

Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 18

Navigating toward Maximum Effectiveness in Midsize Churches

Why are we gifting you this volume? Because the mission statement of our primary publication—*The Parish Paper: New Ideas for Active Congregations*—is to help the largest possible number of congregations achieve maximum effectiveness in their various ministries. *The Parish Paper* is a monthly newsletter whose subscribers receive copyright permission to distribute to their constituents—more than two million readers in 28 denominations. Go to www.TheParishPaper.com for subscription information.

Purpose of this Volume: Provides in-depth answers to questions that readers of *The Parish Paper* ask regarding principles and procedures help 100-350 average-worship-attendance congregations move toward their full potential for health and mission/ministry effectiveness. Clergy, staff, and lay leadership in midsize churches face vastly different challenges than do leaders in small churches (fewer than 100 in average worship attendance) or large congregations (more than 350 in average worship attendance).

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Volume 18 – Contents

How to Use this Resource – Page 2

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #1

- I. Are Midsize Churches an Endangered Species? – Page 3
- II. Five Unique Characteristics Endanger Midsize Churches – Page 3
- III. Unique Leadership Configurations Challenge Midsize-Church Health – Page 3
- IV. Unique Organizational Dynamics Challenge Midsize-Church Health – Page 8
- V. Unique Behavior Patterns Challenge Midsize-Church Health – Page 10
- VI. Unique Sociological Pressures Challenge Midsize-Church Health – Page 16
- VII. Unique Growth Obstacles Challenge Midsize-Church Health – Page 17

Study/Discussion/Planning Sessions #2, 3, 4, 5, & 6

- VIII. How Can Midsize Churches Move Toward Their Full Potential? – Page 20
- IX. Twenty-five Enrichment Strategies for Midsize Churches – Page 21-55
- X. The Bottom Line – page 55

How to Use this Resource

Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing.

Positive change, either in a church or an individual, more often comes by interactions with other respected persons than by solitary study.

Therefore, this resource provides a long-term study-discussion process—though which the congregation can experience itself into new insights, and action-directions.

Unfolding this Study/Discussion/Planning Process

Step #1: The congregation's governing board appoints a special task force to act on its behalf, comprised of six respected laypersons and the pastor. (Some churches call this group the Parish Enrichment Planning Team, or PEP Team.) A good selection formula for this special task force: two people above age forty, two people under age forty, two adults who became members within the last three years, and the pastor.

Warning: No matter how small the number of active leaders in your congregation, do NOT hand this material to any presently-existing group in your congregation, such as the governing board or a committee. Experience indicates that this *always* short-circuits the opportunity for positive results!

Do not succumb to the temptation to think your church is an exception to this rule! Better not to use the process at all than to block its effectiveness, then say, "We tried that!" when you didn't actually use it.

Avoid the temptation to appoint a husband and wife to the PEP Team. By reducing the number of viewpoints, you reduce the creativity.

Avoid the temptation to make the PEP Team larger than six people plus the pastor. Research indicates that any kind of group, regardless of the excellence of its individuals, reduces the likelihood of thinking outside the box of recent history, reduces its insight-generating ability, reduces its creativity, and reduces its planning ability when it moves beyond five-to-seven members.

Avoid the temptation to think the PEP Team, by itself, should personally DO all of the ideas it decides to recommend to the governing board, committees, or other congregational leadership groups. The PEP Team functions as a task force appointed by the governing board to guide the implementation, testing, and refining process.

Step #2: The Parish Enrichment Team (PEP Team) begins its ministry with six, one-hour discussions of this study/discussion/planning resource during six consecutive weeks. Prior to the first session, create three-hole notebooks and distribute them to PEP Team member. Ask Team members to commit themselves to reading the material in preparation for the six discussions.

Step #3: The PEP Team, across a three-year period, leads the congregation's committees, ministries, and governing board in systematically implementing, refining, and perfecting the ideas and methods selected during the six-week discussion sessions.

Biblical Basis for this Study/Discussion/Planning Process: "Where there is no vision, the people perish. . . . (Proverbs 29:18, KJV)." "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed (Proverbs 15:22)." "The ear of the wise seeks knowledge (Proverbs 18:15)." "Behold, I make all things new (Revelation 21:5)."

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #1

I. Are midsize churches an endangered species?

- A. Fifty percent of America's approximately 350,000 churches are "small," meaning they average fewer than 100 in worship.
 - 1. Eleven percent of American worshipers attend these small churches.
 - 2. During recent decades the total number of small churches *stayed about the same*.
- B. Ten percent of America's 350,000 churches are "large," meaning they average more than 350 in worship.
 - 1. Fifty percent of American worshipers attend these large churches.
 - 2. During recent decades the total number of large churches *steadily increased*.
- C. Forty percent of America's 350,000 churches are "midsize," meaning they average between 100 and 350 in worship.
 - 1. Thirty-nine percent of American worshipers attend these midsize churches.
 - 2. During the past two decades *the total number of midsize churches steadily declined*.

(The above data is from the largest, most representative sample of American congregations ever taken, Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce, *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002], p. 22)

II. Five unique characteristics endanger midsize churches.

- A. Midsize churches have
 - 1. Unique leadership configurations
 - 2. Unique organizational dynamics
 - 3. Unique behavior patterns
 - 4. Unique sociological pressures
 - 5. Unique growth obstacles
- B. The following material examines each of those five unique characteristics.

III. Unique leadership configurations challenge midsize-church health.

- A. Churches do not move closer to God's vision under their own energy.
 - 1. They go where their leaders take them.
 - 2. Leadership effectiveness is therefore the most important element in determining a congregation's effectiveness in ministry and mission.
- B. Congregations of every size contain three kinds of leaders, which function together like the sides of an equilateral triangle.
 - 1. The triangle's base consists of *policy leaders* (the church governing board).
 - 2. One side of the triangle is *pastor leaders* (clergy, paid program staff, and clerical staff).
 - 3. The third side of the triangle is *program leaders* (committee chairpersons, Sunday school teachers, women's organization officers, etc.).
- C. What if one of the triangle's three sides is weak (ineffective)?
 - 1. The triangle loses its perfection and collapses toward the middle, becoming a dysfunctional triangle, compromising congregational effectiveness.
 - 2. For example, many congregations' leaders believe that "if we could just get the right pastor . . ."
 - 3. However, when a governing board consistently operates in dysfunctional ways, an effective pastor cannot save the congregation from overall dysfunction.

- D. Each side of the leadership triangle exerts leadership in two critically important ways:
1. The three kinds of leaders must function effectively in their *ministry roles*.
 2. The three kinds of leaders must function effectively in their *people relationships*.
- E. Like the two rails of a railroad track, those two leadership functions are equally important. Remove one rail and the train goes nowhere fast, its cargo-delivery ability compromised. Examples:
1. Joe teaches an adult Sunday school class. Joe is a nice guy, a teddy-bear type person who loves everyone. Warm and caring, a real joy to be around, everyone likes him. Yet, when Joe stands up to teach the adult class, he instantly transports everyone to “Snores-Ville.”
 - a. What is missing here?
 - b. Joe lacks a quality essential to effective functioning in this ministry role. Instead of the gift of teaching, Joe has the gift of boring.
 2. Harry fills an important office on his congregation’s governing board. With a high IQ and excellent memory, he can quote verbatim large sections of his congregation’s governance manual, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. Unfortunately, Harry too frequently over-functions with his photographic memory, coupling the skill with an abrasive, dominating, and over-controlling manner. Harry is one of those people who make a greater contribution to a group by their absence than by their presence.
 - a. What is missing here?
 - b. Harry has an important ministry skill but lacks the other quality essential to effective functioning in his ministry role, *people-relationship skills*.
 3. The pastor is an excellent human being, caring, pleasant, fun-loving, and joyful. Yet people complain that the pastor accomplishes great volumes of nothing in organizational and administrative leadership. Meetings are not scheduled. Newsletter announcements are promised but never printed. Phone calls are not returned. The overall result: most members feel that “nothing happens around here.” Many of the former leaders withdraw from active roles and sit in the bleachers.
 - a. What is missing?
 - b. The pastor has people skills but lacks a quality essential to effective functioning in every clergy role: administrative, organizational, and follow-through action on the details of committee and governing board plans.
- F. “Congregational personality” describes how a church’s three kinds of leaders (policy leaders, pastor leaders, and program leaders) accomplish their two leadership functions:
1. How skillfully they accomplish their *ministry roles*
 2. What kind of attitudinal and emotional climate they create through their *people relationships*
- G. However, the three kinds of leaders never work in a vacuum, totally walled-in by present circumstances and currently active church members.
1. A congregation’s long-established, deeply-ingrained personality pattern also impacts the ability of its three kinds of leaders in their functional ministry roles and their people relationships.

2. Leaders inherit a congregational personality pattern that has evolved through time, layers of circumstances, the habits of previous generations of leaders, and years of cherished traditions.
 3. Sometimes called its “story,” that historic congregational personality pattern exerts great power on the present generation of leaders. Example:
 - a. A young chairperson of a church governing board described a big problem to a visiting consultant.
 - b. As the young board chairperson detailed the problem and why the leaders were dealing with it in what seemed like a dysfunctional way, the consultant began to suspect that this problem did not begin recently, so he asked, “When did this start?”
 - c. The young board chairperson replied, “In 1937. My grandfather was board chairperson at that time. You met him at the breakfast meeting this morning.”
 - d. The manner in which leaders were handling this problem was embedded in their historically rooted congregational personality pattern.
- H. In small and midsize congregations, long-standing, deeply-ingrained congregational personality patterns more often reproduce themselves across decades and generations than is the case in large churches.
1. In small and midsize churches the actors change with each new generation of leaders, but the play often stays the same.
 2. To learn how your church’s personality developed, Robert Dale suggests some questions that can surface old congregational visions, some of which are usually blocking movement toward contemporary mission and ministry effectiveness. (Robert Dale, *To Dream Again* [Nashville: Broadman Press])
 - a. How would I describe our church’s first pastor and charter members?
 - b. Was our church born out of positive circumstances or out of negative circumstances?
 - c. What are the most unforgettable stories from the early years?
 - d. What was the greatest growth period(s) of our church?
 - e. Who was the pastor then? For how long? What were the pastor’s slogans and mottoes?
 - f. What projects and new programs were initiated during the growth period?
 - g. Which events and persons from that era are “magic” and are still remembered and discussed? Why?
 - h. What or who are the “traditionalizing,” status quo maintenance forces?
- I. In small and midsize congregations, the possibility that some leaders wear multiple hats makes leadership much more complex than in a large church.
1. In small churches, the three leadership roles—policy leader, pastor leader, and program leader—often blur together, because so many individuals wear multiple hats.
 - a. The most active leaders in small congregations often occupy several ministry roles simultaneously. For example, almost all policy leaders also carry two or three program-leader roles.
 - b. This, in small churches, malfunctioning on one of the two tracks—ministry skill or people relationships—often reflects negatively on the quality of the whole congregation and may precipitate a perpetual crisis and/or gradual congregational meltdown.

2. In large churches, lay leaders far less frequently hold multiple offices and function in multiple leadership roles.
 - a. Thus, when something goes wrong on one of the two tracks—ministry skill or people relationships—that malfunctioning affects only one part of the congregation.
 - b. New pastor leaders, policy leaders, or program leaders can more quickly change the congregational personality pattern, especially when a new senior pastor arrives on the scene with new ideas.
3. In unhealthy, dysfunctional midsize churches, several lay leaders wearing multiple-leadership-role hats helps to explain why changing the congregational personality pattern is far tougher than in large churches.
 - a. A short list of very long-term, highly change-resistant committee chairpersons own and operate the congregational personality.
 - b. Some of these program leaders are deficient in people relationships. Others are deficient in ministry skills. A few are deficient in both.
- J. In unhealthy, dysfunctional midsize congregations, small-group dynamics rooted in the multiple-hats phenomenon often short-circuit the best-laid plans for positive change.
 1. Congregations of all sizes contain at least twenty churchgoer temperaments, and every church contains a few of the personality types listed below.
 2. In *healthy, effective* midsize and large churches the negative personalities in this list may have little influence.
 3. However, in *unhealthy, dysfunctional* midsize churches those destructive personalities often wield enormous influence.
 4. Take two minutes to put a check mark by *each temperament type* that you think *strongly influences* your congregation's atmosphere and effectiveness.

Twenty Church Member Temperament Types

- 1. Extreme Optimists** do more than see the silver lining in every cloud. They fail to see the cloud.
- 2. Chronic Pessimists** see only storm clouds. They predict that the sun will never shine again. (Most finance committees have at least one such person.)
- 3. Comedians (Court Jesters)** make fun the goal of every church gathering and keep leaders from taking themselves too seriously.
- 4. Strangers** just started attending worship; no one yet knows how they think and behave. (Typically, one or two long-term members appoint themselves to the role of instructing these strangers in “how we do things around here.”)
- 5. Newcomers** who arrived during the last three years bring new perspectives untarnished by knowledge of “how we do things around here.” Some church leaders welcome their viewpoints; others try to protect the church from contamination.
- 6. Butterflies** flit from church to church, looking for something better.
- 7. Barnacles** stick to the church's hull like their ocean-vessel counterparts. Leaders expend much energy to keep them from being a drag on progress.
- 8. True Friends** attend regularly and give generously. They dispassionately, rationally examine all new ideas. Untainted by selfish ego needs, they consistently see and work for God's best interests in mission and ministry.
- 9. Positive Matriarchs/Patriarchs** are long-term, highly respected, influential members.
- 10. Negative Matriarchs/Patriarchs** are long-term, influential, tiresome, over-controlling dictator members. Example: In a small town, one midsize congregation's negative patriarch was

president of the only local bank, where most of the farmers obtained loans. They had to put up with his personality at the bank; they preferred not to put up with that personality on Sunday. That midsize church, over a period of twenty years, slowly died, then closed. (Actually, a negative patriarch murdered it.)

11. Obsessive Nostalgia Fanatics long to recreate the congregation's past success. Their suggestions often begin with "I remember when . . ."

12. Financial Controllers view all decisions through the lens of "We can't afford to do that!"

13. Building Controllers view all decisions through the lens of "We mustn't change that! Uncle Harry donated the money for it. We'll have to keep it that way."

14. Program Controllers view all decisions through "the way we have always done it." All new ideas are bad ideas.

15. Emotional Terrorists maintain influence and control by their willingness to say and do things that intimidate normal people. They often use this "winning by intimidation" procedure in meetings, causing many church members to withdraw to the sidelines and/or withdraw to another congregation.

16. Peace Lovers are obsessed with avoiding all conflict, no matter what the cost. They therefore always side with the controllers, nostalgia fanatics, emotional terrorists, and everyone who strongly resists making changes.

17. Covert Clergy try to exert strong lay leadership (sometimes in a pleasant manner and sometimes in an over-controlling manner) as a way of (a) compensating for their regret and subconscious guilt at not having become a clergyperson or (b) demonstrating that because "my father was a pastor," I naturally know more than most people about "how we should do things around here."

18. Clergy Controllers drop by during the pastor's first week of tenure (a) to recruit him or her for their pet project or (b) to let the pastor know they have power and he or she must therefore listen to and receive guidance from them.

19. Clergy Antagonists automatically oppose all of the pastor's ideas.

20. Clergy Supporters automatically affirm all of the pastor's ideas.

A. Which of the temperament types that you checked *positively* influence your congregation's atmosphere and contribute to its mission and ministry effectiveness?

1.

2.

3.

B. Which of the temperament types that you checked *negatively* influence your congregation's atmosphere and inhibit its mission and ministry effectiveness?

1.

2.

3.

