

Small Strong Congregations

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0. Introduction

God invites us to serve in mission. God gives us the remarkable gifts of compassion and community. God encourages us toward self-reliance and self-sufficiency. God gives us the amazing gifts of worship and hope. God helps us to be, together, a team of leaders and congregation. God provides just enough of a home that we can be God's family together. God shares extraordinary generosity with us. With God's help we live with the Spirit of promise.

Kennon Callahan

1. *Small is strong*

The Twelve Keys to an Effective Church.

<i>Relational</i>	<i>Functional</i>
1. Specific Concrete Missional Objectives	7. Several Programmes and Activities
2. Pastoral and Lay Visitation	8. Open accessibility
3. Corporate, Dynamic Worship	9. High Visibility
4. Significant Relational Groupings	10. Adequate Land and Parking
5. Strong Leadership Resources	11. Adequate space and facilities
6. Solid Decision Making	12. Solid Financial Resources.

There are four kinds of church in the future:

Small Strong	Easy to achieve
Middle Size	Hardest to achieve
Large Regional	Easiest to achieve
Mega Church	Hard to achieve

All four of these can be:

Strong (Have 9/12 Keys)	Weak (Have 5-8/12 Keys)	Dying (Have 1-4/12 Keys)
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Important to note that you don't need to have 12/12 of the keys. If you have 9 that's great. If you can get another key, great, if not don't worry! (9 is the target – not 12)

Most people think that mega congregations are the way to go. Callahan postulates that mega-congs are really groupings of small strong congregations under one banner and leadership.

Bigger is just bigger – not necessarily better. We are over-preoccupied with bigness.

Some important trends:

- Immensity and Immediacy: We are discovering the immensity of the universe, creation, the city, the company. It reminds us of the Immensity of God's love, but makes us long for the Intimacy of Immediacy. A trip to the Grand Canyon makes us long for friends around a campfire. Even big houses are designed with small intimate gathering rooms for family.
- There is a more positive spirit regarding small congregations. Small is no longer regarded as failure. Small congregations are learning to manage resources, capitalize strengths, appreciate leaders, deepen spirituality and get on with God's Mission to the world. They are learning to use the compassion and competence of older adults and include the youth. They have stopped dividing into age groups and worship as a family.
- People are looking for steadfast love not big and busy – they have that in the workplace. They are looking for small and intimate where they can give and receive. They are looking for the security and strength of the community. They don't want a congregation that is trying to do too much too soon – they've tried that. They're not looking for a congregation that is trying to please everyone – They've

tried and failed. They don't want a congregation that is trying to do everything.

The strengths of Small Strong Congregations:

1. Mission and Service
2. Compassion and Shepherding
3. Community and Belonging
4. Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency
5. Worship and Hope
6. Leaders and Team
7. Just enough space and facilities
8. Giving and Generosity.

Their strength is in God.

Not fleeting or fickle, but solid and steadfast.

Small is Strong.

2. Mission and Service

Preach the gospel at all times – use words if necessary

Francis of Assisi

Opens with a story of a congregation that dwindled to 15 members. Some of them went to Callahan's seminar where he invited them: "To have a theology of service – not survival. A theology of mission – not maintenance." They went home and started a supportive work in a nearby elementary school – they gave the best support they could. Within a year the congregation had grown to 90 members. They still consider themselves small and they are sticking to their ministry in the school.

What Callahan has learned from Small Strong Congregations with regard to Mission and Service is:

- Small Strong Congregations share one excellent mission
- Small Strong Congregations share their mission as a gift – a theology of service – not survival.
- The Mission begins, frequently, with one precipitating event.
- It begins with 2 or 3 people who deliver concrete effective help
- The Mission is Mutual it involves the congregation, those being helped, and the community.

Here's more detail:

2.1. Small Strong Congregations share one excellent mission

Whether kids, shut-ins, alcoholics, or whatever! But the congregation keeps this as the clear focus. Not a shotgun approach trying to do a bit of everything, and also not a whimsical flavour-of-the-year approach. Stay focused on one mission and do it really well with excellence that wins the community's respect.

It is well-known that one focus yields a high success rate. Single majors do better than students with 3 or 4 majors. Supermarkets focus on delivering food. Everything else is an elective.

