

HOW BIG: A PLAN OR ACCIDENT?

A Biblical Perspective

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How should the church/ministry grow and expand? The central question is whether to grow wildly or control growth. Another question has to do with size of the church/ministry in the long run. Or maybe it's time to retrench. When you grow at will you are reacting to opportunity. This was the strategy of General Patton in World War II: "Take as much ground every day as you can." For the church, it's expand your market as fast as possible. The notion is "big is better." Many believe the opportunity is there, and you better not pass it by or perhaps it is gone forever.

Should the church ministry grow and expand? While the answer to that question may seem obvious, it is not as clear as it might seem. While we suggest that the church should grow, growth does not always mean expansion. In addition to getting larger, growth may mean getting smaller, better, or simply changing into something different. To make the choice as to how to grow and how much, it is necessary to understand why churches/ministries should grow in the first place.

Why Should Churches/Ministries Grow?

To answer the question—why should churches/ministries grow—we must understand how organizations grow as systems. We start with the presumption that any organization is a system. We know that all systems by nature may self-destruct in a process theorists call entropy. Entropy is the tendency for an organized system to become disorganized—essentially to fall apart. We can explain the tendency toward falling apart by borrowing liberally from Newton's laws and applying them to the church setting.

Church revitalization expert, Norman Shawchuck, observes the church as any other organizational system: a set of interrelated elements within a particular environment.

Constituting its nature and mission are certain subsystems that are crucial to its existence: its organizational structure, human relational system, and theological or belief structure. In order for the church to grow and be healthy, the internal systems must be developed and managed to support that growth. It is here that Newton's laws, as applied to organizations, are helpful in determining how growth can be properly managed for the overall success of the organization.

First Law of Organizations: A Church/Ministry at Rest Tends to Stay at Rest.

We know that organizations don't like to change, that inactivity breeds inactivity and finally complacency. This complacency takes the form of the organizational "couch potato"—the church/ministry that has a routine from which it does not want to detour. However, in the rapidly changing world of today's environment, complacency can spell trouble, as we see from the second law.

Second Law of Organizations: Churches/Ministries at Rest Tend to Decay (or at Least Get Into Trouble).

There is an old saying that goes something like "if you snooze, you lose!" While there is much to recommend stability, the religious world is not a particularly stable place. As a result, complacency means that the church/ministry falls behind. In our world, change occurs at ever-increasing rates. The complacent ministry falls behind even more rapidly. For example, it is impossible for the church to stand still and maintain stability. Attrition alone makes it absolutely necessary to sustain an aggressive proactive approach to outreach.

The typical church must add at least 10 percent new members each year just to offset normal loss. In some volatile environments with a highly transient population, this may run 40% or more. Because people move, die, change churches, and leave for various reasons, the church is always in danger of decline from a leadership that simply does nothing. When you think of

how many visitors a church has to attract, win over, induct, and integrate to establish membership, the challenge becomes clearer.

Third Law of Organizations: Churches/Ministries in Trouble Tend to Get Worse!

In his research on bankruptcy, Don Hambrick of Columbia University coined the term "flailing about" to describe the death throes of an organization. When churches/ministries decline, panic often sets in so pastors/evangelists start doing anything they can—as long as they are doing something. Hambrick suggests they flail about looking for a solution. As leaders get increasingly desperate, they also get increasingly poor at making choices, creating a spiral of decline.

Shawchuck describes the failure syndrome in the life of the typical church as beginning with generalized conditions of apathy and an increasingly complacent and reactive posture. In this state, it only takes one crisis of moderate proportions to send what looks like a fairly stable church into a tailspin. The crisis could be set off by a financial setback, a leadership problem, an unforeseen change in the environment, or any number of other influences that would seem manageable under normal circumstances. The result is a deadly cycle of reactions, hasty decisions, and ineffective damage control. This free-fall continues as the church finds it lacks the spiritual and emotional reserves to tackle the problem head-on. Problems increase and multiply until the church is paralyzed by a sense of helplessness. One has no idea of how many dominos are waiting in place until the first one falls.

Church leaders facing this cycle of increasing dysfunction find that if the internal systems of the church are weak or nonexistent, there is little strength in place to resist the trend. Here the value of organizational strengths becomes evident. The internal systems of good organizational structure, sound policies and procedures, ongoing evaluation, and quality control are essential.

How Does the Church/Ministry Combat the Forces of the Three Laws?

