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

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NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT DATA
NCDAMERICA.ORG

- 2007-2017 data
- 9,529 local congregations
- 258,099 surveys

Church Streams

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

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>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>
<tr>
<td>5-year Growth Trajectory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>

\[ x^2 = 1471.827, \ p = .000, \ r = .063, \ n = 250262 \]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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?

### When new people come to church events, we approach them openly and lovingly - agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Churches</th>
<th>Midsize Churches</th>
<th>Large Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>to a great or very great extent</strong></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>to an average extent</strong></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hardly or not at all</strong></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>to a great or very great extent</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to an average extent</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardly or not at all</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$x^2 = 1428.707, \ p = .000, r = .043, n = 246201$
### 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>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>- to a great or very great extent</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- to an average extent</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- hardly or not at all</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
# Leadership Style of a Pastor

**By the Trajectory of Church Attendance (N=9148)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Midsize</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-Oriented</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-Oriented</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-Oriented</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Oriented</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**church attendance categories:**
- Small
- Midsize
- Large
LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR
CHURCH SIZE BY THE GROWTH RATE (N=7112)

AUTHORITARIAN
GOAL-ORIENTED
PEOPLE-ORIENTED
TEAM-ORIENTED
RELATIONAL
TASK-ORIENTED
SERVING
PARTNERSHIP
DEMOCRATIC

SMALL  MIDSIZE  LARGE
THEOLOGICAL STAND OF A CHURCH
BY THE TRAJECTORY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)

CHARISMATIC
- Small: 5%
- Midsize: 4%
- Large: 3%

PENTECOSTAL
- Small: 4%
- Midsize: 2%
- Large: 2%

EVANGELICAL
- Small: 11%
- Midsize: 5%
- Large: 1%

FUNDAMENTALIST
- Small: 7%
- Midsize: 5%
- Large: 3%

POLITICALLY ENGAGED
- Small: 2%
- Midsize: 2%
- Large: 2%

TRINITARIAN
- Small: 7%
- Midsize: 5%
- Large: 3%

LIBERAL
- Small: 7%
- Midsize: 4%
- Large: 2%
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)