the small church.

Lyle Schaller explains:

In thousands of small congregations there are no seminary-trained and ordained ministers on the scene. Even in those small-membership churches served by a seminary trained minister, the pastor usually has less influence in charting the course than is true in large congregations.<sup>11</sup>

One of the prerequisites for pastoral success in the small congregation is the ability to accept the reality of lay leadership and work effectively with the influences that reside in the congregation. The effective pastor, however, must also learn to be sensitive to the church's changing expectations regarding his role. This can be complicated, since these expectations change with both the size of the church and the individual leadership situation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 28.

<sup>12</sup>The situational leadership theory of Blanchard and Hersey points out that the

Small churches numbering under 100 value the personal and relational aspects of pastoral ministry. In churches that average between 100 and 200 the focus is on individual leadership characteristics. In large congregations the emphasis is placed upon organizational leadership.<sup>13</sup> Even within small congregations one finds a range of expectations regarding pastoral leadership. Schaller has divided small churches into three basic organizational types:

(1) The fellowship of less than 35 or 40 which uses an informal decision making process akin to that of the small group. In the fellowship the individual member's voice is going to carry as much weight as the pastor's, if there is a pastor!

(2) The congregation, averaging from 35 to 90, which utilizes standing committees and uses more congregational involvement in its decision making. Churches of this size expect the pastor to be more of an initiator than those that could be regarded as a "fellowship."

(3) The larger (or mid-sized) congregation that averages from 85 to 150 whose government is more representative. Churches of this size expect the pastor to be an initiating leader and an administrator.<sup>14</sup> Notice that there is some overlap in these designations. Whether a church falls into the category of a fellowship, small, or mid-sized congregation depends upon a combination of factors. A good example of this is seen in Steve Burt's description of two churches, both with a congregation of eighty to ninety people and engaged in similar activities, but whose self perception was radically different. One church described itself as a "mid-sized church with a variety of programs." The other described itself as "just a small church."<sup>15</sup> A

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most effective leadership style depends upon a combination of factors that include both the motivation and the task readiness of those for whom the leader is responsible (Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior* [Englewood Cliffs: Simon & Schuster, 1988]). This applies only to those opportunities that fall outside well-defined biblical mandates or direction.

<sup>13</sup>Lyle Schaller, "What Does Your Pastor Do Best?" *The Christian Ministry* 15/2 (March 1984):13.

<sup>14</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 161-63.

<sup>15</sup>Steve Burt, *Activating Leadership in the Small Church* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1988)

major contributing factor will be the leadership style employed by the pastor.

It is interesting to note that these differing values not only reflect the increasing organizational complexity of the developing church, but also appear to mirror the corresponding distance that arises in the relationship between the pastor and the congregation as the church grows.

#### *Administrative Demands*

The pastor's role is further complicated by leadership demands which are placed upon him but which may not be a part of the congregation's normal expectation. Despite the fact that small churches value relational skills over those that are administrative, the pastor is still required to do the work of administration. Whether or not the small congregation views the pastor as a CEO, he is nevertheless required to function as one. Indeed, the ability to balance congregational involvement with strong pastoral leadership skills may be the key ingredient for success in the small church.

Not only do the leadership demands placed upon the pastor shift as the size of the church increases, they also change with the age of the church. In the early stages of the church's development the entrepreneurial pastor is likely to be the most effective. As the church matures, however, more complex managerial skills are needed and the pastor's leadership function becomes more maintenance oriented.

This change can create conflict for the pastor whose primary area of leadership strength does not correspond to the church's current need. At this stage he can choose either to further develop his own skills in the needed area, compensate through effective delegation, or limit the church's development. In some cases this may be the point at which a pastoral change will take place.

#### *Balancing Personal and Flock Involvement*

Successful leadership in the small church is multidimensional. It is

made up of two components that, on the surface, would seem to be in conflict with each other: strong pastoral leadership and strong lay leadership. Strong pastoral leadership is needed for casting vision and providing the kind of direction that will help the church steer clear of those innate tendencies which tend to stifle its growth and development. The right to exercise such leadership is earned.

Strong lay leadership is equally important. While the small congregation may not be capable of being a "full service church," motivated and active members can provide a surprising number of highly effective ministries. Although the small congregation naturally tends to foster lay leadership, the pastor also plays a critical role.

The pastor who wishes to achieve the highest degree of lay involvement must recognize that effective lay leadership is a matter of empowerment rather than employment.

Steve Burt observes,

Too many pastors, in their eagerness to bring in the kingdom fast, act like donkey owners, treating their volunteers like dumb asses who refuse to move instead of treating them like the pearls of great price that they really are.<sup>16</sup>

As a pastor I must ask myself why I want people to be involved in the ministries of the church. There are two possible motivations. One is utilitarian: their involvement will enable me to accomplish my ministry goals. Viewed from this perspective people become the tools the pastor uses to help the church and further his own ministry. In this model lay leaders serve the pastor. Understandably, members who feel they are being used in this way are often reluctant to cooperate.

A better motivation is one that springs from a desire to see others find complete fulfillment in Christ by helping them develop their full potential. In this model the pastor serves the lay leaders. Lay leaders who are fortunate enough to be part of a congregation that employs this model are more likely to enjoy their ministry, since the church's

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 46.

programs are designed to match their unique gifts and interests. They feel valued because they perceive that the church has a genuine concern for their welfare. The overall quality of ministry is more likely to improve because the church's programs are driven by the interests of those who serve in them. Jesus' observation regarding the Sabbath is equally appropriate for the ministries of the church: programs were made for people not people for programs.

### *Vision*

It is also important to recognize that effective lay ministry grows out of a sense of congregational need. The pastor's function as one who casts vision must be balanced with a sensitivity to the congregation's perception of its own needs. The pastor often anticipates a field of ministry that is much broader than that perceived by the congregation. This difference is partially due to the fact that most members view the church as a place to be served rather than to serve.<sup>17</sup> They believe that the church's primary responsibility should be to minister to the needs of its own.

Because of this perception the thinking of the average member tends to be rooted in the present. The leadership role of the pastor, on the other hand, requires that his thinking be focused on the future. At times this difference in orientation produces conflicting views of what the church's goals and objectives should be. The pastor, for example, may feel that the church's resources would be most strategically used in fostering the strength of the youth ministry, because he anticipates that an increasing number of teens will come into the church program in the years ahead. The congregation may feel that those same resources would be better used to renovate the kitchen, because they

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<sup>17</sup>A 1991 survey by the Barna Research Group revealed that fifteen percent of the adults questioned who described themselves as Christians were also involved in the teaching ministry of the church. Nineteen percent of those surveyed were in positions of leadership. While these percentages are surprisingly high, they still reflect what might be described as a consumer mentality among believers. In the average church a minority does a majority of the work. See George Barna, *What America Believes* (Ventura: Regal, 1991) 261.

are currently being inconvenienced by its inadequate facilities.<sup>18</sup> This difference in priorities does not necessarily mean that the congregation is unconcerned about the youth. It is simply a reflection of their "present minded" orientation. Congregational priorities are likely to change once the current population of children ages and members become aware of the stress placed upon the church's programs. While such short term thinking is understandable, it is also dangerous because it can limit the church to a maintenance ministry, or it can force a church to base decisions on selfish priorities rather than spiritual priorities.

Perceived needs must be affirmed and balanced with goals that reflect both the developing needs of the church, as well as its broader responsibility to the community at large and to God's Word. A vision statement can be an effective means of accomplishing this.

George Barna recommends that the church's vision statement be limited to a short paragraph and satisfy at least three key requirements. First, it must identify the type of people to whom the church has been called to minister. Secondly, it must clarify what the church hopes to accomplish through its ministry to this target group. Thirdly, it should identify the distinctives of the church that have defined its particular ministry niche.<sup>19</sup> Once the church's mission has been defined and articulated, it should be regularly restated to the congregation.

## GROWTH DYNAMIC

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the small church is that of growth. Congregational growth is not automatic. It is affected by a complex set of factors, not all of which can be controlled by the church.

