



Strengthening Small Churches



VISION & GOALS



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Strengthening Small Churches

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STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Leader's Guide

How to use “Strengthening Small Churches” by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources at Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want, and the way you want them to. They're completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or other committees or groups of leaders. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of “Strengthening Small Churches,” you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ Bible study
- ◆ case study
- ◆ activities
- ◆ interview
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ resources
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ retreat plan

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you want help assessing the ways you serve in a small-church setting. See “An Opportunity for Excellence” (p. 7). Perhaps you need tangible ideas on how to maximize the impact of your small church. Use “The Power of Partnership” (p. 9). Or maybe you need a new perspective on the dynamics that shape a small church and how to effectively lead in that environment. See “Understanding the Small Church” (p. 14).

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected “The Power of Partnership.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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Unconditional Commitment in the Small Church

Don't underestimate what God can do with seemingly insignificant tools.

Exodus 3–4

I (Neil) know a great pastor who during his pastoral prime moved to a troubled church in western Kansas. For 15 years he had served a 500-member church in Yakima, Washington, with distinction. From the start, everything went wrong in the new assignment. After a couple of years of misery, the decision group requested his resignation, and he submitted it. He had no place to go, and he had little money.

The contrast between the loving congregation in Washington and his rejection in Kansas ate like a cancer at his sense of self-worth. He called his former district superintendent in the Northwest to discuss his dilemma. The superintendent felt troubled as he pondered this great pastor's predicament. So he phoned early the next morning and offered a new assignment at a tiny church. "Why don't you serve there for a few months until a stronger church opens?" he told my pastor friend.

- *Describe a time when circumstances weren't good and the opportunity presented seemed like a step backward rather than forward. How did you respond?*

My pastor friend accepted the challenge. He moved to that isolated town and to a church attended by fewer than 75 people. To everyone's amazement, he stayed in the community for 10 years. The little church was the talk of the town, and it grew. New people began attending. When asked about his tenure in such an ordinary place, he laughingly replied, "I found a secret here. People in this fine church were waiting for someone to love them, so I did. And they have loved me back."

My friend committed himself to the greatest thing in the entire world—to be used of God. That pastor discovered the old but ever-new adventure of self-crucifixion to security, place, and prominence.

- *Is there an opportunity at your church that seems trivial right now, but may be something God can use in unexpected ways? How can you proceed?*

God Nullifies Every Excuse

All of our self-centered rationalizations are questioned as we listen to the conversation between God and Moses at the burning bush.

Turn to Exodus 3 and 4. Read through both chapters, and then review these lessons:

- **Lesson 1:** No need for self-pity or to complain, "Why me?" God answers, "I will be with you, and that is enough" (see Ex. 3:11–22).
- **Lesson 2:** No use to sniffle, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?'" With unbelievable assurance, God tells Moses, "I'll give you a miracle or two to inspire you and to capture their attention" (see Ex. 4:1–9).
- **Lesson 3:** No need to point out inadequacies or low self-esteem and whine, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." Weary of Moses' rationalizations, God responds with a command and a promise: "Go. I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (see Ex. 4:10–12).
- **Lesson 4:** No use to suggest that God send someone else: "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." God answers with a promise: "I will give you someone to help you, and I will give both of you resources to speak and will teach you what to do" (see Ex. 4:13–16).

Go back to Exodus 3 and 4. How do these lessons speak to you in your current situation?

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Because the assets are significantly larger than the obstacles, let's refocus our vision. This time in human history promises to be one of frightening resistance and of incredible achievement for the gospel. We will maximize the possibilities only if we approach our task with creative imagination, alert competence, and unconditional dependence on God.

—H.B. LONDON JR. AND NEIL B. WISEMAN; excerpted from *The Heart of a Great Pastor* (Regal Books, www.regalbooks.com, 2006). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Discuss

1. Looking at Moses' exchange with God, how should we approach the leadership roles given to us at our small church?
2. What does the pastor's experience from the example above teach us about what we can accomplish in a small-membership church?
3. What are some immediate and long-term ways leaders can love their congregation, regardless of setting or circumstance?

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The Small Church as Family

Love the opportunities—and limitations—that come with smaller congregations.

1 Timothy 6:6

*John Koessler spent nine years pastoring a small church in central Illinois and watched it grow from 45 people to about 90. Today, he is a professor and chair of pastoral studies in the undergraduate school at Moody Bible Institute. He has written several books, including *A Stranger in the House of God* (Zondervan, 2007). He spoke with *BuildingChurchLeaders.com* about opportunities and challenges for the small church in the 21st century.*

What are two or three defining characteristics of the healthy small church in the 21st century?

One mark of a healthy church is a biblical sense of mission. It's particularly important for the small church to get its marching orders from Scripture, and not from the culture, particularly since the culture seems to focus on the large church. The Bible describes the church as a community of the Word, a community that worships, a community that demonstrates mutual concern and ministry, and a community that bears witness to the surrounding world.

A second mark of health would be a biblically informed sense of realism, because I think there are too many small churches laboring under the burden of false expectations. We approach ministry under the assumption that the small church is really just an underdeveloped large church, instead of seeing it as a distinct expression of the body of Christ. We really can't do all the things that the large church is doing, so we create a climate for failure and that failure creates a culture of defeatism. The mantra you often hear in a small church is, "We're just a small church."

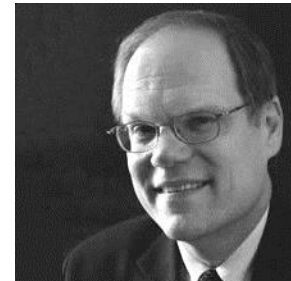
A third mark of health is a more holistic sense of what constitutes church growth. Numerical growth is one dimension, but it's only one, although it's an important one. But there are other important measures. For example, I think the small church needs to ask questions about whether a congregation is growing in its understanding of God's Word. Do you see a growth in character among God's people? Are they developing their capacity for ministry?

How do you encourage the pastor or leader who feels his or her life calling is in the small church, meaning they may never lead a church with high attendance or a large budget?

It's vital to remember that your value or your effectiveness as a pastor is not determined by the size of your church. We have come to believe that the bigger the church, the better the pastor, and I just don't see that as being true. Someone's capacity to be a good shepherd or a skilled communicator of God's Word is really not a function of church size. There are a lot of pastors who are effective shepherds, they're good preachers, and they're in small churches.

