

**The Family Church
(fewer than 50 active members)**

Relationship Style:

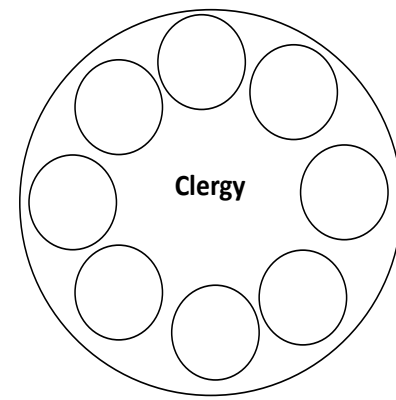
One group consists of tightly knit extended families or “clans” that center on matriarchs or patriarchs

Leadership Structure:

Family Matriarchs & Patriarchs make decisions. Pastor (part time/retires) functions as chaplains. Board conducts business & ministries in support of matriarches & patriarchs. Other staff (usually a musician) is part time & performs a limited but essential function.

A small congregation that operates like an extended family (and may in fact be a biological family network). Just as in the famous tavern from the television series Cheers, “everybody knows your name.” This church is organized around one or two anchoring figures called matriarchs and patriarchs to indicate their tacit authority in the system. Such congregations often have part-time pastors, and their clergy tend to adopt a chaplain role—leading worship and giving pastoral care.

A pastor who challenges the authority of a patriarch or matriarch, or who presumes to be the primary leader of the congregation, generally will not stay long.



**The Pastoral Church
(50 to 150 active members)**

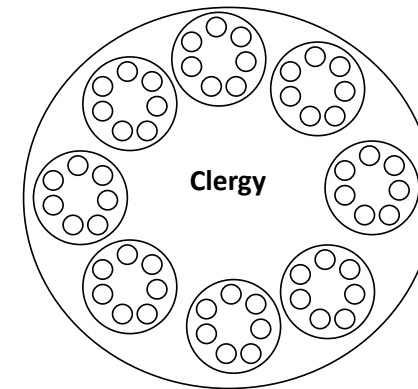
Relationship Style:

One Large group centers on the pastor, with some members in loosely knit functional or friendship circles

Leadership Structure:

Pastor is hub of the wheel: master coordinator, chief minister. Board members are short term task-doers, micro-decision makers. Ministry coordinators are permanent task-doers who value a close relationship with pastor. Other staff (usually a musician and a secretary) are part time and perform limited by essential functions.

A coalition of two or three family and friendship networks unified around the person and role of the pastor. Clergy time is largely taken up maintaining a direct pastoral relationship with each member, coordinating the work of a small leadership circle, personally conducting worship, and leading small-group programs such as Bible study. The governing board usually operates like a committee, arranging much of the day-to-day life of the congregation. Members recognize each other’s faces, know most people’s names, and will notice if someone new is present at worship



**The Program Church
(150 to 350 active members)**

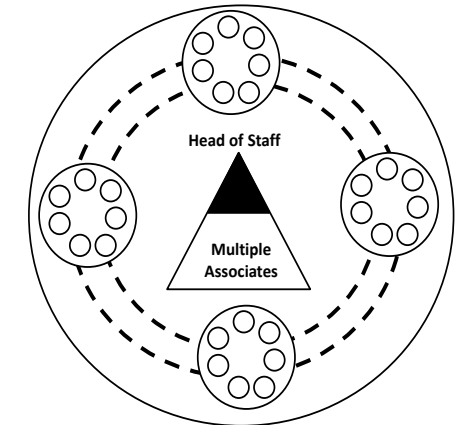
Relationship Style:

2 or more distinct worshipping congregations include 1/3 of all members (in small groups of 5-15 people) that center on skilled and empowered staff or lay leaders

Leadership Structure:

Program groups/teams/committees have their own empowered lay leaders and plan and implement programs and activities. Board members are managers, policymakers, who oversee but do not lead program groups. Pastor functions as executive. Other staff may include 1 or more ordained) and program resources

Known for the quality and variety of its programs. Separate programs for children, youth, couples, seniors, and other age and interest groups provide entry points for a wide range of people. The pastor’s crucial role is to recruit, equip, and inspire a small circle of key program leaders—lay and ordained, paid and unpaid. This ring of leadership might include, for example, the choir director, the church school superintendent, the youth group leader, the coordinator of lay visitors, and the head of a committee that tracks new member incorporation. Working as a team with the pastor, they reach out to involve others as program participants and as leaders. Decision making is broadly distributed within the wider leadership circle (perhaps 50 people) and pastoral care is shared by laity.



**The Corporate Church
Also called: “Resource Church”
(350 or more active members)**

Relationship Style:

More than 2 worshipping congregations include 1/2 of all members coalescing by affinity into small “congregations” of 30+ people

Leadership Structure:

Pastor is CEO with mythic qualities. Staff (several ordained & lay) includes full time executives in charge of program areas. Program groups/teams/committees with virtual autonomy operate programs as almost independent organizations. Board functions as board of directors.

Known for excellence in worship and music, and for the range and diversity of its programs. Specialized ministries are provided for narrowly identified groups of people; several of these programs may be known beyond the congregation for their excellence. Often, distinct sub-congregations form around multiple worship services.

