

# SIZING UP A CONGREGATION

## INTRODUCTION

Who has not been seduced by the fantasy of a perfect program that will solve the problems of all churches everywhere? Our experience tells us that such an idea leads to frustration. Why? The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate how one important factor, the size of congregations, prevents us from using one program and one style of leadership for all church situations.

The size of a congregation acts as a key variable in those factors that determine the structure, functions, and style of relationships in its group life. For ease of analysis we will assign four categories of size to differentiate a pattern: small, medium, large, and extra large.

The small church will have up to 50 members active and attending worship with some regularity. This size we will call the FAMILY CHURCH.

The medium size church will have from 50-150 active members and will be identified as the PASTORAL CHURCH.

The large church will have 150-350 active members and it becomes the PROGRAM CHURCH.

The extra large church, called the CORPORATION CHURCH, includes an active membership of 350-500 and over.

One gauge of active membership is the average attendance at worship over a one-year period. We are not interested here in the number of communicants or baptized persons on the record. The following analysis assumes that each numerical range represents a membership that demonstrates a commitment and maintains a vitality in both their worship and work.

There is no intent in this presentation to attach any stigma or respectability to size as such. On the contrary, it is assumed that any size church is the right size, and any size church can attract and assimilate new members. However, the basic hypothesis is that *the most effective means of carrying out a new member ministry varies with the size of the congregation*. The hypothesis does not mean to deny the importance of other variables, such as context, available resources, local history, institutional and systemic cycles, etc. In the real situation no one variable can be isolated.

This presentation draws on available research\* and my own careful observations. It uses these to answer five questions in each category according to the variable of size.

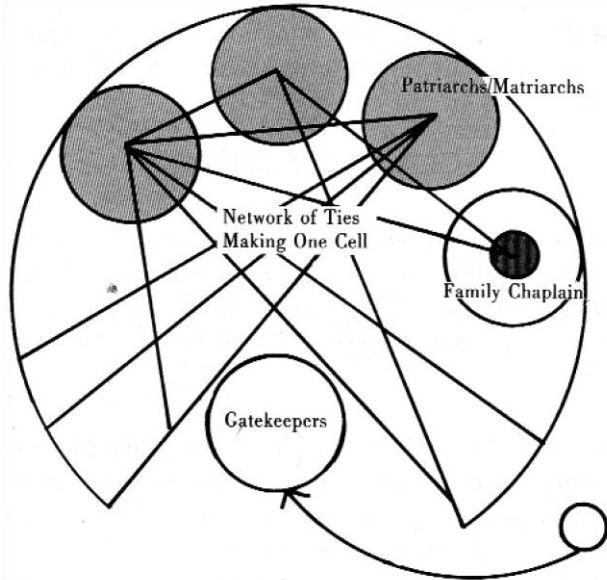
1. What is the basic structure of each type of church: family, pastoral, program, and corporation?
2. How does each category typically attract new members?
3. What are the predominant characteristics of entry for the new member?
4. What are the basic needs of the new member in each size congregation?
5. How might a church most effectively meet those basic needs of a new member?

# THE FAMILY CHURCH 0-50

## ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Rural Areas, some  
Urban Centers, and Small Towns

### 1. The Structure of the Family Church



The relatively recent, but classic description of the “family” church comes from the writings of Carl Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective*. Dudley points out that the small church has the basic dynamics of a one-cell unit, such as a family with strong parental figures in control of the norms and changes in the family life. The priest and/or deacon in this situation will function as chaplain but not as the primal father. If this is not understood, much of the clerical ministry is spent in frustration and in conflict with the well-established patriarchs and matriarchs. A sense of mutual ministry and cooperation gives the small church an effective leadership in which each type of leader offers the appropriate gift in the church family. When this harmony exists, the small church offers rich rewards of familial support and a profound sense of belonging.

Members who can get into the family are loved and cared for intimately, but how do newcomers make their way into this close, and sometimes closed, family? The “gatekeepers” serve the role of a cheerful, welcoming, kind person who is ready for casual conversation. A gatekeeper opens the door, but it is the patriarch and matriarch who sanction a place in the family for the newcomer. The method of assimilation is more like adoption than simple social acceptance. The adoption will take longer than social acceptance, but the eventual bond with the new church family will be very strong.

### 2. Attracting New Members to a Family Church

- a. Persons in small communities are attracted to a church that services its neighbors in significant ways. Such a community values, trusts, and will affiliate more readily with a church that demonstrates the commandment of Christ to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

- b. Being a true servant church is best achieved in a small church through defining and concentrating on a special vocation for the congregation in the community. This vocation must meet a visible need and can arise out of any one of the five basic functions of a congregation: social service, worship, education, evangelism, and pastoral care. It is essential that the vocation be given time to emerge and form so that it will have integrity and excellence. In a small community, reputation is primary and passage of time is secondary.
- c. The requirements in money, volunteer time, and personnel for the vocation should match with the resources in the congregation. The vocation is a long-term commitment on the part of the whole congregation; consequently a large percentage of the active membership should share in discovering and defining the vocation.
- d. When a congregation, such as one in an urban setting, dedicates itself to a social service for a socio-economic level in the community that does not attend the worship services, it may create two tensions:
  - (1) The new socio-economic group will not respond by becoming members of the immediate congregation. This disconnection might be interpreted falsely as failure. The mission of the church is not, in all circumstances, demonstrated by an increase in membership.
  - (2) One of the persons who is helped by the church may elect to attend a church gathering but does not feel accepted as an equal in worship and fellowship.

