



EQUIPPER

The monthly e-magazine from the Church Administration and Development team of Grace Communion International.

October 2012

Volume 7, Issue 10

MinDev.gci.org

Dear pastoral leader:

As a fellowship of about 900 churches, GCI is active in about 100 nations. Though most of our churches are small, by God's grace they are not small in heart or in impact. God has taught us that his work is accomplished not by human might or power (or size), "'but by my Spirit,' says the Lord of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is accomplishing the mission of God in and through the church, made up mostly of small congregations. Understanding this, we have learned not to despise "the day of small things" (4:10).



In GCI, we value our small churches, appreciating the benefits they bring—things like close-knit, family-like relationships; opportunities for people of all ages to serve actively, side-by-side; and team-based leadership with collaborative decision-making. Our small churches are able to change course quickly in order to follow where the Spirit leads—focused on what truly makes a difference for the Kingdom.

We thank God for making us who we are, and for leading us forward. We look to the future with vibrant hope, trusting God who has brought us this far.

Certainly, we face challenges as we follow God forward—but in these challenges, we are not alone. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church surveyed the pastors of its smallest churches in 2007. The results revealed the top ten challenges these pastors faced at that time. In this issue, we review five of those challenges, offering brief related comments. We encourage you to consider this information—perhaps discussing it in a meeting with your leadership team.

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As you do, be encouraged to know that God is with you. Don't over-worry how you will address the challenges—remember, your ministry belongs to Jesus and he will succeed! However, some thoughtful, prayerful reflection will, no doubt, bear fruit—particularly when such discussion occurs in community.

In closing, let me add how thankful I am to you for your labor of love within your congregation. I appreciate the challenges you face, and all of us on the CAD team pray frequently for you and those who labor with you. Your calling to pastoral ministry is not easy. However, it is profoundly important and deeply rewarding, because it involves you in the ministry that Jesus is now doing through the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Father's mission to the world! What a blessing!

Sharing the journey with you,
Dan Rogers, CAD director

The challenges of ministry in a small church

A survey administered in 2007 by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), asked EPC pastors of small churches (those with fewer than 200 members) this question: “*What are the most pressing issues facing small church leaders?*” Here are five of their top ten responses (in descending order). We’ve added comments for your consideration. You will, no doubt, have comments of your own—if you are willing to share them, please email them to Ted.Johnston@gci.org. We’ll use this feedback to guide future articles here in *Equipper*.

- 1. Church ministries:** Members and visitors often expect a full range of programs from churches. Small churches only have the resources to do a few such programs.

Comment: Don’t burden yourself and your members trying to offer multiple programs as though you were a large church. Figure out how God has gifted your members for ministry and then focus on those (few) ministries, organized around a “discipleship pathway.” Be focused, and keep it simple!

- 2. Lay leadership:** A small church has a small pool of people from which to choose their leaders. As a result, lay leaders in small churches tend to “recycle” and over-commit, which means that creativity may be lacking and that leaders are tired.

Comment: See the comment on #1, above. Also, try rotating programs on a seasonal basis so that you give leaders time off, and opportunities to try new things.

- 3. Assessment of worth/value:** In a culture of “bigger is better,” the small church and the pastor feel that they must be doing something wrong.

Comment: Studies indicate that the size of a church has little to do with its impact. Don’t buy into this consumer mentality—be who you are and focus on being effective in Christ’s service.

- 4. Closed fellowship:** Close relationships in a small church are an asset that can become a liability if turned inward. A small church can be a closed group, not actively reaching out to the community, and not wanting others to come in and thereby change their equilibrium as a congregation.

Comment: Thank God for your close, family-like relationships! However, understand the possible downside and discuss it openly with your congregation. Brainstorm ways to be more outward-looking, and more welcoming to people who visit. Some instruction about both *outreach* and *assimilation* might be helpful—we recommend the books *Missional (joining God in the Neighborhood)* by Alan Roxburgh and *Fusion (turning first-time guests into fully engaged members in your church)* by Nelson Searcy.

- 5. Vision:** Articulating a vision that stimulates passion for evangelism and outreach can be more difficult for small church leaders. A church’s small size can limit people's thinking about what may be possible.

Comment: Whether a church is small or large, vision is more “caught” than “taught.” As a pastoral leader, show the way by demonstrating your own passion for living and sharing the gospel by being involved actively in reaching out to your community. Lead frequently in prayer in church services and small group meetings for the community and its unchurched people. Consider taking some members with you on a short-term mission trip into the community or elsewhere where they can “catch” Jesus’ passion for the Father’s mission to the world.