

Small, Strong Congregations **Kennon L. Callahan**

Chapter 1 **Small Is Strong**

The art is to look at the twelve central characteristics of strong, healthy congregations:

1. Specific, concrete missional objectives
2. Pastoral and lay visitation
3. Corporate, dynamic worship
4. Significant relational groupings
5. Strong leadership resources
6. Solid decision making
7. Several programs and activities
8. Open accessibility
9. High visibility
10. Adequate land and parking
11. Adequate space and facilities
12. Solid financial resources

Look for the strengths you have, not the ones you wish you had.

In small, strong congregations, people discover the steadfast love of God.

People are looking for a congregation that helps them live whole, healthy lives.

The art is to grow the real strengths God gives you in ways that match with the community God gives you.

Small, strong congregations do not try to do everything.

These qualities are present in many small, strong congregations across the planet:

- Mission and service
- Compassion and shepherding
- Community and belonging
- Self-reliance and self-sufficiency
- Worship and hope
- Leaders and team
- Just enough space and facilities
- Giving and generosity

Chapter 2

Mission and Service

- Small, strong congregations share one excellent mission.
- The congregation shares its mission as its gift with the whole community. The participants of the congregation live a theology of service, not survival.
- The mission begins, frequently, with some precipitating event, some planning event, or some other decisive event that stirs people's discovery of their longings and strengths.
- The mission begins with three to five people. They share their mission with the spirit of a team. They deliver concrete, effective help.
- The mission is mutual. The consequence is that new helpers for the mission come from among the persons helped. The congregation is a legend for the mission and service of a few people in the congregation.

The mission helps the people of a small congregation focus on someone beyond themselves.

They share richly what they have.

Small, strong congregations are gift-driven, not getting driven. They are strength-driven, not weakness-driven. They are spirit-driven, not size-driven. Small, strong congregations are high-compassion congregations. They do not ask, "What's in it for us?" They are not interested in church growth. They are interested in people growth.

The mission may focus on any of these possibilities:

- Life stage
- Human hurt and hope
- Sociology
- Vocation
- Geography
- Community and civic interest
- Recreation
- Music and arts
- Health
- Religion

Sociology: one small congregation shares an amazing mission with the poor.

Vocation: In one mill town, a congregation discovered its mission to help the persons who work in the mill.

Geography: people who live in the immediate area of the church.

Health: The congregation decided to help with the vaccination effort.

Religion: On a Saturday morning, they offered a one-time Bible study.

The mission begins with three to five people.

The mission is mutual. The consequence is that new helpers for the mission come from among the persons helped.

When the mission is mutual, no dependency-codependency patterns are created. When the mission is shared in a top-down fashion, where we imagine that “we” are helping “them, co-dependency becomes the fatal pattern.

It is the mutual encouragement people share as they help one another, as they discover a mutual relationship with one another.

When the mission is mutual, members of the community help.
When the mission is mutual, friends of the congregation who live elsewhere help with your mission.

When the mission is mutual, members of your congregation help.

Chapter 3 Compassion and Shepherding

Small, strong congregations share a remarkable spirit of shepherding and compassion:

- A small, strong congregation is compassion-driven.
- The congregation shares the sacrament of compassion.
- The congregation lives a theology of forgiveness.
- The congregation is a legend for its spirit of a loving heart.

Small, strong congregations are compassion-driven.

The small, strong congregation is a high-compassion community, not a high-commitment church.

Small, strong congregations have a security about their own relationships with one another. They are therefore able to share with new people the same grace, love, and encouragement with which God is blessing them.

Compassion, vision, challenge, and commitment are good friends. However, what people long for and look for is someone who will share with them the gift of compassion.

Small, strong congregations share the sacrament of compassion, the sacrament of shepherding. A sacrament is a sign of grace, compassion, community, and hope. The sacrament of shepherding is an outward and visible sign of the inner and invisible grace of God, compassion of Christ, and healing hope of the Holy Spirit. When you care with another person, you share one of the richest sacraments in the Christian movement.

They share events of good fun and good time. Anniversaries, births, birthdays, graduations, major promotions, significant community events, and retirements are events we experience with a sacramental spirit.

