

LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS IN SMALL,
ESTABLISHED CHURCHES OF UNDER 100 PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS IN SMALL, ESTABLISHED CHURCHES OF UNDER 100 PEOPLE

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A review of current literature demonstrates that very little material is available regarding small churches and the leadership problems that the pastor will face. The purpose of this project is to shed light on some of these problems, and provide insight and helpful advice to those pastors serving in small churches. Based on the literature available, this project reviews the most common leadership problems faced by small church pastors, and gives advice and suggestions for dealing with these problems.

Abstract length: 79 words.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my church for their sacrifice of allowing me the time and space to start and complete this work. I also dedicate this to my friends and family who truly sacrificed their time and patience as I worked to complete this project. Most of all I dedicate this to my wife Barb, for supporting and pushing me to complete this project. You have given me the support and strength that I have needed to accomplish this task. I will always be indebted to you. Thank you!

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS IN SMALL,
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problems in churches are not uncommon. Pastors deal with many issues as they lead their congregations. Some issues are relatively minor, whereas, others can be crippling to the life of the church, as well as to the well being of the pastor. Let's look at one example: The pastor and the head elder of the church had been at odds for quite awhile. The pastor was trying to lead the church in the direction that he felt God wanted it to go. The head elder was determined to hold onto all the power that he could in the church. Consequently, he would oppose the pastor's desires for changes, as well as, any suggestions he made to elect new people into leadership positions. This battle had gone on for about six years now, and it was coming to a head. The pastor, unknowingly, had started to slip into depression. He knew that he could not handle this situation much longer, but he was determined to deal with this elder before he left the church. He knew that if he did not deal with him, then the next pastor would have to go through all the things he had over these last six years. This battle had reached the point where every church issue and board meeting was a battle. The pastor knew that one or the other was going to go. It finally ended in a shouting match in a board meeting, and the subsequent resignations of this elder and his wife.

Here is another example given by Rediger:

The first sign of the killing process began at a church board meeting. A member of the board, Tim Johnson said, ‘A lot of people are complaining to me about Pastor Enright. They’re saying he doesn’t call enough; he can’t be reached when they want to talk to him; and he is not friendly enough.’

Board members asked Johnson to identify ‘a lot of people,’ but he refused to name them. Then they asked for specific examples. He refused to be specific. The board said they couldn’t take action unless they knew the specific complaints. Johnson replied that they had better take action because these were important members who might leave the church.

In response to Johnson’s demand, the board set up an investigative team. At the next board meeting, the team reported that they could find no tangible evidence of any problems. Johnson told them the complaints were real and might have something to do with sexual misconduct and misuse of church funds. The investigative team did some more work and again reported, at a later date, no tangible evidence of such misconduct. Johnson then called for a congregational meeting. This request was denied.

Before the next board meeting, a letter filled with innuendoes against the pastor was mailed to the congregation. At the following meeting, the board and Pastor Enright were in a near panic. Johnson said he had talked to the Bishop, and the Bishop said these were serious charges that needed to be investigated. At a later date, a new investigative team reported that there seemed to be a lot of people unhappy with the pastor. The board voted to have a delegation meet with the pastor.

The pastor was absent from the next meeting. After six months of this harassment, he was in the hospital. The board voted to send a delegation to the bishop and at a following meeting, the delegation reported that the bishop recommended removal of the pastor. By that time, the pastor was scheduled for heart bypass surgery. And it was rumored that his wife had become addicted to tranquilizers.¹

This does not sound like great situations to find oneself in as a pastor, but the situations are true, and they occur over and over again in small churches around the country. These situations are true because you hear about them all the time in talking with other pastors.

We need to understand that the problems that larger churches face are much different than the problems that smaller churches face. The great church growth leader, Peter Wagner, comments on the differences between small and large churches when he states,

¹ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 5, 6.

“Churches that have remained small for some time are not simply miniature large churches. They have a different character altogether. The major difference lies in interpersonal relationships. In the small church there are no strangers. Everyone knows everyone else. The social situation is predictable and therefore comfortable. Preserving this value by maintaining the status quo becomes a very high priority in the lives of many church members.”² Lyle Schaller, who writes extensively in the area of small churches, weighs in on these differences by defining the difference between small and large churches when he states,

In the large congregation, there is a tendency for people to conceptualize reality in terms of functional categories, whether it be in describing the greatest competence of the pastor, in categorizing people, in designing the organizational structure for the congregation, or in evaluating the performance of that congregation. In contrast, in small congregations the members tend to think in terms of interpersonal relationships. The relationships of life, rather than the functions of the church, top the priority list in the small church.³

W. Curry Mavis also speaks about the differences between large and small churches when he states in his book, “Personality tensions and clashes represent an antithesis to the fellowship that characterizes small groups and the stresses are particularly detrimental to the moral of the little church. They tend to involve the whole congregation, whereas in a larger church differences of opinion often affect only one club or group. Relationships are so intimate in a small church that personality clashes frequently divide whole congregations, sometimes along the line of blood relationship.”⁴ The problems faced by pastors in smaller churches might be similar in some degrees, but the affects of those

² C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 17.

³ Lyle Schaller, *The Small Church is Different* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 31-32.

⁴ W. Curry Mavis, *Advancing the Smaller Local Church* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1957), 47.

problems on the pastors is much different. This is due to the strong interpersonal relationships that are built in smaller churches. Some pastors in larger churches say that their problems are worse than what a pastor in a small church would face. This is wrong. The problems in larger churches are difficult, but the problems in smaller churches kill pastors and destroy and cripple many of its ministries. These problems demand personal sacrifices that pastors in larger churches would never have to face. But leadership, many times, does demand sacrifice. Ronald Heifetz states, "If leadership must always demand great personal sacrifice, then our communities and organizations must wait for the occasional hero."⁵

The sad part about these situations is that it never ends with the defeated person slinking off to lick his wounds. The consequences for the pastor and his family will be felt for many years to come. As was mentioned, pastors many times slip into depression from all the battles and seeming hopelessness of the situation. The strange thing about it is that most of the time they never realize that they are depressed until after their final battle in the board meeting. Over the next few months is when reality hits them. They realize the toll that they had to pay in order to win this battle. They are depressed, but worse, is the effect that all of this has had on their family. His wife has to deal with the effects it has on her, which can cause her to step away from some ministry opportunities. His children may avoid wanting anything to do with ministry and chose another profession instead. It might even cause them to turn away from God completely. Truly, the cost is high. G. Lloyd Rediger in his book, *Clergy Killers* states the affect that ministry can have on the pastor and his family. He states,

⁵ Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 235.

My research with pastors in Wisconsin and Minnesota (heavily church states) indicates that 63 percent of pastors know of a colleague who has been seriously abused by a congregation, colleague, or denominational executive. Approximately 25 percent of pastors have suffered such abuse themselves.

In the Winter 1996 issue of *Leadership* magazine, the results of their national survey of Protestant clergy indicated that approximately 23 percent of pastors say they have been fired at least once, and 43 percent said a 'faction' (typically less than ten people) forced them out. . . . This survey also showed that 41 percent of congregations who fired their pastor have done this to at least two other pastors. The reasons pastors gave for their terminations included personality conflicts, 43 percent; conflicting visions for the church, 17 percent; financial strain in the congregation, 7 percent; theological differences, 5 percent; moral malfeasance, 5 percent; unrealistic expectations, 4 percent; other, 19 percent.⁶

The personal affect of church struggles and pressures can have an enormous effect on a pastor and his family. The fact that the majority of churches in the United States are under 100 members tells us that most of the small church pastors are dealing with these strains of ministry.

Clearly, you can understand the reason for the interest in this topic. There needs to be more awareness and concern for the pastors that are living in, or facing, similar situations to these scenarios. The author writes with determination to keep every pastor possible from having to endure the war and consequent affects of that war that these pastors endured. The truly frustrating thing about going through a situation like this is that these pastors find very little help, and very few resources to help them through their struggle. Consequently, this paper will attempt to help pastors that are dealing with overwhelming problems in their churches.

⁶ Rediger, 13, 14.

Background

To give some background on the author, he has been a pastor in the Christian and Missionary Alliance for the last fourteen years, all of which were in small churches with an average Sunday morning attendance of less than 100 people. During this time he has pastored in two churches of which one was in New York State and his current one is located in Pennsylvania. He has had to deal with many of the problems that will be discussed in this paper over the past fourteen years. He has also noticed, through discussions with other pastors in similar size churches, that these problems are not limited to just one city or state, but they are common problems that occur everywhere.

Small churches today

Small churches are still very common today. A large percentage of every denomination is made up of smaller churches that have attendance figures of less than 100 people. Stephen Burt and Hazel Roper classify churches of less than 100 people into two different categories. The smaller of the two is called, "The Family Church" (2-35 at worship). This church rarely has a full-time pastor. The pastor in these churches serves as a chaplain. They describe the dynamics of this church by stating that, "Not only does the Family Church feel like family to its participants, in some instances, the church literally is family. The Family Church is a relational entity, functioning as an organism rather than as an organization. . . . In this relational structure authority is given to people rather than to positions or offices."⁷ The second of the two church sizes is called "The Pastoral Church" (35-90 at worship). This is a single cell church, which means that it

⁷ Steven E. Burt and Hazel A. Roper, *Raising Small Church Esteem* (Herndon, VA: An Alban institute Publication, 1992), 23.

functions with one leader and this leader is usually the pastor.⁸ In some cases it can be a lay person who has had some biblical training.

W. Curry Mavis characterizes small churches this way, “Churches with Sunday morning congregations and Sunday schools of fewer than 150 may be considered as smaller.”⁹

Theodore W. Johnson gives four classifications for churches when he describes the different size churches as family (1-50), Pastoral (51-150), program (151-350), and corporation as 351 and over.¹⁰ Two of these classifications fit into what this paper views as a small church.

Alice Mann also places two different categories for churches that have less than 100 people in them. The first she calls the “Family-size church” (up to 50 adults and children at worship). She describes this church as, “A small church organized around one or two matriarchs or patriarchs who are often the heads of extended biological families in the church. The pastor functions in a chaplain role, leading worship and giving pastoral care. A pastor who challenges the authority of a family-size patriarch or matriarch or presumes to be the primary leader of the congregation generally will not stay long.”¹¹ The second category she calls the “Pastoral-size church” (50-150 at worship). She describes this church by stating, “The pastor is the central figure, holding together a small circle of leaders. Two or three major “fellowship groups” compose the congregation, but each

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Mavis, 9, 10.

¹⁰ Theodore W. Johnson, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 32.

¹¹ Alice Mann, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 77.

member expects personal attention from the pastor. The pastor's time is largely taken up maintaining direct pastoral relationships with each member, coordinating the work of the leadership circle, and personally leading worship and small group programs, such as Bible study.”¹²

Carl George in his book has three classifications that would fit into churches with less than 100 people in them. The first he calls a “Mouse-size” church, which is composed of 3-35 people and he classifies as a “House group.” The next he calls a “Cat-size” church which is composed of 35-75 people, and he classifies it as a “Small church.” The last is called a “Lap Dog-size” church, which is composed of 75-200 people and is classified as a “Medium church.”¹³

Lyle Schaller in one of his books gives the following statistics to show that not only are small churches of fewer than 100 people common, but that extremely small churches of less than 25 people are also very common. He gives the following statistics:

Proportion of Congregations reporting worship attendance of 25 or less in 1991¹⁴

United Methodist Church	21%
Free Methodist Church	19
Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)	14
Church of the Nazarene	13
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	13
Assemblies of God	12
Church of the Brethren	12
American Baptist Churches	11
Southern Baptist Convention	11
Christian (Disciples of Christ)	10
Episcopal Church	10
Presbyterian Church in America	9

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church For the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), 54.

¹⁴ Lyle Schaller, *The Small Membership Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 47.

North American Baptist Conference	9
United Church of Christ	9
Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod	5
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	5
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod	4
Evangelical Free Church	4
Baptist General Conference	4
Reformed Church in America	4
Evangelical Covenant Church	4

All of this shows that there are different ideas as to what constitutes a small church. This is why the figure was set at 100 in average Sunday morning attendance for this research.

Small churches have some characteristics that are different than what you would find in larger churches. Understanding these characteristics gives a good idea of what a pastor might expect as he begins his ministry in a small church. Glenn Daman gives 15 characteristics that describe the small church. They are:

1. The small church is relationally driven.
2. The small church works through informal channels.
3. The small church works as a whole.
4. Power and authority reside in the laity rather than the pastor.
5. The small church relates as a family.
6. Communication occurs through the grapevine.
7. Traditions and heritage undergird the structure, ministry, and culture.
8. The church functions and worships inter-generationally.
9. The focus is upon people rather than performance.
10. There is a place for everyone.
11. The small church values relatives.
12. The small church values generalists.
13. There is a place for everyone and everyone has a place.
14. The small church has its own calendar and timetable.
15. In the small church, people give.¹⁵

These characteristics give a good description of the small church, and will be helpful to understand as this paper moves forward.

Small churches need to run effectively. By running effectively, the author means that they are growing, winning people to Christ, and discipling believers. Church growth is

¹⁵ Glenn Daman, *Shepherding the Small Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, Inc., 2002), 43-51.

an absolute necessity for any church. C. Peter Wagner talks about the absolute need for churches to reach people when he talks about the commission Jesus gave to his disciples in Acts 1:8. He comments, “If we fail to take seriously this Great Commission we have missed the central point of historic Christianity.”¹⁶ The problem is that many smaller churches remain small, because of problems in the church that keep it from growing. This paper is written to discuss and give advice to the pastor that is struggling through these problems.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper will cover the leadership problems that that the author has experienced in his church and, also, those problems that he has seen, heard about, and researched, through discussion, in other established churches that are similar in size. It will discuss the five most common problems that are found in small, established churches, as seen through the literature, a discussion with a small church expert,¹⁷ and conversations with other small church pastors. It will give actions steps and possible outcomes on how to deal with these leadership problems.

The problem defined by the literature

Small churches have many problems which they have to tackle. Different authors have tried to list the main problems that small congregations face. The following authors

¹⁶ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), 20.

¹⁷ Presentation by Rev. Joseph Toomey at a small church “Makeover Over” seminar held at North hills Alliance Church in Pittsburgh, PA, March 2006, author’s notes, Wampum, PA. Rev. Toomey works at the Western PA District Office as the district’s church planter and revitalization director.

and their thoughts represent just a portion of those that have weighed in on defining these challenges.

Mavis, in his book, came up with three limitations that all small churches face. Describing these limitations he says, “Most of the smaller churches, whether tiny or larger, carry on their work in a social-psychological atmosphere that is characterized by limitations.”¹⁸ He then states the three limitations that he found. They are:

1. There is usually a lack of denominational or community status.
2. There is frequently a lack of workers.
3. There is usually limited finance in smaller churches.”¹⁹

Anthony Pappas, in his book gives what he feels are the “Six Challenges for Small Churches.”²⁰ The first of these challenges is “Traditionalism threatens the future of our small churches.”²¹ By this he holds that what the church has always done will continue to be the way things will always be done. Nothing will change, and the church will continue to function under the same rules, programs, and government. The second challenge he presents that small churches must overcome is “‘Niceness’ threatens our small churches.”²² He means here that we are so closely bound to one another in smaller churches, either because of being related to one another, or because we consider ourselves a family, that we are afraid of hurting one another’s feelings. Therefore, we would never say anything to someone where they might be offended even if they needed

¹⁸ Mavis, 10, 11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church* (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2000), 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 8

to hear it. The third challenge that Pappas feels the small church faces is “a ‘club’ mentality threatens our small churches.”²³ Here, he talks about the idea that churches become so much like a family that the members do not want to grow because that would require adding new people to the family, and that is not acceptable. The fourth challenge that he feels small churches must overcome is “paralysis in the face of conflict threatens small churches.”²⁴ He discusses the fact that when conflict comes up in small churches that they do not know how to deal with it. They are a family and those that lead the family (the patriarch and matriarch) have not allowed them to fight, or discuss, think as adults, but as children with their parents. He states, “Progress is frozen in many small churches because the members have never learned to fight in a Christ-like manner, that is, they haven’t learned to speak their truth with love, to strive for win-win outcomes, or to subordinate their positions to God’s will.”²⁵ The fifth challenge for small churches is “negative ‘scripts’ threaten small churches.”²⁶ His thought here is that small churches get this “woe with me” attitude. They feel the denomination does not care about them, but only the larger churches. They feel that any new person who begins to attend their church will be lured away by a larger church. They feel that they cannot compete with the larger churches, so why try. There is just a strong negative attitude that has to be overcome. The last challenge he gives for small churches is “the cost of our buildings is a threat to small churches.”²⁷ By this, he means that smaller churches have a hard time

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 9

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

with the finances of their church. Just the basic costs of running their church building can become overwhelming for some small churches.

Lyle Schaller describes six areas of the church that need to be looked at, and adjusted before growth can come to churches of any size. Each of these points he presents as a chapter in his book, *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance*. They are:

1. Worship services.
2. Review the schedule.
3. Operational policies.
4. Power of programs.
5. Real estate considerations and church buildings.
6. Institutional factors.²⁸

He breaks down the different things that churches need to do to increase their attendance as he moves through these chapters. He believes that if these areas are improved, then growth will naturally follow.

Dean McIntyre, in his article on small churches listed eight challenges for small-membership churches. These are:

1. Psychology—by this he means that there is an attitude that pervades small churches that hinder them from growing.
2. Our Building—small churches are many times stuck in buildings that don't have good facilities.
3. Leadership development and training—This is a problem because the talent pool is so small.
4. Money for conferences and training—Finances are a problem in small churches, yet they are expected to pay the same price for conferences that larger churches pay.
5. The struggle for technology—Again, finances play a major role in being able to pay for new or better technology.
6. The travel gap—Finances again hinder the small church from sending leaders for training if it requires airfare or hotel reservations.
7. Burnout and overcommitment—Everyone has to be involved, and therefore, it creates opportunities for some to suffer from burnout and being overcommitted.
8. The shallow talent pool—Not enough people to do the things that larger churches are able to do (choirs, musicians, etc.).²⁹

²⁸ Lyle Schaller, *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988).

Joseph Toomey, a pastor who has done extensive work with pastors of small churches and is the current director of church planting and church growth in the Western Pennsylvania District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, stated to the author what he perceived to be the five biggest problems that small churches face as (in no particular order):

1. Finances.
2. Lack of workers.
3. Tradition.
4. Dominant personalities.
5. Church buildings.³⁰

He also stated that pastors in small churches get dragged down by the church. They end up feeling useless, and not feeling that they can accomplish anything. The negative attitudes of the church are passed onto the pastor, and he becomes defeated.

The four main problem areas identified by the above authors and experts of small congregations are: Dominant Families and/or Individuals, Tradition, Finances, and Lack of Trained Personnel in the Church. The chart below gives a quick overview of who felt which area was a problem for the small church. Each of these areas will be covered fully in the chapters that follow.