More is not better and more is not necessary! Rather do one thing exceedingly well than deliver a few in a mediocre manner. More than one mission often results in conflicts of interest. (e.g. of congregation that wanted to reach young families and have classical music in the service. The one excluded the other!)

2.2. They share their mission as a gift

There are no strings attached to the gift of mission. We are not doing this so that our congregation can grow, but so that we can serve. Example of a congregation that started door-to-door work because they cared about

the people in the community. It was so successful that the church grew and church growth became the primary issue. They had to reorientate their ministry to be a gift.

Small Strong Congregations have to be very careful because it is easy to go into “Survival Mode.”

Their concentration should be on helping people with their lives. There can be no ulterior motive. Being *Mission Driven* is often different from being *Purpose Driven* because many congregations state that their purpose is to grow the congregation. Mission is not inward-focused but outward-looking. Mission always meets a need and there is no intended kickback to the congregation.

2.3. The Mission begins, frequently, with one precipitating event.

Lots of examples here: An accident, a retreat, a friendship gathering discussion, etc. The following are common areas where it happens:

- LifeStage – e.g. Concern for Youth
- Human Hurt and Hope – e.g. Alcoholism
- Sociology – e.g. Work among the poor.
- Vocational – e.g. A factory, mine or mill.
- Geography – e.g. The immediate neighbourhood.
- Community or Civic Interest – e.g. A School needing teaching assistance
- Recreation – e.g. Sports Ministries
- Music and Art – e.g. A Congregation that put on a musical and invited people to watch and participate
- Religion – e.g. “One time Bible Studies.”

2.4. It begins with 2 or 3 people who deliver concrete effective help.

Always starts with a core who have passion, purpose and power. They start small and get on with it. They don't enlist, conscript, or nag – they just do it concretely and effectively. They start small and don't overwhelm those they are helping. It will grow.

2.5. The Mission is Mutual

This is not a congregation-only thing. In fact there will be many in the congregation that are not directly involved. Most of the helpers will come from the surrounding community who respect what you are doing and from among those who you are helping.

People are attracted by the integrity of your mission. There is also buy-in from distant people who have been involved at some time and who are impressed with what you are doing.

This is not about *membership* but *missionship*!

2.6. Conclusion

People across the age spectrum are tired of committee meetings. They want to help – they want to make a difference. They want Mission.

People are loyal. Now, people are drawn to mission loyalty more than to organizational loyalty. They look for a theology of service, not a theology of survival. They are drawn to mission-driven, gift-driven congregations, not program-driven, money-driven, bigger-driven or maintenance-driven congregations. People want to serve, not simply survive.

Mission is grassroots. Mission grows from among the grassroots of a congregation. Three to five people discover their longings to help with a specific human hurt and hope. They discover their competencies to deliver concrete, effective help. They find one another. They become a mission team.

They do solid work. They share one excellent mission. They discover new helpers for the mission from among the people being helped. The mission flourishes. For the work of these persons, the congregation becomes a legend on the community grapevine for its excellent mission. It lives out a theology of service, not survival. It is a small, *strong* congregation.

3. *Compassion and Shepherding*

Opens with a large number of examples illustrating how members of congregations give of themselves to share compassionately with those in their sphere of influence. They care for the elderly, kids, people in need and people in trouble. It's not just what they do for those in the congregation, but even for those outside.

3.1. **Being Compassion-Driven**

Preach the gospel at all times – use words if necessary

Francis of Assisi

Small Strong Congregations preach by their member's impact on the community. Gives a long example of an elderly woman who was lovingly cared for by her congregation.

Small Strong Congregations are Compassion-Driven. Not purpose-driven, not challenge driven. They are high-compassion not high-commitment.

The compassion comes from the security of knowing God's grace. If there is any vision, it is that of the Good Samaritan. They are stirred by compassion.

It is not “For God was so committed to the world that He gave His one and only Son.” They are a movement of grace more than law, love more than legalism, and compassion more than commitment. It is not “And now these three remain: vision, challenge and commitment and the greatest of these is commitment.”

Before you consider a vision-statement, consider a compassion-statement. Who are you loving and serving in mission?

Gives an example of two new congregations in the same town. One put out a pamphlet with their vision statement and high-challenge ideals. The other was entitled “Your friends next door.” (The emphasis was on friendship and relationship.) The second congregation got a much better response.

Being purpose-driven is fine as long as the heart of compassion is not lost. Be compassion-driven!