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<sup>18</sup>The ministry goals of the pastor may also be affected by community needs that are not immediately felt by the congregation. For example, if the congregation is aging, the pastor's desire for a ministry to teens may have been prompted by his awareness that there are a large number of troubled youth in the community.

<sup>19</sup>George Barna, *Without a Vision the People Perish* (Glendale: Barna Research Group, 1991) 130.

Small congregations which are committed to church growth would do well to ask themselves three key questions.

(1) *Why are we small?* Given the preference worshipers seem to have for larger churches, the fact that the majority of congregations in North America are small is somewhat surprising. One can only conclude that when a church is small, there is a good reason for it. William E. Ramsden identifies three types of small churches: those that have always been small, those that are new and are on their way to becoming larger, and those that were larger but have decreased in size.<sup>20</sup>

It is not enough for a large church which has shrunk to take into account those dynamics inherent in its smaller size which now hinder its growth. It must also identify and address those elements which originally contributed to the church's decline.

For the new church on its way to being larger, the issue of size is primarily an organizational question. This is especially true if it is located in a community that is experiencing population growth. People are more easily attracted to new churches than to those that are already established.<sup>21</sup> The challenge before the new church is to design its organizational structure in a way that prepares for future growth.

The church that has always been small faces the most difficult challenge of the three. The shrinking church wants to be larger. The new church expects to be larger. But the church that has always been small, in the vast majority of cases, falls into that category because it prefers to be small.

(2) *Do we really want to grow?* The longstanding small church must wrestle with this question for a number of reasons. First, because

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<sup>20</sup>William E. Ramsden, "Small Church Studies: Emerging Consensus," *The Christian Ministry* 14/3 (May 1983):10.

<sup>21</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 129. This is probably not because people are attracted by the fact that the church is new so much as it is because such churches are by nature more inclusive than longstanding congregations. New churches are actively seeking worshipers and have not yet become a closed society. As the church becomes cohesive and develops a sense of its own congregational identity, openness will no longer come so naturally to it.

members must change the attitudes and practices that have kept them from growing in the past. Secondly, because it needs to work through the implications that growth will have for the church. Lyle Schaller explains:

Planning to move up off a plateau in size, especially in congregations averaging fewer than 160 at worship, usually is extremely difficult. One reason is growth usually means attempting to bring strangers into a small, intimate, and warm fellowship that is reinforced by longstanding kinship and/or friendship ties. A second reason it is difficult is that substantial growth usually requires changing the basic organizing principle from a network of one-to-one relationships with the pastor at or near the hub of that network to a network of groups, organizations, classes, cells, choirs, and circles and/or to a larger and more complex program.<sup>22</sup>

Schaller adds that moving off a plateau in size is especially difficult because people naturally prefer the *status quo*. In other words, if the small church succeeds in growing, it will lose those characteristics which have attracted its members to it in the first place. They love the church precisely because it is small.

Despite this preference the small congregation still has an obligation to seek growth. Not because bigger is better but because it is heir to Christ's calling to "seek and to save that which was lost." Evangelism is central to every church's mission regardless of size.

(3) *What must we do in order to grow?* It is possible for the small church to experience growth. But first the church must develop a strategy that is based on its own unique gifts and tailored to the needs of the community.

One of the reasons people prefer larger churches is that they are capable of offering an array of services. The small church cannot afford such a luxury. If it is to be effective it must carefully choose its ministries.

George Barna has observed that this strategy is a common feature

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<sup>22</sup>Lyle Schaller, *Create Your Own Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 73.

of growing churches:

Despite the urge to be all things to all people, the successful churches resisted that impulse to be the answer to everyone's every problem by focusing their vision for ministry, by reaffirming their commitment to quality, and by recognizing their limitations. If they were to devote themselves to meeting every need in their marketplace, they would dissipate their resources and have no impact—the very tragedy that has befallen the majority of Protestant churches in America. In general, these growing congregations refused to be enticed into areas of ministry in which they discerned no special calling. Instead, they concentrated on doing what they knew, beyond a doubt, they were called to do.<sup>23</sup>

The smaller church is especially well positioned to practice this principle. Unfortunately, many churches, both large and small, seem to develop their ministries by default. Programs are developed haphazardly, without first asking if the church has the resources to staff them or whether they are merited by the needs of the community or even called for by Scripture. In many cases the successful programs of other churches are copied in the hope that, "if it worked for them, it will work for us." This often results in a futile attempt to act like a big church.