The senior pastor spends more time preparing to preach and lead worship than most clergy and must be skilled at working with a diverse staff of full-time professional leaders. Decision making is carried out by a multilayered structure of staff, boards, and committees.

While clergy continue to provide pastoral care, especially in crisis moments, most members find their spiritual support in small groups or from lay visitors.

The Dunbar Effect

In 1993 social anthropologist Robin Dunbar wrote a groundbreaking paper on research related to group size and group limits. His work revealed that the capacity of the human brain is a key determinant in the size of the groups that we form to organize ourselves and get things done. Various sized groups tend to different types of social interaction and, therefore, serve alternative functions. Dunbar argued that the stability of organizations and social groups is based on the intimate knowledge that individuals within a group have of one another, and their ability to use this knowledge to manage relationships. Attempts to increase any group size beyond its effective limit, which is determined by the capacity of group members to track social interaction, will inevitably result in reduced social stability, and ultimately, group fission. Humans are known to have a cognitive upper limit to the average number of individuals with whom they can form coherent personal relationships. That limit, known as the Dunbar Effect, is around 150 people. Having enough memory space to remember people's names and faces is not enough to manage 150 relationships. Group members must integrate and manage information about the constantly changing relationships among individuals within a group. Recognizing that 150 is our outer relationship limit, sociologists have been able to identify a series of smaller social building blocks that help to explain how we function in organizations with more than 150 members.

Decision Making

Large churches need these smaller decision-making units, housed within larger working groups, to maintain a strategic focus in their decision making. We also see the decision-making limit of seven played out within staff team dynamics. As a staff team grows in size, it must continually reorganize itself into meaningful decision-making bodies of five to ensure that most decision making will be dominated by the most politically influential individuals in the room, whether or not they have the best ideas. Thus we encounter the emergence of specialty sub-teams within the larger staff team (e.g., the program directors group, the admin staff, the children's ministry staff, the pastoral care team, etc.) When the team is not organized into smaller decision-making bodies, the work of the group changes to accommodate what the group is capable of doing. When the group becomes too large, their gatherings turn away from decision making and towards reporting, support, and care.

Care and Support Group

This group consists of the individuals with whom one has special ties and maintains regular contact. These are the relationships that provide us with the greatest intimacy, mutual support, and care. In the world of congregations, these groups are embodied in our small group ministries, smaller Sunday school classes, and ministry teams. These sympathy groups are often homogeneous in nature and often represent the people we turn to in our deepest moments of need. The outer effectiveness limit of a sympathy group is based upon the human capacity to manage social grooming, forms of personal contact that produce group cohesion. Anecdotally, group members report how increasingly difficult it becomes to maintain the effectiveness of a sympathy group once the group number exceeds 12 members. In a group that exceeds 15 members, people begin reporting that they don't get their fair share of time, and some members begin to recede into the background. Attendance becomes lax because people don't feel personally valued. Trust becomes difficult because individuals begin to lose track of one another and have too much difficulty managing all of the possible relationships. One of three things typically happens when a sympathy group passes the 15-member mark. Most commonly the group naturally shrinks back to a more manageable number, because people are unhappy with the group dynamics and abandon it. Sometimes the group has the clarity that it needs to split into two groups, which restores the ability of the group to offer support and care, and two new effective sympathy groups are formed. Finally, some sympathy groups, by expending lots of organized energy around communication, continue to grow through the 15-person threshold limit and become clan or family-sized groups (see the next category).

Clan or Family Group

The next building block in organizational structure is the group of 25 to 75 individuals, which might be thought of as the clan or family group. This group provides identity and a feeling of vibrancy. This group is much less homogenous than the care and support group and may be intergenerational. In large congregations we often see the clan or family group at work in larger Sunday school classes, choirs, youth groups, and men's and women's ministry groups. Groups of this size are generally thought of as nonexclusive groups, meaning that they are not the only group in which an individual participant is involved. The clan is too large to offer individual care and support to every member of the group, so most people within the group also belong to a sympathy group in some other part of the congregation, or within the larger family group. So, for example, while the Sunday evening gathering of the full youth group operates like a clan system, a member also meets on Wednesday nights with his small support group of youth, a subset of the youth ministry program. The governance of clan groups is family-style leadership, with the most respected people serving as leaders (the choir director, the Sunday school superintendent, the youth group advisor). Member roles, rights, and privileges are determined by respect and position. The outer threshold limit of clan groups is around 50. Beyond this number the family support structure begins to disintegrate.

Community Group

Once a group has exceeded 75 participants, it is no longer capable of maintaining itself as a clan system and, if it survives, the group must become a community group. The community group is primarily a fellowship group. It corresponds to a typical village unit in pre-modern history. It provides a broad group identity for its participants and some sense of belonging and safety. The community group, as a building block of organizational structure, may be more prevalent in the medium-sized congregation than it is in the very large congregation. A pastoral-sized church, taken as a whole, is a stand-alone community group. A program-sized congregation is a congregation that is managed as an amalgam of small, family, and community groups, with the community groups represented by the worshiping communities.

One place that the community-sized group regularly expresses itself in the large congregation is at the all-church meeting. Anytime the full congregation is called together for decision making, a community-sized group tends to show up. This seems to hold true regardless of the size of the congregation. Whether the congregation draws 500 or 2,000 people together in average weekend attendance, the number of people who will show up for an open congregational meeting is typically 75 to 150 people, a community sized group.