3.2. **A Sacrament.**

Story of Esther who suddenly fell sick. A huge portion of the congregation pitched up to support and visit. The doctor said “The best medicine she received was the love and care of her congregation.”

A sacrament is a sign of grace, compassion, community and hope.

Shepherding is the outward and visible sign of the inner and invisible grace of God, the compassion of Christ, and the healing hope of the Holy Spirit. When you share care with another person, you share one of the richest sacraments in the Christian movement.

We are broken people, not always lovable or loving. So, when we share acts of shepherding and compassion in spite of our brokenness, God is at work in us.

Small Strong Congregations share the sacrament of caring and compassion in:

1. Events of fun and good times

2. Celebration of Remarkable Events and Achievements.
3. Tough and Tragic moments.

It is very important to have a balance of all three. If one is only there for tragedy, then the batteries of compassion discharge very easily. It is the togetherness in good and happy times that gives the depth and wisdom for the tough times. We need the balance of celebration with tragedy so that we don't wear out.

3.3. Forgiveness

Gives an example of a feud among friends in the congregation. It took a long time, but the congregation's compassion brought the two friends together in the end. Compassion in a tough time was the key.

Compassion requires toughness! Which is easier? Commitment or Forgiveness? Being a high-compassion church is harder than being a high-commitment church. Compassion is not soap opera sentimentality – it is confronting grudges, learning to apologize and forgiving mistakes.

3.4. Conclusion: A loving heart.

Small Strong Congregations are not so much concerned with growing bigger as what they are with loving better. Today people are looking for places where they can receive and give compassion and shepherding.

A loving heart lives well – it longs to share and serve. Small Strong Congregations have loving hearts.

4. Community and Belonging

We may not have it all together, but together we have it all.

Story of Barb who was 16, rejected by family. Eventually she found love and community at a Small Strong Congregation. They made her feel loved and accepted.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Eph.2:19

Small Strong Congregations are

- Open and Inclusive
- Helping people to find family
- Serving multiple neighbourhoods
- Healthy as one or three or more groups.

4.1. Open and Inclusive

This can be true of small and large congregations. Cliques, exclusivism, isolation and closedness can also be true of congregations of any size.

Broken cliquey congregations are quick to *use* new people on their rosters and duties, but then exclude them from the decision-making “inner circle”.

Small Strong Congregations are not exclusive. They don't differentiate between those who are members and those who are not. They don't differentiate between old members and new members. They are warm and welcoming.

People are searching for community – not committee. The time for people finding meaning in committee work is history.

Small Strong Congregations treat adherents as members. The categories of membership, adherents, and prospective members are not so important. They don't make non-members feel like second-class citizens.

Nevertheless, the art in Small Strong Congregations is that we think in informal family terms, not formal membership terms. We think in mission terms, not membership terms.

Gatherings in Small Strong Congregations have a spirit of a family reunion. You may not know everybody, but you feel like you get to know them easily.

There are two factors at work in cliquish congregations:

1. Their network of relationships is fragile. People are anxious over their belonging. There is no depth in their relationships.
2. They are not secure in their relationship with God. There is no sense of His warm, welcoming and inclusive grace.

4.2. Helping people to find family

Small Strong Congregations are a family – not an institution. There is a warm sense of welcome and community. The family is extended – not just members, but those served in mission.

In today's culture people don't see church as a must. There are many alternatives on Sundays. We must take them very seriously when they attend. They are not there by default – they have chosen to come.

Membership in Small Strong Congregations is elastic. There are

- Those served in Mission
- Friends of the Cong (Now live somewhere else, but still care about the church)
- Friends in the community (Not members, but supportive of the Church's mission)
- Those who come to worship but are not involved yet (Constituents)
- And formal members.

A Small Strong Congregation is a matter of being – not doing.

If a Small Strong Congregation is too heavily organizational in its structure, three problems arise:

1. Not enough leaders – so a constant changing of hats
2. Normally the best decisions are made informally – over heavy structures impede this.
3. The emphasis moves from being to do doing.

4.3. Serving multiple neighbourhoods

Callahan identifies that people live in multiple neighbourhoods. There are five basic neighbourhoods that people live in and the church brings all five together.

1. Relational: (friends and family.)
2. Vocational: (Those we work with)
3. Sociological: (What grouping of society I am in.)
4. Geographical:
5. Genealogical:

4.4. Healthy as one or three or more groups.

Gives a fascinating account of a congregation that was caught up in a two-cell(group, camp) fight.