IV. Unique organizational dynamics challenge midsize-church health.

- A. Small churches, even though their *Constitution and By-Laws*—or in denominations such as The United Methodist Church, their *Book of Discipline*, or in The Presbyterian Church (USA), their *Book of Order*—describe themselves as a “representative democracy,” *do not operate that way* on a day-to-day basis.
 1. Small congregations make decisions and exercise authority like “participatory democracies,” not like the representative democracies in large churches, which grant authority to elected and appointed leaders, clergy, and paid staff.
 2. In small congregations, some people who occupy no elected positions at the moment exert as much influence as the governing board.
 3. In some instances, small congregations allow one such influential individual to exercise veto authority over a majority vote by the governing board.
 4. An accurate graphic depicting decision-making and the exercise of authority in small congregations looks more like a pancake than a pyramid.
 - a. The decisions and authority “bubble up” from different sources in different ways on different days, depending on the subject under discussion.
 - b. Most decisions and authority come from the influence of long-tenured, strong-minded, highly-vocal, individual laypersons—not from paid clergy.
- B. Large churches, in their *Constitution and By-Laws*—or in denominations such as The United Methodist Church, their *Book of Discipline*, or in The Presbyterian Church (USA), their *Book of Order*—describe themselves as a “representative democracy,” *and for the most part operate that way*.
 1. Authors often describe the decision-making and authority-flow in business or corporate life as a pyramid.
 - a. At the top, the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), the CFO (Chief Financial Officer), and the COO (Chief Operating Officer), usually working with a group of vice-presidents who lead divisions and/or a small board of directors comprised of major stockholders, make the big decisions.
 - b. These corporate leaders hand off their production, marketing, policy, and procedure decisions to divisions, plants, employees, franchises, or retail outlets across the United States or across the world.
 2. Large churches in many ways mimic that corporate decision-making and authority-flow through their numerous paid staff.
 3. Large churches use representative democracy to make decisions and exercise authority that accomplishes mission and ministry objectives.
- C. Midsize churches use a complex combination of representative democracy (like the large-church corporate-model) and participatory-democracy (like the small-church in which a few powerful, individual laity call most of the shots).
 1. Midsize churches *sometimes* make decisions and exercise authority like the “participatory democracies” in small churches where long-tenured, strong-minded, highly-vocal, individual laypersons exert strong influence and sometimes veto power.
 2. Midsize churches *sometimes* make decisions and exercise authority like the “representative democracies” of large churches, which grant authority to elected and appointed leaders and to paid clergy and staff.
 3. Effective leaders in midsize churches understand and become skillful in working with that complex mixture of “representative” and “participatory”

democracy at the central location of midsize-church power—the various committees.

- D. The deadly combination of multiple-hat leaders and “participatory democracy run amuck” can produce a tyranny of misguided core value systems in churches of every size.
1. That combination is especially damaging in small churches and unhealthy, dysfunctional midsize churches where change resistances is so strong!
Example:
 - a. “Two years ago,” the dedicated layman said, “we wrote a mission statement and set membership-growth goals. It didn’t help. What are we doing wrong?”
 - b. Like dedicated leaders in many other churches, this man does not know that churches *always unconsciously act on their core values*, not on the goals they set!
 - c. Churches whose goals match their values tend to achieve those goals.
 - d. When core values do not match goals, the values always win.
 2. Jesus taught his first disciples three core values through The Great Commandment and The Great Commission (Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:41-42). Jesus’ three core values summarize as follows:
 - a. Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God.
 - b. Love your neighbors in church, community, and world.
 - c. Offer Christ to people outside your walls.
 3. Using Jesus’ three core values, the early disciples and congregations continued Jesus’ ministry. The result: healthy, effective churches that spread across the world.
 4. Clergy and lay leadership in *healthy* congregations develop and implement strategies and procedures that accomplish in their communities all three of Jesus’ core values in a balanced way.
 - a. Individual committees and staff may of necessity need to focus on only *one* of Jesus’ three core values.
 - b. However, in its overall priorities and actions healthy congregations accomplish *all three* of Jesus’ core values.
 5. Clergy and lay leadership in *unhealthy* congregations tend to focus on one of Jesus’ three core values and neglect one or both of the other two.
 - a. Their clergy and lay leadership tend to consciously or unconsciously believe the myth that Jesus’ other two core values happen automatically, as a byproduct of focusing on the one core value about which they feel the most passionate.
 - b. In other words, when clergy and lay leadership make Jesus’ three core values a multiple-choice question, they produce *unhealthy*, ineffective congregations whose long-term existence is in jeopardy.
 - c. For example, many midsize churches value “loving our neighbors” through faithfully caring for members and community service.
 - (1) Pride in that value-system focus sometimes blocks leaders from noticing that a 1965 worship style equals not offering Christ to young adult families.
 - (2) That kind of neglect gradually kills their church because most young adults decide to worship elsewhere.
 6. *The Tragedy*: congregations that focus on one of Jesus’ core values and neglect the others seldom see that fatal flaw.

7. *The Certainty*: your congregation's values determine its future health and effectiveness!
 - a. Which of Jesus' three core values drives most of the decisions in your church?
 - b. Which of Jesus' three core values drives the fewest decisions?
8. Eminent church sociologist, Dr. Wade Clark Roof, conducted national research in congregations of The United Methodist Church.
 - a. After examining the way churches spent most of their time and energy, he reported that "loving your neighbor" by helping less fortunate people in the community and caring for hurting people in their congregation was an important priority among United Methodists.
 - b. However, Roof found that only 26 percent of clergy and lay leaders thought "offering Christ to people outside the walls" should be on their congregation's agenda.
 - c. Roof added that he did not mean the other 74 percent of clergy and lay leaders made evangelism activities a *low* priority in their congregation: Evangelization efforts were *totally missing* from their congregational agenda.
9. Does not this research help to explain, not just the sizeable membership decline in The United Methodist Church since 1965, but the membership declines of the other mainline denominations?

V. Unique behavior patterns challenge midsize-church health.

- A. In addition to the complexity that policy leaders, pastor leaders, and program leaders face as they work in a sometimes *change-resisting congregational personality pattern*, is the unique set of behavior habits in midsize churches.
- B. If we tried to summarize the unique behavior dynamics of midsize churches in one word, Lyle Schaller's suggestion of "awkward" says it best.
- C. Midsize churches come across as the "awkward size" in at least seven kinds of behavior.
- D. This awkwardness is best seen when contrasting those seven behaviors to those of small churches with fewer than 100 in worship and large churches that average more than 350 in worship attendance.

1. Priorities:

- a. The priorities in small churches that average fewer than 100 in worship attendance focus on face-to-face relationships. Small churches resemble large families, most of whose members do everything as one group, thereby experiencing a powerful sense of belonging. In the small church, the individual's relationship with the other members matters more than the performance quality of what happens in the congregation's programming.
- b. By contrast, the overall priorities in large churches of more than 350 in average worship attendance tend to focus more on *performance quality* than on *people relationships*. Many people who attend large churches are seeking quality programming for themselves and their children: quality music, quality preaching, and quality everything. At

the people-relationship level, many large church attendees are looking for anonymity more than they are for the intimacy of a small family group. Example:

- (1) The scene is a small-church worship service. During the offertory, a twelve-year-old boy plays a viola solo. The boy is not all that good with the viola. However, in the third pew on the right side of the sanctuary sit his grandfather and grandmother, long-term, active members of this congregation. His parents, an assortment of family friends, and a few other relatives are scattered throughout the sanctuary. For this congregation, the quality of the viola solo is irrelevant. The boy and their relationship with him are the goals.
 - (2) A large congregation of 1,200 in average worship attendance could not permit that quality of viola solo, so it would never happen. Why not? In large churches, the quality of what happens in the worship service must be consistently exceptional. Leaders know that only a few of the worshippers would know the boy and his family; therefore, most worshipers would feel negative rather than positive about the performance. Leaders also know that many among the numerous first-time and repeat worship visitors would feel turned off by the viola solo's damage to their worship experience.
- c. What do the attendees of midsize churches want? Both!
- (1) Many of them come from previous experiences in small churches, so they are looking for *quality relationships*, caring, a pastor who acts like a personal friend and sometimes stops by their home, and a strong sense of group belonging.
 - (2) On the other hand, many midsize church attendees come from previous experiences in large churches, so they are looking for *quality programs*, well-organized activities, and highly professional leadership.
- d. Summarizing the *priorities* of those three sizes of churches in one word:
- (1) Small Churches—*People* (as individuals)
 - (2) Large Churches—*Performance* (as in high quality)
 - (3) Midsize Churches—*Programs* (for groups of individuals; some of whom value the relationships while others value the quality performance they find there)

2. Pastors:

- a. Small-church attendees expect close personal relationships with the pastor and his or her family.
- b. The majority of large-church attendees expect to know their pastor primarily through large gatherings such as worship, funerals, weddings, fellowship dinners, and through what he or she writes in the newsletter.
- c. What do midsize-church attendees want from their pastors? Both!
 - (1) Some of them expect a close personal relationship with their

- pastor, and all of them expect excellent preaching and leadership ability.
- (2) They want from their pastor both quality relationships and quality performance in ministry skills.
- d. A summary of the priorities that members of the three church sizes typically expect from their pastors might look like this:
- (1) Small Churches focus on *People* (as individuals) and expect Chaplain-behavior from their pastors.
- (a) Thus, when people in small churches begin “murmuring” about their pastor’s inadequacies, what is the most negative comment they can make? (Murmuring is a King James Translation word for the Old Testament account about Moses: “They murmured against Moses” [Exodus 15:24].)
- (b) When a small church’s members murmur, “I’m not sure our pastor really cares about people,” they are stating a horrific accusation.
- (c) Small-church members understand themselves to be in the caring-for-people business (retail, one-at-a-time, not just wholesale, in groups).
- (d) Therefore, the most important role their pastor plays is “Chaplain.” If the members view their Chaplain-CEO as lacking compassion for people, they feel their church has the wrong kind of leader.
- (2) Large Churches focus on *Performance* (high quality is expected and measured at *Events*) and expect Corporation President-behavior from their pastors.
- (a) When the “murmuring” begins in a large church, the complaints often mention something not going well in one of the congregation’s events.
- (b) Fifty-two of these events per year happen on Sunday morning. Other events happen at special seasons and special times such as funerals and weddings.
- (c) People in large churches tend to count things when they judge clergy performance.
- i. They look around the sanctuary and decide whether it is “as full as it used to be.”
- ii. They look at the financial report to see if the income and outgo match.
- iii. Or, as one lay leader said to another, “We have always had about 700 people at the Annual Thanksgiving Dinner, but I don’t think we had more than 200 this year. Sunday morning attendance seems down too. We need to do something about this!”
- (3) Midsize Churches focus on *Programs* (for groups of individuals who feel connected to it through some group, activity, or ministry) and expect “Y-Director” behavior from their pastors, rather than “Chaplain” behavior or “Corporation-President behavior.”
- (a) When the “murmuring” begins in a midsize church,

the complaints more often mention something that is not happening the right way in one of the church's programs, groups, or ministries.

- (b) Example: "When Pastor Smith was here, we had twenty-five high-school kids in the youth group. I understand that only about three attend now. We have a big problem!"
- (c) The midsize-church pastor must shepherd several groups and ministries, not just shepherd the individuals in those groups.
- (d) What happens when pastors who have developed skill as chaplains relocate to midsize congregations where attendees measure clergy effectiveness by how well he or she keeps several group and program plates spinning in the air at the same time? Considerable transition stress may result during the first eighteen months (for both the pastor and the congregation).

3. Personnel

- a. Small churches rely heavily on lay volunteers for getting things done.
- b. Large churches, by contrast, rely far more on paid professional staff that gives direction to lay leaders and members for accomplishing ministries.
- c. What do midsize-church attendees want? Both!
 - (1) Some midsize-church members expect to operate autocratically and independently of clergy and staff leadership.
 - (2) Other midsize-church members operate at the opposite extreme, expecting the pastor and staff to tell them the details of what to do and how to do it.

4. Programming

- a. Small-church attendees expect minimal programming, often consisting of worship, Sunday school, choir, youth activities, and a women's organization. Thus, most of the members view small-church pastors who exhibit enthusiastic support of those five programs and genuine concern for the church members and people in this community as highly effective, even though the church stays the same size for many years.
- b. Large-church attendees, by contrast, expect a cafeteria of programming that meets the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of persons at every age and stage of development.
- c. What do the attendees of midsize churches want? Both!
 - (1) Many of the members expect the small-group feeling that comes from everyone participating in every activity.
 - (2) Other members expect the freedom of choice that comes from picking and choosing among church activities.
 - (3) Midsize-church members expect their leaders to produce an organization that combines the sense of belonging

experienced in a large, tight-knit family and the multiple options a shopping mall provides.

5. Participation

- a. Small-church attendees expect everyone to participate in every gathering. Every absent member is a matter of concern, because small churches are in the *individual* caring business. If an active member is unexpectedly absent from a small-church gathering, several people wonder whether she is out of town, ill, or angry. During the next couple of days, one or several people check with her to find out.
- b. Large-church attendees, on the other hand, expect to pick and choose the church activities in which they participate. Members who do not attend everything are not viewed as disloyal or alienated.
- c. What do midsize-church attendees want? Both!
 - (1) Some members expect to participate in every church activity.
 - (2) Other members assume that their church participation is like going through a cafeteria line in which they take what they want and leave the rest.

6. Procedures

- a. The small church is a participatory democracy in which consensus of the members determines procedures.
 - (1) Small-church attendees expect their high involvement levels to give them ownership and control of decision-making procedures.
 - (2) Thus, the governing body meetings in small churches often have the emotional feel of town-hall gatherings in small New England villages.
 - (a) In small churches, people not present at the meeting sometimes exert strong influence. Example: When someone asks at a governing board meeting, “What will George Murphy think of this decision?” the group may decide to get George’s opinion before they vote on this matter. Why?
 - (b) They know that a majority vote does not always mean that the board’s wishes can happen. In some instances, one respected, strongly-opinionated individual not present at the meeting can successfully veto the action of twenty-five board members.
 - (3) Small-membership churches give their pastors little or no authority for congregational decision-making.
 - (a) On the day the pastor arrives, he or she finds no leadership role vacancies. Those roles are already filled by influential laypersons.
 - (b) Most of the members highly respect the new pastor. However, they view him or her as a “chaplain-outsider” who will not be here long. “So we need to decide things to suite ourselves.”
 - (c) Small-church leaders expect the pastor to preach,

teach, visit the sick, bury the dead, and marry the willing, but they do not expect the pastor to exert leadership, especially at the point of making changes.

- (d) Someone made only a slight overstatement with the assertion that leaders in small-membership churches tend to define change as “changing pastors,” not as expecting pastors to change church procedures.
- (4) Because small churches act like families, their members can fight intensively and remain together, whereas large congregations may split when they cannot agree on similar issues.
- (5) Lay leaders in small-membership churches dislike written communication, which is one of the reasons they have a love-hate relationship with their denomination.
 - (a) Regional and national denominational structures, by necessity, communicate on paper. How do families communicate at the dinner table? Do they circulate memos? No! They talk with one another.
 - (b) Little wonder that small churches get irritated with “all this paperwork” from their districts, regions, synods, and presbyteries.
- b. The large church is a representative democracy that determines its procedures through elected representatives, appointed representatives, and paid staff.
 - (1) Leaders and members in a large church give the senior pastor more authority his or her first day in the parish than small-church laypersons give the pastor after five years of faithful service.
 - (2) Large churches must use bales of paper and barrels of ink to communicate with and among members, committees, governing boards, and ministries.
 - (3) Lay leaders in larger churches know that the oral grapevine does not go everywhere, and that oral grapevine frequently distributes inaccurate information to the people and groups within its reach.
- c. What do midsize-church attendees want? Both!
 - (1) Some members expect to be in on all decisions.
 - (2) Other members expect the pastor, governing board, and committees to “take care of all that stuff” for them.

7. Property

- a. Small-church attendees expect people to treat the church building as they do their own home, with carefully followed traditions for room use, turning off the lights, and tidiness.
 - (1) Attendees view many objects as sacred, with special history and meaning (like the precious personal items in our homes).
 - (2) Moving or changing certain of those objects can be highly offensive, to some members feeling like an insult to their congregation’s heritage and “the people who built this

- church.”
- b. Large-church attendees expect people to treat the church building like a public institution through which much traffic flows for many different reasons. Their attendees do not expect everyone to take meticulously good care of the building, and they expect high maintenance costs.
 - c. Midsize churches are the awkward size because their leaders and members operate with both perceptions.
 - (1) Heated discussions often arise in meetings as some members want to prohibit facility use by groups “who will not take care of the building,” and “after all, the church is not for that purpose anyway!”
 - (2) Other members, many of whom grew up in large churches where thirty or more groups used the building each month and two custodians kept the place together, are puzzled by these attitudes.
- E. Where does this leave people to whom God entrusted the midsize church?
1. Puzzled, trying to figure out how to make this system work!
 2. Many leaders can identify with the cartoon that pictures a goldfish in an electric blender saying, “You think you have stress!”
- F. Clergy and laity who figure out how to lead and manage midsize churches understand that strong, effectively functioning committees are the only answer when this many diverse viewpoints float around in the daily mix of mission/ministry efforts.
- G. Summarizing the contrasts among small, midsize, and large churches reveals that the three kinds of churches operate from three different power centers:
1. Small Churches focus on People (as individuals); expect Chaplain-behavior from their pastors; and the Policy Leaders (the church governing board) is the primary center of power in decision-making and governance issues.
 2. Large Churches focus on Performance (high quality is expected and measured at Events); expect Corporation-President-behavior from their pastors; and the Pastor Leaders (clergy, paid program staff, and clerical staff) are the primary center of power in decision-making and governance issues.
 3. Midsize Churches focus on Programs (for groups of individuals); expect Y-Director-behavior from their pastors; and the Program Leaders (committee chairpersons, Sunday school teachers, women’s organization officers, etc.) are the primary center of power in decision-making and governance issues.