Beating the inevitable decline described above simply requires planned growth. In our terms, growth means on-going development of the organization and its capacity. However, growth, as we indicated previously, does not always mean expansion. Growth can mean getting better.

The church must always be about the work of strengthening the internal systems that make it healthy and able to support ongoing growth. These internal systems include the organizational structure which provides for delegation of responsibility and accountability, the relational system which provides for communication, problem solving, and conflict management, and the theological system or belief structure which provides the church with the philosophy and ideology necessary to support its Christian mission purpose.

Growth may mean a different direction. The Mother's March of Dimes started out to fight polio. In 1957, the organization helped Drs. Salk and Sabin defeat polio for good.

Instead of accepting victory and disbanding, the organization took stock of itself, realized the potential good this effective group could do, and took on a new challenge. The new focus, birth defects, sadly is one that the organization will have reason to battle forever.

Describing how churches/ministries get better or different is beyond the scope of this article. What we can discuss is growth in size. To most people, the growth of a church means getting bigger. We see countless examples of churches and ministries which are growing in numbers but are doing little to grow in corporate strength. On the ministry level we see crowds increasing but little being done to nurture the individual or family to health and wholeness.

However, not all size decisions mean the church/ministry is getting bigger. Sometimes the leaner size can be very effective. As an example, in our neighborhood of Tulsa, one church had successfully addressed the issue of responsible growth with a well-publicized slogan. Dr.

James Buskirk of First United Methodist Church wanted people to know that the importance of the individual and the quality of community were a priority in a climate of mega-churches where individuals tended to feel lost and alienated. The slogan: "We don't think bigger is better, we think better is bigger."

Church expert, Carl Dudley, observes that the small church is bigger than the large church in two critical areas: relationships and accountability. He contends that small churches by nature are far better at providing the family atmosphere and personal touch so necessary to the nurture and development of the individual and community. Compared to the Sunday "mega-crowd" where anonymity is the order of service, the small church requires that the individuals involve themselves to know each other and build relationships for the church's survival. Because of this strong interpersonal factor in the small church, such ministries as pastoral care, discipleship, lay-leader training, and fellowship tend to be stronger.

The central question for pastors/evangelists is one of how big the church/ministry should be for the long run. Ralph Moore, one of the new generation's leaders in the cell-group approach to church growth, uses a proactive method of multiplying and managing groups as the primary thrust of evangelism. Instead of adding groups to meet the needs of the growing crowd, he uses the cultivation of healthy cell groups as the primary focus outreach. Based on his experience with Hope Chapel and its 80-plus member churches, he trains pastors in a very direct process of church growth through establishing, building, and reproducing groups. His method is to set up groups with assistant leaders, then to multiply the group by using these assistants and members of existing groups to start new groups in a well-planned cycle. This approach keeps the basic unit of the church and all its nurturing elements intact as the church develops. As a strategy, this approach seems to have unlimited potential for keeping the balance between growth and nurture.

One needs to look no further than the largest church in the world to see this methodology maximized. Dr. Cho built his church in Korea on the concept of a cell for every member. Training lay-leaders and multiplying groups and organizing these groups into networks overseen by capable pastors is the demonstrated dynamic which has challenged traditional approaches to church growth based on the Sunday gathering.

The argument for controlled growth is to be conservatively aggressive. Controlled growth requires more analysis. It is proactive not reactive. In this scenario the opportunity is minimized for costly mistakes.

Peter Drucker, noted business consultant and author, (1,641) believes a firm has an optimum size in every industry. It is a good theory, but how does the firm determine size? We believe the church/ministry also has an optimum size.

In order for churches to respond to the call for growth, each area of the ministry must have resources. As such, we need to understand the role that resources play. Webster's defines a resource as "something that lies ready for use or can be drawn upon for aid." Traditionally, economists have classified organizational resources into three general categories—land, labor, and capital. However, as we will discuss below, several intangible resources are also essential for firm survival.

While having resources is necessary for growth, just having resources is not sufficient. Churches and ministries can be in the midst of plenty only to die.

Another way to view long-term success of the churches/ministries is with the formula:

$$X = f(a,b,c,d,e, \dots ?)$$

The (X) represents the dependent variable, long-term success. In the formula, X is function of the various combinations of independent variable, a,b,c,d,e, on to infinity. The

discussion could be expanded to independent variables: environment, organization, human relations, theological system, etc.