You've said a small church builds community through people, not programs. What are some tips you'd give to those who may feel better equipped at programming?

In our book *No Little Places* (Baker, 1996), Ron Klassen and I mention the importance of using your "two I's"—intimacy and involvement. When you look at the people who attend the small church, they are usually there because they have a relational connection with somebody in the church. That means that I'm going to recognize that's what motivates the congregation to serve in the church's ministries. In most cases, it's because they like being together. So I would capitalize on these strengths as I build my ministry strategy.



John Koessler

"One mark of a healthy church is a biblical sense of mission. It's particularly important for the small church to get its marching orders from Scripture, and not from the culture, particularly since the culture seems to focus on the large church."

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If I feel better equipped at programming, one of the things that I can do is to help the small church improve its ministry structures. That leader who has that ability can help the small congregation improve the quality of its ministries and can build a platform for ministry development that will enhance the church's growth, but that's only going to be true if there's recognition of the small church's unique dynamics.

What is one common misstep that small-church pastors or leaders could avoid?

It would be the temptation to wish for something "better." There's this sense of discontent, this sense of disappointment. I'll never forget the time I met one of the members of the church I pastored at the post office. After the prerequisite comments about the weather, she said, "I can tell God has been working in your life." Of course I wanted her affirmation, so I asked her to tell me what she had seen. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "Somehow before, it seemed as if we just weren't good enough for you." And I was really devastated by the truth of her comment. For a number of years, I had felt I had gifts that could be used in a larger context. I think the hidden agenda of my ministry was to try and transform the church into something that made me feel good about myself, and not necessarily something that was pleasing to God. I was grateful that God helped me to see that before I finished my time there and I was able to moderate that.

What is one powerful role a small church can play, despite its limited resources, in a heavily populated area?

Small churches really are like a family. In a heavily populated area, the small congregation has the potential to provide a face-to-face community in a context where the dominant social experience is one of being nameless and faceless. What you find in the metropolitan setting is that the small church has the potential to provide what I'd call a relational oasis in a desert of anonymity. That isn't without its challenges, however. It's very rare in the average small church for newcomers to walk in off the street, and because many small churches are hidden away in their neighborhoods, it's hard for them to impact the community.

This is also where the family dynamic can work against the church. If the congregation is comfortable, if they enjoy their relational network, they don't feel heavily motivated to move out into the community. This is where the pastor comes in, this is where the pastor can help remind the church of its responsibility to look outside of itself.

What is one way the rural small church can make a significant difference in a sparsely populated area?

Lower population density does decrease the potential for numerical growth, but what it increases is the possibility of impact. There are many rural churches that still play a central role in the life of the community. Unfortunately, I think it's often true that many have become so embedded in the community that they lose sight of their potential for cultural transformation, they lose sight of what you might call their prophetic role. This is where the rural church can learn a valuable lesson from the urban church. Both deal with many of the same social issues—limited resources, poverty, the collapse of the family. But the urban church is ahead of the rural church when it comes to this vision for impacting the surrounding culture. I'd like to see the rural church kind of go to school in that area and own that potential.

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Discuss

1. Does our church possess the traits of a healthy small church Koessler describes? If not, what does this tell us?
2. Do we focus more on programs or people, in terms of how we operate our ministry?
3. What are some ways we can overcome the excuse of limited resources to make a significant impact, regardless of our geographic location?

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An Opportunity for Excellence

By their very nature, small churches meet vital needs for communities—and the kingdom
 Acts 1:8

Small membership churches have a real advantage when it comes to incorporating people into a fellowship in which they are known and in which their personal needs are met. Small churches and their pastors should not fail to make the most of this ministry. The very demographic distribution of people in America, and in other places too, determines that, if everyone is to be served by the church, many will have to be served by churches with an average attendance of fewer than 100.

Rate yourself on the following attitudes and actions as a leader in a small-membership church. Answer each question by checking one of the boxes in the right column:

	This isn't true	This is sometimes true	This is mostly true
➤ As a pastor or leader of a small-membership church, I give my church my best.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ If I spend my whole life serving small membership churches and doing it well, then I think that will have been a life well spent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ If I am destined to eventually serve large-membership churches, I view the insights and experiences gained while serving small-membership churches as priceless training for my future leadership in larger congregations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I am committed to and creative in seeking ways of doing ministry that are appropriate and effective in my own church and community situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I try to think of church growth in terms of people being led into life-shaping relationships with God, who loves us all.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I am not the only person in the congregation involved in caring ministries; we're actively working to build our network of caring relationships and outreach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ As a leader, I provide leadership in developing these caring and outreach ministries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I provide training and examples of these ministries.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I help identify needs so that those who can help in the congregation can get in touch with those in need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
➤ I have a plan in place to help mobilize the church with a comprehensive response to human needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—JAMES L. KILLEN JR., adapted from *Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church* (Abingdon Press, 2005).
 Used by permission.

Discuss

1. Until now, has our church viewed its size as an opportunity or an obstacle for fulfilling needs of members and the greater community?
2. From a leadership perspective, what are some creative ways to best serve this church and community?
3. What are some ways we can intentionally build caring networks inside and outside the church?

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Reframing Small-Church Success

Six ways small-church leaders can see whether they're staying on track.

Colossians 3:23–24

Like many small-town, small-church pastorates, ours was a caretaking ministry. At the end of a day, I'd come home feeling like I'd achieved little—nothing of lasting value to the church, and certainly nothing recognized in wider circles as the marks of success.

The combination of my church's inertia and my declining interest in caretaking left me with a lot of guilt. I thought, *I'm being paid with people's hard-earned money, but what am I accomplishing?* I felt that I'd failed, and with no one to tell me otherwise, guilt became paralysis.

