



# EQUIPPER

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Dear Christian on mission with Jesus:

When it comes to participating in mission with Jesus, personal invitation is powerful. I've been blessed by many invitations in my life: to join ball teams, to work multiple jobs and to enter into various leadership positions. The best invitation of all came from my parents—to enter into a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The power of inviting people to attend church has been confirmed by several studies. One surveyed 10,000 church-goers, asking this: "What was the main factor that influenced your decision to come to Christ and to the church you now attend? Here are the survey results:

- 6% said it was the minister
- 5% said it was the Sunday school
- 3% said it was church programs
- 3% said they "just walked in" (a good reminder of the importance of good signs—see an example at left where a church named Emmaus sets out signs in front of a rented hall)
- 2% said it was a special need they had
- 79% said that it was an invitation from a friend or relative

There is power in personal invitation! Do your members regularly invite? If not, why not? Maybe they think their church is too small or otherwise insignificant, if so, see the articles on pages two and three. In thinking this through with your leaders, consider the following opportunities for connection that often lead to opportunities to invite:

**Family:** John the Baptist (Jesus' cousin) invited his follower Andrew to follow Jesus, and then Andrew invited his brother Peter to do the same (John 1:35-42).

**Friends and neighbors:** Having met Jesus at the town well, the Samaritan woman invited the rest of the village to meet Jesus, too (John 4:7-30).

**Co-workers:** The apostle Paul, who shared tent-making with Priscilla and Aquila, invited his co-workers into a relationship with Jesus (Acts 18:1-3; 25-26).

**Acquaintances:** When Paul entered a city, he visited the same places daily (Acts 17) where he spent considerable time, which led to developing relationships based on trust, then to opportunities to make gospel invitations.

**As we go:** In the Gospels, we frequently see Jesus engaging people as he traveled about. How many people do we come into contact with in everyday life? How many do we spend time with? How many do we then invite to know Jesus and to attend church with us?

My prayer is that we all become more aware of opportunities to connect, build relationships, then offer personal invitations to meet Jesus and enter into his community, the church.

On mission with Jesus and with you,  
Greg Williams, associate director, Church Administration and Development



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## When Smaller is Better by Karl Vaters

The article below is excerpted (with permission) from an interview with church pastor Karl Vaters who wrote the book, "The Grasshopper Myth." You can read the full interview at [www.buildingchurchleaders.com/articles/2014/when-smaller-is-better.html](http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/articles/2014/when-smaller-is-better.html). For a related "GCI Weekly Update" post with a video, go to <http://update.gci.org/2014/03/small-church-myths/>. For additional ideas on this topic see the March 2008 issue of Equipper at <http://www.gci.org/files/GC2%203.3.0.pdf>.

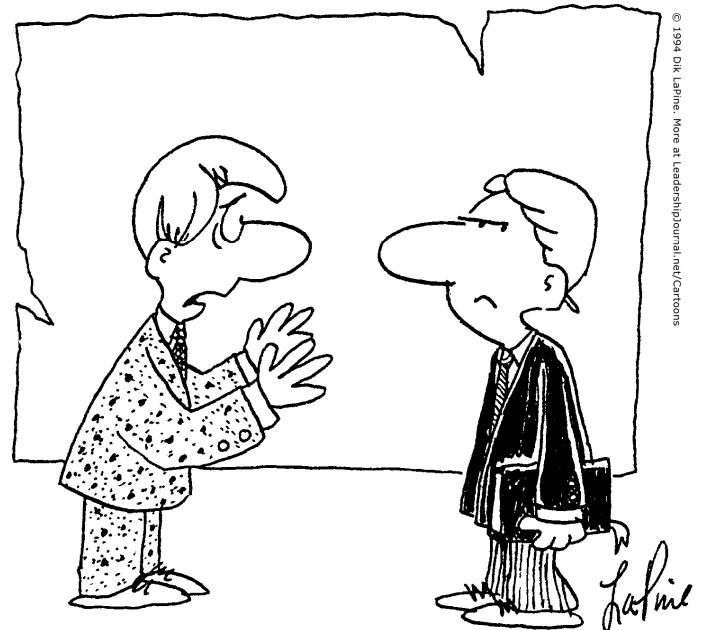
I started in ministry in the early 1980s, just when church-growth teaching was beginning to take root.... I started reading, studying, and going to conferences to try to figure out how to break through the 200 barrier. We made it to about 400... After about a year at that level, things started going really south, really quickly.... We shrank so much it wasn't fun anymore, and I stopped counting—we were probably in the low 100s. I was in a bad place spiritually and emotionally, just trying to figure out what was going on. I followed all the rules, and it didn't work.

A former pastor who is now a counselor walked me through that long season. He said, "Karl, you've got to figure out how to redefine success." When he said that, I wanted to punch him in the nose. I thought what he meant was, *You've been trying to jump a 10-foot bar but you're only jumping 9 feet, so lower the bar to 9 feet and call it a success.* I couldn't do that. But he said, "Forget about jumping a bar...you have to redefine success. It's not about jumping the bar anymore. Success for you is going to look different than butts in the seats. You've got to figure out what it is."