These two tensions require further teaching in the skills of incorporating new members with different styles of life. With such training most churches can make an intentional, even if not natural, effort to broaden their social, economic, and ethnic profile. Also, it has been found that new members are attracted to a congregation that is loving and caring in the Spirit of Christ although the newcomer may not be the direct recipient of that service. These new members say to themselves, "Those people are the kind I want to be around."

- e. Examples of small church vocations in their relation to five basic functions of a congregation:
  - (1) Service: in a seaport town a small church has established and maintained, for decades, an excellent seamen's center. In an inner city, a small group has housed, in church property, hostels for battered women and children. Another urban church gives its time to services that help Asian immigrants adjust to their new environment.
  - (2) Worship: in an older suburban area two small churches offer a vocation in two different styles of worship, one charismatic and the other very "high church." They draw people from a larger perimeter than their immediate neighborhood.
  - (3) Education: a small rural church offers an excellent "Vacation Bible School" for children of all denominations.  
A small white church joined with a small black congregation to support a remedial training program in the community for the underachieving student when the government programs were withdrawn.
  - (4) Evangelism: a small and new congregation in a new area of town planned a unique way of getting acquainted with newcomers in the new development. They made homemade wine and homemade bread

which were taken in a welcome basket with a simple note inside explaining the meaning of bread and wine as a symbol in civilization and in the Episcopal Church.

(5) Pastoral Care: a little mission has a new hospital built near it because of the growing population of exurbia, the joining of a country town with the advance of a larger population center. They developed their congregation into hospital calling teams to assist other Episcopal parishes and often other denominations in giving a fuller visitation program to patients.

Your congregation has a special vocation, too. When found, it will give new excitement and purpose to the mission of the small church.

### **3. Characteristics of Entry into a Family Church**

- a. New members come predominantly through the strong family and friendship ties that have existed for generations. In some small communities it is better to think about family units being the newcomer rather than simply individuals. In the social environment of many small towns, a major change in patterns of behavior, such as joining a church, is a decision that is made in unit strength—come one, come all, and all the aunts, uncles, and cousins might follow too.
- b. A newcomer will probably already be known by someone in the church and by the “gatekeeper.” If a crisis is involved, the chances are that the whole community knows it by the “grapevine.” Having grace and sensitivity in new relationships at church will be extremely important.
- c. Beyond the immediate circumstances, true adoption into the church family will be long-term, but we do not want it to become too long!

### **4. Basic Needs of the Newcomer in the Family Church**

- a. The newcomer needs information about the heritage and particular traditions of this congregation in order to fit in comfortably and knowledgeably. Not to know what everyone else assumes is a conversational barrier, at least, and often more.
- b. Acceptance and recognition beyond the ritual of contact with the “gatekeeper” is particularly needed outside of the church gatherings. Here is perhaps the only legitimate possibility for “street corner” evangelism. When the newcomer is seen at the local grocer, service station, cafe, etc., it is necessary that the church members be warm and responsive in this normal daily contact.
- c. Church leaders need to arrange gradual and intentional association with the “patriarchs and matriarchs.”
- d. The newcomer needs safe opportunities and safe persons for discussing the “new siblings” and the new relationship in the new church family. All will not always go easily, and the newness will cause awkward moments.

## **5. Suggestions for Responding to the Basic Needs**

- a. Plan a one-to-one visit with a “retired” patriarch and/or matriarch, who functions now as the family-lore teller, in order for the newcomer to have a good experience with the heritage of the congregation.
- b. Make available to the newcomer a brief history and membership roster.
- c. Identify the family and close friends of the newcomer who are already in the church. Help these members become aware of the way smaller churches receive, and relate to, a new person. Ask these church members explicitly to accept the ministry of being a guide for the newcomer in getting acquainted and in learning about the life of the congregation.
- d. Be interested in, and learn about, the new person. Find out by respectful listening about work responsibilities, hobbies, community contacts, family ties, association in clubs, schools, other churches, etc. In these polite probes, search for significant contact points with other church members, particularly patriarchs and matriarchs.
- e. Recruit support for encouraging and appreciating the new person at every point in community life where a church member associates with the newcomer. Specifically ask the church member to make a reasonable effort at building a friendly and caring relationship with the newcomer. It is important that these church members on special assignment identify and seek out the new person at church gatherings.
- f. The priest and deacon in the small church have the opportunity to offer a special type of contact. Because the parishioners are giving regular friendship, the priest can be a spiritual guide and confessor when the new person wants to share something in confidence. The clergy can say clearly and appropriately, “If difficulties occur in coming into our family, please let us talk about it. I’ll be confidential and support you in working through the situation.”

