

The Bride, Chapter 5 - A Metropolitan and A Neighborhood Mentality

How do we prepare ourselves for the growth of a Ministry?

We have so far covered in Chapter 1, the primary purpose of a church is to glorify God. In Chapter 2 and 3, we looked at the essence of Ministry, and the 4 Objectives of the Church - being Worship, Instruction, Fellowship and Expression. With much prayers and guidance by the Lord, the Vision and Mission of our Church set by the Board are in line with the Scripture, reflected in these studies. Our Vision is to Glorify God (the purpose of a Church) as a Holy, Loving and United Church. As a holy church, we are to focus on spontaneous Worship and substantial Instruction. As a loving church, our emphasis is to having genuine Fellowship with each other and be compassionate in our Expression to the World. These are also articulated in our Mission – to love Christ and people, transforming hearts and lives together. Which is the Contagious Style we aspired in Chapter 4 – to be **biblical** in content, **authentic** in nature, **gracious** in attitude and **relevant** in approach. If we displayed the contagious style (which very much reflected in our strategic direction), not only will we honor God, we will also expect people to be attracted to our fellowship, and growth in our Ministry. This is how I deem Chapter 5 – ‘The Difference between A Metropolitan and A Neighborhood Mentality’, as laying the foundation to prepare us for the growth of our church. The understanding of this chapter is not so much for us to appreciate which mentality ministry is better than the other, as they are each uniquely used by God, but rather it helps us to understand the principles we could apply when the Lord blesses us with growth in the church. With the Vision, Mission and strategic actions plan God has led the Board to put in place, what can we learnt from the Scripture in this Chapter to be ready when the Lord blesses Bethany with growth.

A big Church mentality is not uncommon in the Scripture. In fact, we found God blessed the earliest church with numbers, with instant growth to about 3,000 souls in Acts 2, and the number of the men grew to be about 5,000 in Acts 4. While the church was growing, while the numbers were increasing, while God was blessing, like in many huge congregations, we read in Acts 6:1-4, a complaint arose that their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. We can learn from the early leaders on how they handled the issue. They called a group together, after acknowledging the need was legitimate, they selected seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom to meet this need, while they continue to focus on their priority to pray and to the ministry of the Word. The point is clear: The apostles’ higher priority was maintained and they worked out a way for the needy to be cared for.

Ministries of Metropolitan churches

Scripture suggests no alarm to a church because of its growth in size, nor does history. Page 88 to 90, actually reviewed a historical list of numerous large churches being richly blessed and used by God for decades. I’ll leave us to read this list of the Metropolitan churches at our own pace. The point to be made is that though larger churches have their own complexities, problems and may appear to be impersonal, they have been on the scene for decades (and will continue to be so), and most of them have been unquestionably made an impact for our Lord. The question is what does a church do when it experiences a rapid growth by God’s direction? How do we handle it? What are the principles necessary for keeping us effective?

Timeless Principles for Staying Effective

The Scripture recorded for us valuable hands-on experience from Moses and Paul with very demanding ministries. We will find these timeless principles are still applicable for growing churches today.

The Experience of Moses (Pg 91 -99)

Moses had acquired no ministry experience except for taking care of sheep in the desert for 40 years. Then suddenly at the age of 80, he found himself recruited by God to lead/pastor a congregation (we can call it the

‘Wilderness Bible Church’) of about 2 million souls, recently released from slavery. The demand of the ministry was much more than what Moses could handle. Fortunately, God sent him a counselor - Jethro, his father-in-law – to help him cope with the demand. We read in **Exod. 18:13-18**, the situation. Jethro saw Moses sat to judge the people and the people stood about Moses from morning until evening. Jethro wisely questioned him: “Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stood about you from morning to evening?” And he cautioned Moses that “The thing you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and your people”. Moses was trapped in the ‘one-man’ show, driven by the desire to implement God’s Law into the life of every Israelite. He was in the danger of wearing out and the people were heading for exhaustion as well.

