

So what went wrong in my church? Was it because we ditched the T-shirts and the flyers on the grounds that they were too 'naff'? I don't think so. More to the point was that less than two months ago we expended a good deal of effort and energy in a mega 'Christian Festival' - maybe another evangelistic push at this stage was too soon. Perhaps too there was the fact we were promoting a host of other bridge-building activities (e.g. a quiz night and an international evening) as well as our next Alpha course. Or was it that many of my people just did not feel comfortable with the emphasis on 'back to church', when so many of their friends had never been to church in the first place? I don't know.

All I know is that we were not the only church in the land whose hopes were dashed. At the parish church my mother attends, despite the vicar's efforts, numbers were down that day too!

WHAT TYPE OF CHURCH IS YOURS?

Paul Beasley-Murray and John O'Keith.

I recently read *Size Transitions in Congregations* (Alban, Virginia 2001), edited by Beth Ann Gaede. Many of the essays are based on the work of Arlin Rothauge, a professor of congregational studies at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary.²³² I have not been able to get hold of his booklet, but from what I have gained from the essay by veteran American church consultant, Roy Oswald,²³³ Rothauge's analysis of church size is truly insightful. In this article I will summarise these insights and apply them to the British scene.

The cell or family-size church- also called the patriarchal or matriarchal church, has up to 50 active members.

"This small church.... functions like a family, with appropriate parental figures. The patriarchs and matriarchs control the church's leadership needs. What family-size churches want from clergy is pastoral care, period. For clergy to assume that they are

²³² Arlin Rothauge, *Sizing up a congregation for new member ministry* (Seabury Press, NY, undated).

²³³ 'How to minister effectively in family, pastoral, program and corporate sized churches', 31-46, in *Sizing up a congregation*.

also the chief executive officer and the resident religious authority is to make a serious blunder. 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. It is generally suicide for clergy to get caught in a show-down with the patriarchs and matriarchs within the first five years of the particular church”²³⁴.

As with families in general, family or patriarchal churches incorporate new members by birth, marriage or adoption.

The congregation or pastoral-size church has 50 to 150 active members.

“Clergy are usually at the center of a pastoral-size church. There are so many parental figures around that they need someone at the center to manage them. A leadership circle, made up of the pastor and a small cadre of lay leaders, replaces the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family-size church... A key feature of a pastoral-size church is that laity experience having their spiritual needs met through their personal relationship with a seminary-trained person. In a pastoral-size church it would be rare for a Bible study or a prayer group to meet without the pastor. The pastor is also readily available in times of personal need and crisis... A second feature of the pastoral-size church is its sense of itself as a family in which everyone knows every else... Clergy begin to feel stressed when they have more than 150 active members whom they try to know in depth. In fact, this is one of the reasons why clergy may keep the pastoral-size church from growing up to the next larger size... 150 active members are about all one person can manage”²³⁵.

People tend to join - or indeed leave - the church because of the pastor.

The programme-size church has 150 to 350 active members.

“The program-size church grows out of the necessity for a high-quality personal relationship with the pastor to be supplemented by other avenues of spiritual feeding. Programmes must now begin to fill that role. The well-functioning program-size church has many

²³⁴ Oswald 32.

²³⁵ Oswald 35, 36.

*cells of activity, which are headed up by lay leaders. These lay leaders, in addition to providing structure and guidance for these cells, also take on some pastoral functions... Clergy are still at the centre of the program-size church, but their role shifts dramatically. Much of their times and attention is spent in planning with other lay leaders to ensure the highest quality programs. The pastor must spend a lot of time recruiting people to head up these smaller ministries, training, supervising, and evaluation them, and seeing to it that their morale remains high. In essence the pastor must often step back from direct ministry with people to coordinate and support volunteers who offer this ministry... To be sure, a member can expect a hospital or home call from the pastor when personal crisis or illness strikes. But members had better not expect this pastor to have a lot of time to drink coffee in people's kitchens"*²³⁶.

People tend to be attracted to pastoral-size churches, not just because of the pastor, but because of the programmes the church runs.