For example, in the best-case scenario, long-term success (X) of the church could be a function of balancing or adjusting the internal systems of the church to support the numeric growth of the church. Other independent church variables are leadership and specific programs of evangelism, discipleship, and education; these and other independent variables should be integrated.

Conclusion

Our recommendation is a thoughtful, creative approach to strategic planning. The strategic plan is developed by taking all factors into consideration. This process forces the size decision. The options could be to double in size, have modest growth, or as we have seen in the past decades—downsize. The emphasis here is proactive planning. Too often, for example, downsizing is in small increments. It is like cutting the dog's tail one segment at a time. Every cut is painful. A better approach is proactive retrenching and then an aggressive scaled-back attack plan.

Too often a ministry with uncontrolled growth ends up with disillusioned leaders, harassed pastors and staff, confusion, and a declining quality of all programs. It can be likened to an army out-running its fuel and food. The excitement of the rapid advance is sobering as the church/ministry (and the army) becomes vulnerable to attack while mired in their self-imposed quicksand.

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Dr. Migliore is President of Managing for Success, an international consulting company. He was Professor of Strategic Planning and Management at Northeastern State University/University Center Tulsa from 1987 to 2002; Dr. Migliore teaches at the graduate and undergraduate levels. He became Professor of Management in the School of Business at Oral Roberts University (ORU) in 1970 and served as Dean of the ORU School of Business from 1975 until 1987. He was a visiting professor at the University of Calgary, fall of 1991; ITESM Campus Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, spring of 1995; and Singapore in 1997.

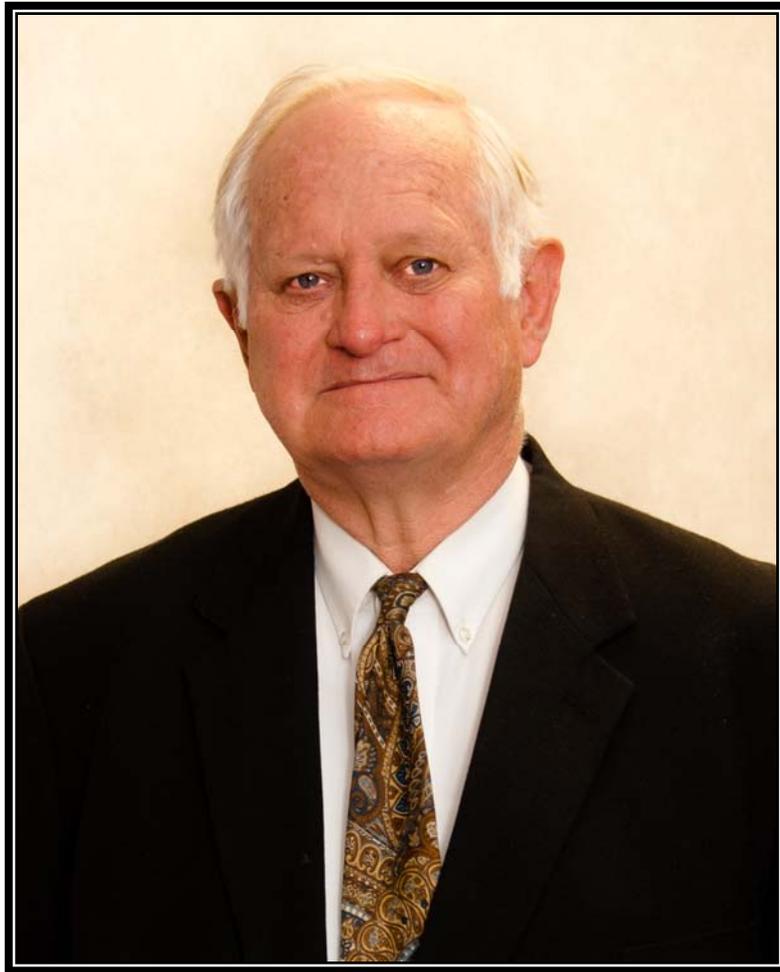
He is former manager of the press manufacturing operations of Continental Can Company's Stockyard Plant. Prior to that, he was responsible for the industrial engineering function at Continental's Indiana plant. In this capacity, Dr. Migliore was responsible for coordinating the long-range planning process. In addition, he has had various consulting experiences with Fred Rudge & Associates in New York and has served large and small businesses, associations, and nonprofit organizations in various capacities. He has made presentations to a wide variety of clubs, groups, and professional associations. Dr. Migliore has been selected to be on the faculty for the International Conferences on Management by Objectives and the Strategic Planning Institute Seminar Series. He is also a frequent contributor to the Academy of Management, including a paper at the 50th anniversary national conference. He served for 12 years on the Board of Directors of T. D. Williamson, Inc., and was previously on the Boards of the International MBO Institute, Brush Creek Ranch, and the American Red Cross/Tulsa Chapter, and he is chairman of a scholarship fund for Eastern State College. In 1984 he was elected into the Eastern State College Athletic Hall of Fame. Dr. Migliore has been a guest lecturer on a number of college campuses. He has lectured for the Texas A & M–Pepperdine, ITESM–Guadalajara, and the University of Calgary Executive Development Programs. He serves on Chamber and/or Civic Committees, and he served on the Administrative Board at The First United Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was selected Who's Who on a list of 31 top echelon writers and consultants in America.

