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IDEAS AND INSIGHTS FOR ACTIVE CONGREGATIONS

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How Much Staff Is Enough?

Church members know that staffing is a crucial component of congregational effectiveness. Less often, however, do members agree on, "How many staff and what kind?"

Small Churches

The majority of members in churches that average fewer than 125 in morning worship want a full-time pastor. Dramatic increases in health insurance premiums increasingly make that an impossible dream.

When we change the question from "What do people want?" to "What works best?" we get a different answer. Generally speaking, small churches more often grow in membership under the leadership of a part-time, bi-vocational lay pastor than when a pastor divides his or her time between two or more congregations. Recognizing this fact, many denominations are taking more seriously the need to train, certify, and give appropriate recognition to diaconal or licensed pastors who serve part-time.

Secretarial Staff. At 100 in average-worship attendance, a church needs a secretary who works five mornings per week—twenty hours. What if the secretary also carries the duties of financial secretary, treasurer, and bookkeeping? That requires a Monday through Friday, thirty-hours-per-week secretary.

Small churches should employ a secretary from outside their membership. This policy reduces the natural inclination of members to feel that a secretary (because she is a member) exercises more power and control than is appropriate. Additionally, hiring a member as secretary in a small church is like employing relatives in a secular business. They are easy to hire, and they often bring strong emotional commitment to their work. However, if they experience unhappiness or perform their job poorly, the emotional damage from discharging them is far greater than when they are not family members.

Midsized Churches

One full-time pastor and a full-time secretary can care for a congregation of 125-150 in average worship attendance. A full-time secretary is one of the best financial investments a congregation of this size can make.

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 laypersons that specialize in ministries such as youth, elementary children, hospital visitation, etc.

In churches of this size, 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 accomplished is greater per staff dollar spent. (b) They usually stay longer. (c) Their performance is often superior.

Employing part-time staff from within the congregation always involves some risks. What if the job performance proves less than satisfactory to parishioners and/or the senior pastor? What if the working arrangement proves unsatisfactory to the staff member? Minimize those risks by employing part-time lay staff on a yearly-contract basis, with both parties reviewing the contract at the end of each year.

What qualifications are required in those lay staff posi-



tions? Each person should possess a passion for his/her ministry role, spiritual gifts appropriate to that role, aptitude for the role, skills appropriate to the role, and willingness to work some evening hours every week to accomplish the role. Staff members who possess these five qualifications can sharpen their skills by attending workshops. No amount of continuing education compensates for the absence of those five qualities.

At 250-300 average worship attendance, the pastor begins needing someone to carry additional clergy responsibilities such as weddings and funerals. The best step is calling a part-time retired clergyperson, if available.

Secretarial Staff. A capable full-time secretary facilitates the ministry involvement of church members, maintains high-quality communication flow, and maximizes efficient time use by the pastor and other staff persons for tasks that they and they alone can perform. Generally speaking, as a church moves closer to 300 in average worship attendance, hiring church members as staff becomes less dangerous. Until that time, hiring from outside the congregation increases the likelihood of a positive result.

Two part-time secretaries do not equal one full-time secretary. Why not? The pastor must carry the time-consuming communication ball between the two secretaries! Supervising two part-time secretaries also takes more than twice as much of the pastor's time as does supervising one full-time secretary. Nor does a half-time secretary, aided by five volunteers for the afternoons, equal one full-time secretary. Some of the volunteers inevitably fail to appear some days, without providing a replacement. Again, the pastor diverts precious time into filling the gap!

The midsize church usually needs to add an additional clerical-staff member as it grows from 150 toward 350 in average worship attendance—often, to carry financial and accounting responsibilities.

Large Churches

Beyond 350 in average worship attendance, the “economy of scale” theory in staffing is mostly myth. Churches usually need one full-time program-staff person (or part-time equivalencies thereof) for each 100 people in average worship attendance.

Obtain staffing-related information at the following website: www.churchstaffing.com/leadnet/ features (a) 200 job descriptions for all types of church positions; (b) over 3,000 resumes; (c) managed job search; (d) listing your church's job opening in a database available to hundreds of staff professionals; (e) criminal background checks, employment verification, and reference checking; and (f) salary package comparison database.

Secretarial Staff. One reliable formula is, “one clerical-staff member for each additional 200 worshippers, beyond 350.” Another general formula is, “one clerical-staff member for each two full-time program staff or part-time equivalencies thereof.”

Megachurches

In smaller congregations, the senior pastor can delegate to staff members tasks and responsibilities in which they serve as assistants to the senior pastor. Above 1,000 in average worship attendance, the senior pastor must hold staff members accountable for results in their area of expertise, rather than merely delegating assistant responsibilities and closely supervising them.

At approximately 1,200-1,400 in average worship attendance, the church needs a business administrator (who is usually a layperson) and a program director (who is a pastor). These two individuals direct operations, programming, and staff. They are accountable to the senior pastor for results in their leadership roles. This arrangement frees the senior pastor from day-to-day details. Thus, he or she can focus on preaching, teaching, pastoral concerns, and serving as the public and parish symbol for the church.

Many churches that grow beyond 1,500 to 1,800 in average worship attendance add to their staff an executive pastor (sometimes called administrative pastor, staff director, or executive director). This person works in tandem with the senior pastor and usually serves as staff supervisor, along with helping to guide the overall direction and function of the church. For detailed ideas on how to expand the staff effectiveness in a church of this size, see procedures for staff meetings and other tips on pages 152-167 of Adam Hamilton's excellent book, *Leading Beyond the Walls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

Financing Clergy and Program Staff

In growing churches, if the new part-time or full-time staff member is genuinely needed and if the person is competent, the new position usually generates sufficient increased donations to pay for itself in six months to one year.

Whether worship attendance is 30 or 1,800 people, most churches expend about 50 percent of their budget on personnel (clergy, program staff, secretarial, and custodial).

In too many instances, financial stewardship levels far below the potential of the members dictate inadequate staffing. Thus, when leaders discuss staffing needs, the question of “what kind and how many?” is often sabotaged by the poverty-syndrome question of “can we really afford that much staff?” The prime reason for inadequate financial stewardship is virtually always an inadequate (or non-existent) annual stewardship campaign.

The Bottom Line

What steps should our congregation consider taking to provide the appropriate number and type of staff?