Finally, **the corporate-size church** has 350 or more active members.

*"The quality of Sunday morning worship is the first thing you usually notice in a corporate-size church. Because these churches usually have abundant resources, they will usually have the finest organ and one of the best choirs in town. A lot of work goes into making Sunday worship a rich experience. The head of staff usually spends more time than other clergy preparing for preaching and leading worship. In very large corporate-size churches, the head of staff may not even remember the names of many parishioners. When members are in the hospital, it is almost taken for granted that they will be visited by an associate or assistant pastor, rather than the senior pastor... Key to the success of the corporate-size church is the multiple staff and its ability to manage the diversity of its ministries in a collegial manner"*²³⁷.

How does this relate to the British scene? The family-size church is what we in Britain would call the 'small' church. According to the English Church Census of 2005, some 49% of all English churches come into this category. With the continued decline of churchgoing

²³⁶ Oswald 39, 40,

²³⁷ Oswald 41, 42.

since then, we can say with certainty that now most English churches have less than 50 people in worship on a Sunday. Indeed, as far as my own denomination is concerned, over half of the churches belonging to the Baptist Union of Great Britain have less than 40 members.

The pastoral-size church is what we might call a ‘medium’ size church. Most churches of this size would hope to have their own theologically trained pastor. Unlike the picture painted by Oswald, in Britain many of these churches would be quite used to meeting for Bible study and prayer without the pastor. Unlike family-sized churches which tend to be one cell churches, pastoral-size churches in Britain are likely to have a number of small groups meeting during the week for fellowship. Nonetheless the pastor is the king (or queen) pin to whom everybody relates. The pastoral-size church is a very comfortable place to be. Although in larger pastoral size churches not everybody will know one another, on the basis that most people can with relative ease know the names of 60 to 75 people, the likelihood is that there will be more people who are known than are not known. Nobody feels a stranger in a pastoral-size church. Furthermore, from the perspective of the pastor, it is an eminently manageable size of church. Once, however, the congregation grows beyond 150, that moment the effectiveness of most pastors is seriously decreased. For instance, in a survey of 350 English Baptist churches, Alan Wilkinson and I discovered that “A full-time pastor could cope with the demands of a growing church with a membership of under 150. But beyond that point, the strain and limitations begin to have an adverse effect on the potential for growth of the church”²³⁸.

I am not sure what we in Britain would call a programme church. The Baptist Union of Great Britain, in developing a network for larger churches, has decided that churches with a membership of 200 or more are ‘larger’ churches. Strictly speaking, this is of course true: churches with more than 200 active members are indeed larger than others. However, I myself prefer to stay with the American nomenclature: a programme size church, for it is the programmes of such a church which are often the great attraction. People will often begin to attend programme-size churches because of the activities which they run for children or for young people or

²³⁸ See *Turning the Tide: An assessment of Baptist Church Growth in England* (Bible Society, London 1981) 57.

for young adults. These churches tend to have a second member of staff - in the British scene this second member is often a youth minister or worker. To my mind, a programme church begins to become a 'larger' church when it begins to seek to develop its staff team beyond just the minister, a youth worker, and perhaps a part-time church administrator. That seems to me to be the point when some programme churches begin the process of becoming a corporate church. At a guess I would therefore say that a 'larger' church is likely to have at least 250 people in worship on a Sunday, if not 300.

Finally, there is the corporate-size church. We tend to call them the 'large' churches. Corporate churches have got beyond the vicar and curate stage. They have staff teams - both pastoral staff (i.e. ministers) and office staff. There are, of course, different graduations among these corporate churches - clearly a mega-church with 1000 or more members is a very different animal from a church with 500 members. However, within the British scene, there is probably little reason to refine these distinctions. Some people in Britain would define a large church as a church with over 300 in worship, in which case around 6% of all English churches fall into this category. If, however, we define a large church as a church with over 400 at worship, then only 4% of churches may be described as large - and many of these churches would be Roman Catholic churches. According to Peter Brierley, 1% (150) of Anglican churches and 2% of Baptist churches have 350 or more attending on a Sunday. These 200 churches respectively accounted for no less than 10% of all Anglican and 13% of all Baptist churchgoers in 2005²³⁹.