There is a fifth area that will be addressed in this paper which was not addressed by the above experts. This is the area of bi-vocational ministry. This area was addressed by other experts, but was usually addressed as a separate issue. Therefore, it was not included with the discussions of small churches. This area can be a major problem area

²⁹ Dean B. McIntyre, *"The Small Church Primer: Strengths, Weaknesses, Worship, and Music In The Small-Membership Church,"* www.gbod.org (2002), July, 2006.

³⁰ Toomey interview.

for some small churches, so it was necessary to include it in this work. This area will also be addressed in the following chapters.

Author	Patriarch	Tradition	Finances	Lack of leadership
Mavis			X	X
Pappas	X	X		
Schaller		X	X	
McIntyre		X	X	X
Toomey	X	X	X	X

Definitions

To understand this paper fully, there are two terms that will need to be defined as to how they will be used throughout this paper. These terms are “Leadership” and “Established.” They are very normal and common words that we use frequently in our normal discussions, but they need to be defined as to how they will relate to this topic.

The first word we will look at is “Leadership.” This term is used very frequently in the business world today. It is a “buzz-word” that CEOs and corporate presidents are looking for in their organizational managers. The problem with the term leadership is that it can have many different meanings. Some meanings imply more of a management of a department or organization, rather than any real leading of that department or organization. This type of leadership is management. There are some who define leadership to refer to the company as a whole. Others look at leadership someone who can lead and motivate the people of their company. For the purpose of this paper, the term leadership will be defined as the pastor being able to address problems, difficulties,

and changes within their church structure to bring about a better and healthier congregation and church.

The second word we need to address is “Established.” This means that we will not be looking at churches that are just starting up. We will be looking at churches that have been around long enough to have dealt with increases and decreases in congregational size. By established churches the author means ones that have been around, in the same location, for more than twenty years, and have had to deal with at least one pastoral change.

STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

Other than the parameters set by the above outline, this paper will be limited in the following ways. First, this paper will not discuss the problems of larger churches. There may be some problems that are applicable to all churches, but, as a whole, larger churches have much different problems than established, smaller churches. There are also a lot of resources directed toward the problems that face larger churches, which is sufficient to address their needs. Therefore, there is not a need to address their problems in this paper. Second, this paper will not address the problems that are more common in churches that are just beginning. Newer churches have problems and issues that are unique to them. Third, this paper will not address all the problems that pastors in established, small churches will face. The author will address the five biggest problem areas that pastors in smaller churches have to address. But, the author in no way suggests that these are the only problems that pastors in established, smaller churches will face. Fourth, this paper will not address the problems and struggles that are faced by

congregations. This paper will stick to pastoral problems which address the struggles that pastors have with their congregations, and not vice versa. Fifth, this paper will not address all the possible solutions to a particular problem. There are many other suggestions and ideas that pastors can try in their own churches. The suggestions given are those that the author found to be particularly helpful as he dealt with these problems in his own church. Sixth, the suggestions that are given in each chapter are not guaranteed to resolve the problems that a church might have in that given area. They are suggestions that might work, but the author suggests that the readers evaluate the suggestion before trying to implement them in their own church. Seventh, this paper will not address the different leadership styles that pastors use to resolve problems. The way that a pastor with a more assertive leadership style addresses a problem will differ greatly with a pastor who has a more laid-back style when dealing with the same problem. This paper will not address how a pastor will address each problem from these different leadership styles. Eighth, this paper will not address denominational differences. There are different denominational structures and there are different ways that denominations deal with problems. The author will not look at the different church leadership structures that can be present in churches. The author will look at these problems through the eyes of the church and denominational structure that he is familiar with, and that is a congregational leadership style which is common in the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

The early church was designed to be a group of smaller churches meeting in homes and other places to cover a larger geographical area. The course that the church was to take was expressed to them by Jesus just before He was taken up to heaven. This course was to proclaim the Gospel message in every location. They were told, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). His command to them was to make disciples in each of these locations. We see this in Jesus’ words in what is known as the “Great Commission” and were stated as, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20). The commission that was received by the apostles was also the commission that has been passed onto the church. The church’s purpose is to spread the gospel to every country and every person, and the way that the church is to do this is through groups of people who gather together in different locations to be taught, to develop, and to be trained to spread the Gospel.

The early church had to struggle to find places to worship. The book of Acts tells us that in Jerusalem they would meet in the temple courtyards and in homes. We read, “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 5:42). As Paul moved about on his missionary journeys, the problem of finding a place to meet continued to be a trouble spot. Paul would begin preaching at the local synagogue, but he would be quickly told to

leave, or be run off by the Jews. We see an example of this also in the book of Acts where it says, “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying” (Acts 13:44, 45). Also we see an example of this later in Acts where it says, “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures. . . .But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd” (Acts 17:2, 5). Consequently, the church found itself meeting in the homes of the people of the church. Some other Scripture passages that show the church gathering in homes are:

1. When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying (Acts 12:12).
2. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20).
3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house (Romans 16:3-5).
4. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house (Colossians 4:15).
5. To Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home (Philemon 2).

Small churches have been in existence from the very beginning of the Christian religion, and are seen throughout the expansion of the gospel in Paul’s day. Most people feel that most churches are large, but small churches are prevalent in our society today. Carl George, in his book, states, “The most frequently found church in the United States

and Canada is the small fellowship. The Sunday-morning norm for half of the churches in either of these countries is to have up to fifty people gathered for worship. If we include churches with an average attendance of seventy people or less, we've covered nearly 70 percent of North American Christianity's houses of worship."³¹ Obviously, the small church continues to be the staple by which Christianity is spread even up to this day.

There is nothing wrong with being in a small church. As we have seen, they are normal, and they're not unbiblical. Although small churches are prevalent in our culture, today, they should not stay that way. The church is to grow spiritually and numerically. The writer of Hebrews tells us of our need for spiritual growth by stating, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God."³² The numerical growth is seen through the fact that the early church increased rapidly. Church growth was the desire of the early church. Here are some scripture passages that show the early church's desire to grow:

1. Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41).
2. Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).
3. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand (Acts 4:4).
4. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number (Acts 5:14).

³¹ Carl George, *Prepare Your Church For The Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 45.

³² Hebrews 6:1. All Scripture references taken from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1983), unless otherwise noted.

5. So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).
6. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).

The early church's structure was centered on the small church or small group model.

The major problem with the church's rapid increase was that there were not any buildings where they could meet. They were ostracized from the Synagogue because of their opposition to the Jewish teachings. Therefore, they were limited to homes and other small gathering sites where they had the freedom to meet. The number of churches was growing rapidly in the first two centuries as Schaff tells us that, "Ten men were sufficient to constitute a religious assembly."³³ This meant that it was not necessary to have a large group to form a church. But it was not until the third century when they were able to begin building meeting places for the church. Schaff writes, "About the year 230, Alexander Severus granted the Christians the right to a place in Rome against the protests of the tavern-keepers, because the worship of God in any form was better than tavern-keeping. After the middle of the third century the building of churches was began in earnest, as the Christians enjoyed forty years of repose (260-303), and multiplied so fast that, according to Eusebius, more spacious places of devotion became everywhere necessary."³⁴

The early church was faced with numerous problems that the apostles and other church leadership had to address. Some of these problems are similar to some of the

³³ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 456.

³⁴ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 200.

problems faced by pastors today. These would include Bi-vocational ministries (Priscilla and Aquila, Acts 18:3), financial problems (Galatian churches, I Corinthians 16:1, 2), leadership problems (Hymenaeus, I Timothy 1:20), and personality problems (Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15:39). These will all be addressed in their particular chapters later in this paper. There are some problems which the early church faced that are much different than anything the church, today, faces, at least in this country. These include persecution, Gnosticism and other false teachings, and some doctrinal issues. We will look at these briefly here to show that the early church, as well as the church in any age, had to deal with many problems.

Persecution

The early church faced extreme persecution. The most noteworthy of this occurred during the reign of Nero, as *Foxe's Annals of Martyrs* so greatly portrays in its second chapter. But persecution plagued the church throughout its early existence. This helped to foster the need for smaller house churches, because it allowed the church to stay hidden, but also to meet for instruction and fellowship, as the believers were afraid for their lives. This is seen through the words of John Foxe when he states, "And when a spirit so calumnious and unscrupulous as that of Nero was ever on the watch to let loose the demons of fury, we cannot be wrong in concluding that the whole body of Christians throughout the Roman Empire would henceforth feel that their property and life were held by the weakest of tenures, and that every step they took, they trod on the verge of a treacherous abyss, which might engulf them at any moment."³⁵ There are several verses

³⁵ John Foxe, *Foxe's Annals of Martyrs* (Burlington, Ontario: Inspirational Promotions, 1956), 33, 34.

in the book of Acts to show the persecution that the church endured during this time.

Three of these verses are listed below:

1. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went (Acts 8:1, 4).
2. It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover (Acts 12:1-4).
3. The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailor was commanded to guard them carefully (Acts 16:22, 23).

The church endured the persecution and continued to grow through it. Persecution helped the church to grow by causing it to spread out to areas where persecution was not taking place. It also forced the Christians to be extremely strong in their faith. No one was going to endure persecution unless they were very confident in what they were placing their faith.

Paul was an instrumental person in the growth of the early church. He was both a persecutor and one who had been persecuted. He was known as a persecutor of the Christians. In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, he tells them, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (I Corinthians 15:9). But as much as Paul persecuted the church, he probably endured more persecution to his own self than what he gave out. In his second letter to the church in Corinth he tells of the persecutions he has endured when he says,

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked (II Corinthians 11:23-27).

It is obvious, from his account, that Paul faced much persecution in his life. In fact, church history records that he died a martyr's death at the hands of Nero. Foxe mentions this when he states, "If the traditions are to be credited, the most distinguished sufferers under the cruel hands of Nero were none other than the apostles Peter and Paul."³⁶

The early church's experience with persecution is something that we have not had to endure here in the United States. We have been relatively free of any strong religious persecution, due largely to the fact that we have freedom of religion in our country. Still, there are many people outside the United States that are suffering under extreme persecution for their faith, today.

Gnosticism

The second problem that the early church had to deal with was the false teaching of Gnosticism. Gnosticism came into full-blown conflict with Christianity in the second century, but the beginning of Gnostic ideas began to confront Christianity in the latter part of the first century. It is these early beginnings of Gnostic thinking that the early church had to address. Guthrie addresses this when he states, "It will be seen, then, that all that can satisfactorily be claimed is that these false teachers in the Pastorals have a

³⁶ Foxe, 34.

remote kinship with Gnosticism; but the evidence is far from conclusive that the writer is, in fact, combating developed Gnosticism.”³⁷ The apostle John deals with this struggle in some of his writings. Part of the Gnostic religion denied that Jesus Christ was from God, was God, and could save man. John uses the term, “antichrists” to describe them. He states, “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son” (I John 2:22). Hans Jonas, in his book on Gnosticism, states that theological dualism governs Gnostic thinking, and therefore, makes it impossible for a God in heaven to effectively work in the lives of man on earth. He states the theology of Gnosticism as, “dualism that governs the relation of God and world. . . .The world is the work of lowly powers which though they may immediately be descended from Him do not know the true God and obstruct the knowledge of Him in the cosmos over which they rule.”³⁸

Gnosticism had three main points as described by Harold Brown in his book. He states, “Gnosticism involved (1) a complicated cosmology based on Near Eastern ideas, not Biblical ones; (2) Hellenistic patterns of speculative thought, and (3) the acceptance of Jesus as the Savior of the world.”³⁹ Although they looked at Jesus as the Savior of the world, he was not considered God in their thinking.

The Gnostic religion was very harmful to the spread of the gospel. It created confusion for those that were hearing both the gospel and Gnostic teaching. It was something that the early church had to address, and then did through writings, and

³⁷ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 37

³⁸ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 42.

³⁹ Harold Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1984), 49.

eventually through church creeds. To this extent, Gnostic teaching did help to establish a more defined doctrinal statement for the church. Harold Brown discusses Irenaeus' work "Against Heresies," which was written around 180-189 A.D. He talks about the significance of this work by stating, "Thus we see that one of the very earliest significant doctrinal works of Christianity was the direct result not of any desire to produce a comprehensive theology, but grew out of the necessity to deal with a dangerous and persistent heresy."⁴⁰ Thus, the problem of Gnosticism was dealt with by establishing doctrinal statements that gave a better understanding of the tenants of Christianity.

Other false teaching

Gnosticism was a strong heretical force that the early church had to deal with, but it was not the only false teaching that plagued the spread of the gospel. The early church had to deal with the witchcraft and mythological gods that were present in the places to which they tried to spread the gospel. These were not prevalent in Jerusalem and the surrounding area, but they were seen and had to be dealt with during the travels of the apostles.

Peter and John had to deal with some witchcraft right after the persecutions in Jerusalem started. They ran across a man who had some powers and was called 'Simon the Sorcerer.' What we know about this man is stated for us in the Bible where it says, "Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great" (Acts 8:9). This seems to have been some form of magic. This was something that had been going on throughout

⁴⁰ Ibid., 42.

Jesus' ministry. There were always men trying to impress people with their magical abilities. Some of these men were what we would call magicians. Others were people that dealt in the demonic world. It was another problem that the apostles had to address as they taught the people.

Another religious movement during this time was mythology. It was seen in Paul's travels throughout the Roman Empire. There were different gods being worshipped in the different cities where Paul stopped to preach the gospel. One such event occurred in the city of Lystra. The Bible records this event as follows:

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them (Acts 14:11-13).

Paul had to deal with the many temples and statues he saw in Athens (Acts 17:16-23) and the worship of the goddess Artemis, or Diana, in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). These mythological gods were prominent and people had to be converted from this worship in order to become Christians.

We do have false gods worshipped today, but it is not a problem area for our churches. We might deal with more doctrinal issues, but very rarely would we have to address a problem of worshipping a statue or idol, today.

Doctrinal Issues

There were some doctrinal issues that the early church had to address, which is obvious due to the nature of beginning new churches. But there was one particular issue that plagued the early church. This issue was whether to allow Gentile believers to be

accepted in the church. This was a very controversial issue because the older Jewish believers did not want the Gentiles in the church. They wanted them to take on the characteristics and mannerisms of the Jewish believers.

Peter had to deal with this issue after a visit to Caesarea when he visited Cornelius. It was there that the Gentiles turned to God and received the Holy Spirit. We read of the conflict that ensued in the book of Acts where it says,

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them (Acts 11:1-3).

Peter then had to defend himself before the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. He even had to defend the conversions of the Gentiles to them. They refused to believe that uncircumcised Gentiles could be allowed to become children of God. It was only after Peter’s description of what happened that they believed the Gentiles could be saved. We see their response when they state, “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life’” (Acts 11:18).

This did not end the controversy. There was still much debate among the Jews as to what would be required of these new Gentile believers. Some still argued for the need for them to be circumcised. This debate was never settled until Paul, the other apostles, some Jews and a few Gentiles gathered together for a Council in Jerusalem. We see the struggle, again, as it is recorded in the book of Acts:

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this

question (Acts 15:1, 2).

Again, the doctrinal question of circumcision had to be addressed in order for the church to be able to move forward. There were other doctrinal issues that had to be resolved in the early church, but this was by far the biggest problem.

The church today, has doctrinal issues that have to be addressed at different times, but many times these are dealt with on the national level, and are not addressed at the local church. This is not to say that doctrinal issues do not affect the local church, but the debate and the issue are addressed at the national level, and the results are given to the local church. Besides, smaller churches are not bastions for those that are trying to promote controversial doctrinal issues. Smaller churches can not survive splits over doctrine, as they can not afford to lose people.

STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

This paper is designed to be a help for the pastors of small, established churches. It is geared toward addressing common problems found in smaller churches and to give suggestions and ideas on how those problems can be resolved, or dealt with.

This thesis project will address the five main pastoral problems found in established, smaller churches. Each chapter will address one of the problems and then give solutions and suggestions for how the pastor can deal with each of those problems.

1. Chapter two will deal with the problem of bi-vocational ministry.
2. Chapter three will address two problems which are closely linked together.

The first is the problem of dominant personality people. These are people that when they speak the rest of the church listens. The second is the problem of

family churches. These are churches where everyone is related to everyone else in the church.

3. Chapter four will address the problem of tradition. Tradition is a common problem that can dominate thinking and decision-making in the small church.
4. Chapter five will address the problem of finances in the smaller church.
5. Chapter six will address the problem of having to use people in church positions where they are not necessarily gifted or called.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There seems to be a huge lack of books and articles dealing with this topic. There are many books that deal with problems that are faced in larger churches, but very few that deal with the problems that smaller churches deal with, which are different than larger churches. L. Shannon Jung's article, *Small church Ministry: A Survey of the Literature*, was very helpful in finding books and articles that would help in this project. She also recognized the limited information available, especially in the area of contemporary issues dealing with the small church, when she states, "Even within the wealth of materials reviewed here, there are serious omissions. Still, there are areas within small church theory and issues within the social milieu which beg for attention."⁴¹ In the literature, if there was any mention of smaller churches it was done in a chapter or a smaller section of a chapter within the book. If there were books or articles that dealt exclusively with the small church they spoke mostly on how to make them grow, and not with the problems that keep the small churches small. There are some authors who do

⁴¹ L. Shannon Jung, "Small Church Ministry: A Survey of the Literature." *Anglican Theological Review* 78 (no 4 Fall 1996): 648.

write extensively on the small church. One such author is Lyle Schaller. From his books and his thoughts about the problems facing small churches, there was much that could be compiled and incorporated into this project. Most of the other books and articles that were used dealt with general leadership problems that occur in churches. It was through compiling these thoughts and ideas from the different books that most of the other information used in this project was gathered.

Leadership

The biggest source of information that the author found was the different books on leadership and management. Leadership ability is a vital requirement to deal with the problems that arise in any size church, but especially in smaller churches where the problems are more dramatic and personal. One book that helped immensely in this area is John Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. There were many chapters in his book that were helpful, but two stand out. The chapter on the "Law of E. F. Hutton" makes a strong statement. Maxwell writes, "People listen to what someone has to say not necessarily because of the truth being communicated in the message, but because of their respect for the speaker."⁴² A second chapter that was very helpful in delving into the source of problems is the "Law of the Inner Circle." This law states, "You see, every leader's potential is determined by the people closest to him. If those people are strong, then the leader can make a huge impact. If they are weak, he can't."⁴³ This is a problem

⁴² John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 51.

⁴³ Ibid., 110.

area in most small churches. People get into positions of power that then influence how the church runs, and once they get into these positions they do not want to give them up.