They do compassion well because they do forgiveness well.

People increasingly long for and look for (1) a grouping that helps them with compassion and shepherding and (2) a grouping in which they can share their compassion and their shepherding.

Chapter 4

Community and Belonging

- A small, strong congregation is open and inclusive.
- The congregation helps people discover family.
- The congregation serves multiple neighborhoods.
- The congregation lives a healthy life as one, or three, or more groupings.

A small, strong congregation is marked by the dynamic of community, not the multiplicity of committees.

Small, strong congregations invest their resources in helping people discover community; find roots, place, belonging; discover family and friends.

Some congregations are closed, exclusive, isolated, and cliquish. This is a matter of spirit, not size. This exclusive attitude can be found in small, large, middle, and mega-congregations.

Small, strong congregations are a family, not an institution. They are a relational, person-centered, and people-centered group. They are not functional, institutional, and organization-centered.

Small, strong congregations think, plan, and act like a healthy, extended family. The customs, habits, and traditions confirm that we are a family together. Compassion and shepherding are primary values. Most of the decisions are made informally. Much of what happens is spontaneous, on the spur of the moment. There is a wonderful family spirit, fully open to new people.

In our time, people join a family, not an organization. People join a congregation, not a denomination. People join a movement, not an institution. In our time, people are drawn to a community, not a committee. They are drawn to the spirit of a movement more than the structure of an institution.

Small, strong congregations do not have enough leaders to serve on all of the prescribed committees.

As a congregational family, small, strong congregations make most of their decisions together, and they make most of their decisions informally.

Small, strong congregations serve multiple neighborhoods:

- We live in a relational neighborhood
- We live in a vocational neighborhood
- We live in a sociological neighborhood
- We live in a geographical neighborhood
- We live in a genealogical neighborhood

There is multiple belonging in these neighborhoods= multiple community

The small, strong congregation reaches out to the convergence of multiple neighborhoods that network with it and, in that sense, serves these neighborhood networks.

The neighborhood of a small, strong congregation is a collection of people who bring with them interconnecting relationships with the five neighborhoods in which they live.

The healthy cell grouping is open and inclusive, warm and welcoming. People discover a healthy sense of family in the grouping.

The healthy congregation helps people learn and develop their capacity for dealing constructively with the multiplicity of neighborhoods in which they find themselves.

Three-grouping congregations do fight. But they take turns; they fight around. The balance of power shifts. It is no longer simply a fight

between the old-timers and the newcomers. Likewise, four grouping fight. They take turns. They learn how to live with one another.

There is no future for unhealthy, two-cell, small congregations.

A healthy small, strong congregation is the result of one open cell, or three or more open cells.

If we do fight, we now fight about the key mission projects that serve well the multiplicity of people we are now helping.

Chapter 5

Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency

Syndrome of denominational dependence - it became a pattern for the congregation to depend on the denomination to help them from one crisis event to the next.

The denomination was so used to helping them that, even after the congregation had broken its pattern of denomination dependency, the denomination was having difficulty breaking its own part of the codependent-dependent pattern of behavior.

- A small, strong congregation has a consistent spirit of self-reliance.
- The congregation encourages creativity and improvisation.
- The congregation benefits from community resources.

Three things are true in some small, strong congregations:

1. There is a shortage of personnel and money.
2. There are inadequate supplies.
3. There is hardly enough of anything.

Small, strong; small, weak; and small dying congregations all tend to have about the same range of resources. The difference is what they do with the resources they have.

A further difficulty is that only you can grow you. No one can do it for you.

- Under threat, people wither. With encouragement, people grow.
- People are not persuaded to do something because someone tries to frighten them.
- Congregations are tough and resilient and last a long, long, time.

Small, strong congregations live in the community, not inside the congregation.

Small, strong congregations think, plan, behave, and act with the mind-set of how they can serve in the world.

The pastor who does too much for a congregation creates a congregation that does too much for the people it seeks to serve.

If the pastor shares a reasonable amount of resourcing, with an encouraging spirit, the congregation learns how to be self-reliant as a congregation.