In the light of this analysis, what type of a church are you? My own church has over 350 members, and - on a good Sunday - we may have as many as 400 people in worship. If the truth be told, we are probably still a programme church blessed with a growing staff team, which may well become a corporate-size church, but still has yet to arrive.

Before I bring this article to a conclusion, I wish to make one thing clear: no one type or size of church is necessarily any better than any other type or size. Alas, all too often value judgments are

²³⁹ Peter Brierley, 'Pulling out of the Nosedive', *Ministry Today* 38 (Winter 2006) 10-11.

made. Larger is not necessarily better than smaller. Nor indeed is smaller necessarily more beautiful than larger. As a pastor of a 'larger' church, I am very conscious that certain of my colleagues in smaller churches can be very scathing about churches like my own. The impression, for instance, is sometimes given that smaller churches are likely to be more faithful to the Gospel, for it is argued, that only in smaller churches is meaningful community possible. This I believe is a travesty of reality. A community which reflects the person and values of Jesus is not dependent upon size. Churches of any size can be special.

An additional reflection by John O'Keith

Paul invited me, when he sent me this article, to add my own reflection on the contents of the article. I was already familiar with the concepts because, several years ago, I spent a week researching Local Collaborative Ministry as it is carried out in the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), where Dean Fostekew, Susan Wiffin and others had taken material from the Alban Institute and reworked ('tartanised') it into a course known as *Making Your Church More Inviting (MYCMI)*. The material which Paul describes above is part of that course. Let me now offer my own conclusions about how Roy Oswald's congregation sizes might be understood in an English or Welsh situation.

Which Type of Church Are You?

In my view, the sizes of Christian congregations in Wales and England would work more like this:

- Cell (or family) - up to about 30 people
- Congregation (or pastoral) - 30-120 people
- Celebration (or programme) - 120-300 people
- Corporate - more than 300 people

The numbers reflect the total if all the regular worshippers (once per month or more often) turn up on the same day. In reality, attendance is usually about two-thirds of this figure.

For Anglicans, the situation is complicated considerably by the fact that many parishes consist of several congregations meeting in different buildings, often some distance apart, served by the same (often part-time) cleric. A typical example would be a parish of four former parishes in which, if all the regular worshippers turned up on the same day, they would number just over 100, which would

put them close to the top end of the 'Pastoral' category. So the (probably part-time) incumbent of that parish has to answer an important question: do I treat them as one, large, pastoral congregation? Or do I treat them as three cell (family) congregations and a small pastoral one? Trust me when I say that this is not an easy dilemma to resolve, and little real attempt has been made (to the best of my knowledge) to develop material to assist clergy and their superiors in identifying how to address the challenge.

This discussion raises another question: does the larger size church include the advantages and disadvantages of the smaller congregations? I suggest that, if they don't, something has gone seriously wrong. But before I unpack that potentially controversial statement, let me try to show how I believe the four categories of church should be understood in the UK context.

The Cell or Family Church

Such congregations usually function like an extended family, in which everyone knows everyone else reasonably well, newcomers are immediately noticeable, and the business of the church is usually done fairly informally.

That all sounds fine: the church clearly has all the advantages of smallness, including being the most likely size to grow in numbers. But it also has the disadvantages of a family. Disputes within such a small congregation affect everyone in a very negative way. There is often not enough money nor people to do everything which needs to be done. And it is all too easy for the cell-sized congregation to become dominated by one patriarchal or matriarchal family.

This is a potential trap for unsuspecting clergy. These little congregations expect their clergy to give them pastoral care, but do not expect them to effect any significant change. If the often long-serving leaders of this congregation decide against an idea, it almost certainly won't happen. Not that there'll be any nastiness about it. All that will happen is that nothing will happen, because nothing can happen without the approval of these leaders.

