

Reasons Why Small Churches Dwindle Over Time (NIV based)

Introduction:

It is sad to watch small churches unnecessarily dwindle over time, especially when considering that in the majority of cases, the causes of this dwindling effect can be fairly-easily identified, remedied, or avoided. Thereby, this document is written to assist in deterring the dwindling of small churches. Herein, all of the items listed in this document come from decades of observations of various true churches and ministries. This document can be printed out and used as a checklist of items that need to be worked on and improved in your church or ministry.

The Pastor:

Personal Deficiencies:

☐ The pastor has a lack of recognizing and/or following guidance from God, through the Holy Spirit.

☐ The pastor has: laziness; or bondage(s) to sin(s); or anger. (2 Timothy 2:24-25; James 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:31-32)

☐ The pastor is afraid of his own shadow - afraid of risking alienating people in his dwindling flock by making any changes or standing firm for what is right. Instead, he listens to and agreeably reacts to people who behave in an ungodly manner and/or promote worldly or ungodly agendas.

☐ The pastor yells at workers, members, and the congregation, including during his sermons.

☐ The pastor is unwilling to share authority with anyone, such as elders. So, there are too few or no elders to help him with the ministry workload.

☐ The pastor has become overworked, and/or very discouraged, and/or burned out.

Administrative Deficiencies:

☐ The pastor is distracted or diverted away from engaging in pursuits that will build the congregation.

☐ The pastor has poor skills in leadership, and/or time management, and/or administration, and/or pastoring.

☐ The pastor has poor, or inappropriate, or even ungodly management of the budget and finances of the church.

☐ The pastor (and/or leadership) operate by assuming rather than asking volunteer ministry workers if they will perform the same functioning this year that they did last year.

☐ There exists a failure to train in advance backup workers for technical jobs, for examples such as: sound board operator; projector computer operator; or video camera operator.

☐ There exists an ongoing presence of a die-hard core of old people running the church into the ground - slowly but distinctly dwindling the church.

Teaching / Preaching Deficiencies:

☐ The pastor has insufficient or even non-existent academic bible college/seminary training, thereby causing the pastor over time to prove to be inadequate and incompetent in preaching, teaching, and leading the church long-term.

___ Thereby (from the lack of academic bible college training), the pastor has poor exposition skills of Scripture verses in sermons and Bible lessons, having no depth, and/or little or no relevance to the congregation, or applications for the listeners to implement in their life.

___ Thereby (further), his sermons / lessons unquestionably are boring, or simplistic, or are mainly comprised of fluff and prattle.

___ Thereby (further again), the pastor essentially repetitiously preaches / teaches the same message and/or theme each week.

___ Or, the pastor is preaching / teaching essentially only "milk" of the Word and not "solid food" of the Word. (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a)

___ The pastor's sermons / lessons may be comprised mainly of a long linking of numerous verses, with very little continuity, explanation, and no applications.

Program Deficiencies:

___ There is no implementing of training nor any coaching of congregants to do ministry work.

___ There is inadequate or no periodic training on spiritual gifts. Thereby, there are congregants who have never discovered what their spiritual gifts are. There needs to be an identifying of spiritual gifts, personality, and natural abilities for each individual congregant, which then are matched with a corresponding type of ministry functioning, followed by the conducting of ministry training and subsequent coaching for each of those individual persons.

___ There is no program that makes an effort to form and maintain connectedness amongst other persons in the congregation, such as home groups or eat-together-after-church groups.

___ There is a poor or erroneous or deficient or defective or impractical understanding, strategy, and approach of how to conduct outreach that is effective at bringing new people into the church - in other words accomplishing church growth. And typically, there is essentially no church-wide evangelism program or efforts occurring.

___ There is present a dynamic of 'cronyism' - "Hiring favoritism shown to old friends without regard for their lack of qualifications", and/or 'nepotism' - "Hiring favoritism shown or granted to relatives who lack qualification". (AHD)

___ There is a failing to abide by clear guidelines in the Scriptures about various aspects and policies that are to be adhered to in the governance of the church, for examples such as:

___ women having authority over men; (1 Timothy 2:12)

___ women preaching and/or teaching the Scriptures to men; (1 Timothy 2:11-12)

___ a refusing to offer to God (and the congregation) the best (and even readily-available) quality of performance in the worship music, thus substantially compromising and degrading the integrity, appeal, and effectiveness of the worship music.

___ There is a refusing to temporarily suspend conducting programs for which God has not sufficiently supplied acceptable workers to do.

___ There is in fact a priority catering to the preferences of the elderly congregants while in reality being substantially or totally oblivious or incognizant to the preferences of

young families, for examples such as liturgical worship services and music of mainly or only old hymns.

___ There is a gross failure and perhaps even outright spiritual dullness in responding agreeably when God is actively and distinctly endeavoring to intercede in and reverse the downward decline of their church, which can then develop and manifest as a blatant refusal to proceed in the direction that God wants to lead them in, for them to walk by faith in (2 Corinthians 5:7, NAS) and take God-guided risks in, for examples:

___ when God specifies a new and somewhat different course of direction for the church to pursue and go;

___ when He brings in highly-qualified and extensively experienced ministry persons to assist the church and the leadership in reversing its downward decline, but incredibly, the leadership reacts to these persons with great suspicion, distancing, imposing of gag orders, and even to some degree veiled contempt, rejection, and repulsion.