This tool will help assess performance in six areas to see if you're making the kind of progress a leader should in a small-church setting. Use it to help in situations where things aren't going well, or use it to help bolster a good situation by looking ahead. Answer each question by checking one of the boxes in the right column:

- | | I
never
do this | I
sometimes
do this | I
usually
do this | I
always
do this |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Am I taking time to grow? I take time to relax, read, recreate, spend time with family and friends, and grow professionally. I try to seize opportunities to take classes and seminars that challenge me intellectually. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I work my plan—then stop. Having a long-range plan and carrying it through are the best antidotes to the paralysis of guilt. And while my to-do list may not sound challenging to someone in a large, program-oriented church, in a small church, sometimes there's no one to delegate to. So I set a realistic plan and stop with that. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I persist. When progress seems to come to a halt, I remind myself that the Lord wants me to accomplish something here. If I just keep hammerin', he'll help me to break through to someone in a way that will be richly rewarding. Loneliness, discouragement, and lost opportunities aside, I recognize that sometimes ministry means just being available for someone else. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I discern the source of my frustration. I differentiate the challenges intrinsic to ministry from the frustrations that arise because of differing cultural expectations, educational backgrounds, and philosophies of ministry between pastor and church. I try to minister with compassion and competence no matter what the setting. But I don't believe it is wrong to want to match my gifts, needs, and vision with those of a church, recognizing it is not unholly ambition to long to minister where the differences between the church and me are not so sharp. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I sift through criticism. I take informed, constructive criticism seriously, but I don't let unbridled criticism sabotage my ministry. As hard as it is, I try to ignore any criticism—whether from a denominational executive or a church member—that doesn't come from those willing to take the time to see my life and work from the inside. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I refuse to live with loneliness. I make cultivating friendships a priority. I travel to visit friends and family. I realize it is unrealistic to expect that all of my social needs can be met by church members. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

—LOREN SEIBOLD; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 1998 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. What are some practical ways to address any areas that drew “Never” or “Sometimes” responses?
2. After reviewing these six areas, what are the most encouraging trends to build upon?
3. How can a focus on these six areas unintentionally create blind spots, and what are some ways to avoid them?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

The Power of Partnership

One small church, working with community groups, found ways to make big differences.

Romans 12:12–18

The Case:

I had led churches to remodel buildings, buy property, launch direct mail campaigns, and dream new dreams. I knew how to lead suburban churches, but there was something different about Chatham, Virginia—a small town—and I couldn't figure it out. Of course, I had never actually lived in a small town before, so it was a new experience for me, and the church was the smallest I had pastored since graduating from seminary 24 years earlier.

Our region suffered with the highest unemployment rate in the state of Virginia. But the community had taken steps to reverse this decline and reinvent itself, particularly through a unique partnership between Virginia Tech University, the city of Danville, and Pittsylvania County, where Chatham is the county seat. The result was amazing: The Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, a \$20 million glass-and-brick research center dedicated to new technologies and new jobs for the people of Southside Virginia.

What Would You Do?

- Given the town's conditions, how would you approach stepping into a small church?
- What roles could the church play, despite its limited resources?

What Happened:

This model of collaboration brought hope to our community and hope to me for our church. *If our church could figure out how to pull people together like this region has done, we could accomplish a lot*, I thought. Maybe Chatham Baptist Church's contribution didn't have to be something we did all by ourselves. Fast forward a little more than two years. Things have changed dramatically. Even though we are still a small church in a small town, we have:

- Partnered with the Boys and Girls Club to establish a club at our church, which now has more than 150 kids enrolled, serving about 40 boys and girls per day.
- Partnered with other pastors to build a new community center. With a \$3 million grant we received, we will soon complete a new 16,000-square-foot building that will house a gym, meeting rooms, art studios, a computer lab, and a commercial kitchen.
- Partnered with local artists and educators to begin a series of open-mic nights for teens, which meets in an empty storefront owned by a church member. More than 80 high school students show up to display their art, sing, present dramatic skits, read poetry they have written, and support the performers.
- Partnered with teens and parents to form a summer drama club. The high school drama club had been disbanded because no faculty sponsors were available. Our church hosted the drama group's weeklong workshop led by a local theater grad student. More than 50 of our neighbors attended the summer's grand finale, mostly people who do not attend our church.
- Partnered with Virginia Tech University and local arts enthusiasts to form a community arts organization. More than 30 children take weekly music lessons in violin, cello, guitar, piano, and voice. The goal is to form a community youth orchestra. Our church has become the unofficial headquarters of this program by hosting concerts and providing space for lessons.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is famous for his quote, "The world is my parish." We weren't quite that ambitious, but we made the intentional decision to engage our community:

1. We didn't convene a task force, form a committee, or do months of strategic planning. The church had done all that before, compiling reams of reports, but nothing had changed. This time we were after results, not reports. And we got them!
2. Our church members realized we couldn't do it by ourselves. Our manpower and resources were limited. If we were going to engage our community and have the kind of impact we desired, we needed help. Our church members were already stretched with traditional programs like Sunday school, choirs, and committees. We realized the work of engaging the community had to include the community.

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3. We started conversations with our neighbors and listened to what they said. We discovered many shared the same interests we did, providing programs for teens, encouraging the arts, serving the underserved, and bringing the community together in celebration and friendship. As people outside our church realized we were really interested in the community, they opened up to us, and viewed us in a different light.
4. We learned that when you partner with others, you give up some control. You collaborate. We collaborated with teachers, local politicians, business leaders, and artists as equal partners.
5. We had to drop our hidden agendas. We weren't doing good in our community only to get people to join our church. True, our worship attendance is up about 20 percent. New members have joined, and we have first-time visitors almost every Sunday. Not all are a result of our partnerships, but some come because they have seen what we are doing.

More important, we are becoming known as a church that cares about the community. We don't label these partnerships as evangelism or even pre-evangelism. We are just building bridges, working with others, and making a difference in our community.

Through our partnerships, I learned that small town ministry happens in everyday life. Now, my role is simply to meet people, see what God is doing in their lives, and see how we might work together to better our community. I've learned to share the limelight; shared success is sweeter than solitary success. Like our region, our town is changing for the better, and in the process, a small church is making a big impact.

—CHUCK WARNOCK, excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2007 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. What are the immediate lessons we can draw from Chatham Baptist Church?
2. As we look at our church, and its current role in the community, what are some immediate needs we can address, and what are some groups and churches we could work with to do that?
3. How comfortable is our church with the idea of collaborating with others to do “good in our community,” without the primary goals of evangelism or increasing attendance?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Big Ambitions, Small Church

Worldly standards can cloud the important calling of leading small churches.

1 Peter 5:2–3

The Case I was mad. And the more I thought about it, the madder I got. I had attended a seminar entitled “Ministry in the Small Church.” I had pastored small churches, but this was my first study of the concept. Now, heading home from the conference, I was mad—at the denomination, at the seminary, at my superintendent, even at myself.

I was mad because I wasn’t at all ready to hear what I heard. I wasn’t prepared to see myself as a career small-church pastor, enduring low status among colleagues, locked into a lifetime of poverty. The financial pinch was the toughest. I’d been on food stamps for two years, and the kids were being fed by WIC and free lunches at school. I had cashed in my life insurance policy, and when the old Toyota died, it was replaced by a bicycle. I didn’t know how much longer we could survive. This was not what I expected. Where was my yuppie church?