VI. Unique sociological pressures challenge midsize-church health.

- A. Small churches are holding their own in membership size and numbers of congregations in all American denominations. Why?
 1. Many pre-1946-birthdate church attendees prefer small churches.
 2. Approximately 20 percent of Americans of all ages are not emotionally comfortable in groups larger than 100.
 3. For this group the small church is a welcome haven, and the demand for this kind of institution will keep many small churches alive and well for decades to come.
- B. Large churches are growing larger and more numerous in all American denominations. Why?
 1. Most young adults with birthdates between 1946 and 1985 grew up in large school systems.
 2. This explains why they feel comfortable in large churches.

3. When they look for quality programming in a church, they expect to find it in a large one.
 4. So approximately 75 percent of young adults shop for a church home among large congregations.
- C. This explains why midsize churches are growing smaller and fewer in American denominations.
1. When the approximately 75 percent of young-adult families shop for a church, they quite naturally move past midsize to churches that seem to provide the qualities with which they are comfortable in large school systems and large organizations of other sorts:
 - High quality worship, preaching, music, and programming
 - Numerous worship-time and programming options for every age group
 2. These statistics are so dramatic and pervasive across denominational lines that researchers could accurately refer to midsize churches as the “dangerous size” rather than the “awkward size.”
- D. Another part of the danger for midsize churches derives from the following dynamics:
1. Leaders in small churches are highly motivated by survival instincts and fear of institutional death. Thus, small churches are very hard to kill.
 2. Leaders of large churches have another, different kind of “edge.” They are willing to delegate to capable senior pastors a great deal of authority for the decision-making needed to change directions and meet new needs.
 3. By contrast, midsize-church policy leaders and program leaders lack both the pressure of feared failure and the strong central leadership made possible by delegating authority to clergy and staff.
 - Midsize churches are relatively comfortable, financially. They can afford a pastor, a church secretary, a part-time custodian, and sometimes additional part-time staff.
 - They are also relatively comfortable in withholding the authority a senior pastor needs in order to make rapid changes to keep up with changing needs and circumstances.
- E. Yet 39 percent of American churchgoers attend a midsize church.
1. With that kind of responsibility, should not the leaders of this 40 percent of American churches that are midsize attempt to navigate them toward maximum effectiveness in mission and ministry?
 2. Then too, America’s popular large churches do not start large; they must move through this awkward, dangerous midsize to arrive at large size.

VII. Unique Growth Obstacles Challenge Midsize-Church Health

- A. Midsize churches that reach 135-150 in average worship attendance tend to stop enlarging due to the often invisible but powerful lack of sufficient paid staff for youth and children’s ministries.
1. The small church is a single-staff organism that includes a part-time or full-time pastor and sometimes a part-time office secretary.
 2. Failure to move beyond that pattern at about 135-150 average worship attendance locks the church at the “Chaplain” size and prevents it from moving to the “Y-Director” size.

3. At 150 in average worship attendance, a *healthy* church has a full-time pastor, a full-time office secretary, and may need a quarter-time youth director and/or children's ministry director.
 4. Transitioning beyond 150 in average worship attendance seldom happens without a crisis, either within the pastor and his/her family or within the policy-leader and program-leader system.
 - a. At approximately 150 worship attendees, the pastor finds it impossible to stay in close touch with all of the members, even though many of them continue to insist on that small-church relationship pattern with their pastor.
 - b. At this point, the pastor either changes churches, or changes procedures, or changes spouses, or all three, to become more of an organizer and a motivator in the "Y-Director" midsize-church role than a "Chaplain" in the small-church role.
 - c. Instead of relating only to individuals, the pastor focuses more on relating to groups of individuals.
 - d. The pastoral caring still happens but takes on new forms.
- B. Midsize churches that reach 190-200 in average worship attendance tend to stop enlarging due to the often invisible but powerful lack of sufficient staff to institute and nurture the new adult groups and ministries essential to involving the expanded number of members/attendees.
1. At 200 in worship attendance, a healthy church has a full-time pastor, a full-time office secretary, and the equivalent of another full-time program staff member, either in two half-time staff members or one half-time staff member and two quarter-time staff members, each specializing in specific ministries (*in addition to* the part-time organist and part-time choir director).
 2. The principle is roughly as follows: after 150 in average worship attendance, the church must add one the part-time equivalences of one additional, paid staff member for every additional 100 people in average worship attendance.
 - a. Like an expanding secular business, the midsize church must employ additional staff members slightly in advance of reaching the full 100 additional worshippers beyond 150 in average attendance; otherwise, the insufficient-staff lid blocks the church from enlarging.
 - b. Generally speaking, churches find that each additional part-time staff person generates his or her salary within a year, due to increased attendee participation, but the church must expect to subsidize that salary for the first several months.
 3. Generally speaking, a good way to move beyond "zero additional program staff beyond the pastor" is to add two, quarter-time, lay staff members, each of which specializes in one-to-two much-needed aspects of congregational ministry—probably in those high-priority areas in which the church is attempting to develop stellar ministries with children, youth, and young-adult households.
 - a. Adding part-time lay specialists is *always* superior to calling a second, full-time clergy person in a general area such as Christian education.
 - b. Why does the first full-time clergy person added to a solo-pastor church usually fail in congregations that average fewer than 300-350 worship attendees?
 1. He/she becomes an "unintentional-interim associate pastor" by displacing from leadership and decision-making roles

- several volunteer, unpaid program leaders and policy leaders.
2. Yes, they felt overloaded. Yes, they wanted help. However, they also feel uncomfortable about giving up their authority.
 3. That discomfort usually produces enough complaints and organizational stress to make the first, additional clergy person fail.
 4. At about 300-350 worship attendees, program leaders and policy leaders have adjusted to sharing their previous roles with the additional clergy person.
- c. At 200 worship attendees, two part-time program staff members produce less transition-generated conflict.
 - d. Employ these part-time lay staff on a one-year basis, with both parties reviewing the agreement at each yearend.
 1. The part-time staff members enhance their effectiveness by attending continuing education events in the areas of their specialties.
 2. The church must include in its annual budget the resources for part-time staff to attend continuing education events each year.
4. Despite the need for more program staff, the pastor's limited staff leadership and management experience creates another transition hazard. The pastor tends to treat new staff members like paid volunteers, meaning there is no job description, no clear definition of expectations, no accountability system, and sometimes no weekly staff meetings to coordinate efforts and maintain communication and camaraderie.
- C. Midsize churches that reach 290-300 in average worship attendance tend to stop enlarging due to the often invisible but powerful twin barriers of (a) insufficient staff and (b) insufficient adult groups to serve as entry and assimilation points for new worship attendees.
1. At about 300 in average worship attendance, especially in an older-median-age congregation with numerous funerals and hospital calls, the midsize church begins needing either a part-time retired clergy person or a full-time clergy person to serve as associate pastor; otherwise, the sizeable number of funerals makes it difficult for the senior pastor to take a vacation or be out of town.
 2. At about 300 in average worship attendance, the staff and lay leadership is often unaware that the congregation now has insufficient numbers of adult groups to serve as entry points for newcomers.
 - a. To measure this ratio, determine the total number of ongoing, regularly-meeting adult groups such as Sunday school classes, women's circles, and weeknight study groups.
 - b. Divide that total number of adult groups into the average worship attendance.
 - c. If the resulting figure is greater than sixteen, the congregation must recognize that this glass ceiling blocks the entry of congregational newcomers and decide to add more adult groups.

VIII. How Can Midsize Churches Move Toward Their Full Potential?

- A. Leaders must understand the unique nature of midsize churches. Without that understanding, well-meaning, enthusiastic governing boards, committees, and ministry teams try to use strategies and programs that fit small or large churches but fail in midsize congregations.
- B. Leaders must understand that achieving maximum congregational health and effectiveness always requires the implementation of *several* ideas and methods, not just one “silver bullet.”
- C. Leaders must understand and feel motivated to achieve *all twelve* of the conditions essential to optimum health and effectiveness in midsize churches.
 - 1. A strong spiritual focus that gives equal emphasis to prayer, Bible study, stewardship, fellowship, and service to hurting and needy people in the community and across the world.
 - 2. A worship service that includes a joyful atmosphere, effective preaching, and hymn-selection that shows equal respect for the spiritual preferences of all four adult generations and a fifth teenage generation.
 - 3. A pastor who goes beyond genuinely caring about individuals to help the various group leaders develop the atmosphere, motivation, and methods to care about one another.
 - 4. Warmth, concern, and caring for individuals through the various church groups and Sunday school classes.
 - 5. A positive, hopeful future focus.
 - 6. One or two stellar ministries with children and young adults, of which the surrounding community is well aware and the church members are justifiably proud.
 - 7. Effective recruitment methods that encourage members to invite and welcome new attendees.
 - 8. A determination to start at least one new group or ministry each year that serves as an entry point for new attendees.
 - 9. High levels of communication through Sunday morning worship bulletin inserts, newsletters, weekly staff meetings, and regular meetings of committee chairpersons.
 - 10. A group of lay leaders who learn how to work with the two, very opposite viewpoints of church members born before and after 1946.
 - 11. Organizational procedures that involve regular, *separate* meetings of (a) the governing board, (b) the committee chairpersons meeting together as a strategic planning group, (c) approximately seven standing committees meeting individually, and (d) six, ten, or more “ministry teams” distinct and apart from the committees, involving numerous church attendees in specific ministry efforts that they view as a meaningful and satisfying use of their time and from which they derive fellowship with other ministry team members.
 - 12. A determination to remove the ministry-inhibiting lids in the church building and property.
- D. Which of those twelve do you feel need strengthening in your congregation?

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #2

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

IX. Twenty-five enrichment strategies for midsize churches. What are “enrichment strategies”? Enrichment strategies enable a church to experience a new sense of vision, hopefulness, and effectiveness in accomplishing Christ's ministry to their community.

Turnaround Strategy #1: Recognize that a high median-age of local members can terminate your congregation's future by 2025. One congregation learned that only 6 percent of local members were under age 18, whereas 28 percent of the county residents were that age. In that same church, 65 percent of the local members were age-65-plus, whereas only 11 percent of the county residents were that age. These percentages told the church's leaders that without a turnaround strategy it would become extinct by 2025. (To compare those age-range percentages in your church, go to www.census.gov and click on your state, then on your county.) The shock therapy provided by presenting this information to a church governing board can sometimes help its leaders awaken from their lack of recognition that the congregation is slowing going out of business.

Turnaround Strategy #2: Recognize the natural human inclination to want progress without making any changes. A national study by *American Demographics Magazine* revealed that 47 percent of American people strongly resist change. Another 17 percent of Americans, while they do not strongly resist change, are “peace lovers.” Members of this group do not care whether something changes or stays the same, as long as their group maintains peace and unity.

Guess who the 17 percent in the peace-lover category always side with when someone proposes a change in their corporation, club, or congregation? Of course! The peace lovers side with the 47 percent who strongly resist change, because members of that group express their resistance in highly vocal ways.

This explains why the governing board of a congregation should never vote on a major change at the first meeting at which it discusses the change. Say something like, “Let's discuss it tonight, then give people time to think about it. We'll vote on it at the next meeting or perhaps a few months from now.”

Lyle Schaller, America's most highly respected church consultant, has said that (a) two-thirds of congregations could double in size during the next decade and (b) that same two-thirds of congregations will not be around fifty years from now.

What makes the difference between those two congregational outcomes? Two factors: (a) Are the pastors willing to pay the price required to lead change? (b) Are the lay people willing to make the changes?

Turnaround Strategy #3: Recognize that if we continue doing everything “the way we have always done it,” we continue to get the same results. The old jest that defines insanity as “doing something the same way the next time and expecting different results” more often applies to leaders of congregations than they care to admit.

Turnaround Strategy #4: Recognize that even when the changes we make start achieving positive results, those changes generate at least four kinds of anxiety. Effective church leaders view these anxieties as what they are—anxieties—not just bullheaded resistance to change. Four kinds of success anxiety:

- Homesickness for familiar ways of doing things, as when Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. Note the biblical record. Moses rescued these slaves from certain death. Yet immediately after another life-changing miracle when they crossed the Red Sea, a group of change-resistant leaders formed a “back to Egypt Committee.”
- Fear of the unknown, as when Joshua urged the Israelites to invade the Promised Land.
- Fear of failure, as when Nehemiah led the Israelites back from Babylonian exile and rebuilt the Jerusalem wall.
- Uneasiness with newcomers, as when Paul convinced the Jerusalem Council to welcome non-Jews into the Church.

Turnaround Strategy #5: Decide to do whatever it takes to increase ministry and outreach impact in your community; thus, insuring that your congregation will be alive and thrive in 2025. The value system of the World War II generation—“Good people do whatever it takes, make whatever sacrifices are necessary!”—reappeared following the 9-11-01 twin towers attack. To avert gradual disappearance from the face of their community, members of many small-membership churches must replace their sense of complacency with that same “whatever it takes” value system.

Enrichment Strategy #6: Increase the percentage of attendees who pray daily. Prayer is a powerful but often under-utilized resource among people who lead change in congregations.

Few endeavors increase insights and spiritual maturity in adults more than prayer. Increase the percentage of members who pray daily by using, both within the PEP Team and throughout the entire congregation. Procedures for use of the prayer card titled, *The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask* by Herb Miller. (Obtain that prayer card free of charge, in electronic form for easy reproduction, along with permission to photocopy it and instructions for how to use it with your entire congregation at www.TheParishPaper.com) This tool motivates a sizable percentage of members to include in their daily conversation with God the habit of praying (by name) for other members, the pastor, and the staff.

Enrichment Strategy #7: Encourage the pastor to develop in equal proportions the twin skills of (a) caring for individuals and (b) helping the various adult groups and Sunday school classes organize so that they extend care and concern for church members during times of life-stress, grief, and illness.

A. Individual caring skills:

1. Using the list of church households, pray for each individual in five different families each day. Praying for people by name, in addition to helping those people address their life challenges, increases your sensitivity to their feelings and needs.

2. To counterbalance your tendency to spend more time with a short list of people because (a) they are quite active in leadership roles and/or (b) they meet your personal emotional needs and/or (c) they are more fun to visit with, develop systematic ways to express concern for every household and individual.
Examples:
 - Use the phone a great deal. When you feel God’s urging, which often happens during prayer time, call and say, “I haven’t had a chance to visit with you for a while; I thought I’d check in and see how you are doing.”
 - One pastor found that a birthday card to each member communicated pastoral care and concern.
 - Another pastor carefully notes the date of significant losses, such as the death of a spouse, and telephones that individual on the first anniversary of that death to say, “I knew this would be a difficult day for you,” and listens to the person’s feelings.
3. Visit all of the households once during your first year, preferably during the first several months. This establishes your reputation as a caring pastor. Before you start visiting, ask a long-term leader to place the following codes on a household membership list:
 - “A” equals “attends every Sunday and has a pre-1946 birth date.”
 - “B” equals “attends a couple of times a month and has a post-1946 birth date.”
 - “C” equals “attends a few times each year.”
 - “D” equals “attends at Christmas and Easter.”
 - “E” equals “they have not attended for several years.”
4. Start with the “A” list, especially the people on the “A” list born before 1946, since most people in that group have higher expectations regarding pastoral visitation. Why start with this “A” group? They quickly spread the word across the congregational grapevine that you are a caring pastor. Do the “B” list second, and so forth. Leave the “E” list until last.
5. To save time and make the visit feel more important, telephone ahead for an appointment. Wanting to “stop by and get acquainted” is your reason for visiting. Later in your pastoral tenure, saying, “I haven’t had a chance to visit with you for awhile” is the reason for your visit.

