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Bigger 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)

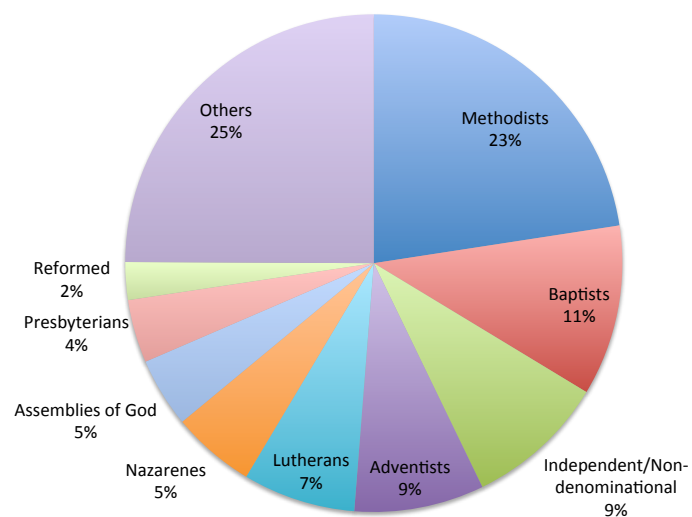
October 13, 2017
SSSR Conference
Washington D.C.

NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT DATA

NCDAMERICA.ORG

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

Church Streams



NCD

AMERICA

We Help You Thrive!

BIGGER BETTER?

LIT REVIEW

- International research:
 - “On nearly all relevant quality factors, larger churches compare unfavorably 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: $> 5\%$

<http://www.mychurchgrowth.com/church%20growth/agr.php>

- 3 categories for church attendance

Small church: < 100 people attending

Midsize church: 101-249 people attending

Large church: > 250 people attending

<http://www.umcbrunswick.org/the-mid-size-church-how-size-matters.html>

BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	5-year Average Annual Growth Rate by Church Size		
5-year AAGR	-1%	+1%	+5%
Std. Error of Mean	0.003	0.002	0.004
	5-year Growth Trajectory		
Decline (< -5%)	40%	26%	15%
Plateau	37%	49%	49%
Growth (> +5%)	23%	25%	36%
	$(\chi^2 = 334.061, p = .000, r = .179, N = 7154)$		

BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	I am often bored during the worship service - agree		
to a great or very great extent	8%	6%	5%
to an average extent	14%	13%	10%
hardly or not at all	78%	81%	85%
	$\chi^2 = 1471.827$, $p = .000$, $r = .063$, $n = 250262$		

BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	Our worship service attracts unchurched visitors - agree		
to a great or very great extent	32%	40%	55%
to an average extent	40%	41%	33%
hardly or not at all	28%	20%	12%
	$\chi^2 = 10275.063$, $p = .000$, $r = -.195$, $n = 244724$		

BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	When new people come to church events, we approach them openly and lovingly - agree		
to a great or very great extent	76%	72%	71%
to an average extent	20%	23%	24%
hardly or not at all	4%	5%	5%
	$\chi^2 = 1573.429$, $p = .000$, $r = .066$, $n = 250736$		

BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	New Christians find friends in our church quickly - agree		
to a great or very great extent	49%	45%	44%
to an average extent	41%	46%	46%
hardly or not at all	10%	10%	9%
	$\chi^2 = 1428.707$, $p = .000$, $r = .043$, $n = 246201$		