___ There is a strictly and indiscriminately imposing of a policy of not allowing any new person to serve in any manner in the church for a period of one year, no matter how excellent the ministry credentials and ministry work experience record that person has.

___ There is an unwillingness to go out, seek, and actively attempt to recruit people who have the skills that are needed for doing ministry that is lacking in the church.

___ There is a failure to adequately advertise within the church for needs in the conducting of ministry in or by the church.

___ There is a failure to adequately and substantially promote upcoming programs, or events, or trainings of the church.

___ There is a failure to establish, ongoing-ly instill, and maintain a sense and urgency of outreach - to "go and make disciples". (Matthew 28:19)

___ There is an allowing and/or perpetrating the teaching of false doctrine, which of course, reduces the spiritual healthiness of that church, and limits what God will be willing to do within that church. (1 Timothy 1:3)

___ There is a lack of a children's program.

___ There is a refusal to allow unsavory unbelievers to attend church programs. (James 2:1-9)

___ There is a lack of using any songs in the worship music that are enthusiastic, lively, uplifting, or invigorating.

Many Or Most Members And Congregants:

___ There are people in the congregation who are extremely comfortable with the status quo in the functioning of the church and its programs, and are strongly resistant and even outright opposed to any changes that would upset their comfortableness and familiarity. They are essentially inflexible to anything else that God wants them to pursue or do next or instead.

___ There are people in the congregation who are (in a sense) 'green but bearing no fruit' (James 2:17, with Hebrews 6:7-8a) - spending years or decades of being only observers in the church, while essentially being unmotivated and even refusing to get involved, help, or contribute in any tangible or substantial manner to the ministry functioning of the church.

___ There are people in the congregation who have an introvert mindset, which results in them having little or no concern for people who are outside of their sphere of friendships or relationships. They have an inward focus rather than an outward focus.

___ There are people in the congregation who continue to be greatly adversely affected by bad experience(s) that they had in the past when trying to serve somehow in a ministry. They were substantially or even severely mistreated and/or abused by the church leadership at that time in the past, and they have since never recovered or healed from that experience. (Note: To assist them in recovering, the document "Recovering From Ministerial Abuse, Assault, Murder" is available for free download on the 'Counseling' web-page of this website, www.BelieverAssist.com .)

___ There are people in the congregation who have a critical spirit, or a skeptical spirit, or a worldly perspective, or typically evaluate improvement efforts as futile or hopeless, or feel unappreciated for their ministry work involvement.

___ In the culture of the church, there exists a social norm that in effect is a failure or refusal to consistently warmly greet, friendly interact with, and then test possibly eventually pursuing personal friendship bonding with new visitors to the church.

___ In the church, there is the presence of a divisive faction that is adamant in promoting and dictating their agenda regarding one or more social, medical, or political issues, or divergent doctrinal beliefs even though those beliefs are readily debunked by sound interpretation of the Scriptures.

___ Within the congregation, there exists a covert or perhaps overt infighting, possibly leading to the attempting of a church split or hostile takeover.

___ Some members, and/or ministry leaders, and even pastors are unwilling to do a particular kind of ministry work for which God has called and definitely gifted that person to do, because that ministry work is difficult, or involves them making personal sacrifices that they are not willing to make.

Facilities (building(s), parking, proximity):

___ There is inconvenient, unacceptable, or inadequate parking available.

___ The location of the church building facility is too far away from where congregants live and are willing to ongoing-ly commute from.

___ The tithing to the church is not enough to cover the ongoing financial expenses of the church, for examples such as: rent, mortgage payments, electricity, heat, insurance, buildings repairs, cleaning, and employee salaries.

___ The conditions around and/or the demographics for the location of the facilities have changed or have become unsuitable.

___ The facilities and its' features have become outdated, and/or unappealing, and/or insufficient, for examples: wooden and uncomfortable pews; huge wooden pulpit; too-small stage and inadequate sound system for the worship music team; old or cathedral-like architecture or outer façade; inadequate heating or air conditioning systems; and etcetera.

The Importance Of Elders:

___ Ultimately, it is the head pastor who sets the spiritual tone, the atmosphere, the culture, the direction, and the programs of the church - which need to be godly, loving, resolute / determined, and active, while consistently and continuously pressing for the congregants to each be godly active servants in the church.

___ By God's design, elders are to be overseers of individual ministries, and collaborative co-workers and leaders with and alongside the head pastor in "directing the affairs of the church". (1 Timothy 5:17)

___ Together, the head pastor and his collaborative elders can be a formidable team that not only successfully sustains the operating of a small church, but can furthermore build the small church much larger. Instead of having only the head pastor unsuccessfully trying to do all of the many needed leadership and pastoral functions, now with the elders, there are multiple men successfully doing all of the needed leadership and pastoral functions, plus additional advantageous functions as well.

___ Of course, unity and harmony amongst the elders and the head pastor are of critical importance for the healthy and effective functioning of their joint leadership in a small church.

___ Mutual submission and agreement should prevail amongst the elders and the pastor. But when substantial disagreement arises regarding a particular matter, then no action or change in action, regarding that particular matter, should be taken until unity and harmony are established regarding that matter.

NOTE: On the "Home Page - Ministry" of this website, www.BelieverAssist.com, the "Elder Training Series" contains a substantial amount of training for pastors and elders, including on the spiritual gifts of: 'Teaching' - Session 14; 'Preaching', 'Evangelism', and 'Leadership' - Session 15; and 'Administration' and 'Pastoring' - Session 16.

Works Cited:

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