

Growth Points

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Breaking the 400 Barrier

Churches that average between 200 and 400 worshipers are often classified as middle-sized churches. Another way to characterize these churches is by their organizational structure. As a church grows larger than two hundred worshipers, the essential nature of the church changes from a focus on relationships to organizing its growing array of new ministries, people, staff, and facilities. Relationships, continue to be important, but the growth in size brings with it the need to administer the church in a better way.

“Pastors who flourish in middle-sized churches are often gifted administrators or are able to function in an administrative capacity for a brief period of time”

Pastors who flourish in middle-sized churches are often gifted administrators, or they are able to function in an administrative capacity for a brief period of time. It is possible for pastors who are strong caregivers to lead middle-sized churches, but they need to share leadership with an administrative assistant or an assistant pastor who will take care of the bulk of administrative details.

The small staff and volunteer leaders in the middle-sized church are good at doing ministry. Some of them, though, find it difficult to build teams and end up doing most of the work themselves. If the pastor and other leaders do not learn to delegate, this phase of the church's life will be strenuous.

Leaders find that the grapevine does not work as well in getting information disseminated among the members, and decisions have to be made through formal channels. New policies are developed for auditing financial books, selecting leaders, and starting new ministries.

At this size, the decision-making authority begins moving away from the family cohort model that is observed in smaller churches.

Historically, a structure of committees or commissions took the place of the ruling family model in the middle-sized church, although churches today try to avoid the committee structure if at all possible.

Like churches found at every level of growth, some middle-sized churches hover for years between two hundred and four hundred worshipers. Staying on a plateau at this level for a long time is difficult due to pressures from people who prefer a smaller church vs those who prefer a larger one.

Due to such pressures, most middle-sized churches move in one of the two directions. Over time they will either continue to grow, becoming a larger church, or eventually succumb to the downward pull and return to the small church size.

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Lay persons become responsible for care.

Three pastors are needed to reach 400 worshipers.

Churches that grow beyond four hundred worshipers employ the following moves.

First, a third pastor plus one additional support staff member must be added.

Since each pastor can effectively serve 150 people, to grow beyond four hundred requires three pastoral staff members (3 X 150 = 450). A church cannot wait until it has an attendance of 450 before hiring the third person. It is the addition of the third staff person that allows the church to grow beyond four hundred worshipers. In some situations it may even demand the addition of a fourth staff person, particularly if there is a heavy demand on the staff. In such situations the church will either have to hire additional support staff or a fourth pastor in order to grow larger than four hundred.

Second, for the church to grow larger than 400 worshipers, the lead pastor must make another transition to function as a leader.

Growing beyond 400 means the pastor must become responsible for long-range planning, directing a multiple staff, casting a vision for the future of the church, preaching consistently fine sermons, and designing systems to reach, win, and keep new people. As the church grows larger, the lead pastor needs to especially improve speaking skills.

Third, the church must start the process of shifting responsibility for pastoral care from the pastors to lay persons.

As the total number of worshipers increases, it becomes difficult for pastors to maintain a high level of quality care for the entire congregation. The larger numbers of people attending worship services makes it difficult to keep track of the attendees, let alone try to provide a significant level of pastoral care for them all. The answer lies in shifting the burden of pastoral care to the lay persons of the congregation rather than expecting pastors to provide such personal care.

Fourth, another shift that begins at this level is changing the roles and responsibilities of the staff.

As the senior pastor transitions into more of a leadership role, other pastors and support staff must shift into more specialized roles, covering administration, outreach, newcomer connection, children, youth, and adult ministry. If the pastoral staff were considered generalists, they must now become specialists.

Fifth, most churches will need to add a third worship service to grow beyond four hundred worshipers.

A church with two worship services must have a minimum of 325 useable seats in its auditorium to maintain an total attendance above four hundred. If a church only has seating for two hundred people, it will have to add a third worship service to have any chance of breaking the four hundred barrier. In addition, a church with two worship services needs 150 parking spaces as a minimum.

Is your church facing the 400 barrier? If so, begin employing the five ideas for breaking the barrier this year.



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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