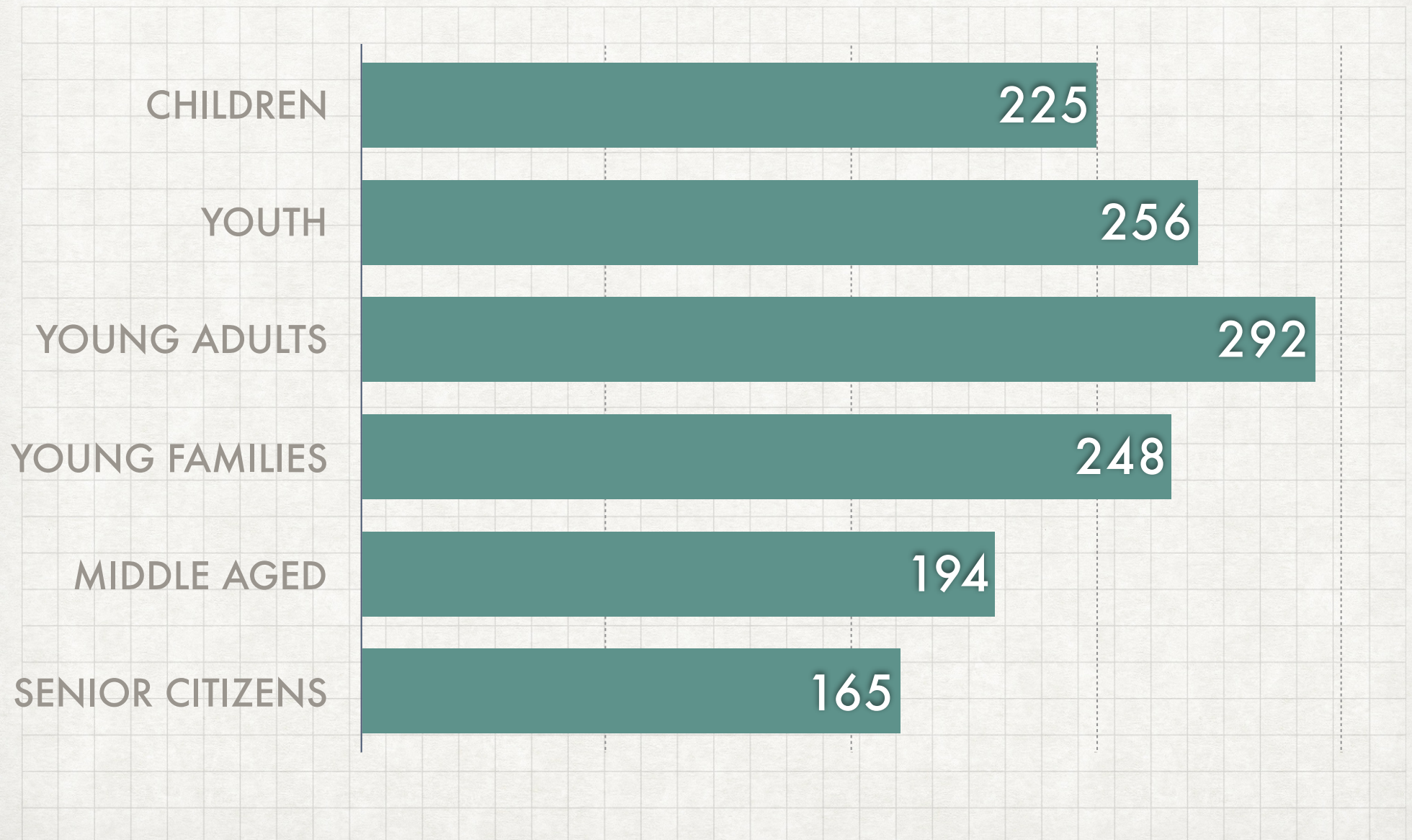
BIGGER BETTER?

