

Congregational Size & Common Challenges

Every Congregation can be a Vital Congregation, and there are different challenges for differently sized congregations.

Does the behavior of your congregation place you firmly within one size category, or are you straddling two or more size categories?

Is your congregation being pulled upward or downward along the size continuum? Is the congregation currently on a plateau, or perhaps hitting a ceiling?

Which leadership challenges are currently the most problematic for your congregation? Is there one set of leadership challenges that seem to be holding you back from living into the size category most appropriate to you?

In which system or challenge is the congregation feeling the most stress? What adaptations would need to take place in order for the congregation's systems to feel "right sized?" What systems would need to change to prepare for growth?

Size Category Average Weekend Attendance or Annual Operating Budget	Family Size <50	Pastoral Size 50-150	Program (Transitional) 150-200 \$150k-\$650k (avg 375k)	Program (Multi-celled) 200-400 \$500k-\$1.5 million (avg 680k)	Corporate (Professional) 400-800 \$1-\$2 million (avg 1.1 million)	Corporate (Strategic) 800-1200 \$2-\$4 million (avg 2.4 million)	Corporate (Matrix) 1200-1800 \$4 million+ (avg 5.5 million)
Average Weekend Attendance	<50	50-150	150-200 \$150k-\$650k (avg 375k)	200-400 \$500k-\$1.5 million (avg 680k)	400-800 \$1-\$2 million (avg 1.1 million)	800-1200 \$2-\$4 million (avg 2.4 million)	1200-1800 \$4 million+ (avg 5.5 million)
Annual Operating Budget	<\$85k (avg 30K)	\$85k-\$200k (avg 180k)					
ORGANIZING THEME	PATRIARCHAL/MATRIARCHAL	PASTOR-CENTERED	REORGANIZATION	LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	PROFESSIONALIZATION	ALIGNMENT	DECENTRALIZATION
Growth Challenges	<i>Claiming a larger vision & mission that exists beyond the extended family.</i> New programs or initiatives may exhaust the church families and their resources of time. Carefully cultivate resources and personal investments for maximum missional impact.	<i>Manage multiple conflicting expectations.</i> As the church grows, the pastor will be stretched between caregiving, equipping, supervision, coordination, and connecting with the mission field. Members may be wary of sharing their relational time with the pastor.	<i>Create "emotional space" for multiple ministries to thrive simultaneously.</i> No longer will every member want (or need) to attend every church function. Ministry scheduling will create time and facility conflicts.	<i>Examine assumptions about growth.</i> The congregation must come to terms with how it understands and defines growth, whether it desires growth, and whether the culture will accommodate growth. Leaders must claim a strategic identity and define growth accordingly.	<i>Build capacity for growth on the staff team.</i> Ideas to generate growth abound but are limited by the capacity of the staff team and limitations in the facility. The church's capacity for growth has to be continually negotiated and planned.	<i>Assume growth and plan for it.</i> Lack of growth will lead to stagnation and ultimately to decline. Growth is an ongoing management issue. The nature and direction of growth has to be continually negotiated and planned.	<i>Manage growth from multiple places.</i> Independent function ministry areas and locations are all working on their own growth initiatives. Growth initiatives are coordinated through the strategic planning and operational budgeting processes.
Pastoral Challenges	<i>Serve as the hub of a wheel or relational web.</i> The pastor, will serve as a congregational chaplain to the church family and community. Because of the high turnover of pastors in smaller congregations, one or two strong laypeople will be developed to manage the church's ministry and existence.	<i>Build a vision of congregational and community care in which the pastor is a leader, but not the only provider of pastoral care.</i> Pastor will need to: Communicate a caring presence in the congregation while reducing the level of one-on-one care provided to members.	<i>Adopt a visionary leadership style.</i> The senior clergy leader must: Discern and articulate an energizing vision for the congregation, and translate vision into specific goals to be accomplished. Clearly describe who the congregation is and is not, and what its mission is and is not.	<i>Adopt a managerial leadership style.</i> The senior clergy leader must: Let go of a purely relational style of leadership and engage the congregation from a managerial perspective. Shift the care focus from the congregation at large to the staff team and key lay leaders. Manage the collective performance of the staff team.	<i>Adopt a strategic leadership style.</i> The senior clergy leader must: Focus on the right things, say no to the wrong things, and spend time on the important things. Let go of day-to-day management decisions, find ways to pull back and see the big picture, and learn to lead through the projection of a public persona. Crystallize the vision of the church into clear sound bites that keep the staff team and board in alignment.	<i>Adopt an ideation leadership style.</i> The senior clergy leader must: Focus exclusively on strategy, teaching, preaching and fundraising. Lead the staff team and board with clear statements of vision, values, and strategic priorities. Create a culture that supports the generation of new ideas and innovation. Delegate the day-to-day management of the church.	