Conflict management and resolution

Another section of books that was helpful was in the area of conflict management and resolution. Every church has to deal with conflict, and knowing how to address it to bring about the desired results is of great importance. One book that was helpful was Kenneth Boulding's book *Conflict and Defense*. He states that there are three procedures to bring about conflict resolution. They are reconciliation, compromise, and award. He describes it this way, "To each of the three forms of procedural conflict conclusion, there corresponds an appropriate set of procedures. Thus, reconciliation is the result of conversation, argument, discussion, or debate that leads to convergent modifications of the images of the two parties. Compromise is the end result of a process of bargaining, in which mediation and conciliation may play an important part. An award is the end result of arbitration or legal trial."⁴⁴ His thoughts were very helpful in analyzing what course of action needs to take place to bring about the desired result.

Change

The main event that is sure to bring up conflict in the church is change. There were some good books that helped with the change process, and the problems that naturally arise from change. Change invariably causes those that have been in position of power to get defensive and fight for the control they believe that they are losing. These perceived

⁴⁴ Kenneth E. Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A general theory* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 310.

problems can be real or imaginary. One book that addressed the areas where change might be construed as harmful was Aubrey Malphurs' book *Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins*. He gives eleven reasons why change can be so hard to deal with in the church. These are:

1. Felt needs.
2. Status Quo.
3. Values.
4. Vested Interests.
5. Distrust of leadership.
6. Stress of change.
7. Differences of temperament.
8. Sacred Cows.
9. The complexity of change.
10. The paradigm effect.
11. Self-centeredness.⁴⁵

All of these reasons will cause those in the church, especially those that are trying to retain their power, to dig their heels in and resist moving forward. There has to be a perceived reason to allow the change or these people will resist it all the way. Maxwell, in his book, labels this the "Law of Buy-in." He states, "As a leader, having a great vision and a worthy cause is not enough to get people to follow you. First you have to become a better leader; you must get your people to buy into you. That is the price you

⁴⁵ Aubrey Malphurs, *Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 85.

have to pay if you want your vision to have a chance of becoming a reality.”⁴⁶ John Harris, in his book entitled *Stress, Power and Ministry* agrees with Maxwell. He states, “To achieve inclusion, the pastor must be perceived as one who values the existing consensus, and yet one who has earned the right to test its adequacy and play a part in changing its nature. He or she must be recognized as a trusted person, capable of giving and receiving straight talk.”⁴⁷ It is obvious that change has to come from someone the congregation accepts. Many times a pastor arrives at a church and tries to change programs and structure that have been in existence for a long time. He has neither established himself in the congregation’s eyes, nor taken time to understand why the program has been run that way these many years. Consequently, the people will refuse to listen to him, or support him in what he is trying to accomplish. Thus, change becomes a battlefield that could have been avoided through time, discussion, and shared vision casting.

Commentaries

Another source of help came through the different commentaries that are available. Some of the ones that were viewed were J. Vernon McGee, Oliver B. Greene, and the Tyndale Commentary series. The author was able use these to look at the early church and the problems that they faced. Also, the author was able to find some history about the different struggles that they faced, such as Gnosticism and other foreign religions, and the false teachings that ran wild through the early church. They were a good source to

⁴⁶ Maxwell, 149.

⁴⁷ John C. Harris, *Stress, Power and Ministry* (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 1977), 67.

compare the problems in churches today with the problems in the early church and see if the way that they handled their problems will still work today.

Church personality problems and difficulties

The last section of material that was found to be helpful was in the areas of church personality problems and difficulties. There are many areas that this covers. Some of these areas we will deal with in more detail in their corresponding chapters. These personality problems are with people in the church who are striving for control. There are people who manipulate others. There are people who strive for power and control over the church, it's people, and the pastor. There are dominant families that run the church through power and sheer numbers. There are also struggles of interest, which deal with what one person says should be done as opposed to what the pastor says should be done. There are many other problem areas as well.

One book that was extremely helpful in this area was Marshall Shelley's book *Well-Intentioned Dragons*. In it he says, "In the church, most dragons see themselves as godly people, adequately gracious and kind, who hold another viewpoint they honestly believe is right."⁴⁸ There are many people that fall into the category of a dragon. Shelley says that the most common tactics of dragons are, "personal attacks and plays for power"⁴⁹ She defines them by saying,

Within the church, they often are sincere, well-meaning saints, but they leave ulcers, strained relationships, and hard feelings in her wake. They don't consider themselves difficult people. They don't sit up nights thinking of ways to be nasty. Often they are pillars of the community—talented, strong personalities,

⁴⁸ Marshall Shelley, *Well-Intentioned Dragons* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 47.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

deservingly respected—but for some reason, they undermine the ministry of the church. They are not naturally rebellious or pathological; they are loyal church members, convinced they’re serving God, but they wind up doing more harm than good.⁵⁰

It is these persons that drive pastors from their churches, and ruin any ministry that might be going on in the church. These personality problems are destructive in every sense.

Another area of problems with people in the church is when they are manipulators. There were some books that discussed this aspect of organizational struggle. Manipulators are people who try to get their way in the church, or over an issue in the church, by forcing others to take their side or face the consequences. They can manipulate by loving you to their position, or by threatening you to their position. Either way, they are disruptive forces in the well being of the church. Maxie Dunnam in her book, *The Manipulator and the Church*, gives seven ways that people manipulate pastors and other church people. They are:

1. Cancel the pledge.
2. Cut off attendance.
3. Coerce through committees.
4. Create dissension.
5. Cover up with clichés.
6. Control the curriculum.
7. Close the mind—refuse to listen.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ Maxie Dunnam, G. J. Herbertson, E. L. Shostrom, *The Manipulator and the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 61-63.

All of these ways are used by people to force others to accept their way. These people are more concerned with getting their way, then with allowing God to work in the church, and this obviously means nothing but trouble. Virginia Hoffman also talked about manipulation in her book entitled, *The Co-Dependant Church*. She states, “Rigid churches operate, as do any other addictive families, by manipulation and control, and they do so for the same reasons—family loyalty, protection, and keeping the family secret. We have rules that keep people in fixed powerful and powerless roles within the temple walls, and rules that keep them from asking or even thinking questions—all ‘for their own good.’”⁵² Manipulation is a tactic used by some people to gain control, or keep control, within their church setting. These books gave good insights regarding this destructive tactic in the church.

Another device used by people in the church is the welding of power. Using one’s power to get their way destroys the idea and concept of wanting to being united and a “church-family.” Morton Deutsch in his book, *The Resolution of Conflict*, addresses this topic while writing to the business world. He believes that it is a common problem in any organization. He states, “Almost all scholars include the real conflicts of interest that arise from the competition for such scarce resources as wealth, power, prestige, and territory.”⁵³ He feels that power is something that a person will not use when he is alone, but rather when he is in a relational situation. He describes this when he states, “Power is a relational concept; it does not reside in the individual but rather in the relationship of the person to his environment. It follows that an actor has more power to satisfy his

⁵² Virginia Hoffman, *The Co-Dependant Church* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1991), 97.

⁵³ Morton Deutsch, *The Resolution of Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 70.

desires when his environment is ‘facilitative’ rather than ‘resistive’ to his goal achievement; that is, he has more power to overcome another when the other’s resistance is weak.”⁵⁴ He feels that power can be removed from a person if the environment around them does not support, but opposes his attempts at wielding power. If the environments, or people, stand strong against the one wielding their power, then they can neutralize that person’s power.

Dominant people and families was another area of personality problems that the author was able to find some helpful information on. These areas are common in smaller churches. Larger churches might deal with dominant personalities, but never with dominant families, and even in the case of dominant personalities they have enough power balance to neutralize any one individual. Stephen Worchel in his book *Conflict between People and Groups* addresses this problem. He states, “Dominance behavior controls through threat. To be effective the threat must be credible.”⁵⁵ He feels that fear is the key for these people to dominate others. If they cannot cause them to fear then they lose their power. He says later, “Consequently, a dominator’s ability to mobilize the support of others is a major determinant of his or her capacity to credibly threaten another.”⁵⁶ He feels that in many cases that the dominator can only motivate others through this way. If they lose their dominance then they lash out in other ways, but not to motivate, but to hurt.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 84, 85.

⁵⁵ Stephen Worchel and J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Conflict Between People and Groups* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1993), 114.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 115.

Dominant families are ones that try to control the church through the sheer weight of numbers. They control most, if not all, important offices, and keep the pastor and any resistance under their thumbs. There is not a lot of information on this subject, but there are some thoughts that were able to be gathered from a book by Israel Galindo entitled, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations*. He addresses the severity of this problem by stating, “Any group that needs to step up during crisis to provide the leadership functions that the pastor rightfully needs to provide may set up a dangerous precedent no future pastor would want to live with—and certainly this is a pattern that is not healthy or helpful to the system in the long run.”⁵⁷ When the leadership of the church comes from a group, or person, other than the pastor, then the church is going to have problems. It is not that the pastor should have unlimited power, but that there needs to be a central person that oversees the functions of the church. If someone other than the one who sits in the overseers chair is running the show, then the church loses the ability to function normally.

Summary

Small churches were the norm for the early church, as were problems. Many of the problems in the early church have continued on to the church today, but have just taken on different forms. The problems that we see in small, established churches are common, and they are extremely damaging. They are so damaging because the churches are so small, and when problems arise among small groups of people the church just tries to survive. There is no growth that can occur, and the work of God comes to a standstill.

⁵⁷ Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations* (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2004), 149.

This paper will look at how to move smaller churches out of the doldrums of problems by overcoming these problems successfully.

CHAPTER 2

BI-VOCATIONAL MINISTRIES

Introduction

The bi-vocational pastor has many other names that he is called depending on the denomination. To some, he is called a dual role minister, or non-stipendiary minister, worker-priest, or tentmaker. All of these terms describe the same position. It is one of working part-time as a pastor of a church, while simultaneously working part-time, or in some cases full-time, in a secular field outside of the church. The bi-vocational pastor is in a very unique position. It is one that is brought about for many different reasons. The usual scenario is the bi-vocational pastor shepherds a small congregation that is not able, or willing, to pay the pastor enough money for his family and himself to live on.

There are other scenarios that fall into what is called a bi-vocational ministry. In some cases, the bi-vocational pastor is an individual that has already been a member of the church but has employment outside the church, and assumes the responsibilities of the pastor when the last one has left the church, but he continues to keep his secular job. In some rarer circumstances, a pastor might shepherd two or three small congregations at the same time. This is due to the fact that these congregations can not afford to pay a

full-time pastor, and elect to share him, and his salary among the churches to provide a livable income for the pastor and his family.

This brings up an interest point as to whether it is better to have a pastor work a secular job and pastor a church, or is it better to have a pastor lead two or three small churches at the same time. Lyle Schaller, who has written many books on the small church, weighs in on this issue. Schaller feels that a pastor serving in two churches is worse than him working in a secular field and in the church at the same time. He states, “The evidence appears to be heavily on the side of the argument that contends that if numerical growth is a factor or if the morale of the minister is considered to be important, it may be better to find a minister with part-time or full-time secular employment rather than share a pastor with one or more congregations.”⁵⁸ He believes that a pastor is placed in a bad situation when he is pastoring two or more churches. There will always be constant comparing as to which church he spends more time with, and which church he favors more. He feels that it is better on the pastor and his family if he works a secular job where these comparisons cannot be made.

The reality for denominations is that the bi-vocational minister will be much more common over the next few years. This is due to the decrease in church membership and the increasing costs of keeping smaller churches open. Small churches will find themselves unable to afford a full-time minister. Instead, they will be forced to combine with another church, increase their giving to pay for a full-time minister, or use a lay person to fill the pulpit. Small churches are already facing these decisions. The Presbyterian Church (USA) states, “It is rare in small congregations to have a minister on

⁵⁸ Lyle E. Schaller, *44 Ways to Increase Church Attendance* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 113, 114.

staff. Among the 2,286 such congregations (50 or under), only 323—14%--are listed in General Assembly records as having a pastor (This total includes solo pastors, those who served yoked parishes, and tentmakers).⁵⁹ It is obvious, over the next few years, that the financial limitations of smaller churches will bring an increased need for bi-vocational pastors.

Problems of bi-vocational pastors

Whatever the reason for a church to have a bi-vocational minister, there are some important considerations that need to be thought through before one would accept the call of bi-vocational ministry. The Presbyterian Church (USA) lists five considerations that must be thought through and discussed with both the bi-vocational minister and the congregation. They are:

1. That the bi-vocational minister is not over-extended.
2. That there will be satisfaction in each position the bi-vocational minister holds.
3. That the congregation will find the secular position acceptable.
4. That the needs of the church can be met by this ministry.
5. That there is a plan for the regular review of the ministry.⁶⁰

Besides these, there are issues of vacation, both church and secular. There are time requirements, such as, can the minister accomplish what the church desires in the amount of time that he can give the church. Also, how many hours is the bi-vocational minister

⁵⁹ John P. Marcum, "A Statistical Look at Small membership Congregations," www.pcusa.org (2002), accessed October 2006.

⁶⁰ Linda Kuhn, "Tentmaking or Bi-Vocational Ministers," www.pcusa.org/ministers/types/tentmaking.htm (2004) accessed March 2006.

expected to put in at the church, and who is he accountable to if he needs to report these hours. All these issues should be addressed prior to a pastor accepting a position with a church as a bi-vocational pastor. Also, it is best to have these conditions written out and signed by both the pastor and the board so that there will not be any questions about these conditions during the pastor's ministry.

The bi-vocational ministry also carries with it some obvious problems, the most obvious of which is the pastor being torn between two professions. Secondly, it also requires a pastor and his congregation to compromise on what duties will be expected of the pastor during his ministry there at the church. We will just briefly look at these and some other problem areas in this chapter. The problem areas that will be addressed will include issues with time, conflicts between church events and secular work schedules, too many expectations by the church for the bi-vocational minister, missing denominational events, and a perceived loss of interest by the congregation and/or the denomination.

Time

The bi-vocational pastor's greatest enemy is time. He will be torn between what is required of him from both jobs that he works. As any pastor knows, church work can take up all the time that a person can give. There is never an end to what a person can do in regards to church work. Even full-time pastors know that there is more that they could do at the church. Adding to this a family and a secular job creates added burdens and a time crunch. For these reasons, the bi-vocational minister has to be very organized and be good at time management. There can not be a lot of wasted time or effort, because there just is not any extra to spare.

The bi-vocational pastor will also have to address how much time he will need to be at each job. This should be discussed at the beginning of his ministry with the church leadership so that there will not be any conflicts later on. More importantly, this needs to be discussed with his family to make sure that there will be adequate quality time for family time. The amount of time that the pastor spends at the church and at his secular job can not be allowed to ruin his family time. The time he spends with his family must be preserved. This means that he does not give them the leftover time of his day, and he should not give them time just at the end of the day when he is too tired to do anything. He needs to give them quality time when he is alert and active and not over tired. A pastor who brings dissension to his family by working too much or too hard cannot be an effective pastor in his church. The importance of this is seen through Paul's words when he is writing to Timothy and talking about overseers and deacons. He states, "He must manage his family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect."⁶¹ The proper order of importance for a pastor is God, his family, and then the church. Every pastor needs to make his family a priority.

Conflicts with church events and work schedule

The bi-vocational pastor also needs to address the conflicts that might arise between work requirements and church requirements. It is very possible, especially in times of emergencies, where the pastor will not be able to be there. A pastor with work obligations might not be able to be at the hospital for all surgeries, or emergencies that come up. The bi-vocational pastor will also have conflicts with church events during the time he is normally working, which could include funerals. These items will need to be

⁶¹ I Timothy 3:4.

worked out with the church leadership before hand, so that there is a plan of action available if the pastor cannot be there. It would be good for the bi-vocational pastor to have church leadership that could pinch hit for him when he is working. This might require the pastor to train some of his laity in what they should do or say in these situations. Even full-time pastors can not be everywhere all of the time, so training people in the church to help is always a good idea.

More expectations

Another problem for bi-vocational pastors is the expectations that his church requires of him. It is possible, especially if the church has not had a bi-vocational pastor previously, that they will expect him to do things that he just does not have time to do. Stephen Norcross addresses this concern when he states, “It is sometimes feared that clergy in a part-time arrangement will be exploited, expected to provide full-time service for less than full-time pay. This has happened. It is true that, at times, church vestries have offered less than standard compensation packages, with the secret hope that the pastor will work extra hard and bring the church’s budget up out of the hole.”⁶² It is important for the pastor to have a good understanding of what the church is requiring him to do as their part-time pastor. It is also important that the pastor make clear those things that he will not be able to do. These things should be written down and signed by the pastor and the church leadership so that there will not be any confusion over what requirements were agreed to at the pastor’s hiring.

⁶² Stephen Norcross, *The Bi-vocational Option*, *Inside the Small Church* Anthony Pappas, Ed. (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1989), 67.

It would also be good for the pastor and church leadership to work out a schedule for evaluating their working relationship. The pastor might desire to work at the church on a full-time basis somewhere in the future; whereas, the church might not be interested in having a full-time pastor because of the added expense it would bring them. This should be addressed at the pastor's hiring. Also, yearly evaluations of the pastor and church's working relationship would be good so that there can be adjustments made to the amount of work and time required of the pastor. This could vary based on the pastor's secular job and the expectations that they have for him at his work.

Missing denominational events

Still another problem that bi-vocational pastors face is the struggle with their denomination over denominational events. Each pastor not only has events that they need to plan for and work their schedule around in their church, but there are also events that the pastor is expected to attend on a denominational level. These would include annual conferences and business meetings, as well as any local meetings for the denominational pastors. These meetings are much harder for the bi-vocational pastor to attend due to his secular employment. Norcross addresses this conflict by saying, "What I do mean to suggest is that the time for diocesan meetings and other church related involvements is built into the work week of the full-time clergy. For bi-vocational clergy, time must be begged, borrowed, or stolen from the other job to obtain the time to leave town for such events."⁶³ The bi-vocational pastor is usually not thought of when these meetings are planned. The denominational leadership usually plans these meetings according to the schedule of the normal pastor. Therefore, they mostly occur during the

⁶³ Ibid., 69.

day when the bi-vocational pastor is working his other job. The bi-vocational pastor should address his concerns with the denominational leadership so that his failure to attend these meetings will not create additional problems. This brings us to the next problem area with which bi-vocational pastors have to deal.

Perceived loss of interest

The last problem area that we will address, but in no means the last problem area that bi-vocational pastors face, is the area of a perceived loss of interest on the part of the pastor by the denominational leadership. Although this probably would not happen, it still can happen. When a pastor has to keep excusing himself from denominational or local events for the clergy, they might be perceived as someone that is not interested in the denomination, or has lost his heart for ministry. Norcross also addresses this area when he states, “Part-time clergy are, therefore, often seen to be marginal in the extended church. After a few times of asking my bishop to excuse me from clergy conference meetings and my missing clergy association meetings due to work commitments, it’s easy to conclude that I have lost interest.”⁶⁴ This places an added burden on the bi-vocational pastor because he feels a sense of guilt for not being able to attend the denominational meetings. The bi-vocational pastor should stay in frequent contact with his denominational leadership so that these false perceptions do not materialize.