B. Group caring skills:

1. Without organized, intentional ways to build strong relationship bridges, newcomers in midsize churches continue to feel like outsiders.
 - Bridge-building failures account for the many sad stories from newcomers who never found a sense of belonging.
 - One layman put it this way: “They welcomed us into the building but would not let us into the congregation.”
2. Effective relationship bridges in midsize churches happen through involvement in a regularly meeting adult group and in a responsibility, job, or ministry that the newcomer feels is a genuinely meaningful use of time and energy. (Most newcomers prefer to experience congregational life before becoming official members. Getting involved in a ministry and a group is a good way to gain that experience.)

3. To insure that the highest possible percentage of new members and people who become regular worship attendees are still attending worship after one year:
 - Get newcomers involved in a Sunday school class or group of some kind *within the first six weeks* after becoming regular worship attendees.
 - Ask newcomers to assume some type of church responsibility or job *within the first six months* after becoming regular worship attendees.
4. Without intentional, organized procedures those two bonding techniques do not happen.
5. Bonding into a group and a ministry happens with the largest possible percentage of newcomers when (a) a staff member or volunteer assumes the role of “Newcomer Assimilation Coordinator” and interviews each person who regularly attends worship for two consecutive months and (b) the congregation has an organizational structure that accomplishes this goal (one that includes numerous “entry level positions” provided by the numerous “ministry teams” outlined in Enrichment Strategy #21 later in this material).
6. Establish the newcomer interview process described in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 7, How to Build Assimilation Bridges for New Members & Attendees* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
7. The Newcomer Assimilation Coordinator provides leaders in the various ministry teams with appropriate information gained in newcomer interviews. The number-one reason why people volunteer is because they are asked. Only 21 percent of Americans volunteer when nobody asks them, whereas 85 percent volunteer when asked.
8. Consider establishing a “Care Team” of twelve to twenty people from various age levels with whom the pastor meets monthly. This group works with the pastor to assure that appropriate concern and caring is extended to members and attendees during times of life stress, grief, and illness. *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 9, How to Develop a Congregational Care Team* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).

Enrichment Strategy #8: Overcome tendencies toward low congregational self-esteem with thinking and behavior habits that paint a positive, hopeful future. Low self-esteem can happen in congregations of any size. For example, a congregation that averaged 700 in worship attendance in southwestern Kansas City felt low self-esteem because it was only a few blocks from the largest United Methodist Church in the United States (averaging more than 12,000 worship attendees) and two of the largest Presbyterian Churches in the country.

- A. An atmosphere of congregational “low self-esteem” is especially likely if the midsize church was previously much larger than it is at present.
- B. Declining population statistics that drain members give midsize churches in small towns an additional reason to feel low-self-esteem, as do the membership losses that result from ethnically changing inner-city neighborhoods.
- C. Most members in these congregations do not know that one out of four growing-membership congregations in the United States serve in a declining and/or changing population base.
 1. Factors other than demographic trends control a congregation’s future size.
 2. Yes, churches find it easier to swim downstream in a growing-population community than to swim upstream in a declining-population community.
 3. However, if you don’t know how to swim, it doesn’t matter which way you swim.
 4. Even worse, if you are not motivated to learn how to swim or you see yourself as someone who “couldn’t possible learn how to swim,” you sink even sooner.

- D. Membership size is not the only factor that gives a midsize church low or high self-esteem.
1. The congregational personality pattern, built up over many decades through the repeated modeling and habit patterns of policy leaders and program leaders—and sometimes by previous pastor leaders—significantly influences the level of hopefulness and optimism among the members.
 - Optimism levels differ due to regional and/or community circumstances: a study indicates that people who live in the Midwest are less optimistic than people who live in the Sunbelt South. People who live in central cities and in small towns distant from metropolitan areas have more negative moods.
 - Generally speaking, agricultural communities whose farmers depend on irrigated water are more optimistic than communities whose farmers are solely dependent for crop production on the far less dependable water source of rainfall (whose sparseness creates economic largess some years and economic ruin other years).
 - A congregation's sociological makeup influences its optimism levels.
 - Low-income members are less optimistic than high-income members
 2. Thus, pastors in some churches must work twice as hard at helping to increase the optimism level than leaders in other congregations.
- E. A big part of every pastor's task is to create a pervasive sense of hopefulness, which happens in five ways:
1. Focus mostly on the future and avoid a preoccupation with past events and experiences.
 2. Speak positively about other people at every opportunity and avoid speaking negatively about other people.
 3. Speak optimistically about the future and avoid speaking pessimistically about the future.
 4. Celebrate every congregational success, even small ones. Celebrations tend to counterbalance the inclination to feel pessimistic about the congregation's future.
 5. Establish and maintain effective visionary and planning procedures through regular meetings of the committee chairpersons (see Enrichment Strategy #21 later in this material).

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #3

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Enrichment Strategy #9: Develop planning procedures that match your church's size. One of the major blocks to a positive future in midsize churches is resistance to change. Without effective planning procedures, midsize churches tend to keep on operating in a rearview-mirror mode by "repeating what we did last year" with slight variation.

- A. Midsize churches in the 100-175 worship-attendance range, which often persist in behaviors similar to those of small-membership churches, can use the "annual planning day" procedure Dorothy McRae-Mahon developed. Schedule this on Sunday afternoon and early evening, or on Saturday morning ending with lunch, or starting with lunch on Saturday and running through the late afternoon, or on Saturday afternoon through evening, with a meal as the "break time." Outline:
 1. Brief worship.
 2. Ask people to write down three things in the church that they want to celebrate about the past year and three things they wish had turned out better.
 3. After everyone in the room has done that, list these on newsprint at the front of the room.
 4. Sing a song of celebration for the items you want to celebrate.
 5. Offer a prayer of absolution for the disappointments. (This strategy creates an annual funeral service for failures, helping people to disentangle from and move beyond them.)
 6. Ask people to write down three things they would like to see happen next year.
 7. Arrange these items under headings such as property, Sunday school, fellowship, etc.
 8. Give these items to the various committees that logically have responsibility for them, and ask the committees to spend two hours working on the items they feel should be achieved this year. (In many midsize churches that still act like small churches, committees exist only on the organizational chart and/or in its leaders' imaginations. In operational reality, many such churches do not have committees; they have committee *chairpersons* who call 90 percent of the shots. However, in this annual planning session, most of the committee members are present, giving some substance to the terms "representative democracy" and "participatory democracy.")
 9. Report back to the entire group and send any needed policy decisions to the appropriate policy-making group in your church.
 10. Print the plan in a booklet for use by leaders during the year. Printing it is crucial. This creates "authority" for all the leaders, especially for the pastor. Throughout the year, when members ask, "Why we are doing this?" the pastor can say, "The congregation decided that at the annual planning conference. You may remember reading it in the minutes of that meeting."
- B. Midsize churches in the 175-350 worship-attendance range find the following method helpful: A lay leadership retreat held Friday evening through Saturday afternoon, using the planning retreat outlined in *Creative Programs for the Church Year* by Malcolm Shotwell (Valley Forge: Judson Press).

Enrichment Strategy #10: Institute an annual stewardship emphasis that helps people focus on the biblical, spiritual-growth value of financial giving. Strong financial stewardship is important for two reasons: It helps individuals grow spiritually. It powers the congregation's ministries.

- A. Few factors produce greater feelings of positive future in midsize congregations than resolving persistent financial problems through an effective annual stewardship program that teaches biblical principles such as "the need of the giver to give for his or her own spiritual benefit," not just the church's need to pay its bills.
- B. Yet, many midsize congregations use stewardship methods that limit rather than encourage financial giving; thus, also limiting the individual member's spiritual-growth opportunities.
- C. National research has definitively answered the question, "What causes high-per-capita giving to congregations?" The paragraphs below summarize that data.

Churches across the United States ask people to contribute money in three different ways:

■ *One kind of church takes offerings:* They have no annual financial stewardship campaign. People in those congregations give an average of 1.5 percent of their income to support their church.

■ *Researchers call the second kind of congregation a pledging church:* The leaders build a proposed budget each year, then ask people to write on a pledge card the dollars per week or per month they plan to give and turn in the card during an annual stewardship campaign. People in pledging congregations give an average of 2.9 percent of their income to their church. In other words, people who write their financial commitments on paper give, on average, twice as much as people who do not write their intentions on paper.

■ *Researchers call the third kind of congregation a percentage-giving church:* Instead of building a proposed budget, those churches conduct an annual stewardship campaign that asks people, "What percentage of your income do you feel God is calling you to give?" Parishioners then translate their answers into dollar amounts, write the figure on a card, and turn it in. The church creates the budget by totaling the cards and adding on the totals from regularly giving parishioners who did not sign a card plus any regular incomes from other sources (such as building rental fees). People in percentage-giving congregations contribute an average of 4.6 percent of their income to their church. In other words, national research indicates that people whose churches repeatedly raise the question, "What percentage of your income is God calling you to give?" contribute three times more dollars per year than people whose churches only take offerings. (Dean R. Hoge, Charles Zech, Patrick McNamara, and Michael J. Donahue, *Money Matters* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox])

Annual stewardship programs that achieve the highest per-capita giving levels emphasize the following principles:

- Effective annual stewardship programs talk about need of the giver to give for his or her spiritual benefit, not the need of the church to receive.
- Instead of asking, "What does the church need to balance its budget?" effective annual stewardship programs ask, "What is God calling you to give as a percentage of your income?"
- Effective annual stewardship programs talk about tithing and percentage giving, not as a legalism but as an appropriate faith commitment for which God's grace empowers us. This makes the giving of money a spiritual issue that fits the different income levels of each household.

- Effective annual stewardship programs complete the annual stewardship campaign first, before they establish and publish the church budget. Publishing the budget first puts a lid on the giving, as households calculate “my fair share” of the anticipated budget-increase and tend to increase their giving only a dollar or two a week. By contrast, asking, “What percentage of your income is God calling you to give?” builds a biblical foundation on which much higher percentage-increases appear.
- Effective annual stewardship programs talk about time and talent stewardship during a different month than they schedule the annual financial campaign. When you talk about them simultaneously, some people treat them like a multiple-choice question and respond, “I can’t afford to give much money, but I can give time.” This is not a biblically-based choice. Do not give people the opportunity to make that kind of decision.

Because many midsize churches do not use effective annual stewardship campaigns, they hold down both the spiritual-growth opportunities of members and the financial support of congregational mission and ministries. Discover the total of all giving to all causes in your congregation during last year. Divide that dollar amount by the average morning worship attendance for last year. Many midsize churches find that figure is below \$1,200 per-worship-attende per year.

Why is this figure important? In typical midsize congregations across the United States that computation equals \$1,400 to \$2,700 per-worship-attende per year.

What makes congregational giving levels low or high? Not the median income of the county. Not even the median income of the congregation. The only significant correlation factor is whether the congregation has an effective annual stewardship campaign. If it doesn’t, giving is low and the leaders always find themselves operating with insufficient financial resources. Thus, many midsize congregations unknowingly operate their church \$20,000 or \$40,000 or \$60,000 below the giving potential of their members.

Ironically, the leaders in many midsize congregations defend themselves against having an effective annual stewardship campaign by repeatedly saying, “We do not want to talk about money in our church!” The result: They talk about money all the time. They discuss it at every meeting, especially when creative ideas come up. “We just don’t have the money to do that!”

Wise leaders in midsize congregations reverse this habit. They talk about money four weeks out of each year, during their annual stewardship campaign. Thus, they do not need to talk about money the other forty-eight weeks of the year.

What time of year should churches conduct their annual stewardship campaign?

Research across the United States indicates the following “time of year” pattern:

- 68 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in September, October, or November.
- 27 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in December, January, or February.
- 3 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in March, April, or May.
- 2 percent of congregations conduct their campaign in June, July, or August.

Leaders in most churches feel that fall, as minds move toward Thanksgiving weekend, is a logical time for these campaigns, as we see from the above statistics.

The time of year is not, however, the secret to success. The secret is an effective annual stewardship program that openly and effectively teaches the spiritual-growth value of giving a percentage of your income to the Lord’s work through your congregation.

The following annual stewardship programs use the principles outlined above and have the best statistical track records of any stewardship programs in any denomination in the United States:

© *New Consecration Sunday, 2007 Revised Edition, Stewardship Program with Guest Leader Guide and CD-ROM* by Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007)—ISBN 798-0-687-64437-7—available through www.cokesbury.com or at Cokesbury Bookstores or by phoning 800/672-1789.

Thousands of congregations in 25 denominations have reported (a) 15 percent to 30 percent increases in total congregational giving the first year and (b) 10 percent to 15 percent increases in total giving during each of seven or more subsequent years of use. One congregation obtained the following results: first year, 14.4% increase in giving; second year, 10.3% increase; third year, 13.4% increase; fourth year, 13.6%; and fifth year, 19.6% increase.

In one congregation, financial giving increased 25 percent the first year, 18 percent the second year, and 30 percent the third year. The congregation's financial secretary said, "Three reasons produced these annual increases. Firstly, virtually no households lower their giving during the annual campaign. Secondly, between 66 percent and 88 percent of the households make some degree of annual increase. Thirdly, four-to-six new households decided to tithe each year we used *Consecration Sunday*. These households, some of which grew from giving 4 percent of their income to giving 10 percent of their income, were a major part of our enormous annual increases."

The *2007 Revised Edition* provides (a) a user-friendly CD that contains an audio overview, a downloadable PowerPoint presentation, and several printed letters for congregational use; (b) greater clarity in how-to instructions; and (c) information regarding a free on-line service for guest leaders who wish to e-mail questions to Herb Miller. The program unfolds during four weeks of multifaceted communication and a concluding worship service.

© *Effective Stewardship: Building on Biblical Principles* (Belleville, Illinois, KLV Enterprises), For a free video and explanation materials visit the www.klventerprises.com Internet site. This year-around tithing emphasis works well in churches whose leaders steadfastly resist annual stewardship campaigns.

Warning: Effective stewardship programs in midsize congregations do not ask members to visit other members' homes and ask them to complete a pledge card in their living room. That method, sometimes used in large churches and/or in capital campaigns to raise money for building construction, produces negative emotional results in midsize churches, and negative results in churches of every size in small towns. None of the effective annual stewardship program methods listed above use that approach.

How can we handle the crisis of a financial shortfall at midyear? This often happens when congregations fail to conduct effective annual stewardship campaigns. Churches can address this midyear problem in one of these ways:

- A. Ask the finance committee to lead us in a one-month "tithing" emphasis. Example: Ask people to trust God with their finances by giving one-tenth of their income during the month of June.
- B. After determining the exact total of the financial shortfall, announce that figure and ask people to respond with special gifts "over-and-above" their regular June giving.
- C. After determining the exact total of the financial shortfall, announce that figure and ask people to respond with a sacrificial, "over-and-above" gift of an additional 10 percent beyond the total amount they had planned to give for the present calendar year.

How can we handle a year-end shortfall? Some congregations find value in a "thirteenth-month campaign" that invites people to consider doubling their December offering "so we can finish the year in the black, with all bills paid."

Enrichment Strategy #11: Expand the geographical reach of your parish to fifteen miles in every direction, instead of three-to-five miles. In earlier decades, small-town businesses and small-town churches typically reached three-to-six miles. Then Wal-Mart appeared and began reaching fifteen-to-forty miles in all directions.

- A. Likewise, congregations of every size now provide spiritual enrichment to people from a much larger geographical area than in 1950. In the typical congregation, attendees come from a circle whose radius is fifteen minutes driving distance in every direction. Not only is Jesus' statement that the fields are white to harvest still true (John 4:35); God has added enormous acreage to each of the fields.
- B. Midsize churches cannot compete with the variety of programming that mega-churches offer; however, effective midsize churches have a far larger territory from which to draw attendees than they did only a few decades ago. These larger horizons create greater opportunities for filling the ministry niche that serves the people who seek what midsize churches offer.

Enrichment Strategy #12: Develop systematic procedures for encouraging members to increase the volume of invitations they extend to unchurched people to visit the worship services.

- A. Midsize churches must make reaching a new generation of attendees a high priority, but its pastor-leader must give that ministry less *overt* publicity than the need to care about present members.
 - Few churchgoers in midsize churches have a keen interest in evangelism, especially in mainline congregations
 - Thus, the pastor and staff of midsize churches must seek to help new people connect with Christ and the church while at the same time *not* giving the impression of being more interested in the "new people" than in present members.
- B. In midsize churches that average between 100 and 150 in worship attendance, the pastor gives a great deal of personal attention to recruiting new members and shepherding them through the assimilation process.
- C. When the midsize-church's attendance increases beyond 150, the pastor must develop a system that equips for and delegates to policy leaders, program leaders, and staff more responsibility for recruiting and assimilating new members.
- D. Select procedures appropriate to your congregation and community from the extensive list of outreach options in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 8, How to Attract First-Time Worship Visitors* by Herb Miller (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #4

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team’s discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Enrichment Strategy #13: Fine-tune your worship service toward a blended format, style, and hymn selection that shows equal respect for the spiritual preferences of all four adult generations. Leaders in many midsize congregations do not recognize that a major cause of their attendance decline is the exclusive use of worship style and hymns that spiritually fed young adults during the 1940s and 1950s but do not spiritually connect with of the majority of young-adult families in the 2000s era. When young-adult worship visitors (age eighteen to forty-four) feel that a congregation’s worship services are boring, irrelevant, emotionally flat, and do not communicate in ways that connect with their spiritual needs, they judge those worship services an irrelevant waste of time and decide to shop elsewhere for a church home.

