

Making Church Meetings with Small Crowds Better

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Try to imagine that you have never walked into the sanctuary of a church building. One Sunday afternoon, as you drive by the brick structure that your neighbors frequent two times Sunday and once Wednesday, you see on the church sign that there is a Sunday evening meeting at 6 p.m. You decide to see what it's all about.

You're running a little bit late, so you walk in a few minutes after the start of the meeting, and something strikes you as very odd: About 25 individuals are present in what looks like a sanctuary that could seat at least 150, but the people are scattered all over the room, predominantly toward the back. Even those in the last few rows are not sitting close to each other. You think, "How strange." You then say to yourself, "This is cold and uninviting."



Does your church have a similar "cold and uninviting meeting"? You need to work harder at changing this than perhaps you realize, and not just for the sake of the unbeliever who walks in unannounced. The small crowd of believers (and church leaders) will also benefit greatly if the atmosphere is warmer. How can you make even this week's meeting with a small crowd better? Here are a few suggestions for the congregation and leaders:

Sit together up front:

This not only communicates to both unbelievers and believers that the people in attendance enjoy each other, but it almost always improves the meeting. You may even want to move from the cavernous sanctuary to a different room (even a home) more conducive to fellowship.

The closer you are to one another, the more interaction you will have. And singing will liven up as it comes from a unified whole instead of multiple spots around the room. Even those with poor musical abilities will be emboldened to sing louder. Also, sitting in the front usually helps people listen better, and it definitely encourages those leading and teaching to engage the group both verbally and non-verbally.

Though there may be a few groans, shepherds should invite the sheep to move toward the front at the beginning of the meeting. They might do this *before* everyone is settled in their favorite spot. If you're one of the sheep, willingly and gladly gather in the front. You won't regret it.

Select singable songs:

To make a small group of people sing something significantly challenging usually does not help anyone to focus on the truth. They're too busy feeling their embarrassment and thinking about the group's struggle. Let's just admit it: Some songs are too hard and do not help people worship the Lord. Why not pick theologically rich music that everyone can sing well? Those in attendance should *enjoy* "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with (their) heart(s) to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). This is nearly impossible if everyone is laboring through an unsuitable song.

Truthfully, you might consider singing less if what you are doing is not edifying. It might even be appropriate to listen to a recorded song done well.

Incorporate sharing:

According to First Corinthians 14, more than just the leaders brought something to edify the church in Corinth. The Apostle Paul encourages this in various ways. Why not incorporate a time in your meeting when those in attendance are free to share? This is easily accomplished when the crowd is undersized. Perhaps several men could come ready to teach something from the Bible for a few minutes. Also, evangelistic opportunities from the past week can be shared. This will encourage more boldness in witnessing and eliminate trite, temporally focused prayers.

Work hard to make this time about edification, not simply prayer requests. If possible, the seating should be arranged so that those sharing and listening will be able to dialogue with one another.

Teach among the people:

God has given the church "pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). But a pulpit is not required, and it's somewhat awkward when a man decides to stand so far away from such a small group that it takes binoculars to see him. Sure, standing behind it may suggest to some that the Bible is to be taken seriously, but so will careful teaching down in the midst of the people. And yes, Jesus did have to separate from the crowd occasionally in order to teach (cf. Mark 4:1), but this was about avoiding the mob, which is currently not your problem.

The one preaching should get down with the people, make eye contact and talk to the people (not his notes), and like Paul with the church of Troas, incorporate some dialogue to aid the learning (cf. Acts 20:6-11). The goal is not to present a finely crafted sermon from behind "the desk," but to teach the truth so that everyone understands it and, by God's grace, seeks to live it.

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