

What Can My Church Learn from a Megachurch?

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10 principles from large churches for ministry in any size church

“What could my church possibly learn from these behemoths with million-dollar budgets, hundreds of staff and thousands of excited volunteers?”

In my travels, I repeatedly hear pastors ask this question. I understand why. But my last 20-plus years of research on megachurches throughout the world suggest that churches of all sizes have much to learn from this phenomenon. However, I don't believe the primary lessons come from their specific ministry efforts. Instead, the most important things we can learn are the strategies behind all their ministry efforts.

I've found that one of the biggest keys to most megachurches' success is their ability to minister in, and adapt to, an ever-changing contemporary world. A vital church reaches out to both its members and non-Christians in relevant ways, and megachurches seem to do this both accidentally and intentionally.

Here are 10 basic principles gleaned from megachurches that I believe churches of all sizes can apply:

1) Don't strive for size; strive to serve God. The vast majority of megachurches came about because their pastors had a passion and a vision for reaching the unchurched. They were able to communicate this vision to a group of people who embraced it and joined the pastor in a commitment to share the Gospel with their friends and neighbors.

2) Know your strengths and put them to work. Come to an awareness of exactly what God is calling your church to be and do in your context. This requires spiritual seeking through prayer on the part of the pastor and church leaders. It also involves knowing the needs and cultural characteristics of the persons you are called to reach. You must speak the Gospel in their language. This may mean embracing the use of electric guitars, drums and keyboards, or it could mean hiring a pastor of another race, or starting another service on Sunday evening for young adults.

3) Evangelize in every possible way. The entire congregation, every person—not just the leadership—is commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations. It is clear from our research that megachurches operate more evangelistic programs than smaller churches do. Even more

important, their membership is involved in evangelism to a greater extent. It is also true that the fastest-growing megachurches have the largest percentages of their members engaged in outreach activities.

4) Make it appealing, then make it challenging. Most visitors want to slip in anonymously and experience worship in a user-friendly manner. But don't leave newcomers at the "spectator stage." Christianity is about maturing in the faith. The goal of pastors and teachers is to help the body of Christ "become mature." Many megachurches provide intentional paths for new persons to move into deeper levels of the faith.

5) Worship is not just a "Sunday thing." Megachurch leaders place high priority on worship as central to the life of the church. Their worship services are overwhelmingly described as joyful, inspirational, thought-provoking, exciting, informal, reverent and constantly evolving. But if church is only Sunday morning entertainment, it isn't any better than a Friday evening movie. Preach and demonstrate a faith that is practiced daily in everyday ways.

6) Create participants—not members. Active participation matters. If your members don't attend and aren't active in the life of the church, sooner or later they'll fall away. Megachurches create intentional ways to integrate new persons into the active life of the church. This means more than just new members classes. Show them how committed Christians serve God and the church and encourage them to do likewise. The sooner new people become involved in ministry, the more likely they are to stay and participate.

7) Connect the congregation. It is well-known that megachurches intentionally use small fellowship groups to create intimacy and connections. No church, however, should take the creation of interpersonal relationships for granted. It will not happen naturally. Think about turning all your groups into cell groups. Any grouping of volunteers, hobbyists or committee members can be a small group and strengthen both members' spiritual lives and enhance the social fabric of the congregation. Regardless of their primary intent, these regular gatherings should model a fellowship group and incorporate prayer, Scripture study and support of personal concerns. Think of this as strengthening the spiritual fabric that holds the church together.

8) Whatever you do, do it with excellence. Very few churches will be able to orchestrate worship or put on pageants comparable to the megachurches. However, every size church can start on time, have greeters and ushers who undertake their duties professionally, make sure their bathrooms are clean, and ensure the landscaping is well-groomed. Appearance and attitudes matter to someone attending for the first time. View your church as you would your home when you prepare to entertain guests. After all, God asks for our best and so do those you want to reach out to—whatever "best" means for your church.

9) Empower people to identify and live out their calling. No megachurch pastor ever created a megachurch alone. God was the primary active partner, but it also required the commitment and spiritual labor of the entire congregation. All Christians are called to serve God through their own unique talents and gifts. Megachurches encourage their members to recognize what God is calling

each of them to do, and then empower them to use these gifts and offer them space in which to do it. These churches have a great capacity for sharing the load of a mega-ministry among hundreds, even thousands, of volunteers. By providing a place for individuals to express their calling to serve God, the megachurch helps to mature the faith of their people while expanding the scope of the church's ministry to the world.

10) Sanctification isn't just for newcomers. It's for the saints, too. Strive to deepen the spirituality of your entire congregation. If you are intentionally taking new Christians around the "bases," make sure the longtime Christians continue to run the bases too. Many megachurches offer weekly discipleship and evangelism classes, as well as men's and women's Bible studies, and they encourage both young and mature Christians to participate. Christians who are growing in their faith journey create growing churches.

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