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# GC2 equipper

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Dear small church minister:

Most *GC2 equipper* readers serve small congregations. This issue addresses some of the blessings and challenges small church life brings. It's my prayer that what is offered here will encourage and strengthen you. Thanks for your service to God's children in a small church setting!



Let's start with an important message: ***You are not alone!*** While the media give lots of publicity to the mega-churches, most North American Christians worship in small congregations. According to a March 14, 2001 *Washington Post* article, 50% of U.S. churches have fewer than 100 participating adults and one-fourth have fewer than 50. Yet, according to an article in the July 12, 2003 *Christian Century* magazine, media tend to portray small churches as a dying breed of dinosaur.

The *Christian Century* article debunks this assumption by quoting Carl Dudley (author of *Making the Small Church Effective*): "When church size is measured by human relationships, the small church is the largest expression of the Christian faith." The article also quotes David Ray: "Small churches are the norm, primarily because many, many people still find them to be the right size in which to love God and neighbor."

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I think Dudley and Ray are correct. Small churches are here to stay and they offer many advantages. Rather than holding an inferiority complex about our small church size, let us rejoice in and take advantage of what God has provided!

To help us do just that, we include in this issue various ideas and tips. Many of these are from "The Place of the Small Church in Today's World" by Kenneth Gangel (in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Jan.-March 1984, pp.55-66). You may read his article at [www.smallchurch.com/06%20Journals%20Gangel.htm](http://www.smallchurch.com/06%20Journals%20Gangel.htm).

Enjoy,  
Ted Johnston  
Editor, *GC2 equipper*

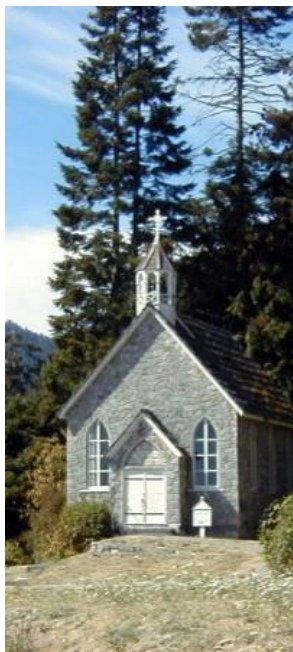
P.S. We've posted online some Holy Week dramatic readings, dramas and sermons. Go to <http://fly2.ws/cZmZswm>. May you and yours have a profound encounter with Christ this Easter season—*He is Risen!*

## Apples to oranges?

A mistake often made by small church ministers is viewing their congregation as a scaled-down large church. But that's comparing apples to oranges. Small churches and large churches are not the same, as noted by Kenneth Gangel:

“The congregation averaging less than 35 or 40 at worship can be represented by an acorn squash, the church averaging 125 at worship can be depicted by a pumpkin, the congregation averaging 200 at worship might be portrayed by a horse, and the huge church averaging 500 or 600 or more at worship can be symbolized by a fifteen-room house. They are not simply different size specimens from the same genus or species. They are almost as different from one another as a village is unlike a large central city. It is impossible to produce a pumpkin pie by combining three acorn squashes.”

And yet, this is sometimes what we try to do—and the result can be discouragement and ineffectiveness. So what's the answer? Recognize who you are (i.e. a small church), embrace that truth, and capitalize upon it. The rest of this issue offers some ideas for doing just that.



## Small church strengths

In the book, *The Small Church: Valid, Vital, Victorious* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1975), Paul Madsen notes significant (though often overlooked) strengths of small churches:

1. **Relational emphasis.** Large churches must have small-group experiences to capture the relational emphasis which comes naturally in the small church not only by virtue of size but also by perspective. In a small church almost everyone is known by his or her (first) name.
2. **Decentralized focus.** The organizational style in small churches can be informal and participatory. This allows decisions to be made by consensus with special concern for families and individuals. This style aligns nicely with a movement in our culture away from rigid structures toward a more participatory management approach.
3. **Resilient persistence.** Because they are small, small churches are able to weather change and setback far more readily than large churches.

Lyle Schaller gives eight reasons for the toughness of the small church: (1) It is not a branch office. (2) It reinforces community. (3) Subsidies increase vulnerability. (4) The socialization factor. (5) The importance of shared experiences. (6) The centrality of worship. (7) The role of the laity. (8) The focal point for loyalty. [Quoted from Gangel's article]

## Small church weaknesses

While extolling small church strengths, Kenneth Gangel also points out some weaknesses which must be addressed:

1. **Inadequate resources.** Churches of all sizes face resource inadequacies, but it's a particular concern for small churches. Money is often in short supply and that leads to inadequacies in facilities and in paid personnel. The answer is to focus on what you have, and then maximize the use of those God-given resources. Again, don't try to be a scaled-down large church.
2. **Exclusionary atmosphere.** Small churches are often so close-knit that outsiders have a hard time breaking into the circle of relationships. The answer is to be very intentional about making outsiders feel like insiders. Teach your members how to do this.
3. **Pastoral discouragement.** Mix inadequate resources and an exclusionary atmosphere and you have the recipe for a discouraged pastor. Small church pastors—find your identity and sense of significance in Christ alone. Small church congregations: be sure to give encouragement to your pastor. Their job is tough!



## Tips for small church effectiveness

### Small church ideas and resources:

- See the resources at [www.smallchurch.com](http://www.smallchurch.com)
- Download the training pack, "Strengthening Small Churches" from [buildingchurchleaders.com](http://buildingchurchleaders.com) <http://tinyurl.com/2sdwxg> (There is a charge for this download)
- Read "Leading the Small Church" by Glenn C. Daman. This book challenges us to return to simplicity in ministry by caring for and loving the people we serve while proclaiming God's Word and setting a godly example. (Kregel Publications 2006)

1. **Emphasize strengths.** Do you have skilled musicians? Emphasize music ministry. Don't try to be what you're not (using CD's for worship is better than featuring vocalists who are tone deaf!).
2. **Emphasize lay leadership.** Don't apologize for a lack of paid staff—you have the opportunity to practice fully the ministry of *all* believers. Focus on helping willing members identify their spiritual gifts and ministry calling and then see that they are equipped accordingly (we recommend our *Servants Passage* program for this purpose).
3. **Don't be tied to a building.** Take church "on the road"—meet in a park in good weather; have a picnic combined with a worship service. Take advantage of your small size to take church to the people, rather than expecting them always to come to you.
4. **Take advantage of your small size in worship.** Don't be locked into a large church format. Open it up for group discussion and individual "sharing and caring." Don't apologize for your small size, use it to create intimacy. Why seat 12 people theater style? Sit in a circle.
5. **Focus on community rather than programs.** Small churches often exhaust themselves trying to run multiple programs as though they were a large church. Don't even try. Instead, emphasize intimacy and involvement. Be the *family* you are, not a multi-tiered, program-driven corporation.