FINDINGS

	Small Churches	Midsize Churches	Large Churches
	I know that other church members pray for me regularly - agree		
to a great or very great extent	52%	49%	50%
to an average extent	34%	36%	36%
hardly or not at all	14%	15%	14%
	$\chi^2 = 561.271, p = .000, r = .030, n = 246214$		

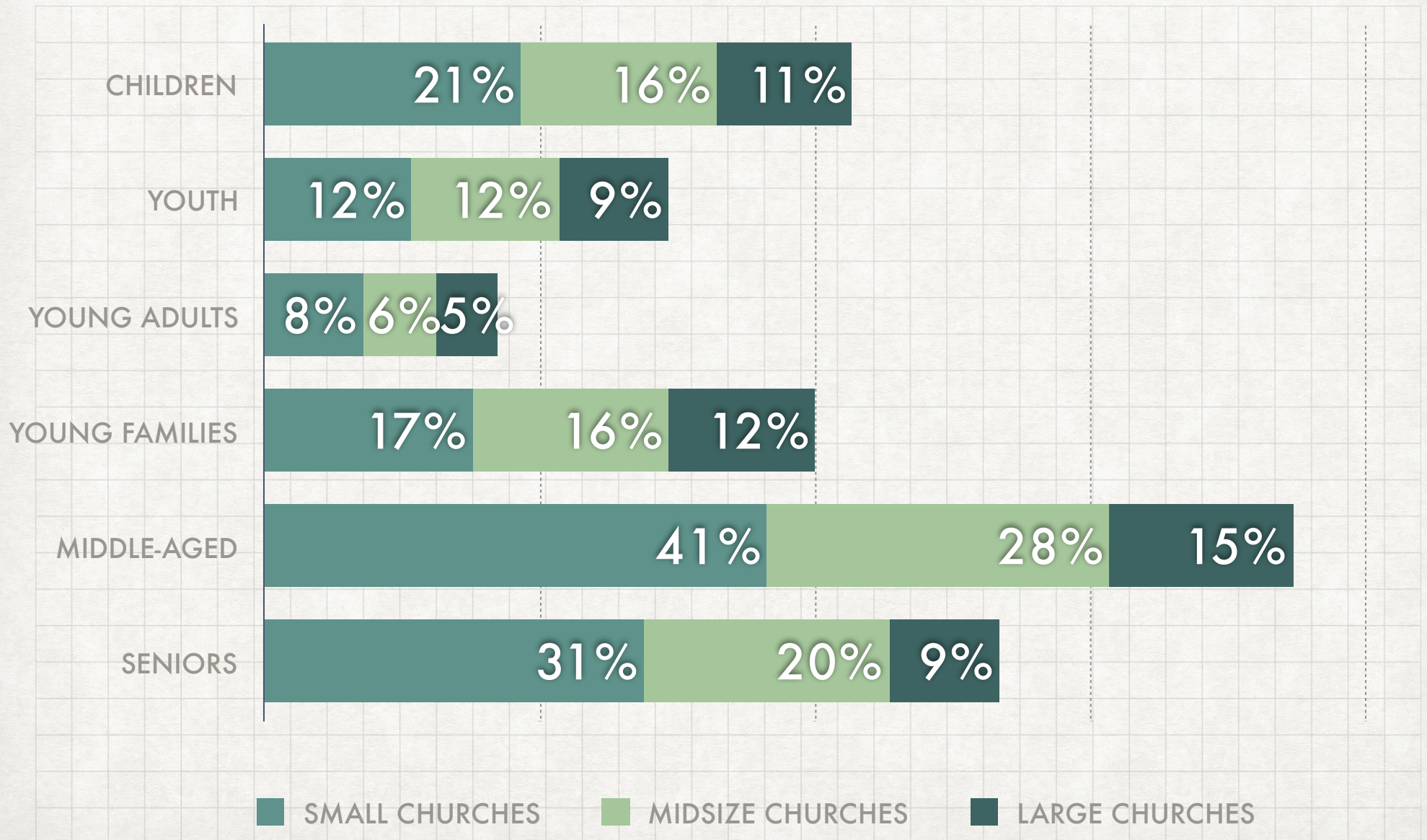
AVERAGE ADULT ATTENDANCE

BY THE PRESENCE OF AGE GROUPS:



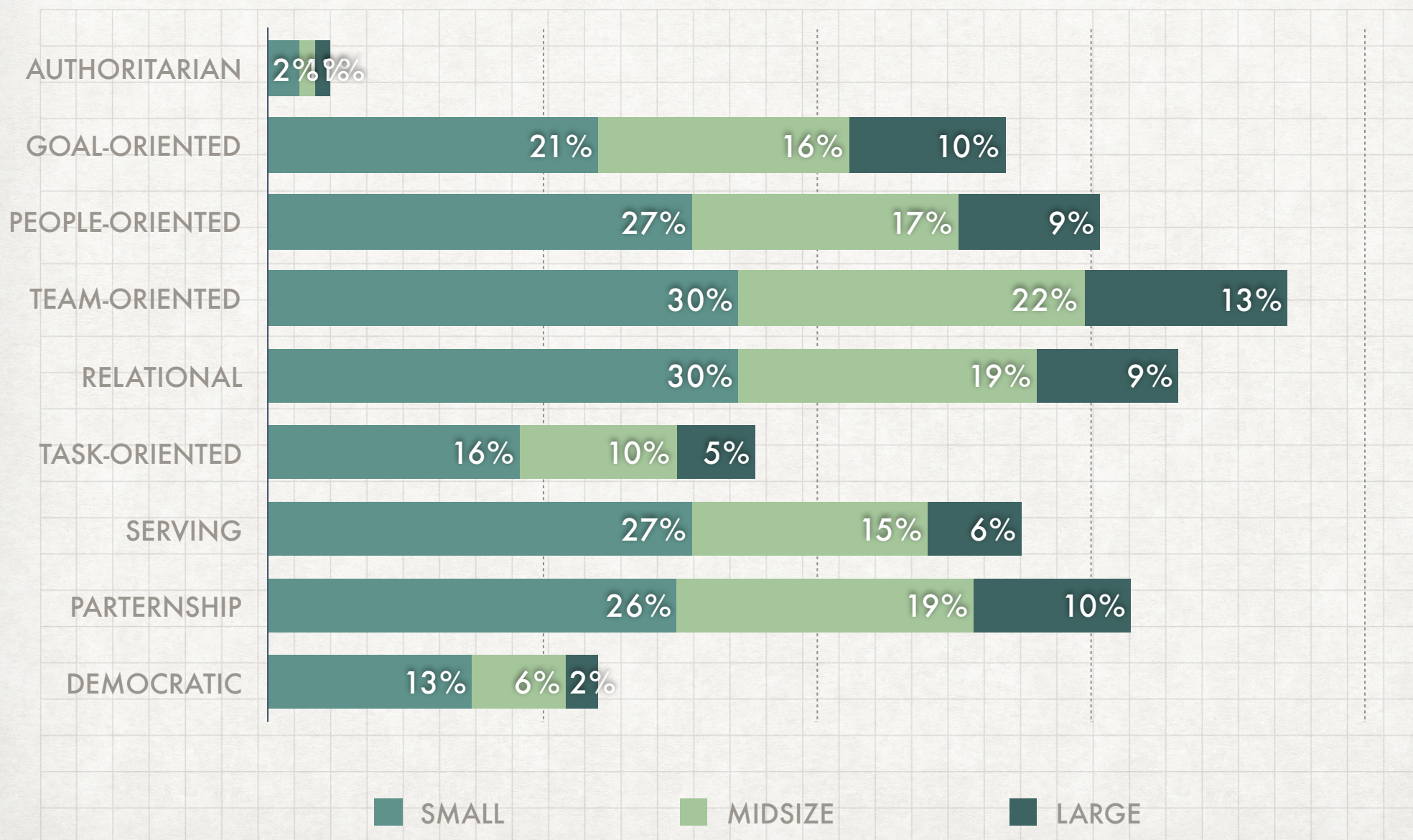
AGE GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

BY THE SIZE OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)