We were worshiping in a hundred-year-old building and managing our entire ministry on a \$40,000 budget. I was less disillusioned with everything the church was than by what it was unlikely to become.

What Would You Do?

- ◆ Have you ever experienced feelings such as these?
- ◆ How have you handled them—or how would you counsel someone experiencing them?

What Happened

My anger soon became a challenge to find the answers. As the discovery process began, I was overcome with a sense of peace that I had some options.

1. There were things I could do to influence my direction. I might become a specialist. Was God developing me into such a pastor? I began to seek out the experts. I subscribed to small-church newsletters. I bought books. I called pastors who appeared to be good at what they do and who stay in small churches intentionally.

2. There was the possibility that God just working on me. Maybe he was teaching me important lessons about his attitudes toward success, contentment, service, long-suffering, and humility.

3. There was a chance for me to redefine success. God helped me see these folks as he sees them—worthy of love, faithful and committed in their own way, tenacious survivors, and bearers of the gospel in a hostile world. Measuring success in the kingdom of God swims against the current of worldly standards. God most often uses small and seemingly insignificant things to reveal his will and to accomplish his purposes. The small church is a unique part of God’s plan on earth. The small church is a place where every person is known, where everyone matters because the entire group’s survival depends on each one’s participation. The small church lives in daily dependence on the Lord.

—JEFF SCHIRLE, excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 1999 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. What are some healthy ways to balance career dreams and expectations with the realities of a small-church setting?
2. What are some of the intangible benefits of our small-church setting, and what are some ways we can acknowledge and celebrate them?
3. As leaders, what networks and resources can we tap to find encouragement, inspiration, and assistance?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

It's Not My Job

A willingness to do the little things well opens up big possibilities.

1 Corinthians 3:6–10

Read *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:6–10)*

Comprehend When I began to plant the church I now lead in Cincinnati, I expended tremendous amounts of energy to get it off the ground. I spoke with some 1,500 people over a two-year period, sharing my vision for this new church and mustering up as much enthusiasm as I could. Yet in spite of all of this effort, our first Sunday service saw only 37 in attendance. A little bit of math shows that's a rejection rate of over 97 percent! It was then that I rediscovered the verse above: It is our job to do the planting and watering but God's to make growth happen.

I have come to realize that I spent the first part of my Christian life exerting a tremendous amount of human effort trying to accomplish what only God can do: to bring about a harvest of fruit. Yes, I am called to be diligent about planting and watering, but I am not responsible for the final result.

This insight has encouraged me as a leader and has reminded me of my limitations. I can become anxious about ministry ventures, wondering if something I've invested a lot of effort in will ever come to fruition. It is then that I have to sit back and pray, "Well, God, I've done about all I can do. I guess now you've got a challenge. I've planted and watered, and I will keep on watering the best I know how, but you are the one who has to bring about a harvest."

I no longer believe I can do a big thing. As a leader, all I am really capable of doing are the small things. But a small thing done consistently in the hands of God is capable of changing the world. God is looking for leaders who are willing to do small things, who are willing to be diligent, and then who are willing to get out of the way.

—STEVE SJOGREN; *copyright © 2001 Christianity Today. Originally appeared in Leadership Meditations, published by Tyndale House Publishers Inc.*

- Discuss**
1. Small churches require tremendous time and energy, so what are some ways we can remain encouraged and energized, even when things may not go as well as we plan?
 2. Can I be content with doing that small thing for God, or do I have a need to do the big, splashy, visible thing?
 3. What are some ways we can "get out of the way," to make sure our faithful service is fully available to God?

Pray Thank God that significance and success are based upon a whole-hearted commitment to serving him.

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Have You Been ‘Discovered’?

How perspective can make small-church leaders more effective.

1 Timothy 6:11–12

Read *But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:11–12)*

Comprehend With two kids under four, night school, and church responsibilities, I don’t spend a lot of time on the couch in front of the TV, but I love *Behind the Music*, a VH1 program that narrates the behind-the-scenes stories of the rise and fall of rock stars. I’ve watched the *Behind the Music* stories of Led Zeppelin, Billy Joel, Mötley Crüe, Tina Turner, and a host of others. It’s a kick to see what’s happened to the bands I grew up with.

But I love the stories for another reason: the interviews with the stars are refreshingly candid. In most of the profiles there seems to be little spin control. Julian Lennon, son of legendary Beatle John Lennon, described the pain of growing up in a home where his father sang “All you need is love” in public but didn’t show much love to his son in private.

The wretched-excess stories of *Behind the Music* are poignant reminders about the vain pursuit of fame, ambition, and success—the American Dream. If we achieve our dream, we’re often left casting about for new directions. If we don’t achieve it, our perceived inadequacy can motivate us wrongly for years.

A friend recently told me about the day he realized he would never be “discovered.” He had served as a pastor for years with the notion that one day he would get a phone call from a large church in a nice suburb and his dreams would be fulfilled. When he was in his 40s, my friend had heard that he was one of the candidates for a plum senior-pastor position in his denomination. But the church never called him, not even to ask for his résumé. My friend later learned that the church had filled the position. “It didn’t hurt my ego to know I was not asked to be their pastor,” he said, “but it was tough to swallow that, given all the hype, I wasn’t even in the top 20.

“After I learned of the decision, I returned to my study to finish the message for the midweek worship service. Humbled, I told myself I would rather be in the will of God than in my dream church. I grieved that I never had the opportunity to meet the committee. Then I looked at my ordination certificate hanging on the wall and saw the names of the ordination council—Tom, Roy, H. A., and Gerald—lay leaders, deacons, and bi-vocational ministers who had served in a rural county. I remembered their affirmation when they laid their hands on me and blessed me—and realized I had been discovered.”

The best kind of satisfaction comes from discovering and living out the call God has placed on your life.

—DAVE GOETZ; copyright © 2001 *Christianity Today*. Originally appeared in *Leadership Devotions*, published by Tyndale House Publishers Inc.

- Discuss**
1. How would I feel if someone told me my professional life would plateau where it is right now?
 2. Do I secretly harbor dreams of being “discovered,” or do I commit those dreams to God to use for his purposes?
 3. How can I turn a healthy desire for success into positive accomplishments for the church I currently serve?