## **6. Summary of the Category: Small Church-0-50**

The family church is able to attract new members, even with limited resources, by becoming visible and distinctive in its community through the development of a vocation. This specialized ministry becomes a major mission focus and represents a particular contribution to the life of that community.

When new members are drawn to the congregation, they need the church to share its heritage, friendship circle, and public acceptance by the leadership. The clergy, patriarchs, and matriarchs can be a critical link between the newcomer and the congregation by discreetly seeking intentional commitments to befriend the new person.

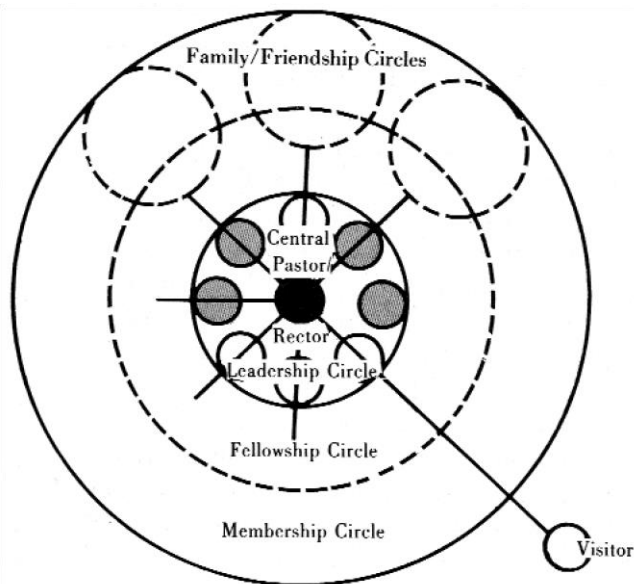
The small church, whether established recently or long ago, possesses the dynamics of a family that follows the lead and temperament of a few patriarchs and matriarchs. It is difficult to gain adoption into the rather closed network of close relationships in this family. Nevertheless, well-informed “gatekeepers” and sensitive “chaplains” can provide easier entry for the newcomer.

# THE PASTORAL CHURCH

50-150 Active Members

Usual Context: Towns and Suburbia

## 1. The Structure of the Pastoral Church



- a. The pastoral church finds it needs more cohesive leadership due to the increase of size over and against the more intimate one-cellular structure. This size of congregation encompasses 2 to 3 cells of quite intense relations. These cells tend to function as layers or circles which revolve around a pastoral care center. The leadership circle replaces the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family church; however, it still includes these longtime members and prominent personalities. A new structure has evolved because the leaders have needed to select a leader. Consequently, an incipient hierarchy emerges in the centralizing of authority in one patriarch/matriarch. In the congregational style of our culture this individual is usually a paid professional with the credentials of higher education and/or ordination.
- b. The power and effectiveness of the leadership circle will depend largely on good communication with the congregation and the ability of the central leader to delegate authority, assign responsibility, and recognize the accomplishments of others. Without such skills, the central pastoral function weakens the entire structure. The clergy person becomes exhausted, overworked, isolated, attacked by other leaders, and harmony in the fellowship circle degenerates. Also, the potential for expansion in the membership circle depreciates rapidly.
- c. The membership looks first to the central leader for direction, inspiration, and pastoral care. This place of high honor for the central pastor provides dangers and opportunities at the same time. The demand upon the pastor can become oppressive. However, most members will respond with loyalty to a reasonable level of attention and guidance from this central figure. Conversely, often the leadership circle offers the central pastor little latitude for error and poor judgment. One moment the leader is treated as a peer and the next as a pontiff. This central leader must be skillful in acquiring and using power with wisdom and grace. Meek as a

lamb and wise as a fox. Normally, the pastor at the center is like the noble shepherd in charge of the flock. On occasion, one of the sheep turns out to be a wolf in wool.

- d. The leadership required is predominantly pastoral because there are so many relationships to watch over in this very large family. Conflict management means survival. If this congregation becomes larger in size, the internal dynamics will change because it will no longer be possible to operate as a super-family with a “big daddy.”

## **2. The Characteristics of Entry into a Pastoral Church**

- a. Newcomers in this type of pastor-centered church will expect attention from the clergy person because this is the common pattern in the existing membership. A new person naturally acquires this pervasive attitude. Consequently, new member ministry could become limited to the central pastor.
- b. In the pastoral church most newcomers find their way into the membership circle through the pastoral work of the clergy person. In this type of church, few visitors stay who cannot relate to the priest in charge. The study, Profile of Episcopalians-1982, found that 54% of the respondents said they chose their parish because they “like the rector.” This percentile probably correctly indicates the influence that the central pastor or rector has in the entry process of newcomers in many medium size and larger suburban churches.
- c. Inevitably, one problem results that stifles growth: namely, the number of newcomers that can be managed within this system is quite limited. If the rector is the key evangelist, who is working alone, then only 6 to 10 persons will be assimilated fully into the membership per year. Also, the priest has the perpetual problem of making friends with the newcomers only to be faced with the necessity of moving on to others. The newcomer may become sensitive to this decrease in attention and misinterpret this withdrawal as rejection.
- d. Most likely the visitor will not be greeted by a “gatekeeper.” The members might be quite casual about, perhaps even uninterested in, the new person. The members think of themselves as a friendly group, but they may be friendly mainly to each other. Membership will be granted easily, but actual inclusion in the fellowship circle and the inner core of leadership will prove difficult. The priest is expected to serve as shepherd in guiding the new person through the stages of visitor to membership to fellowship and to leadership. However, one shepherd will be able to do little more than maintain a level of growth that creates a plateau in size.