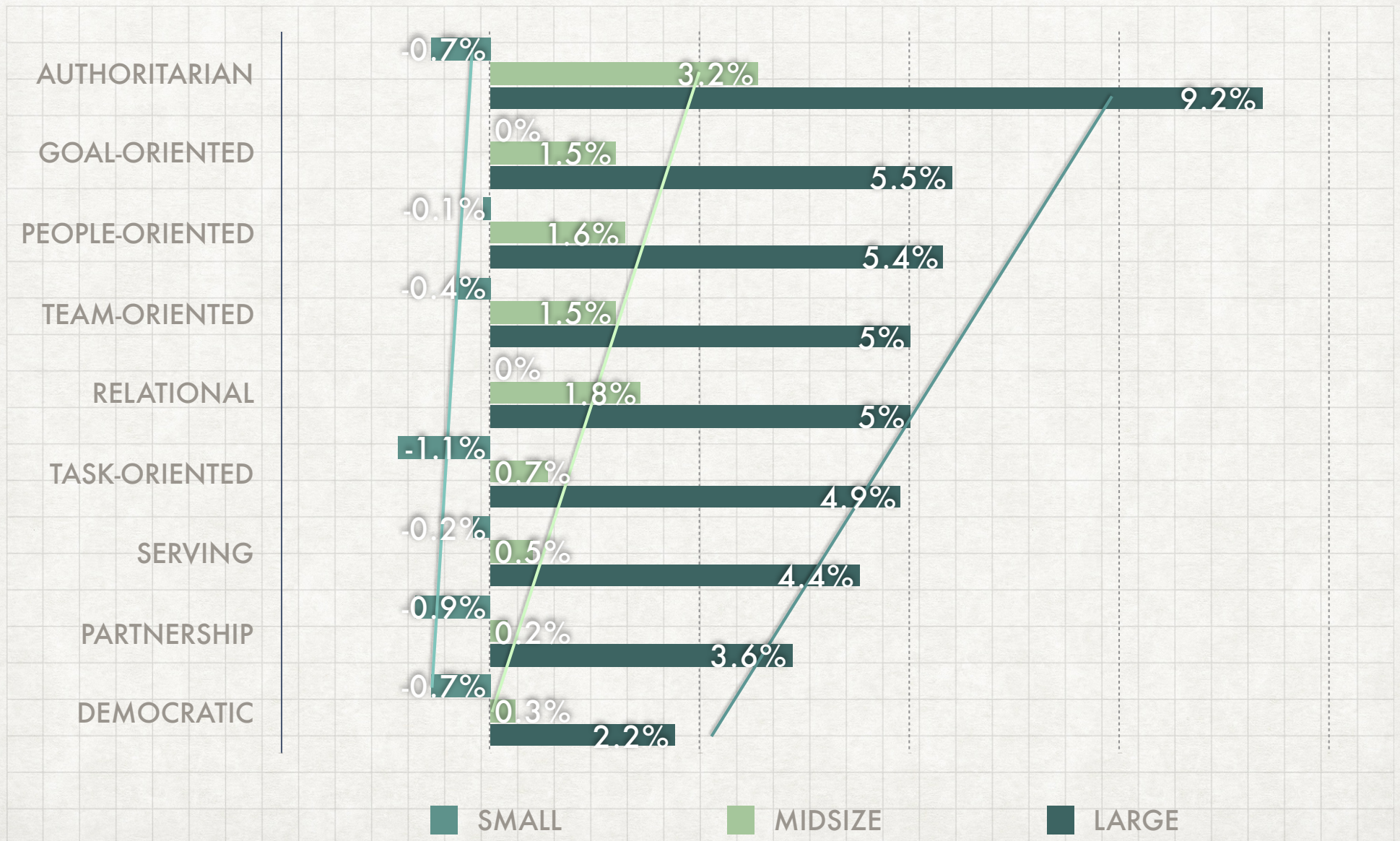
LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR

BY THE TRAJECTORY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)