Biblical support for bi-vocational ministers

Bi-vocational ministry is not something new. It has been going on for centuries. We even see bi-vocational ministries in the Bible. Paul served as a tentmaker in many of the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

cities he ministered in on his missionary journeys. Bi-vocational ministry seemed to be a common practice as Paul traveled from town to town establishing new churches. It was the only way for him to support himself. It was not like today where there is a denomination that can support a pastor as he starts new churches. Even if they did have a denominational system in Paul's day, it would have been near impossible to get money to him on a consistent, or timely, basis, considering how long it took for travel and communication to take place in that time period.

The Bible is full of examples of people working while ministering for God. Unless a person was a priest, they would have needed to take care of their own needs as they ministered. In the time during the establishing of the church, it was necessary for ministers of the gospel to raise their support through other jobs. Jesus was a carpenter, Peter, James, John, and Andrew were fishermen, Matthew was a tax collector, and Levi was a doctor. The disciples traveled with Jesus during his ministry, and many of their needs were taken care of when Christ was with them, but afterward, they would meet their own needs as they ministered. This is recorded most frequently by Paul through his travels. Some examples of people who ministered while working other jobs are:

1. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon (Acts 9:43).
2. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them (Acts 18:3).
3. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you (I Thessalonians 2:9).

It was not Paul's desire or intention that people ministering for Christ would have to work other jobs as they ministered. This was a necessary outgrowth of beginning a new

movement of God. Paul believed that people who minister for God should be paid so that they can focus completely on God's work. He writes, "In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."⁶⁵ The desire for all bi-vocational ministers is to get their church in a position where they will be able to pay the pastor his complete wages so there will not be a need for him to get financial support elsewhere.

Solutions for bi-vocational ministers

There are some things that bi-vocational pastors can do to improve the situation in which they are working. Some of these solutions have been touched on earlier in this chapter, but we will address them more here. There are three main things that can be done to help the bi-vocational pastor and his church. They are: combine events, develop lay leadership, and as a last result close churches. Each of these will be discussed below.

Combine events

One thing that can help the bi-vocational pastor is to combine events or programs with other churches. This is easier when the pastor is working at two or three churches at the same time, but can be easily done with other churches in the area, also. The reason for doing this is to combine resources between churches to get a better event or program. These resources can be your people's effort, money, and/or talent.

Combining events will first of all help to conserve the energy of the main workers in your church. This also allows for churches to have an event without overwhelming those that are the workers in each church. Every event that a church puts on requires someone

⁶⁵ I Corinthians 9:14.

to put in considerable effort to make it run effectively. Combining events may only require one or two workers from each church to organize and run the event. This saves on the workload that would have been expected from the normal workers in the church.

Combining events with other churches can, secondly, help defray the cost that is required to run the event. Every event not only takes effort from your people, but it also takes money to pay for the advertising, supplies needed, or any other expense to make the program work well. When churches combine to do a program they can split the cost and save each church some money while still putting on a good event.

Lastly, combining churches allows churches to pool the talent from all of their churches to make the event or program better. Let's say that a church is doing a Christmas cantata. They might only have 15-20 people in their choir, but if they combined with two other churches the choir might then consist of 40-50 singers, which would make it sound much better and give ample opportunity for the best singers to have solos and do special performances. This would make the event much better using the combined talents of the three churches.

Clearly, combining events and programs with other churches is a cost effective way of doing things for the small church, while delivering a good product. Bi-vocational pastors should take advantage of the resources that are around them, and in nearby churches, to better attract and keep their members in the years ahead.

Denominational closure of churches

The last result that anyone wants to see is the denomination needing to close churches. As bad as this does sound it can be used to better the small church. How can this help?

Sometimes a small church needs to have the denomination come in and threaten to close a church, or even close a church before that church will realize it needs to make drastic changes in order to survive. Some churches die slow deaths without even realizing they are dying. They have always been the way that they are, and they do not see a need to change even though they have not grown and the church has not changed any in the last twenty years. Sometimes it is necessary for the denomination to show some “tough love” to these churches.

Closing a small church can sometimes create an environment to start a new and different church. This type of church would be good for someone who has an outside job, at least in the initial stages of its beginning. The Western Pennsylvania District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance took a small church in Erie, Pennsylvania that had been slowly dying and closed it for a year or two. It then reopened under a different name with a different worship style and new people who had been disciplined through small group Bible studies. The new church is much larger and is thriving under this new makeover.⁶⁶ This might not work in every situation. This denomination has only tried this once, but it is an option that can be used to help a small church gain new life. This can be available for a bi-vocational pastor who wants to begin a restart of a church that has closed, but has a hope of starting anew. A bi-vocational pastor would have the income, from an outside job, to move into an area to lead Bible studies and disciple people to prepare for the restart. Starting a church through small group Bible studies would not require the demands that a structured church would require, which would allow the bi-vocational pastor the freedom needed to work a secular job.

⁶⁶ Information given through the Western Pennsylvania District Conference of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in May 2006, author’s notes, Wampum, PA.

Lay leadership

The best solution for the bi-vocational pastor is to call upon the lay leaders in the church to help carry some of the pastor's duties when he is not available. This will require the pastor to prepare his laity to take on these responsibilities. Maxwell talks about the need to build a good, strong "inner circle" of leadership around you. It is imperative for the bi-vocational pastor to do this. Maxwell states, "You see, every leader's potential is determined by the people closest to him. If those people are strong, then the leader can make a huge impact. If they are weak, he can't."⁶⁷ It will be important to train those persons that he feels are qualified, or have the spiritual gifts, to do the work when he is not available. To do this, he will need to understand the areas where his people are gifted. This will mean that he will need to do some spiritual gifts inventories with his people. This will allow the pastor and the laity to understand where they are gifted and in what areas they can minister for God.

Once the pastor has determined which areas his people should minister in, he will need to set up training opportunities for them. There are many training programs that the pastor can tap into for training his people. He can send them to training programs outside of his church. There are training programs that he can do in his church. Many of these are on video tape, and have work books available for each lesson. The pastor can also train them himself by having them work with him. He can take them visiting with him, so that they can learn how to, and feel comfortable visiting on their own. He can train people in his church to take on some of the secretarial duties that he normal has to do

⁶⁷ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 110.

himself. But it is important for the pastor to take the time to train his people to do these responsibilities. He needs to be able to turn these areas over to his people, even if he believes that he can do it better himself. He needs to allow them to learn as they do it. John Maxwell writes about the importance of reproducing other leaders. He says, “It all starts at the top because it takes a leader to raise up another leader. Followers can’t do it. Neither can institutional programs. It takes one to know one, show one, grow one.”⁶⁸ A bi-vocational pastor is going to need to raise up other leaders in the church to take on the responsibility he will not be able to do.

Summary

It should be clear to us that bi-vocational ministry is an important way to minister within the church. While most pastors do not work under these conditions, there are some that labor effectively for God through this system. The church as a whole needs to do a better job of supporting and meeting the needs of the bi-vocational pastor. Part of the reason that they do not receive the support that they need is due to the fact that their needs are not understood by other clergy and denominational leadership. They are an uncommon group of people that labor for God, but are not able to receive the support that other pastors receive because they are busy laboring in the secular world, also. It will be very important for the church to understand this group of people in the next few years as this type of ministry will be increasing due to the ever-rising cost of keeping churches running, and the lack of funds available in these churches to pay for a full-time minister. Therefore, it is vital for denominational leaders to prepare themselves to be able to help these laborers of Christ to minister more effectively in the future.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 141.

CHAPTER 3

FAMILY CHURCHES AND DOMINANT PERSONALITY PEOPLE

Introduction

Small churches have a phenomenon that is unique to them. It is something that larger churches do not have to deal with to any great degree. This is the problem of having dominant people, or dominant families running the church. Larger churches might have a dominant person that tries to run the church, but he can not run the church like a dominant person in a small church can. It seems that the larger a church gets the less that this becomes a problem. This is due to the fact that when a church gets larger it has to function with a different structure than a smaller church. A large church requires more people being involved in decision-making. A small church functions much like a family. It has its dominant personalities that try and run the family. These people take on the role of the father or mother for the family, and they are referred to as the patriarch or the matriarch.

Small churches also have to deal with the struggle of having a dominant family which runs the church. The smaller the church the more likely it is that one family will dominate the ministries, decision-making, and policies of the church. Every decision will be made through this family because they have family members in all the key areas, and

leadership positions in the church. This family will also have its patriarch or matriarch that will decide how the family will vote on any issue.

These two problems are very similar in that they involve a dominant person, or family member, that makes all decisions for the church. It is very interesting that this patriarch or matriarch does not even have to hold a position in order to control the church. Everyone naturally looks to them, or consults them before a decision is made, or they let their desires be known to their family members or the church members before any decision is made. In this way, they can control everything from a distance and can give the excuse that they are not running the church because they do not even have a church position.

Defining the patriarch or matriarch

It is very hard to put a very clear definition on who might be a patriarch or matriarch. The best concise definition found according to what others have tried to say is that a patriarch or matriarch is a person who has been actively involved in the church since its beginning, or at least longer than any one else. Through their long service to the church, and their understanding and connection to each family in the church, the patriarch or matriarch guides the functions of the church. This guidance might come because of an office they hold, or it might come because of the respect that they have earned. Either way, they control every aspect of the church through their words and actions.

What Dudley has to say about the patriarch and matriarch is helpful. He describes them this way, “The patriarchs and matriarchs are at the center of the church. They sit in the center of the sanctuary, and they feel in the center of the congregation. They may

have wealth and be involved in many activities, or they may have passed their prime. They may be friendly, or aloof. . . . They may no longer sit on the official boards of the church. But they have one essential feature: patriarchs and matriarchs have lived through the historical moments of the church. In their presence, they carry the identity of the church. They remember when things were different, ‘and how we got to where we are.’”⁶⁹ This gives a sense of the struggle in describing who they are. They can be people from many different backgrounds, but they will always work in the church in a similar fashion. They will always be involved in the acceptance of new ideas or new people. Dudley states this when he says, “Matriarchs and patriarchs provide the parent models, the informal officers who recognize and usher the new members into the family.”⁷⁰ Many times the people will not accept someone until the okay is given by the patriarch or matriarch.

Another thought is given to us by Steven Burt in his book. He describes the hierarchy of small churches and the role of the patriarch and matriarch in that situation when he states, “A small church organized around one or two matriarchs or patriarchs who are often the heads of extended biological families in the church. The pastor functions in a chaplain role, leading worship and giving pastoral care.”⁷¹ He goes on to state that the pastor does not wield the power in the small church, but that goes to the patriarch or matriarch.

⁶⁹ Carl Dudley, *Effective Small Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 51, 52.

⁷⁰ Dudley, 65.

⁷¹ Steven E. Burt and Hazel A. Roper, *Raising Small Church Esteem* (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 1992), 23.

Glenn Daman defines the patriarch or the dominant family along the lines of a chief in a tribe. He states, “Quite often a person or family within a small church becomes the tribal chief. This individual or family, because of past involvement, possess significant authority and influence in the church. This person may be in an official position of authority such as on the board, or he may not hold any recognized position. His influence, however, significantly controls the decisions and direction of the church. The congregation looks up to him.”⁷² This person or family run the church along the line of what is good for the chief and not always what is good for the tribe.

Marlin Thomas describes the patriarch/matriarch and dominant family dynamic this way, “Every church also has unofficial leaders. These are the people who, whether elected to office or not, have the respect of congregational members, and therefore often have more influence on the outcomes of decision making than does the elected leadership or the pastor. Some congregations are actually controlled by one or two family groups, who sometimes never relinquish real power.”⁷³

The patriarchal or matriarchal dominated church is so common in small churches that Roy Oswald gives a category, in describing different types of church-sizes, for the type of church that is run by a dominant family, or by a patriarch or matriarch. He describes the Patriarchal/Matriarchal church (up to 50 active members) this way: “This small church can also be called a family-size church because it functions like a family, with

⁷² Glenn C. Daman, “Dealing with Conflict in the Smaller Church,” www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal (2005), accessed March 2006.

⁷³ Marlin E. Thomas, Ed. *Transforming Conflict in Your Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 39.

appropriate parental figures. The patriarchs and matriarchs control the church's leadership needs."⁷⁴

Problems that patriarchs and matriarchs cause

Patriarchs and matriarchs can create many problems for the pastor of a church. They have the power to create problems because they have been there the longest and have assumed control of the church. They have created an environment where they are the parent figure and anyone who opposes them is quickly disciplined. The problems that they can create are many because of their control over every area of the church. They create problems by challenging authority, creating tension and clashes, they will not allow change, they want to have the final say, and they keep the pastor from leading.

They control the church through manipulative tactics. Dunnam, Herbertson, and Shostrom discuss in great detail the manipulation that occurs in churches, in their book. They argue that a person will try and manipulate the pastor or other church members in order to keep control. They address seven areas in their book that are common for a person to try and manipulate the pastor or church. They are: cancel the pledge (giving), cut off attendance, coerce through committees, create dissension, cover up with clichés, control the curriculum, and close the mind.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Roy M. Oswald, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 32.

⁷⁵ Maxie D. Dunnam, Gary J. Herbertson, and Everett L. Shostrom, *The Manipulator and the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1968), 61-63.

Challenge authority

The first problem area that patriarchs and matriarchs bring to a pastor is their need to have control. If the pastor wants to lead the church, especially without the help or direction of the patriarch, his authority will be challenged. The patriarch or matriarch wants to have control of the church. They had it before the pastor came, and they want to keep even after the pastor's arrival. They want the church to remain under their control. Any attempts to take away their control will result in a battle with the pastor. The statement by Dunnam, Herbertson, and Shostrom about the end result of a pastor who challenges a patriarch is very true, and pastors need to heed it. They state, "A pastor who challenges the authority of a family-size patriarch or matriarch or presumes to be the primary leader of the congregation generally will not stay long."⁷⁶ Roy Oswald adds, "It is generally suicide for clergy to get caught in a showdown with the patriarchs and matriarchs within the first five years of ministry at that particular church."⁷⁷ Opposing the patriarch early on in a pastor's ministry will guarantee a short ministry.

The patriarch and matriarch want the pastor to do his job, while they do their's. Roy Oswald describes what they expect of their pastor. He states, "What family-size churches want from clergy is pastoral care, period. For clergy to assume that they are also the chief executive officer and the resident religious authority is to make a serious blunder."⁷⁸ The problem with this thinking is that it does not allow the pastor to do what God has called him to do, and that is to lead.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Roy M. Oswald, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 32.

⁷⁸ Roy M. Oswald, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 32.

The end result of this problem area is that the pastor either has to wrestle control of the church away from the patriarch, which will result in a war and the patriarch leaving the church, or the pastor will leave the church. If the pastor can never gain control of the church, he can never lead it, and if he can never lead it, then he becomes nothing more than a visiting preacher who fills the pulpit from week to week.

Create tension and clashes

The second problem area that patriarchs and matriarchs bring is that they do not like to give up control in the church. The small church has a family environment and the patriarch and matriarch like to run the church with parental control.

Ron Crandall, in his book, uses the example of Paul when he was shipwrecked on Malta to describe the problem-creators in the church. In Paul's case, a viper came out of the fire and bit him (Acts 28:3). He uses this analogy to state, "The 'snakes' most likely to emerge in times of change when the fires of the Spirit are beginning to blaze are those involving power struggles and interpersonal conflict."⁷⁹ He argues that new change can bring out the destructive qualities of those people in the church who want to stop change from happening. These qualities bring tension and conflict to the church environment. Glenn Daman also addresses the conflict that can arise from the patriarch. He states, "Conflict arises in a small church when the tribal chief's authority and influence are challenged. Often the challenge comes from the pastor as he finds himself at odds with

⁷⁹ Ron Crandall, *Turn Around Strategies for the Small Church* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 80.

this individual over the decisions and direction of the church. The result is tribal warfare in the congregation.”⁸⁰

Tension and conflict are not normal aspects of small churches. They should not be normal aspects of any church. But the small church tends to avoid conflict because of the close personal relationships that are developed there. The small church functions much like a family, so any fighting that occurs among its members affects the entire church. Mavis speaks to this in his book when he states, “Personality tensions and clashes represent an antithesis to the fellowship that characterizes small groups and the stresses are particularly detrimental to the moral of the little church. They tend to involve the whole congregation, whereas in large churches differences of opinion often affect only one club or group. Relationships are so intimate in a small church that personality clashes frequently divide whole congregations, sometimes along the line of blood relationship.”⁸¹ The tension that comes through conflict in the small church hurts the church’s moral, and can cause long term problems as people in the church become divided over issues.

Having said this, it is also important for the members of the church to understand that conflict is natural if it is done correctly. Marlin Thomas states, “When a disagreement becomes public, or at least noticeable, some church members condemn those making waves. Since conflict is seen by some as bad, anyone involved in it must also be bad. The message is that conflict must not be allowed to exist. The attitude is, ‘Get over it quickly and let’s hear no more of it.’ Other church members react to conflict by staying

⁸⁰ Daman article.

⁸¹ W. Curry Mavis, *Advancing the Smaller Local Church* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1957), 47.

away from those involved. Conflict is dirty, they feel, and they don't want to get any of it on themselves."⁸² The result is that the church tries to function by getting everyone to agree on something before doing anything, and if they cannot agree then nothing will happen. This is also unhealthy as Thomas later states. He says, "A church that demands that everyone be happy with every decision has weak personal boundaries. It says, 'We are all one' in an unhealthy way. Where no dissent is tolerated, dissenters are forced either into hypocrisy or into leaving. Neither is it a healthy thing for a church to be dominated by a few strong personalities who say in effect, take it or leave it."⁸³ He argues that the church must find a common ground between debate and acceptance for it to function healthily.

Will not allow change

The third problem area that patriarchs and matriarchs bring to the church is that they will not allow the church to change. They do not want the church to change because if it changes then their role in the church might change. The patriarch or matriarch can only thrive in an environment that does not change. The more the church changes the less control they will be able to maintain over everything, because they will not be able to keep up with all the change. Therefore, patriarchs and matriarchs will fight to keep change from happening.

Patriarchs and matriarchs do not want a pastor to do new things, or make decisions on his own. They want the pastor to stick to preaching and counseling, and nothing more.

⁸² Thomas, 35.

⁸³ Ibid., 43.

Roy Oswald mentions this in his book when he states, “The key role of the patriarch or matriarch is to see that clergy do not take the congregation off on a new direction of ministry. Clergy are to be the chaplain of this small family. When clergy do not understand this, they are likely to head into a direct confrontation with the parental figure.”⁸⁴ Alice Mann agrees with this assessment of the pastor’s role in the church when she states, “The pastor is the central figure, holding together a small circle of leaders. Two or three major “fellowship groups” compose the congregation, but each member expects personal attention from the pastor. The pastor’s time is largely taken up maintaining direct pastoral relationships with each member, coordinating the work of the leadership circle, and personally leading worship and small group programs, such as Bible study.”⁸⁵ In contrast to this, most pastors want to make changes to the church when they arrive to make the church more like what they were used to, and/or to move it forward, but the patriarch will oppose him at every turn to do this.