This is a complex period of history for pastors, worship leaders, and musicians. As churches did during the decades following 364 A.D. and 1517 A.D.—the first two major worship-style shifts in Christian history—every congregation in the United States is transitioning through major changes in worship-style preferences. Effectively navigating your way through those changes is a primary predictor of your congregation’s health and vitality in 2025, because it determines your ability to add sufficient numbers of age-eighteen-to-forty-four, young-adult households to create the next generation of church leaders.

Worship Style Transition #1: Generally speaking, people born before 1946 define spiritually meaningful worship with the word “meditation.” Generally speaking, people born after 1945 define spiritually meaningful worship with the word “celebration.” Therefore, the majority of pre-1946-birthdate adults who attend an exclusively celebration-style service want more time to meditate. They prefer the use of traditional liturgies, creeds, and slow hymns popular in the meditation-style era of their young adulthood. Likewise, the majority of post-1946-birthdate adults who attend an exclusively meditation-style service say it feels like a funeral. They want more fast-paced hymns and a sense of joy. If they are shopping for a church home, they decide to keep on shopping. *Starting Gate Clue:* If you want a joyful, celebrative service, do not ask a low-energy person to give the words of welcome and greeting. When that happens, many young-adult worshippers get a depressive, downer feeling and carry it throughout the rest of the service. *Another Clue:* The type and tempo of the opening hymn sets the mood on meditative or celebrative for most of the young-adult worshippers.

Worship Style Transition #2: The challenge of leading worship services in which all four adult generations find spiritual meaning is even more formidable because they favor four different kinds of congregational hymns. Research indicates that people “bond” to music, both sacred and secular, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, which explains the following music preferences. Generally speaking, a few people born before 1946 prefer the old gospel hymns (most of which were written between 1870 and 1935), but most people born before 1946 (15 percent of the U.S. population) like the more traditional hymns popular in Mainline congregations during the 1940s and 1950s.

Another way to view this: approximately 76 percent of worshipers forty or more years of age prefer the older, traditional hymns such as “The Church’s One Foundation” and the Wesley hymns (written between 1520 and 1870)—which means that 24 percent of that age group prefers contemporary praise songs. By contrast, fewer than 20 percent of worshipers younger than age forty prefer traditional hymns; most of those younger adults prefer contemporary hymns and praise songs. Within that younger-adult age group, people born after 1974 prefer contemporary praise songs that were composed since 1980 and have an even faster tempo than the praise songs composed 1960-1980.

Worship Style Transition #3: To make the challenge of leading effective worship services even more complicated, the communication style by which effective worship leaders transmit information and inspiration is entering its third era. From the time of Christ to A.D.1500, worship was in the “oral and visual era.” Few people could read and write. They memorized the hymns. They memorized the creeds and recited them in unison. Information and learning was “mouth to ear” and “symbol to eye.” Through the symbolism of statues, stained glass windows, and the architecture of cathedrals, worship leaders transmitted and spiritually nurtured Christian faith.

Invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s launched the “print era” of worship, which ran from 1500 to 1950. Hymn words were printed on paper (hymnbooks did not include musical notes until about 1855), along with responsive readings and the creeds. Most Christian information and learning was transmitted by “reading and reciting” rather than through memorization and symbols.

Beginning in the 1950s, Christian communication entered the “broadcast era.” People who grew up watching television screens find it is more natural to receive information visually than by reading and reciting. Thus, they feel more comfortable receiving information and doing much of their learning through a combination of oral, visual, and symbol presentations on screens instead of in a solely oral or print format. They tend to listen with their eyes and think with the feelings that result from both seeing and hearing information, rather than hearing alone.

This, of course, explains why screens are going up in church sanctuaries in every part of the country in all denominations. This also explains why some experts predict that denominations will not print many more hymnbooks (except for use by the organists, pianists, instrumentalists, choirs, and vocalists), replacing hymnbooks with electronic disks that provide a far wider range of music in a convenient, easy-to-use format that worshipers can read on projection screens.

How Can Churches Address the Three Worship-Style-Transition Challenges? To avoid one of the following negative outcomes, (1) alienating the older adults or (2) gradually shrinking in membership over the next decade, congregations must show equal respect for the spiritual needs of all four adult generations.

Community size makes a difference in how churches can address these challenges: In large cities, one and sometimes two congregations in every mainline denomination can disregard the observations in the paragraphs above, without gradually declining in membership. These one or two congregations thrive by meeting the worship preferences of that tiny percentage of age-eighteen-to-forty-four young adults who like exactly the same kind of meditative worship style and hymns as young adults liked during the 1920s or the 1940s and 1950s. However, mainline

congregations in small towns gradually shrink in membership if they offer only gospel and traditional hymns, due to the small percentage of adults in the general population with that preference.

Congregational size makes a difference in how churches can address these challenges: Churches with fewer than 150 in average worship attendance, almost never succeed in establishing a “contemporary” worship service on Sunday morning. They can, however, build a positive future by meeting the spiritual needs of all four adult generations in one “blended” service. See the outline and suggestions below.

Congregations that average more than 170 in worship attendance should consider the possibility of establishing a contemporary-style worship service on Sunday morning, in addition to the traditional service. Many, many factors determine whether a church should do this, what time on Sunday morning to schedule it, what month to launch it, and how to accomplish that launch. To investigate these complex questions, ask the governing board to appoint a special task force to study the matter. Name the task force the Worship Enrichment Team, which uses *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 4, How to Increase Worship Attendance* as a study/discussion document. Download free at the www.TheParishPaper.com Web site.

An Effective “Blended” Format for Midsize Congregations: Begin the service with informal announcements and include a brief time in which worshipers greet one another (research indicates that 85 percent of United States congregations now practice this friendliness ritual in their worship services). Follow those informal moments with a medley of three or four “praise songs,” using selections from both “early contemporary” and “late contemporary” every Sunday. These songs promote spiritual focus and God-centered worship. They meet the spiritual needs of younger adults in the same way that the “old gospel songs” did for young adults between 1870 and 1935. In many congregations, a praise team of four-to-six youth or adults, in most instances using musical instruments, leads this opening section of worship.

†To summarize this format, the service flows from warm, “informal moments” that include announcements, to eight minutes of “celebration moments” using contemporary praise songs, to the more “formal, meditative time” that includes more “meditative moments” and hymns from the gospel and traditional eras during the remainder of the service (with hymns led by the chancel choir and music director). In other words, the overall “flow” of the service is from informal to contemporary to traditional. Unfold the various parts of the service in the same progressive order each week, but the manner in which you accomplish each worship element can differ. For example, leaders can do calls to worship, prayers, and Bible readings in several ways. That variety increases inspiration while reducing boredom.

†As you shift to the systematic use of all four hymn types every Sunday, as suggested above, print something like the following in your morning worship bulletin every Sunday for at least six months: “Every Sunday, our congregation strives to show equal respect for the spiritual preferences in worship hymns of all four adult generations. Therefore, each week we select worship hymns and praise songs that speak to each of those three generations. (A practical way to identify those three hymn types is their copyright dates. Traditional: 1520-1870. Early Contemporary: 1961 to 1980. Late Contemporary: 1981-present.)”

†As you use the two or three contemporary praise songs, avoid singing a chorus over more than once. Older adults find repetitive choruses boring because people of their age draw primary meaning from the *content of the words*, whereas younger adults draw primary meaning from the *feeling of the music* and thus do not find repetitive singing of the choruses boring. To get a list of the most popular contemporary songs used in churches across the United States (updated every six months, go to www.ccli.com/WorshipResources/Top25.cfm for the current list

Qualities Often Observed in Blended Worship Services: Like traditional services (1955 style mainline denominations), blended services do not follow one standard format. Different congregations use different elements. However, blended services often feature the following components.

- ☉ The service begins with high-energy participation of worshipers, rather than quiet, meditative involvement.
- ☉ The hymn-singing tempo is faster than was typical during the 1950s.
- ☉ An inexpensive copyright license from Christian Copyright Licensing, Inc. (www.ccli.com) permits printing hymns and choruses in bulletins or projecting them on overhead screens.
- ☉ The presence or absence of a projection screen is not the crucial ingredient in defining a “blended” worship service. An excellent blended service is possible by printing the hymn words on a worship bulletin insert. The crucial issue is whether we sing all four hymn types every Sunday morning!
- ☉ Fewer printed prayers and responsive readings provide a more informal flow and feel.
- ☉ Casual attire is accepted and encouraged among worshipers.

Should a midsize congregation with fewer than 150 in worship attendance use a blended service, even if no young adults attend at the present time? That depends on whether you want your church to live or die. Without blended hymn-singing, most young adults who visit the worship service for the first time make that visit their last appearance. To most young adults, the slow-cadence hymns composed 1517 to 1870 make them feel like they are attending a funeral service. One young father, when asked why his family did not attend a particular congregation (of the denomination in which he grew up), said, “I don’t mind attending a funeral service once in a while; I just don’t want to attend fifty-two of them a year on Sunday mornings.”

Churches that intend to be alive and thrive two decades from now should behave as if they have young adults in every service. Otherwise, they will *never* have a permanent group of young adults in the service. Thus, when the present members “get their promotions” during the next few decades, they leave behind an empty church building.

How to transition toward a blended format, style, content, and hymn type: Appoint a four-person transition team (representative of the four adult generations mentioned above) that meets with the pastor and music leaders for one hour each week for the first four months to (a) critique last week’s worship service, (b) finalize the format of next Sunday’s service, including hymn selection, and (c) brainstorm music possibilities for future Sundays.

Remember that a complete transition—from the period during which long-term members refuse to use praise songs in worship to the time when they say, “We have *always* done it that way here!” typically takes up to seven years. Shifting congregational hymn preference is a process, never an event.

Enrichment Strategy #14: Develop systematic procedures for extending friendliness toward first-time worship visitors. Friendliness is more than an attitude. Friendliness is actions such as the following:

- ☼ At a governing board meeting or some gathering in which numerous church leaders are present, ask people to take responsibility for greeting and getting acquainted with newcomers seated on their pew and the two pews immediately in front of them before or after the service. Do NOT print this instruction in the bulletin. Friendliness should be spontaneous, not institutional.
- ☼ Use the following procedure to motivate more worship guests to write their names, addresses, and phone numbers on a “Ritual of Friendship” pad in the morning-worship service. At each service, the worship leader says, “We want to be a friendly church, and our Ritual of Friendship helps us do that. After the ushers come forward and distribute these pads, please pass them along the pews. We would be grateful if you sign in and let us know you are here this

morning. Then send the pad back to the other end of the pew. Look at the pad to see who is sitting next to you and where that person lives. Be sure to greet that person setting next to you by name after the service. In a few minutes, ushers will return to pick up the pads.”

In conjunction with instituting this procedure, talk with each adult class, group, and ministry in the church. Ask every church member to help with our reach-out efforts by writing his or her address and phone number on the pad or card every Sunday morning. This “modeling” behavior by regular attendees increases the number of first-time worship guests who also write their addresses and telephone numbers, thus making our reach-out work much easier.

☀️ Make three kinds of contacts in three different ways by three different people during the first six days:

- The first contact should be some form of home visit within thirty-six hours. In most cases that is a front-door visit in which a lay caller says, “We appreciate you being in our worship service last Sunday” and hands them some cookies or a church-logo coffee cup and information about your church (copy of your newsletter and, if you have one, a small brochure that describes your congregation). In cases where people absolutely *insist* that you come in, this is a not-more-than-fifteen-minute-in-the-living-room conversation (therefore, do not send laypersons that are incapable of conducting a *brief* conversation).
- The second contact should be a letter or handwritten note from the pastor, mailed on Monday.
- Make the third contact the following Saturday. A layperson telephones worship visitors to express appreciation for their worship attendance last Sunday and say, “I thought I’d give you a call and get acquainted.” The *same layperson* makes all of those Saturday telephone calls, every week. That layperson should *not* be one of the people who made the home visit within thirty-six hours. Why does this work so well? It sends a strong friendliness signal. Though the matter is never mentioned in the phone conversation, it is obvious that this person or household is *not* out of town this weekend. When do church shoppers decide where to attend worship next Sunday? Not on Wednesday! Not before Saturday afternoon, sometimes not before Sunday morning. *Clue*: It is easier to revisit a church that you already know is friendly. (A psychologist says that the first visit within thirty-six hours is “positive reinforcement for behavior” and the telephone call on Saturday is “a prompt that encourages behavior.”)
- Systematically accomplishing these three contacts with every first-time worship visitor in the first six days increases the number of first-time visitors who eventually become regular worshipers and members of your church each year from the national average of 10 percent to at least 20 percent (a few churches achieve 30 percent).
- Why are these contacts so powerful? They strongly and clearly communicate a “welcome home friendliness,” which research indicates is among the most powerful first steps in moving people toward God and the desire to participate in your congregation. Details for developing these procedures and a “Visit the Visitors Team” are found in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 1, How to Transform Worship Visitors into Regular Attendees* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).
- Following the initial front-door visits, providing the worship visitors still seem like people who may return for another visit, add them to your church newsletter list. Leave them on the list until you learn that they have become regular attendees at another church. A huge number of people become “mental members” of a congregation months or years before they become actual members. Why? Even though they may continue to shop other churches they are forming an understanding of your church by regularly receiving the newsletter. What is a mental member? This is the same kind of person who lists your congregation at the hospital upon admittance. You do not know them; they may never have attended. They have developed the feeling, “If I ever attend church, that’s where I’ll

go.” In the same way, non-church attendees sometimes decide to attend your congregation at a time of emotional crisis when they feel they need God. Why your church? Because they have become “mental members” due to receiving the newsletter.

☀️Develop a system for follow-up contacts with persons who visit your congregation a second, third, and fourth time. Study the “Friendliness Team” concept in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 1, How to Transform Worship Visitors into Regular Attendees* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). This ministry team consists of two people from each adult class or church organization such as the choir or women’s organization. The Friendliness Team meets monthly. The pastor distributes and reviews a list of names, addresses, and telephone numbers of repeat worship visitors. *Warning:* without the monthly meeting with the pastor, such teams fall apart in three months.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #5

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

- A. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
- B. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
- C. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
- D. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Enrichment Strategy #15: Develop the highest possible quality of and attendance in elementary Sunday school classes. Raising expectations of adult members regarding teaching is crucial to strengthening this ministry in elementary classes. Develop a climate that expresses the following: (1) No one takes early retirement from transmitting the Christian faith to the next generation. (2) Everyone plays a role in Christian education, not just parents with children in Sunday school. (3) Instead of one teacher, a four-to-seven-person team works together in each elementary class. Study the how-to-do-it section on "Teacher Teams" in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 13: How to Increase Children and Youth Sunday School Attendance* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). Not to be confused with an older, very different model called team teaching, the Teacher Team concept simultaneously provides sufficient Sunday school teachers and assimilates new adult church attendees in a positive way.

Although rarely seen in midsize churches, one of the most life-endangering situations for any congregation is arrival at a year in which it has no children in the elementary Sunday school in the sixth grade and below. Many church health experts say that circumstance equals terminal illness for a congregation. They say that no matter what the leaders do at that point, the congregation continues to decline in membership and eventually disappears. Why? Young-adult visitors with small children quickly learn that this church has no children's Sunday school classes. This leaves those young-adult parents with no choice. One of the principle reasons they attend church is so their children can attend Sunday school. Regardless of how friendly the congregation is and how much those young adults like the people who attend it, they feel compelled to look elsewhere for a church home, one that has elementary Sunday school classes.

Midsize congregations that have only three or four children in all of the kindergarten-through-sixth-grade Sunday school classes are in waters nearly as dangerous. Here, also, many young parents who visit the church feel that their children would have a less than optimum Christian education environment here.