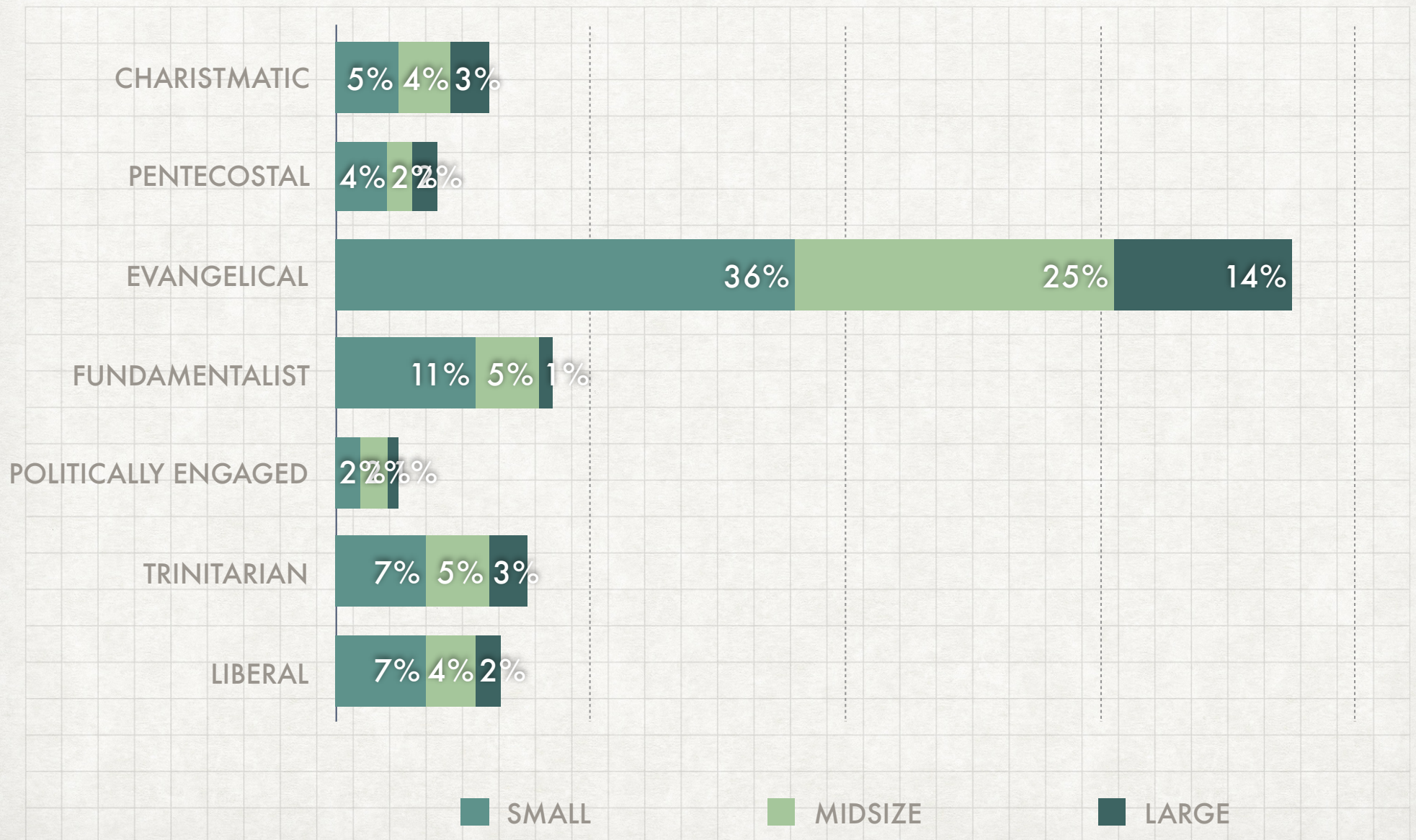
LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR

CHURCH SIZE BY THE GROWTH RATE (N=7112)