Any congregation that can divide into two clear factions is in trouble. These camps are usually the old vs the new or the change vs no-change. The fights are ugly and destructive.

The best is if there are more than two camps. Fights are inevitable, but now it rotates and people are in different groups in different fights. Small Strong Congregations have healthy groupings where there are no major axes to grind.

5. Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency

What lies behind us and what lies before are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Story of a small congregation that had a long history of dependence on their denomination. They were at a meeting planning to ask for help again when one of their members got up and said: "It's time we help ourselves!" They called it their "Coming of Age Moment."

Small Strong Congregations

- are Consistent,
- are Self-Reliant,
- are Creative and Improvising,
- Benefit from community resources
- have Reasonable Pastoral Resources

5.1. Consistent

Small Strong Congregations don't vacillate between dependence and independence. Gives the example of the alcoholic who was on the roller coaster of self-sufficiency and then dependence. Eventually his sponsor said "You can be consistent – You *can* decide, one day at a time, to work on your recovery programme. Let me know when you decide to do so."

Ironically, it is easier to be consistent than inconsistent. It is easier to depend on yourself than to depend on others.

Small Strong Congregations practise, one day at a time, self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

5.2. Self-Reliant

They have learnt that mission matches money. The greater the mission, the greater the money. The weaker the mission, the less the money.

All Small Congregations have	
- A shortage of personnel and money	
- An inadequacy of supplies	
- Hardly enough of anything	
Strong Congregations	Weak and Dying Congregations
- use what they have and do mission anyway	Focus on their shortages
	Look down on themselves and what God has given
	Suffer from low self-esteem

Self-reliant leaders create self-reliant congregations and vice-versa. Self-reliant congregations say: "We do not put our future in the hands of someone else; we do for ourselves. We have not interest in co-dependency; we do well for ourselves."

People think that resources, strengths and power are external. They have not realized that only you can grow you. God gives you the internal capacity to advance and develop your strengths and competencies. God gives you the freedom to grow and advance at whatever pace works for you. God wants you to have the power to grow you.

- Under threat people whither – With encouragement they grow
- People are not persuaded to do things because people try to frighten them.
- Congregations are tough and resilient and last a long long time.

They pray prayers like this:

Take time to claim your strengths – they are gifts of God
Take time to have fun – it is God's way of teaching you your strengths
Take time to grow – only you can grow you
Take time to live well – this is the life God gives you
Take time to trust yourself – God trusts you
Take time to be self-reliant – it is better than being dependent
Take time to share with others – they will bless you and you will bless them
Take time to have hope – You are a child of God.

It is not about being too proud to receive help - Small Strong Congregations are very humble. They live with confidence and assurance that God gives them strengths and resources for the mission He has given them.

They want their future to be in God's hands and their own – not anyone else's.

5.3. Creative and Improvising

These go together with self-sufficiency. The more dependent you are, the less creative you are. The focus becomes complaint and whining when you are reliant. Lovely story of a congregation that was challenged to give up complaint and whining for lent. The result was a stunning revival of creativity and new hope. God creates us to claim – not complain!

People develop a false theology of “Carrying the Cross.” They are thinking about “poor little me.” They do not have a theology of resurrection.

We must choose to use the X amount of energy and resources that we have to get the most positive results. Using the 80/20 principle, the 20% that counts should be used in **mission, compassion, community, self-reliance, worship, teams, adequate facilities and generosity.**

In Small Strong Congregations there is an attitude of “Ready.... FIRE! Aim...” People improvise creatively and make it up as they go along because their sense of community is so strong.

5.4. Benefit from community resources

A congregation that has been effective in mission in the community will experience unexpected blessings from people in the community who will provide time, talent and treasure as a response to the blessings they have had from the congregation's mission even though they are not members.

5.5. Reasonable Pastoral Resources

One of the most damaging things are pastors who do too much for their congregations. Every time they “rescue” an initiative that looks like it might fail or when they “save the day” they are, in fact, furthering dependency.

Good pastors have a clear sense of their strengths and passions and leave their congregations space to grow and try and succeed. If they keep rescuing, the congregation never fails, but it never succeeds!

There are two dangers for congregations that have pastors who do too much for them.

1. The congregation, in turn, does too much for those they help in mission and so those being helped become co-dependent.
2. The pastor will have more and more in his lap and the congregation becomes more and more like a critical consumer.

It is amazing how the grace of God works. God invites us to have a consistent, solid spirit of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, to depend upon the resources God gives us. God encourages us to do so with creativity and improvisation. We discover that the more we depend upon ourselves and on God, and the more we give away in God's Mission, the more community resources come to us to help with the mission. God blesses us with reasonable pastoral resources to help us advance our mission and life together. We live in the grace of God.

6. *Worship and Hope*

Everything done in humankind is done on the basis of hope. Martin Luther

Story of helping a congregation with their preacher's preaching. They loved him and he loved them, but his sermons were dull – he knew it and so did they. They took the following steps:

- The Pastor's Gift was Pastoral Work. They encouraged him in this
“A pastor whose preaching is a 4 but is a good shepherd is heard as a 7
- They worked on his preaching and structure
- They set up a team of good greeters
- They improved the music

The services have improved.

Small Strong Congregations have services that are:

- Warm and Welcoming
- Stirring and Inspiring
- Congregational and Sacramental
- Helpful and Hopeful

6.1. Warm and Welcoming

One of the important things to recognise is that Small Strong Congregations often don't need small groups as their Sunday Worship is just like a largish small group. All the needs that small groups meet are met in the worship service.

Small Strong Congregations have many door-openers and very few gate-keepers. They have a small group of folk who are really good at making people feel welcome and at home. It is not that the whole congregation welcomes visitors – that would be intimidating. There are just a few who do it well.

6.2. Stirring and Inspiring

Long Section on music that is loaded with helpful examples.

- Music is simple and participative. The congregation are not spectators.
- Music teams do short stretches at a time – 4 or 5 months and then another team takes a turn. Each team starts their stint with a retreat and prayer.
- Music is simple but inspiring. The argument is not whether it is classical or modern, but whether it is stirring and inspiring.
- Use groupings like youth choirs and so on, but not for their spectator value, but the ministry and fellowship of the choir in their practices.
- They prepare really well for 8 “major major services” and about 20 “major” services for the year and ease up on the remaining ones so that all services do not feel like major productions.
- They have music directors, not choir directors. Not too many anthems and choir presentations.
- The music should match the message and the congregation. Don't force classical music on a young cong.
- Choose music the congregation sings easily and well.

Plan your services well with a focus on brevity, simplicity and being stirring while keeping people involved.

6.3. Congregational and Sacramental

Services are a gathering of the whole people of God – often has a sense of the communion of the saints. Worship is a banquet of God's Grace.

At a time where people feel the dislocation of power (their lives are being controlled by the inaccessible state) worship is a place of community. This is sacramental: We are reminded of God's Grace and Love. The service fills us with peace and hope.

The service is straightforward: Basic Maths – not advanced trigonometry.

Unchurched people don't know the difference between low and high church, between seeker-sensitive and charismatic services. They want a service that:

- Touches their hearts
- Stirs their longings for a whole and healthy life
- Advances their understanding of life
- Helps them find hope for the week to come

It is really important to keep the service simple. Gives an example of a congregation that had inherited a 20 step liturgy – people just couldn't connect. Keep it simple: *sing, pray, preach, sing, bless.*

Services that are rushed create stress. Keep services simple and leisurely. Small congregations can easily allow spontaneous sharing. Services should never be tense, stiff or rigid.

Callahan wrote an article: *The Millenium begins with the Manger.* The simplicity of the start of Christ's life should be our key. Even the bulletin should be uncluttered and devoid of excess verbiage.

Ease up the service.

6.4. Helpful and Hopeful

The whole service touches the whole person with the gospel.

Some important tips:

1. Start well!

“You can't make a good first impression the second time!”

Don't let your call to worship be a call to despair.

Don't go into announcements. People don't need to know about budget deficits or committee meetings at the start of worship.

If only one part of the service is helpful and hopeful, then let it be the first three minutes! Don't start in a dull and boring manner – *we are here to worship God!*

2. End well – End strong with hope and faith!
3. Concentrate on warm moments – celebrate baptisms.
4. Bring a clear sense of hope in the service. Let the service resonate with hope. It does not have to be a pep-rally, but it should reverberate with solid hope.
5. People place too much emphasis on the sermon. Good preaching will not do everything. Good preaching helps, but it is the whole service that matters. A congregation should never be dependent on a preacher.