How can congregations address these situations? The following method, developed for and in churches across the United States that had zero children in elementary Sunday school classes, was originally called, "Reinventing the Sunday School in Childless Churches." Using this method, one congregation that had no elementary Sunday school classes in March had twenty children in elementary Sunday school classes the following October. Other congregations use the same procedure to triple or quadruple the number of children in their elementary classes. This ministry looks especially important when we remember that 85 percent of people who are become a Christian in their entire lifetime will have a positive experience with a church prior to age eighteen.

From May through September, use the method in the "Reinventing the Sunday School in Childless Churches" section in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 13, How to Increase Children and Youth Sunday School Attendance* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).

The “Workshop Rotation Model” delivers quality Christian education in elementary Sunday school classes—with fewer teachers and less preparation time than traditional Sunday school models. Download information about this system from www.rotation.org and see the explanation in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 13, How to Increase Children and Youth Sunday School Attendance* mentioned above. Curriculum for the Rotation Model is available from Cokesbury, Nashville (www.cokesbury.com).

Turnaround Strategy #16: Begin building the strongest possible junior high and senior high youth ministries. Youth groups are almost impossible to develop when regularly attending households contain no youth. An equally dependable principle says that children become one year older each year.

- Therefore, to build a strong junior-high youth ministry, start by building a strong elementary Sunday school through procedures outlined above.
- To build a strong high-school youth ministry, grow a strong junior high ministry.
- Study the principles and suggestions in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 2, How to Grow Strong Youth Groups* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com).

Enrichment Strategy #17: Start new adult groups and ministries that open more entry ports for age eighteen-to-forty-four young adults. If most of your church’s adult classes or groups began several years ago, they attract and assimilate few new attendees and members, especially those from young-adult households. Thus, each time a church adds a core ministry such as a new adult Sunday school class or a children’s choir, the likelihood of membership growth increases.

- A. Yet most midsize churches at the 100-155 average worship attendance level resist forming new groups and thus transitioning the church’s self-identity from a small group to a cluster of small groups.
 1. This transition precipitates incredible uneasiness in a few program leaders and policy leaders. They feel they should continue to participate in every aspect of church life. Some of them feel separation anxiety and/or a painful sense of loss as new things happen without them.
 2. Unless leaders overcome this identity-change resistance, midsize churches cannot move beyond their initial foray into the midsize range after they arrive there from the small church category.
- B. As the midsize church moves toward 300 in average worship attendance, resistance to starting new groups and classes once again increases, but for a different reason. Now, the staff tends to say, “Don’t we already have enough groups?”
 1. The list of weekly and monthly activities in the worship bulletin and newsletter has become lengthy.
 2. The multiple staff is quite busy with all these activities. Fee staff members feel they need another group or class to help start and nurture.
 3. Unconsciously, therefore, the pastor and staff begin to deflect the idea of launching new classes and groups with words such as, “Isn’t the so-and-so group already doing some of that?”
- C. At both ends of the midsize church’s worship-attendance scale, pastors, especially if they have served the congregation several years, also realize that only about 60 percent of their church’s new groups and ministries actually survive and thrive.
 1. So pastors begin feeling comfortable in settling down around the present number of groups and ministries.
 2. When that happens pastors say, “Why?” to the idea of forming a new group or class instead of “Why not?”

- D. To grow a midsize church, add one-to-three new ministries, classes, or groups each year, recognizing that only 60 percent of them last more than a year or two but that each of them is a building block for offering Christ to additional people. Examples:
1. During spring or fall months, plan an eight-week “Parenting Skills” study/discussion group for sixteen young-adult parents from your congregation and community during the Sunday school hour. Use the steps in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 11, How to Increase Adult Sunday School Attendance* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). Obtain videos on “parenting” from Focus on the Family, 800/232-6459, and invite specific young adult couples and single parents from within your church and outside your church in the community. Remember that 61 percent of singles in the United States are single parents (*Harvard Management Update*, December 2000, page 10).
 - About 60 percent of the time, such study/ discussion groups blossom into a new adult Sunday school class. During the seventh week someone in the group spontaneously says, “This has been fun. We ought to study something else.” Anticipating that possibility, the teacher has a couple of ideas in mind and asks the group to select the one they want to study for the next eight weeks. If at the fourteenth week someone says, “This has been fun. We ought to study something else!” you know that a new adult class has spontaneously combusted.
 - In any such study/discussion group, either the participants bond or they do not bond. Some groups do and some groups do not. If the group is ever going to bond, that happens in six hours. Whether people are discussing something together one hour a week for six weeks or trapped in an elevator, if the group is going to bond, that happens in six hours.
 - If the bonding happens, declare your group a success. If, on the other hand, the group does not decide to “study something else,” declare the experience a success and schedule another one for next year. Either way, this is much better than trying to get an adult class started that ends up with only three or four regular attendees and refused to grow, but no one can figure out how to bury it with the dignity that avoids hurting the feelings of people who worked hard to make it happen.
 2. Using the same how-to steps outlined in the material above, during the following spring or fall months, plan an eight-week “Marriage Relationship Skills” study/discussion group for sixteen young-adults from your congregation and community during the Sunday school hour.
 3. To increase their fellowship dynamic with and thus their magnetic attraction of young adults, some congregations have established a monthly (usually Saturday night) combination of food, fellowship, and recreation. To experiment with that approach, each of two or three young-adult couples invites one un-churched couple to a purely social get-together of some sort. If that experience works well, each of the church couples invites the same couples to another get-together the following month (asking each of those couples to invite another couple). If the group “gels,” which is never totally predictable, the nucleus that forms sometimes evolves into a monthly “Church Bunch” that eventually becomes the basis for a young-adult class or other ministries.

Enrichment Strategy #18: Develop one or two stellar ministries with children and youth of which the surrounding community is highly aware and about which your church members are justifiably proud. This provides the midsize church a quality-performance “feeling” and reputation of a large church without being a large church. In other words, one or two stellar ministries with children put the “buzz” in the community that causes people to remark, “You know, that’s the church that has the great . . . program for kids!”

Most communities need a variety of childcare programs. Churches can usually provide these services on a financially break-even basis. Appoint a three-person task force. Investigate and select from the following list the one you think makes the most sense to establish next year. Add another program the second year. (a) Parents’ Day Out program. (b) Preschool program. (c) Daycare ministry. (d) After-school, Latch-Key Ministry. (e) Parents’ Night Out on Friday or Saturday from 6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. that provides childcare at the church. (f) Home Game Childcare program (for small towns where football and basketball are high points of community focus) and/or a Fifth Quarter, after-the-game gathering for youth. (g) A Montessori education unit for children. (h) In towns with a population under 10,000, a Wednesday, after-school ministry for elementary children such as “Kid’s Club.” The format includes recreation, crafts, study, worship, and food. In small towns, “Kid’s Clubs” often become a powerful magnet for attracting children and their parents. Check with your denominational office for names of congregations that have an effective after-school, Kid’s Club ministry. Contact those churches and learn what has worked for them and what has not worked.

To be long-term effective, each of those ministries with children should charge a small fee that covers staffing expenses. Such projects quickly crash and burn if they rely on volunteer staffing. In most states, the majority of the above programs do not require additional liability insurance.

Study/Discussion/Planning Session #6

PEP Team Member: Prepare for your PEP Team's discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to questions such as the following.

1. Do you recall instances where this paragraph or section was true in your personal experience and/or in a congregation?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways does the idea in this section or paragraph seem true of our congregation?
4. What suggested methods from this section or paragraph should we consider using in our congregation?

PEP Team Discussion Leader: As you move through this discussion session, ask PEP Team members to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

Enrichment Strategy #19: Develop high levels of communication through worship bulletin inserts, newsletters, committees, and weekly staff meetings. Small churches—because the leadership/governance/participation processes are informally conducted by *individual* program leaders and policy leaders—need to put very little of their communication on paper. Thus, small-church leaders usually express general disdain for “paperwork.” However, when worship attendance move to 135-150 communication and leadership-interaction complexity quadruples as the system begins to run on interaction between and among *groups of individuals*. When these groups—committees, women's organization, choirs, etc.—attempt to use the same interaction systems that works fine in small churches, complaints that “we have poor communication in our church” increase among members and leaders, plus many of the other negative congregational qualities listed in Enrichment Strategy #21 below. Thus, one of the greatest dangers when a small-church pastor moves to a midsize church, or when a small church's membership grows to midsize, is diminished communication.

- As time pressures force the pastor to lay down his/her chaplain role at about 150 in worship attendance, he/she sometimes decides to neglect administrative-detail work “so the program leaders will take charge when they see things falling apart.”
- When this happens, the program leaders and policy leaders feel the pastor is neglecting his/her duties and conclude that the pastor is either lazy or has lost interest in them and the church.

In other words, the pastor who stops being *an ineffective chaplain* because that role has become impossible due to the high volume of individual relationships in a midsize church must become *an excellent coordinator and communicator*. The pastor leader's role shifts toward helping program leaders (committee chairpersons) vision, plan, coordinate, evaluate, and communicate with one another.

- For many pastors, transitioning from the one-to-one ministry delivery, *chaplain* role to the group leadership, committee coordinator, and staff *management role* is more challenging than any other growth period in their ministerial career.
- Some pastors, rather than climbing this steep learning curve into midsize-church pastor leader competence, unconsciously maintain the church at 150 or fewer in average worship attendance, so they can keep on doing what they know how to do—the chaplain role.

Making the transition from small to midsize requires a high level of intentionality by policy leaders, pastor leaders, and program leaders. Pastor leaders cannot fully deal with the irrational anxiety that arises among some policy leaders and program leaders due to this size transition. However, the pastor leader's best tool is high levels of printed, redundant communication combined with regular meetings of the program leaders (committee chairpersons).

- The grapevine meets most of the communication needs in small churches, because it is primarily oral; the distance is short from the root to the end of the vine.
- In midsize churches, however, the grapevine does not run everywhere, to every person. The bigger the midsize church grows, the more inaccurate some of the information on its grapevine becomes—inaccuracies that often generate unnecessary conflict.

In midsize churches, redundant communication systems on paper and in meetings (see Enrichment Strategy #21 below) must replace the oral grapevine in order to minimize conflict.

Enrichment Strategy #20: Fine-tune your organizational structure. Organizational structures that fit a congregation's size increase its mission and ministry effectiveness by (a) improving communication (b) encouraging the free flow of new ideas and creativity, (c) providing efficient, rapid decision-making in a spirit of participatory democracy, (d) reducing the likelihood of two or three change-resistant leaders and/or the pastor exercising veto power over congregational decision-making processes, (e) reducing the likelihood that laissez faire style leadership by committee chairpersons and/or the pastor can create a nonproductive, do-nothing congregational atmosphere, (f) holding conflict to a minimum, (g) increasing the spirit of congregational unity, and (h) enlarging the percentage of members/attendees involved in the various ministries.

Organizational structures *not* appropriate to a congregation's size decrease its mission and ministry effectiveness by creating the following results: (a) poor communication among members, (b) inadequate flow of new ideas and creativity, (c) a short list of laypersons and/or the pastor making most of the decisions, (d) frequent exercise of veto power by two or three long-term change-resistant leaders, creating the feeling that “a small cliché runs our church,” (e) several dysfunctional committees and/or ministries due to the laissez faire, do-nothing leadership style of some chairpersons and/or the pastor, (f) a painful sense of disunity among members, (g) high-levels of unproductive conflict among leaders, and (h) a short list of hard-working lay leaders who feel increasingly burned out while a large number of members “sit in the bleachers and watch” because they feel unneeded or unwanted.

Despite the fact that its leaders often think their church's organizational structure is dysfunctional, midsize churches are often so addicted to a familiar pattern that they keep doing it “the way we have always done it” instead of changing to a system that works better but with which they are unfamiliar.

In healthy, effective midsize churches a far higher percentage of members participate in the decision-making, planning, and accomplishment of the various ministries. Policy leaders and program leaders in unhealthy, dysfunctional midsize churches use organizational procedures like those in small congregations but typically do not recognize the connection between their frustrations, conflicts, and dysfunctional behaviors and their “inappropriate small-church governance structure and procedures.”

The *organizational* structure in healthy, effective midsize churches involves four distinct and *separate-from-one-another* planning, decision-making, and action groups: (a) the governing board, which meets six times a year, (b) the committee chairpersons meeting together as a strategic planning team six times a year, (c) seven standing committees meeting individually six times a year, and (d) six, ten, or more “ministry teams” that function separate and apart from the seven committees and involve numerous church attendees in specific ministry efforts that they view as a meaningful and satisfying use of their time and from which they gain feelings of fellowship with other team members.

In small churches those four functions blur together in various ways. When a church reaches 120-150 in worship attendance, the leaders must formalize those four functions in the manner described below in order to (a) achieve the positive results listed in the first paragraph in this section and (b) decrease the negative results listed in the second paragraph of this section.

A frequent origin of midsize-church malfunctioning happens when pastor leaders, policy leaders, and program leaders consciously or unconsciously decide to leave out the crucial

“committee chairpersons meeting together as a ‘strategic planning team’ six times a year.” Some leaders often think this ‘strategic planning team’ is a duplication of effort because they do not understand that its purpose and function is distinctively different from that of “the governing board.” Other leaders eliminate this vital function because they assume it gets done in ways other than formal meetings and/or they want to reduce the number of meeting nights per year.

The overextended pastor leader often supports and perpetuates this deadly deletion of a vital function by the policy leaders and program leaders, not realizing that time spent in the strategic planning team meeting reduces his/her time expenditures in repairing the results of insufficient visioning, coordinating, calendaring, and communicating among the primary leaders of a midsize church: the committee chairpersons.

An effective organizational system in midsize congregations has the following components:

A. The governing board is an overall-policy body of twelve people that meets four times a year *for one hour* (and in special called meetings, if needed). Governing board members are elected in the way normal to that denomination, with three-year rotating terms of office, sequenced so that four people go off each year and four new people come on. Chosen for their faithfulness and their wisdom, about one-third of the twelve should be long-term, highly respected, experienced leaders. Another one-third should have become members during the last five years. Another one-third should be people less than age forty-five.

The goal of this smaller governing board is not *representation*, as was the case when many congregations had forty-to-ninety people on their governing boards; the goal is church effectiveness in mission and ministry through wise decision-making. This is far more likely to occur in a smaller governing board where (like local school boards) almost 100 percent of members are present at every meeting.

A smaller governing board and fewer meetings gives church members more time to serve on the various ministry teams noted in “Item C” below, a much more meaningful use of time in the opinion of most people.

The twelve governing board members fulfill the classic functions of governing boards in churches. Functions include receiving and approving reports from all committees, approving the annual budget upon recommendation of the finance committee, approving additional expenditures not covered by line items in this year’s annual budget upon recommendation of the finance committee, approving the sale of physical properties upon recommendation from the trustees/property committee, and approving the purchase of property upon recommendation of the trustees/property committee.

During the week prior to the governing board meeting, the church secretary mails each board member a copy of all the committees’ minutes and recommendations from their last meeting. The board *only receives reports and considers recommendations* that are on paper and meet the mailing deadline. Major agenda categories for the board meeting include Action Items (decisions at this meeting), Information Items (reports from task forces and committees), and Discussion Items (no decisions at this meeting).

Effective governing boards respond to reports and requests in three ways: “yes,” “no,” and “please do some more work on this and bring it back to us again at our next meeting.” Effective governing boards limit meetings to one hour because they know that longer meetings mean the board is consciously or unconsciously doing the work (or redoing the work) or either the strategic planning team or the individual committees.

Effective governing boards *respond* to reports and requests from the individual committees. Reversing that process with a date sequence in which the board meets first and then the committees meet produces low participation in the committees and ministry teams because the board inevitably begins giving directions to the committees instead of receiving reports and recommendations from them.

B. The strategic planning team comprised of all the committee chairpersons meets six times a year to communicate, coordinate, calendar, and vision at a 6:00 p.m. sandwich supper one month prior to the six annual governing board meetings. At each strategic planning team meeting, the chairpersons take turns reviewing a printed agenda of items they plan for their committee to discuss at its 7:30 p.m. meeting that same night. This six-time-per-year meeting of chairpersons also keeps the governing board from trying to mingle policy-setting with strategic planning (which does not work).

Without a strategic planning team or its equivalent, where do church leaders have the forum in which to introduce and discuss seed-thought ideas that may or may not have value in the overall “big picture”? This strategic planning team also provides opportunity for the pastor to raise questions and make suggestions regarding “big picture issues” before the committees meet.