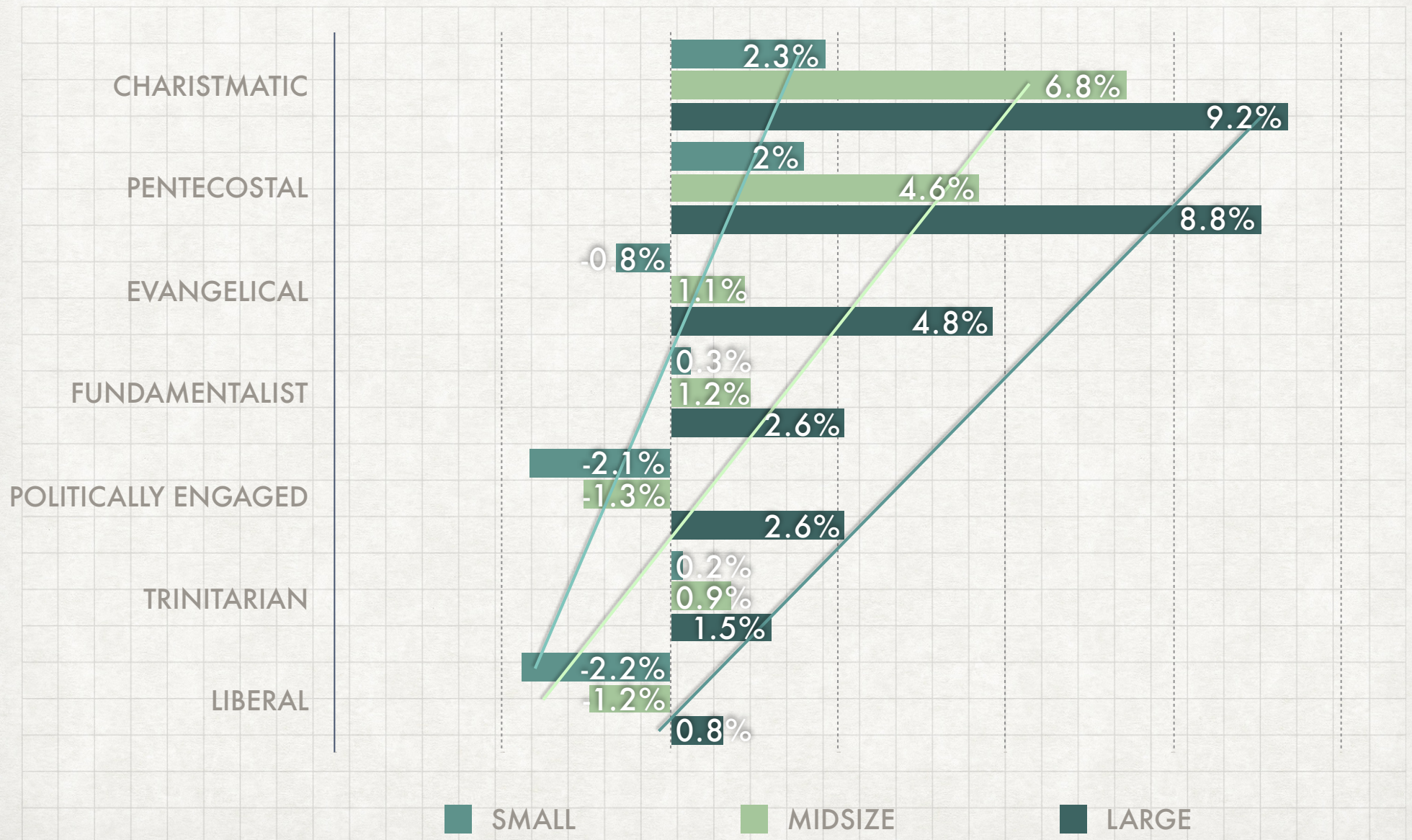
THEOLOGICAL STAND OF A CHURCH

BY THE TRAJECTORY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE (N=9148)



LEADERSHIP STYLE OF A PASTOR

CHURCH SIZE BY THE GROWTH RATE (N=7112)



BIGGER BETTER?

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)