## **3. The Basic Needs of a Newcomer**

- a. The new person will need recognition and support during the “screening process.” Screening is not necessarily an overtly hostile act on the part of the congregation, but it may hurt. It is a natural mannerism through which any group works out an adequate matching device for prospective members. Groups have norms and purposes that are fundamental to their identity. Screening is the way a group signals to new persons whether or not they will be compatible in the new social environment. The result may be incorporation or rejection. The testing process is difficult and not always pleasant. In the Christian community we practice screening, but must protect newcomers from an experience that is inconsistent with the Christian principles of respect for all human beings and love of our neighbors. Further, there is a difference between group life and gospel life. The gospel is for all; not every group is for all. As the bearer of



the gospel, the church must become a place for all. Perhaps it would be more realistic to say that the church must become a place where everyone can find a place.

- b. In preparation for the newcomer the leadership needs to provide for, and be aware of, multi-entry points into the fellowship circle of the congregation. Each entry point will be governed and facilitated by a separate group, perhaps a study class, a men's, or women's, or youth fellowship, a service project, a choir, etc. Whatever the group, each one offers another opportunity for newcomers to make contact, to find people with similar interests and values, to participate in satisfying activities, and to build new relationships.
- c. The visitor does not need to know the names of all the members. It is adequate to know 8 to 10 people by their first name. Two or three of these acquaintances should share some common interest with the newcomer.

#### **4. Suggestions for Response to the Basic Needs**

- a. Identify members who have exceptional gifts in being a host/hostess and in pastoral care. Such a person can remember names, give warmth without the preliminary foundation stage of friendship, carry on conversation easily with new acquaintances, and have the ability to accept graciously a wide range of people without feeling nervous and judgmental. This person should be fully accepted in the leadership circle and have extensive contacts in the fellowship circle.
- b. The candidate for this responsibility is commissioned to the ministry of hospitality in some public way that is appropriate in the congregation, perhaps at the offertory in the Eucharist. The hospitality minister (other titles may be used) is more than a greeter although he or she will serve with the priest in the narthex and coffee hour.
- c. It is the task of the hospitality minister to learn about newcomers and assume responsibility for their being welcomed at the church during the first six months. Such duties are
  - (1) to match the newcomer with suitable members and groups,
  - (2) to make the appropriate introductions, and repeated introductions, at church gatherings,
  - (3) to give the newcomer and group leader the necessary orientation and information in order to facilitate a comfortable entry.
- d. The hospitality minister will host situations that provide one-to-one contact with the clergy, and help the clergy make home, or hospital, calls when the newcomer desires visitation. The priest should take care not to overload the hospitality minister with other congregational responsibilities and with too many cases.
- e. It will be necessary for the hospitality minister and clergy to confer with each other regularly to provide in-service training and an exchange of information that is pertinent to the new member ministry.

In The Master Plan, Colman points out that Jesus, as a teacher and trainer, selected a few persons for close and continuous supervision. Clergy will find that the method of Jesus is an effective model for enabling mutual ministry and greater trust between the laity and the ordained ministry. Such an approach is particularly useful in congregations of up to 150 active members, that is, the family and the pastoral churches.

## 5. Summary and Evaluation

There are substantial reasons for not suggesting that the priest organize a new-member committee in the congregations that fit the first and second categories. One study discovered that churches with new-member committees do not grow any faster than the churches without such groups. Why? They may be used as a substitute for the membership-wide responsibility of inviting and integrating others. Such committees may represent a recognition that the character of the community has changed and that efforts to contact prospective members must become more focused and intentional. However, new-member committees may appear counterproductive because they are often found in congregations where the social context makes church growth almost impossible, or in congregations where the larger membership has lost its enthusiasm about the ministry it shares. In such instances, new-member committees are symptomatic of deeper difficulties which the congregation needs to face head on.

Finally, we have observed in looking at congregations of an active membership up to 150 that organization is not a key issue in their life. Strong family ties and an effective pastoral leader stand out in vital churches of this size. The organization is usually low-key and very flexible, perhaps changing with each task. Major attention is given, not to organization as such, but to building trust between the key leaders and the priest and to training in a one-to-one supervisory style.

It will prove helpful to have a support group for new member ministry that may be called a committee, task force, working group, or something else. The name and the organizational style are not significant, but this commitment to evangelistic ministries will provide for the pastor and the hospitality ministers a group where concerns, dreams, problems and achievements can be shared. The function is much more than administration.