Pray Thank God for the joy of serving him in the place that he has called you to serve.

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Understanding the Small Church

Relationships and unity are hallmarks of this unique setting.

John 17:20–23

Small churches operate under a family model of leadership in which relationships form the fabric of the community and organization. Just as leadership is vastly different in a family-owned-and-operated business compared to a Fortune 500 corporation, the roles and responsibilities of leaders in a small church are perceived much differently than in a megachurch.

Management Is by Relationships

Within a small church, decisions are not based on corporate objectives, but on the effect the decisions will have on the unity and fellowship of the congregation. No matter how significant or beneficial a decision might be, it will be rejected if it is perceived to undermine or threaten the unity within the community.

- Most of the literature today dealing with the vision and direction of the church reflects a model adapted from the business community. Pastors are seen as responsible for setting the direction and vision for the congregation, and the congregation then follows the pastor and assists in implementing the vision.
- By contrast, small churches often balk at a pastor who attempts to dictate a direction for the congregation. The role of the pastor, in this model, is not to set the direction, but to help the congregation establish its own direction and to make sure that the direction reflects biblical reality.

The Pastor Serves as a Shepherd

Small churches want pastors who will relate to the congregation as individuals. They look for someone who will minister to them personally rather than through programs. They want a leader who is approachable and who provides guidance and comfort through the struggles and pressures of daily life. While the pastor may oversee various programs and ministries, the people are more concerned about his relational skills than about his managerial skills.

Relationships Dictate Policies and Procedures

In a small church, based on a family model of leadership, the assumption is that individuals are more important than the whole organization. It is not that the importance of the organization is not recognized, but the health and well being of the individual is seen as having a significant effect on the health and well being of the whole group. Consequently, policies and procedures are established to assure the health of individual members and to protect them from harm, even at the expense of organizational effectiveness.

The Focus Is on Stability and Unity

Success is measured by relationships and inward experiences. The congregation is process oriented rather than product oriented. The church is considered successful when there is unity in the congregation and when people are caring for one another. Health is measured by the absence of conflict, the stability of the membership rolls, the willingness of people to be involved, and the amount of personal growth they experience. Regardless of the numbers, people are satisfied as long as each individual is growing.

The Congregation Makes Most of the Decisions

Everyone is considered to have an equal voice, and the congregation makes most of the decisions. Boards and committees make only minor decisions and then only after the congregation has carefully delineated the scope of those decisions. Boards are responsible for researching issues and bringing recommendations to the congregation, but it is the congregation that has the final say. Decisions are made by the whole even when they affect only a part.

Decisions Guide the Budget

When a business contemplates a proposal, one of the first considerations is how the idea will fit within the budget. Although finances are not the sole determining factor, they do weigh heavily in the process. In the family model, the budget plays a far less significant role. People give based on needs rather than on the budget. The budget serves only as a general guideline. When needs arise and proposals are made, decisions are based on the present financial status rather than on a future budget. When there is a need, the congregation readily alters the budget rather than restricting it based on future budgeted needs.

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES**Groups Function Interdependently**

Each group is an interrelated part of the whole. As a result, every decision of one group is of interest to the other groups, even when that decision does not have any direct bearing on those other groups.

—GLENN C. DAMAN; excerpted from *Leading the Small Church* (Kregel Publications, 2006). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. How would we describe the leadership atmosphere of our church? Where can we stand to improve?
2. Do we expect our pastor to serve as a shepherd, rather than a manager? Should we?
3. While the familial approach is preferred by this author, what potential dysfunctions should we be wary of?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES**Leading in the Small Church**

Five vital qualities for leaders to possess

Colossians 1:28–29

The task of leadership is not to force people to follow, but to create an atmosphere in which they desire and are willing to be led, in which they trust and are willing to support the leadership. The pastor of a small church must demonstrate certain skills and abilities that are necessary for effectiveness in the small-church context. Accepting the family model of leadership and learning to understand and serve within that model are essential to leadership in a small church.

Family Leaders Lead by Example

Small-church leaders have personal contact with everyone in the congregation. The leader must be a mature disciple of Christ, one who submits all aspects of life to the authority and guidance of Scripture. And the leader must exemplify the type of commitment and dedication—in both time and energy—needed if the church is to accomplish its mission.

Family Leaders Lead Through Servanthood

Servant leaders are not concerned about their own success; instead they sacrifice themselves completely for the success of others, as Christ did for the church (Eph. 5:25).

Family Leaders Learn to be Relational

Small-church leaders must learn to be relational, grounding their leadership on the development of strong personal relationships with the people whom they serve. Relational leadership encompasses five critical characteristics:

1. Relational leaders love deeply.
2. Relational leaders accept people.
3. Relational leaders must be good listeners.
4. Relational leaders are personal.
5. Relational leaders value each individual as much as they do the whole congregation.

Family Leaders Are Patient

Family leaders do not force people to change; they carefully assist people in changing. They patiently wait until people are ready. They work within an individual's capacity to process information and accept change, rather than imposing their own expectations.

Family Leaders Are Teachers

Effective leaders do not assume that people will accept their ideas and changes merely because the leader made suggestions. Instead, leaders recognize that before growth can occur, there must be careful instruction (2 Tim. 4:2).

—GLENN C. DAMAN; excerpted from *Leading the Small Church* (Kregel Publications, 2006). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. In terms of our leadership, where are we strongest in these five areas? Weakest?
2. How can we be relationally minded, understanding the many other duties and responsibilities expected of us?
3. In what situations might a managerial approach to leadership work more effectively than the familial one? How would such an approach be received by those we serve?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES**Making Decisions in the Small Church***Effective ways to implement plans or changes.*

Zephaniah 3:9

Just as a small church approaches leadership differently than a large church, so also the process by which decisions are made reflect a family—rather than a managerial—orientation.

Family Leaders Encourage Participative Leadership

Although a family has a designated leader, decisions that affect the whole family require everyone's participation in the decision-making process. Participation means that everyone interested in the decision or affected by the decision is given the opportunity to share his or her ideas and concerns before plans are formulated.

Family Leaders Gain Acceptance for Decisions Before Implementing Them

The family leader recognizes that a majority vote may get the issue passed, but it requires acceptance by the whole congregation before it will be fully embraced and implemented.

Family Leaders Work with the “Tribal Chiefs”

In most small congregations, certain individuals exert great influence over the rest of the community by virtue of their positions or their family relationships. Effective leaders learn to accept the position and influence of these individuals, and are not threatened by them, but learn to work with them and through them.