Want to make the final decisions

The fourth problem area that comes from patriarchs and matriarchs is that they want to have the final say on everything. It is part of their controlling nature. It is okay for the pastor to make decisions, but the patriarch is going to want to give their approval of it before it becomes a part of the church. The patriarch will let the pastor think that he is making the decisions for the church. In reality, the patriarch is making them because he

⁸⁴ Oswald, 32.

⁸⁵ Alice Mann, *Size Transitions in Congregations*, Beth Ann Gaede, Ed. (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2001), 77.

is giving his approval or disapproval of them to the congregation and the congregation will take their clues from the patriarch.

In the small church, it is not the person with the highest position that makes the decisions. The pastor might have the position of power, but the power does not always come from him. Steven Burt describes the power of people over position in his book. He states, “Not only does the Family Church feel like family to its participants, in some instances, the church literally is family. The Family Church is a relational entity, functioning as an organism rather than as an organization. . . .In this relational structure authority is given to people rather than to positions or offices.”⁸⁶ The small church leadership dynamic is based on who has the power to influence others, not on who has the highest position.

Pastor can not lead

The last problem area that comes through the work of the patriarch and matriarch is that they will not allow the pastor to lead the church. Pastors want to lead their churches. They come to a new church with ideas that they feel God is calling them to do while they are there. They have experiences that they have gathered through previous ministries that they pull from to make the needed changes that they immediately see in the church. The pastor comes excited about leading the church and moving the church forward. He wants to lead the church forward in the direction God has for them.

One of the problems that pastors face in dealing with the patriarchs and matriarchs is that they expect or hope that the people of the church will support them in the changes

⁸⁶ Steven E. Burt and Hazel A. Roper, *Raising Small Church Esteem* (Herndon, VA: An Alban institute Publication, 1992), 23.

and decisions that they make. In reality, the people of the church will not take the side of the pastor against the patriarch even if they do not agree with the patriarch. They would rather see what will happen as these two square off. Roy Oswald speaks about this when he states, “Clergy should watch out for the trap set when members complain to them about the patriarch or matriarch of the parish and encourage the pastor to challenge the parental figure. Clergy, who respond to such mutinous bids, expecting the congregation to back them in the showdown, do not understand the dynamics of small-church ministry.”⁸⁷ Glenn Daman also addresses this when he states, “When the conflict is between the pastor and the tribal chief, people often will not openly oppose the pastor, but they will begin to withdraw from ministry positions and from financially supporting the church. In many cases, when the tribal chief conflicts with the pastor, the rest of the congregation will support the tribal chief and the pastor becomes isolated from the church and is eventually forced to resign.”⁸⁸ The reason why the people of the church will not support the pastor through this is because they are afraid that the pastor might leave before the confrontation is completed and they will be stuck dealing with the hurt patriarch that they have not supported through this confrontation.

Biblical examples of patriarchs and matriarchs

The Bible gives us both good and bad examples of the role dominant people can have in the church. The obvious person who falls into this category of a patriarch is Abraham. He was the patriarch for both the Jews and the Gentiles, since they both trace their

⁸⁷ Oswald, 33.

⁸⁸ Daman article.

ancestral line through him. He was a good example of what a patriarch can be. He is referred to as the Father of the Jews in several portions of scripture. Some of them are:

1. God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation” (Exodus 3:15).
2. Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one, and I blessed him and made him many (Isaiah 51:2).
3. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham (Matthew 3:9).
4. “Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did” (John 8:39).

These verses show that Abraham was considered the patriarch of the Jews, and that he had a positive influence on them following God.

The Bible also gives us examples of patriarchs that can cause problems in the church.

These are seen through Paul’s ministry to the churches. Some bad examples of patriarchs are:

1. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (I Timothy 1:20).
2. Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia (II Timothy 4:9, 10).
3. Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message (II Timothy 4:14, 15).

Although these verses do not tell us that these people were patriarchs in their churches, we can assume that they had great influence in their churches, because Paul is concerned

about the effect that their words are having on the believers in their cities. Alexander the metalworker had turned many away from Paul's words (II Timothy 4:14). That is why Paul speaks up against him. He is concerned that his influence, although negative, could destroy the work that Paul started in that city. This could only be done through the power of a very influential person in the church. We can assume that he was the leader of that church, either in position, or in influence.

The Bible might not make much mention of patriarchs because a patriarch is someone who has been in a church for a long time, and holds a great deal of influence over it. The churches in Paul's day had not been established for very long, and thus would not have had time to develop people into the patriarchal role in the church.

Ideas on how to deal with the patriarch or matriarch

The patriarch or matriarch can not be ignored in the small church. They will be at every function, and have knowledge of what occurs at every meeting, whether they were present or not. A person might wonder why a pastor can not just let them do their own thing. The problem with that is that their own thing is everyone's thing. Their involvement and influence in everything is not good. The pastor who thinks that he can do his own thing while they do their own thing is headed for trouble. Therefore, the pastor will have to deal with these people in one way or another. The pastor has one of three choices in dealing with the patriarch and matriarch. He can work with them, He can fight them, or he can work around them. The pastor will have to make this decision himself, based upon the situation, and the influence that these people may have on his church.

Work with them

Throughout this chapter, we have viewed patriarchs and matriarchs in a negative light. This does not have to be the case. Some patriarchs and matriarchs can be very beneficial to the church, and the pastor. But this is a rare thing, and the pastor who has this situation should consider himself blessed. Most patriarchs and matriarchs will begin their relationship with the pastor on good terms. They will say how well the pastor is doing, and be the first to pat the pastor on the back. It is not even unusual for these people to be the pastor's biggest supporters when he first arrives. But this will change over time. The pastor will know when this takes place, because it will be obvious that the "honeymoon" is over. In those cases where the patriarch and matriarch are beneficial to the pastor and the church, it is important for the pastor to realize that this still is not a healthy working relationship. The pastor is the head of the church, not the patriarch. The pastor has been called by God to lead the church. The patriarch has come and assumed the role of leading the church. The pastor needs to be able to take control of the church from the hands of the patriarch, so that, he can lead it in the direction God has for that church.

There are two situations that a pastor will face in dealing with patriarchs or matriarchs. They will either support the pastor, or they will oppose the pastor. It is important to note that their opposition might not be on all things. It might just occur on those things that are near and dear to them. In these situations a pastor has to first assess the importance of that area in the lives of the patriarch and matriarch. If they are unwilling to move in that area, then the pastor needs to determine whether this is an area important enough to risk alienating the patriarch or matriarch by fighting with them over it.

A patriarch that has been very supportive of the pastor and the church should be dealt with differently than a person that has fought the pastor every step of the way. We will address the patriarch who wants to oppose the pastor below. The patriarch that has been supportive of the pastor needs to be addressed with the same respect that he has shown the pastor. The pastor should make every effort to address the problem area in a non-confrontational way. This works best when the pastor has already established a good rapport with the patriarch. This could be a weekly breakfast or coffee time to discuss the progress and growth of the church. This should be a one-on-one time where the pastor should seek for, and ask for, the support of the patriarch before implementing anything. The patriarch should have time to address his concerns and have his questions answered during this time. This is an important time for open discussion on the issues of the church. Marlin Thomas addresses the importance of this time when he states, “Those individuals who experience the disagreement speak directly with each other about the disagreement, and discover that a potential storm is transformed into united energy for mission. They may disagree on a precise definition of the problem, and may also have differing views for a solution. But they are spiritually connected, and work diligently together in search of mutually satisfying options to resolve the situation.”⁸⁹ If the pastor can get the support of the patriarch, then any change will be approved by the rest of the congregation.

Glenn Daman addresses the importance of working with the patriarch when he states:

Pastors can avoid being entangled in controversy by learning to work with the tribal chief of the congregation. Remember, this individual has considerable influence in the church. A pastor sometimes wrongly assumes that the tribal chief disagrees with his ideas because he is carnal and power driven. In most cases,

⁸⁹ Thomas, 29.

however, the tribal chief has risen to the rank he holds because of his faith and long-term involvement in the church. A tribal chief often provides the spiritual stability small churches need during changes in pastoral leadership.

Because small churches tend to experience rapid turnover in pastoral leadership, people in the church do not always look to the pastor to provide the stability needed to see the church through difficult times. Rather, the tribal chief is the stabilizing influence. When a pastor seeks to unseat a tribal chief, he finds himself not only at odds with the tribal chief, but at odds with the congregation. When the church becomes unsettled because the pastor and the tribal chief have entered into conflict, the people will not look to the pastor for stability and security, but will turn to the tribal chief.

If a pastor desires to have influence in the growth and stability of the congregation, he must learn to work side by side with the tribal chief, gaining his trust and support. When the pastor enlists the support of the tribal chief for a new ministry or a change in ministry, the entire congregation will readily adopt the idea. They will no longer see the change as a threat to the stability of the church.⁹⁰

The old saying, “Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer,” applies very well to working with patriarchs and matriarchs.

Fight them

Fighting with the patriarch or matriarch over control of the church is the worse case scenario that a pastor can come across, and it should be avoided at all cost. A pastor should exhaust all other avenues before embarking on a fight with the patriarch. Saying this, there are times when it is absolutely necessary to stand and fight for something. But the pastor better make sure that it is an important enough area to risk the harm that could be done to the church, his family, and himself.

There are times when the pastor has no other choice but to stand up to the patriarch. In these situations, it is, first, good for the pastor to talk to his area leadership to seek advice and to make sure this is a last resort. Many times they have dealt with similar situations, personally, or know of someone that has dealt with a similar situation that

⁹⁰ Daman article.

would be a good resource for the pastor. It is also important to let the area leadership know of the situation so they can pray for the pastor during this confrontation, and be ready to field any phone calls from the patriarch, or anyone else in the church, who might call to complain about the pastor. Secondly, the pastor should contact other clergy in the area to ask them to pray for this situation, and the coming confrontation. Thirdly, the pastor should have spent much time in prayer himself over the situation. This should include praying for God to change the heart of the patriarch, so that, he can be used more fully by God in the church. Lastly, the pastor should confront the patriarch with one or two other members of the church that are in agreement with the pastor, preferably, board members or elders.

The confrontation should begin and end in prayer. The patriarch should be told that the church loves and admires his support. The pastor should voice his concerns, and/or the direction the church is going in to the patriarch. He should ask for his support. The patriarch should be allowed to voice his concerns, and ask any questions, or for any clarifications. As much time as is needed should be given to address all the patriarch's concerns and questions. This meeting should not be rushed. If, through the course of the meeting, it is clear that the patriarch will not support the pastor, then the pastor should once again ask for him to support the church by not publicly opposing the pastor, or the church's direction.

After the meeting, the pastor should move forward as quickly as possible in the new direction, or with the change. This will allow little time for the patriarch or matriarch to build an opposing voice from the other members of the church, which will begin shortly after the pastor leaves through many phone calls. The pastor and the other members that

went with him and the church leadership should continue to pray for the situation until it is resolved.

If the area being disputed is important enough for the patriarch, then the pastor should realize at this point that a war will break out. This war will not end until either the patriarch or the pastor has left the church. These wars will not end with compromise. The pastor will have had to prepare himself to see this through until the end before he even confronts the patriarch. If he is not willing to fight the war that will take place, then he should never confront the patriarch. He should be willing to see it through until the patriarch has left the church, and stay on another year or two to help the church heal from the battles that were waged. The church will need the pastor's strength and determination to set the new course for the church over the next few months.

Work around them

A third alternative for dealing with patriarchs and matriarchs is to work around them. This might sound impossible, but it can work, especially in churches where the pastor and the patriarch are at odds, and the church membership supports the patriarch. This is accomplished by creating a different environment that is separate from them. This process will take a long time, but it is the best way for the pastor to transfer the power from the patriarch to the pastor. This is a process that best deals with the patriarch or matriarch that will not relinquish control of the church. This is a good approach for churches that are made up of mostly one family.

The purpose for doing this is to develop a group of people in the church that find their support from each other, rather than the patriarch. This is best done through Bible study

groups that the patriarch or other supporters of the patriarch do not attend. This could be a new believer's group, or a group of new attendees to the church. The goal is for this group to build a bond among themselves away from the church body. By doing this, the pastor allows a separate group to grow and mature away from the grip of the patriarch. In this way, these group members will develop friendships among themselves, and not as much with the established members of the church. The reason for doing this is because the patriarch feels it is his responsibility to approve, or offer the hand of welcome, to the new attendee. If this welcome does not happen then the new attendee is ostracized by the established attendees until the patriarch gives said approval. Once this group is established, and has been attending church for a while, the pastor can begin moving them into positions in the church. When the pastor suggests new things, or changing something, this new group will support the pastor even if the patriarch or matriarch does not.

The pastor should also slowly introduce this newer group to the older membership. He should work at integrating them with those older members who, themselves, are not closely linked to the patriarch. The desire is that bonds will develop and grow apart from the patriarch. This will allow the church to build a foundation aside from the control of the patriarch where the pastor can build the church.

This might sound like the pastor is creating a split within the church, but he is not. This is designed to remove control of the church from the patriarch. If the patriarch realizes that the pastor has more people supporting his side then the patriarch has supporting his, then the patriarch will come to the understanding that he no longer has control of the church. The patriarch will most likely leave the church after a short time of

trying to regain control of the church once again. When his attempt fails, he will leave rather than work under someone else.

There are not any good ways of dealing with a patriarch or matriarch who oppose the pastor. The pastor has to be able to lead the church in the direction God intended for it. This has to be done free of any man-made hierarchy. The best case scenario is to have a patriarch that is willing to work with the pastor, and is willing to submit to the pastor's leadership.

Conclusion

Every small church will have a patriarch or matriarch. It is vitally important for the incoming pastor to quickly identify this person. In many cases, the pastor will meet them very early on in their initial visit to the church. This person will have the unofficial control of the church. The pastor needs to understand that not all patriarchs and matriarchs are bad. Some can be very helpful in moving the church forward, or in dealing with problem people in the congregation. The wise pastor will recognize who this individual is early on in their ministry, and build a rapport with them very quickly.

The new pastor will commit ministry suicide if he tries to ignore the patriarch or matriarch early in their ministry. He will quickly find out that he will not be able to get approval for any of his programs or suggestions. He needs to learn the unofficial procedure in doing things. This requires getting input from the patriarch or matriarch. The new pastor will also commit ministry suicide if he opposes this person early on in their ministry, or attempts to make any changes in the church without first seeking this person's approval. Their stamp of approval will make any change much easier.

The patriarch or matriarch will be the pastor's greatest ally, or his worst enemy.

Which it will be will be determined on how the pastor builds his relationship with this individual.

CHAPTER 4

TRADITION

Introduction

Tradition is one of the hardest things that a pastor will have to deal with in a church, and every pastor will have to deal with it throughout their ministry. Traditions are present in every church. They are events or programs that start harmlessly enough, and in many cases are very helpful to church growth and/or church moral, but they continue on and on until they become tradition. But, traditional things are not always bad. We all deal with traditions in our own lives. Christmas time is full of tradition, both in the church and in our homes. In most homes, people eat traditional meals for different holidays. Churches also have traditions that are carried on from year to year. The annual Christmas program, Sunday School picnics, and Watch Night services are examples of church traditions. These are not bad events. Where tradition causes a problem is when we continue to do the same thing year after year and no one knows why we do it, but no one is willing to change it, because it is tradition. Some examples of this are church music, church curriculum, and who occupies what position in the church. These things can hinder a church from growing, but they will not get changed because of the attitude of the people, which is, “We have always done it this way.”

This chapter will define what makes something traditional in the church. It will also address the problems that tradition brings to the church. It will show how tradition has been a problem in the church as far back as Christ, as we will see His problems with the traditional elements of the church. The last part of this chapter will deal with some solutions that pastors can use to eliminate the old traditional programs that have become “sacred cows” in their churches.

Definition

Before we look at how to deal with tradition, let us get a better grasp of what tradition is, or is not. We need to get a good definition to start us off. A common dictionary states tradition is, “The knowledge, doctrines, customs, practices, etc., transmitted from generation to generation; also, the transmission of such knowledge, doctrines, etc. The body of unwritten Christian doctrine, handed down through successive generations.”⁹¹ This is a good basic definition, but we need to understand that there is a difference between tradition that comes to us from the Bible, and tradition that comes from dear Aunt Mary. Jackson Carroll describes this difference by stating, “Every one of the historic faiths has a Tradition (capital T) to which it looks as a final authority. But this Tradition has, through the years, generated traditions (lower t) that are historically and contextually bound expressions of the Tradition as the religious community has engaged in the reflexive process of retraditionizing. The temptation is always to turn tradition into Tradition.”⁹²

⁹¹ Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, Vol.2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, Inc., 1981), s.v. “tradition.”

⁹² Carroll and Roof, 213.

The tradition that we are talking about here is the traditions, or rituals, that come from people in the church and become a part of the church's fabric. They develop over time and for many different reasons. Jackson Carroll defines tradition this way, "Tradition involves habits, or repetitive patterns in social life, which function to undergird a sense of order and continuity in human experience."⁹³ Nancy Foltz uses the term rituals instead of traditions, but she means the same thing in her use of the term. She describes rituals by stating, "Rituals are patterned, predictable, repetitive behaviors that can be either formal or informal. They are often subtle, natural movements and patterns that emerge over time. Rituals are part of the fabric of our lives, and of the small church."⁹⁴ She then mentions the source of these traditions and rituals can be determined through the people of the congregation. She states, "The oral historians in the congregation can tell you when and how different rituals in the church and community originated."⁹⁵ These people can be helpful in determining how deeply this tradition is held within the church or community.

What George Barna says about the difference between tradition and vision because of how it applies to this topic is good. He states, "Tradition is generally a reflection of the past. Vision is always a reflection of the future."⁹⁶ It is this clinging to the traditions of the past, and the lack of looking to the future that creates the problems that tradition brings to the church.

⁹³ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade C. Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 51.

⁹⁴ Nancy T. Foltz, *Caring for the Small Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1994), 33.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ George Barna, *The Power of Vision* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 110.

The problems of tradition

The problems of tradition are wide-spread in the church. The funny thing is most churches would argue that they have very few traditions. Pastors and church leaders might even be annoyed at the suggestion that their church is bound by tradition, but the reality is most small churches are stuck in tradition. George Barna states, “For the last quarter-century it has become common practice to criticize churches for not trying new methods or ideas. But despite this widespread ridicule of churches’ stubborn adherence to outdated traditions and practices, thousands continue to resist reasonable change.”⁹⁷ These traditions create many problems for the pastor trying to lead a small congregation. Three main problems that traditions create are: they bind the church to set patterns which allow no flexibility, they will not allow any change to fix the problems with which they are dealing, and traditions create a negative attitude that drags the small church down. These three problem areas must be dealt with in order for negative traditions to be removed from the small church.