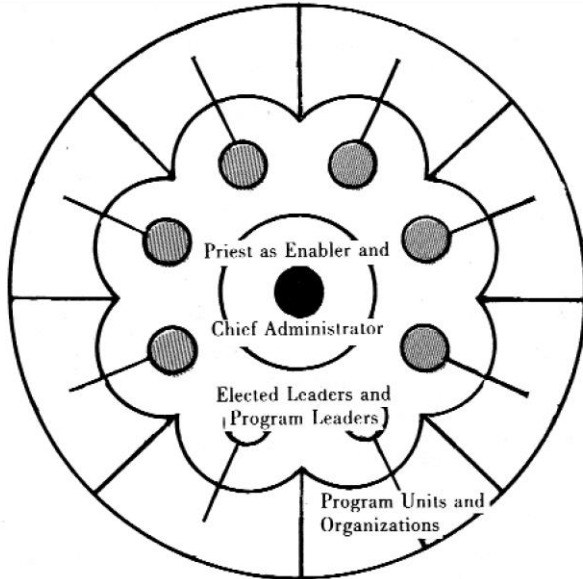
The Evangelism Committee, or a New Member Commission, as a distinctively administrative group, is not without impact in the appropriate setting. In the next section on the program church we will begin to see the role of such a group.

# THE PROGRAM CHURCH

150-350 Active Members

Usual Context: Larger Towns, Urban and Growing Suburban Areas

## 1. The Structure of the Program Church



- a. Democratic organization and leadership by the laity are the keys to effective ministry in the program church. Due to the increase in size it will no longer be possible for the central leader to maintain pastoral contact with the whole congregation. The priest and church staff will be delegating more responsibility and authority to the laity. Team leadership will replace centralized leadership. The church staff and lay leadership will require more training and pastoral support for their expanded ministry. The central pastor becomes a pastor to the lay pastors.
- b. The congregation will need to make a further transition from dependency upon the priest in basic ministry functions, such as counselling, teaching, administration, membership development, and worship. To use titles for expressing this change: the “father” becomes facilitator. The patriarchs and matriarchs come into full power again, but this time the environment is more democratic than autocratic. The best leaders are comfortable with the interdependency of teamwork, and they are responsive to the dictates and directions that arise from the church community. The major decisions are made in representative governing bodies, such as the vestry and program councils.
- c. As the number of parish programs and program leaders grow, the priest finds that more and more time is taken up with the formation of dreams and new directions, with the coordination of many different ministries, and the administration of goal setting, strategy planning, resourcing, training, and perpetual evaluation. The pastoral work of the clergy is carried out in the setting of administration.
- d. The life of the parish progressively tends to center around separate programs and worship services. Friendships cluster around these centers of activity. This development can create a twofold problem:

communication and unity. The many friendship clusters and manifold programs can give members the impression that too much is happening outside their immediate circle that they don't know about-and it might be true. Anxiety about this lack of awareness expresses itself in the common complaint about "a break in communication." Further, the increase in activity demands much more coordination in order that there might be one thrust rather than a situation in which everyone is "doing their own thing" with little interest in the rest of the parish.

The priest and program leadership succeed in avoiding such problems through an adequate means of sharing information about events and insuring an integration of program areas. In a sense, the congregation becomes a "public" and the leadership needs good public relations. Many methods of communication are available to us, but the program church must give itself permission to spend considerable time and money in their employment. It is not a waste; rather, it is good stewardship.

- e. In an effective program church, the whole congregation affirms a clear statement of the purpose of the parish. Annual goals and all activities throughout the year reflect the purpose statement. The entire leadership assumes accountability for supporting the purpose as a guideline. The program church will suffer if its purpose is not intentionally articulated and reviewed publicly. This purpose statement serves also as a conservator of time and energy. If a proposed activity, or existing program, does not conform with the purpose, then there is good reason to give no further staffing and money in that direction. Using a purpose statement well is like pruning a plant for its maximum growth potential.

## **2. Attracting New Members to the Program Church**

- a. The program church frequently draws persons by the visibility and quality of its programs. Consequently, every leader should be aware of this potential in every area of programming. For example, always encourage participants to share their enthusiasm for the program with someone else. Provide easy ways that a new person can be introduced to a program and made part of a friendship circle that is associated with the program.
- b. The maxim, "Find a hurt and heal it," characterizes a good strategy for reaching out to the community. The expansion of leadership and the wider range of caring services in the program church give many resources for responding to human needs in a variety of critical experiences, such as illness, surgery, births, baptisms, graduations, marriages, divorces, deaths, financial crises, major transitions in life, recent arrivals in a neighborhood, need for spiritual direction, etc.
- c. It is advisable for a program church to have specific programs for achieving visibility in the community, for attracting prospects, and building "bridges of trust" between the membership and the unchurched population. Research teams and a task force can be assigned to exploring the possibilities for programs that might achieve such goals.

## **3. The Basic Needs of a Newcomer in a Program Church**

- a. A directory that gives a composite picture of the life and functions of the parish. This information serves as a "road map," guiding the new persons to groups that share their interests and to programs that will meet their own needs,

- b. A process of incorporation that makes provision for each step a newcomer must make in order to find a place, in the structures and systems of the church organization. That potential “new friend,” good spiritual nurture, and a satisfying expression of lay ministry will be hidden in the organizational layers of the program church. An incorporation procedure should help new members find their way. It is easy to get lost and drift out the back door.
- c. Recognition and respect for the newcomer as an individual, rather than merely another potential member. If the available resources of the present membership are strained, that is, if they are trying to do too many programs, the program church could project anxiety about needing recruits for committees and tasks. The newcomers will feel needed but used unless there is an evident concern for their own circumstances. Giving the impression of exploiting new people is a perpetual danger in larger organizations.

