

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Thriving As A Mega Church

Some voices are predicting that mega churches are beginning to decline. For example, attendance at house churches has been increasing over the last decade. Up to four million people in the United States are currently involved in a house church, and attendance is growing.

Other new movements, such as the emerging church and the missional church, are in part reactions against mega churches. These movements suggest that a new emphasis on authentic worship and community is best accomplished in small churches.

Research shows, however, that the total number of non-Catholic mega churches in the USA are continuing to increase. John Vaughan reports that in 1970 there were only 10 mega churches in the USA. The following chart shows the rapid growth of total mega churches in the USA since 1970.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mega Churches</u>
1985	100
1990	250
1998	400
2000	500
2003	700
2004	850
2005	1,200
2006	1,400

As one can see from the statistics, the total number of mega churches continues to grow, rather than decline.

Leadership Network reported in January 2007 the following breakdown of churches by size.

<u>Attendance</u>	<u>Total Churches</u>
1-99	177,000 (59%)
100-499	105,000 (35%)
500-999	12,000 (4%)
1,000-1,999	6,000 (2%)
2000-9,999	1,170 (0.4%)
10,000+	40 (0.01%)

Mega churches make up a small percentage of all churches, but they clearly continue to be increasing rather than declining.

Mega churches have increased in popularity since the early 1970s. While it is difficult to prove cause and effect, contributing factors appear to be related to the following.

- > An increase in population and density.
- > An ability to contextualize ministry to the culture.
- > Suburbanization and ease of travel.
- > Innovative forms of ministry driven by entrepreneurial leaders.
- > American cultural values, i.e., fondness for large successful organizations.
- > New generations that are comfortable with big organizations.
- > Economies of scale that allow larger churches to provide a quality level of programming.

“Megachurches seemed so 1990s. But it turns out that the phenomenon of American congregations swelling to unprecedented sizes is still hot news in the 21st Century.”

—Dallas Morning News, 2006

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Mega churches are increasingly popular.

Large churches are getting larger . . . faster!

Strengths of Mega Churches

Mega churches demonstrate a number of positive aspects. Among them are . . .

- They make it easy to attend.

Mega churches open the front door wide by communicating that everyone is welcome.

- They create intentional ways to welcome and involved new people.

Mega churches have mundane processes they follow to welcome and involve newer people.

- They offer more opportunities to participate.

Mega churches provide a variety of ministry opportunities that increase the likelihood that people can find a place to serve.

- They reach outside the church to non-churched.

Mega churches stress outreach more than non-large churches, and provide several doors through which newcomers may enter the church.

- They have a clear direction and purpose.

Mega churches cast a clear and compelling vision for the future that attracts people.

- They connect with people through worship.

Mega churches use worship to engage people at deeper levels than words can go.

- They provide ministry that meets felt needs.

Mega churches provide numerous ministries and programs that focus on the hurts and problems that people face in today's world.

In order for mega churches to continue to thrive they must . . .

- > Manage their brand.
- > Strengthen leadership development
- > Continue to multiply ministries.
- > Partner with community organizations.
- > Develop multiple sites for ministry.
- > Renew their vision.
- > Manage growing complexity.
- > Stay true to their DNA.
- > Make their church a place of community.
- > Invest in community causes.
- > Tap into existing networks.
- > Empower staff development.

What strengths and insights regarding mega churches can you use in your own church? Pick three ideas and use them this year to empower your church . . . no matter how large or small.



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For information about training workshops, seminars, and church consultations call 951-506-3086.

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