

State of the “Smaller” Church: Trends for 2025

I meet so many pastors who say, “Well, I pastor a small church.” Maybe that’s true, but let’s put things in perspective:

- If you are fully employed as a pastor at your congregation, you are not at a small church
- If your church’s average attendance is more than 109 people, you are, actually, a larger-than-average church

Chances are, your church is bigger than you think. But it is a size that comes with unique challenges.

Too often, all the news and headlines go toward the big churches. We serve most of those, but did you know that over half of our church work is now searches for churches between 100 and 500 people? Yours is the size church I grew up in, and the size church I pastored right out of Princeton Seminary. I’ll always have a place in my heart for the so-called “smaller” churches.

I know you have very different needs and very different challenges that come with your size. And with that, here are some tips to help your church grow and thrive in 2025.

Use data to become experts in your community

Ever worry that your congregation is more interested in listening to one of the super gifted preachers on YouTube than you? Well they are. But you can reach your congregation in a way nobody else can. Here’s your competitive advantage: You can become an expert in your local city without spending money.

Billy Graham often spoke about how he would prepare for a crusade message. He said he would sit down at a table with the Bible on one side and a newspaper on the other. And he would ask himself, “What does God’s word have to say in today’s world?”

Any pastor of any size church can do this now, and not just with global news. You can go micro. You can become the resident expert on your church’s community. Try using Google News set to your ZIP Code. You can learn more about what’s going on in your very particular part of the world more easily than ever before.

Perhaps this year, you sit down for message preparation with the Bible, or [YouVersion](#) on one side of you, and your local Google News alerts on the other. Try putting every message through the lens of, “What does God’s word have to say for my community today?”

If you have a little bit of money to spend, you might also consider contacting our friends at [Gloo](#). They have aggregated incredible research on local communities and what visitors are looking for in your area. Imagine knowing whether your community has a higher than normal divorce rate or a higher than normal addiction rate or a higher than normal affluence rate? Knowing that data can help you handcraft your messages in a way that is more meaningful for your local congregation. The impact your messages have will never be surpassed by those written for the entire nation.

There’s riches in the niches. Find yours.

There’s an old saying in business: “You’ll find your riches in the niches.” Businesses have learned that they either need to specialize in something very particular or become part of something very large. For instance, law firms either need to specialize in a very particular area of law, or go ahead and be absorbed by one of the mammoth sized firms in the country. You can see this happening in churches as well if you look.

Churches that are unable to differentiate often find themselves in a decline, and must ask themselves whether or not they should be part of a merger with a larger church. According to studies a couple of years ago from my friend [Jim Tomberlin](#), about one out of three new locations for multi-site churches are the direct result of a merger or adoption of a smaller church that is struggling.

By contrast, the churches that are 100 to 500 that I see thriving are ones that adopt a very niche cause. There’s one church on my morning run here in Houston that has decided their niche is serving breakfast to the homeless. Another client of ours of the same size has decided their one mission project will be Compassion International and ministry to displaced children. By defining that one thing, congregants are able to clearly differentiate from other churches. They will be able to say, “Our church is the very best at _____.” If you can tie that niche directly to a unique community need, even better.

I promise you, if you’ll find your niches, you’ll find Kingdom riches.

Churches your size can afford excellent video.

As we noted in the longer whitepaper that was sent out, video is the future. But how can a church like yours afford to embrace this trend?

Video and graphics are expensive to staff, and often out of the reach of churches with your budgets. But there are thankfully workarounds. I see some of the most vibrant churches 100-500 in size doing this, and I predict it will become a major trend moving forward.

If you don't know the software called [Canva](#), you should get to know it quickly. This is one of the leading graphic design software that's been around for a long time. But in the last year, they have released Canva with AI. Unless you need absolute world class video and graphics, Canva with AI can be your graphic designer for the fraction of the cost of a staff person.

I would also strongly encourage a church your size to consider [Church Visuals](#) for videos. I'm not getting compensated for this plug, I just really like this company that can produce quality video for your services and all your communications.

I'd love to hear your thoughts if you have any other trends you see coming for churches like yours. Thanks so much for all you do, it's a joy to serve alongside you.