

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

July, 2021

One priority our council set for this time of transition is growing in discernment. One of the many directions for discernment is what a church needs to function well and the gifts a pastor needs to effectively serve Highland Church at this time. At our July meeting, council discussed a summary of insights from Arlin Routhage on how size affects church dynamics and in turn the skills needed from a pastor. We thought the insights so valuable that we should share it with the entire congregation.

Like automobiles, churches come in all shapes and sizes. And like cars, the size of a church profoundly affects how it functions. It affects the way members interact, the leadership structure, the role of the pastor, the church budget and its mission. When a church has developed a certain culture and pattern with one size, it can be difficult to shift to a different size and dynamic- both for congregation and pastor. Here are four basic church sizes and how they affect dynamics and a pastor's role.

The Family Church (fewer than 50 active members)

A small church can be called a family church, because it's like a tight-knit family. It usually revolves around a few families, with strong patriarchal or matriarchal figures who have the primary influence. They expect the pastor to provide faithful preaching and pastoral care, but not new ideas or direction.

Family churches are remarkably resilient. They usually have limited expenses. They pay a relatively small pastoral salary. Often they don't mind a pastor's departure; without a salary it's easier on their coffers. They carry on, while pastors come and go.

The Pastoral Church (50-150 active members)

This size of church transcends a few main families and their patriarchs/matriarchs. This church is large enough that the full-time pastor becomes central- a shepherd figure. Leadership falls to the pastor and a circle of lay leaders. Communication is key. Ministry must be shared. Otherwise the pastor becomes overworked and exhausted.

In a pastoral-sized church, members have their spiritual needs met in the context of a personal relationship with the pastor. In this size church a pastor is present at many of the prayer meetings or Bible studies. The pastor is expected to be available in times of personal need or crisis. If a parishioner calls with some need, the pastor is expected to respond that day or certainly that week- not like a larger church where the first available appointment to see the pastor might be in two weeks. With the varied roles of preaching, leadership, and most pastoral care, the time demands can become a burden. However, with healthy boundaries the varied role of a pastor can be very healthy.

A second key feature of the pastoral church is its sense of being a family where everyone knows everyone else. If you show up with your daughter Julie, everyone will greet you and Julie too. When such congregations grow larger they get nervous, seeing faces they don't know and fearing the loss of cherished intimacy. Beyond 150 members a pastor may feel stressed in not being able to provide pastoral care to that many people.

The Program Church (150-350 active members)

In the program-sized church spiritual needs are met through various programs and fellowship networks along with the pastor's ministry. A healthy program church will have many cells of activity making up the whole body of Christ. Most of these cells or programs are led by members. These various ministries naturally provide some of the pastoral care needed in the church. For example, a small group or ministry team may notice something seems wrong with someone in their circle and check on them and pray for them. A program church is seen as a "full service" church- with programs for most ages and needs.

Pastors are still central in the program church. But their role has shifted significantly. They might be compared to an orchestra conductor. More of their time and attention must be spent in recruiting leaders, training them, planning with them, encouraging them and evaluating with them. More of the pastor's time is spent with leaders and programs and less time in pastoral care to individuals. Some ministries are covered by other paid staff. Members will still expect a visit from the senior pastor when a major need arises, but they shouldn't expect him to have time to drink coffee in their kitchen. Finding time for an appointment might take some effort. Pastors not gifted in planning and equipping and administration will better serve a smaller-sized church.

The Corporate Church (over 350 active members)

A key feature of the corporate church is the quality of the morning worship service. With their extensive resources there will be effective preaching, excellent music, and a well-crafted service. A lot of energy goes into the high quality of the worship service.

In a corporate church, the lead pastor often has a prominent reputation and charisma. He is like an airline captain who works with a flight crew. He functions more as a CEO. He sets vision. Much time is spent with staff: hiring, setting goals, encouraging + evaluating. At the same time, the senior pastor may not even know the names of many in the church. When members are in the hospital it is assumed that an associate will make the visit.

Questions for reflection:

- 1 What type of church best reflects Highland Church?
- 2 Where do you see Highland heading in the future?
- 3 What are the implications for our church structure and gifts we need in our next pastor?