
GROWTH POINTS

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Thoughts on the 200 Barrier

When it comes to church size barriers, the 200 barrier is the most discussed.

It is well-known that the large majority of churches in the USA, as well as around the world, report an average worship attendance of less than 200. The prevalence of this size church leads some to call them the *Normal Size Church*.

Whatever one labels it, a half century of research reveals it is difficult for churches to grow beyond this level. Why is this so?

The answer lies in understanding the nature of the smaller, normal sized church.

Churches under 200 in worship attendance are fundamentally relational. People think of the church as one family. Everyone knows the pastor, and can get an audience with them as desired.

When a church grows beyond 200 in worship attendance, it becomes difficult to keep the same level of relationships intact.

For example, people know around 60 others by name. Thus, when a church grows to 120 worshippers they know every other person. If a church grows to 180 they then know every third person. In a church of 240 each attendee knows just one of every four persons. The gradual increase in size lowers the ability of most worshippers to know others.

The larger a church becomes it increases in complexity. When a church is less than 200, the pastor, board, and worshippers understand the overall ministry program. But, as the church grows beyond 200, the increasing complexity makes it difficult for more than a few people to know the full extent of ministry programs.

Thus, breaking the 200 barrier requires a fundamental change in the nature of the normal size church. From relational to organizational; simple to complex.

Breaking the 200 Barrier

Here are some general guidelines for growing larger than 200 worshippers.

1. Once church leadership determines to work toward breaking this barrier, they must move fast. With effort, it takes churches around two and a half years (30 months) to do so. If it doesn't happen in that time frame, growth rarely happens.
2. The pastor must lead the effort by vocally and visibly promoting the effort to grow larger. If the pastor doesn't lead the effort, growth rarely happens.
3. The pastor must adjust their role from that of a caregiver to that of a leader, casting vision for fulfilling the Great Commission. If the pastor doesn't create the vision, growth rarely happens.
4. A second pastor must be added to the team when worship hits 175 to 200. It takes two pastors (or a combination of part-time pastors equal to two) to sustain growth larger than 200. If a second pastor is not added, growth rarely happens.
5. A church must expand its groups. As a rule, it takes new groups and classes to reach and keep new people. If new units are not added, growth rarely happens.
6. New leaders must be developed. Churches grow at a ratio of ten people for every leader. A church of 200 needs twenty leaders. If new leaders are not developed, growth rarely happens.
7. The number of workers in ministry roles must be increased to about 50% of adult worship attendance. If more people cannot be recruited and deployed into ministry, growth rarely happens.
8. Facilities must be enlarged or used in more efficient ways. This often means adding more seating, available parking, or room for childcare. If facilities are not enlarged, growth rarely happens.
9. The organization of the church must be simplified. A church mired in bureaucracy is unable to make decisions fast enough to break the barrier. If a church doesn't streamline its decision-making process, growth rarely happens.

When a combination of these insights are put into place, it's possible for a church to grow beyond the 200 barrier. What insights do you need to put into place this month?

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