Even more difficult is when those same lay leaders are unpopular and others encourage the new vicar to confront them. A wise vicar declines to do so, knowing that, in reality, he or she probably can't win, and probably won't be able to win such a confrontation until they've been in post for at least five years. Meanwhile, the role of

the vicar is to act as a guide and consultant to the lay leaders, winning their confidence, and nudging them in the direction he or she feels the church should go.

Small churches like this are often where newly ordained clergy are sent to gain experience before moving on to bigger and better things. Stuffed with ideas and enthusiasm, they arrive in a church where both are resisted with non-activity. After a few years of frustration, they either burn out or leave (or both) and often leave pastoral ministry altogether.

Surprisingly, attempts to close these cell-sized churches, on the grounds that they are non-viable, usually fail. They are more resilient than large congregations because they are often such a tight-knit group. To put it another way, an incompetent priest can lose 200 members in a year from a large congregation, but the same useless vicar will have little impact on a small congregation. These little congregations survive everything that is thrown at them, because of the strength of the internal lay leadership.

The Congregation or 'Pastoral' church (30-120 active members)

As Oswald says, clergy are usually at the centre of a Pastoral church. There are more potential leaders around, so they need someone at the centre to manage them. A leadership group, made up of the minister and a relatively small group of lay leaders usually run this kind of church. The ability of the leadership to lead usually depends on good communication with the congregation, but also on the ability and willingness of the leaders to delegate their ministry. In this kind of church, the role of the leader is to define reality and say 'Thank you' as often and in as many different ways as possible.

Without these abilities, the clergy person is in serious danger of burnout, as the sheer size of the job proves too big for all but the most gifted and energetic minister. Sadly, all too often, these churches are led by clergy who have burned out, but, because they have the freehold of the parish, are reluctant to move. Or they perform poorly at interviews because of their burnout symptoms and are therefore unable to move - who wants a Vicar who is burned out before he starts work?

In a church of this size, everyone in the regular congregation expects (often unreasonably) to have a personal relationship with

the clergy person. They expect him or her to meet their spiritual needs, although once the regular worshippers exceed 100, it is highly unlikely that he/she will succeed, mainly because the administrative burden will have become too great. It is likely that people expect the minister/vicar to turn up at every meeting. People expect (usually unreasonably) the vicar to call when they are unwell (they also expect him or her to know about the pastoral crisis without being told, but that's another story!). When people ask to see the minister, they expect to be seen within a couple of days at the most. The time demands on the vicar of a church of this size can become oppressive, but most members will respond with loyalty to a reasonable level of attention and guidance from this central figure.

In a Congregation-sized church, everyone who's been there for any length of time still knows everyone by name, and may well know the names of their spouses and children, and even what they all do for a living, but it would not go much deeper than that. As this church reaches its maximum size, people begin to find that they no longer know everyone, with the result that they begin to get nervous. They begin to ask whether they are losing the quality of friendship, relationship and fellowship that they prize so highly. The answer is that, if the church is to grow any larger, they will have to pay that price. If they are not willing to pay the price, they will (without any malice aforethought) begin to freeze out newcomers, preventing further expansion. Clergy often collude with this process, especially if they begin to feel uncomfortable that they no longer know everyone, and can no longer offer the quality of pastoral care to which they have become accustomed.

People join the church because they like the interaction between pastor and people, but when a congregation grows to the point where its pastor's time and energy is drawn off into many other activities and the one-to-one pastoral relationship begins to suffer, adding additional clergy will have limited success. Anyway, shortage of clergy and money to pay them means that this is not usually an option.

Moving through to the next size (Celebration or Programme church) is often difficult and meets resistance from both vicar and congregation as both are threatened with the loss of features of church life which they regard as non-negotiable. However, this shift can be eased by either providing further training in the

required skills, or replacement of the senior clergy person, and by taking steps to ensure that the growing congregation is encouraged to relate to one another in smaller groups.

The Celebration or 'Programme' church (120-300 active members)

As a congregation grows beyond the ability of a single employed clergy person to meet all their spiritual needs, it becomes necessary for programmes to be put in place to ensure that those needs are met in other ways. At the same time, the larger congregation opens up a range of possibilities for worship and evangelism which are often not possible in a smaller church. For example, it may become possible to sustain one or more choirs and singing groups, one or more worship bands or even a church orchestra. These can give the worship a sense of celebration which is harder to achieve with more slender resources.

