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## Review of Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250, by Karl Vaters

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which inhibit effective leadership, are diminished or eliminated.

Further, spiritual leaders are knowledge workers. We do not work with a tool to produce a finished product. Our business is people, and we must be able to communicate ideas effectively. Communication is a hallmark of a pastor's work, whether it is through Bible studies, counseling, running a business meeting, or preaching. Chiesa states, "Communication is the one single issue that makes or breaks teams. Communication is one of the hardest challenges for teams and organizations, and even for many of us, as individuals in our personal lives" (loc. 1764). Her book gives very basic, yet thorough, instruction needed to draw individuals together to form a cohesive unit.

As mentioned above, the author outlines a very clear strategy for addressing conflict. When a person's life work involves people, conflict is inevitable. Knowing how to resolve disputes is an invaluable tool to possess.

I whole-heartedly recommend this book to anyone in leadership, especially to ministerial students preparing to enter pastoral ministry. I certainly wish I had had it as a resource earlier in my career. The author makes the concepts clear through personal experience and references to experts in the fields of leadership, conflict resolution and interpersonal communications, organization, and productivity, to name a few. A reader of this book will enjoy a delightful balance of readability and a wealth of information and application to the task of team building and personal development.

SEAN DAY is a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in the North Bay District in Florida.

## **SMALL CHURCH ESSENTIALS: FIELD-TESTED PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING A HEALTHY CONGREGATION OF UNDER 250**

*By Karl Vaters*  
*Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers (2018)*  
*Paperback version, 255 pages*

*Reviewed by R. DAVID MORGAN*

Karl Vaters, author of *Small Church Essentials: Field-tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250*, has been a small church pastor for over 30 years. He has written extensively about his experiences, including the book *The Grasshopper Myth*, to address the topics of church growth and small church ministry; Vaters blogs at ChristianityToday.com, giving a small-church perspective to innovative leadership concepts. He is also the founder of NewSmallChurch.com, a weekly blog ministry that encourages, connects, and equips innovative small church pastors.

Through his work, Vaters has discovered that over 90% of the churches in the world have less than 200 people in attendance, and 80% have fewer than 100. However, he challenges the notion that this is truly a bad thing. What if "smallness" is an advantage God wants to use, as opposed to a problem we need to "fix?" Asking this and other questions resulted in him viewing church health and leadership in a different way—not as a means to growth, but as a means to effectiveness.

Big churches get most of the attention regarding how to do church ministry, yet they are a small part of the overall church community. This book

fills the gap in the ongoing discussion of church growth, an area that is overwhelmingly overlooked and neglected. While many Christian leaders focus on methods to grow larger churches, the author encourages us to focus less on size and more on quality. This book is full of practical principles and encouragement to make a small church a great, healthy church within the community in which they serve.

The book is composed of four main sections. The first section addresses the idea that a small church is not necessarily broken; furthermore, pastors of smaller churches can minister well and do not have to settle for less. Vaters describes many types of healthy churches and why they stay small, either by design or as a result of the kind of work they are called to do. This can help give small church pastors a barometer of congregational health. It should be noted that the author acknowledges the need for different sized churches (large and small) to meet the needs of various communities and to fulfill the gospel commission.

The second section outlines the differences and similarities between larger and smaller churches, how people behave in each environment, and the unique characteristics and challenges faced by smaller churches. People, their personalities, and the overall church culture will have an impact on new ideas, projects, or changes a pastor wants to implement; this will be particularly helpful in understanding how to lead the church in accomplishing its mission. Not only does the author identify and help the reader understand the dynamics of various church cultures and how they affect change, he also outlines strategies to navigate those changes within the context of a congregation's culture. However, Vaters emphasizes the need for pastors to

realize that the people are not a means to an end; they are not merely tools to be used to create the desired outcome. People are the result. This is a refreshing perspective on relationships and is one of the strengths of this book. It is beneficial for all pastors to recognize that there is no single factor more important for the health and vitality of the church than healthy relationships with Jesus, each other, and with those they seek to reach.

In the third section, the author addresses how to bring new life into an existing small church by dealing with the chronic issues most pastors face. Some of the topics discussed include: recognizing if your church is strategic or stuck, determining the cause of the constant problem, knowing how to work with controlling people, minimizing surprises, and noticing if your church needs more direct hands-on pastoral care. Vaters discusses proven principles to guide pastors in implementing changes in a small church setting.

The practical ideologies of this book are enormously valuable for small church pastors involved in everyday ministry. The guidelines for knowing when and how to start, how to change or stop a ministry, how to avoid common mistakes when leading a church through change, and discovering what your church does well and then doing it on purpose are necessary principles for congregations who want to thrive in the continually changing community. The encouragement to always be changing something and to continue improving is a significant inspiration for pastors to view change as a necessity to lead healthy small churches. The mission of the church is too vital for any congregation to settle for "business as usual."

The final and fourth section of the book outlines some practical tools

that can help any church move from merely being healthy to effectiveness and greatness. This section begins by discussing the first-time guest, then talks about discipleship and leadership, and concludes by examining outreach. A more welcoming church will have a far more significant impact on the lives of its guests; many people who attend smaller churches expect to be noticed and to be a part of the conversation. People usually visit a church because a friend invited them, and when they choose to stay, it is because they have made friends.

One of the significant benefits of this book is the GIFT plan for developing a friendlier church. Being intentional and planning for a more welcoming church is by far the most valuable aspect of this book, and it applies to churches of all sizes. The plan outlines a weekly effort for church leaders and members to:

- 1) Greet someone you've never met before;
- 2) Introduce people to each other;
- 3) Follow up with someone you met recently; and
- 4) Thank someone who did something you appreciate.

The discipleship chapter is short when compared to the space allocated for the other essentials of leading a healthy small church. Although there is no shortage of books available today on the topic of discipleship, the author takes a rather simple approach to discipleship—mentoring new believers. The simple principles outlined in the book are an effective method of discipleship that has its origin in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Planning is another practice that must be intentional for small church success. Taking time away from the busy routine of life is essential for the small church pastor. Get to your cal-

endar before everyone else does by scheduling time every week to plan church events. Vaters prepares in advance, with a 3-2-1 planning system that is easy to implement and effective for the busiest small church pastor. The checklist for effective leadership team meetings is relevant and useful for successful, focused, and productive meetings. The author should be commended for including encouragement to do ministry away from the church, not just in the church—a call to get out of your comfort zone.

I recommend this book to any pastor or church leader who desires to fulfill their God-given purpose in leading a healthy congregation to become innovative and faithful to the gospel commission in a small church context. This book will challenge your thinking about the impact and effectiveness of small churches while encouraging one to see ministry in small congregations in a refreshingly new way. One will be inspired by the insights and proven principles that can help pastors lead a healthy small church in having a big impact.

DAVID MORGAN is the pastor of the Fairview/Selah Washington, USA district in the Upper Columbia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## **THE COACHING HABIT: SAY LESS, ASK MORE & CHANGE THE WAY YOU LEAD FOREVER**

*By Michael Bungay Stanier  
Toronto, ON: Post Hypnotic Press  
(2016)  
Kindle version, 251 pages*

*Reviewed by SAMUEL RIEMERSMA*

Michael Stanier's focus is summarized in the title of the book: "How to