Binds the church to a set pattern

The first problem that tradition brings to the church is that it paints the church into a corner. It sets a pattern for how the church is going to run, without allowing for any leeway to this pattern. Tradition forces the pastor to function under very specific guidelines and rules, which many times, have no Biblical background for them. The pastor then has to lead and grow the church under these guidelines and rules that he had no say in developing, and he has no power to change. This can be both frustrating and discouraging.

⁹⁷ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 67.

The church, on the other hand, sees these rules as barriers to keep the church from wandering into areas they term, “liberal.” Most small churches pride themselves on their “conservative” thinking and viewpoints. It is common to hear someone talk, with pride, about the conservative nature of their church. Carroll and Roof describe what this conservative thinking really is when they state, “Their conservatism is not necessarily conservative, in the usual contrast between liberal and conservative theological or political views. Rather, they seek to conserve that which they have inherited from their denominational tradition, their own congregation’s experience, and their respective ethnic heritage. As a result, their preferred practices and programs come more from the past rather than being an adaptive response to contemporary culture.”⁹⁸ This conservative and traditional method by which the church functions is so much a part of the church’s culture that it becomes the only acceptable way of functioning. The people of the church would struggle in ever accepting another approach to running the church. For many, they have never known of another way in which the church could function.

It is interesting that people who are involved with a small church get so used to the way that church functions that it becomes second nature to them. They do not know how a tradition or ritual started, and they are not interested in finding out the reason for it, either. They just know that this is the way it has always been done. Anthony Pappas describes the confusion that ensues if a pastor would ever ask a congregant why something is done the way it is, or when it is. He writes:

Ask a small-church person “Why?” however, and an entirely different response will ensue. The first and most likely response will be confusion. Not only is the question difficult to answer, the reason for asking it is almost beyond comprehension. Small-church society is not primarily self-reflective. Self-

⁹⁸ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade C. Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 137.

analysis, asking why about behavior, is not an ordinary activity. The answer is so obvious as to remove the need for the question. The behavior is its own rationale. 'We do this because we do this.' What we do and how we do it are almost never at issue because we do what we have always done, and we do it as we have always done it. To ask why is almost to question the integrity of the group, to shake the foundations that hold us up. We have forgotten why we started doing it this way, but now it's our way of doing things, our way of enacting and living out life. So the first response to 'Why?' is confusion and, if pushed, defensiveness.⁹⁹

It would seem strange for someone in the business world to do something, or have his company do something for a reason that none of them knew, but it happens all the time in the church. Congregations go about doing the same things year after year without knowing why, or even asking the question, "Why?" and it is accepted.

Does not allow for change

The second thing that small church traditions do is hinder, or stop completely, any way or desire to change. As was mentioned earlier, the patterns established by the small church culture set up barriers that must be broken through in order for change to take place. Loren Seibold addresses this problem when she states, "Small churches cling to tradition. While the world all around them is changing, the church remains the one place that stays the same. Here members can conserve their values and beliefs, their relationships and friendships, and their sense of what is right about the world. It is no accident that small churches pass their strengths and their pathologies along from generation to generation, even though the entire group is replaced: generations of departed saints are still present in the hearts of those who remain."¹⁰⁰ The result of the

⁹⁹ Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church* (Herndon, VA: An Alban Institute Publication, 2000), 38.

¹⁰⁰ Loren Seibold, "Why I Love Small Churches." *Christianity Today* 43(Feb. 8 1999); 64.

church not changing is that the church becomes a stagnant non-growing, non-moving organism that ends up slowly dying.

One aspect of not wanting or allowing change, is that the people that actively work in the church become so overwhelmed with keeping the traditions going that they do not have the energy to start or try new things. The result is the church is so busy maintaining its traditions that it cannot find the energy or the time to grow. Anthony Pappas explains this struggle by stating, “The goal of small-church behavior, then, is maintenance, not transformation; preservation, not change. The small-church world is essentially fixed and unchangeable. When change does occur it is often disruptive and harmful and so gives a negative feeling to the very concept of change. And if things are difficult, to add to the burden of endurance, the burden of responsibility for change is often crushing, not liberating.”¹⁰¹ If the saying that, “20% of the people do 80% of the work” is true, then it is no wonder that the workers of the church feel overwhelmed when the pastor makes any new suggestions, or comes up with some new program that he wants to start. These 20% need to let go of the old and embrace the new.

The reality in an organization is that change has to happen. It is inevitable. The reason that change has to take place is that society is constantly changing. If the church, or any business, does not change than the result is that it will become obsolete and irrelevant. It is important for congregations to realize that change has to take place, but change does not mean that you are compromising the church’s fundamental beliefs. Dr. Elmer Towns calls these fundamental beliefs “principles.” He says that these principles can not change, but the methods by which we communicate those principles can change.

¹⁰¹ Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, 62.

He has a little saying that he uses when he teaches his classes about this. It states, “Methods are many, principles are few. Methods may change, but principles never do.”¹⁰² This is a good statement for what is acceptable change in a church. Note, though, that the church needs to change.

Hurts morale

Tradition can lead a church to its slow death. The people do not realize that the church is dying because they have gotten so used to things being the way that they are that they accept the status quo. The traditions have bogged down the church to such an extent that the people refuse to try something new, or to some extent, are so weighed down by the burden of keeping the old traditions that they do not have the energy to try something new. Consequently, the church becomes stagnant and can not grow. The result is that the people get more tired, some will eventually leave the church, the children grow up and leave because they want something new, and the church slowly dies.

The question might be asked as to how a church could get so wrapped up in it's traditions that it would allow itself to die? What Hollis Green says in his book about this is worth noting. He states, “A church is going to age, mature and become bound by tradition. No one is going to let the old ways die. Consequently, the tradition continues. The machinery is kept in motion even though the church is making no progress. Yet,

¹⁰² Comment of Dr. Elmer Towns, during a D. Min. seminar “Various Descriptions of Revivals,” Lynchburg, VA, July 2006, author’s notes, Wampum, PA.

many clergymen and congregants are unaware that the church is dying. This lack of awareness contributes to the mortality rate of local congregations.”¹⁰³

Tradition does not occur in the church on purpose. It is slowly worked into the fabric of the church. The same events occur year after year. The same people do the same thing year after year. A never-ending cycle is formed and the church unknowingly has walked into the trap of tradition. Hollis Green states,

Accepting the pattern of previous patterns forced upon each succeeding generation by their elders, seems to cause an adjustment to mediocrity. The endless routine of activities that have little meaning overwhelm the people by demanding their time and presence until there is nothing left for the spiritual life of the church. An automatic and superficial response to the needs of the people develops. The vision of the congregation dims and the spirit wilts. Slowly the programs and opportunities that once held a promise of fulfillment become a burden and a drudgery. Everyone attends out of loyalty but there is no real personal motivation by love that would demand a meaningful involvement.¹⁰⁴

Tradition in the Bible

Tradition is not a problem that has occurred in just the modern church. Tradition has hindered the church from its very beginning. Christ and the apostles dealt with the problems that tradition had brought to the church in their day. Some of the verses that show the problem that tradition created in the Bible are:

1. Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat! Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother and anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to honor his father with it. Thus you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition (Matthew 15:2-6).

¹⁰³ Green, 206.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 39.

2. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men (Mark 7:8).
3. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that (Mark 7:13).
4. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely jealous for the traditions of my father (Galatians 1:14).
5. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Colossians 2:8).

Christ had to combat the traditions that had been espoused by the Pharisees and Sadducees in His day. These traditions had drove people from the Jewish faith, and had set up a wall between the people and the Jewish leadership. These traditions were not laws that had been given by God (like the Ten Commandments), but were rules and regulations that had been added to the law by the Pharisees and the Sadducees in order to develop a scale by which people could rate themselves on how holy and upright they were living. Christ had to stand against these traditions because they gave the false impression that one could be declared righteous by how they lived, and not through God's redemptive work.

The traditions that Paul and the other apostles had to stand up against came from the Jews. These traditions involved the practice of circumcision and eating food offered to idols, or any other unclean foods. Paul, before his conversion, was one that promoted these teachings, and even persecuted the Christians for their beliefs. After his conversion, he was persecuted for standing against these teachings. He now promoted salvation through Christ and not through the works and traditions taught by men. It was these Jewish traditions that plagued the growth of the Christian church through the first century.

Solutions to dealing with tradition

There are four solutions that the author found from the literature dealing with traditions and talking with those that have had to deal with tradition. These are: adoption, evaluation, perseverance, and developing a change attitude.

Adoption

This first idea comes from Carl Dudley. This idea centers on the fact that small churches are very family oriented, as has been discussed previously. His idea is not to change the environment of the church, but increase the amount of people that can be ushered into the church family. He uses the term “adopting” new people into the church. By this, he means that a new person in the church would be slowly brought into the church family. Dudley states that adoption occurs when, “the newcomer joins the history of the family.”¹⁰⁵ This means that the traditions already present in the church would be accepted by the new attendee. This new person would accept the family as it is, and want to join it. This occurs when “the faith statement of the new member must be mingled with the story or history of the congregation.”¹⁰⁶ Once this happens, Dudley would argue that the new attendee has been ushered into, and accepted by, the family.

The problem with Dudley’s idea is that this only allows for slow growth. It is also dependent on the “one” (who most likely is the patriarch or matriarch of the church) who allows entrance into the family. If this person is very selective, or if they are determined to allow only those with similar tastes to their’s to enter, then the growth of the church will be very slow and narrow. It will not open the door for new styles and tastes to come

¹⁰⁵ Carl Dudley, *Effective Small Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 61.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

into the church and the church will become dominated by people who all think alike. This is not how a church grows and thrives. This is how a church dies.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important part of keeping the church current. It also allows for the ending of programs that no longer work, or are outdated in the church. This is the best way of keeping the church from becoming stagnant in its programs. The truth of the matter is this does not happen in very many churches. There is not a great deal of evaluating programs to see which are working well, and which are not. Most churches will not evaluate their programs because they are under the assumption that since it worked well in the past it will work well in the future. But this is just not true. A program that was very successful in the past might not be accomplishing anything in the church right now. It is just another program that the church is keeping going. This bogs the church down with more programs, and keeps workers busy running the program when they could be much more useful doing something else.

Evaluation is an important aspect of keeping a church healthy. George Barna talks about the need to evaluate programs on a regular basis as a part of being a highly effective church. He states, “Leaders/pastors at highly effective churches drive the process of challenging the value of existing ministries, programs, policies and practices. They train their fellow leaders to recognize that every program and policy has a life cycle and that eventually every program and policy must be updated to reflect environmental changes. Killing a program or altering a policy is not a sign of defeat—it is a mark of

vitality.”¹⁰⁷ Barna encourages churches to evaluate and modify their programs. He argues that this is a sign of progress, improvement, and growth in the church.

Lovett Weems addresses his thoughts about long standing programs that have passed their usefulness. The author agreed with some of what he said, but disagreed with other things that were said. Weems holds to the belief of letting bad things about the culture in a church slowly die away. He states, “Time may render some values no longer relevant.”¹⁰⁸ This is very true. As the world around the church changes, the methods of doing church will also have to change. Therefore, all church methods will need to be evaluated to see how relevant they still are. Weems then addresses what a pastor needs to do with those methods and values that have become obsolete. He states, “What do you do with those dysfunctional, perhaps even idolatrous, elements of a church that are so irritating. . . .You ignore them. They become less significant over time through neglect.”¹⁰⁹ The author of this paper disagreed with this thought. He would like to think that these elements would become less significant over time, but this is not always true. It will depend on the person who holds those methods or values. If they are a patriarch in the church, those methods and values will not die no matter how wrong they are. They must be killed. Otherwise, they will infect the church for years to come. The power of the one who holds those methods and values will determine their life expectancy.

Evaluation is a key component in fixing problem areas in a church. If we do not keep evaluating programs and methods in the church, then we run the risk of those programs

¹⁰⁷ George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999), 64.

¹⁰⁸ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Take the Next Step* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 65.

¹⁰⁹ Weems, 65.

becoming “sacred cows” that are passed on from year to year. It is the lack of evaluating that allows things to become traditions.

Perseverance

The most important quality a leader can possess as he deals with tradition is perseverance. A leader will have to endure criticism, obstinence, and the inevitable backlash that occurs when dealing with traditions in the church. Clinton addresses these issues by developing an “Eight Stage Leadership Backlash Cycle” for what happens when a leader receives negative reactions to a decision made by the group when ramifications to that decision begin. This cycle is defined this way:

1. The leader gets a vision (direction) from God.
2. The followers are convinced of the direction.
3. The group moves in the direction given.
4. The group experiences persecution, hard times, or attacks from Satan—spiritual warfare is common.
5. There is backlash from the group.
6. The leader is driven to God to seek affirmation in spite of the action’s ramifications.
7. God reveals Himself further: who He is, what He intends to do. He makes it clear that He will deliver.
8. God vindicates Himself and the leader.¹¹⁰

A leader that deals with changing any aspect of the church will have to deal with the fury that will result. But this cannot hinder him from evaluating and dealing with the different programs that are in the church. Those programs that are no longer accomplishing the purpose that they were originally intended to do need to be revamped or ended. This will require the pastor to keep moving forward, no matter the opposition.

¹¹⁰ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 109.

Change attitude

As has been discussed earlier, small churches get stuck in the rut of tradition. Many times this occurs because of a fear of what might happen if we do change. Many people would rather stay with something they know, even if it does not work, than change to something they do not know. They are afraid that doing something new might be worse than what they are currently doing, or change the church negatively. Glenn Daman addresses these problems when he states, “Change creates a conflict with the past as the church seeks to move forward to the future.”¹¹¹ He later writes, “Because the small church is relationally driven, people are not willing to embrace changes that may negatively affect relationships within the congregation.”¹¹² What this shows is a fear of change, and there are some things that a pastor can do to correct this attitude.

The first thing a pastor needs to do is give his congregation an understanding that change is Biblical, and even required of believers. The Bible is full of verses that talk about the need of the believer to change. Some of them are:

1. The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person (I Samuel 10:6).
2. And He said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).
3. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (I Corinthians 15:51, 52).
4. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Corinthians 5:17).

¹¹¹ Glenn C. Daman, “Dealing with Conflict in the Smaller Church,” www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal (2005), accessed March 2006.

¹¹² Ibid.

God wants us to be changed so that He can use us. God cannot use who we were, He can only use who we can become. If we cannot change spiritually, then we cannot be used by God. The verses above show that God wants to change us, and that we need to be changed in order to be acceptable to Him. Our current state is not acceptable to God, and not acceptable for entrance into heaven. We must change in order to stand before a holy and perfect God.

The second thing a pastor needs to do to combat this is to develop an attitude, in the church, where change is not feared, but understood. This will require time and patience on the part of the pastor. He will need to lead the church through some small changes. These changes do not have to be big or significant, but they need to be visible to everyone. It might be changing a picture or poster on the wall that has been there for years. It might be changing something in the order of worship on Sunday morning. It might be having someone other than the normal people pray. Whatever it is, it needs to be noticeable, but not significant. Making small changes like this will show the congregation that change can be good, or at least, harmless.

Once the congregation has seen some changes take place, the pastor can be a little bolder in making more significant changes. The pastor will have to be careful that he does not proceed too fast, but he needs to keep the momentum of change going. John Maxwell in his book, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, sums up this idea well. He states, “Strong leaders understand that to change direction, you first have to create forward progress.”¹¹³ He states later that, “With enough momentum, nearly any kind of

¹¹³ John Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 165.

change is possible.”¹¹⁴ But he makes it clear that momentum must start with the leader. Once the leader has momentum, the followers can catch it and move forward with the leader.

Lastly, the pastor must tap into the younger generations in the church who see change daily, and accept it as a common event. Those of us who are older have seen great changes take place throughout our lifetimes, but the youth of today see changes weekly. Changes in society that took years in our day, now only take a month or two. The postmodern generation sees constant change as a common thing. Elmer Towns, in talking about the spread of postmodern thought, said it is enhanced by four avenues of our society. He calls these four things, “the interstate, the Internet, the cell phone, and the television.”¹¹⁵ Our young people are living in a world with limitless boundaries, limitless communication, and access to limitless knowledge. Therefore, to them, change is commonplace. This generation is helpful in implementing change into the church. They want change, and they will help create and develop change in your church if you will allow them. When the older people in your congregation see the youth actively involved in doing things in the church, they will jump on board. Pastors need to take advantage of change agents that are already present in their congregations.

Summary

Tradition is something that has the tendency to hang around. That is why it is tradition. It has always been that way. It is important for the pastor to be able to evaluate

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 173.

¹¹⁵ Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2004), 159.

the traditional programs, methods, and values of the church to see if they are still relevant to the culture around the church. Some methods have run their course and need to be updated or removed completely. The pastor will have to make these tough choices as he is directed by God, and he will face opposition for whatever changes he tries to implement. But He will have to be persistent in moving forward, not because he wants to show his congregation his stubbornness for making changes, but because God has directed him to make those changes, and he wants to be obedient to God. A good way to end this chapter is with the old saying that goes, “It’s better to look forward and make new mistakes than to look back and do nothing.”

CHAPTER 5

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Introduction

The problem of finances is not limited to small churches. All churches deal with money issues. There is not a church in America that does not have discussions about finances at their monthly leadership meetings. But the financial problems of smaller churches are different from larger churches in that they hinder the basic functions of the church, including paying utility bills or the pastor's salary. Jackson Carroll, in his book, addresses these issues when he states, "Churches with membership of less than two hundred persons are likely to have resources insufficient or barely adequate to maintain the institution and carry on a program."¹¹⁶ It might be sad to say, but money has a lot to do with everything that a small church can, and can not do. It is so important Lyle Schaller states, "Money, rather than ministry and mission, becomes the most influential factor in policy making."¹¹⁷ The author wishes this was not the case, but it too often is true.

¹¹⁶ Jackson W. Carroll, *Small Churches Are Beautiful* (New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 125.

¹¹⁷ Lyle Schaller, *The Small Membership Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 100.

Problems finances create

The problems that small churches face in regards to finances are many. In most small churches, the finances will consume much of the discussion when the church leadership meets together. They have the unenviable task of trying to juggle their meager finances to cover the bills and whatever programs they are running. The problem areas that we will address in this paper are: pastor salaries, church growth, church moral, and church appearance. Each of these areas has an important role in the church, but each will cost the church financially. That is why these are problem areas brought on by the lack of funds in the church.