It took me awhile to take that in. But once I did, I realized he was right. God had given us a small church, and the amount of work that it was going to take to become a big church was going to be (1) outside my gifting, and (2) maybe not where God was taking us. And if we were going to be a small church, we should be the best small church we possibly could....

If you look around, 80 percent of the churches in the world are under 100 people, and 90 percent are under 200 people. What if that's part of a strategy God wants to use, rather than a problem God wants to fix? I'm very slow to say that God calls some churches to be small, because this ministry of mine celebrating small churches can still sound like settling: *This is all we're meant to be.* But there is a different set of skills that are needed over the 200 barrier than under the 200 barrier. What if your leadership style is more shepherd and less rancher? More pastor and less administrator? That's the case for me....

Those leading small churches have to recognize that as a valid ministry all its own. That was step number one for me. I got to the point of despising my church and myself, and being angry at God, because the church stayed small. Then, when I started redefining success, I wondered, Why am I mad at God for giving me a wonderful, healthy, vibrant small church? That's a valid thing to be....



"Pastor Marv, we can't revive our church by implementing small groups—we *are* a small group!"

Everyone needs to recognize there are certain things that small churches can do that bigger churches can't.... There are a bunch of people who just don't like the corporate, somewhat impersonal feel of a larger church. They want to go to a smaller church, but not one that is settling for less. They don't want a place where the paint is peeling and where the bathroom smells and it doesn't look like anything has been updated since 1987. They might, however, go to a bohemian-style coffee shop in downtown San Francisco, or they might go to an art studio in downtown Manhattan that hosts a church in the back. None of those churches will grow large, because they're reaching out to a segment of people that is small. But if those people could go to a church where people look and sound like them, and were meeting in a place that has more of a resonance with their hearts, then that's going to work. That's part of the innovativeness that we need as church leaders: we need to start imagining church in different ways than we have traditionally done it.

## Embracing My Less than Spectacular Church by Daniel Darling

*This article is reprinted here with permission from ChristianityToday.com. You can read it online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2013/september-online-only/embracing-my-less-than-spectacular-church.html>*

For nearly nine years I was on senior staff at one of the largest evangelical churches in the suburbs of Chicago. We were highly organized, and prided ourselves on excellence in all of our ministry outreaches. My drive to work every day was about 30 minutes, a commute that took me past many small churches, churches I then considered insignificant. As their tiny, sometimes run-down buildings sailed by, I would think, *What's the point of these churches? Is anything even happening there?* Turns out God had a way of shaking me loose of my mega church arrogance. In a poetic justice kind of way, I found myself pastoring one of "those churches," the seemingly insignificant, small congregations where God, in my view, wasn't at work.

It's been five years and I'm still the senior pastor of a small church, a congregation that may never be profiled in leading evangelical publications, one that will probably never be held up as a model ministry for church planters and revitalizers. However, I don't consider churches such as ours as insignificant anymore. Though God is still chiseling off my big-church pride, I realize just how important all churches are to Kingdom work.

### Ministry jealousy

Some have a bias against mega-churches. They see them as a symbol of everything that is wrong with today's modern evangelical church. I don't subscribe to this theory. And yet I have also disabused myself of the notion that unless a church is huge, the Spirit of God is absent.

I recently spoke to a longtime pastor in our area. He's pastored large churches and small churches. Today he leads a midsize congregation. Among the valuable pieces of advice he gave me was this surprising caution. "Dan," he said, "Watch yourself for ministry jealousy. If you read too many of the leading church growth and leadership books, you'll slowly begin to feel that the work you are currently called to is somehow insignificant and even unworthy of God."

This is sage advice, because I do find I have a tendency to grow discouraged after I've returned from a popular conference or after I've read the latest bestselling ministry tome. I think the discouragement comes from the knowledge that the church I now lead is not what it should be. In some ways this is healthy. Pastors must constantly be setting vision and moving their people beyond their level of comfort in fulfilling the Great Commission. On the other hand, too much exposure to the "successful" church models can breed a deep and paralyzing sense of jealousy. I think it fuels the wanderlust in pastors who, after a few difficult years, start searching for a more success-rich environment.

I've even been lectured by my wife, who after seeing my downcast spirit after a visit to a large church or after a conference will say to me, "If these events are going to get you more discouraged, you need to stop going." In this way I'm tempted by ministry success like my children are tempted by things in the store they cannot have. I've learned, as a parent, that the more I parade my children up and down the aisles of stores whose shelves are lined with toys they cannot have, the more I have to fight their discontentment and envy. Small church pastors like me can make an idol of what we think ministry success looks like.

### Where God dwells

Ultimately, ministry jealousy stems from a faulty view of God. During my time on staff at a large church, I mistakenly thought that God only worked through the most cutting edge, organized, streamlined ministries. It's the same misguided view I carried into my experience pastoring a small church. But Scripture tells us something far different. As Paul reminded the Corinthians, God often works through the "foolish" and "weak" things of this world. Abraham was an impotent pagan whom God raised up to father the nation of Israel. David was the least likely to succeed in his family and yet became King of Israel. Gideon was trembling in fear when the angel of the Lord called him a "mighty warrior." Moses was well past his prime when he led the Israelites out of Egypt. The list goes on.