Family Leaders Recognize the Value of Informal and Personal Communication

Notes in the bulletin, announcements from the pulpit, and letters sent to the congregation are all helpful means of communication, but the most important and effective communication occurs over a cup of coffee through face-to-face interaction. Effective leaders recognize that they need to spend time with people, sharing plans and goals long before attempting to implement them.

Family Leaders Keep the Organization Subservient to Relationships

The ultimate question is not, *What is best for the organizational church?* but, *What is best for the individual relationships in the church?* Replacing the organist with a worship team may be the right thing to do organizationally, but it might damage relationships, undercutting the vitality and strength of the small church.

—GLENN C. DAMAN; excerpted from *Leading the Small Church* (Kregel Publications, 2006). Used by permission.

Discuss

1. In our church, how are significant decisions typically made? How can we improve?
2. Is a familial approach realistic all the time? How might a managerial style sometimes be necessary in order to avoid a standstill?
3. Have we identified our church's “tribal chiefs” and involved them in our decision-making?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Making the Small Church Visitor-Friendly

Three principles that can create the right atmosphere for any place of worship.

Proverbs 3:27–28

There I was, settling into my first full-time pastorate and wondering, *What have I gotten myself into?* With a consistent attendance of less than 15 and a total church budget of less than \$14,000, you might say there was nowhere to go but up. But how do you begin the ascent?

With limited resources, a handful of people, and not infrequently a hint of discouragement or desperation, what can a pastor do to make a difference, especially when the budget restrains experimentation? From my more than 10 years in a small church, I have learned three principles that helped keep us growing:

1. A positive perspective. The small church knows full well what it can't do, how much money it doesn't have, and all the needs it isn't meeting. Such attitudes often lead to an unhealthy introspection and an apologetic demeanor: "Well, I know it's not much, but we're giving it our best shot."

I've found it better to continually hold before my people the good things the church is accomplishing. Even small things, when lumped together, give a sense of real accomplishment to the people. Pastors are often advised to perform a "strengths vs. weaknesses" study of their churches. Perhaps a better starting point would be targeting one or two strengths and working to improve them even more, making them the central thrust of the church's ministry.

- Developing strengths gives the church an area of expertise. Very likely this strength will establish the church's reputation in the community and become a natural springboard for outreach.
- And it gives the church a reason for genuine and healthy pride. Nothing helps a small church's esteem so much as to know "We do this well!"

2. A clear purpose. Purpose comes second for a definite reason. Often the smaller church has no clear purpose, and the idea of developing a church purpose can strike fear in the hearts of church leaders. Where do we start? How do we proceed? And how can we convince the church it's even necessary?

Sitting down cold and trying to state on paper their reason for being is often just too big a step for church leaders. To be "spiritual," the church will try to do a little bit of everything.

If, however, the church has already specialized in one or two areas, grasping the concept of purpose and direction is much simpler. The process then becomes one of understanding the scriptural mandates for churches, seeing where the church is going, and developing a purpose that combines the two by saying: (1) "As we understand the Bible, the church is to do ..." and (2) "We can fulfill that mandate by ..." This way, rather than forcing a purpose on the church, purpose emerges out of the gifts and natural aptitudes of the church.

3. A thoughtful presentation. Visitors gauge how friendly a church is by the way it presents itself. Smaller churches may unknowingly project a negative image. Buildings are sometimes old, and there's not always money for proper upkeep. Bulletins and church literature may look decidedly amateur. The physical plant and public image communicate the personality of the church.

Beyond the material considerations stand the people themselves: how they react to visitors and how they treat each other. No matter how much the church wants to reach out, growth will not happen if the building and the people fail to say, "Welcome!"

One technique I've found helpful in building this awareness is to walk church members through their building as if they were first-time visitors. I take a small group a block or so away from the church, give them pencils and note cards, and try to create a "first-time visitor" mindset for them, asking questions about the building, grounds, interiors, and signs.

I apply the same technique to the Sunday activities. Is any effort made to create a good impression? Or is too much taken for granted? How many people talk to visitors? How much time elapses before someone greets newcomers? Does the church give any impression that it even expects someone new to come?

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I try to extend image-oriented thinking to all the public images our church projects, including church bulletins, logos, and T-shirts. I've found that whatever we decide to do—even as a small church—we need to maintain a sharp image before the community, one that says, “We know what we’re doing, and we intend to do it well.”

I've discovered these three principles are neither costly nor difficult to implement, yet they can help churches overcome self-image deficits.

—GARY HARRISON, excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2006 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. What are two or three of our church's strengths that we can focus on?
2. If we approached the church as first-time visitors, what positive and negative experiences would we likely encounter?
3. What are some cost-effective ways we can spruce up the church's image, be it in the appearance of the building or the presentation of the Sunday bulletin?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Major Ministry on Modest Means

A small budget doesn't have to equate to small impact.

2 Corinthians 8:1–7

Our collection one week recently was \$691.30. We needed \$1,300 to meet budget.

Standing at the front door of our brownstone church, saying farewell to our 80 congregants, I saw Robert, a street person in our neighborhood. He asked a member for a quarter. *We barely have a quarter to give you*, I thought. The fact was, we didn't know how we could help anyone. We simply didn't have the resources. We were in a large, older building, and our expenses, even cut to the minimum, were often double our weekly offering.

Where could we begin?

Start by recognizing existing resources. We didn't have a lot of discretionary income. Our budget was overstrained. But as we assessed our resources, we realized we have more than we thought we did.

- We have a large building. That gave us space to host a variety of ministries and programs without having to worry about finding or renting room for them.
- We have a church office with supplies and equipment. We can handle, slowly, the basic communication and correspondence needed in any outreach.
- Though our congregation is small, it's resourceful. Most of us have learned the hard way how to get the most for our money.
- Most important, we have an omnipotent God. And our community needs an omnipotent God, with troubling levels of unemployment, single-parent homes, and crime. But our God is bigger than even these staggering problems.

Once we had seen all we did have, we could put those resources to use. For example, we were concerned about the mental health of our community, but we couldn't afford a part-time counselor, let alone a full-time one, to address the staggering needs. So we went to a local Christian ministry and offered office space in our building—for free—if they would provide a counselor available to people in the community.

Network with other groups. The counselor arrangement illustrates something else we've learned: When you can't afford to do it by yourself, don't. Work with other groups.

