

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 7 MAY 2017



Getting Unstuck

Karl Vater

Pastoring a small church is not for the faint of heart.

It involves ministering to and with people at every level of their lives. Spiritual, social, financial, emotional and more. All with extremely limited resources at every level, including time, staffing, facility, finances and more.

Then, even if we're managing all of that complexity well, we often face criticism from people both inside and outside the church (not to mention inside our own hearts and heads) if that wonderful, complex, multi-faceted organism called the local church isn't keeping pace with expected numerical growth rates.

This is when we get tempted to offer explanations (also-known-as excuses) for our lack of growth, even though other churches have overcome harder challenges than our church.

Innovative small churches find alternatives, not excuses.

Not Growing? No Excuses Allowed

One of the prime mandates of my ministry is that we are a no-excuse zone.

What's a small church pastor to do when we're working hard, seeing signs of health, but the numbers are stuck?

Don't look for excuses, look for alternatives.

Most of us have an image in our heads of what church growth should look like. Some see a bigger crowd or a bigger building. Some see a large, but mostly empty building getting full again. But for many of us, that church growth image comes down to one final result. More people in my church.

As much as we like to deny it, most of us think and act like a bigger church is a better church.

But is it always better?

Exploring Alternatives

Max Depree said that the first responsibility of leadership is to define reality. I agree wholeheartedly.

Defining reality includes identifying and assessing our challenges as well as our opportunities. It also includes identifying and assessing alternative ways to overcome those challenges.

Problems don't become excuses when we say "we can't do it that way." They become excuses when we say "we can't do it any other way, either."

Small churches are well known for our lack of resources. But we should never be defined by them. Our lack of resources can either limit our ministry or spark our creativity.

Innovative ministry is not about being cool, hip or trendsetting. It's about looking for alternative ways to do ministry when the usual ways stop working.

We need to start asking hard, even scandalous questions about church health and growth. Including "what if our church's best ministry adds more people to other churches than it does to ours?"

Can we be okay, even celebrate kingdom growth when it doesn't match up with the church growth picture in our heads?

If my ideas for church growth are limited to the visible results in the church I pastor, then my ideas are smaller than God's ideas.

...we need to stop complaining, stop offering excuses and keep looking for fresh new ways...

Growing Outside, Not Just Inside The Church

What if God is calling your congregation to be a catch-and-release church? An equipping and sending church? A church with a bigger online presence than a physical one?

There are so many ways a local congregation can contribute to the growth of the church if we take our blinders off and stop insisting that every result of our ministry has to be seen in our seats on Sunday.

Sure, there are many churches that do great outside-the-walls ministry and get bigger inside the walls. But not every church is called to do both.

If your church, like the one I pastor, is called to be bigger outside than inside, we need to stop complaining, stop offering excuses and keep looking for fresh new ways to do exciting, kingdom-building ministry.

No excuses. No narrow thinking. No territorialism.

No limits.



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Some Examples of Innovative Church Ministry

- Playgroup**
- English as a second language (ESL) class**
- Online sermons and podcasts**
- Discipleship program** (one-on-one mentoring)
- Prayer group network** (at different times and places)
- Hospitality** (e.g. café-quality morning tea)
- Lunch fellowship** (not only on Sundays or in the hall)
- A second Sunday service in a different language** (e.g. Korean, Arabic)
- Conference day with guest speaker**
- Visiting choirs/musicians/singers**
- Organised car-sharing** (lifts to church for those without transport)
- Church open-garden**

The Goal of All Church Ministry

A
Christ-centred
message bringing
Christ-centred
hope to
Christ-centred
individuals in a
Christ-centred
community.