#### **4. Response to the Basic Human Needs through an Incorporation Process**

The essential functions of an incorporation program are:

##### **a. *A Warm Welcome***

We can start by identifying and training greeters for Sunday morning. This group can also conduct small group sessions to discuss and train the whole membership in being open and sensitive to visitors. These sessions, perhaps as informal gatherings in homes, stress fuller awareness of

- (1) the needs and feelings of newcomers,
- (2) the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in groups
- ,(3) the steps in the parish program for assimilating new members.

##### **b. *Visitor Information***

To make follow-up possible, it is essential to devise some polite method of securing the name, address, and phone number of visitors. Then, use the method consistently.

##### **c. *Follow Up Response***

Respond to a visitor in the first through the second week by mail, phone, or a home visit. It is minimal hospitality to say “Thank you for your visit” in some manner. Of course, the content and form of the response will be determined by the intentions and circumstances of the visitor. For example, a close relative is in the hospital and the person is frightened. Act fast! An active Episcopalian moves into town and expresses the desire for a new church affiliation. A home call in the first week after the visit is certainly appropriate. However, if a non-Episcopalian stops by for worship while visiting a relative in the congregation, a cordial letter of appreciation is adequate.

Any visitation program must be carried out by well qualified persons, who are in possession of needed background information on those to be visited, in order that the initial contact will be handled correctly and sensitively. That first impression is crucial.

**d. *Opportunities for Orientation and Education***

More churches are conducting perpetual Inquirers' Classes for new members and confirmation preparation. Weekend retreats can also serve the function of providing regular orientation and exploration of the Christian faith.

It is helpful to offer special learning experiences for adults who are seeking baptism and for parents who are seeking baptism for infants. Further, children need specially designed instruction to understand their baptism. Lay leaders should participate in conducting all the above opportunities for teaching our faith.

Some visitors will need a short-term situation that gives them elementary information about how we worship and what the different parts of the service mean to us. This instruction can become a way of sharing Christian views in a low-key way with the unchurched person. The teacher can apply to our daily 'needs some of the Christian values we celebrate in the Eucharist, such as love for others, freedom from guilt by confession, having a sense of being in a larger family at communion, getting ideas for working out problems from the reading and expounding of scripture, etc.

**e. *Finding a Place to Belong***

The program church has so many entry points for a newcomer that it may be difficult to find a place to begin. Some orientation about the options available is helpful to new members before they attend meetings or accept committee assignments. Some churches ask members to serve as "shepherds" for new members. They literally help them down the path to the "right pasture" and "best water." This function is a specialization in the hospitality ministry that was mentioned in the previous section. The greater portion of the hospitality of the new church home will be experienced once the "shepherds" have done their work in helping the newcomer find a good place to belong, that is, a cluster of members that share the interests of that new person.

**f. *Self Discovery and New Challenges***

Make available to recent members an opportunity to engage in some methods of gifts identification and a review of their opportunities for ministry.

**g. *Monitoring Progress and Satisfaction***

The most astute church will train experienced leaders to be "guards at the back door." The members of the program church may move in and out of the committees and friendship clusters without notice. In fact, they may even move to the back door and leave without notice as the church grows larger. Often, recently incorporated members are not watched carefully enough for signals of discontent, disappointment, unresolved conflict, faith crisis, etc.

Many losses in membership can be prevented if the most mature and experienced members keep eyes and ears open for any danger signals. This is an excellent ministry for past adult class teachers, past Senior Wardens, and past Junior Wardens. These leaders bring their observations of early signs of trouble to the attention of the church staff in confidential consultations. This ministry assumes and strengthens a high level of trust between the priest and the well-established leadership.

Another function of monitoring can be handled at a secretarial level. For the first year, at least, it is wise to monitor the progress of the newcomer, with careful notations being recorded in the membership file. The

assimilation process does not take place accidentally. The priest and leaders who are responsible for newmember ministry must be deliberate, reflective, and methodical in their work.

#### **h. *Ministry of the Laity***

As the program church advances into a fuller mutuality of ministry between clergy and laity, it will be possible to train “Member Care Teams” to work with four categories of membership development: transfer members, new members, lapsed members, and the baptized infants and their families. The Care Teams offer a pastoral ministry which, in a smaller church, might be provided by the clergy. The pastoral ministry of the laity provides general supportive relationships, home visitation, one-to-one education and spiritual guidance, and reconciliation in conflict situations. The Care Teams will specialize in one or two of the four categories. The team will require intensive training and supervision by the clergy at first. However, with experience, advanced trainees will become trainers and supervisors.

#### **i. *Administration of the Process***

Due to the characteristics of a program church, it will be natural to establish a commission and/or assign a staff person to membership development in order to coordinate the planning, resourcing, and training that will be required in the program for attracting and assimilating new members. The members of this commission should be committed to membership development and evangelistic outreach. Their gifts should give them special competency as planners, educators, and managers.

