

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

Volume 19 Issue 9

PO Box 892589, Temecula, CA 92589-2589

September 2007

Size As A Factor in Church Growth: Part One

The impact of size on organizations and organisms is recognized in several disciplines. Various researchers in such diverse fields as economics, business management, sociology, biology, and missiology have all acknowledged the impact of size on organizational development.

For example, studies in biology speak of “power scaling relationships,” which are mathematical determinations of how characteristics change with size in different species.

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Specifically, we find that chief executives of smaller organizations engage in fewer formal activities, but are much more concerned with the operating work of their organization.”

—Henry Mintzberg

Geoffrey B. West, writes,

...metabolic rate increases as the power of mass. Put simply, the scaling law says that if an organism's mass increases by a factor of 10,000 (four orders of magnitude), its metabolic rate will increase by a factor of only 1,000 (three orders of magnitude). This represents an enormous economy of scale: the bigger the creature, the less energy per pound it requires to stay alive. This increase of efficiency with size permeates biology (*Harvard Business Review*, 85(2):34).

Henry Mintzberg, Bronfman Professor of Management at McGill University, points out the importance of understanding the impact of organizational size on management practices. “The size of the overall organization appears to have a considerable effect on what senior managers do,” writes Mintzberg.

Specifically, we find that chief executives of smaller organizations engage in fewer formal activities but are much more concerned with the operating work of their organization” (Mintzberg 1973:104).

Mintzberg observes that in business enterprises senior executives of smaller companies tend to focus on 1) operating the organization, 2) internal issues, 3) maintaining workflow, 4) real-

time concerns, and 5) informal-connections. In contrast executives of larger companies tend to focus on 1) directing the organization, 2) external issues, 3) maintaining wide perspective, 4) future-time concerns, and 5) formal-connections. In a later book Mintzberg suggests three hypotheses concerning effects of size on organizational structure.

1. The larger the organization, the more elaborate its structure—that is, the more specialized its tasks, the more differentiated its units, and the more developed its administrative component.

2. The larger the organization, the larger the average size of its units.

3. The larger the organization, the more formalized its behavior (Mintzberg 1983:124-126).

Issues of size have also been recognized as significant aspects related to church growth.

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Churches tend to gather at predictable plateaus

Size is a very useful frame of reference.

No one in the church growth field has addressed the issues related to congregational size as widely as Lyle E. Schaller. As early as 1973, Schaller differentiated his advice on the basis of small, medium, and large church categories. In *The Pastor and the People* he defined a small church as one with fewer than 100 people at worship, a medium church with 100-200 worshipers, and a large church with over 200 worshipers (Schaller 1973/1986:145-147). Two years later he observed in *Hey, That's Our Church!* that churches tend to group at four size levels or plateaus: 30-35, 70-85, 115-135, and 175-200 (1975:39-50).

Schaller wrote three books in the 1980s specifically targeted to different sized churches. The first was *The Multiple Staff and the Larger Church* (1980). This was followed by *The Small Church IS Different* (1982) and *The Middle Sized Church* (1985). Not only did these three books signal a new approach to church growth (i.e., one based on size), but they also communicated new definitions of small, medium, and large. Schaller classified churches into seven categories: fellowship (35), small (75), middle-sized (140), awkward size (200), large (350), huge (600), and minidenomination (700) (1980:27-35). This division eventually developed into the following widely used analogy of church sizes.

<u>Average Attendance</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Analogy</u>
<35	Fellowship	Cat
35-100	Small church	Collie
10-175	Middle-Sized	Garden
175-225	Awkward Size	House
225-450	Large	Mansion
450-700	Huge	Ranch
700+	Mini-denomination	Nation

Along with Schaller, an early church growth writer who influenced church size thinking was David A. Womack. In *The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth* Womack introduced the concept that churches tend to cluster at certain sizes. Building on earlier research by statistician George Edgerly, Womack wrote that churches tend to cluster at 35, 85, 125, 180, 240, 280, 400, 600, 800, and 1,200 average worshipers (1977:17).

A summary comparison of the breakdown of church sizes according to these two church growth writers is as follows. My listing below is not based on any scientifically gathered data, but a updated “best guess” based on the observations and studies I have gathered.

<u>Schaller (1975)</u>	<u>Womack (1977)</u>	<u>McIntosh (2007)</u>
<u>30-35</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>35</u>
<u>70-85</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>85</u>
<u>115-135</u>	<u>120</u>	<u>125</u>
<u>175-200</u>	<u>200s</u>	<u>200</u>
<u>300s</u>	<u>225-450</u>	<u>400</u>
<u>600</u>	<u>450-700</u>	<u>800</u>
<u>1,200</u>	<u>>700</u>	<u>1,200</u>
	<u>3,000</u>	<u>3,000</u>

[To be continued next issue]



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