The well-functioning Programme church has many areas of activity, which are headed up by lay leaders. These lay leaders, in addition to providing structure and guidance for these activities, also take on some pastoral functions. So, for example, if the leader of Mothers' Union notices that someone in the group is feeling depressed, the leader will often take the member aside and inquire about their well-being. Even if the leader eventually asks the pastor to intervene, the pastor has already received a lot of assistance from this lay leader.

Clergy are still at the centre of the Celebration or Programme church, but they are no longer pastors - they are team leaders. Much of their time and attention must be spent in planning with other lay leaders to ensure the highest quality programmes. The vicar must spend a lot of time recruiting people to head up these smaller ministries, training, supervising, and evaluating them, and seeing to it that their morale remains high. In essence the pastoral leader must often step back from direct ministry with people in order to co-ordinate and support volunteers who offer this ministry. Unless high priority is given to the spiritual and pastoral needs of lay leaders, those programmes will suffer.

Members of the programme church are unlikely to receive pastoral visits from the senior minister, because his or her time is rightly focussed on supporting the other leaders. To see the vicar about a

parish matter, it will probably be necessary to make an appointment at the church office several weeks in advance.

The Corporate church (300 or more active members)

Oswald correctly identifies that the quality of Sunday worship is the first thing you usually notice in a Corporate church. The senior minister will probably spend a lot of his or her time ensuring that the quality of worship is of the highest possible quality. For this church, second-best is just not good enough.

In this church, the senior cleric may not even know, much less remember, the names of many churchgoers. He will rarely make pastoral visits, and then usually it will be to members of his central leadership team. Those who value highly the Corporate church experience are willing to sacrifice a personal connection with the senior cleric in favour of the Corporate church's variety and quality of programme offerings. Sometimes the senior cleric is so prominent that he or she acquires an almost 'legendary' quality, especially in the course of a long pastorate. Few may know this person well, but the role does not require it. They become a symbol of unity and stability in a very complicated congregational life.

The Corporate church is distinguished from the Programme church by its complexity and diversity. The patriarchs and matriarchs are still there, but now as the governing boards who formally, not just informally, control the church's life and future. Laity lead on many levels, and the Corporate church provides opportunity for gifted lay people to exert considerable influence.

Key to the success of the Corporate church is the multiple staff (lay and ordained) and its ability to manage the diversity of its ministries in a collegial manner. Maintaining energy and momentum in a Corporate church is very difficult when there is division within the parish staff. Any inability to work together harmoniously is especially evident during Sunday worship where any tensions among the ordained leadership of the parish will manifest themselves in subtle ways.

It is at this point that clergy making the transition to the Corporate church find themselves most vulnerable and unsupported. The clergy who are called as head of staff in Corporate churches are usually multi-skilled people who have proved their skill in a great variety of pastoral situations. But now he has to learn to allow his staff to do things their own way, which

is in itself a major new demand. Research using psychometric testing of clergy shows that congregations are best served when the multiple staff includes different types. The more diverse the staff, the greater its ability to minister to a diverse congregation. But this requirement for diversity makes multiple staff functioning more complicated: the more diverse the staff, the harder it is to understand and support one another's ministries.

Lay leaders are generally completely baffled by the inability of ordained people to work collegially. 'If our religious leaders aren't able to get along, what hope is there for this world?' they may wonder. Lay leaders could help enormously by seeing to it that there is money in the budget for regular consultative help for the staff. This help is needed not only when tensions arise. Multiple staffs need to be meeting regularly with an outside consultant to keep lines of communication open and difficulties surfaced.

When the multiple staff is clearly and visibly having fun working well together, this becomes contagious throughout the Corporate church. Lay people want to get on board and enjoy the fun, so the parish has little difficulty filling the many volunteer jobs needed to run a Corporate church.

