

# Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 28

## Coaching Midsize Congregations toward Positive Change

**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](http://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 by which pastors can encourage congregations that average between 125 and 350 in worship attendance to move beyond change-resistance toward maximum health and effectiveness.

**Possible Uses:** a four-session group study by four to six pastors or study by individual pastors.

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## How to Use this Resource

*Fact #1:* Information on paper does not equal transformation in congregations. Knowing does not equal doing.

*Fact #2:* Growth in pastoral leadership abilities more often results from discussions with respected peers than from solitary reading of a document.

*Therefore:* This resource provides a study/discussion process through which a group of midsize-church pastors can develop new awareness, insights, and action-directions.

### Biblical Basis for this Study/Discussion Process

“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).”

### Unfolding this Study/Discussion Process

**Step #1:** If used as a four-meeting group study, discuss in the opening session the purpose of this experience:

To provide practical, proven principles and procedures by which pastors can encourage congregations that average between 125 and 350 in worship attendance to move beyond change-resistance toward maximum health and effectiveness.

This is *not* group therapy, but it is more than a mere academic experience:

- Ask each participant to state what she or he hopes to gain from this study.
- Agree on some parameters for the discussion, such as “honest expression of feelings, but no personal attacks or criticisms of other group members.”

This study/discussion resource assumes that (a) the discussion leader has some training and skill in the basics of group process, (b) everyone realizes that at a few points the discussions may surface matters that could be painful or contentious, and (c) every participant enters the group discussions with an honest desire for insight and the willingness to talk through such issues.

**Step #2:** Appoint a discussion leader, elect a discussion leader, or agree that four different pastors from within the group will each lead one of the four discussion meetings.

**Step #3:** Schedule four, two-hour discussions. Download a free copy of *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 28, Coaching Midsize Congregations toward Positive Change* for each pastor from the [www.TheParishPaper](http://www.TheParishPaper.com) Web site.

**Step #4:** Ask every pastor-participant to prepare for each discussion by reading the material in that section of this resource.

## Study/Discussion Session #1

*Pastors.* Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions:

1. Do you know of pastors or congregations to which insights in this paragraph or section seem to apply?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

*Discussion Leader.* As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

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**Change is a constant with every organism.** Few changes are neutral. Most changes are either positive or negative. For example, as the youth grows into an adult, most physical and mental changes are positive. Later in life, he or she arrives at the invisible moment when most changes become negative: the body begins a quiet but certain reduction in efficiency, moving inexorably toward old age and the cemetery.

**Congregational change is also a constant that is seldom neutral.** A church either moves toward maximum health and effectiveness in mission and ministries or moves toward extinction preceded by shrinking enthusiasm, layperson efforts, and financial resources.

**The constant change that happens in human beings and congregations differs in one BIG way.** A church can move toward extinction for several years, losing its health and effectiveness, and then reverse its direction. Example:

- A New England church established in 1717, grew to more than 600 in average worship attendance during its first two centuries, and then declined over the next thirty years to only 50 worshipers.
- The church then entered a new era of health and effectiveness, and it now exceeds 300 in worship attendance.

Recurring cycles of health and effectiveness are not a certainty in any congregation; some churches decline and disappear. But renewal of congregational vitality is always a possibility.

**Some principles of congregational change-coaching are universal.** These principles apply to churches of *every size*. Study/Discussion Session #1 outlines several universal principles of congregational change-coaching.

**Other principles of congregational change-coaching are size specific:** Pastors that serve small, midsize, large, and mega churches encourage them toward maximum health and effectiveness in ways that have little in common with churches in the other three size categories. Sessions #2 through #4 illustrate ways in which effective pastors apply those size-specific principles in congregations that average between 125 and 350 in worship attendance.

**A. Different types of change require different approaches.** Some types of change require far more skill than other types. Every proposed change falls into one of the following two categories.

*First-Order Reactive Change:* incremental course corrections as a response to unpleasant circumstances. Example: adjusting the thermostat after four teachers complain about cold rooms.

*Second-Order Proactive Change:* major alteration of the entire system to prevent a detrimental future outcome. Example: after years of declining elementary Sunday school attendance, shifting to the “Rotation Model,” a totally different learning method. (See [www.rotation.org](http://www.rotation.org) for a description; obtain curriculum for this model at [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).)

First-order reactive change requires *transactional* leadership: “I’ll do this for you if you will do that.” Translation: “I’ll turn up the thermostat if you stop complaining.”

Second-order proactive change requires *transformational* leadership. Example: “Should we discuss the possibility of replacing our elementary classes with a completely new approach that (a) achieves our Christian education goals and (b) doubles attendance?”

*Proactive transformational leadership requires a complex mixture of skills.* A few examples:

1. Transformational leaders show consistent trustworthiness in their servant-hood and role-authority behaviors.
2. Transformational leaders exhibit excellent relational skills with the congregation’s members and lay leaders. An old bromide says that most leaders are either task-oriented or people-oriented. Transformational leaders excel at both.
3. Transformational leaders obtain many “yes” answers from their invitations to workers and learn how to manage the 5 percent who are control-addicts.
4. Transformational leaders place in leadership roles people whose track records indicate they are effective leaders.
5. Transformational leaders involve several lay leaders in effective planning for the future.
6. Transformational leaders persistently energize people to look at big-picture issues. Their leadership methods extend far beyond the boundaries of “I will do this for you if you do that for me.” They ask questions such as, “What would we need to do to double our Sunday school attendance? What would it take to grow our worship attendance from 90 to 150?”
7. Transformational leaders recognize that people less often change what they do because someone gives them *analysis* that shifts their *thinking*—than because someone *shows* them a truth that influences their *feelings*. (John P. Kotter, *The Heart of Change* [Boston: Harvard Business School Press], p. 1)
8. Transformational leaders focus much of their energy on one-to-three priorities crucial to the congregation’s future health, rather than spending all of their time on problems that require transactional fixes.
9. Transformational leaders repeatedly cast God’s vision regarding those one-to-three big-picture priorities.
10. Transformational leaders work hard, passionately, and persistently to achieve those one-to-three crucial visions. Example: A pastor retired after thirty years in the same congregation. He understood that relational skills, vision, and hard work accomplish much. The church grew in numbers and ministries. At age seventy-eight he became part-time interim pastor of a 100-year-old, rural congregation, membership twenty-five. Three years later, membership reached 150. The church had completed a quarter-million-dollar building campaign, and he was awaiting replacement by a full-time seminary graduate.

Summary: Does your congregation need transformational leadership? If so, which of the ten skills listed above need implementation?

**B. Recognize the six invisible change blockades.** Organizations, like people, are creatures of habit. Thus, the mental frameworks (thinking patterns) through which organizations view and discuss proposals for change invisibly predetermine the outcome of most new ideas. Both functional and dysfunctional congregations contain those predetermining mental frameworks.

*Leaders in healthy, effective congregations* habitually use an invisible mental framework that (a) respond to new ideas rationally, (b) assess new ideas on their merits, (c) in some cases implements the new idea as is, (d) sometimes modify the new idea before implementation, and (e) in some cases decide that the new idea is interesting but not advisable in this congregation.

*By contrast leaders in dysfunctional, ineffective congregations* habitually use an invisible mental framework that responds to new ideas in one or several of the following ways. The more aware new pastors are of these classic blockades, the more competent they become in (a) leading congregations beyond them when discussing new ideas and (b) helping lay leaders redesign dysfunctional mental frameworks into healthy, rational thinking habits.

Six of these invisible habit patterns that block change and create invisible, dysfunctional routines are described below. [Adapted from a list by David A. Garvin and Michael A. Roberto, "Change Through Persuasion," *Harvard Business Review*, February 2005, p. 109]

*"No" culture.* This pattern is often observed in organizations dominated by cynics and critics. A few influential lay leaders greet new ideas with skepticism and fawn superiority to such nonsense. Someone likened her leaders' response to new initiatives like a skeet shoot. Someone yells, "Pull!" A deafening blast shatters the new idea into fragments. This pattern happens in two circumstances: (a) churches that overvalue criticism and analysis and (b) congregations in which changing something requires multiple approvals from different committees or boards in which critics can say "no" but "yes" is hard to hear above roar of resistance. This is especially common in churches whose decision-making processes involve committees comprised of powerful, critical members and/or chairpersons.

*The process is the main thing.* Some churches put so much emphasis on the "proper" way to discuss new ideas that their leaders unknowingly blur form and content, procedures and results. How people present a new idea becomes more important than the merits of their proposal. Despite much discussion, plus great pride in open-mindedness, the endless debating process wears out the new proposal between conception and birth.

*The grass is always greener.* To avoid dealing with BIG issues, such as (a) un-inspirational worship services or (b) ineffective children and youth Sunday school classes, leaders repeatedly become fascinated by peripheral ministry concepts picked from the trees of programming in other churches.

*After the meeting ends, debate begins.* This routine is difficult to spot. It happens under cover, such as in the parking lot following meeting and in subsequent telephone conversations. Thus, cordial and seemingly cooperative meetings are a prelude to resistance and end-runs around democratic decision-making systems. As a result, board and committee meetings become empty rituals, influential lay leaders are polite in public discussions and murder new ideas privately, and politics triumph over substance.

*Ready, aim, aim ...* Staff members generate a constant stream of ideas and proposals, but the committee's or board's inability to arrive at a definitive course of action prevents a final decision. Often called "analysis paralysis," perfectionist lay leaders and church cultures trying to avoid all risk become "perfect" at this invisible change barricade. In these waters, staff members either (a) drown from conflict when they move ahead too quickly with good ideas or (b) die of boredom as they wait for decisions that never come.

*This too shall pass.* What if prior pastors repeatedly proclaimed a state of crisis followed by few substantive changes? Parishioners become jaded, developing a heads-down, bunker-mentality reluctant to respond to the latest warning of declining attendance. Many lay leaders believe that the wisest action is to ignore new initiatives, work around them, or wait for God to provide.

**C. Understand the anatomy of change resistance.** Like individuals, organizations use ego defenses such as denial, rationalization, and fantasy to maintain their self-identities. They fear forging new self-identities and developing new competencies.

People do not process change-proposals rationally. Change-permission happens at the emotional level, not the rational level. The process by which individuals emotionally commit to change unfolds in three stages:

*Awareness:* “I know a change is happening.”

*Buy-in:* “I believe this change will benefit the congregation and me.”

*Ownership:* “I take personal responsibility for helping to implement this change.”

Awareness of these three stages helps you abandon the myth that change is an event. Change is a process. Appeal to multiple audiences over a long time-period. Seek feedback. Find out whether your message is moving beyond information-transfer to emotional ownership.

Develop answers to classic change-reaction questions:

- *What are you changing?* Translation: Can you explain it clearly? Can you explain it in less than sixty seconds? Better still, can you explain it in one sentence that pictures the change and its benefits?
- *What will be different because of the change?* Translation: The people from whom change requires a *behavior* change need to know precisely what behavior you are asking them to change.
- *Who will lose what because of this change?* Translation: Endings come before beginnings. Even the changes that bring people positive benefits begin with some kind of loss, a setting aside of familiar routines. (William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*)

Develop a game plan for managing change reactions. Plan steps such as the following:

1. Avoid taking emotional change-resistant statements personally. As reliably as water runs downhill, the threat of change produces resistance to change.
2. Avoid blaming people who make change-resistance remarks.
3. Realize that people’s initial reaction to a new idea often bares little similarity to their final opinion about it at a later date. With time to think, resistance can change to acceptance.
4. Ask people how they feel. Change resistance is rarely rational. Look for and try to address the emotional threat they fear.
5. Help people identify differences between this change and similar ideas that did not work.
6. Put change-resistant people on a committee to develop implementation procedures. Let them exert their “control needs” that way, rather than via resistance to the change-idea itself.
7. Pay more personal attention to change-resistant people. Sometimes, resisting change is a way to command attention.
8. Let others in your board, committee, or group answer change objections. Peer pressure often disarms change reaction far better than pastor pressure.
9. Give it time to percolate. Avoid rushing something to a vote before change reactions can mature beyond initial resistance-reactions.
10. Avoid letting fear of change reaction prevent change proposals.

Summary: treat change as an *emotional process*, not a *rational event*.

**D. Practice the principles of safe change.** A parishioner wrote, “Our church has longevity, a rich heritage, and important traditions. However, too many older people who do not like change run our congregation.

“Our membership has declined for two decades. We have very few young adult families and less than a half dozen teenage youth.

“Yet, the majority of our board members vote against the necessary changes.

What can we do?”

The consultant responded with ten suggestions:

1. *Build self-esteem.* Many once-strong-but-now-declining-membership churches feel endangered. Board members frightened about the future cling to the security of their cherished traditions, so they unconsciously resist essential insights. Understanding that “mental color-blindness,” change-coaching leaders affirm those cherished traditions before they try to change them.
2. *Identify a crisis.* Make sure this is a “consensus crisis” on which most members agree, not just a “potential crisis” that is far out on the horizon.
3. *Strengthen trust.* Spend time with and genuinely care about each individual governing board member. Anxiety increases when people consider changes. Change-coaching leaders reduce anxiety through warm personal relationships, not through the brilliance of logic and frontal attacks on bronzed traditions.
4. *Increase the level of discontent.* Slowly turn up the burner of urgency. Create numerous opportunities for discussing the crisis over several months. People need time to reflect. They often change their minds after, rather than during, meetings.
5. *Beautify the proposed change.* Make field trips. Gather information from congregations that made a similar change. Let board members experience themselves toward a new way of thinking.
6. *If possible, experiment with change before making a final decision.* Saying that “we will evaluate this after several months” reduces anxiety.
7. *Suggest that this change is a way to reclaim our heritage.* Lead a charge back to the good old days or “back to the basics.” People love to follow leaders who connect the future with the past.
8. *Connect the change with a biblical mandate.* People feel more secure with a change that seems to serve God more effectively.
9. *Announce the change as a way to express love and concern.* “Love your neighbor” is a widely affirmed biblical principle. If not changing appears to violate that principle, change begins to look better than not changing.
10. *Remember that a few board members will resist the change to the end and beyond.* Rational thinking, warm sincerity, and personal caring never grant you total immunity from a short list of irrational people. Love them anyway.

What are the great traditions in your church? Affirm them! Build on them! What are the change-resisting traditions? Help people move beyond them!

**E. Use effective motivation procedures.** People who attain great goals influence the people around them to see the benefit of each goal—both to themselves and to their organization—and to work together for its achievement.

Whatever their roles in a congregation, people who achieve significant results build and motivate teams of people.

The coordinated efforts of a group win victories that Lone Ranger personalities find impossible.

Motivational communication contains content such as the following. (Adapted from George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* [Nashville: Word Publishing], p. 166)

*List below each item one way by which you could do that in the congregation you serve:*

- Address issues that matter to people in this group.
  
- Repeatedly fuel their focus on a compelling vision.
  
- Offer them a concise, significant, and challenging role in fulfilling the vision.
  
- Package the vision in captivating ideas, persuasive words, and an inspiring example.
  
- Describe in reasonable terms your expectations regarding their performance.
  
- Support them with resources, guidance, encouragement, and rewards.
  
- Always place peoples' personal needs ahead of program-accomplishment goals.
  
- Provide generous praise, selflessly and genuinely deflecting credit to the entire team.
  
- Celebrate each small win along the path to the ultimate vision.

**F. Exert spiritual, not just organizational and psychological, leadership.** Pastors in spiritually transformed and transforming churches emphasize the following spiritual behaviors:

*1. Preach, talk, and teach a “God is alive” theology.* A consultant interviewing a layperson in a healthy, growing congregation asked what their pastor did best.

The man replied, “Communicates a live God to people.”

Effective spiritual leaders provide more than psychological help, more than good ideas, more than emotional experiences, more than a social group. They encourage people to make a spiritual connection with God. They do not confuse the bread of life with the crumbs of religion.

When people think God is alive, they think God is present rather than historical. That conviction translates into what theologians call a “high Christology.” God is incarnated in present-day culture to transform the quality of individual lives. For people in churches that teach a high Christology, the Bethlehem stable is a continuous event. God is still among us. He still walks the Emmaus Roads of daily life, communicating with people who are willing to talk with him.

*2. Preach, talk, and teach the value of personal prayer.* A pastor facing life-threatening heart surgery visited the office of a clergy friend. In case anything went wrong, he wanted his friend to preach his funeral. After they chatted a few minutes, his friend said, “Let’s go down to the prayer room.” The two entered a small room that contained an altar and kneeling rail. His friend prayed for his safe passage through and recovery from the surgery, revealing in his prayer that he had listened carefully to every aspect of his friend’s emotional stress.

Later, after surgery, the pastor told his daughter how much his friend’s prayer had meant to him. She said, “No wonder that church has more than 1,000 people in worship each Sunday. My pastor would have listened empathetically and given me a pep talk about how capable my surgeon is. Even if our church had a prayer room, I doubt he would use it.”

Everyone has a spirit of some kind, and that spirit can change with circumstances. People can have a peaceful spirit, a negative spirit, an angry spirit, a fearful spirit, or some other kind of spirit. Spiritually skilled pastors know that the best way to help people shift to a new spirit is by helping them connect with the spirit of Christ. Prayer is the primary way that happens, which is why scripture urges us 103 times to “ask.”

*3. Preach, talk, and teach the life-transforming power of Bible study.* College courses such as “The Bible as Literature” have educational value.

- However, transmitting facts is not a church’s primary purpose; changing lives is the goal.
- Thus, we have a biblical book titled *The Acts of the Apostles*, not The Thoughts of the Apostles or The Ideas of the Apostles.

H. Richard Niebuhr warned against “biblicism,” reminding us that such an approach makes scripture the object of its study, instead of God. (*Reflections*, Summer-Fall 1995)

- “Biblioatry” can block God’s truth by putting it into unusable, deadening forms.
- Yet “rationalolatry” can be as dangerous for some congregations as fundamentalism is for others.

Rational thinking, when divorced from a spiritual focus, becomes an invisible form of “salvation by intellectual good works.”

- The Christian faith is not merely right behavior (as some moralists would tell us).
- The Christian faith is not merely right thinking (a viewpoint that many conservatives and liberals share, which explains why they argue so vehemently).
- Nor is Christian faith merely right feeling, as some congregations seem to emphasize in their worship format and content.

Christian faith is a gift God gives to people who form and maintain a right relationship with him. That is the primary objective of Bible study in transformed and transforming churches. Their Bible study concentrates on helping people to form and maintain a personal relationship with God.

The people in an African coastal village were physically stronger, more mentally alert, and more culturally advanced than their relatives in the country's interior. A physician discovered why: the seacoast families got adequate protein from their diet of fish.

We are what we eat—in more ways than one! Pastors who facilitate positive change feed people spiritual food.

*4. Remember that a few people—despite the positive results evident from making changes—will continue to resist the changes that produced those results.* Rational thinking, warm sincerity, and personal caring do not grant leaders immunity from the lunatic fringe.

Continuing to care about these people requires a spiritual attitude, not an emotional or psychological method.

- Love them anyway.
- Repeatedly express appreciation to them.
- Pray for them by name, daily.
- Disregard their attempts toward negative influence.

Ask God to give you the same feelings toward such people that Jesus possessed when he looked down from the cross and said of the soldiers who killed him, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:24)

*5. Refuse to INTERNALIZE the criticism of that 5 percent of people in every congregation who are perpetually critical.* In her book, *The Comfort Trap*, Judith Sills quotes a Buddhist parable: an enemy shoots an arrow at your heart. It falls short and lies at your feet. Now you have two choices. You can finish the job, or you can turn and walk away.

Every pastor makes that choice regarding the dissident 5 percent.

- Healthy, effective pastors see the arrow laying there at their feet.
- They continue to care about the persons who shoot arrows, but they turn and walk away.

Effective pastors do not allow a short list of antagonists to paralyze a congregation's forward momentum.

- They hear the dogs barking and respect their right to bark.
- But effective pastors know that most of the barking is rooted in internal fears rather than in reality.

Such pastors claim the freedom of mind that stands clear of and remains detached from destructive and/or irrational perceptions and habits.

**G. Provide a balanced theological perspective.** Every pastor possesses, articulates, and promotes through preaching and teaching a set of attitudes and behaviors—which either *are* or *are not* consistent with the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus and the apostolic New Testament church. Healthy, effective congregations possess and live out those apostolic attitudes and behaviors. Unhealthy, ineffective churches have lost or discarded those apostolic attitudes and behaviors.

1. *The Congregation's Ethos.* This invisible yet powerful quality is the fundamental character or spirit of a church's culture. In spontaneous, recurring patterns, ethos is the underlying sentiment that drives and refuels a church's beliefs, attitudes, customs, and practices. (Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Unstoppable Force* [Orange: California: Yates & Yates] p. 97)

- *Healthy*, effective congregations consistently (a) *live by faith in God's guidance*, (b) *are known by their love*, and (c) *speak words of hope*. (1 Corinthians 13:13) A congregational culture of faith, hope, and love is capable of transforming individuals and the communities in which individuals live. "People are looking for something worth believing in, somewhere to belong, and something to become. In the contexts of an apostolic ethos, those intrinsic longings of the human spirit are called out and then find their fulfillment... Faith, love, and hope are not foundations, they are wellsprings." (*The Unstoppable Force*, pp. 162-163)
- *Unhealthy*, ineffective congregations are weak in either (a) their faith in God's guidance, (b) their love toward people inside and outside the church, or (c) their hope in the future, or weak in all three. God cannot bless an organization that does not embody all three of these apostolic qualities.

2. *The Congregation's Core Values.* Many congregations become frustrated when they set important goals and make plans, then fail to arrive at the destination they so carefully selected. Those failures often happen because congregations *always act on their core values*, not on the goals they set! Congregations *always act according to their core values*, not according to their plans. Unfortunately, a congregation's core values are always partially invisible to its leaders, submerged in "the way we have always done things here."

- Jesus taught his first disciples three core values through The Great Commandment and The Great Commission (Acts 2:41-42, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20).
- Christ's three core values summarize as follows: (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.

The emphasis on or neglect of one or two of Christ's three core values determine a church's destiny:

- *Unhealthy*, ineffective congregations give most of their emphasis and energy to *one* of Christ's three core values. Their clergy and lay leadership tend to consciously or unconsciously believe the myth that Christ's *other two* core values happen automatically, as a byproduct of focusing on the *one* core value about which they feel the most passionate. In other words, when clergy and lay leadership make Christ's three core values a multiple-choice question, they produce *unhealthy*, ineffective congregations.
- *Healthy*, effective congregations give all three of Christ's core values equal emphasis and energy.

## Study/Discussion Session #2

*Pastors.* Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions:

1. Do you know of pastors or congregations to which insights in this paragraph or section seem to apply?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

*Discussion Leader.* As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

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Guiding a midsize congregation toward the polar star of positive change is a complex navigational challenge. The pastor's role is more like acting on the data from dozens of instruments in a space ship than reading the compass in a seagoing vessel.

Many of the insights and methods in this study/discussion session stem from much-appreciated interviews with thirty-three highly effective midsize-church pastors. Their comments (a) reveal twenty aspects of that complexity and (b) suggest numerous ways in which midsize-church pastors can strengthen their ministry results.

**A. Understand the differences between midsize and small churches.** Midsize is not merely a small church with more members and attendees. Midsize churches are another species.

Midsize churches differ in these ways:

- Their nature
- Their thinking patterns
- Their behavior patterns
- Their pastors' functioning patterns

Learning and adjusting to these differences is often a greater challenge than small-church pastors who relocate to midsize churches anticipate. Not uncommonly, a pastor's adjustment period is eighteen to twenty-four months.

*1. Midsize churches have more members.* The larger group creates differences in the ways pastors *do* ministry and *feel* about their ministry. The pastor relocating from a small church seldom anticipates the uneasy feeling that arises from inability to (a) know all of the members personally, (b) know their opinions about church life, and (c) know what they want from and for their church.

One pastor said, "Shifting from the relational nature of a small church—where everyone knew everything and I knew everyone's opinions about everything—to the greater complexity of determining a midsize congregation's pulse has been a challenge.

"When the governing board makes a major decision, I catch myself wanting to drive with my brakes on, wondering, 'Do we really know enough about how people will react to go ahead with this?'"

"In a small church, I always *knew* how people would react to a decision before we made it. In a midsize church, I'm more often forced to depend on the opinions of governing board members and committee chairpersons."

2. *Midsized churches have more happening, at a faster pace.* New pastors who previously served small churches quickly discover that more is happening than they can be involved in. One pastor said, “I’ve had to stop thinking that I should show up for everything, and I’ve had to stop feeling a little guilty that I am not present for every committee meeting and activity. I’m still working on that. I guess it takes awhile.”

The greater number of groups, activities, and events does not, however, mean that laypersons do not hold the pastor responsible for what is happening. In midsized churches—often described as “program size churches”—most of the laypersons expect ministries that laypersons do not expect in small churches (often described as “pastoral size churches”). One pastor described his role as similar to that of a YMCA director: laypeople do not expect him to participate in every group and activity, but many of the laypeople DO hold him accountable for how well things are going in those programs and groups.

Reflecting on these size-related changes, a pastor whose midsized church now fits in the large-church category made the following comparisons. “Small churches are more like a family and almost everyone is involved in almost everything, including the pastor. In midsized churches the pastor knows most of what is happening but is not involved in all of it. In large churches the pastor does not know everything that is happening and is involved in only a small percentage of it.”

He added, “Each size change put me on a new learning curve. I had to make attitudinal and emotional shifts that I had not anticipated and which were not as easy as I expected.”

3. *Midsized churches have more people resources.* More congregants do not guarantee higher quality of ministries. Small churches can also provide high-quality ministries. But a larger pool of people typically (a) broadens the range of gifts and graces with which to accomplish ministries and (b) adds the “bench strength” of more individuals with those gifts and graces.

Instead of only one person for whom a particular ministry is “their thing,” two to five people may feel called to that ministry. This changes the manner in which pastoral and organizational leadership happens.

4. *Midsized churches have more staff.* In most small churches a solo pastor does everything; other staff is minimal—seldom comprising more than a part-time nursery employee on Sunday morning and/or a part-time custodian and/or a part-time office secretary.

By contrast, midsized churches are by definition multiple-staff organizations. They cannot retain their effectiveness and size without additional part-time or full-time staff. Thus, in midsized churches the hiring, leading, and coordinating of staff takes a chunk of the pastor’s time.

How much staff is enough? Dependable staff-number formulas:

- One full-time pastor and a full-time secretary can care for a congregation of 125-150 in average worship attendance.
- For each 100 worship attendees beyond 150, congregations need one additional program staff member or part-time equivalencies thereof.
- As they grow from 150 to 250 in worship attendance, wise congregations add one, then two or more, quarter-time or half-time lay persons who specialize in ministries such as youth, elementary children, hospital visitation, etc.

In midsized churches of 150 to 250 worship attendance, why are multiple, part-time lay staff specialists better than adding a full-time associate pastor who carries several portfolios? (a) The amount of ministry part-time staff accomplish is greater per staff dollar spent. (b) Part-time staff members usually stay longer. (c) Part-time staff members’ performance is often superior.

How can the growing midsized church afford to hire more staff? If the new staff member is genuinely needed, and if she or he is competent, the new position usually generates sufficient increased donations to pay for itself in six months to one year.

5. *Midsized churches are more multi-celled.* Small congregations usually contain one to three groups of people who vocalize one to three viewpoints. But midsized churches usually contain seven to twenty groups of people who vocalize seven to twenty viewpoints. Thus, when a small-church pastor moves to a midsized congregation, he or she may shift from refereeing two groups (voices) to refereeing a dozen groups (voices). Rumor that the quip, “Leadership is like herding cats!” originated with a midsized church pastor might be accurate.

6. *Midsized churches have more active committees and constituency groups.* Midsized-church pastors find themselves working more with leaders of constituency groups and with chairpersons of committees than they did in small congregations—where most of the committees existed more on paper than in reality and things got done through the commitment of individual laypersons.

This does not necessarily mean that the midsized-church pastor attends all committee meetings; he or she may attend one-half to three-fourths of them. However, the pastor knows what is happening in the various committees and constituency groups.

This does NOT mean that the pastor’s relationship with *individuals* in midsized churches is inconsequential. All effective leadership has a relational base. But effective midsized-church pastors develop greater group-leadership and group-coordination skills to compliment the “chaplain-style skills” with individuals so crucial in smaller congregations.

Example: In small churches, one or two influential individuals usually have veto power over new ideas. In midsized churches, one or two groups (such as adult Sunday school classes or committees) usually have veto power over new ideas. Thus, the pastor’s sensitivity to the thinking patterns of specific groups becomes as important as the sensitivity to thinking patterns of individual lay leaders.

7. *Midsized churches have programming needs similar to larger churches (but with fewer financial resources to hire staff) and pastoral care needs similar to smaller churches (but with far more parishioners for which to care).* This unique mixture of needs—which creates higher pastor time-demands than in smaller and larger churches—is reinforced by two, opposite expectation patterns: (a) members who grow up in or transferred from smaller churches and (b) members who grew up in or transferred from larger churches. Some parishioners see their congregation as a small church. Others see it as a large church.

One pastor observed that this type of thinking makes midsized churches schizophrenic: their leaders and parishioners think like small churches in some respects and think like large churches in other respects.

Another pastor said, “Most members feel that midsized churches cannot merely act like small churches, but they are not ready for it to act like large churches, either. Midsized churches are somewhat like ecclesiastical junior highs, capable of both thinking patterns in unexpected ways at unexpected times.”

Still another pastor affirmed Lyle Schaller’s famous label for midsized churches: the awkward size. Whatever metaphor we prefer, midsized churches can no longer act like small churches and cannot yet act like large churches.

8. *Midsized churches are somewhat less locked-in to traditions.* This does not mean that midsized churches have no traditions. They do, as do congregations of every size. But congregations in which more ministries are conducted by *lay groups*—and fewer by laypersons in *solo* roles—provide more opportunities to discuss possible changes in practices and policies.

In small churches a short list of influential *individuals* tends to block change: “Aunt Susan wouldn’t stand for that!” In midsized churches a short list of influential *committees* tends to block change: “The property committee will not stand for that!” This does not mean that change is *easy* in midsized churches. However, change is easier to discuss because of more *group venues*, such as committee and Sunday school classes, in which such discussions can naturally occur.

9. *Midsized churches can make changes more quickly.* This does not mean that making changes is simple. Facilitating changes in any size and type of organization is *never* simple and easy. However, compared to smaller congregations, most midsized churches are less tightly bound by the thinking of one or two powerful laypersons. Thus, midsized churches can typically move from discussing new ideas to acting on them in fewer months and years.

10. *Midsized churches obtain “buy-in” to new ideas in a different way.* Getting buy-in is a major challenge among small church members, where only two or three voice-groups must agree. But buy-in feels like mountain-moving in midsized churches, where a dozen voice-groups vie for control.

Example: The property committee jealously guards its authority over preserving the traditional appearance of the sanctuary. The worship committee thinks it is in charge of what happens on the platform at the front of the sanctuary. What if the worship committee wants to use a praise band for one of the services? Who decides how to enlarge the chancel area so that can happen?

Both committees! That buy-in process feels awkward, takes several months, and is somewhat like teaching two elephants to waltz.

11. *Midsized-church lay leaders often engage in the “corner-cutting syndrome.”* In midsized churches the public tends to expect the type of excellence in facilities and programming found in large churches. But many midsized lay leaders (a) grew up in small congregations, and/or (b) where members of this church remember when it was much smaller, and/or (c) prefer small-church thinking patterns, and/or (d) *unconsciously* and unknowingly prefer decisions that tend to shrink this church from the midsized to the small category.

Thus, the lay leaders’ definition of “good enough” is sometimes two miles below the standards of midsized-church visitors. Helping lay leaders to overcome this perceptual problem, without putting them down, is tricky.

12. *Midsized churches usually experience greater frequency and intensity of conflict.* As noted above, this is mostly driven by (a) all of those competing voice groups and (b) the competing small-church and large-church perceptions of various members. But why has this naturally high conflict pattern increased even more in the decades since 1960?

Gallup Poll research says that the percentage of church attendees who grew up in other denominations grew from about 4 percent in 1954 to 44 percent in 1994 and to more than 50 percent at present. Decision-making patterns differ greatly between congregational-polity denominations such as the Southern Baptist Church and connectional-polity denominations such as The United Methodist Church. Parishioners who bring those diverse perspectives to the table have increased clergy and lay leadership stress in midsized churches to an all-time high.

13. *Midsized churches tend to resist behaviors that produce membership growth.* Adult households in America tend to seek out one of two kinds of churches: (a) what one pastor termed the “Wal-Mart Church that has a bit of everything, including traditional and contemporary worship styles” or (b) the “Cheers Church of fewer than 100 members where everyone knows my name and the atmosphere provides abundant feelings of intimacy and family.”

This is another reason for intense and frequent conflict in midsized churches:

- Some people who settle in a midsized church aspire to make it into a Wal-Mart model with a growing membership.
- Other people who join midsized churches expect it to retain Cheers Church characteristics; in other words, they fight for the behaviors that keep it midsized.

This difference of opinion among key lay leaders can create another layer of conflict opportunity that keeps life interesting for midsized-church pastors.

*14. Midsize-church parishioners often exhibit less hospitality toward newcomers.* Because worship visitors are more commonplace in midsize churches, parishioners pay them less attention than in small churches, where visitors are unusual. Then, too, because the midsize church is by nature a “group of groups,” parishioners develop small, close-knit friendship circles—to which they gravitate before and after worship, while disregarding newcomers.

In smaller congregations, the regulars know where everyone sits. Nearby empty space is usually abundant, visitors are more unusual, and parishioners tend to treat them like guests in their homes. In midsize congregations, seating is often less abundant and greater numbers of visitors appear. As in small churches, parishioners tend to identify certain pew spaces as “my pew.” But midsize-church members seem more inclined to behave with either possessiveness or downright rudeness toward visitors who invade their pew space. Not uncommonly, instead of showing hospitality, some old-guard regulars find someone in their space and quip, “You’re sitting in my pew.” Most of them say that in a joking way. It rarely feels like a joke to the visitor!

*15. Midsize-churches typically have a higher percentage of parishioner mobility (members moving out of town and newcomers joining).* This challenge varies somewhat with the economic base and demographic content of the community in which the congregation serves. Examples:

- Midsize churches in small towns with an agricultural economy may experience only a 4 percent annual membership turnover.
- Midsize churches in the suburban and metropolitan communities typically experience 8 percent to 10 percent in-out mobility each year.
- Midsize churches located near a military installation often see annual in-out mobility rates of 12 percent to 18 percent.

Whatever its demographic location, midsize-church pastors typically (a) spend more time getting acquainted with new people, (b) spend more time recruiting, training, and replacing Sunday school teachers, and (c) spend more time identifying, recruiting, and coaching laypersons who serve in various leadership roles.

*16. Midsize churches have greater financial resource potential but often use inadequate financial stewardship and management systems.* The majority of midsize churches tend to retain small-church financial giving habits but have large-church financial needs. Per member annual giving levels are often low (as in small churches) while the need for program expenditures tends to be high (as in large churches). Note the stewardship contrast between large churches and small churches:

- Research indicates that Protestants in churches whose membership totals 100 to 200 give, on average, 1.8 percent of their income to the Lord’s work through their church.
- In contrast to giving in those smaller churches, people who attend churches with more than 1,000 members give, on average, 3.7 percent of their incomes—twice as much.

What causes that sharp contrast in per capita giving differences between large and small churches? The following factors are especially important:

- In large congregations, one or two powerful, outspoken lay leaders *less often* block the use of an effective annual stewardship program.
- In small congregations, that blockade *often* occurs.
- Thus, small churches typically lack an effective annual means of inviting attendees to consider increasing their giving. (Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in The Churches* [Oxford: Oxford University Press], p. 238)

Summary: The financial giving behavior of midsize congregations is usually more similar to that of small churches than that of large churches. A *minority* of midsize churches use annual stewardship education programs whose teaching and asking procedures energize members toward their financial giving potential.

17. *Midsized-church pastors focus their time and energies differently.* Small-church pastors often find themselves encouraging, empowering, and coordinating the ministries of *individual laypersons*. Midsized-church pastors spend more of their time encouraging, empowering, and coordinating the ministries of *groups* of laypersons and *several* lay leaders.

18. *Midsized-church pastors have fewer opportunities for one-on-one pastoral-care relationships.* Small-church pastors feel they are serving an organization comprised of individuals to whom they relate in caring pastoral ways. Many of the parishioners expect the pastor to routinely stop by to chat with them, and a full-time pastor has time to make such visits.

By contrast, midsized-church pastors experience time constraints due to (a) the greatly increased number of people in the congregation and (b) additional administrative responsibilities. This inevitably produces changes in pastoral care methods, such as the following:

- Fewer opportunities for pastoral-care conversations with parishioners
- Greater focus on pastoral care at times of crisis such as hospitalizations and grief
- More use of the telephone to make pastoral contacts with parishioners
- More informal counseling done in the church office rather than in homes/workplaces
- A few parishioners—especially those with birthdates prior to 1945 who grew up in small churches—retaining small-church pastoral-care expectations
- Most parishioners feeling that the pastor is not THE major caring symbol; concern from other members adequately signaling that “my church cares about me”
- Small-group ministries such as adult Sunday school classes meeting many parishioner needs for care and concern, since people in midsized churches are usually more comfortable sharing their brokenness with one another
- Midsized-church parishioners in small towns more often retaining small-church pastoral-care needs, since small-town residents are more likely to resist honest sharing with one another in small groups

One pastor summed up pastoral care delivery differences by noting the differences in contact points in churches of different sizes:

- In small churches, the pastor has a high number of pastoral-care contact points with people.
- In midsized churches, the pastoral-care contact points are *more intentional*, such as hospitalizations, grief, and life-crisis events.
- In large churches, the pastoral-care contact points are *more occasional*, at times of extreme crisis to supplement that of the staff member responsible for pastoral care.

Then, too, midsized-church pastors find that some laypersons develop closer fellowship bonds with lay leaders or other staff members than with their pastor. On Sunday morning some youth and adults cluster around youth sponsors as their primary relationship source. Depending on their personalities, some small-church pastors who move to midsized churches find moving from a chaplain role into a chaplain-of-chaplains role is relatively easy. Other pastors experience some transition stress.

Changes in the volume and delivery method of pastoral care plunges small-church pastors who move to a midsized church into a stressful adjustment, especially pastors who (a) draw great personal satisfaction from individual relationships, and/or (b) find little satisfaction in helping a group of groups to accomplish ministry, and/or (c) feel ill-equipped to manage and lead a group of groups in accomplishing ministry, and/or (d) prefer to do hands-on ministry rather than motivating and equipping others to accomplish hands-on ministry, and/or (e) are uncomfortable with not knowing everything that is happening in the congregation, and/or (f) feel ill at ease in organizational circumstances characterized by untidiness and lack of perfection, and/or (g) are psychologically wired with the need to control the details of ministry throughout the congregation.

*19. Midsize-church pastors spend less time with parishioners and more time with staff members.* In small churches, the pastor works with individual laypersons to accomplish the various ministries. In midsize churches, the pastor works with individual laypersons, with groups of laypersons, and with staff members to accomplish ministries.

The larger the midsize church, the more important becomes the pastor's ability to hire, relate to, lead, and coach staff members. Since the pastor cannot increase the number of hours in a week, the use of some hours must shift. Failure to recognize the importance of working with staff members results in poor communication, increased conflict, and wasted emotional energy. Thus, the pastor either makes that shift in time use and (a) spends more time with staff or (b) spends more time fixing problems that result from *not* spending more time with staff.

For example, many of the staff members are part-time employees who cannot attend staff meetings on weekdays. Thus, the pastor faces substantial communication and coordination challenges that are more complex than those in large churches with several full-time program staff. That challenge is even more formidable because a midsize-church pastor's previous experience in smaller churches has rarely built skill in supervising *any type of staff*, much less part-time staff—many of which were formerly volunteers and continue to behave more like volunteers than employees.

One pastor added, "I also had to learn that staff members differ from one another. Some require more guidance than others. Some require more performance accountability than others. Figuring out how to accomplish that has created some rough spots, especially with staff members who are not performing well and don't feel a sense of responsibility to the new pastor."

*20. Midsize-church pastors feel a greater sense of inclusiveness with lay leaders in decision-making processes.* In small churches respected lay leaders usually assume most of the command and control functions. In midsize congregations the committee chairpersons and lay leaders are usually more willing to listen to the pastor's ideas. That attitude stems, to a great extent, from a different understanding of church governance:

⚡ The majority of parishioners in midsize churches feel comfortable with a "representative democracy" form of church governance—one in which they trust elected and appointed lay leaders and paid staff to plan, decide, and act.

⚡ Parishioners in small churches more often pay lip service to their denomination's "representative democracy" form of church governance—but in reality operate their church like a "participatory democracy." They (a) expect every active member to affirm the plans, decisions, and actions and (b) permit some members to veto the plans, decisions, and actions.

The exceptions: *A few lay leaders* inevitably expect their midsize church to function like a participatory democracy. This is one of the major reasons why governing board meetings often run to 11:00 p.m., repeating the discussions and decisions of committees that report to them.

However, most midsize-church pastors report feeling more freedom to lead than in small churches. After listening carefully to ideas from many individuals and groups, pastors usually find committees and key leaders more willing to "give it a try and see what happens." Thus, midsize-church pastors encounter greater leadership expectations, and a different set of leadership expectations. These expectations include the pastor's role within the church, and—in small towns—their role in the community. A pastor summed up these expectation-differences this way:

- Small churches expect the pastor to be the preacher and chaplain.
- Midsize churches expect the pastor to be the COO (Chief Operating Officer, seeing to it that ministries get done by the committees and constituency groups).
- Large churches expect the pastor to be the CEO (Chief Executive Officer who leads and manages the staff, the committees, and the governing board in getting the ministries done).

"The pastor moving from one size to the next size meets these unwritten, invisible expectations," the pastor added. "Nobody told me about this in seminary."

**B. Perfect pastoral leadership skills that fit midsize churches.** Clergy report they must discard or retool some of the small-church leadership skills that led to their call or appointment to midsize congregations. Some skills that got them to this dance are useful. Other skills are detrimental and, if retained, lead to failure in a midsize-church leadership role. Highly effective midsize-church pastors list the following items as especially helpful.

*1. Effective midsize-church pastors learn how to assume a broader range of administrative responsibilities.* The small-church pastor who relocates to a midsize congregation typically finds that he or she spends a larger percentage of each week's working hours in administrative and coaching roles with lay leaders and committees and a smaller percentage of the week in chaplain-type roles with individual parishioners. Examples of administrative and coaching tasks:

- Working with a property committee (called the trustees in some denominations) responsible for larger facilities with attendant maintenance *and repair problems*
- Supervision of staff, a complex leadership role for which few small-church pastors are equipped when they become a midsize-church pastor
- Working with a finance committee on matters related to endowments, investments, and the ownership of donated property
- Teaming with the stewardship committee to generate sufficient financial assets for various ministries
- Efforts to revitalize non-functioning committees and/or the reorganization of a sprawling committee structure designed when the congregation was one-third its present size or three times larger than its present size
- Improving woefully inadequate membership-record systems

The absence of these administrative skills—or failure to recognize that one must learn them—is much more noticeable in midsize churches than in small churches. Without administrative skills, pastors can have extraordinary preaching and pastoral care skills but limited effectiveness.

*2. Effective midsize-church pastors learn new time-management skills.* As increased administrative responsibilities and work with committees and ministry teams eats time formerly used for sermon preparation and pastoral visitation, pastors ask questions such as the following:

- How do I separate the essential from the important? (Everything is important to someone in the congregation!)
- How do I decide which task opportunities are ones that *I and I alone can do* and which ones I should train others to do?
- How do I explain my decisions to myself?
- How do I justify my decisions to lay leaders and parishioners?

Failure to make appropriate time-use choices destines the pastor to (a) feel highly stressed and/or (b) behave in ways that shrink the midsize church to a smaller size.

*3. Effective midsize church pastors learn how to prioritize their efforts.* The ability to classify and act on the 3-Ds becomes acutely important. Decisions regarding time use fit into three categories: Do, Delegate, and Delete.

Effective leadership is only possible when the pastor accurately differentiates between these three actions:

- (a) What I and I alone must *Do*
- (b) What I should *Delegate* to others
- (c) What I should *Delete* from my effort-agenda altogether

This involves learning how to graciously and respectfully say “no” to two-thirds of what clamors for attention—so that time is available to say “yes” to the one-third of task-opportunities that I and I alone can do.

4. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn the midsize-church barriers to leadership effectiveness.* One pastor said, “Effective leadership is the same in churches of every size.” He then listed several of the essentials for transformational and spiritual leadership covered in Session #1 above. “But,” he said, “The *barriers* to effective leadership *differ in churches of different sizes,*” then gave the following examples.

Small Church Leadership-Effectiveness Barriers:

- Laziness, because the proscribed duties are less clearly defined and pastors can settle into a very undemanding, relaxed set of activities
- The chaplain-mentality trap, in which the pastoral care of individual lay leaders and parishioners is *so much the pastor’s focus* that not offending people destroys the courage necessary to lead change beyond the status quo

Midsize Church Leadership-Effectiveness Barriers:

- The program-leadership trap, in which coordinating the activities of so many committees and constituency groups is *so much the pastor’s focus* that helping things to function smoothly and efficiently eats the time and destroys the courage necessary to lead church beyond the status quo.
- Programs and activities with considerable ministry value that keep the congregation self-centered and non-productive in ways that block the existence of key ministries such as making new disciples

Large Church Leadership-Effectiveness Barriers:

- The run-this-big-machine trap, in which dozens of funerals each year, multiple worship services, staff coordination, hospital visits, and oiling the gears of a complex organizational system is *so much the pastor’s focus* that little time and emotional energy remains to lead the church beyond the status quo
- Successfully tending the immense, complex organizational system, providing the appearance to parishioners and the feeling by pastors and staff that all is well, while a more careful analysis would deliver the unpleasant news that membership is gradually declining and key ministries such as making new disciples are in neglect

Like knowing the difference between how to paddle a canoe and how to captain *The Queen Mary*, pastors must know the peculiarities of their vessel and the classic barriers to safe sailing.

5. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn to steadfastly maintain their focus and direction.* They stay alert to and ready to slay the ever-present dragon: the tyranny of running the system while neglecting the central, biblical, spiritual goals for which the system is designed. This involves the following type of leadership:

- Keeping oneself spiritually and intellectually fed so as to recognize and avoid spending all one’s time in the tempting, often ego-rewarding, effective-program trap
- Preaching that intends to help people grow spiritually in specific ways, as contrasted with merely providing information and edification through a pattern of addressing various important topics
- Repeatedly asking yourself and staff crucial questions such as, “What is the focus of your ministry?” and “How are we helping people create healthy relationships?”
- Lay-leadership development that includes, not just accomplishing programs and activities, but changed attitudes and increased discipleship behaviors
- Repeatedly reminding staff and lay leaders that ministries must happen *outside* the church in the community, not just *inside* the church

Failure to maintain focus and direction can mean that many good things get done while the most important ministries get neglected.

6. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn how to trust the gifts and graces of more people in ministry-accomplishment.* As one pastor put it, “When we limit *who*, we limit what we *do*.” Sometimes that means working with one individual volunteer who feels God’s call to help with or to initiate a ministry. Most of the time that means equipping committees, chairpersons, and ministry teams to do ministries that no individual, working alone, could accomplish.

Some effective midsize-church pastors say that serving on a committee is not ministry; rather, committees are a means of *managing* specific ministry tasks that are done by individuals whom God calls into ministry. However the midsize-church pastor defines ministry, he or she spends much time communicating with committees and other ministry groups or teams—comprised of volunteers—to accomplish ministry.

In effective midsize churches, pastors learn that competent laypersons often assume ministry roles that (a) the pastor did in a small church and (b) paid staff might do in larger churches. Becoming comfortable in working with and helping to equip this informal team of unpaid assistant pastors is a key ingredient in successful midsize-church leadership.

7. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn how to help a group of committees and ministry teams involve other people in ministry.* Leading, encouraging, and empowering several ministry groups (some of which are committees) requires a different set of skills and behaviors than those needed in a small-church pastor’s accountability to a governing board for the accomplishment of pastoral duties. A great quarterback who takes up a coaching career still plays football. But a coach needs a different set of skills (the referees do not let the coach on the field to run the ball). Likewise, coaching volunteers in a midsize church takes a new set of skills. One pastor put it this way: “Blue-collar pastors obsessed with *accomplishing everything themselves* in a hands-on manner cannot be effective in a midsize setting.”

Fortunately, most midsize-church pastors report that most parishioners and lay leaders are more comfortable with a pastor’s overt leadership through various committees than are laypersons in small churches. Midsize-church pastors gradually learn a new set of leadership skills to accomplish the role of inspiring, encouraging, and coordinating committees and ministry teams.

Without this set of skills, midsize-church pastors achieve far less than maximum involvement of parishioners in the congregation’s various ministry opportunities.

8. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn how to select, recruit, train, empower, and trust the gifts and graces of LAY LEADERS with the accomplishment of ministries.* By definition, effective clergy leadership in midsize congregations means getting ministry done through the skill of others, not merely doing ministry oneself. Thus, effective midsize-church pastors spend more time training a few people to do ministry. Secure in their own competence, they do not fear a staff member or lay leader becoming more competent than they are. That fear fosters failure!

One pastor said, “I’ve learned that I can’t do it all and that leadership development is the only solution: without that, you either kill yourself or burn out in a midsize church.”

Another pastor said, “Only God can be everywhere and do everything. I tried to be God. That did not work. After that exercise in spiritual arrogance, I started learning how to receive God’s gift of other people’s gifts and graces.”

The effective midsize-church pastor watches for laypersons who *desire* to be in leadership, knowing that having specific technical or leadership gifts is not enough. Without (a) the zeal that comes from a feeling of God’s call and (b) an internal passion for a particular ministry, giftedness or skill is irrelevant. When those factors are present in a potential lay leader, small-acorn skills can grow into large oak trees. Without those internal factors of zeal and passion, the worms of indifference, preoccupation with work and personal matters, and the pursuit of leisure activities nullifies personal skill sets.

9. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn that asking for volunteers often means asking for failure in various ministries.* One pastor said, “In a midsize church that recruits people to participation only by asking for volunteers, between 30 percent and 50 percent of the attendees remain in the bleachers as observers, watching other people work hard at trying to win the game.”

Another pastor said, “Don’t ask *anyone* to volunteer. Reach out to and *call* people to ministry roles. Base those ‘calls to ministry’ on peoples’ passions and gifts for ministry. Find out what people are good at, and capitalize on it.”

Still another pastor reported that not only did the Sunday school attendance increase dramatically by using the new “Rotation Sunday School Model” but that the number of adults who had never before taught Sunday school increased radically. “These people did not volunteer!” the pastor said. “But after we “called them,” because of specific skills they possessed, they responded and enjoyed the opportunity to serve.” (Most denominational publishing companies now provide curriculum for the “Rotation Model.” For a summary of this method, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 12, How to Increase Children and Youth Sunday School Attendance* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

10. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn leadership-development skills.* Whereas pastors in small churches viewed leadership development as a theoretical need, pastors in midsize churches find it is a practical necessity. Midsize churches *always* lack sufficient lay leaders. Thus, effective midsize-church pastors focus much more of their time on equipping people for doing their own ministry of leading other people in accomplishing ministries.

One pastor stresses the importance of consistent mentoring. He does that in three ways:

- a. The pastor meets monthly, one-on-one, with each key lay leader (a total of about fifteen individuals)—sometimes for lunch, sometimes for coffee. That pastor’s informal agenda for these monthly meetings with individual lay leaders following roughly this format: (1) “How is it going?” (2) “What do you need?”
- b. The pastor supplements those individual mentoring meetings by scheduling a monthly “Leadership Forum” that all of the lay leaders attend. The forum provides opportunity to discuss specific issues or challenges.
- c. Occasionally, when the need seems apparent, the pastor calls a meeting of a small, unofficial “Vision Team” that can sort through more complex issues and discuss possibilities for long-term needs. Sometimes, the Vision Team channels ideas to the monthly Leadership Forum for consideration and discussion.

Another pastor, in a rapidly growing midsize congregation, stresses the value of a progressive discipleship-development process:

- Most of the adults who eventually join that church first experience a short-term small group.
- Then, they go through the first class of a series of four classes *before* they are baptized and become formal members.
- At the end of that first class, before baptism and uniting with the congregation, they sign a covenant that they will support the church with their time, treasures, prayers, and presence.

That church’s progressive class system, modeled after Rick Warren’s pattern at Saddleback Church in California (visit [www.saddleback.com](http://www.saddleback.com) for such resources) unfolds like this:

- Class 101—“Discovering First Church”
- Class 201—“Discovering Spiritual Maturity”
- Class 301—“Discovering My Ministry”
- Class 401—“Discovering My Life Mission”

That pattern, which has proved quite effective in that congregation, is one of the most organized leadership-development systems one sees in midsize American churches. Few midsize churches have that type of system, but they must develop lay leadership in some manner.

*11. Effective midsize-church pastors learn that small-group dynamics strongly influence congregational effectiveness.* Without intentional planning, guidance, structure, and relationship-building activities, the natural internal dynamics of groups such as adult choirs and adult Sunday school classes tends to limit rather than expands participation.

One pastor reported that a six-person adult choir became a twenty-person choir after shifting internal attitudes and practices. The choir members learned what seasoned leaders of large adult choirs always know; namely, the importance of relationships. Effective adult choirs are not merely singing groups that occasionally have some fellowship; effective adult choirs are fellowship groups that sing. The glue of warm, fun-filled relationships holds the adult choir's singing ministry together, enabling newcomers to stick to it so that it expands. High standards of vocal singing ability, without the building and maintaining of relationships, cannot accomplish that.

Each adult Sunday school class in that congregation strengthened its effectiveness by appointing a "steering team" that assumes total responsibility for class health and vitality. The steering team meets at least every two months, takes minutes, and reports to the class.

Tips for effectiveness in that type of class leadership structure:

- a. Change one-third of the steering-team members every six months.
- b. Rigid adherence to that six-month-tenure rule prevents turf-holding, burnout, or both.
- c. Put new class members on the steering team, not just long-timers.

An active steering team signals that the class belongs to its members, not to its teacher. The steering team determines curriculum, teacher, and social events. As well as protecting the class from a teacher who loses touch with class needs, the team provides an invaluable sounding board that increases the teacher's effectiveness.

Each adult class uses the following steering team structure:

- Teacher
- Membership Care Coordinator, who organizes appropriate ministry for class members that enter the hospital, experience grief, or face a major life stress
- Social Activities Coordinator, who organizes a monthly social activity
- Hospitality Coordinator, who oversees helping first-time visitors and new attendees get acquainted and feel socially comfortable
- Recruitment Coordinator, who oversees procedures for inviting and attracting potential new class members

The steering committee, coupled with those five leadership designations and procedures, counterbalances the natural tendency for adult class vitality to rise or fall with the teacher's energy level and ingenuity.

*12. Effective midsize-church pastors learn forward-planning habits.* Greater reliance on groups, volunteers, and staff to accomplish ministries requires greater coordination of efforts. Guidelines such as the following facilitate cooperation among the diverse groups and ministries that comprise every midsize congregation:

- Plan sermons and sermon series several weeks in advance, so that the choir and music staff can select music.
- Assure that the efforts of individual committees do not conflict with those of other groups and ministries, thereby creating unnecessary conflict.
- Schedule events and ministry efforts several months in advance, rather than a few weeks in advance.
- Provide a continuously updated and shared church calendar for the coming year, in which all committees, ministry teams, and constituency groups actively participate.

Advance planning does not prevent all dysfunction and conflict but can halt about 75 percent of problems before they disturb the peace with unexpected disharmony.

13. *Effective midsize-church pastors become capable group-of-groups leader-managers.* That skill involves helping groups work together on long-term issues such as vision, mission, and direction.

A major danger of pastors in midsize-churches is trying to be everywhere at once and control all the decisions and outcomes of all the committees and ministries. This (a) damages the trust-relationship with the lay leaders, (b) earns a pastor the reputation of being an over-controlling person rather than a caring person, (c) reduces the creativity ordinarily generated by individual committees and ministry groups, (d) reduces the number of congregants actively involved in ministries as more and more people feel unneeded, (e) increases the number of inactive people who sit on the sidelines and watch, and (f) reduces the total volume of ministry accomplished.

One pastor reports that what his congregation calls the “huddle” is among the most helpful ways to increase committee creativity and accountability, thereby counterbalancing the natural pastoral desire to know everything and control everything. Another pastor said the church involved many more people in actual ministries with an organizational structure of committees AND ministry teams, instead of the older model of assuming that everything happens through committees. Blended together, those two organizational modifications—the huddle for committees and the Ministry Team model to involve more people in ministries—looks something like the following:

**a. The “huddle” is a strategic planning team comprised of all the committee chairpersons.** The huddle 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 huddle, the various committee 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-times-per-year meeting of chairpersons also keeps the governing board from trying to mingle its *appropriate* policy-setting role with an *inappropriate* strategic planning role (a commingling of roles that does not work because the governing board is stealing authority from and de-motivating committee-member participation).

Without the “huddle,” 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”? The huddle also provides opportunity for the pastor to raise questions and make suggestions regarding “big picture issues” *before* the committees meet.

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

**b. A detailed agenda for accomplishing the four objectives of the huddle—communicate, coordinate, calendar, and vision—consists of the following ingredients:**

(1) *Communicate and Coordinate.* During the week previous to the huddle, the church secretary mails every committee chairperson the minutes of all the other committees’ most recent meetings.

- As the huddle begins, each chairperson takes turns in the “spotlight seat” as each of the other chairpersons take turns asking clarification questions regarding his or her committee’s plans, based on the minutes of the previous meetings. Much communication and many spontaneous-coordination thoughts appear in this sharing 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 of 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 that section of the meeting, the pastor has established an idea file in his/her 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 the huddle, the pastor takes thirty minutes to organize those ideas in note-form on one sheet of 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. This creates a natural interaction that reduces the inclination of some committee chairpersons to view the pastor as commander-in-chief. The pastor participates in the huddle, along with all of the chairpersons, as they ask questions of the committee chairperson in the spotlight seat regarding his/her committee agenda.
- One of the best ways pastors can lead is to ask questions. An even better way to lead is to ask lay leaders questions in the presence of their peers (other committee chairs). The huddle 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. The huddle is also much more creative, because the individual chairperson instantly gets a feel for how an idea comes across to the other committee chairs.

(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 tend to identify 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’ minds and develops a gradual consensus regarding important visions for the future.

**b. 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:
  - In preparation for the new church year, the nominating committee nominates six people for each of the seven committees, with three-year, rotating terms.
  - Then group the 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 huddle 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 the pastor or a staff member.

While that type of “called meeting” approach may appear to be more efficient, it frequently means that not enough people have input. This produces the following:

- (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”
- (5) An opportunity for the pastor and staff to get most of the blame for anything that goes wrong or does not get done

The every-other-month “stated time for committee meetings” system, in which all committees meet on the same night, has several beneficial results:

- Reduces the amount of time that the pastor, staff, and members spend in meetings each month, thus increasing their available time for other ministries
- Increases the flow of communication between and among committees
- Increases the level of responsibility carried by each of the committees
- Eliminates the possibility that an individual serves on more than one committee—an unnecessary and counterproductive pattern
- Decreases any tendency for an over-controlling pastor or layperson to dominate committee decisions
- 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 (personnel 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.** A few helpful guidelines for forming and maintaining effectively functioning ministry teams:

- (1) Each ministry team is comprised of church members and worship attendees who have not yet joined the church.
- (2) Ministry team leaders recruit their teams in informal ways throughout the year.
- (3) Most team members begin serving in January.
- (4) Others are invited to join a ministry team at other times of the year.
- (5) Ministry teams are in-service learning experiences for congregational newcomers.
- (6) The nominating committee does not nominate members for the ministry teams.

What ministry teams are and are NOT:

- 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.

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.

For a much more detailed look at this organizational approach, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 23, Fine-Tuning the Organizational and Communication Engine* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

14. *Effective midsize-church pastors learn how to select, develop, train, empower, and trust the gifts and graces of staff members with the management and accomplishment of ministries.* By definition, effective midsize-church leadership means leading and managing staff. The larger the midsize church, the more true that principle. The absence of a well-coordinated, well-cared for, dedicated staff guarantees failure in midsize-church ministry. Yet many clergy have neither the experience nor the training to fit that essential piece into the midsize-church puzzle.

Recognizing that solo ministry is impractical in this size church, effective midsize-church pastors use thought and behavior patterns such as the following:

- a. Resist the temptation to disdain and badmouth “administration” as a poor way to use professional ministry time.
- b. Resist the temptation to rationalize their lack of experience in staff supervision by saying that “administration is just not my thing.”
- c. Recognize that time spent in staff meetings and team-building is as important as time spent in sermon preparation.
- d. Learn how to develop job descriptions and staff accountability systems.
- e. Recognize the value of relating to and coaching staff members.
- f. Recognize that some staff members need close supervision and financial accountability systems while other staff members require less supervision.
- g. Recognize that casting vision and repeatedly reinforcing that vision with staff members is a leadership essential.

One pastor described the staff-coaching role as “keeping people on task” by striking a balance between the *micromanagement style* (which runs off a large percentage of staff members and volunteers) and the *totally detached style* (which convinces most staff members and volunteers that the pastor does not care whether anything happens and does not care about them personally).

The *micromanagement style* creates lots of conflict and convinces numerous people to watch the game from the bleachers. The *totally detached style* fosters a reduction in total ministry output and convinces numerous people that their pastor means well but does not get things done.

To achieve an effective coaching-leadership balance, one pastor views the following principles as essential:

- Informally and continuously ask every lay volunteer and staff member three caring questions. Seldom let a week pass without either a face-to-face or a telephone conversation with every key lay leader and staff member in which you ask, How are you doing?; What can I do to help you?; What can we, as a church, do to help?
- Recognize that the most unlikely people are often the most likely to create positive change. The best ideas do not always come from committees but from individuals who say, “I see that vision; let me walk with it.”
- Recognize that if someone does a task and fails at it, you should thank the person for his or her efforts, even when those efforts fail.
- See every problem as an opportunity.
- Understand that positive change is more a matter of *positive congregational culture* than merely a matter of using the right methods.

Without a dedicated group of staff members, effective midsize-church ministry is impossible. The pastor’s failure to hire, care about, coach, cheer lead, and coordinate those staff members guarantees failure in midsize-church ministry.

A few clues:

- a. Weekly staff meetings are important caring, communication, and coordination opportunities. In one midsize church, each staff meeting’s agenda includes asking and discussing the answers to these two questions: What were the victories from last Sunday? What were the problems from last Sunday?

- b. One pastor believes that achieving positive congregational change involves repeatedly saying to staff, “My job is to make you look good. Your job is to make me look good. All our jobs are to make the church look good.” That kind of attitude and staff culture creates the atmosphere in which positive change is possible and likely. Absence of that attitude and staff culture fosters a smog-ridden atmosphere that makes positive change unlikely.
- c. Talk a great deal about team ministry and reinforce its reality with team-building attitudes and behaviors—including fellowship times—that cause team members to feel like a team.
- d. With part-time staff, engage the church secretary or administrative assistant in the communication and coordination process. One pastor said that at the conclusion of impromptu in-office conversations during which part-time staff told him of their plans, he taught himself to say, “That is important stuff. On your way out, could you take time to stop and share that information with the administrative assistant? She needs to be aware of how that works.”
- e. Many part-time staff cannot attend weekly staff meetings, but staying in touch with those individuals is crucial. A short list of full- and part-time staff members may attend the weekly staff meeting, but occasional staff meetings on Sunday afternoon can involve *all full-and part-time staff*, with the exception of nursery workers. This keeps part-time staff pulling on the same rope, in the same direction, and at the same time. Without such meetings, some staff members inevitably become disconnected from crucial information, make seemingly innocent but quite destructive solo decisions, begin acting independent of the staff ministry team, and either unknowingly or knowingly foment unnecessary conflict.

For additional insights and methods, see *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 21, How to Maximize Personnel Committee Effectiveness* and *Volume 22, How to Strengthen Clergy/Staff Leadership & Relationship Skills* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

*15. Effective midsize-church pastors develop compensatory leadership skills to cope with strong lay leaders.* Especially in small towns, but to some extent in cities, highly effective business and professional laypersons tend to gravitate toward control-roles in midsize congregations. Because parishioners view such laypersons as successful people, regardless of their spiritual qualifications, they hold church offices. People listen to them and accept their guidance in congregational decision-making. Some such influential laypersons exert quite a positive influence; others exert a thoroughly negative influence.

What one pastor called the “CEO-type,” these negatively influential laypersons tend to fall into two categories: (a) CEO-types who want to recreate the congregation’s golden past and (b) CEO-types who want to sweep away everything that has happened in the past (including the church’s denominational loyalties and identity) and invent something new.

- The “traditionalist CEO-type” often blocks the church from adapting new ministry ideas that connect with this generation of young adults, thereby terminating the congregation’s future.
- The “nothing from the past has value CEO-type” may (a) lead the congregation out of its denominational family, or (b) lead a sizeable number of members out of the congregation into another church, or (c) lead several households out of the membership and into forming a new congregation.

The presence of one or two negative-influence CEO-types in the congregation is, of course, another reason for frequent and intense conflict in midsize churches.

*16. Effective midsize-church pastors learn that high quality preaching and worship are even more important ministry tools than they are in small churches.* With fewer opportunities for one-on-one ministry, midsize-church pastors communicate with and minister to a significant percentage of parishioners *only* from the pulpit.

The worship service is thus the hub of the wheel, without which effective spokes become impossible because (a) the worship either inspires people and energizes their participation in ministries or bores people and repels their participation in ministries and (b) the worship quality either influences first-time worship visitors to return a second time or not to return a second time.

On this page in history, the way members and newcomers define “quality” in worship depends on (a) whether the service contains some of “my kind of worship hymns,” (b) whether the feel and flow of the service fits my generation, and (c) whether the preaching style and content connects with people of my generation.

*17. Effective midsize-church pastors learn that communication happens differently than in small congregations.* Small churches are more like families: much of the communication happens informally, by word of mouth from the pulpit or in conversations. By contrast, effective communication in midsize churches increases its impact through repetition and through intentional distribution in various groups.

One pastor says that in most instances where difficulties and conflict arose, he can trace its origin to insufficient or ineffective communication. Either he did not (a) listen carefully enough to communication feedback to ensure its reception accuracy or (b) repeat the communication sufficiently with sufficient groups. Another pastor says that unless the communication happens six or seven times in several different venues over a period of weeks, many parishioners do not receive it and thus feel left out.

Part of this communication challenge is generational in nature. The type of communication that effectively reaches a group of older adults in a Sunday school class may not connect with teenagers or with young-adult households. Increasingly, one of those communication methods is electronic. The print-on-paper newsletter is still important, but E-mail notices and chat rooms for youth increase the likelihood that communication sent equals communication received.

*18. Effective midsize-church pastors learn that the relational basis for pastoral care expands.* As in small churches, hospitalizations, funerals, and life crisis situations provide the context for many pastor-parishioner interactions. In midsize churches, pastors learn that many more pastoral care opportunities present themselves in the interaction context of working with laypersons in various congregational groups and ministries.

*19. Effective midsize-church pastors involve the congregation in prayer about change.* Teach and preach about the importance of positive change. But rational thinking alone, without an emphasis on and involvement of lay leaders and members in prayer to learn what God calls them to do, is an insufficient means and motivation for change.

No amount of rational thinking, planning, teaching, and preaching on the topic of needed change substitutes for regular opportunities in which the pastor and parishioners can share their feelings and thoughts in the context of a prayerful atmosphere. The following examples illustrate that principle:

**Example #1:** To establish a prayer ministry soon after beginning his tenure, one pastor started a weekly Sunday evening “Praise and Prayer” service. Attendance is about twenty people, but the objective is not large attendance; the objective is to (a) demonstrate the value of prayer, (b) provide opportunity to pray for people and for God’s leadership in the congregation, and (c) allow the pastor a venue by which to communicate his feelings and thoughts with a group of dedicated church members in a prayerful atmosphere.

The order of worship consists of (a) singing three or four praise songs, (b) a time of informal sharing in which individuals who wish to do so share what is happening in their lives, (c) three or four more songs, and (d) a period of conversational prayer sometimes punctuated by long periods of silence. On Monday, someone often sends cards to people with special needs, letting them know that the Sunday evening prayer group prayed for them by name.

**Example #2:** The pastor in another church says that with difficult decisions such as with the necessity of dismissing a staff member, he urges the committee members to pray about the matter for a week or two before coming to a final decision.

**Example #3:** See the Appendix for a prayer experience process that thousands of congregations have found effective to increase the percentage of parishioners who engage in daily prayer.

At every level of the organizational structure, effective mid-size church pastors teach and promote prayer as a power that often provides more insight than rational thinking, emotional feelings, or the tradition of “how we’ve always done things around here.”

*20. Effective midsize-church pastors typically stay with the congregation for seven or more years.* Staying a long time gives the pastor opportunity to (a) build the trust essential for leading positive change and (b) root out the organizational and lay leader dysfunctions that can lock a church in status quo mediocrity. Staying a long time does not guarantee midsize-church pastor effectiveness; high achievement requires more than endurance. However, high achievement seldom happens in a short-sprint clergy tenure, regardless of his or her skill level.

One pastor makes a strong case for consistent, positive spotlighting of inappropriate control behavior by laypersons, reminding lay leaders again and again that “we don’t do that here.” This repetitive leadership and organizational education—combining the qualities of *kindness* and *firmness*—helps the congregation shift its identity from mindlessly repeating dysfunctions to purposefully deciding and acting on what God calls them to be and do in this community. A lengthy tenure by such a pastor increases the likelihood of overcoming deeply rooted, negative congregational thinking and behavior patterns.

*21. Effective midsize-church pastors recognize that change, conflict, and transition are perpetual.* Pastors and congregations never “arrive” at a point where these are behind them. “To serve the public faithfully and at the same time please it entirely,” Benjamin Franklin wrote, “is impossible.”

One pastor said, “Learn to live prayerfully and learn to be happy in the midst of change, conflict, and transition.” Like farmers who learn to live with insects, plant diseases, and drought to produce crops, effective pastors learn to live within the incongruity of bad things happening to good churches and people with good intentions. Churches do not get *beyond* change, conflict, and transition; they learn how to live *in them* with a sense that God will provide providential aid and produce ministry despite adverse conditions.

*22. Effective midsize-church pastors often participate in a confidential clergy group that meets regularly for accomplishing care, sharing, prayer, support, and learning.* One such clergy group, consisting of eight pastors, has been meeting four times each year for fifteen years. In the beginning, most of them were in small churches and some were in midsize churches. Over the years, the group has gradually come to consist of midsize church pastors. The group is quite tight-knit; new pastors are not admitted without unanimous consent of the present members.

The group meets four times a year—usually for two to three days. Sometimes that happens at a cabin in the mountains and sometimes in a mutually agreed upon city location. In the three-day meetings, the group sometimes devotes one entire day to individual rest, recreation, and reflection, which helps the pastors to regain a balanced perspective on the challenges that they face.

About fifty percent of the group’s meeting time involves a mixture of (a) discussing books that the group has agreed to read, (b) discussing issues that pastors bring up from their personal reading, which gives the other pastors a list of book-buying possibilities, (c) fun and frivolity, and (d) good food at nearby restaurants.

The other fifty percent of the group’s meeting time involves going around the circle, with each pastor taking turns in the spotlight seat. The group asks that pastor, “How is it with your soul?” This informal interaction is sometimes of the deepest, most personal nature, and may last an hour or hours. Pastors feel comfortable in sharing their most personal crisis with the group. This informal interaction may involve the group praying with that pastor, crying with that pastor, or laying hands on that pastor for healing of personal health or emotional pain.

*23. Effective midsize-church pastors often develop a multiple-layer enrichment and support network.* One pastor stresses the value of a five-layer network:

- A confidential clergy group that meets quarterly
- A confidential, local, retired, clergy mentor with whom to discuss sticky issues
- A confidential, out-of-town, clergy friend with whom to discuss complex challenges and new ideas via telephone
- A confidential, local, layperson with whom to discuss issues that require knowledge of congregational history and local personalities
- A consistent, daily self-care pattern of prayer and Bible study

Each of those five layers serves a particular purpose in the pastor’s complex task of maintaining emotional and intellectual perspective.

Plenty of opportunities arise, some of them in the form of lay personalities with strong personal needs for power and control, by which the pastor can lose perspective. No amount of gray matter, theological education, and spiritual commitment can compensate for that type of loss.

How do pastors lose perspective? In a variety of ways! Tall among perspective killers are (a) becoming too physically tired (b) becoming emotionally exhausted from refereeing too many conflicts or from too many personal problems, (c) feeling spiritually drained, and (d) thinking too long about a stressful issue, devoid of insights from caring, thoughtful colleagues.

How do pastors find perspective? Change mental lenses by changing location (get out of town). Or, change thinking and feeling patterns (talk with someone who looks at your problem from a different direction).

## Study/Discussion Session #3

*Pastors.* Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions:

1. Do you know of pastors or congregations to which insights in this paragraph or section seem to apply?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

*Discussion Leader.* As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

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**A. Use initial weeks in the congregation to set a change-receptive climate.** God has surely called you to this church, not merely to the ministry of maintaining and managing respected traditions but to help create a positive future. Begin that ministry with the expectation that the church's members will teach you important knowledge regarding this congregation's history, habits, and traditions.

Some tips for getting started:

- As God incarnated Christ into first century culture to make a difference, achieving your ministry goal begins by allowing God to incarnate you into this congregation and this community to make a difference.
- The first step is "listen carefully."
- Avoid arriving with the attitude that you are here to impart wisdom to the natives.
- You know some ideas about ministry that these people do not know; but members of this congregation know many things about their church and community that you do not know.
- Listen with humility.
- Respecting these people on their turf is step one in developing a climate in which the Holy Spirit can speak through you and them to accomplish what neither you nor the people could have done alone.

However, in the desire to "get to know people and avoid making abrupt changes too soon," new pastors often miss significant opportunities that can develop a seedbed for positive changes in later months.

Make a few safe changes:

- Leadership experts commenting on the arrival of a new mid-level manager in the corporate workplace "have long noted the importance of a new leader's first three months on the job, when employees are most open to new direction." (H. James Wilson, "The Case for Collaborative Leadership," *Harvard Management Update*, October 2004)
- Newly arrived pastors, consumed with the details of getting settled in a new home, getting children enrolled in school, fitting into a new worship service, memorizing the names of parishioners, locating the various hospitals, and finding out how we do things around here often miss golden opportunities that will not be available after the first year.

The following examples suggest ways of capitalizing on golden opportunities during those early weeks in the congregation.

*Example #1.* One pastor used the following procedure:

- After dividing the 400-member church into twenty groups of twenty people each, the pastor organized twenty “coffees.”
- The pastor asked coffee attendees to assist with “congregational planning for the next ten years” by answering three questions: What are our congregation’s strengths? What new strengths is God calling us to develop? What is God calling us to do?
- After correlating notes from the twenty “coffees,” ten long-range goals emerged for the next ten years. The governing board subsequently approved those ten goals as the congregation’s long-range plan.
- The ten goals clustered in three general categories:
  - *Financial.* A current budget deficit of \$40,000 coupled with annual shortfalls during each of the past several years (the pastor and lay leaders corrected this problem by asking committees to share equally in trimming their spending for that year, communicated this clearly to the congregation, and instituted an effective annual stewardship campaign that increased giving)
  - *Worship.* A several-year history of disagreements regarding the worship service style (the pastor led the development of a blended-style worship and eventually to the establishment of two Sunday morning services, one with a contemporary-hymn format and the other with a traditional-hymn format)
  - *Facilities.* Fifteen years of financial difficulties, partly caused by a gigantic building debt for a new sanctuary, which had produced deferred maintenance problems with the other parts of a large, older facility (gradually, the pastor led the congregation in section-by-section remodeling and updating of the education building and fellowship hall)
- During the next seven years (the length of that pastor’s tenure), the congregation achieved nine of the ten goals.

*Example #2.* Another pastor used this procedure to ensure that he heard the “silent majority.”

- Soon after arrival, the pastor conducted a series of parsonage meetings and invited about thirty people to each meeting (in this congregation, inviting people to the pastor’s home was an important symbolic gesture).
- The pastor asked these questions, inviting everyone in the circle to respond, while he took notes:
  1. What brought you to this congregation?
  2. Why did you stay in this congregation?
  3. What happened since you came that was extremely positive?
  4. What happened since you came that was negative?
  5. What do you see happening, if our congregation is to have a positive future?
- For the persons invited to each parsonage meeting who did not show up, the pastor mailed a letter asking for their response to the five questions. He received several written responses that proved valuable.
- Subsequent to these parsonage meetings, the pastor made a statement from the pulpit, indicating that “In the coming weeks and months, I’m going to be communicating with you regarding our congregation’s future. I’ll be telling you what I think, but I also want to know what you think. Please let me know your opinions, either in writing or by taking time to phone me or stop by the office.”
- That pastor received important information through *all* of these means. The information protected him from listening only to the thinking and feeling of key lay leaders and governing board members.

*Example #3.* Another pastor used this procedure:

- Soon after arrival, the pastor involved the governing board and committees in scheduling a “Vision Meeting” all day one Saturday, with lunch as part of the agenda.
- During that day, the pastor asked questions such as the following to discover the history, currents of thought, and convictions of key leaders in this congregation.
  - What are some of the most important things that have happened in this congregation during the last few decades?
  - What are some of the most important things that have happened in this community during the last few decades?
  - What are some of the most important strengths and ministries of this congregation?
  - What are some of the growing-edges in which God is calling our congregation to develop more strengths and ministries in the future?
- The interactions throughout the day gave the pastor several natural opportunities to share some personal convictions about what is important in ministry.
- During the next few years, that pastor scheduled an annual Vision Meeting to stay in touch with what leaders were thinking. Those Vision Meetings provided information not possible to obtain during the routine meetings of committees and the governing board.

**B. Roadmap for informal change process.** Pastors who prefer an *informal* change process find the following principles and methods of value:

*1. Develop a trust-relationship with the congregation.* Lay leaders’ receptivity to new ideas that the pastor suggests increases as trust increases. Pastors cannot build this trust instantly. Parishioners must learn by observation and personal experience that the new pastor is trustworthy and “on the job” in accomplishing pastoral and leadership roles. People only learn that when they have several opportunities to observe the pastor thinking and behaving in a trustworthy manner.

Trust *begins* as the pastor builds relationships with lay leaders through honest and open communication. Trust *increases* as what one pastor termed “the pastor’s ethos” (nature, habits, and credibility) become more obvious over time.

The pastor’s ethos is a composite blend of what the pastor *is*, what the pastor *does*, and *how* the pastor comes across. In other words, the pastor’s ethos is composed of (a) how people *feel* in the pastor’s presence and (b) how effectively people think the pastor accomplishes ministry tasks.

The pastor’s ethos becomes clear to parishioners as they obtain answers to unstated questions such as the following:

- Are the pastor’s life and personality consistent with the gospel?
- Does the pastor exhibit genuineness his or her preaching style?
- Does the pastor’s demeanor evidence care and concern for leaders and parishioners?
- Does the pastor consistently make hospital visits in a timely manner?
- Does the pastor consistently “show up for work” at the office and elsewhere?
- Does the pastor consistently follow through on commitments and promises?

One pastor advises, “Begin building trust by getting some small wins under your belt.” Inevitably, a few changes need making that require no major congregational discussions. Provide the leadership that makes those obviously needed changes. Leaders and parishioners typically respond with a greater willingness to engage in discussions regarding more complex matters upon which the lay leaders are *not* in agreement. A few small wins create momentum.

As another pastor says, “When momentum is moving in the right direction, you look better than you are; when momentum is moving in the wrong direction, you look worse than you are.”

2. *Accurately identify what the pastor must do to earn and retain THIS PARTICULAR CONGREGATION'S TRUST.* Each church has a different value system, based on factors such as (a) recent painful congregational experiences, and/or (b) what a beloved previous pastor did right, and/or (c) what an ineffective previous pastor did wrong, and/or (d) congregational experiences that set leaders' fears, aspirations, hopes, and dreams in concrete several decades ago.

For example, what if the previous pastor used little sense with regard to money and budgets? In order to earn trust, the next pastor must demonstrate ability in these matters. Or, what if the previous pastor showed no respect for the congregation's cherished, historic facilities? The next pastor must talk and act in ways that bely the suspicion that pastors care nothing about what the congregation deems extremely important.

3. *Repeatedly praise and affirm the congregation's ministry strengths.* National research indicates that every congregation has strengths. Pastors who cannot see any strengths in a congregation are either (a) too cynical for this profession, (b) too perfectionist for this profession, (c) too unintelligent for this profession, or (d) not paying attention. As someone said, "People always feel better about trying something new if they are reminded of how competent they are." (Maryann Hammers, "Resistance Buster," *Selling Power*, April 2005, p. 61)

4. *Reinforce and/or repair the congregation's spiritual focus.* The congregation's lay-leader core group can become so preoccupied with budgeting, buildings, and meetings that they lose sight of the "why" behind their activities. As that happens, the leaders focus on keeping conflict at a minimum, doing everything decently and in order, and balancing the budget. They unintentionally lose the "why" in a busy forest of "what to do" and "how to do it."

Thus, the *mechanics* of being a church replace the *reasons* for being a church, and leaders lose their focus on accomplishing Christ's three core values: (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 (Acts 2:41-42, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20).

One pastor said, "Spiritual momentum is important. When a congregation is changing lives, changing its programs and activities with new ideas becomes much easier."

5. *Reinforce and/or repair the congregation's sense of unity.* Peacemaking skills are especially important in midsize congregations, since conflict is typically greater in midsize churches than in small, large, or megachurches. Midsize churches contain greater numbers of parishioners and lay leaders with diverse expectations of what their congregation should accomplish, due to (a) the small-church expectations of some members and (b) the large-church expectations of other members. Then, too, some members think individual lay leaders and the pastor should make all of the decisions. Other members think committees should make all of the decisions. Such opinion mixtures are quite combustible, often creating conflict.

Some peacemaking happens naturally, as previously conflicted parties reorient themselves around a new pastoral personality. Other peacemaking results also happen naturally, as the new pastor begins to help people figure out "what God is calling us to be and do in the future."

A crucial but often unrecognized necessity: the pastor must *want* to address the conflict(s). Merely knowing conflict-management skills is not enough! The majority of pastors react to conflict by (a) hoping it will pass, (b) avoiding discussions of it, or (c) running away from it. Unless the pastor *wants* to resolve the conflict, it reasserts its ugliness every time someone proposes a change.

In a few congregations where conflict seems an endemic and perpetual aspect of "the way we do things around here," new pastors may want to lead governing board or other key leaders in a study of resources such as *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 3, How to Prevent and Resolve Congregational Conflict* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

6. *Learn this congregation's culture.* Like the often-used term “corporate culture” in the business world, congregational culture is the *total environment*—the ocean in which this fish swims. Corporate culture is different in each congregation, and takes considerable time to figure out.

A congregation's culture includes components such as the following:

- Written and unwritten rules regarding how the organizational structure functions (how we do things around here)
- Customs, traditions, and rituals to which leaders and parishioners religiously adhere
- Furniture, pictures, and rooms in the building that hold great symbolic meaning
- Often repeated “creation stories,” describing the church's early days, founding principles, and the primary constituent base
- The deep meaning and continuing influence of events or personalities during high or low points in congregational history (photos that would appear in the congregation's family album if such a book existed)
- Often repeated metaphors regarding which ministries are important and how to do them
- The congregation's self-identity in this community (how parishioners see it and how they think community residents see it)
- Type of spirituality, such as conservative, evangelical, fundamentalist, charismatic
- The core values desired, taught, and preached (which sometimes differ from the *actual* core values lived out in congregational behavior)
- Mental models deeply embedded in the lay leaders' cherished ideologies and organizational structures
- Basic philosophies and priorities—often unwritten and sometimes unbiblical—that repeatedly judge some ministries important and other ministries irrelevant (example: “Our church is about the right size,” a totally opposite idea from Christ's Great Commission, in which he directs his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples.)
- Emotional climate (warm, accepting, and loving—or cold, judgmental, and introverted)
- The dominant psychological mood—such as depressed, happy, fearful, cautious, or critical
- Significant congregational skills and parishioner skills
- Behavioral standards to which lay leaders hold one another and parishioners accountable
- Which members the congregation holds in high esteem, listening carefully to their opinions, and which members the congregation disregards
- The activities and ministries lay leaders feel are worthy of spending time to accomplish and the ones they feel comfortable neglecting
- The activities and ministries lay leaders feel the pastor must make a high priority and the ones they feel comfortable with the pastor neglecting
- Which group(s) the pastor must take care not to alienate, such as the women's organization, a particular adult Sunday school class, or the property committee
- How the congregation thinks about money and financial giving, such as the type of annual stewardship programs that are acceptable and unacceptable
- Vision of what our church should attempt in future years

The multiple components of a congregation's culture (total environment)—many of which are invisible to the just-arrived pastor—determine (a) how and why parishioners do what they do and (b) what type of new ideas they typically embrace or reject.

7. *Learn this congregation's unstated but deeply ingrained ethos.* Congregational ethos is its attitudinal, spiritual, and emotional *atmosphere*. Often invisible at first glance by a visitor, this powerful influence is the congregation's fundamental *character* or *spirit*. Ethos includes (a) the congregation's emotional climate (warm, accepting, and loving—or cold, judgmental, and introverted) and (b) the dominant psychological mood (depressed, happy, fearful, cautious, or critical). As noted in Session I above, ethos is the spontaneous, recurring, underlying sentiment that drives and refuels a church's beliefs, attitudes, customs, and practices. (Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Unstoppable Force* [Orange: California: Yates & Yates] p. 97) Examples:

- *Healthy*, effective congregations consistently (a) *live by faith in God's guidance*, (b) *are known by their love*, and (c) *speak words of hope*. (1 Corinthians 13:13) A congregational culture of faith, hope, and love is capable of transforming individuals and the communities in which individuals live. (*The Unstoppable Force*, pp. 162-163)
- *Unhealthy*, ineffective congregations are weak in either (a) their faith in God's guidance, (b) their love toward people inside and outside the church, or (c) their hope in the future, or weak in all three. God cannot bless an organization that does not embody all three of these apostolic qualities.

Whatever the congregation's innate ethos, the pattern tends to persist across generations of a church's lay leaders and members, decade after decade. Without an understanding of this ethos, a midsize-church pastor cannot fully understand how the congregation's internal soil influences whether the seeds of change grow, struggle, or fail to germinate.

8. *Learn this congregation's deeply ingrained, but often unstated, core values and vision for ministry.* A congregation's core values are the mission and ministry crops that grow in this *environment* (congregational culture) and in this *atmosphere* (congregational ethos). Wrapped in the treasured folds of congregational history and experience, core values and vision are not instantly obvious. Like treasures hidden beneath the surface of an archeological dig, a church's core values and vision emerge as a pastor interacts with individuals, groups, and the governing board.

As noted in Session #1, page 11, "Many congregations become frustrated when they set important goals and make plans, then fail to arrive at the destination they so carefully selected. Those failures often happen because congregations *always act on their core values*, not on the goals they set! Congregations *always act according to their core values*, not according to their plans. Unfortunately, a congregation's core values are always partially invisible to its leaders, submerged in "the way we have always done things here."

Jesus taught his first disciples three core values through The Great Commandment and The Great Commission (Acts 2:41-42, Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 28:19-20). Christ's three core values summarize as follows: (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.

The emphasis on or neglect of one or two of Christ's three core values determines a church's destiny.

⚠ *Unhealthy* ineffective congregations give most of their emphasis and energy to *one* of Christ's three core values. Their clergy and lay leadership tend to consciously or unconsciously believe the myth that Christ's *other two* core values happen automatically, as a byproduct of focusing on the *one* core value about which they feel the most passionate. In other words, when clergy and lay leadership make Christ's three core values a multiple-choice question, they produce *unhealthy*, ineffective congregations.

⚠ *Healthy* effective congregations give all three of Christ's core values equal emphasis and energy.

Gradually, a pastor finds out (a) what the church is doing and not doing, (b) what the church's oral tradition says is important to do, (c) what the people in this community expect effective churches to do and not do, (d) what role this particular congregation has played in the history of this community, (e) what this congregation's REAL core values are (compared to its desired or stated core values). One pastor stresses the necessity of listening VERY HARD for what she calls the congregation's "password" (the values that are critical to these parishioners' hearts).

An Iowa town's name is Story City. But every town or city has a "story" and every church has a "story." The congregational values and vision are embedded in that story. Effective pastors know that learning and becoming part of that story is essential to exerting positive influence in this congregation and community. Change proposals built on a congregation's foundational story, using its heart passwords, stand an excellent chance of acceptance, action, and positive results. Other types of change proposals, regardless of how rational, practical, appropriate, or frequently used by other congregations, may achieve active or passive resistance by fine, dedicated lay leaders.

9. *Gradually begin fine-tuning the deeply ingrained congregational values and vision so that they fit this moment in history and unify the leaders and congregation.* The vision and energy for new directions MUST evolve from within the congregation's lay leadership group, not from the new pastor's determination to (a) use a particular program from his or her previous congregation, or (b) take charge and fix things here, or (c) imitate the ministry of a famous megachurch.

"Organizational excellence tends not to be a function of imitation. It tends to be a function of origination." (Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass] p. 5) The pastor and laypersons develop the vision and energy for change jointly; otherwise, the laypersons will now "own" the vision. Thus, when the pastor begins to communicate and administrate the fine-tuned vision, some of the sailors mutiny—either by (a) jumping overboard, or (b) by inciting the other sailors to riot, or (c) by attempting to throw the pastor overboard, or (d) by all of the above. The effective midsize-church pastor generates new vision *with* the laypeople rather than imposing it *upon* them.

Commenting on this messy process of coalescing vision and energy for the future, one pastor recommends repeatedly asking lay leaders some form of Lyle Schaller's famous planning question, "What year is it?" Denial of reality is a powerful, omnipresent coping trait common to all human beings, even laypersons with the highest aspirations for their congregation. Thus, the first step in arriving at the future often involves helping lay leaders move from the past to the present.

Another pastor says that coalescing vision for the future takes much conversational seed planting, over a long period of time. Not all of the seeds come up. Pastoral seed-planting may feel a bit like the American frontier farmer's saying regarding the need to plant four grains of corn in every hill: "One for the cutworm, one for the crow, one to rot, and one to grow." But the seeds that sprout often become powerful plants for positive change. When a pastor, months later, hears a layperson say in a meeting, "Maybe we need to consider . . ." the pastor knows the seed germinated.

Still another pastor notes that all positive change requires some upstream rowing, against the status quo—not drifting downstream with every plea to "keep doing what we've always done in the way we've always done it." In some instances, this may mean turning a deaf ear to some traditions and helping lay leaders to move beyond them. This is a major challenge, since the pastor must exercise that skill while (a) continuing to care about those lay leaders and (b) not moving so far and fast beyond tradition as to create conflict and lose several key players.

In many instances, the role of *leader* contrasts sharply with the role of *pastor*. Which role is the most important? The answer is yes. The effective midsize-church pastor keeps both roles in dynamic balance. He or she does not (a) stop caring for individuals and (b) does not stop helping the congregation to move forward in its mission and ministries.

Despite the pastor's best efforts, major changes in direction typically lose one or two key lay players. But conflict so great that four or five key players leave the court typically means that the pastor (a) involved an insufficient number of key lay leaders in discussing the change options, and/or (b) moved so quickly to change-implementation that sufficient lay buy-in did not occur, and/or (c) several key lay leaders felt so displaced and undervalued that they traveled from frustration to irritation to anger to retaliation. In other words, effective midsize-church pastors must be willing to take the heat for trying new ideas but must avoid creating unnecessary heat that burns his or her leadership bridges and thus the congregation's ministry effectiveness.

In some instances, this may mean (a) lots of asking questions and listening before suggesting a new idea, (b) laying out a possible direction with inspirational preaching and teaching, (c) asking people to get on board, (d) asking uninterested people to give the new idea a chance by not prematurely vetoing it, (e) evaluating the new idea's results, and (f) making course corrections or burying the new idea after unintended consequences prove it faulty.

Whatever approach they take, pastors who focus only on appeasing the status quo are, by definition, not leaders. Managers help people to efficiently accomplish what they are doing. Leaders help people to move beyond where they are and get where they want to go. Leaders rally people to a better future. In many instances leaders help people to accomplish what they have not previously recognized that they want to and need to accomplish.

*10. Identify the congregation's lay leaders.* One pastor said, "Identifying the movers and shakers is more difficult in a midsize church than in a small church. These people are not always in the foreground, the ones who do all the talking when you arrive." Another pastor said, "Soon after arriving, I saw that the *real* leaders of the congregation are not always in the room where decisions are made." Learning who the real leaders are typically takes a few months to one year.

"Look for laypersons who are 'influencers' of opinion," a pastor advised. "In small churches two or three laypersons call the shots. To effectively lead, the pastor must become a chaplain-leader, staying close enough to those individuals to genuinely hear and appreciate their ideas, yet influence their ideas.

"In midsize churches, the effective pastor must become a chaplain-coordinator—with laypersons who are the 'influencers' of congregational opinion, decisions, and actions, often through specific groups in the congregation. Some of these groups have formal authority, such as committees. Other groups have informal but sometimes even more powerful authority.

"The effective midsize-church pastor is an influencer of the influencers. Often, you must learn which group those influencers are in. For example, one of the adult Sunday school classes must approve, or at least not veto, every significant congregational change. Before learning that this class is THE major influence center in the church, I did much wheel spinning without achieving forward momentum."

Another pastor warned, "Beware of the first person who shows up in your office after you arrive as the new pastor. That person may look like an influencer but may not be one. Instead, that person often wants to make sure that his or her agenda becomes your agenda. In short, he or she is attempting to preempt your leadership and covertly gain control of the congregation's direction in one or all aspects of its ministry."

Still another pastor said, "Few of the genuine influencers self-identify. Most of them have more humility than that. Some of them are not even aware of their influence ability. As I begin getting acquainted after I arrived in this congregation, I informally asked several people, 'If you were making a list of the three or four people who exert strong influence in this congregation, who would be on that list?' I began hearing some of the same names from several different people. That process taught me volumes about those influencers from an excellent source: their peers."

11. *Ask questions that help lay leaders to focus on where we are as a congregation and where we are going.* Questions uncover a congregation's historical "story" and make it more obvious to the lay leaders as well as to the new pastor. Some of the lay leaders helped to create the story. Many of them are newcomers who inherited "the way we do things around here." Where the lay leaders think we are and where they think we are headed (a) provides the new pastor with important information and (b) influences the lay leaders to think about "where we ought to be headed."

12. *Ask questions that identify the discrepancies between what is and what could be in our congregation's ministries.* This includes (a) what ministries are working and what ministries are not working, (b) our present circumstances and our preferred circumstances, and (c) our present vision for ministry and our preferred vision for ministry. In other words, ask questions that help people recognize the points at which "we need to do something different."

13. *Create a healthy dissatisfaction with what is NOT working in our congregation's ministries.* Through multiple and repeated personal and group conversations, get key lay leaders on board with change-possibilities that might address our dissatisfactions. Recognize that amassing a crew and passengers for a change-ship usually takes three to five times longer than the new clergyperson thinks is necessary. One pastor says, "I don't make major changes quickly. I don't want to act on an idea that I have suggested until I hear people repeating that idea in meetings. I wait until I hear a consensus. That usually means waiting longer than I'm comfortable waiting."

14. *Share new ideas and questions with key individuals over a period of several months.* One pastor says that in casual conversations with key individuals he often asks, "What would happen if we ...?" and listens carefully to the responses. That pastor mentions the importance of "generational opinions."

He raises the question regarding a possible change with people in several different generations within the congregation. Sometimes, people in one generation see no problem with the new idea while members of another generation spot something that would need addressing. (This generational equation is much more evident in small towns and rural areas, where congregations more often contain five generations.)

That pastor stresses, "*Always* give other people the credit for new ideas. One way to do that is by saying, when asking what someone thinks of a new idea, 'I talked with ... about that matter. This is an idea that came out of that conversation: ... How does that sound to you?' That way, you hear a response that runs less danger of contamination by any of the types of unresolved authority-figure reactions that you sometimes encounter in church members. Some people listen better and more rationally consider ideas that come from other church members than ideas from their pastor."

15. *Cultivate the will to change.* Tell stories from the congregation's history that help parishioners feel new directions are in continuity with "who we are." People accept changes more readily when they seem built on valued foundations from the past.

Robert E. Quinn summarizes that leadership task as follows: "I use conceptual images of the future embedded in the language and fact of the past to help myself and others recognize the reality that life is a continuous stream of change, and I seek to empower myself and empower others in shaping an emerging future. I thus integrate fact and hope, past and future." (*Building the Bridge As You Walk On It* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass], p. 140)

Tell stories of people who benefited from this congregation's new directions. Stories are more powerful than logical principles in reconnecting lay leaders to faith issues and the "why" behind the "what" and the "how to do it" in church life.

*16. Gradually develop vision, strategies, and plans that address our healthy discontents.* Such strategies and well-thought-out plans rarely happen in overnight retreats or in one governing board meeting. More often, the strategies and plans emerge haltingly, serendipitously, and erratically. Recognizing, perfecting, and approving the best way to move beyond what is to what ought to be is a messy process.

Four types of pastors and lay leaders are VERY unhappy with this process: perfectionists with a plan, controlling personalities, impatient people, and people who are uncomfortable with ambiguity. Many such persons always want us to “get on with it” or “do it this way, starting tomorrow.” As in so many endeavors, success is not an event; success is a long, slow process. Effective midsize-church leaders kiss lots of frogs on their way to meet the prince.

Generally speaking, learn to make changes by *additions* to the church’s programs and activities, rather than by subtractions. Learn to make plans for changes slowly, with plenty of communication and many opportunities for discussion and the development of group ownership, so that changes seem fair rather than forced.

*17. Beware of the normal human tendency to focus ONLY on unimportant peripheral and mechanical issues—rather than on the truly important issues.* A positive future belongs to congregations whose leaders ask the right questions and develop strategies by which to answer those questions. One pastor said that lay leaders responded creatively to questions such as these:

- “How can our congregation be a transformational influence for Christ in the lives of people?”
- “How can our congregation change people in the name of and by the power of Christ, in the way that he changed his disciples?”
- “How can our congregation influence the largest possible number of people to make a life-changing connection with Jesus Christ and grow in that relationship?”

Unfortunately, pastors and lay leaders often fail to ask those prime questions; thus, they stay trapped in preoccupation with mundane peripherals. Mechanical and organizational questions such as “How many people should serve on our governing board? How many worship services should we have? How do we recruit Sunday school teachers?” are not unimportant! However, these are *strategy* questions.

Ask the *vision* questions first, before asking the *strategy* questions. Otherwise, you are discussing what type of transportation to use BEFORE you pick a destination and feel motivated to travel there.

*18. Find lay leaders who can help the vision happen.* In smaller churches, clergy less often *select* lay leaders; more often, clergy in smaller churches learn how to *accept* and work with the lay leaders they find firmly rooted in leadership roles. In midsize churches, clergy more often play a role in selecting lay leaders.

One pastor reported that this process is more trial and error than science or art. The pastor’s first impressions often prove inaccurate. A layperson’s capability does not always match subsequent observations of that individual’s ability to work with and inspire other people to action. Sometimes, initial choices for important lay leader roles—choices based on a person’s obvious zeal for or competence in a ministry task, or on the person’s affirmation of a pastor’s cherished dreams—reveal one or more of three flaws:

- This individual does not inspire people in the congregation.
- He or she comes across in ways that cause anger and/or rejection by parishioners.
- Because parishioners do not trust this individual, they will not follow his or her leadership.

In the presence of one or more of these reactions from church members, a lay leader’s zeal or competence is worthless or worse for promoting congregational change.

19. *Consistently invest the time necessary to train laypersons who assume important leadership roles.* Delegation is not enough. A continuing relationship with lay leaders is essential. One pastor reports that he tries to spend 80 percent of his time with that 20 percent of leaders who can make the big difference in the congregation's ministries.

20. *Recognize that a significant percentage of positive change happens through the leadership of the congregation's newer members.* Change cannot happen unless long-tenured, influential lay leaders affirm a new idea sufficiently that they do not veto it! But the energies of newer leaders tend to accomplish a large percentage of the positive changes in congregations.

Recognize that the old saying is wrong: the future of a congregation is never in its children and youth; the future of a congregation is in the adult leaders, many of which are newcomers within the last five years. Through the influence of these adult leaders, the children and youth move into a positive future; without that lay leadership, children and youth merely grow one year older each year.

21. *Communicate a clear and compelling vision repetitively and in multiple ways.* The intelligent midsize-church pastor learns that while he or she "can't do it all," he or she *can* do much of the vision casting that inspires laypersons to "do it all." This involves talking about who we are, our traditions, and what God is calling us to do and be.

The larger the church, the more times a pastor and lay leaders must communicate a new idea in order to affect change. Communication or lack of communication either diminishes or heightens the fears that can block change-agent efforts. Buying in to and beginning to take action on the congregational vision is a process, never an event. Repetitive communication over a period of several months is the oil that greases the squeaky wheels that, left untended, can burn out the bearings that make movement and momentum possible.

One pastor stresses, "I will not argue with people who disagree with a new direction. I ask questions whose answers tell me where they are coming from. I try to identify what people feel they are losing by the proposed change. Sometimes all it takes is careful, thoughtful listening. Sometimes listening gives me some good ideas for how the change might feel more palatable to some people. Other times listening is not enough. If it isn't, no amount of argumentative persuasion from me will convert them."

Different people assimilate a vision into their thinking and behaviors at different speeds. Thus, in one congregation whose vision was the concept of servant evangelism, the pastor preached, talked about, and discussed the concept with his governing board—with little result. After his wife taught a Wednesday night, six-week, small-group study of servant evangelism, many people were ready for action.

As a result, the members selected, organized, and accomplished numerous ministries, free of charge, such as mowing lawns, washing windshields, subsidizing gasoline purchases by 5 cents per gallon. In each instance, church members handed people a card with these words printed on the front of it:

"Yes...it really is free!  
We hope this small gift brings some light into your day.  
It is a simple way of saying that God loves you—no strings attached.  
Let us know if we can be of more assistance."

The opposite side of the card contained the congregation's name, address, telephone number, worship time, and Sunday school time.

These unselfish acts of caring and kindness achieved a far greater positive impact and magnetic attraction in that small town than any amount of commercial advertising the church could have purchased.

22. *Communicate a constantly positive enthusiasm about the congregation and the changes essential to arrival at a positive future.* The pastor's *attitude* is as essential a tool for moving a congregation toward a new end-result as any of the new ideas and methods used to travel that road. A church's culture (its values, thinking habits, and behavior patterns) change only slowly. Without continuous, positive, conversational cheerleading from its primary leader—the pastor—church cultures do not change at all.

Just as no amount of effective lay leadership adequately compensates for a pastor's negative feelings and demeanor, no amount of effective lay leadership generates the energy of a pastor's positive enthusiasm. Yes, midsize-church leadership is a team process. However, the old adage is accurate: "Pace of the leader, pace of the team."

That energy and enthusiasm is especially essential in efforts to attract and welcome new attendees—a motivation and skill not typically present in most congregations, especially midsize, mainline denomination congregations. Encouraging parishioners to increase their volume of inviting people to worship, warmly welcome newcomers, and help newcomers connect with a group and a ministry task requires pastoral energy, enthusiasm, and influence.

Beginning to behave as if "the world is my parish" instead of behaving as if "the parish is my world" is not a short, natural trip for most midsize churches. Parishioners do not make that journey without enthusiastic, energetic, pastoral leadership.

23. *Learn how to address the unusual thinking and behavior patterns in churches that were formerly much larger or much smaller.* In midsize churches whose worship attendance and membership has changed during recent years, helping parishioners adjust to a new self-identity is often part of the new pastor's role. Churches have difficulty changing their thinking, feelings, and behaviors if most of their lay leaders' thought patterns fit a smaller or a larger congregation.

*In churches that have grown in membership*, pastors find it beneficial to say in meetings and in parishioner conversations—repeatedly, over a period of one to two years—that "Churches the size ours has become in the last couple of years usually . . ." The pastor illustrates the end of these sentences with typical midsize-church behaviors. This repetitive group education gradually helps leaders to shift into a new self-identity. They begin to feel normal about what they and the congregation have become and are doing, rather than abnormal.

In some instances, the new pastor recognizes that some members and leaders are grieving the loss of the small-church atmosphere and habits to which they were so accustomed. They enjoyed a pastor who played the chaplaincy role more than they value the possibility of accomplishing a larger volume of ministries as a midsize congregation. Such grief-responses tend to frustrate pastors but are often part of the growing midsize church's landscape.

In a few instances where a small church has grown to midsize, some of the part-time staff members are not ready to adjust their sights to a bigger vision. Nor are they willing to receive evaluation and supervision based on that bigger vision and larger numbers of members. Such a situation requires the pastor's (a) patience, (b) insistence on adequate staff performance, (c) regularly schedule coaching interaction with each staff member, and (d) working with the personnel committee to replace under-performing staff members.

*Parishioners in midsize churches that in recent decades were larger in membership* (a frequent experience in mainline congregations since 1965) have difficulty overcoming a sense of inadequacy and frustration. Lay leaders and parishioners often expect the type of staff and ministries that were present in the church's golden years when the membership was three or four times its present size.

In other words, in many formerly large churches, lay leaders block change with memories of a storied past (stories that have grown larger with frequent retelling). In such churches, the pastor must help people move beyond such delusions of grandeur (hoping a dead past can live again) into acceptance of current reality. Until that happens, the ritual of remembering the past eliminates entering the present and constructive planning toward a positive future.

Pastors in such churches find themselves in a long-term teaching mission. They frequently say, “In a church of our size . . .” followed by a description of what typically happens in the ministry of that size congregation. Ordinarily, a few years transpire before the bulk of lay leaders and parishioners become satisfied with and affirm their congregation’s present identity as positive. Eventually, they stop concentrating on the way things used to be, begin living in the present of how things are, and start building on that presence.

*24. Learn how to work with the differences between small-town and city congregations.* For newcomers, loneliness can be even greater in small towns than in cities. Due to their established social networks, small-town churches may (a) score lower on hospitality and (b) remain quite unaware of that deficiency.

One pastor illustrated this challenge by noting that he found integrating adult newcomers into an established Sunday school class quite difficult. He said it was easier to start a new adult Sunday school class comprised of newcomers than to teach established classes to *genuinely* include new people.

While small-town parishioners are friendly toward worship visitors on Sunday morning, small-town social-relationship networks may be quite closed. In long-established, small-town communities where many family trees have flourished tall and deep for decades, most of the active church members live in social silos with invisible walls. Their long-established friendship connections with specific people and families (a) fill their free time to the brim, (b) blind them to the relationship needs of community newcomers, (c) encourage them to assume that long-time, un-churched community residents will *never* consider church attendance, (d) build a sense that people from other ethnic and socio-economic groups would *never* feel at home in our congregation, (e) dampen their enthusiasm for using the inviting, hospitality, and caring tools essential to effective evangelistic outreach, and (f) make them oblivious to the need to integrate new members into a job and a group that helps them feel they genuinely “belong” to this church.

In metropolitan and city settings where a high percentage of the population move in and out each year, congregants are usually more aware of the need for and practiced in the use of evangelistic reach-out and welcoming skills. Thus, pastors who relocate from metropolitan churches to small-town congregations often find that the need for more intentional teaching and training on the various issues that make a congregation (a) evangelistically effective and (b) a hospitable environment for newcomers.

Then, too, pastoral leadership in small towns may need to be somewhat more relational with regard to influencing the direction of committees and ministries, due to larger number of key laypersons who may have held particular chairperson and ministry team positions for a much greater number of years.

**D. Formal change process options.** The following methods are highly organized, structured processes in which the church’s governing board appoints a specific group and assigns that group responsibility for surveying attendee opinions, studying options, and leading in the accomplishment of specific congregational changes.

(1) One such process involves securing and photocopying the study-discussion-planning-action process found in *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 18, Navigating toward Maximum Effectiveness in Midsize Churches* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com)).

(2) Hundreds of congregations in many denominations have used the step-by-step planning process below, titled *How to Accomplish Effective Congregational Planning*. Like the process noted above, you can download this procedure free of charge at the [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com) Web site.

## Study/Discussion Session #4

*Pastors.* Prepare for this discussion session by making notes in the margins, especially with regard to the following questions:

1. Do you know of pastors or congregations to which insights in this paragraph or section seem to apply?
2. What would you like to add or subtract from this paragraph or section?
3. In what ways do you feel that an insight in this section or paragraph applies to you or the congregation you serve?

*Discussion Leader.* As you move through this discussion session, ask participants to take turns sharing their answers to the above questions.

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**A. What are the most rewarding feelings in midsize-church ministry?** The midsize-church pastors interviewed in this study gave a wide range of responses to that question. Listed below is a sampling of comments that fit into three categories.

*1. Personal Satisfaction:*

- A sense of accomplishing ones purpose in life
- Personal relationships with and involvement in peoples' lives
- Feeling a sense of love from and credibility with the people in this congregation
- The joy of working with and being part of a staff team
- Activities in the small-town community in which church members are also active

*2. Spiritual Service to People:*

- Preaching that imparts faith and changes how people view their church
- Opportunities for pastoral care conversations that make a differences in people's lives
- Seeing an unchurched family become active attendees and participants
- Seeing children's lives changed by God's love and the church's ministries
- Seeing people take ownership of their congregation's ministries and begin to lead with passion and excellence
- Seeing people with gifts never before tapped given the opportunity to live out their potential
- Seeing people connect with one another in positive relationships
- Seeing our members welcoming new people

*3. Strengthening the Congregation:*

- Fixing challenging financial problems and paying off a building debt
- Seeing worship attendance grow
- Seeing visitors come back a second and third time
- Seeing a turnaround in attitudes and behaviors
- Knowing that the church is healthier because you were there
- Seeing momentum develop and persist, accompanied by excitement and satisfaction among the people
- When lay people take on a ministry and have a sparkle in their eye because they are doing something for the kingdom

**B. What are the greatest points of pain in midsize-church ministry?** The midsize-church pastors interviewed in this study gave a wide range of responses to that question. Listed below is a sampling of comments that fit into five categories.

*1. Personal Challenges:*

- Letting go of control in areas that you controlled in smaller churches
- Letting go of my need to “know everything that is going on,” which is possible in smaller churches
- Learning to wear so many responsibility hats of administrative leadership
- Frustrating staff and personnel problems
- The occasional “dry” times, when you feel nothing is happening
- Finding appropriate time for family relationships and responsibilities

*2. Change-Resistance Challenges:*

- A power group that wants to run the church and (a) threatens to leave or (b) leaves
- Resistance to any sort of change, even when people know that what the congregation is doing is no longer working
- Learning that some of the people that you were sure would stand with you on new ideas strongly resist change
- People leaving the church due to conflict or not agreeing with new directions

*3. Community Challenges:*

- Seeing a small town’s population gradually decline and its school system move toward disappearing
- Seeing community demographics changing, racially, ethnically, and culturally

*4. Congregational Challenges:*

- Feeling that I don’t know all of the members as well as I did in a smaller church
- Frustration of not being able to do everything we need to do because of the limitation of either people or money
- People displaying satisfaction with the status quo despite failure in several ministries
- Frustration when a short list of anarchists with veto power make all the decisions
- People who lack sufficient Christian love to let other people into their social circle
- Frustration at (a) not seeing more people experience faster spiritual growth and (b) what seems like a lack of *any* spiritual growth in some individuals

*5. Professional Challenges:*

- Recognizing that it takes two years for people to get beyond viewing you as “the new guy [or gal]”; when the previous pastor had a lengthy tenure, it may take even longer
- Feeling overwhelmed by the expanded duties and administrative responsibilities
- Feeling a sense of loss due to spending fewer hours each week in the role of pastoral care with individuals
- Figuring out the tasks in which one should invest time and energy
- Dealing with a sense of failure when you do not see much-needed changes happening
- Overcoming occasional seasons of asking oneself, “What am I doing here?” and a sense of despair regarding one’s ability to change things
- Dealing with staffing issues such as some individuals resisting accountability for improving inadequate performance effectiveness
- Feelings of stress that results from staff members “who don’t work out”

**C. What are the greatest needs of pastors in midsize-church ministry?** The midsize-church pastors interviewed in this study gave a wide range of responses to that question. Listed below is a sampling of comments that fit into three categories.

*1. Personal Needs:*

- High energy to deal with a broader and different set of responsibilities than in smaller congregations
- Becoming accustomed to and learning how to compensate for a higher level of stress than in smaller churches
- Scheduled time off, totally away from clergy role responsibilities, which combats (a) the “they can’t do without me syndrome” and (b) the tendency to lose perspective without knowing that you have lost perspective
- Sufficiently balancing family time with church responsibilities, so that you have positive family relationships
- Strong daily devotional habits
- Recreation
- Respect and encouragement from denominational leaders who believe that midsize churches and their people are as valuable as larger congregations and their ministries
- Sympathetic support by an informal network of laypersons that you enjoy inside the congregation, with whom you can discuss issues and ideas, and who help you to persevere during the times when you suffer at the hands of those you serve

*2. Professional Skills:*

- Recognize the different, more complex leadership style needed in midsize churches.
- Maintain a kind but firm dissatisfaction with the status quo.
- Find and use constructive feedback systems.
- Recognize that you cannot afford all the staff you need and learn how to compensate by developing lay leaders who do what staff members do in larger churches.
- Training in administrative skills, especially the following
  - a. Learning how to lead
  - b. Learning how to manage
  - c. Learning how to increase financial stewardship
  - d. Learning how to delegate without (a) neglecting or (b) over-controlling
  - e. Learning how to identify and develop lay leaders.
  - f. Learning how to increase evangelization outreach effectiveness
  - g. Learning how to manage time
- Learn how to find competent staff, such as nursery workers, on a small budget.
- Learn how to lead and manage staff (personnel work), and especially how to coordinate the ministries of part-time staff who do not attend staff meetings.
- Overcome the feeling that you *must* be at the church every time its doors open for a meeting or function. “If you think you need to know everything that is going on, not enough is going on.”
- Develop time-management skills that sort out and focus on the essentials in this size church (what the pastor must do and does not need to do).
- Effectively balance local and denominational responsibilities: midsize-church pastors are more often appointed to district and regional denominational boards and committees; thus, they must balance those time-demands with local time-demands.
- Combat intellectual arrogance by maintaining life-long learning habits.
- Get training and skills in *leadership*, which is different from *pastoral care* skills.

- Find continuing education, training opportunities, and practical resources that actually apply to midsize churches, not just small churches or megachurches.
- Provide sufficient and appropriate reports and information to parishioners, to assure them that you and the staff are faithfully doing your jobs.
- Learn not to project your personal impatience into the mix of congregational atmosphere and lay leadership.

### 3. *Professional Relationships:*

- Find the time in a pressurized schedule to develop support-group relationships with a network of other clergy that provides opportunity to share joys, vent feelings, ask questions, be confronted, be encouraged, and learn.
- Overcome time limitations, especially in small towns with so many community groups meeting, and find a clergyperson confidant from outside the congregation to whom you can relate and with whom you can discuss issues.

*Someone identified effective clergy as people with competency, compassion, and character.* That assessment is accurate but insufficient. Three more qualities are essential. Nothing substitutes for high energy, strong motivation, and aggressive learning:

1. Research indicates that *high-energy people* usually accomplish three to five times as much as low-energy people.
2. *Strong motivation* is another essential. When she or he does not feel motivated toward excellence in leadership effectiveness, a great deal of nothing happens, over and over.
3. Effective pastors of midsize churches are *aggressive learners* who constantly search for new ideas by which to put operational wheels under the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

**D. What books or resources are helpful in midsize-church ministry?** The midsize-church pastors interviewed in this study gave an extraordinary volume and range of responses to that question. Listed below is a sampling of those books, in three general categories. (Some of these titles are no longer in print.)

#### *Theological and Spiritual Resources:*

- *The Power of Appreciation*, Adrian van Kaam and Susan Muto (Pittsburgh: The Epiphany Association, 820 Crane Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15216-3050)
- *An Unstoppable Force*, Erwin Raphael McManus (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing)
- *Deep Change*, Robert E. Quinn (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers)

#### *Leadership Resources:*

- *Leadership and Self-Deception* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers)
- *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It*, Robert E. Quinn (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers)
- *The Leadership Challenge*, James M. Kouzes, Barry Z. Posner (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers)
- *Leadership Is The Key*, Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven R. Covey (New York: Simon and Schuster)
- *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*, Andy Stanley (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers)
- *Developing the Leaders Around You*, John Maxwell (Nashville: Thomas Nelson)

- *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, John Maxwell and Zig Ziglar (Atlanta: Maxwell Motivations, Inc.)
- *Management of Organizational Behavior*, Paul Hershey, Kenneth Blanchard, Dewey E. Johnson (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall)
- *Church Personality Matters*, Herb Miller (St. Louis: Chalice Press)
- *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)
- *The Five Temptations of a CEO*, Patrick M. Lencioni (San Francisco: Jossey Bass)
- *Leaders*, Warren G. Bennis and Burt Nanus (San Francisco: HarperCollins)
- *The Interventionist*, Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *Diagnosing Organizational Culture Instrument*, Roger Harrison, Herb Stokes (San Francisco: Pfeiffer/Jossey-Bass Publishers)
- *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar H. Schein (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers)
- *Well Intentioned Dragons*, Marshall Shelley (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers)
- *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press)

*How-to-do-it Methodology:*

- *The In-Between Church*, Alice Mann (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute)
- *Raising The Roof: The Pastoral-To Program Size Transition*, Alice Mann (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute)
- *The Middle-Sized Church*, Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *Leading Beyond The Walls*, Adam Hamilton (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *Conspiracy of Kindness*, Steve Sjogren (Ann Arbor: Vine Books)
- *Attracting New Members*, Robert L. Bast (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth, Inc.)
- *The Vital Congregation*, Herb Miller (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- *Turn Around Churches*, George Barna (Ventura, CA: Regal Books)
- *The Middle Sized Church*, Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press)
- For finding and developing lay leaders and volunteer, the various Spiritual Gift Identification instruments and seminars are of value. Two Examples:
  - *The Equipping Church Guidebook*, Sue Mallory, Brad Smith, Neil Wilson, Sarah Jane Rehnberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishers)
  - *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 24, Identifying and Mobilizing Parishioners' Spiritual Gifts* (download free at [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com))
- The Prism feedback system is available at their [www.nacba.net/prism](http://www.nacba.net/prism) Internet site. A similar system, also modeled on the well-known 360 degree feedback system widely used in corporations is *Church Effectiveness Nuggets: Volume 15, How to Obtain Accurate Feedback on Ministry Role Performance* Download free of charge at the [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com) Web site).
- Serving as associate pastor in a large congregation provides excellent administration and organizational learning experiences.
- The three-year, post-seminary-graduate program at The Beeson Institute for Advanced Church Leadership, Asbury Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, in which pastors spend a week at several effective congregations such as Saddleback in California, Willow Creek in Chicago, and Frazier Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, is helpful.
- The attitude of always being in a learning curve, always seeking information that might increase ministry effectiveness, is as crucial as any book or resource.
- For some clergy, interaction with other midsize-church pastors is the primary resource for learning new ideas and methods.

## Appendix

**How can we increase the number of people who engage in daily prayer?** Ask people to include in their daily conversation with God the habit of praying (by name) for other members, the pastor, the staff, and various ministries.

Mother Theresa was right:

The fruit of silence is prayer;  
The fruit of prayer is faith;  
The fruit of faith is love;  
The fruit of love is service;  
The fruit of service is peace.

Create a sheet or folder from the material on the next page in one of these ways:

- Photocopy it on a single sheet of paper.
- Or, print it front and back on one-half-page card stock.
- Or, print it on a billfold-size, two-fold (three-panel) card.

Insert a copy in each worship bulletin.

Preach through it as a sermon outline.

Ask people to commit to its use for fourteen consecutive days.

*You do not have permission to alter in any manner the wording on this copyrighted prayer card.* This model has been tested and revised several time over many years. Any alteration of the words is an express violation of United States and International Copyright Law. Reproductions must carry the copyright notice.

Download from the [www.TheParishPaper.com](http://www.TheParishPaper.com) Web site a free electronic version of the prayer card on the next page.

## **The Secret to Abundant Living: Learning How to Ask**

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

“And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

### **Ten Steps to God**

Many people feel they should pray, but few know how. The following steps, if used fifteen minutes daily for fourteen consecutive days, enable you to experience God’s peace, joy, and power in a way you have never known before.

As you begin this adventure, remember that prayer is an experience, not an idea. Prayer is like riding a bicycle. You only learn by doing it, never by thinking about doing it.

Few people experience God’s presence as fully during their first three or four days as they do after several days of practice.

The experience of God’s presence is impossible to define. But when it happens, you understand why great Christian leaders of every century have so enthusiastically recommended and practiced prayer. You understand what Jeremiah meant when he said, “You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart. . . .” (Jeremiah 29:13).

1. In preparation, set aside fifteen minutes in a location where you can be physically relaxed and uninterrupted. Read one or two chapters from the Bible, listening for what God says to you. This helps to erase distracting thoughts from the blackboard of your mind. The following passages are especially helpful in preparing for prayer: John 14, Psalm 23, Matthew 5:1-12, Romans 8:35-39, 1 Corinthians 13, Psalm 46, Romans 12, John 15, Psalm 27, Psalm 103, Psalm 121, Isaiah 55, Luke 15, Psalm 84, John 1:1-18, Psalm 90, Psalm 19, 1 John 4:7-21, Psalm 139, Luke 24, Psalm 130, and Luke 18:1-17.

2. Close your eyes and give thanks for three personal blessings of which you are especially conscious today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from a sense of your own self-sufficiency.

3. Ask God to help three other people you feel need God’s help today. This helps you move toward God by moving away from self-centeredness.

4. Ask God to forgive specific mistakes and sins from the last 24 hours and give you the strength to forgive others.

5. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like. Ask God to give that person insights into his or her personal problems and ask for the power to let God’s love flow through you to him or her.

6. Ask God to give you sensitivity to the needs of one person today with whom you can share God’s love in word or deed.

7. Ask for insights into your personal problems.

8. Ask for help in achieving your personal goals.

9. Ask God to tell you the most important thing you need to do today to “seek first his kingdom” (Matthew 6:33).

10. Conclude by listening intently for three minutes to what God may say to you.

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**Origin of the above prayer card:** Several people asked a young psychotherapist at a medical clinic, “How can my Christian faith help me deal with these problems?” In response to that, the young man developed the prayer card above and gave it to people who wanted to connect their faith with their therapy. He asked patients to use the card for fifteen minutes each day.

Since the therapist typically saw each patient once a week, he could easily monitor the results. He found that some people made the following statement after their first seven days: “I felt a sense of the presence of God unlike anything I’ve ever before experienced.” At the end of their first week, other patients reported “no results, nothing happened,” but they *always* reported their experience in something like those words by the end of the second week (fourteen days): “I felt a sense of the presence of God unlike anything I’ve ever before experienced.”

During the years when the therapist was a pastor, he used the prayer therapy under quite different circumstances. For example, late one afternoon a few months after arriving in his first church out of seminary, the pastor visited the home of an inactive church member as part of his congregational get-acquainted ritual. As an oil field specialist called a “Pumper,” the man went to work early in the morning and arrived home about mid-afternoon. He welcomed the pastor and asked if he would like a cup of coffee. They sat down at the kitchen table to chat. The pastor opened with his standard line, “How are things going with you?”

“TERRIBLE!” the man answered. He added to that explosive beginning a long monologue regarding his newly appointed supervisor at work. “I don’t know what I’m going to do,” the man said, “I have a lot of retirement money built up, but I’m thinking about chunking it all and walking away. I just cannot tolerate the way this guy treats me.”

The second surprise came when, at the end of his long monologue, the man asked the young pastor, “What can I do about this?”

The pastor replied, “I can tell you what to do about that, but I don’t think you would be willing to do it.”

“Try me!” the man replied. “I’m desperate.”

The pastor responded, “I can give you a prescription that will help, but I’m skeptical about your willingness to use it. Before I give you the prescription, you would have to promise me you will follow it.”

After the man promised that he would comply, the pastor asked, “Do you have a sheet of paper?” After a brief introductory explanation that included, “Set aside fifteen minutes every morning to follow this prescription,” the pastor dictated the ten steps on the prayer card above as the man wrote them out on the first page of a yellow legal pad.

Several months later, the pastor had still not seen the man in worship. (A couple of years later, the man and his wife became active church members, but not at this point).

The pastor arrived home a bit early one afternoon. Since the oil field worker only lived three houses down the street, the pastor walked down the sidewalk and knocked on his front door.

The man welcomed him in. As usual, they sat at the kitchen table and drank coffee. The pastor fully expected to get “the rest of the story.” When he opened with, “Well, how are things going with you?” the man responded, “Just fine!” and shifted the conversation to a recent local event. As the minutes passed, the pastor waited, assuming the man would get around to discussing his “supervisor problem.” That did not happen. They talked about the rainstorms, the snowstorms, the sandstorms, the ball games, and local happenings.

Overcome with curiosity, the pastor thought, I’ll tell him that I’d better be getting on down the road. Then, when he knows that I’m leaving, he will bring up this sensitive, personal subject. However, in this case, that time-tested technique (a form of which had virtually always worked forty-five minutes into a fifty-minute therapy hour at the clinic) failed to elicit the expected response.

Finally, as they walked toward the door, the pastor said, “Oh, I forgot to ask. How did that problem at work ever come out?”

“What problem?” the man asked, seeming puzzled.

“I seem to remember that when we talked several months ago,” the pastor said, “you were going through a stressful time with a new supervisor at work.”

“Oh, that,” the man replied.

“How did that ever come out?” the pastor asked.

“He changed!” the man said.

Prayer does not merely change the person who prays. Research by the parapsychology department at Duke University and medical research at several hospitals demonstrates that prayer sometimes has a scientifically verifiably influence that extends beyond the normal cause-and-effect elements of nature and human nature.

Later that year, the young pastor involved a group of twelve key leaders from his church’s governing board in an eight-week Bible study of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, and Titus. During that study, the leaders make a commitment to use the ten steps on the prayer card. The results were dramatically helpful, both to the individual people in the group and to the atmosphere of the congregation. Financial stewardship improved. A couple of the lay leaders who would barely speak to each other, partly because of strife they had experienced as employees of competing oil companies, went to lunch, worked out their differences, and became good friends.

A few months later, the pastor had the prayer card printed on three-fold, billfold-sized cards. He distributed them at the midpoint of a sermon on prayer and wove the ten steps of the prayer card into the sermon content. The concluding “altar call” asked people to sign an accompanying commitment card, pledging to set aside fifteen minutes every day for the next fourteen days to use the card’s ten steps.

The content of that sermon, titled “Keeping in Touch,” included the following paragraphs, which have been slightly altered for use by other pastors:

“Advertising people touched a deep human yearning a few years ago when they developed the slogan, ‘Ford Brings You a Better Idea.’ We may have different opinions about automobile brands, but that is exactly what most of us need—a better idea. Most of us are struggling with a problem of some sort in our lives. For some of us, it is a very large problem; for others, it is a series of smaller problems. But whatever the problem, we need insight regarding how to deal with it. We need a better idea.

“If we are Christians, it is easy to ask, ‘Why doesn’t God give me the answer to my problem?’ We know that God knows the answer, so why doesn’t God tell us? The Bible is full of people with whom God communicated in amazing ways: Matthew, Peter, Moses, Amos, and Isaiah. And there are other illustrations of people closer to our own time, such as David Livingston, Albert Schweitzer, E. Stanley Jones, Mother Teresa, and countless others to whom the word and power of God came in special ways. Why, then, doesn’t God communicate with me in that way? Why doesn’t God give me a better idea when I need it?

“Herb Miller says he stumbled across the answer to this question a few years ago while speaking on a university campus in New Mexico. The campus minister was showing him around the student center. As they walked down the hall, looking in different rooms, they came by a door marked ‘Prayer Room.’ Herb says, ‘I don’t think he meant to show me that one, but as we went by, I pulled the door open.’ This is how Herb described the prayer room.

‘I was amazed to see it stuffed with boxes, boots, clothes hangers, junk, and a general musty smell. On the alter stood a pair of cowboy boots, an old box that had at some earlier time contained a well-known brand of whisky, and a roll of toilet tissue. A little embarrassed, the campus minister told me that they used it for a storage area during the summer and hadn’t gotten it cleaned out yet.

‘At first glance, it seemed like a sacrilegious thing to me to stack a prayer room full of junk. I felt some righteous indignation was appropriate here. But then I realized what a dramatic picture that prayer room was of my own life. I had let important demands of my life crowd into the time I should have spent talking with God each day, until I could no longer get back into the habit of praying at all.’

“Take another look at the life of Christ. What made this man different from other people? One of the most observable differences was his prayer life. He was fully in touch with the hidden power of the universe. The disciples would often awaken early in the morning to discover Jesus missing from the camp.

When they found him, he was out by himself, praying. At other times, even in the midst of great crowds clamoring to hear him teach and many people who needed his healing touch, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place by himself to pray. If Jesus, the Son of God, needed to do that in order to stay sufficiently in touch with God to live an effective life, how can you and I expect to get by without it?

“And yet we do try to do without it, don’t we? Much of our prayer is done either because of a crisis—like the old story of the man who said he prayed the most serious prayer of his life while standing on his head after falling into a well—and out of habit (when someone asks us to start or stop a meeting by praying an invocation or benediction or by saying grace at a family dinner).

“For me, the bottom-line question of faith has come down to this: Are we or are we not alone in the universe? Is there just us? Are we alone in this room? Or is there something more here—something that we cannot see but something to which we can relate as the generations before us have related—something they have called God? If we are not alone in the universe, if there really is something here besides us, why would we not talk to that mysterious other?

“There are two major reasons why you and I do not unlock the hidden power God has put into our lives. One is that we don’t know how. The disciples had the same problem. That is why they said to Jesus, ‘Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1).’ They didn’t ask Jesus to teach them how to preach or how to do evangelism, or even how to heal; but they did request instruction in how to pray.

“We are going to look today at a contemporary answer to this question of how to pray. Thousands of people throughout North America have used the pattern of prayer I want to share with you this morning. I can guarantee that if you use this pattern faithfully every day, somewhere between the third and the tenth day after you begin, you will begin experiencing the presence and power of God when you pray. That may not happen the first day you use this pattern, but it always happens within the first two weeks.”

Ask the ushers to distribute the prayer cards. While that distribution occurs, read aloud to the congregation Matthew 6:5-13 and 7:7-11.

After everyone has a prayer card, read through it aloud and illustrate some of the points. Example: “Sometimes people respond to ‘4. Ask God to help one person whom you find it hard to like.’ with a denial that they have anyone like that in their lives. I say to such people, ‘Get away from me with that. You are either lying to yourself, lying to me, or you have a very bad memory.’”

“God is trying to communicate to our minds every day, every minute of the day. Like a gigantic radio station filling the airwaves of the world around us with love, wisdom, and peace, God is reaching out to us all the time. If we tune our minds to God’s mind in prayer, we will hear the words God is constantly sending us. If we, like the disciples, learn to relate to God in prayer, we will find insights about our problems, a sense of direction for our lives, and a new power to live in God’s will. That is the great good news of Christmas and Pentecost—not that God came to people once a long time ago but that God still comes to people today.

“‘But how can I do that?’ you ask. ‘I’m so busy. I am so short on time.’ But let’s put that question another way. If someone called you on the telephone and said, ‘If you will get up just fifteen minutes earlier every morning for the next several days, I’ll send someone to your house each day during that time. Each morning, he will knock on the door and give you a one-hundred-dollar bill.’

“What would you say? ‘I just don’t have time; I just can’t get up that early!’

“Isn’t it equally ridiculous to say that we don’t have time to pray? The real question, you see, is ‘Can I afford not to pray?’ With this kind of power available free, can I afford not to learn how to pray?

“A traveler was sitting at the counter in the Albuquerque airport restaurant, waiting on a plane and drinking coffee. The waitress was talking with a man seated next to him at the counter. From the conversation, the traveler realized that the two were old friends. The man asked her how she liked her trip to Japan. After recounting a few of her experiences, she said, ‘It was wonderful, but I sure am glad to be home. You know, if you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard.’

“That sentence stuck in the traveler’s mind like a spear: ‘If you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard.’

“That’s the way it is with God and us. Prayer is the language by which you speak to God, and more importantly, by which God speaks to you. And if you don’t speak the language, it’s real hard to know God is there. It’s real hard to receive from God the insights that God wants to give you.

“How is it with you? Do you speak the language?”