- We offered to host a chapter of Narcotics Anonymous.
- We decided to go beyond our annual \$100 dues at the East End Cooperative Ministry, a coalition of churches that runs a food closet, soup kitchen, meals-on-wheels program, shelter, halfway house, and employment agency. The board and I volunteered to serve in these ministries. Before long our tiny congregation was logging more than 100 hours in these ministries every week—more than an hour per member! It didn't cost a nickel, but we started receiving rich spiritual returns.
- We began to support, along with other churches and groups, a Jubilee housing project. The project buys abandoned houses, refurbishes them, and allows low-income people to live in them at modest rates. The only stipulation is that they must take good care of them. If they do, in 20 or so years they will own their own homes.

Focus on areas of greatest need. One painful realization for any pastor is that you can't do everything. The number of needs in any church and community is simply too great. We feel this acutely. With so much that needs to be done, and so little money, what can we do? We have decided, by necessity, to focus on the areas of greatest need.

Avoid dependence. A key question for churches trying to build a major ministry with modest means is this: how much can you depend on others? To refuse funds is to refuse opportunities for ministry. But to accept them is to open yourself to an insidious cycle of dependence. We've tried to resolve the issue by determining what the funds are for. If they're for operating expenses—lights, heat, my salary—we refuse them. That's our responsibility. On the other hand, we will gladly accept money for ministry and mission.

The “avoid dependence” principle works the other way, too: we try not to build an unhealthy dependence in the people we serve. A few years ago I was introduced to the idea of “dignity ministries,” programs that build not

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dependence but dignity. With that in mind, we opened a Christmas store. We asked area churches to provide new toys. But instead of giving them away, we *sold* them—at 30 percent of retail price. (We also made Bibles available.) For many customers, it was the first time they had been able to buy Christmas toys for their children.

If folks couldn't afford to pay for the toys—and it was surprising how many could—we allowed them to work for them.

By minimizing dependence, we maximize impact.

Don't settle for second-rate. In our ministries to the poor and powerless, we endeavor to provide excellence. We think our Lord demands nothing less.

Not settling for second-rate means, among other things, that when you enter new areas of ministry, you have to ask for advice. And by tapping others' expertise, we are able to make sure that our projects are done right.

A simple fact. A simple fact eventually dawned on us: with no increase of our budget, we had become a powerful church. We were becoming respected, even loved, by people in our community, and some of them started coming to church. Eventually some became officers; gradually we were becoming a community church again. We had no more broken windows or walls defecated on because this was their church.

Our budget is still \$72,000 a year, and we still have 79 members. We still receive \$691.30 some weeks. But more and more the congregation offers \$1,000 or even \$1,500. We have begun to meet budget for the first time in years. Last year, we ended up \$7.30 in the black!

We are the church of Jesus Christ, and we have to be more than a good feeling or an attractive building. Our communities are counting on us.

—JAMES STOBAUGH; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2006 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. What resources, financial and otherwise, have we identified among our church and churchgoers that can expand the impact of our ministry?
2. What are the areas of greatest need that we can address, and what might we have to give up to meet those needs?
3. Regardless of our budget's size, what are some ways we can meaningfully teach about tithing and stewardship?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Where 20 or 30 Are Gathered ...

Creative worship options that smaller congregations enjoy.

Matthew 18:20

Smaller congregations—whether they have 15 or 75 worshipers—have some interesting challenges. They also have wonderful strengths and opportunities.

1. Smaller congregations share a strong sense of *community*.
2. Small congregations tend to run on *lay involvement*.
3. Smaller congregations are characterized by a sense of *authenticity*. There's not much to hide behind when worshiping in a group of 40 as opposed to 400.
4. Smaller congregations have the luxury of *flexibility*. There aren't as many people to persuade when experimenting with something new.

Keeping these strengths in mind can help you develop creative worship services that work in the intimate setting of a smaller group. Here are some ideas to use as starting points for developing your own services.

As a group, spend five minutes discussing each of the five categories and ways you might incorporate some of these ideas into your services. Then spend 10 minutes answering the discussion questions at the end.

Prayer

- **Bidding prayer.** The worship leader or pastor opens the prayer and bids worshipers to pray out loud or silently for each category he or she mentions. These may include thanksgivings, concerns, and other categories determined by the particular service.
- **Joys and concerns.** The worship leader solicits joys and concerns from worshipers, while the pastor or another leader writes them down. Then the pastor or other leader offers the prayers of the people, incorporating the items mentioned.
- **Encircling prayer.** The worship leader gathers everyone into a circle for prayer, perhaps also for the laying on of hands for someone who's having a particularly difficult time. This can be a powerfully moving time of prayer.
- **Prayer journal.** Ask someone in your congregation to keep track of prayer requests as they are offered during the prayers of the people. At the end of the year, review some of the requests during a service or ask someone to distribute a synopsis of all the requests so you can see how God has worked in your congregation throughout the year.

Communion

- **Around the table.** Invite worshipers to come forward—all together or in groups, depending on the number of worshipers—to stand in a circle around the Communion table. Each worshiper passes the bread and the wine with appropriate words: “The body of Christ, given for you,” or “The blood of Christ, shed for you,” with the receiver responding, “Thanks be to God,” or “Amen.” Passing the bread and wine from one to another emphasizes community as people share the Communion meal.
- **Read Scripture during Communion.** If you usually sing hymns while people are coming forward for Communion, ask someone to read Scripture in place of one of the hymns. This is particularly appropriate if you don't have enough people in the congregation to sing while another group is up front.
- **Bring children into the Communion circle.** If children are elsewhere during the service, bring them in to join the Communion circle with their families to reinforce the sense of community. They can receive a blessing from the pastor as professing members receive the bread and wine around the circle. This approach also allows nursery volunteers or teachers to join the circle to receive Communion.

Baptism

- **Introduce the child (or adult) to the congregation.** After the person has been baptized, have your congregation sing a hymn of welcome as the pastor or an elder walks the newly baptized person around to introduce this newest member of God's covenant people to the congregation.

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- **Baptismal bowl.** Invite grandparents or godparents to hold the baptismal bowl. Having a member of the child's inner circle hold the bowl reinforces the sense of community as well as the multigenerational nature of God's family.
- **Baptismal banners.** One option for a baptismal banner is to add each person's name as he or she is baptized, so that the names are dancing across the banner whenever a baptism is held. Or create a banner for each one baptized, which the family can take home as a reminder of this special occasion.