### **5. Summary and Evaluation**

At this point in our study we can see a pattern in which each size of church can claim advantages that would not be present in the other sizes. The family church enjoys very close ties in the congregation. In fact, everyone in the church probably knows the other members quite well. The pastoral church benefits from the consistent care of a central pastor who is well trained. Further, such a congregation benefits from a multi-cellular structure which is able to provide more diversity of talents and association than the one-cell character of the family church. In the program church it would be impossible to know everyone in the congregation well, and the priest is not able to give close attention to every member as might be expected in the pastoral church. Because of size, in the program church many members do not know each other beyond a casual and somewhat superficial level. However, the program church has the resources to provide for its members a wide variety of programs and more facilities. In contrast, it is best for the family church to specialize in its program because of limited resources. On the other hand, no other size congregation could offer such lasting bonds between its members.

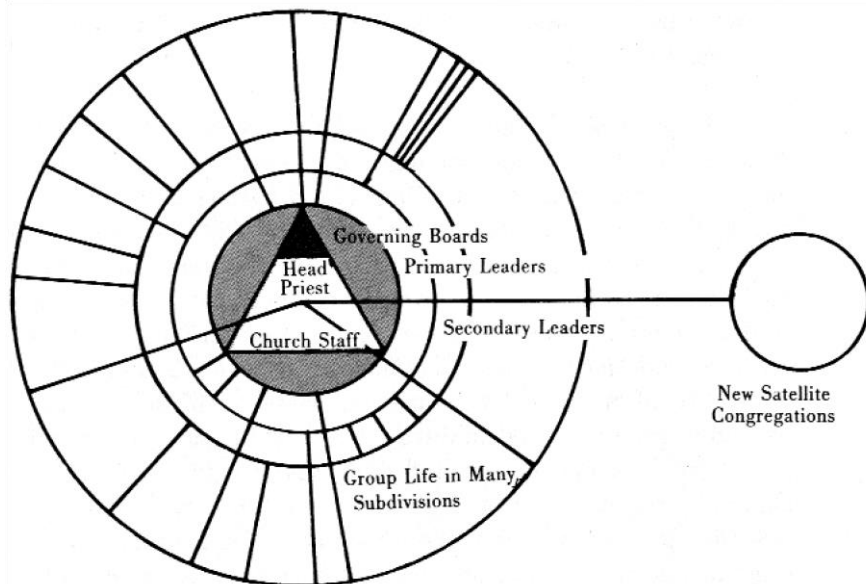
These advantages and limitations are important to consider when we think through the new-member ministry that might be expected in the family, pastoral, and program churches. In particular, we want to use the strengths that are inherent in each category.

# THE CORPORATION CHURCH

300-500+ ACTIVE MEMBERS

Usual Context: Cities and Metropolitan Areas

## 1. The Structure of the Corporation Church



- a. The corporation church is characterized by more complexity and diversity. It includes many characteristics of the other categories, but in a more extreme form. The patriarchs and matriarchs return, but now as the governing boards who formally, not just informally, control the life of and the future of the congregation. The central pastor reappears as the head pastor who now has so much prominence that the personage acquires a legendary quality over a long pastorate. Perhaps few know this person closely, but the function does not require it. The head pastor becomes a symbol of unity and stability in a very complicated congregational life. The leadership

of the laity now takes a multi-level form in which there is opportunity for working up the ladder of influence in the large community. We see the outline of the program church, but with more divisions of activity and more layers of leadership ranks.

- b. There is a sense of belonging to something awesome when the community gathers in worship; the head priest is seen as presiding over the massive family. Much of the pride and loyalty in the congregation comes from being part of the majesty that is created by the large proportions of the church, the numbers, and the authority of the visible leadership. Newcomers might be attracted by an impressive worship service, powerful preaching, or a grand building.
- c. The personal relationships between members of the congregation tend to form around small groups. These take many shapes and have various reasons for being. The programs are extensive and may reach into aspects of the members' daily life. Perhaps there is a private school, day care for children, recreation facilities for the family, music programs and social occasions for youth, choirs for two or three age levels; perhaps there is



affiliated retirement housing and hospital facilities, and even the possibility of many helpful business contacts. Most of these programs generate opportunities for becoming part of a small group. New persons usually find their way into the corporation church by way of the cellular groups which form both spontaneously and purposefully throughout the parish. On the other hand, some members of very large congregations enjoy the anonymity that is possible.

## **2. An Interesting Historical Note**

It is possible to see the pattern of the corporation church in the dioceses; and the historical evolution of the diocese seems to include the characteristics of change in the early church from a family church, to a pastoral church, to a program church, to a corporation church.

In our present system we could see the bishop as the head pastor over a complex coalition of units under governing boards, immediate staff, and primary leaders—in this case, the clergy who are responsible to the bishop as well as their own subdivision of diocesan life. It might be new for us to think of the dioceses as a congregation, but the historical record makes it a feasible perspective.

*Family:* in the post-resurrection church we find a family church firmly centered around patriarchs, the apostles, and notable matriarchs such as the mother of our Lord and the women referred to in the Pauline Letters. The new converts lived with goods and assets in common, as a family would. Their homes seemed a natural place for their assembly.

