

Growth Points

Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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The Nature of Pastoral Ministry in Small and Larger Churches

While there are numerous factors that may influence a pastor's work, the size of a church appears to have a major effect on what pastors actually do.

Research among chief executives in small and large organizations point out that leaders of smaller

desk work. Thus, leaders of larger organizations tend to have two to three times more focused time than those in smaller organizations.

Pastors in smaller churches find their ministry lives more fragmented between numerous activities, such as,

A variety of factors may influence the pastor's work. Some factors include the church culture, skills of the leader, philosophy of ministry, age and size of the ministry, and the context around the church.

organizations typically engage in about 77 activities per day. However, leaders of large organizations engage in just 22 activities per day. Activities include things like phone calls, scheduled meetings, reading and answering mail/email, unscheduled meetings, and

sermon prep, hospital visits, counseling, meetings, phone calls, answering emails, office work, etc. Since pastors of larger churches usually have staff members to handle much of the work, they have ministry lives that

Discovering Facts

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It always helps to know what is actually going on in one's ministry. To remove the fog, try the following.

- Keep a list of every activity you do in the following seven days. Note every phone call, hallway conversation, email or piece of mail read, each period of desk work, etc. Make a full accounting of every activity that takes your time at work.

- Add to your list how much time each activity requires.

- At the end of the seven days, count the number of activities that you completed each day and determine the average. Group activities together and see how much time you spend on each one.

Ask: What needs to change?

are more centered on a few important activities.

Pastors of smaller churches can easily relate to the lack of focused time by the way their work is limited through interruptions. For example, consider that phone calls and unscheduled meetings are likely to take about one-third (32%) of a pastor's time each day in a smaller church, while the same activities only take about one-sixth (16%) of the time for pastors in a larger church.

In smaller churches pastors focus more on internal operating procedures, and most of their meetings are with only one person. In contrast, pastors of larger churches place more stress on strategy than operations, and make better use of the few meetings they have by meeting with an average of three people in each meeting.

Pastors of smaller churches are more oriented toward issues that are immediate and span shorter periods of time. This leads them to be reactive with a short-term outlook. Pastors of larger churches, however, deal with issues that are more long range, which allows them to be more

intentional in maintaining a long-term outlook.

Pastors of smaller churches often find they deal primarily with internal matters facing the church, while pastors of larger churches are able to deal primarily with matters outside the church. This causes pastors in small churches to spend a major portion of their time simply keeping the church running, with little time to think about, plan for, or engage in ministry outside the local church. Yet, pastors of larger churches are able to spend a major portion of their time on involvement in community affairs, as well as planning ways to strategically engage people with the gospel.

The larger the church the more a pastor spends time in formal communication through letters, emails, scheduled meetings, and presentations. Pastors of smaller churches spend more time in informal conversations, unscheduled meetings, dealing with day-to-day issues, and one-on-one conversations.

Pastors of larger churches seek to build teams of two (dyads) or three (triads) to help share the different

activities expected of them. Most common in larger churches is the establishing of teams to deal with internal issues so the lead pastor can focus on external issues. Solo pastors of smaller churches attempt to do all of the various activities alone, which leads them to deal with internal issues to the neglect of external outreach.

Consider the following questions as you begin your ministry this year.

First, is your ministry characteristic of a larger church or a smaller church?

Second, how many activities do you deal with each day?

Third, do you find yourself focusing more on internal church affairs or on external outreach?

Fourth, do you have one or two teams in place to help with the various activities that come your way?

Fifth, if you do not have any teams in place, write down the names of two or three people who you could ask to help.

Last, what changes do you need to embrace to become more effective?