This meeting must occur on a different night from and on a date that precedes the governing board meeting. Having both meetings the same night gives the impression that both are policy groups, which eventually leads to a discontinuance of the strategic planning team and escalates complaints about “poor communication” and low participation levels of laypersons in the committees and ministry teams.

A detailed agenda for accomplishing the four objectives of this meeting—communicate, coordinate, calendar, and vision—could consist of the following ingredients.

1. Communicate and Coordinate: During the previous week the church secretary mails every committee chairperson the minutes of all the other committees’ most recent meetings. As the meeting begins, each chairperson takes turns in the “spotlight seat” as all the other chairpersons take turns asking clarification questions regarding that committee’s plans. Much communication and spontaneous-coordination thoughts appear from this process.

Next, all of the committee chairpersons take turns distributing a copy of the rough-draft agenda for their committee’s meeting tonight at 7:30 p.m. Taking turns in the “spotlight seat,” all the other chairpersons ask clarification questions about matters that committee will discuss at its meeting. This process sparks communication, creativity, and coordination in ways that do not feel highly structured.

To prepare for this section of the meeting, the pastor has established a file folder in the church office. As ideas for the various committees occur to him/her during the month, or arrive in the mail, the pastor throws those ideas into the file folder. The afternoon before this meeting, the pastor takes thirty minutes to organize those ideas he/she wants to pass along to committee chairpersons, in note-form on one sheet of note-pad paper. As the committee chairpersons take turns asking the chairperson in the spotlight seat agenda-related questions, the pastor participates by referring to his/her note sheet.

Why is this process helpful? One of the best ways to lead is to ask questions. An even better way to lead is to ask questions in the presence of several peers (other committee chairs). This saves the pastor tons of time in accomplishing his/her leadership role, compared to the procedure of telephoning chairpersons throughout the month with those ideas. This procedure is also much more creative because the individual chairperson instantly gets a feel for how this idea comes across to the other committee chairs. Note: This procedure is somewhat similar to the President of the United States working with his cabinet members during cabinet meetings. This creates a natural interaction. The pastor participates, along with other chairpersons, in asking the committee chairperson questions regarding his/her committee agenda.

2. Calendar: Distribute a copy of the present church calendar for the next four months. Ask chairpersons whether they need to add items. Discussions that arise spotlight any pressure points and give each chairperson clues regarding when he/she needs to start planning for a particular calendar event. Because this calendaring process happens in the presence of other chairpersons, individual chairpersons feel more accountable than when the pastor alone tries to gently motivate/prod/coordinate/pressure them one at a time via telephone or other conversations. Like a

good baseball team, chairpersons begin feeling accountable to one another, not just to the coach [pastor]. This process produces a superior team atmosphere and moral.

3. *Vision*: Taking turns, and requiring that *everyone* speak, go around the room and require every chairperson to state one thing that he/she feels is “going quite well in our congregation right now—accomplishing excellent ministry.” Too often, church-leader meetings concentrate only on “what’s broke” rather than “what’s going right.”

After everyone has spoken, go around the room again. Require every chairperson to identify one matter “to which we probably need to pay close attention—to insure maximum ministry results.”

The pastor asks the chairpersons, “Which of these should we make part of our ‘visioning for the future’ thinking-and-planning agenda?”

Note the important items. Carry the BIG matters forward to the next or subsequent meetings. At that time the pastor may ask questions such as, “How are we doing on this matter? What else should we be considering in (a) the short term of coming weeks and months and (b) the long term of next year or coming years?” This process produces and plants seeds in chairpersons’ subconscious minds and develops a gradual consensus regarding important visions for the future.

C. A maximum of seven small committees perform the management function in church life. Four of the seven—Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations Committee, Nominations (Lay Leadership Committee), and Finance—are required by *The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*. Other denominations have similar requirements that leaders should honor as they fine-tune their congregation’s organizational structure.

After meeting specific requirements of your denomination, call the remaining three committees the NOW system (Nurture, Outreach, and Worship).

- Example of how to make this shift: The nominating committee nominates six people for each of the seven committees (three people per committee in churches under fifty in average worship attendance), with three-year, rotating terms.
- Then group your presently-existing longer list of committees under those seven headings and convert some of those present committees to “ministry teams” that operate under the auspices of a committee but whose members do not have to attend committee meetings.

Committees meet every other month at 7:30 p.m. (the same evening as the strategic planning team comprised of the committee chairpersons meets for a sandwich supper at 6:00 p.m.).

Rationale: Few churches have effective committee systems unless all the committees meet at stated times during the year. Committees that meet “only when we have something to meet about” ordinarily have most of their decisions made for them by the chairperson, or by the chairperson and one of the staff members. While this may appear to be more efficient, it frequently means that not enough people have input. This produces (1) some bad decisions based on insufficient information, (2) a low energy level among committee members, (3) low creativity in each of the committees, (4) the belief by some church members that “two or three people make all the decisions in our church,” and (5) an opportunity for the pastor and staff to get most of the blame for anything that goes wrong or does not get done.

This every-other-month system in which all committees meet on the same night has several beneficial results. (1) It reduces the amount of time that the pastor, staff, and members spend in meetings each month, thus increasing their available time for other ministries. (2) It increases the flow of communication between and among committees. (3) It increases the level of responsibility carried by each of the committees. (4) It eliminates the possibility that an individual serves on more than one committee (an unnecessary and counterproductive pattern). (5) It decreases any tendency for an over-controlling pastor or layperson to dominate committee decisions. (6) It provides childcare for all the committees on the same night, thereby allowing both the husband and wife in young families to participate.

Important Exceptions: The staff-parish relations committee and the nominations committee do not fit into this “all-committees-on-the-same-night strategy.” Some of members of these two committees also serve on other committees, and the staff-parish relations committee requires the pastor’s presence throughout the entire meeting, at all of its meetings.

D. Six, ten, or more “ministry teams” operate under the auspices of or in addition to the seven committees. Each ministry team is comprised of church members and worship attendees who have not yet joined the church. Ministry team leaders recruit their teams in informal ways throughout the year. Most team members begin serving in January. Others are invited to join a ministry team at other times of the year. Ministry teams are in-service learning experiences for congregational newcomers. The nominating committee does not nominate members for the ministry teams.

Ministry teams are not new; only the title is new. Examples of ministry teams that have long played important roles in congregations across the country include the adult choir, the ushers, morning worship greeters, food pantry workers, and used-clothing workers.

Ministry team is *not* a new term for committee, subcommittee, or task force, each of which serves a valid but different kind of function. Ministry teams fit the way incredibly busy young adults are willing to volunteer their limited time. Married couples today work an average of 26 percent longer per week than they did thirty years ago. (*American Demographics*, July 2000) They will give time to (1) meaningful relationships with other people and (2) opportunities to make a difference in the lives of other people. However, only about 15 percent of young adults are willing to give their precious time to (1) positions of status on boards/committees and (2) attending meetings.

Ministry teams create a marvelous mix of task and fellowship. Affinity (a passion or enthusiasm) glues the ministry team together. While the affinity may seem unimportant to other people, members of a ministry team feel it is the best way to use their gifts or skills to make a difference.

Ministry teams are not a rotation of members to accomplish a specific task. That procedure focuses only on a task and produces almost no fellowship while accomplishing each task.

Ministry teams function in accordance with the congregation’s core values, beliefs, vision, and mission. The committees do not assume micro-management control of the ministry teams. Linkage focuses on empowerment and accountability, not on supervision. Church staff and lay leaders who experience the most transition stress when adding ministry teams to their governing board and committee system typically have a high personal need to control or to be controlled.

Each ministry team has authority to take any action it chooses as long as the action (1) is consistent with the congregation’s core values, beliefs, vision, and mission and (2) does not require financial funding that exceeds that ministry team’s line item in the church budget. For example, one congregation says that the formation of a new ministry team is automatically approved if the proposed ministry (1) introduces people to Jesus in positive ways, (2) helps people grow spiritually, or (3) relieves suffering. In another congregation, the formation of a new ministry team is automatically approved if (1) the goal is consistent with the congregation’s values, beliefs, and mission and (2) the person with the ministry-team idea can find three other people to help him or her accomplish it. This kind of permission-giving atmosphere increases the number of enthusiastic, energetic people in a church’s ministries.

E. Schedule a leadership seminar for committee chairpersons each January. Review matters such as the annual responsibility list for each committee. The annual January seminar also teaches how to form ministry teams, delegate, develop meeting agendas, conduct effective meetings, communicate with the other committee chairpersons, and provide newsletter information to the church office.

F. The nominations committee attempts to have one-third of each committee consist of people who joined the congregation during the past five years. Research indicates that 34 percent of the typical congregation's members began attending within the last five years. Even in churches with smaller percentages of newcomers, the varied backgrounds and experiences of the newest members ensure a continuous flow of new ideas and a broadening of perspective.

Scrupulously apply three-year term limits to (1) protect people from burnout and (2) avoid the appearance that "a few people make all the decisions around here." Nominate for each committee as many age-twenty-five-to-forty-four people as possible. Limit committee size to six people.

Scrupulously apply two-year term limits to committee chairpersons. Members of the nominations committee do not nominate themselves as chairpersons.

Do not nominate two members of an immediate family (spouse, parents, and children) to the same committee. Avoid such nominations for the governing board.

No one serves on more than one committee (with the exception of the staff-parish relations committee and the nominations committee and a few people who must serve "by virtue of office").

To operate at highest level of health and effectiveness, nominate to governing board and committee membership positions *only* people with consistent financial giving patterns and regular worship attendance patterns. A good procedure: *Ask the financial secretary to verify to the nominations committee* that all committee and governing board nominees are regular financial contributors to the church. Building a governing board and committee system without that criterion is like recruiting members for a football team who do not believe in football.

For the same reason, *ask the worship attendance record keeper to verify to the nominations committee* that all committee and governing board nominees attended worship at least twenty-six of the last fifty-two Sundays. This avoids the inevitable results of "putting someone on a committee in the hope that she or he will become more active." That is like promoting a low-productivity corporate employee, in the hope that she or he will become a better employee.

Some churches take the principles-outline in the two paragraphs above one step further, to protect nominating committee members from potential conflict in those regards: the congregation puts into its bylaws the requirement that all nominees (a) be regular attendees, (b) be regular financial contributors, (c) have spiritual leadership qualities, and (d) possess positive personal attitudes.

Three tendencies cause many congregations to assign committee roles to a short list of people. (1) We ask people to help us with whom we are acquainted. (2) We ask people to help us who have proven their dependability in the past. (3) We ask people to help us who agree with our viewpoints.

This selection process causes congregations to develop a smaller and smaller leadership group over a period of years and tends to (1) burn out the church's hardest-working core leadership group and (2) reduce the involvement of, and thereby the commitment of, other church members.

The individuals who burn out (1) begin to feel judgmental toward people who do not work as hard and (2) begin to feel that they *own* their committee rather than *serve* on a committee. Those self-destructive and church-destructive feelings come to virtually everyone who serves too long on one committee, no matter how spiritually committed or idealistic that individual is.

Some congregations find it helpful to test new organizational structures on an experimental basis, by saying, "We will see how this system works and change back to the previous model if this does not work out as well as we expect." That approach often helps a midsize church to get past "status-quo veto votes."

Enrichment Strategy # 21: Repeatedly teach leaders the principles and methods for effectively handling differences of opinion and conflict. Conflict is a natural result of two or more people working on something together, as in a marriage. No church group can totally eliminate conflict, and small amounts of it enhance creativity. However, most people are about as eager to participate in a quarreling church as they are to put their hand in an electric blender. Congregations with quarreling patterns create an anti-magnetic atmosphere that repels borders as effectively as the boiling pitch with which merchant ships defended themselves against pirates.

Some churches suffer from one or the other, or both, of two classic conflict patterns—conflict between the pastor and members (which repeats itself pastor after pastor) or conflict between members and members (which keeps repeating itself regardless of who the pastor is). Either of these patterns can keep recurring for decades. The characters change, but they keep re-performing the same play.

Of the various conflict patterns, the “blaming syndrome,” especially when promoted by one or two over-controlling, dominating lay leaders, is the toughest challenge with which to deal. The habit of blaming rather than praising tends to produce one or more of the following destructive results:

- Frequent conflict over small issues
- Difficulty in getting people to assume offices and responsibilities in the church
- Reduction of creativity and innovation
- A series of short pastorates

Books such as the following are valuable for identifying and learning how to deal with difficult church members: *Congregational Fitness: Healthy Practices for Layfolk* by Denise W. Goodman (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute) is an excellent study/discussion resource for governing boards. *The Care of Troublesome People* by Wayne E. Oates (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute) provides helpful insights for clergy and lay leadership. *Creating a Healthier Church* by Ronald Richardson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress) explains the nature of congregational patterns and how they tend to repeat themselves.

For the causes behind and procedures for dealing with a wide variety of “bent personalities” and congregational conflicts, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 3, How to Prevent and Resolve Congregational Conflict* (download free at www.TheParishPaper.com). In some congregations, the staff-parish relations committee schedules, in coordination with the governing board, this study and/or uses it as part of a January orientation of new officers, committee chairpersons, and governing board members.

At every opportunity, affirm the following principles and practices:

☉ Say frequently and firmly, “Differences of opinion are acceptable in our congregation: the only unacceptable behavior here is unwillingness to discuss the underlying reasons for the differences of opinion.”

☉ Remind people that opinions not openly expressed tend to grow stronger and go underground where they become impossible to deal with in constructive ways. Example: Following the strong remarks of a habitually dominating person at a board meeting, the chairperson wisely said, “Let’s get several different opinions on the table so we can think about this issue as intelligently as possible.” She patiently waited through ten seconds of silence. A normally timid person began to speak. The chairperson restrained the chronic dominator’s motor-mouth while drawing out the thinking of several other board members. The chairperson kept repeating her plea, “Let’s hear all of the opinions: That way, we can make a much better decision.” Her courage and skill, repeated at every meeting, modified the over-controlling board member’s behavior. The over-talking habit stopped working, so she stopped using it.

☉ Remind people that it is okay to confront; Example:

“I find it difficult when you”

It is okay to contend, to set forth one’s opinion clearly.

It is okay to disagree: “I see it rather differently from that.”

It is okay to accentuate: “This is a major concern to me.”

It is okay to indicate: “I can live with (this), but not with (that).”

It is okay to express concern, to state facts that document the existence of a problem.

It is okay to request: “May I ask that in the future you”

It is okay to confess injury, to relate an event or remarks that caused pain.

☉ Remind people that it is *not* okay to condemn; example:

“You have absolutely no business . . . !”

It is *not* okay to contrive, to line up political support for one’s position in an effort to control a decision.

It is *not* okay to discredit: “This is a stupid idea that will never work!”

It is *not* okay to exaggerate: “This is the worst I can imagine.”

It is *not* okay to dictate: “You either do (this) or I will do (that).”

It is *not* okay to place blame and make generalizations that indict another person; sometimes you have the right to be angry but that does not give you the right to be cruel.

It is *not* okay to demand: “I’m telling you that from now on you had better . . . !”

It is *not* okay to inflict guilt or try to induce shame in another person for his or her conduct or words. (Adapted from Keith Huttenlocker, *Conflict and Caring* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], p. 73)

Turnaround Strategy #22: Encourage tolerance between the strong, opposite viewpoints of people born before and after 1946. The depression years of the 1930s are well known for having produced a generation of people which, throughout their lives, espoused financially conservative values.

- Less often recognized is the manner in which the life circumstances through which every generation passes during their late teens, 20s, and 30s shape the personal value systems by which they relate to and give time and energy to organizations such as civic clubs, corporations, and congregations.
- Two radically-contrasting value systems were forged by the national experiences of the generation that fought (or whose parents fought) World War II and the generation that fought (or whose parents fought) in Viet Nam. Examples:

People born *before* 1946 have a high commitment to and confidence in institutions. A chain of command in which they have no personal say is quite acceptable. Much of this attitude was shaped by the successful winning of World War II, one of the greatest institutional triumphs in history. These people are easily motivated by “duty,” by “ought to,” and by “should.” Regardless of obvious flaws, they tend to maintain loyalty to their corporations, clubs, and congregations.

People born *after* 1946 have low confidence in institutions. They insist on having a say in major decisions of any group in which they participate. A chain of command works only when they have involvement and input into the process. Much of their opinion was shaped by the Vietnam War, one of the worst cases of institutional mishandling in history. They do not respond to “guilt” motivation. They are motivated by things that make sense to them, not by what older church leaders say we “ought to do.” If an institution is not willing to meet their needs, they move to another job or to another congregation.

