Begger Better? How Church Size is Related to Church Health (&Growth)

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BIGGER BETTER? HOW CHURCH SIZE IS RELATED TO CHURCH HEALTH (&GROWTH)

October 13, 2017
SSSR Conference
Washington D.C.
2007-2017 data
9,529 local congregations
258,099 surveys

Church Streams
- Methodists 23%
- Baptists 11%
- Presbyterians 4%
- Reformed 2%
- Assemblies of God 5%
- Nazarenes 5%
- Lutherans 7%
- Adventists 9%
- Independent/Non-denominational 9%
- Others 25%

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT DATA
NCDAMERICA.ORG

AMERICA
We Help You Thrive!
BIGGER BETTER?
LIT REVIEW

• International research:
  • “On nearly all relevant quality factors, larger churches compare
disfavorably with smaller ones.” (Schwarz 2012: 48)
  • Church size turned out to be the third strongest negative factor, on a
par with “liberal theology” and “traditionalism!” (Ibid.)
  • A “small” church wins just as many people for Christ as a “large” one.
  (Schwarz 2012: 49)

• US Voice:
  • “Bigger is not always better.” (Williams 2005: 13)
  • Pastors of small churches view themselves as a failure because their
church is small (Williams 2005: 14)
BIGGER BETTER?
PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What is the relationship between church size and
  • annual growth rates?
  • growth trajectories?
  • measures of congregational health?
  • age groups in churches?
  • leadership style of the pastor?
  • theological position of the church?
BIGGER BETTER?
DEFINITIONS (SIZE, GROWTH ETC.)

- 3 categories for the church growth
  Decline: < -5%
  Growth: > 5%

- 3 categories for church attendance
  Small church: < 100 people attending
  Midsize church: 101-249 people attending
  Large church: > 250 people attending
## BIGGER BETTER?

### FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5-year Average Annual Growth Rate by Church Sze</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year AAGR</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>+5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Mean</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5-year Growth Trajectory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decline (&lt; -5%)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plateau</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth (&gt; +5%)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
(x^2 = 334.061, p = .000, r = .179, N = 7154)
\]
# Bigger Better?

## Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am often bored during the worship service - agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a great or very great extent</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to an average extent</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardly or not at all</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[x^2 = 1471.827, \ p = .000, \ r = .063, \ n = 250262\]
### Bigger Better?

#### Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our worship service attracts unchurched visitors - agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a great or very great extent</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to an average extent</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardly or not at all</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 10275.063, \ p = .000, \ r = -.195, \ n = 244724 \]
**FINDINGS**

**BIGGER BETTER?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When new people come to church events, we approach them openly and lovingly - agree</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to a great or very great extent</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to an average extent</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardly or not at all</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 1573.429, \ p = .000, \ r = .066, \ n = 250736 \]
# Bigger Better?

## Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Christians find friends in our church quickly - agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to a great or very great extent</strong></td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to an average extent</strong></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hardly or not at all</strong></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 1428.707, \ p = .000, \ r = .043, \ n = 246201 \]
## BIGGER BETTER?
### FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I know that other church members pray for me regularly</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- agree</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to a great or very great extent</strong></td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to an average extent</strong></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hardly or not at all</strong></td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ x^2 = 561.271, p = .000, r = .030, n = 246214 \]
AVERAGE ADULT ATTENDANCE
BY THE PRESENCE OF AGE GROUPS:

- CHILDREN: 225
- YOUTH: 256
- YOUNG ADULTS: 292
- YOUNG FAMILIES: 248
- MIDDLE AGED: 194
- SENIOR CITIZENS: 165
AGE GROUPS IN THE CHURCH
BY THE SIZE OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)

- **CHILDREN**
  - Small Churches: 21%
  - Midsize Churches: 16%
  - Large Churches: 11%

- **YOUTH**
  - Small Churches: 12%
  - Midsize Churches: 12%
  - Large Churches: 9%

- **YOUNG ADULTS**
  - Small Churches: 8%
  - Midsize Churches: 6%
  - Large Churches: 5%

- **YOUNG FAMILIES**
  - Small Churches: 17%
  - Midsize Churches: 16%
  - Large Churches: 12%

- **MIDDLE-AGED**
  - Small Churches: 31%
  - Midsize Churches: 20%
  - Large Churches: 9%

- **SENIORS**
  - Small Churches: 41%
  - Midsize Churches: 28%
  - Large Churches: 15%
LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR
BY THE TRAJECTORY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)

**Authoritarian**
- Small: 2%
- Midsize: 3%
- Large: 5%

**Goal-Oriented**
- Small: 21%
- Midsize: 16%
- Large: 10%

**People-Oriented**
- Small: 27%
- Midsize: 17%
- Large: 9%

**Team-Oriented**
- Small: 30%
- Midsize: 22%
- Large: 13%

**Relational**
- Small: 30%
- Midsize: 19%
- Large: 9%

**Task-Oriented**
- Small: 16%
- Midsize: 10%
- Large: 5%

**Serving**
- Small: 27%
- Midsize: 15%
- Large: 6%

**Partnership**
- Small: 26%
- Midsize: 19%
- Large: 10%

**Democratic**
- Small: 13%
- Midsize: 6%
- Large: 2%

**Church Attendance Trajectory**
- Small: 2%
- Midsize: 2%
- Large: 10%
# Leadership Style of a Pastor

**Church Size by the Growth Rate (N=7112)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Midsize</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-Oriented</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-Oriented</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-Oriented</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Oriented</td>
<td>-1.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving</td>
<td>-0.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes
- The chart represents the percentage distribution of leadership styles among pastors based on church size categories: Small, Midsize, and Large, with church growth rates ranging from negative to positive values.
- The data indicates a trend where larger churches tend to have a higher percentage of pastors with an Authoritarian leadership style, whereas Democratic styles are more common in smaller churches.
THEOLOGICAL STAND OF A CHURCH
BY THE TRAJECTORY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)

CHARISMATIC

PENTECOSTAL

EVANGELICAL

FUNDAMENTALIST

POLITICALLY ENGAGED

TRINITARIAN

LIBERAL

SMALL | MIDSIZE | LARGE
LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR

CHURCH SIZE BY THE GROWTH RATE (N=7112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Midsize</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charismatic</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalist</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically Engaged</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinitarian</td>
<td>-2.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- SMALL
- MIDSIZE
- LARGE
CONCLUSION

• In US context, larger churches overall tend to be healthier and have a more robust growth orientation.

• There are, however, healthy and growing churches all three size-categories of churches. So size of churches should not be reason for not striving for health and/or greater quality.

• Factors helping health and growth should be considered (such as involvement of younger age groups, utilizing of empowering leadership styles, organic theology, etc.)

• Where it is possible, small churches need to strive for the greatness of the megachurches. Churches need to influence the community in which they live regardless of their size. (Williams 2005: 14)

• “You can’t keep healthy church from growing.” (Williams 2005: 28)