To date, previous articles on management and business subjects have appeared in *AIEE Journal*, *Construction News*, *Management World*, *Management of Personnel Quarterly*, *Journal of Long-Range Planning*, *Dental Economics*, *Health Care Management Review*, *MBO Journal*, *Business and Society Review*, *Parks and Recreation Journal*, *The Journal of Business Strategy*, *Daily Blessing*, *Ozark Mountaineer*, *On Line*, *Real Estate Today*, *Communication Briefings*, *Journal of Sports Management*, *Alberta Business Review*, *The Planning Review*, *Hospital Topics*, *Journal of East-West Business*, *Journal of Ministry Management*, *IIE Solutions*, *Industrial Safety and Hygiene*, *Debt-Free Living*, *Supply Chain Management*, and two Mexican journals. His books include *MBO: Blue Collar to Top Executive*, *An MBO Approach to Long-Range Planning*, *A Strategic Plan for Your Life*, *Strategic Long-Range Planning*, *Strategic Planning for Church and Ministry Growth*, *Common Sense Management: A Biblical Perspective*, *Personal Action Planning: How to Know What You Want and Get It*, (expanded and updated October 2011), and *Tales of Uncle Henry*. They describe personal theories and experiences. He contributed to the books *Readings in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication* and *International Handbook on MBO*. He coauthored the book *The Management of Production: A Productivity Approach*. Other books he wrote include *Strategic Planning and Management*, *Strategic Life Planning*, and *Common Sense Management*. The manuscript *People, Productivity, and Profits* has been completed. He is coauthoring a series of books with Haworth Press. Released so far are *Church and Ministry Growth* (1995), *Planning for Nonprofit Management* (1995), *Strategic Planning and Health Care* (1996), *Strategic Planning for Private Universities* (1997), and *Strategy Planning for Collegiate Athletics* (spring 2000). *Strategy Planning for Higher Education* and *Planning for City Government* were completed in 2003. *Strategic Long-Range Planning for the New Millennium* was updated and published in June of 2011. His books have been translated into Russian, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, German, and Japanese. A Spanish version of *Strategic Planning* coauthored with Gonzalo Rivero, had an early edition out in February of 2002. He has also produced *Personal Financial Success*, an ORU video training kit offered on nationwide television, and video/audio tapes to go with his books. Dr. Migliore has developed three complete videotaped and computer Internet Web-based correspondence courses.

In November of 1985 the daily *Managing for Success* cable television program was inaugurated and was on the air until March of 1986. It was on Tulsa Cable. The series began again on Tulsa Cable in September of 1986. He writes occasional columns for the *Tulsa World*, *Tahlequah Pictorial Press*, *Collinsville News*, *Jenks Journal*, and *Muskogee County Times*. A complete video series with 4 summary units and 36 support units covering planning, management, and common sense management supports other material.

In November of 1998, Dr. Migliore was inducted into the Eastern Oklahoma State Hall of Fame. This followed his induction in 1988 into the Eastern Athletic Hall of Fame.

Dr. Migliore has been a small business consultant for the Oklahoma Small Business Development Center for 13 years. Dr. Migliore holds degrees from Eastern Oklahoma State, Oklahoma State University, St. Louis University, and completed his doctorate at the University of Arkansas. He belongs to the Academy of Management and the Planning Executives Institute and is a senior member of the American Institute of Industrial Engineers.



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