Listen to Jethro’s wise counsel in **Exod. 18:19-23** – i) You be the people’s representative before God, ii) then teach them the statutes and the laws, make known to them the way in which to walk, and the work they are to do, iii) select *able* people who *fear God, men of truth*, those who hate dishonest gain and place them as leaders. The principles emerge from Jethro’s counsel are: i) Leaders need to continue to be people’s representative before God. As leaders, our priority will be to pray and to study the Word of God; ii) To communicate – to “teach them the statutes and the laws”, the ministry of the Word. Leaders, who try to take care of every nut and bolt of a ministry, can’t possibly maintain the quality of teaching and leadership. Iii) To delegate. Share the workload. Not to just anybody, but to people of *ability* and *character*. Divide the workload and put *trustworthy* people in charge.

The results of applying these timeless principles to the church are found in page 98:

- The ministry will become easier, for the Pastors and the church leaders (vs. 22),
- The congregation will also play their significant roles in the ministry (vs. 23).

3 thoughts stood out from these applications:

1. When God blesses us with growth. More people, plus more expectations, with more needs would mean more responsibilities.
2. As work increases, the load must be shared. Efficiency sometimes reveals itself not by what one has done but by what one has delegated.
3. God’s servants are not exempted from the penalties of breaking God’s natural laws. Too much work and not enough rest can make anyone sick, anxious, bitter or broken. Let us be prepared to share the responsibilities to make the ministry and life of our Pastors and their wives easier.

The Perspective of Paul

Eph. 4:11-16 gives some great encouragement for shifting the load to gifted people within the body. Vs. 11 – gives a limited representation of spiritual gifts in the body. Other gifts can be found in Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Peter 4. There are people with the gift to help, to organize, to show mercy, to teach, to evangelize, to give, to exhortation, etc., etc.. A church would be wise to teach its members about spiritual gifts, explaining the value of each and encourages them to function so that the workload can be shared.

Don’t miss the 3 principles Paul packs into this passage:

1. **There are sufficient gifts to sustain any size church** (vv. 11-12). God gave spiritual gifts to His entire body, not just to the pastor. As long as there are people in the church, there are enough gifts to sustain the ministry.
2. **When the gifts are exercised, the congregations grow up** (vv. 13-14). A body must exercise all its parts to develop. The more the members use their gifts, the more mature the body.
3. **Maximum involvement leads to healthy growth** (vv. 15-16). A church deepens spiritually as its members serve the Lord and one another.

Differences between the Metropolitan and Neighborhood Ministries

Smaller neighborhood churches need the advice of Paul and Moses just as much as the larger churches. However the applications may differ, as should our expectation of each kind of church. The chart displayed on page 103 gives a clearer picture of the differences between the metropolitan and the neighborhood church mentalities. A good understanding and acceptance on the differences hopefully will lessen some of the frustrations experienced by these churches. **However, remember one is not better than the other; they are each uniquely used by God.** Even though much of the chart is self-explanatory, brief summary on the differences will help.

In the “neighborhood” mentality, there are close ties between pastor and people, like one big family. Everything is of a smaller scale. Congregation mainly comes from close geographical proximity. Narrow rotation expected among the leadership. It is easy to know everyone. Workload is borne by volunteers. Mostly single staff team is expected. Relatively simple to manage and maintain. Strong loyalty to the church and it is easier to implement involvement. Atmosphere is naturally warm and friendly.

Moving to the other side of the chart, we immediately see a series of contrasting realities. In the “metropolitan” mentality, there are close ties but between identity groups, numerous families, identify with one another. Everything is of a larger scale. Congregation comes from larger geographical radius. Broad rotation expected among leadership. It is impossible to know everyone. Some work delegated to specialists. Complex to manage and maintain. Multi-staff team expected. Loyalty decentralized to various ministries, more difficult to implement involvement. Atmosphere can still be warm and friendly, but a constant challenge.

Keep These Things in Mind

As we become more aware of the differences between a “neighborhood” and a “metropolitan” mentality, bear in mind the below 3 practical suggestions:

1. If you have neighborhood expectations, you will be frustrated in a metropolitan church. The reverse is equally true.
2. Broad minded flexibility and small-group participation is necessary for a growing church mentality. Get involved in a small group. Think of yourself as a minister, touching others’ lives with the spiritual gift God has given you.
3. Changing methods doesn’t mean a changing message – this will be further developed in the next chapter.