Chapter 6 Worship and Hope

Consistently, the services are:

- Warm and welcoming
- Stirring and inspiring
- Congregational and sacramental
- Helpful and hopeful

In small, strong congregations, the art is to focus on Christmas and Easter along with the five to eight major-major Sundays. The art is to develop stirring, inspiring worship for these times. Small, strong congregations do well what they do well.

Most of the time, it helps to have a simple service and, if you choose, as simple bulletin.

Chapter 7 Team, Leaders, and Congregation

The ability to live and share as a team is one of the important competencies of small, strong congregations.

- Their capacity to see the whole, not the parts
- Their understanding of the diversity of gifts
- Their appreciation of the gifts of a pastoral leader

Small, strong congregations offer a youth program built on the principle of the whole.

In a small, strong congregation, the whole family participates in the whole congregation.

In our time, particularly in small, strong congregations, the primary competencies important for a pastor to develop and share are these:

- Good shepherd
- Helpful preacher
- Wise, caring leader
- Community pastor

Importantly, in small, strong congregations the key leaders, the grassroots participants, and the pastor see themselves as a competent team together.

Leaders lead. These factors contribute to their being leaders:

- Their capacity for imagination and creativity
- Their gift of encouragement and coaching
- Their appreciation for the steps of loving, listening, learning, and leading

One of the most important competencies in small, strong congregations is the capacity to be a congregation together over the long haul.

The following factors contribute to their being a congregation

- Their spirit of continuity
- Their appreciation of being informal
- Their ability to pass the power

It is not possible to be a small, strong congregation and at the same time rotate leaders and change pastoral leadership every three or four years.

The solution to a boss-run church is a three-step process:

1. Develop and encourage competent leaders.
2. Add new people to the leadership team (you can add people without rotating anyone off).
3. Advance a shared understanding of congregational leadership.

Four stages of creating a healthy team:

1. Learn the possibilities for the team and begin to picture accomplishing some of them.
2. Discover the match of strengths the leader brings and the few key objectives to accomplish.
3. Develop and mobilize a team to achieve these few key objectives.
4. Let the leader and team come into their own.

It takes some time to move through the steps of loving, listening, and learning to reach the step of leading.

Small, strong congregations pass the power well.

Chapter 8

Space and Facilities

Small, strong congregations are healthy and vital because their facilities are:

- Adequate for their mission
- Both sacred and shared
- A blessing, not a burden

The first priority of your congregation is to discover the mission to which God is inviting you.

Small, strong congregations know how, generously and efficiently, to share space.

Key principles that are central with respect to your space and facilities:

- The focus of our congregation is on the mission.
- We have just enough facilities, but not too many.
- We sense the sacred in our lives more than in our building.
- We practice shared, multiple use of our facilities.
- Our facilities help our mission, not hinder it.
- We develop the wisdom and generosity of enduring gifts.

Chapter 9

Giving and Generosity

Small, strong congregations look forward to special planned offerings that share when four things are true:

1. They feel they have participated in choosing the causes.
2. There are clear people pictures as to who is helped.
3. They can see that what they give goes directly to the people they seek to help.
4. They are encouraged to give in a way that matches the way they live and give.

Small, strong congregations make available all six sources of giving:

1. Spontaneous giving
2. Major Community Sunday giving
3. Special planned giving
4. Major project giving
5. Annual giving
6. Enduring giving

Enduring Giving- people look for ways to give enduring gifts that have lasting value.

In small, strong congregations, we are alive with these strengths for giving:

- Giving is compassion-driven
- It is marked by solid financial leadership
- It is developed with positive reinforcement.

Five major motivations out of which people share their generosity:

1. Compassion: sharing, caring, giving, loving, serving
2. Community: good fun, good time, roots, place, belonging, friends, family
3. Challenge: attainment, accomplishment, achievement
4. Reasonability: data, analysis, logic, “it makes good sense”
5. Commitment: duty, vow, obligation, loyalty

Chapter 10

Living with the Spirit of Promise

You can move forward as you:

1. Claim your strengths
2. Expand one current strength
3. Add one new strength
4. Act