Specialization has long been recognized as an effective strategy by the business world. It has been the key to success for many small businesses that fill a "niche" left by other larger companies against whom they would otherwise be unable to compete.

Some may object that such an analogy is inappropriate, arguing that churches ought to cooperate rather than compete. This is a noble sentiment. However, the blunt reality is that most churches are already competing for the same pool of worshipers.<sup>24</sup> Most church

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<sup>23</sup>George Barna, *User Friendly Churches* (Ventura: Regal, 1991) 51-52. This concept does not bypass the sovereign work of God's Spirit in the church, but rather depends on it.

<sup>24</sup>George Barna observes that although the number of churches has grown in the past two decades, the number of worshipers has remained the same: "Since 1970

growth comes from new members who transfer in from other congregations, rather than as a result of conversion. A niche approach to ministry that is sensitive to the needs of the unchurched can increase the likelihood of reaching prospective worshipers who lie outside the pool of those who are merely being shifted from one church to another.

A niche approach to ministry can also be a tremendous boost to the small church. It demonstrates that there truly is a place for the small congregation that cannot be filled by its larger neighbors. When the small congregation becomes a specialist in ministry, it discovers that a small church can actually do some things better than a large church.

Such an approach requires a dual focus. First, the church must look inward to discover its area of primary strength. This can be done formally by means of congregational surveys and spiritual gift inventories. Or it can be done more informally by looking at the ministries which the church already has in place. One or two programs will usually stand out above the others. These ought to be seriously considered as possible areas of specialized ministry.

Secondly, the church must look outward to identify an appropriate target group. Lyle Schaller recommends that the church contemplating a specialized ministry ask itself three questions: Who are the people in this general community who are overlooked by the churches? What are their spiritual needs? Which of these needs could we respond to if we decided to make the effort?<sup>25</sup>

These questions can be supplemented by demographic information that addresses the following questions: Who lives in our community? How does the demographic profile of this community

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there has been no appreciable change in the proportion of adults who attend church services at any time during the week. This is true in spite of a growing number of churches, increased church spending for advertising and promotion, and the availability of more sophisticated techniques for informing people of a church's existence" (*Marketing the Church: What They Never Taught You About Church Growth* [Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988] 22).

<sup>25</sup>Schaller, *Small Church* 74.

compare to the make-up of our church? What is the typical lifestyle of the target group we are trying to reach?

Much of this information can be obtained from the latest census report, usually available at the public library. Lifestyle demographics can be culled from observational trips through the community, church-sponsored or professional surveys, and the local newspaper. The local chamber of commerce is often a helpful resource for collecting demographic information.

There is really nothing new about a niche-based ministry. Most churches expect missionaries to employ this strategy as a matter of course. If mission organizations approached their task as inefficiently as the local church, would we continue to support them? So the small church should subject itself to the same kind of accountability.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

Small church ministry is not easy but it does have its rewards. This fact is poignantly illustrated by Walter L. Cook's account of his conversation with a pastor who had served the same small church in rural Maine for eight years:

He told me he plans to stay even longer, "When I look at the same faces in the congregation each Sunday and often during the week, too, I never fail to find something new in them. It's really more exciting to stay than to travel up from church to church trying to get to the top."<sup>26</sup>

Reflecting on his contentment and the unique privilege of serving a church whose members are closely knit and highly involved, Cook observes: "Maybe he *has* arrived at the top."

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<sup>26</sup>Walter L. Cook, *Send Us a Minister . . . Any Minister Will Do* (Rockland, Maine: Courier-Gazette, 1978) 80-81.