*Pastoral:* the rapid growth of the Jerusalem church soon required a council of patriarchs who followed the lead of central figures, such as St. Peter and St. James. Larger numbers caused the complaint that pastoral care was not handled adequately any longer. The response was the first expression of a program awareness.

*Program:* it was necessary to appoint some leaders, called deacons, to be pastoral servants who would attend the needy in the congregation. Other programs arose. In education, the sacred teachings were recorded, put in libraries, and itinerant teachers toured various church houses. In evangelism, missionaries were commissioned to go beyond the walls of Jerusalem to other cities and lands. In worship, new buildings were designed, especially for the new forms of Christian ceremony.

*Corporation:* before the end of the first century, the Christian faith was protected, nurtured, and propagated by a maze of both one-cell and multi-cellular gatherings. Later on, due to continued expansion, it became impossible for the patriarchs and central pastors of a city to assemble the faithful as a single congregation. The elders, or presbyters, then took charge of the smaller neighborhood units as deputies of the central pastor. Here we see the beginnings of the system we have now: a diocese which is pastored by a bishop who is represented locally by the other ranks of holy orders, the deacon and the priest.

## **3. Major New-Member Ministry Opportunities for a Corporation Church**

- a. Whether we are thinking of a local congregation of considerable size, or a diocese, the significant changes in membership are often not under the immediate control of the leadership. Many external factors are at work that parallel trends in the corporation church. Some factors might not be easily identified: such as the sudden appeal of a leader with charisma, the openness of a culture or sub-culture to the religious ethos of Christianity, the shift in values in a society from a secular orientation to concern for spiritual ideals, and the general curiosity in a public over some highly visible feature of a congregation, or a religious movement.

- b. One cause of rapid growth in new members is easily determined and analyzed demographically, the population trend. In an area that has a significant increase in population a congregation must be established, and normal growth is nearly inevitable up to the level of the pastoral church. It is the major responsibility of the corporation church and the diocese to provide for new missions in new population centers. A corporation church without satellite congregations, and a diocese without a program for establishing new congregations, loses a major opportunity for evangelism. Without the greater resources and contacts that the corporation church and the diocese enjoy, the new-member ministry of the Christian effort, in general, would be reduced to very slow expansion. Historically, the greater number of new Christians were made through establishing new units at the level of the family church in neighborhoods with the potential of sustaining a mission venture. A plateau of membership is common in pastoral and program churches which are located in areas that have stabilized economically and socially. In fact, an energetic new-member ministry might be necessary to maintain a plateau.
- c. Another opportunity for mission confronts the corporation church and the diocese in congregations that are experiencing a decline in membership. A clear demarcation should be made in a diocese between missions that are established for the purpose of a new member ministry and missions that have become perpetually dependent on other congregations who have more resources. The proportion of resources that should be invested in such dependent missions can be determined by a clear mission strategy for the corporation church and the diocese. Without such a strategy, we could easily get trapped by the survival syndrome. Every social entity will seek to survive for the sake of survival, and a Christian mission is no exception. The survival syndrome, however, generates only frustration, futility, and failure. A small group should know who they are and why they exist. They should know without hesitation answers to the following questions. Are we a family church in an area that has a potential for growth, and do we have the support of a larger group to insure the resources? Are we a small band of missionaries who are commissioned to furnish a Christian presence in a declining neighborhood? Do we have a plan for the number of years that we can sustain the effort, and clarity about the goals that are expected of us? And are the goals related to the reality of the situation?

#### **4. The Basic Needs of, and Suggested Response to, the New Member in a Corporation Church**

I will propose that the needs and responses that form a new member ministry in the corporation church are found in what we have already said about the family, pastoral, and program churches. The corporation church could be viewed as a proliferation of family churches, a division of the pastoral church into more levels of leadership, and an expansion of the program church into an even fuller range of benefits and services for its membership. If this perception is true, the corporation church gives us opportunity to draw the presentation to a summation.

## New Member Ministry in the Corporation Church

### The NEED of the New Member

Family Church Feature: ADOPTION into a one-cell unit

Pastoral Church Feature:

ORIENTATION and guidance in a new social context.

Program Church Features: FORMATION of a new commitment to the new congregation.

### The RESPONSE in the Church

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Personally ask members of a one-cell unit to accept the new person.

Train members in the art of facilitating the inclusion of a new person.

Provide a step-by-step process that clearly presents for the new person the benefits and expectations of the congregation.

## 5. Conclusion

Three words have been selected to give a final conciseness to our analysis: *adoption, orientation, and formation*. Of course, every congregation will need to be aware of these three functions of new member ministry. What, then, does size determine in the end? *The greater the size of the congregation, the more intentional effort will be required for each function*. In a small church, the adoption procedure will include orientation quite naturally. The larger church will find it necessary to engineer all three steps more carefully. Attracting and assimilating new members becomes more a question of management than impulse.

## A SELECTED AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### *Research Centers*

The publications of the two following institutes have proven consistently helpful in understanding the dynamics of group life and development in a congregation.

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