In addition to learning to manage a multiple staff, clergy making the transition to head of staff need to hone their administrative skills. These clergy are becoming chief executive officers of substantive operations. However, it is important to emphasise leadership skills over management skills. Managers manage the energy of a parish, but it is leaders who generate that energy. Without that energy, the Corporate church, however well managed it may be, begins to decline. In fact, recent research in the UK indicates that most of the church decline of recent years has happened in the larger congregations. Generally speaking, the larger the congregation, the more likely it is to be in decline.

Conclusions

At the beginning of my input to this discussion, I asked whether the large church groups should include the strengths and weaknesses of the smaller ones. I stated that, if they don't, something has gone seriously wrong. Let me now justify that statement.

It seems to me that, however large the congregation, however brilliant the programme, however excellent are the acts of worship,

the congregation still craves the strengths of the smaller church. They still want to feel that they are important, valued, cared for, encouraged, supported and thanked by the leadership. Sadly, it is possible for leaders of growing congregations to become bogged down with making the system work, servicing the programme, managing the committees and providing excellent communication and worship, so that they forget that church, in the end, is all and only about relationships.

However, the small church can have the opposite challenge. With a tiny congregation, it is easy to become bogged down in the minutiae of parish life that leaders can forget their responsibility to manage the church well, with the result that, bit by bit, the organisational wheels start to come loose and fall off. It's also easy to become so cosy with the group that there is no felt need to grow and develop - we're fine just as we are, thank you, Vicar!

What I am arguing is that, although the skills required of leaders are different depending on the size of the congregation, the objectives stay the same. A Church is still a Church (and I'm talking about the people, not the building) whether the congregation is six or six hundred. The objective is always to create a missionary community which will bring the good news of Jesus Christ to bear on the wider community in which they are set. It's not about what goes on in church buildings, but about how those people and their leaders live when they are out and about in the wider world. And I submit that at least one of the major reasons why most of our congregations are now largely devoid of two whole generations of Christians is that we have become either too cosy, or too disorganised, or too committee-bound or programme-driven to enable our people to simply live the Jesus-life among their families, friends, neighbours and colleagues.

How do we change that? It is my view that the way in which we train our clergy must change if they and the churches they serve are to thrive. For example, our denominational systems do little to equip clergy to work collegially within a multiple staff. A three-day workshop at theological college on management is probably the only training they will receive. Even leaders in industry with master's degrees in personnel management still make serious mistakes in hiring and developing leaders for the corporation. So it's not surprising if the minister of a small local church gets it wrong from time to time as he or she learn to manage a multiple

staff of (mostly) volunteers by trial and error. Sacrificing a few lay and ordained leaders on the altar of experience is (sadly) the price the church pays for such lack of training.

For the most part clergy are not taught to work collegially. In theological college we compete with one another for grades. Each of us retreats to his or her own cubicle to write essays and dissertations. There is little interaction in class. We don't really have to take each other seriously. This might change if, for example, a professor were to assign four students to complete research on a church doctrine, write one paper, and receive a group grade. In that kind of learning atmosphere we would have to take one another on and argue about our different theological perspectives and forms of piety. Unless our training can begin to equip us for collegial ministry, our colleges will continue to turn out solo performers who don't really know how to work with others in developing parish life and ministry. By that time our patterns have been set.

A three-day course at theological college on management skills is simply not enough to enable leaders to focus on the important and not get bogged down in the unimportant. It is time to teach these skills to ordinands so that they can correctly analyse the situation they find themselves in, and are able to adapt their leadership style to suit the needs of that situation.

The research done by Roy Oswald and others needs to be at the heart of that training, but, in my view, its greatest value is to our prayers as we seek to catch the wind of the Spirit - or perhaps more accurately, desperately try to hang on to the Spirit's coat-tails!

FINDING HOLY GROUND IN DULL TERRAIN

Karen Case-Green

Member of Guildford Baptist Church, mother of two and part-time lecturer at the University of Surrey

I write this having just dropped my children off at their respective schools on the first day of term. The house seems eerily quiet after the cacophony of the summer holidays. It's a near-forgotten luxury