Staff Team Challenges	<i>Pastor works with extended families.</i> The appointed pastor often a bi-vocational local pastor or an lay supply preacher, can best serve as a consultant to the patriarch/matriarch, working alongside them. A musician may also be paid to assist in music leadership.	<i>Manages a complicated mix of paid and unpaid servants.</i> Paid staff is usually part-time, and perform limited but essential functions, such as administrative secretary and musician. As needs grow, the number of paid and unpaid staff require supervision that will lead to less time for one-to-one pastoral care, causing friction.	<i>Strategic Staffing for Growth.</i> Pastor will need to be a leader for a staff team and work with SPRC on a staffing vision. As the congregation is closer to the 200 mark, program staff will need to be added beyond the pastor and a few part time administrative or program specialists. Focus should be connecting member's gifts to ministry.	<i>Embrace a team identity.</i> The staff team must: Add Specialized program staff to grow the church when the budget may not be fully ready to support staff additions. Learn to balance the work of the generalist alongside the work of the specialist.	<i>Professionalize the ministry.</i> The team must: Assume tasks previously accomplished by volunteers. Find new ways to engage volunteers. Move away from a generalist orientation to distinct areas of specialization. Accept supervision from someone other than the senior clergy leader.	<i>Align work of multiple sub-teams.</i> Staff must: Avoid a silo mentality. Maintain a relational focus in program roles as the administrative components of roles increase. Grow the admin team to accommodate additional growth in the church. Learn to work under the direction of an executive leadership team.	<i>Create cross-functional structure.</i> Staff must: communicate and coordinate, sometimes around dual reporting relationships. Maintain a dual focus on their functional areas of responsibility, and attend to the needs of multiple sites and/or constituencies. Decentralize decision-making.
Board Challenges	<i>Decisions are made by the Matriarch/Patriarch.</i> A simplified structure (single board) is suggested. Board conducts business and ministries in support of the matriarch's and patriarch's vision. Members' roles, responsibilities, and rights are often based upon respect and position.	<i>Complex leadership mix that is difficult to define and categorize.</i> Board operates as a mix of elected leadership and chosen (or self selected) ministry coordinators and decision-makers, some of whom are short term task-doers. As unpaid servants, ministry coordinators are more permanent leaders and task-doers who value a close working relationship with the pastor.	<i>Move away from day to day management and into a governing role.</i> Board should focus on overarching goals, policy, and oversight. Utilize board training, periodic retreats, and consultants to strengthen the board's governing role.	<i>Organize work around mission/vision.</i> Board leaders must: Coordinate the work of a variety of committees and groups. Learn to say "yes" to ideas and activities that support the mission and no to ideas that distract from its mission. Develop new lay leadership.	<i>Create management systems.</i> Board leader must: Create policies and establish a staff team performance management system. Relinquish the daily management of the church to the staff team.	<i>Reduce size of governing board.</i> The board must: Provide a strong support and accountability system for the head of staff. Operate with a strategic mindset, letting go of representational thinking. Create an executive team (if board size is larger than 7 people). Other leaders must: Learn to trust the decision-making lead of a smaller group.	<i>Decentralize decision-making.</i> The board must: Empower each ministry venue to make decisions about growth in their own areas. Institute a systematic approach to program evaluation to keep the number of programming options workable.
Assimilation/Acculturation Challenges	<i>Welcome new family members.</i> The intimacy and extremely strong relational ties of the church that have withstood the testing of time may also make assimilating new people into the congregation quite difficult. Focus on personal faith-sharing and unofficial family mentoring of new people into the life of the church family.	<i>Connecting guests to the community of faith.</i> The pastor usually does guest follow-up, but the larger congregation must follow-up as well with personal invitations to ministry groups and programs.	<i>Create a team and process to ensure that new people find a suitable place within the life of the church, led by an chosen layperson with training.</i> The congregation must embrace the community in new ways to expand reach beyond current membership.	<i>Expand Points of Entry.</i> The congregation must: Add new worship venues, small groups ministries, etc. Meet emerging standards of excellence that people expect from a larger congregation.	<i>Watch the back door.</i> The congregation must: Address the anonymity that occurs in the large church. Find new ways to keep track of members and to get members engaged. Let the staff team take the lead in identifying and developing new leaders.	<i>Create a seamless system of membership.</i> The congregation must: Link membership, discipleship, gift discovery, and stewardship through a fully formed network of classes or small groups. Add a staff member who focuses on membership and volunteer management. Empower newcomers to find their own way into participation and membership.	<i>Coordinate participation across venues.</i> The congregation must: Create a membership/development department to coordinate the many venues of entry, so a unified perspective on membership is generated. Hire a development director. Customize and coordinate programs of orientation, and membership so that each venue is unique, but unified.

The content and organization of this chart are adapted from Susan Beaumont's *Inside the Large Congregation*, Alice Mann's *Raising the Roof: The Pastoral to Program Size Transition*, and Beth Ann Gaede's (ed.) *Size Transitions in Congregations*.

All three authors owe a great debt to Arlin Rothauge, who first defined Church Size Theory in his *Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry*