

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Breaking the 85 Worship Barrier

The second size barrier that most churches encounter is between 85 and 125 in worship attendance

Growing from 85 to 125:

If churches hope to break this barrier, more ministry programs must be added. As a church approaches this size, people will begin to increase their expectations, particularly at the adult level. When the church was smaller, the adults most likely found the worship service met their needs. They could pray for one another and serve each other without much

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effort. Most people, studies confirm, can only know about sixty persons on a first name basis. Thus, when a church grows beyond that number of participants, people begin to feel left out. To reach the next level of one hundred twenty-five, a church normally must add three new adult programs that relate to men and women.

Expectations for children's programming also increases. Children's classes up to sixth grade will be expected at this new level. Some may wish for a youth ministry, but the critical mass of youth is often too small to provide a youth program at this size. Additional ministry offerings outside of Sunday morning may also be needed, but some churches find they can make use of another church's children's program for activities during the week.

When a church grows beyond eighty-five people, it is a prime time to begin a small group ministry. The church is now large enough that a single fellowship meeting of the entire church is not easy to accomplish. But the desire of people for connection will provide an opportunity to bring people together in homes. A church should plan on offering a minimum of seven small groups for every

one hundred adults in worship attendance.

By this point the pastor will certainly be full-time. While continuing to be a model for ministry, it is critical at this level to begin delegating ministry to others. The church is still small enough that most worshipers will want contact with the pastor, but the hiring of a good secretary can assist in propelling the church to the next level.

Once again the need for adequate facilities becomes crucial. For a church to reach an average worship attendance of one hundred twenty-five in one worship service means a church needs a minimum seating capacity of one hundred and fifty. Add to this the required parking of seventy spaces, and it is easy to see how facilities can cause a church to plateau.

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Pastors must delegate ministry to others.

The second barrier to growth is at 85-125 worshipers.

Growing from 125 beyond 200:

Breaking the proverbial two hundred barrier has proven to be the biggest growth challenge that churches face. At least nine key factors must be integrated before a church is able to break this most difficult barrier.

First, a church must add a second full-time pastor and two full-time support staff. Recent studies confirm that churches grow at a rate equal to around 150 people for every full-time pastor. Given this reality, it is clear that for a church to grow beyond two hundred worshipers, it must have two pastors. The newest finding, however, is the need to have an equal number of support staff in place.

Second, the lead pastor must shift from operating primarily as a care-giving shepherd to being more of an administrative shepherd. The fact that three-fourths of churches are still smaller than two hundred reveals that most pastors are not able to make this shift. Or, perhaps it shows that the congregation will not allow the pastor to make this change in style.

Third, the pastor must begin delegating ministry to other leaders in the church. When a church grows past two hundred, it becomes evident that a pastor cannot do it all. History shows that when a pastor tries to do it all, and does not learn to delegate to others, the church stops growing.

Fourth, members of the congregation must be mobilized. The church must help members discover and use their spiritual gifts and natural talents. Growing beyond two hundred requires that more ministry programs be started, and it takes the wise recruiting, training, and deploying of laity for this to happen.

Fifth, as a church nears two hundred in size, and passes that mark, people begin to expect the church to have a youth program for junior high (or middle school students) and high school students.

Sixth, in order for most churches to pass the two hundred barrier, they must add a second worship service. While this depends to some degree on the size of the worship auditorium, studies of churches that have grown larger than two hundred point to the fact that most added a second worship service as part of their growth mix.

Seventh, churches must add new groups and classes. People need places to gather so they can serve, care, and support each other. The larger a church becomes the more difficult it is to meet adult needs through the worship service alone.

Eighth, the organization's structure must become more formal, but it should not be allowed to become bureaucratic in a way that stifles creativity and the ease of making decisions.

Ninth, expanding facilities is a continuing need as a church grows to the next size level. If the church has only one worship service, it will need a minimum of 110 parking spaces and a minimum seating capacity of two hundred and fifty to break the 200 barrier. Additional space will also be needed for childcare, classes, and group meetings.



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