Those contrasting generational values influence adult thinking and behavior, not just in church participation but in every kind of community, civic, job, and corporate setting.

Examples:

- People born prior to 1946 rally to the cry, “United we stand!” People born after 1946 are more likely to say, “Individually, I’ll decide!”
- When faced with an overwhelming obstacle, people born prior to 1946 are likely to feel and say, “Whatever it takes, we’ll get it done!” People born after 1946 are more likely to feel and say, “Whatever makes sense.”
- People born prior to 1946 are likely to say, “Meaning in life comes from commitment to great causes.” People born after 1946 are more likely to say, “Meaning in life comes from personal choices.”

Governing board members can better understand these differences by discussing the chapter that deals with this issue in *Church Personality Matters* by Herb Miller (St. Louis; Chalice Press).

Enrichment Strategy #23: Remove ministry inhibiting barriers in your church buildings and property. Church buildings either lift or put lids on the quality of functioning and relationships by pastor leaders, policy leaders, and program leaders. Study the five most frequently seen ministry-inhibiting lids and some ideas for lifting them:

A. Insufficient or over-sufficient sanctuary seating

- Most people experience a room that is 80-to-85 percent full on an average Sunday as “uncomfortably full.”
- If the sanctuary feels uncomfortably empty (which usually happens when the pews are less than 50 percent filled), removing a few of the back pews and/or a few of the front pews and placing them in storage can improve the atmosphere.

B. Insufficient parking

- At least one close-by parking space is needed for each two worshipers.
- Fewer parking spaces than that keep a restraining lid on attendance (this lid is invisible until the first month after you remove it).
- The long-term solution to insufficient parking is either to buy more adjacent lots or to relocate the church building to a site that has sufficient parking.
- The short-term solution to inadequate parking is to ask a dozen or two of the most active leaders who are physically able to do so and are willing to make the sacrifice to park at a distance, so that newcomers do not drive away when they see that there is no place to park.

C. Insufficient classroom space

- Build more classrooms.
- Ask one or more adult classes to meet in the living room of a home near the church.

D. Insufficient fellowship hall space

- Build a larger fellowship hall,
- Make arrangements with a nearby high school or other institution to use their facilities for church meal functions involving the entire congregation.

E. Insufficient contemporary decor of the building

- Some architects say, “Most rooms that have not been updated for twenty years feel ‘old’ to most of the people who visit them for the first time.”
- Research indicates that newcomers become so accustomed to the inadequate ambiance of a room or facility after six visits that they no longer see it as drab, outdated, or museum-like. Why? The positive relationships with people in the facility gradually replace negative feelings about room ambiance.

- What if newcomers are so put off by the “old” feeling of the facility that they do not return? The positive ambiance of friendly church members never gets a chance to replace the negative ambiance of the facility.

Midsize churches in which many leaders have been members for several decades are especially prone to not seeing one or more of the five ministry-inhibiting lids. The following ideas can help to address facility lids:

☺ The most important places to begin improvements in older buildings are (a) the church nursery, (b) the hallways on the way to the nursery and elementary classrooms; some of these hallways are narrow and dark; with thirty-watt bulbs every thirty feet, they have the ambiance of the catacombs with none of the spiritual significance, (c) the rest rooms, especially the women’s restroom, and (d) the narthex, or main entryway; some of these spaces have all the appeal of a cluttered freight office. To address the need to improve the narthex, employ an interior decorator for a few hours (she or he must never have been in this building before) and ask for suggestions on how to improve the ambiance. These improvements are usually not expensive but make a big difference in first impressions among newcomers.

☺ Healthy, effective congregations ask three questions about any facility improvement project they are considering. The order in which leaders ask these questions is crucial. (a) Is this facility improvement something God wants us to do, something that will produce real ministry benefits in the lives of people? (b) Is the timing right; are we ready to do it now? (c) How would we pay for it? Ineffective church leaders scramble the sequence of those questions, asking the third question while disregarding the other two questions. Effective, healthy churches never have enough money, because they use all of their money in ministry efforts. God gives churches the money to do what he calls them to do in ministry.

☺ Appoint a “facilities improvement study task force” and ask this group to obtain more information about the improvements needed in your present facilities. Over a period of about two months, the facilities improvement study task force should gather ideas from all classes and groups of every age to begin surfacing important issues that your church should discuss concerning facilities. Visit each adult Sunday school class, hold a meeting of all elementary and youth class teachers, talk with each committee in the church, and communicate with all ministry groups that presently use any part of your facilities. Following the completion of those visits, as the next step during the next couple of months, go back to all of these groups and ask individuals to prioritize a list of possibilities.

☺ Congregations always find it easier to raise money for several small projects all at one time than to raise the same amount of money over a period of years in several different efforts. Raising money one project at a time means (a) some people are for it; some against it and (b) it seems like “we talk about money all the time.” By contrast, “putting all your begs in one asket” means that everyone sees at least one of their pet projects on the list and therefore has a good reason to give generously.

☺ A “Miracle Sunday” campaign for multiple facility improvements has raised an amount equal to between one-third and three times the size of the church’s annual operating budget in countless congregations across the United States (to obtain a free copy of detailed “how-to-do-it” information on this sixteen-week process, go to www.TheParishPaper.com). The following factors are important for succeeding with a Miracle Sunday: (1) Establish one or more causes or needs that almost everyone will enthusiastically support. (2) A goal that is less than one-third of your annual budget apparently does not stimulate people’s imaginations sufficiently to produce a successful effort.

Enrichment Strategy #24: Keep facility improvement costs separate from your operating budget. Contrary to what many people fear, a capital-fund campaign for facilities improvement rarely has a negative impact on regular budget giving. The opposite is more often true. In most cases, the positive experience of giving to an effectively designed and implemented capital campaign significantly increases regular giving to the operating budget during subsequent years.

Generally speaking, mainline congregations should never combine their annual budget campaign with a capital campaign for facilities improvement. Combining the two appeals tempts some members to split their present level of giving between capital and budget, rather than making an over-and-above gift to the facilities improvement project.

Separating the two endeavors creates more effective opportunities for congregational inspiration and education. Scripture provides a basis for that practical advice. In the Bible we see two types of gifts—(1) gifts that build the temple, which come as additional offerings on unique occasions and (2) regular and ongoing gifts that run the temple by supporting the priests, religious celebrations, and benevolences.

Enrichment Strategy #25: Develop effective procedures for employing the right number of and the right kind of staff members to match your congregation's size. “When I entered seminary, I never dreamed I'd end up as a personnel manager,” the pastor said. “Now I spend several hours a week in that role.”

Some staff stresses are unpreventable, part of the normal landscape in churches. However, pastors and lay leadership can prevent some headaches by fine-tuning their hiring procedures.

1. Do we use appropriate hiring procedures? Update the job description, or draft a new one for a new position, and begin searching for candidates.

The pastor or the staff-parish-relations committee (called the personnel committee in some churches) chairs the interview team. Usually, one staff-parish-relations committee member serves on the interview team, plus two other people who are (a) involved in this ministry area and/or (b) possess expertise in a discipline relevant to this staff position.

Advertise the position as “open to all qualified applicants, both inside and outside the congregation.” That prevents church members from assuming they automatically have the inside track. Distribute the job description to all interested parties.

2. Is the job description accurate and clearly stated? An effective job description answers the following questions: For what ministry activities am I responsible in this job? What general objectives am I trying to achieve in this work? What *top priorities* are more important than anything else I do in this job? To whom am I accountable for my work? Over what decisions do I have authority? Job descriptions that do not answer these questions produce supervision headaches and unhappy staff.

3. What qualities are essential to effectiveness in this job? Put the answer in writing *before* you begin considering candidates! Example: This staff member should possess (a) *passion* for his/her ministry role, (b) spiritual *gifts* appropriate to that role, (c) *aptitude* for the role, (d) *skills* appropriate to the role, (e) “*people skills*” in working with other staff, (f) *cooperative spirit* in working with the senior pastor and supervisor, and (g) *willingness to work some evening hours every week* to accomplish the role. Staff members can increase their skills through workshops and continuing education. No amount of training compensates for absence of the other qualities.

4. Where do we look for staff? If you employ someone who attends your congregation, include the following in your hiring interview and new-staff orientation: Church members are free to express an opinion on any issue. Staff members who are also church members *relinquish that prerogative* in favor of behaviors appropriate to their “staff member” role. In other words, we expect employees to voice concerns about church policies or procedures *only* to supervisors and/or in staff meetings—then in all private and public conversations support whatever decision the supervisor and/or staff-team deem appropriate.

Obtain information on a wide variety of staffing issues at www.churchstaffing.com/leadnet/ including the following: (a) downloading of 200 actual job descriptions for all types of church positions, (b) over 3,000 ministry resumes, (c) managed job search, (d) listing your church's job opening in a database available to hundreds of staff professionals, (e) criminal background checks, and (f) salary package comparison database.

5. How do we run references on potential staff? Never rely *only* on paperwork reference checks. Telephone, use the following outline, and take notes: *I'm ___ from ___ Church in ___.* *Our church is looking for someone to fill the position of ___.* *One of the people we are considering is ___.* *He/she gave us your name as a reference. May I ask you a few questions and get your opinion about ___?*

After the reference answers this and each question, say "thank you" and go to the next question.

How long have you known ___, and in what capacity have you observed or interacted with him/her?

If you were making a list of his/her strengths, what would come to your mind for that list? At first, some references don't know how to phrase their responses. They become more comfortable with the conversation after they begin talking.

Do not ask, "What are his/her weaknesses?" Instead, say the following: *No one is perfect. Everyone has some growing edges in which they or the people who work with them wish they had greater skill. If you were forced to make a list of his/her growing edges, what would you put on that list?* Now that the reference has listed several strengths and become comfortable with the conversation, he or she does not hesitate to answer this question.

Listen responsively. Ask follow-up questions such as, "It sounds like ___ would be really good at ___, but might not be as comfortable in doing ___?"

What is his/her most endearing quality?

What is his/her most irritating quality? Some references cannot think of an answer to this question. Other references respond with amazing information not revealed in their other answers. Example: After giving positive answers to the first two questions, one reference said, "He needs to listen more. He over-talks. He talks for his wife. He talks for other people. He often comes across in a dominating way during meetings."

Anything else you would like to say about ___?

Would you mind giving me the name of one other person who has had the opportunity to observe ___'s ministry? After the reference responds, ask, "Do you happen to have his/her telephone number handy?"

Almost every applicant can provide a list of references that highly recommend him/her. This "second ring" of information often produces a wealth of new insights.

Telephone this "second ring." Repeat the process, with only one variation. On question #1, say, "I believe you are acquainted with ___."

Reference questions for clerical staff: On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate her telephone manner? . . . her neatness? . . . her personality and ability to relate positively to other people in the office? . . . her ability to understand oral instructions the first time? . . . her ability to understand letters and other written communication? . . . her ability to handle stressful work-loads by organizing her priorities? . . . her accuracy with details and figures?

Reference questions that determine quickness, energy, and productivity levels: On a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate her enthusiasm level? . . . her general energy level? . . . her willingness to take initiative in moving ahead to the completion of projects and responsibilities? . . . her tendency to procrastinate on things that are difficult to accomplish? If you were comparing her with other employees you have known, how would you describe the volume of work she produces in an eight-hour day—extremely high, higher than average, or lower than average?

Background checks on church workers (paid staff and volunteers who work with children and youth) are essential elements of any hiring process. Some district or regional denominational structures have a contract with a security firm that provides this service to all of its congregations. Check with that office or with local law enforcement officials.

6. How do we interview the candidate? Try this outline:

Wait until you have at least two strong candidates; three is better. Two candidates can polarize a search committee; a third person often provides a point of comparison, making a clear choice easier.

Schedule one hour for each interview. Mail resumes to interview-team members in advance.

During the first twenty minutes, only the interview-team chair asks questions. Other team members listen. Ask open-ended questions so the candidate talks at length.

Possible interview questions (you may not complete all of these during the first twenty minutes):

—As you look back across the years, what are some of the ministry experiences you have found the most satisfying?

—Among a pastor's [staff member's] wide variety of activities, what are the two or three things in which you feel you have the most skill?

—If you had to list a couple of things in which you feel you need to develop more skill, what would they be?

—Among all the things that churches do, what do you feel are the three most important ones?

—In your experience as a ____, among all the things that you usually do in a week, what are the three highest priorities for how you use your time?

—What is your present housing situation? [If you live in a parsonage, can you see your way clear to making the transition into owning your own home? If you own your own home, would you consider moving to a church with a parsonage?]

At the twenty-minute mark the chair excuses the candidate from the room. The team compares observations/concerns and develops additional questions.

At the thirty-minute mark, the candidate returns. The interview continues, with the team chair asking all questions.

At the fifty-minute mark, the team chair opens the floor to the rest of the team for any follow-up questions they wish to ask.

Ask the candidate whether he/she can think of any additional information to add or has questions he/she would like to ask regarding the position.

Thank the candidate for his/her interest in the position. Tell him/her approximately when you plan to finalize the decision. Do not promise a precise date!

After completing the three interviews, team members decide whether they have sufficient consensus to offer one of the candidates the position.

Teams that lack consensus agree to a course of action. They may decide to dig deeper into the candidate's background or present ministry setting. Sometimes, the team asks the candidate to answer additional questions in writing or a subsequent interview. (Several points adapted from Paul Nixon, *Fling Open the Doors* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002], pp. 169-170)

7. How do we avoid the “halo effect”? This inclination—inherent in all hiring processes—happens when a job applicant possesses one or two wonderful qualities that impress the senior pastor, supervisor, or some of the search committee members. They rush to close the deal, forgetting other important factors. Later, the disregarded deficiencies become apparent in the employee's performance pattern. Committee members wonder how they overlooked those obvious flaws.

This multifaceted checklist reduces that danger:

1. Does ___ have a vision for the church's ministry similar to that of the senior pastor, staff team, and lay leaders?
2. Is ___'s theological orientation compatible with that of the senior pastor, staff team, and lay leaders?
3. Does ___ have ministry strengths that complement rather than duplicate those of the senior pastor and/or other key staff?
4. Does ___ have a historical pattern of loyalty to the senior pastor and/or other individuals to whom he or she reports?
5. Do ___'s primary passions for ministry match the passions needed in this position?
6. Do ___'s core values seem to match this ministry role in our congregation?
7. Does ___'s spouse have a positive attitude regarding partnership with someone in a professional Christian ministry position?
8. Does ___ have sufficient years of and the kinds of experiences needed to prepare for this position?
9. Does ___ possess giftedness in the ministries that are major responsibilities in the job description?
10. Does ___ capably handle confidential information about church members?
11. Is ___ a self-motivated self-starter?
12. Does ___ dependably deliver on promises and commitments?
13. Does ___ usually follow through in completing administrative details?
14. Does ___ have good interpersonal-relationship skills?
15. Is ___ a team player with other staff?
16. Is ___ a person of honesty and integrity?
17. Is ___ an effective time-manager?
18. Is ___ an effective conflict-manager?
19. Does ___ have a high energy level?
20. Does ___ usually exhibit a positive appearance?
21. Is ___ sensitive to people's feelings and needs?
22. Is ___ a good listener?
23. Is ___ a clear communicator?
24. Is ___ joyful and positive in conversation and manner?
25. Does ___ possess spiritual enthusiasm and optimism?

If several answers raise red flags, rethink and keep searching.

No one is perfectly suited for any position. But search committees that faithfully follow this process (a) reduce the number of staff headaches, (b) increase the number of "happy camper" staff, and (c) more effectively accomplish the ministries to which God calls their congregation.

X. The Bottom Line: Which of these twenty-five turnaround ideas might your church want to use in a turnaround strategy? The best way to predict the future is to invent it. An appropriate mix of these ideas, systematically implemented across three years by your congregation's Parish Enrichment Planning Team, can reinvent a congregational future consistent with Jesus' instructions to his first disciples: (a) Help people grow spiritually in their relationship with God. (b) Love our neighbors in church, community, and world. (c) Offer Christ to people outside our walls (Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:41-42).

Have you noticed that as we mature in years, we begin to realize that some of our initial assumptions about what is important in life are inaccurate? As we mature we discard many inaccurate assumptions and replace them with better ones.

This is also a constant process in church life. Effective pastor leaders, policy leaders, and program leaders know that at least one-half of their most cherished personal assumptions are probably *inaccurate* in some way. The big problem: they cannot at the present moment tell which half that is.

Continuously questioning our most basic assumptions helps maturity to happen in congregations and its leaders. Is not that a great part of how we navigate midsize churches toward maximum effectiveness?