Pastor salaries

The biggest financial concern for the small church pastor is his salary and health care. Some people feel that the pastor should trust God for their salary, but the small church pastor needs to feed and provide for his family, also. It would be nice if the only thing the small church pastor had to think about were the things of God, but this is not the case. He has to worry over the financial situation of his church and his home. His salary is just a portion of what he needs. He also has concerns over the rising cost of health insurance. The small church is having an increasingly hard time paying for the health insurance of the pastor and his family. Small church pastors almost always work for less pay than the denomination's minimum standards, and they do so because of God's call, but they always have to deal and work with the financial strains of the small church. Lyle Schaller states on this issue, "Small-church clergy are significantly more likely than

large-church clergy to agree that their salaries are too low to meet family needs and too low in comparison to comparably educated professionals.”¹¹⁸ The financial strain of having a full-time pastor is hurting the small church in our country. The result is that many clergy have to step out of ministry, or work bi-vocationally to help the church out, and/or provide for their families. This problem is seen through Bob Wells’ comments, when he states, “Low clergy salaries make it difficult for pastors to be true to their calling, the study contends. And this lack of income is causing many talented seminary graduates to enter other professions or other forms of ministry.”¹¹⁹ The pastor’s salary is usually, by far, the highest item in the small church budget. It is an area that can create tension with the church leadership or the congregation if finances get tight. The small church pastor has to be ever knowing of the church’s financial status.

Church growth

Another problem that a lack of finances brings to the church is in the area of church growth. The small church needs to grow. It knows that it needs to grow. It might even have plans on how to grow. But what hold them back are the finances needed to put the plans into action. George Barna realizes the necessary cost of growing a church. He states, “If you intend to grow, you will have to invest significant resources in that effort. Rare is the church that embarks on a growth campaign and does not have to scrimp and save, or to allocate sacrificially.”¹²⁰ The small church is now stuck in this “catch-22”

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁹ Bob Wells, “Clergy Pay Causing Problems for Churches,” www.spitirestoration.org (2003) accessed March 2006.

¹²⁰ George Barna, *Church Growth; New attitudes for a New Era* (Glendale, CA: The Barna Research Group, 1989), 18.

situation where they need money to get new people coming to the church, but they need new people coming to the church to get the money. It is a difficult situation for the small church.

There are many wonderful programs out there to help churches grow, but they all cost something. The small church does not have the resources to put towards programs. The fear is that if they spend money on a program and it does not work, then they are in worse shape than they were before because they lost the cost of the program, and they still do not have people in the church. The small church does not feel that they can take chances on programs unless they know for sure it will work. This makes it even tougher on a pastor to grow the church.

Church morale

The widest reaching affect that finances have on a church is in the area of church morale. When the church people realize that finances are a problem, it can have a demoralizing effect on everything the church does. The people begin to feel defeated, and have a sense that they will be unable to do much of anything due to lack of funds. Mavis addresses this attitude when he says, “This type of desperation finance is destructive to morale. Every deficit suggests the church is failing. Some of the donors become overly sensitive about their congregation’s poverty and they conclude that sacrifice is unwarranted. They become suspicious of new projects, being fearful that they will be left holding the sack.”¹²¹ Daman, also addresses this demoralizing effect that finances have on the church when he states, “The morale of a small church is often

¹²¹ Mavis, 105.

fragile. Because the church may struggle with finances, staff, and resources, there is a concern that the church will no longer be viable.”¹²²

This is a terrible feeling for the church people, especially if they are giving regularly to the church. They feel that they are giving, but even that is not helping. They begin to wonder if they are throwing their money into a bottomless pit. The small church suffers tremendously from this condition because there are not enough people the church to meet the monthly bills, the pastor’s salary, and the plans needed to grow. The people might give well, but it is still just enough for the church to scrape by from month to month.

The demoralizing effect on the pastor is also tremendous. He spends more time than he should trying to figure out ways to save money, and, secondly, how to grow the church without using any money. Nancy Foltz deals with this area in her book when she writes, “The pastor-educator has visions for this small congregation, but the resources just are not there to reach that vision. The frustration of a consistent shortage of funds and unmet goals often brings a low self-image or low morale to the congregation and its professional leadership.”¹²³ Consequently, the church struggles forward spending as much time trying to make ends meet as they are trying to get people into the church.

The result of all of this is that the church knows it needs to get more people into the pews so that it can have a larger pool of money to grow the church. Without the pool of money needed to attract new people, there are not any new people coming that could give to the church to increase the pool of money. The result is this vicious circle becomes demoralizing to the entire church.

¹²² Glenn C. Daman “Dealing with Conflict in the Smaller Church,” www.ag.org/enrichmentjournal (2005), accessed March 2006.

¹²³ Nancy T. Foltz, *Religious Education in the Small Membership Church* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990), 187.

Church appearance

One of the biggest problems that a lack of finances has on the church is the affect it has on the upkeep of the church building and its furnishings. Making the church look nice and maintaining the church property cost money that the church might not be able to afford. Many churches that struggle with finances do not have money for the all the necessary expenses that the church needs to pay. Therefore, the church needs to make a decision on what it will pay for, and what it will let go in hopes it can be dealt with later. One of these areas is maintaining the church building, or beautifying the church property. Many times the congregation views these expenses as not being an immediate need so they are pushed back until funds can be raised to deal with them later.

There is a problem with continually pushing the church building and appearance to the back burner. It comes when something gets so bad that it has to be fixed. It can not be pushed back any further. The result, many times, is that the repair at this stage will cost the church more than it would have if the item had been properly maintained in the first place. Therefore, it is important for the church to keep up on any repairs that need to be made as they become aware of them, so that the future expense will not be to replace that item completely, which would cost the church much more.

Also, it is important for the small church to keep the church looking up to date. When visitors come to the church they want to see that the church looks nice, and is well maintained. If it is not, they may not come back. As the old saying goes, “You can only make a first impression once.” It is important for the church to make sure that it is an attractive place to come to worship. Consequently, it is good for the small church to spend some money on landscaping and flowers to beautify its appearance.

Biblical thoughts on church finances

The Bible has much to say about finances and giving to the Lord. The Bible sets up a basic figure that each person should give, and that is called a tithe, which is 10% of a person's income. This was established through the law when it was delivered to Moses, and then to the nation of Israel. The Bible also calls on believers to give up and beyond the tithe out of joy and appreciation for what God has done for them. This is called giving offerings to God. The Bible clearly calls for believers to give. It is expected of all believers to give to the Lord based on what God has given to them, and what more they feel they should give out of the abundant supplies God has provided for them. The verses listed below are no where near all the verses that deal with finances from the Bible, but they give a good overview of what God expects from believers in the way of finances.

Giving to God:

1. Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give (Exodus 25:2).
2. Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, "How do we rob you?" "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:8-10).
3. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (II Cor. 9:7).

Giving for ministers:

4. Take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or staff; for the worker is worth his keep (Mt. 10:10).

5. In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (I Co. 9:14).
6. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The worker deserves his wages" (I Tim. 5:18).

Giving for others:

7. Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made (I Corinthians 16:1, 2).

These verses show that giving to God can be done in different ways. It can be done by directly giving to God. It can be done by giving to support God's ministers and their work, and it can be done by meeting the needs of others who can not afford to pay for their own needs. Jesus clearly shows, in the parable recorded in Matthew 25:34-45, that giving to others to meet their needs is the same as giving to God.

Most of us do not like to deal with finances. We like to deal with them even less when they involve the church. But it is very clear in scripture that finances are an important part of the duty of each believer. It is not just the church that benefits from a person giving their tithes and offerings it is also the person that benefits through their obedience to God's directive.

Solutions for church finances

The financial problems of the small church are obvious, but how can they be solved. The pastor will need to do at least one of four things to deal with the financial problems in his church. These are: create a new vision for the church, encourage his people in their giving, try new programs by discontinuing defunct programs, and/or start a stewardship

program, or campaign. The pastor needs to realize that financial problems are common in the church, and can be overcome. Green addresses the potential of small church finances by stating, “The small church remains small because it usually avoids financial obligations well within its economic capacity.”¹²⁴ The secret for the small church pastor is tapping into the financial resources available in his church. These resources can be found through the current members, or can be found through future members that will be coming to the church.

Vision

The small church will not be able to see past their financial problems until they can get a vision for a different future. The pastor will need to be instrumental in leading them to this new vision. It will be a vision where the people of the church see the church and its ministries for what they can be, and not for what they currently are. The pastor needs to set the course for the church. John Maxwell makes this very true point, “The truth is that nearly anyone can steer the ship, but it takes a leader to chart the course.”¹²⁵ The people of your congregation are looking to you for their direction, both spiritually and for the future of the church. A small church pastor needs to be able to take the reins of the church and move it in the direction God has for it.

The small church pastor has to understand that moving his church and his people forward will require him to win their confidence. A pastor can not come into a church and immediately start changing everything. He needs to understand the people and the

¹²⁴ Green, 146.

¹²⁵ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 36.

reasons for doing what they are doing. Some of these reasons might be legitimate. He also needs to take time for his people to get to know him. They will not rush after a person until they are sure that they can trust him. John Maxwell states, “The leader finds the dream and then the people. The people find the leader, and then the dream.”¹²⁶ He later states, “People don’t at first follow worthy causes. They follow worthy leaders who promote worthy causes. People buy into the leader first, then the leader’s vision.”¹²⁷ It will be important for the pastor to set the course and allow the people to jump on board. For the small church, this means that their focus and vision needs to move from their finances to their ministries.

Encourage

The people in smaller churches have a hard time thinking positively about their church. They like the family atmosphere that is present in small churches, but they get discouraged knowing that they can not compete against the larger churches that seemingly have every program ever invented. They, many times, have inadequate facilities, no money to keep up what they do have, and not enough people or funds to start new programs. The result is that they get discouraged. It is important for the pastor to encourage the people in his small church. Lyle Schaller offers this encouraging information, “There is a factor that remains formative when relating to conflict dynamics. It is the rather obvious characteristic of limited resources. Amazing support is often

¹²⁶ Ibid., 145.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

given to the small membership church from the few members that it has.”¹²⁸ Schaller holds that small membership churches have a greater percentage of its members attending services and giving to the church each week than do larger churches. The pastor will need to use these points to build up the self-confidence of his people. They need to change their attitude from one of saying, “We can not do this,” to one that says, “We can do this.”

The pastor, himself, will need to have a positive attitude as he leads his church. He can not get caught up in any negative perceptions of the church. He must remain positive, and move the church forward with positive thinking. John Maxwell addresses the importance of this when he states, “Being able to navigate for others requires a leader to possess a positive attitude. . . .If you can’t confidently make the trip in your mind, you’re not going to be able to take it in real life.”¹²⁹ The pastor needs to realize that if he gets discouraged, or does not believe in what the church is doing, that it will be seen and taken on by the rest of the congregation. They will follow his lead, and his attitude.

It is also important that the pastor show appreciation for his congregation’s faithfulness to the church, and remind them what their giving is accomplishing in the church and their community whenever possible. If the pastor can shift their vision onto what they are able to accomplish, then they will stop looking at their financial shortcomings as a barrier to ministry. The pastor needs to keep them focused on what they have, and not what they are lacking.

¹²⁸ Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, 100.

¹²⁹ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 38, 39.

Try new things

Another way the church can deal with their finances is to try new methods of doing the things they have always done. It might be more cost effective to change a procedure or a supplier, than it would to keep things going the same way. Part of the mentality in a cash-strapped church is that they are afraid to change anything because they are afraid it might cost more to change it than to keep it the same. This mentality keeps the church from moving forward and improving the systems and programs that they are currently doing. Jackson Carroll addresses this problem when he states, “We are now in an era of tighter and tighter financial resources. Many congregations will close, some of necessity, some out of sheer unwillingness to experiment with new alternatives.”¹³⁰ The small church needs to realize that to stay the same is going to kill the church. Churches need to change to grow. Therefore, small churches are going to need to try new things to survive, and to get out of their financial problems.

Stewardship campaigns

Probably the best way to deal with financial deficiencies is to address the problem of church giving. We would like to think that the people in our church give their tithes regularly in our church, but the reality is that they probably are not. We should not hold it against them for many of them do want to give regularly to the Lord, but forget, do not know how to give, or even when to give. Helping our congregations to give is not unbiblical or a sign of greediness. Instead, it is helping our people to be obedient to what our Lord commanded, and this Biblical idea of giving is called, stewardship. Now,

¹³⁰ Carroll, 87.

stewardship goes beyond just giving. It includes taking care of all that God has given us, but monetary giving is what we most associate stewardship with.

Julia Wallace gives eight stewardship ideas to help increase giving in our churches.

These are:

1. Help people in the congregation see a real need—not just a challenge to meet the bottom line in the budget amount.
2. Create fun fundraising events that involve the larger area around where your congregation is located (village, town, or even city).
3. Celebrate the church’s ministry throughout the year.
4. Invite individuals to talk about how God and the church’s ministry make a difference in their lives.
5. Be practical! Not everything a congregation needs is financial.
6. Encourage church leaders to be role models in stewardship.
7. Tell people often that you believe in them and their generosity of spirit.
8. Participate in the county or school surplus auctions to obtain furniture and equipment at an economic cost.¹³¹

It is vitally important that the church finds ways of increasing their income so that they can meet the ever-climbing financial demands that are placed on the small church. The best way to do this is to increase the amount people are giving, and this is done through the use of stewardship plans.

¹³¹ Julia Kuhn Wallace, “Ideas for Stewardship in Small Churches,” www.gbod.org (2006), accessed October 2006.

Summary

The financial problems in the small church will probably never go away. Even if they are lessened for a period of time, they will be back. So, the small church pastor should not get over-burdened with the financial problems of his church. But, he does need to try and alleviate them to the best of his ability. He needs to make sure that the problem does not get so bad that it begins to affect the moral and ministries of the church. If this does happen, then he needs to put all of his time and effort toward fixing the problem, because if it continues the church will become stagnant by wallowing in its struggle. The small church pastor might not be able to remove this problem completely, but he can improve it, and he needs to keep this as his goal.

CHAPTER 6

LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS

Introduction

It seems that one of the greatest complaints heard from pastors is that they do not have enough workers in their churches. The lack of workers and leadership are especially true in smaller churches. Smaller churches have a smaller group of people from which to pull leaders. This makes it extremely hard for the small church pastor to focus on growing his church, because he is busy running all the programs that no one else wants to, or is willing to, run. This chapter will address the problems that arise from having a lack of leadership, as well as some solutions in creating workers and leaders from among the people currently in your congregation.

Lack of leadership

Most pastors in small churches will complain about the lack of people who are qualified to lead any program in their church. This is the main reason that small church pastors feel overwhelmed by their work load. Many of them are busy running as many of the programs that they can in their church, because there are not enough qualified people to run those programs. This runs down the pastor, and hinders the growth of the

congregants. Anthony Pappas addresses this lack of leadership in smaller churches when he says, “Leadership is a critical dynamic in any size church, but the small church may be especially vulnerable to the effects of ill health in this area. A large church may recognize its need for a wide, diverse, and ongoing stream of leaders. In the small church sharing leadership may be seen as threatening.”¹³² Pappas realizes the small church is just as much in need of leaders as any large church, but many times the small churches do not address this need. What the small church pastor needs to do is to begin training the people he has to take over ministries he does. Until he can make leaders out of the people in his church, he will never be able to begin any new programs or ministries. Therefore, it is vital for the pastor to create leaders out of his followers.

One way that has been suggested is to combine the resources of smaller churches to meet the leadership void that is present in smaller churches. Jim Waugh teaches the importance of small churches cooperating among each other to have the resources needed to minister effectively. He sees this as a way of moving the “old church culture” into the “new church culture” that is needed today. Many of his ideas focus around moving the center of leadership away from a central figure in the church (pastor) to a wider group of people (laity). He lists seven steps that the church needs to take to see growth. They are:

1. Seeing laity as front-line leaders of ministry.
2. Developing lay leaders.
3. Enriching sustainable congregational leadership.
4. Giving emphasis to team work and networking.
5. Promoting church-generated entrepreneurial efforts.
6. Changing worship styles.

¹³² Pappas, 105.

7. Expanding options.¹³³

He believes that the small church of the future has to be lead by the laity in order for it to survive and grow. A pastor-dominated church will only be mired in its autocratic structure and financial deficiencies.

The solution for the problem of having a lack of leadership in the church is to create leadership in the church. If all that the pastor does is to wait until a new family comes into the church with great leadership skills, he might be waiting for years. The pastor can not wait that long. He needs to deal with the leadership void by creating leaders now. The rest of this chapter will deal with the problems caused by the lack of lay leaders and how to create these leaders out of the people presently in your church.

Problems caused by a lack of lay leadership

There are some basic problems that arise when there are not enough people involved in leadership and running a church. The three main problem areas are the pastor and other leadership gets overworked, there is a lack of programs because there is no one to oversee them, and there is void in the development of the church people because they are not involved in the church ministries.

The first problem area is the pastor becomes overworked. This comes about very quickly when the pastor is the only person overseeing the church's programs. He gets overwhelmed with the time requirements and it creates a strain his own life, his home life, and the ministries of the church. A pastor or any church leadership person who is trying to run more than three or four programs will not be able to run them all effectively.

¹³³ Jim Waugh, "Cooperative Ministries into the 21st Century," www.gbod.org (2000), accessed October 2006.

They will require more time than he will be able to give them. Once the pastor or leadership person gets overwhelmed they will oppose any new programs because of the fear that they might have to do more.

This brings us to the second problem area, and that is a lack of programs. When the leadership of the church gets so overwhelmed because they are doing too much now, they do not even want to hear about a new program or idea. They feel like they cannot accomplish anymore than what they are doing, and would even like to give up some of the things that they are doing. The result is that no new programs are implemented into the church's ministries, and the church goes on with the same programs that it has been running for years because the leadership can not handle anymore. These programs will become outdated and unproductive, but the church leadership will not have the time or energy to try and find something more relevant.

The third problem area that arises due to the lack of lay leaders is the area of not developing the church's people the way God wants them to be developed. If the pastor is running around like a chicken with its head cut off trying to run all these programs, then he feels the last thing he can do is add the burden of training others. But this is exactly what the pastor needs to do. He needs to take the time and energy to develop a program of developing new leaders. Not only will this release the pastor from his many burdens, but it fulfills what God expects of him (Ephesians 4) and his people. God does not want his people to only get saved and then sit back. He wants them to get involved in ministry. It is vital for the pastor to get his people trained and moving in ministry. If the pastor does not train his laity then he will be stuck trying to run all the church's programs himself, or at least with very little help.

Biblical basis for lay leadership

The Bible has much to say about leadership. It is a book that features some of the greatest leaders the world has ever known. Every book in the Bible deals with people who are leaders. There are political leaders (Esther, the kings of Israel, and foreign kings) and spiritual leaders (Jesus, Paul, and the twelve apostles) mentioned throughout the Bible. As you look at all the great leaders throughout the Bible, it is interesting to note that the greatest of them always circled themselves with a group of followers that took on leadership roles in their ministry. Lay leadership is seen through these many examples. Even Jesus surrounded Himself with twelve apostles who He trained to become future leaders in the cause of God. The Bible gives clear direction about the importance of the common people being involved in ministry. Some examples are:

1. 'You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (Exodus 19:6).
2. And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast (Isaiah 61:6).
3. Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).
4. To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:12).
5. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:14).
6. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:5).

7. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light (I Peter 2:9)
8. And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen (Revelation 1:6).
9. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10).
10. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6).

It is clear to see from these verses, which are just a few of many, that it is the duty of God's people to be active participants in the work of spreading the gospel. God calls His people priests, which means that we have to be doing the work of God in our churches and communities.

Solutions for establishing lay leadership

The pastor's idea of increasing the role of the laity in leadership is the best solution for many of the problems that the small church faces. Therefore, it is a vital aspect of the church. When dealing with expanding leadership roles in the church, it is important for the pastor to address four areas. They are: when and who to pick as leaders, developing leadership training, helping the congregation realize that they are called by God to be a priesthood of believers, creating an environment where laity can lead, and developing team leadership.

When and who to pick as leaders

Possibly the most important aspect of developing lay leaders within the small church is knowing when and who to add to leadership. This takes some understanding of the church environment and the strengths and weaknesses of the church people. The pastor will first of all need to understand the church's needs, and his strengths, weaknesses, and abilities in meeting those needs. The small church pastor should then seek to add people to leadership positions that can meet the needs of the church that he personally is not capable of meeting. This will require the pastor to get to know the strengths of his people.

The potential leaders need to also have the same direction and desires as the pastors. They need to be of the same mindset, and have the same goals. Michael Slaughter describes the importance of this step when he states, "Lay leadership needs to be carefully selected, based first and foremost on spirit. Others will catch whatever spirit you present."¹³⁴ It is important for the leadership of the church to have the same goals and focus, so the church can move forward quickly.

It is also very important for the pastor of a small church to pick people for leadership that he can work with. If there is dissension at the top of the church, then there will be no growth anywhere in the church. The leadership team of the small church must be able to discuss and problem-solve openly. There has to be respect for one another and their ideas. If the leadership can not work together then there is no hope of the church moving forward. Therefore, it is vital that the pastor know the people he invites into his leadership circle very well.

¹³⁴ Slaughter, 152.

There are some qualities and characteristics that we should look for in those that we bring into our leadership circle. The qualities that Bill Hybels discusses are very good. Bill Hybels gives five qualities that we need to look for in developing leaders. The first is influence. He states, “Potential leaders always have a natural ability to influence others. Even if they have no conscious intention of leading people, they automatically exert influence.”¹³⁵ The second quality that he feels they must have is character. He describes character as, “whether he or she has the honesty, the humility, the stability, the teachability, and the integrity to steward that influence.”¹³⁶ The third characteristic is they must have people skills. This means that they can listen to and care for others. The fourth quality is drive. He describes what he looks for in these people when he states, “I also look for action-oriented people who are comfortable taking initiative.”¹³⁷ The last quality is intelligence. By this, he means he wants people who have quick minds. They are people who are street smart and can sift through a lot of information quickly. The characteristics that Bill Hybels gives should be required reading for pastors that are looking to develop lay leadership in their church.

Leadership training

Training church leadership is an important part of creating an environment where team leadership can prosper. One of the main reasons that we do not have more people in leadership positions and doing leadership is because of the lack of training that our laity receives in their churches. A pastor has to be willing to take people in his church and

¹³⁵ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 127.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 128.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 129.

train them to run the different programs of the church. Many pastors do not do this because they are afraid that by training their people, that they will become less needed in the church. The pastor who feels this way is hurting his church and himself. John Maxwell states, “When a leader can’t or won’t empower others, he creates barriers within the organization that people cannot overcome.”¹³⁸ The reality is that the more we train our people the more that they will need us. They will need the training we can provide. They will need the direction, planning, and understanding that come from the pastor.

The pastor has two groups of people that he needs to prepare to lead. The first group is those that are already in leadership positions. These people are in positions where they can immediately make an impact on the growth and direction of the church. It is vital for the pastor to develop these people into leaders that can take over some of the pastor’s responsibilities, and/or start new programs that the pastor has only dreamed about starting. This second group is those that are not in leadership positions, but have the potential to be leaders in the future, if they receive the needed training. These people are important for the future of the church. Many times they are younger and have not been thrust into leadership positions yet. These people are the ones that will carry the church once those who are currently in leadership positions step down. They need to be trained and prepared to take over, but they also need to be trained in how they can lead right now. If the pastor can train these two groups of people, then he will be able to successfully grow his church.

The pastor must first start training those who are already in leadership positions. Aubrey Malphurs believes the church governing boards are the first place to start training leaders. It is here that the pastor finds people who desire to help lead, and are already in

¹³⁸ Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, 126.

positions where they can lead. He states, “There is a huge need to train church governing boards to function better as leaders, because, in the majority of churches, they are in influential leadership positions, even more than the pastors. . . . In fact it is likely that they are the key to the revitalization of the church in the twenty-first century.”¹³⁹ The pastor should jump on this group of ready leaders and prepare them for the leadership that they can and should be doing.

The leaders of the future must begin to be prepared for leadership now. It is good to use those that have been trained previously, and are currently in leadership positions to train these future leaders. Training programs must be developed so these future leaders can be prepared for ministry now and in the future. Griggs addresses five areas that should be included in any development program for leaders in the church. He states, “The process of leadership development in the church is composed of some very basic, dependable elements. . . .we will explore five specific elements to the process of leadership development: (1) clarifying what is expected of leaders and teachers, (2) inviting persons to serve as teachers and leaders, (3) assessing the needs that persons have, (4) equipping them with the information and skills necessary to be effective leaders and teachers, and (5) providing spiritual nurture.”¹⁴⁰ Griggs explains the importance of each of these areas in his book. He holds that church leadership has to be developed through a strategic and intentional plan created by the pastor. The pastor must encourage and support wholeheartedly the training programs of his church.

It is also important that those in leadership positions continue to grow in spirit, skill, and ability. This means that the pastor must continue to develop training programs for

¹³⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Leading Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 13.

¹⁴⁰ Griggs, 50.

his people. His leaders need to continue to grow, just as much as the pastor needs to continue to grow. Learning can never have an end. A learning environment must be fostered by the pastor.

Priesthood of Believers

The pastor has the vital role of communicating to his congregation that God's desire for them is to be actively involved in ministry, as a "Priesthood of Believers." This means that the work of the pastor has to be passed on to the laity. They are expected to do ministry, not just sit on the sidelines and watch. Griggs, in dealing with this topic, states, "Church growth cannot occur based solely on the energies and ideas of paid staff. If the church is truly a body, then the entire body must be involved in making growth happen."¹⁴¹ Green echoes this statement when he says, "The church has built congregations of spectators rather than individuals personally involved in worship. The church uses Sunday soldiers to fight the battle of the week rather than mobilizing the congregation for an all-out seven-day offensive."¹⁴² The laity can not be passive bystanders watching the struggles of a few soldiers fighting a battle against a foe that vastly outnumbers them. The work of God requires more than a salvation experience. Green later states the requirement that is placed on the laity to do the work of God. He states, "The preaching of the gospel that brings revival proclaims that Christ died for sins. But salvation can never be a passive experience. People cannot accept Christ intellectually and then play the role of a Christian without being involved intimately and

¹⁴¹ George Barna, *Church Growth; New attitudes for a New Era* (Glendale, CA: The Barna Research Group, 1989), 25.

¹⁴² Green, 193.

individually in the daily work of Christ in the world.”¹⁴³ Obviously, it is necessary for the laity to be trained and take their place on the frontlines doing the work of God against the forces of Satan.

The pastor has the role of being the trainer and developer of God’s people. This will require him to do more than just proclaim God’s Word from the pulpit each week. It will mean that he will have to spend quality personal time with his leaders and future leaders preparing them for the work of God. Green laments the failure of pastors in doing this when he says, “Not only does the church neglect the responsibilities of priesthood in the pulpit, the church disregards the reality that each Christian is and should be a priest under God.”¹⁴⁴ Griggs adds his agreement to Green’s statement on the importance of the pastor to teach and train his people when he states, “The first and most essential part of the process is to communicate consistently and persuasively to the whole congregation that every member is called to ministry.”¹⁴⁵ As can be seen by the strong statements made here, the pastor must move his congregation from the salvation experience to the ministry experience. Green, again, adds his thoughts to this topic by stating, “There is a division of labor. The church cannot fulfill its God-given purpose without a ministry, without governments and without teaching pastors. Gifted men are given to the church for such purposes but this does not necessitate neglecting to involve individuals as priests before

¹⁴³ Green, 81.

¹⁴⁴ Green, 184.

¹⁴⁵ Donald L. Griggs and Judy McKay Walther, *Christian Education in the Small Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988), 55.

God.”¹⁴⁶ The pastor has a great responsibility to continue the growth of the people God has placed in his care. This is an absolute necessity for the small church to grow.

It is the desire of every church to grow in Christ, but also in numbers. Growth can only take place when there are enough people trained in the work of God to accomplish the task of winning people for eternity. Green agrees with this when he comments, “Growth can only be sustained if there are enough strong Christians who are committed to being a part of the church’s growth.”¹⁴⁷ A pastor can do many things. He even has the privilege of working on a full-time basis doing the things of God, but the pastor can not do everything. It is necessary to have well-trained, committed people doing the work of God by his side. This requires the pastor to rise up the priesthood of believers that reside in his church.

Environment

When moving people into leadership positions, it is important for the pastor to create an environment where people feel free to grow and try new things. If this does not occur, it will be less likely for the church laity to take on leadership positions for fear of failure. Stephen Covey expresses the importance of this when he states, “Principle-centered leadership is the personal empowerment that creates empowerment in the organization. It’s focusing our energy in our Circle of Influence. It’s not blaming or accusing; it’s acting with integrity to create the environment in which we and others can develop

¹⁴⁶ Green, 184.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

character and competence and synergy.”¹⁴⁸ He later states that the empowering culture that a church possesses is something that can not come from outside of the church. It has to be created and developed within the church’s own environment. He states, “A high-trust, empowered culture is always home-grown.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, it is vital for the pastor to create this environment within his church. If fear of failure and fear of losing influence are dominant within the church’s culture, then growth will never occur, either in its people, or in numbers.

One of the key areas for the pastor is he must be willing to allow for mistakes. Mistakes are not the end of the world in the small church. We, as pastors, need to remember that we have made many mistakes throughout our ministries. People will do things wrong from time to time. These are not times to prove a point, or get our “shots” in. It is a time for us to teach our people, and help them to grow personally and grow in their leadership roles. This is the best time for our people to grow. When everything is going good, they will not feel that they need our help, training, or assistance. It is when something goes wrong that we need to step in and help them through it. This will in turn teach them what to do the next time this goes wrong. Thus, we create a learning environment in the midst of a mistake.

Therefore, we must create an environment where the leaders we have trained and put into positions are allowed to make mistakes. Kennon Callahan, in his book, talks about allowing for “excellent mistakes.” He describes this by stating, “An excellent mistake is one from which we learn something that enables us to share God’s mission richly and

¹⁴⁸ Stephen R. Covey, *First Things First* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 238.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 266.

fully.”¹⁵⁰ If we do not give these leaders the freedom to make mistakes, then we will stifle their creative abilities. They will be so afraid of making mistakes that they will not try something new.

The people we put into leadership positions want to please us. It might scare us to realize this, but they want us to be proud of their accomplishments. If we tear them down because of mistakes they have made, they will not want to do anything in fear that they might disappoint us. Pastors in small churches need to let their people know that they are behind them in their work and effort. When they do make a mistake, we need to tell them that it is alright, and help them to move forward. This will require the pastor to sit them down and discuss what went wrong, how to fix it, and most importantly, what did they learn from this mistake. Helping your leadership through mistakes will help them to grow personally and as a leader.

Team leadership

One of the best ideas that the author came across in his research was the idea of “Team Leadership” given by George Barna. Through the research and countless studies that have been done by the Barna Research Group, and the many questionnaires and interviews done of pastors by this group, George Barna has recommended this team approach to ministry as the best solution in dealing with a lack of leaders in the church. He also feels that this is the way of the future for churches to grow. He believes that the pastor-dominated ministry will not be as effective in growing the church and making healthy believers, as his suggested team approach.

¹⁵⁰ Kennon L. Callahan, *Small, Strong Congregations* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 210.

He first addresses the reasons why pastors do not use team leadership in their churches. He lists ten reasons for staying with the more traditional pastor-dominated model. They are:

1. The desire for simplicity.
2. The need for control.
3. The need for personal significance.
4. The Quest for efficiency.
5. Adherence to tradition.
6. They don't know how.
7. Nobody models it.
8. Absence of vision.
9. The pastor's traditional, central role.
10. Church culture.¹⁵¹

Many of the reasons he gives for staying with the traditional model deal with pastors and churches not having the knowledge or desire to change to a different model. He then gives ten reasons why pastors should lead their churches into this newer team leadership model. He suggests:

1. Biblical endorsement—Moses, Nehemiah, Jesus, and Paul all did it.
2. No more superheroes—There are not people who are greatly gifted in many areas.
3. True community—people working together to accomplish tasks bring the group together, and create a bond between those people.
4. Less stress—fewer burdens on the church's leaders, because it is shared among teams.
5. Greater synergy—More people working means more work is getting done.
6. More innovation—the more people working on solving a problem the better the chance of it getting solved.
7. Greater joy—people love to feel needed and enjoy being successful.
8. The priesthood of believers—Ephesians 4 calls God's people to ministry.
9. Facilitates numerical growth—people involved in the church are more likely to invite their friends and neighbors to church.
10. Relieves the senior pastor—more people involved in ministry allow the pastor to focus more on what God has called him to do.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 64-72.

¹⁵² Ibid., 74-82.

George Barna believes that for the church to reach the potential that God envisioned for it, that this leadership change has to take place. If it does not take place, then the church will continue to struggle and believers will stagnant in their faith.

George Barna believes that this team leadership approach is vital for all churches. He especially sees the significance of it for the small church. He states, “Once again our research shows that not only can teams work in a small church, but that the better they work, the more likely it is that the church will not remain small for long.”¹⁵³ Large churches have to use a team approach, to some degree, because of the many different programs and projects that take place within their church. Small churches are less likely to use a team approach because of the more traditional thinking that pervades the small church. This thinking has to change. Otherwise, the small church will never grow and develop the vital ministries it needs to serve God in their community.

Summary

The small church is in need of more leaders and active workers. Without them, the small church has no hope of growing into the organization that God intended for it. Oddly enough, the answer to the lack of workers and leaders might be right underneath their nose. It is in the people who come to church each week. These people are the hope and future of the small church. Michael Slaughter, in his book, states, “The unpaid servant will spell the success or failure of the Christian mission.”¹⁵⁴ The church laity has to be mobilized to accomplish the work God has for the church. The work of preparing

¹⁵³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Slaughter, *Unlearning Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2002), p. 152.

and mobilizing this work force falls on the shoulders of the small church pastor. He needs to go about the business of training and equipping these people for ministry.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The pastor of any church will have to deal with problems and situations that will require him to use all of his leadership ability to solve them. Both the large church pastor and the small church pastor have to deal with problems that are unique to them. This paper has addressed some of the leadership problems that are more unique for the small church pastor. Some of these differences are addressed by Evan Silverstein when he says, “Small churches face some inherent problems. They often have limited resources. They can be too comfortable and exclusive. Sometimes they don’t relate well—or at all—to their towns or neighborhoods. They don’t always devote enough energy to evangelism and outreach. In some cases, small church pastors can become do-it-all tyrants.”¹⁵⁵ In dealing with these problems, the small church pastor needs to remember some wise words that Shelley gives us. She states, “The church, indeed every Christian, is an odd combination of self-sacrificing saint and self-serving sinner. And the church, unlike some social organizations, doesn’t have the luxury of choosing its members; the church is the assembly of all who profess themselves believers. Within that gathering is found a full range of saint/sinner combinations. Ministry is a commitment to care for all

¹⁵⁵ Evan Silverstein, “Finding God in Small Places,” www.pcusa.org (2003), accessed March 2006.

members of the body, even those whose breath is tainted with dragon smoke.”¹⁵⁶ The pastor can never forget that he has been called by God to minister to the flock under his care. He should lead them with pride and confidence knowing that God is always by his side guiding and directing him through all the ups and downs of the small church ministry.

The small church pastor can get so caught up in the problems of the church that he loses the focus that God has given to him, and that is preaching His Word. This can be the death toll to his ministry. He must always serve God first, and deliver His words to his congregation. Green feels that the loss of the Word of God is the real problem that occurs in churches. He states, “Many maladies plague the church chiefly because clergymen do not practice preventative medicine. Other diseases encroach on the spiritual health of the church because of lethargic and indifferent congregations. A failure to communicate the Word is the basic difficulty and can be better understood by dividing the problem: one half is the failure of the clergy to adequately minister, the other half is the problem of laymen who evade God and fail to hear the Word when it is preached. Consequently, most churches suffer from spiritual malnutrition: a famine of hearing the Word of God.”¹⁵⁷ All the problems that the pastor might face can be addressed and dealt with, but if he stops presenting the Word of God, then all hope for the church is lost.

The small church pastor needs to remember this one thing as he deals with the different problems that he will face in the church. It is that it is not his responsibility to

¹⁵⁶ Shelley, 48.

¹⁵⁷ Green, 209.

change the people of the church. It is God's responsibility to do that. The pastor just needs to continue to present the Word of God faithfully for as long as God directs him to stay in his church.

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VITA

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PERSONAL

Born: May 20, 1964

Married: Barbara J. LaVoy, August 8, 1987.

Children: Anthony James, born June 15, 1988.

Samantha Elizabeth, born June 25, 1990.

EDUCATIONAL

Jamestown Community College, 1983.

B.A., Crown College, 1986.

MSOL, Geneva College, 2004.

MINISTERIAL

Licensed: March 4, 1987 at the Christian and Missionary Alliance headquarters, Nyack, New York.

Passed ordination examination: May 6, 1996 in Rome, New York.

Ordained: September 11, 1996 at the Poughkeepsie Alliance Church, Poughkeepsie, New York.

PROFESSIONAL

Youth Director, Grandview Alliance Church, Erie, PA., 1992-1994.

Associate Pastor, Frewsburg Alliance Church, Frewsburg, NY., 1994-1997.

Pastor, Peoples Alliance Church, New Castle, PA., 1997-present.

PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Published poem in book, "Words of Praise: A Treasury of Religious and Inspirational Poetry, Vol. 3."

Published poem in book, "American Poetry Anthology, Vol. 6, No. 4, Winter 1986."

Received Certificate of Appreciation on October 10, 1999 from the Women's Shelter/Rape Crisis Center of New Castle, PA.