Special Services

- **Ebenezer.** You can base a great Thanksgiving service on Ebenezer—the milestone Samuel built to remind God's people of God's grace and love (1 Sam. 7:12). When worshipers arrive, they receive a brick and an adhesive label on which to write what they are thankful for from the previous year. They attach the label to the brick. During a cycle of alternating hymns and quiet, they bring the bricks forward to build an Ebenezer. One of the songs could be "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," in which verse two mentions raising an Ebenezer. Use silent times between hymns for worshipers to share a thanksgiving or a Scripture.
- **Scapegoat service.** This service of repentance and renewal is appropriate at the beginning of the year or as part of Lent. Ask worshipers to write particular sins on a slip of paper. After the confession and reconciliation, during a time of silence or soft instrumental music, invite them to come forward and burn that slip of paper. (If you do this just after Advent, use the Christ candle to light the paper). The paper disappearing into ash symbolizes how Christ causes our sins to vanish.
- **Maundy Thursday.** Incorporate foot washing (or hand washing) into the Maundy Thursday service before Communion. Ask one person, perhaps the pastor, to wash worshipers' hands or feet and another person to be available with a towel to dry.
- **Flowering of the cross.** For Easter Sunday, make a cross of chicken wire nailed to 2 x 4s. Ask worshipers to bring flowers to the Easter Sunday service (and make sure to bring extra flowers for visitors). After the confession and reconciliation part of the service, sing several Easter hymns (especially ones that people know the words to). Invite worshipers to come forward to insert their flowers into the chicken wire cross. The flowers symbolize the new life we receive in Christ through his death on the cross. They turn a symbol of pain and suffering into something beautiful.
- **Relocating services.** Worshiping in small groups eliminates the need for amplification and makes it possible to worship in locations other than your usual worship space.

Community

- **Greeting time.** Allow enough time for everyone to move around. In one church I visited, everyone moves into the center aisle and walks down the length of the church. In this way, everyone greets everyone. An extended greeting time can be a great way to make visitors feel welcome too.
- **Passing the peace.** At the end of the service, during the closing hymn, the pastor passes the peace to the end person in each row as he or she exits the sanctuary. Those people then pass it to the next person in the row and on down the row.
- **Benediction and parting hymn.** Invite everyone to stand in a circle around the front of the church or around the sanctuary for the benediction and parting hymn. This is particularly effective after Communion services, after everyone has shared a meal around Christ's table. At the end of the hymn, worshipers may pass the peace around the circle.

—LISA STRACKS; excerpted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP journal, © 2005 Christianity Today. For more articles like this, visit www.LeadershipJournal.net

Discuss

1. Some might view the strengths described at the beginning of the article as weaknesses. How do we view them, and how can we build a culture that views these qualities as strengths?
2. Which of the ideas suggested here appeal to us the most? How can we implement them?
3. What other areas of our service could use a boost? What are some ways we can address them?

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Further Exploration

Resources for leading a small church.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Leadership training resources from Christianity Today

- “A Welcoming Church” Assessment Pack
- “Cultivating Active Church Members” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Assessing Church Needs” Training Theme and PowerPoint
- “Church Health” Training Theme & PowerPoint
- “Redefining Success” Training Theme & PowerPoint
- “Starting a New Church” Training Theme and PowerPoint

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Small Church. A resource website providing tips, resources, links, and encouragement for those involved with a small church. www.smallchurch.com

The Rural Home Ministry Association. A group devoted to planting and strengthening churches in small-town America. <http://www.rhma.org/>.

Leading the Small Church *Glenn C. Daman*. This book challenges pastors and leaders to return to the simplicity of ministry by caring for and loving the people they serve while proclaiming God’s Word and setting a godly example. (Kregel Publications, 2006; ISBN 978-0825424472)

Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church *James L. Killen Jr.* Killen shares insights from years of experience in the small membership church setting, helping to identify opportunities while thoughtfully addressing challenges. (Abingdon Press, 2005; ISBN 978-0687343263)

Shepherding the Small Church *Glenn C. Daman*. Daman uses his experiences with small churches to identify several keys to effective ministry. (Kregel Publications, 2002; ISBN 978-0825424496)

The Small Church at Large *Robin Trebilcock*. This book uses storytelling and action steps to illustrate the role of small churches through the changes of our times. (Abingdon Press, 2003; ISBN 978-0687043828)

STRENGTHENING SMALL CHURCHES

Retreat Plan

How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Strengthening Small Churches”

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the “Strengthening Small Churches” theme. The purpose of this retreat is to help leaders assess, reflect, and pray over their small-membership church and determine what God is calling the church—and its leadership—to do.

Friday Evening

- ◆ 8–8:45 P.M. **Opening Session:** Hand out copies of “The Small Church as Family,” the interview with John Koessler on pages 5–6, and allow time for each person to read it. Then form groups of three or four. Have each group discuss the questions at the end of the interview. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have the groups share their comments and consider what that may mean for the church.
- ◆ 9–9:45 P.M. **Bible Study:** Close the evening with “Unconditional Commitment in the Small Church” the Bible study on page 3. Photocopy and pass out the study, or use the handout as your notes.

Saturday Morning

- ◆ 9–9:45 A.M. **Devotional:** Set the tone for the day by handing out (or presenting) “It’s Not My Job” (p. 12). Discuss the questions at the bottom of the page, and have a time of reflection on the ways each leader can do little things well in the church so that God can bring about his harvest.
- ◆ 10–11 A.M. **Activity.** Use the activity “Where 20 or 30 Are Gathered . . .” on page 22 to discuss and consider unique ways to capitalize on your church’s size for its worship and special services.
- ◆ 11:15–NOON. **Case Study:** Use the case study “The Power of Partnership” on page 9. Have each person read the case study individually, then reconvene to identify and discuss tangible partnership opportunities that can broaden your church’s reach. Consider listing the ideas on paper and prioritizing them into an action plan for when you return.
- ◆ NOON. **Lunch**

Saturday Afternoon

- ◆ 1–2 P.M. **Final Group Session:** Close the retreat with the assessment “An Opportunity for Excellence” on page 7. After everyone has read and completed the assessment, have them discuss how their attitudes—positive or negative—affect the church’s overall direction. Discuss whether the church provides effective “caring networks” needed from its attendees and the surrounding community, and how to become stronger in that regard. Pray for God’s guidance as your leadership team serves the church, and works to strengthen its impact to the glory of God.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.