Hope is simple, confident, assured. Hope does not prance and posture. Hope comes in a manger. Hope lives on a cross. Hope opens a tomb. Hope is present with us now. Our hope is in God, not ourselves. Hope is not of our own doing. Hope is the gift of God. Small Strong Congregations live with this spirit of hope. Their worship services are services of hope.

7. Team, Leaders and Congregation

Imagination is more powerful than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

Story of Harriet the Missionary trainer who started having a Bible Study with her Housekeeper. Eventually they included the Gardener. In response to the Bible Studies, the gardener reached 2 friends and they started a church which rapidly grew to 120. The gardener would preach what he had learned in the Bible Study. He was too ignorant to know what he didn't know and built a grassroots church. This whole chapter hinges around being a grassroots movement.

Small Strong Congregations work as a team, with leaders and as a congregation working together in unity. They think and act, plan and practice and live together as a team, with leaders as a congregation together.

7.1. Team

- Small Strong Congregations have the capacity to **see the whole and not the parts**. They don't subdivide the congregation and therefore all can be involved together. Youth are included and not compartmentalized. Often big churches separate everyone into groups or classes (even the adults) but people are looking for family experience. Small Strong Congregations don't have to plan specific intergenerational events – all their events *are* intergenerational.
- Small Strong Congregations understand the **diversity of gifts**. They are good at identifying people's gifts and putting them to use. They don't work with a hierarchy of gifts where one is more important than another. They work with a deep appreciation for diversity.
- They **appreciate the gifts of a pastor**. Pastors frequently do better work than they think they are doing. Many ministers are compassionate, caring, creative and competent. Unfortunately some chase credentials rather than competence.

These are the core-competencies:

- Good Shepherd: share the sad and celebrate the joys of the congregation.
- Helpful Preacher: Help the congregation make sense of life
- Wise and Caring Leader: Part of a leadership team. Wise without necessarily being strong in admin.
- Community Pastor: Has an impact on the community's – not just insular in the church.

7.2. Leaders.

Most Small Strong Congregations have more leaders than they think. We look for formal committee leaders. God gives us informal community leaders.

Good leaders lead with:

- Imagination and Creativity: They use what they have to do what they can - "Let's give it a go!" They are willing to take risks and break open piggy-banks. They celebrate excellent mistakes and create a culture of trying.
- Encouragement and Coaching: Not over-correction that discourages creativity but affirmation and patient encouragement. Not "Permission-Giving" leadership but encouraging. This is done informally in relationships, mentoring, and training up understudies. The baton is passed through one to one succession coaching.
- Loving, Listening, Learning and Leading: Before we can lead we need to love and be loved by the congregation. We need to listen: (1) to what is being said, (2) what isn't being said and (3) what's between the lines. We don't learn by talking, but by learning to listen. It is not a case of leaders knowing it all – grassroots knowledge is considerable!

Some leaders are bossy, some are policy police, some are always planning and never doing and some live for projects. Try to be Loving, Listening, Learning and then Leading.

As leaders, we do not boss, manage, enable, or dictate. We do not manufacture rules and regulations, policies and procedures, conditions and stipulations. We do not create neverending, complex, intergalactic, planning processes. We do not waver and waffle. We are not hesitant and ambivalent. We do not dominate and dictate. We are a healthy family. We love, listen, learn and lead.

7.3. Congregation

The major strength of a Small Strong Congregation is the ability to be a congregation together over the long haul. They live and share together. They cherish the present and look long-term at the future.

- They have a spirit of continuity. You can't keep rotating leaders – it is destructive. The only places where regular rotation is helpful is in the nominations committee and your personnel selection committee – because new choosers will identify new blood. For the rest of your leadership, long-term tenure is most helpful.

Rotation is often introduced to root out bossiness, but this is best cured in three steps:

1. Develop and Encourage new competent leaders
2. Add new people to your leadership team without rotating anyone off.
3. Advance a shared understanding of congregational grassroots leadership.

There are four stages to a healthy team:

1. Learn the possibilities for the team and picture accomplishing them.
2. Discover the match of strengths the leaders bring to some of the objectives.
3. Mobilise the team to realise some of those objectives.
4. Let the leadership team come into its own. Don't rotate people off as they reach their peak.

Some teams will achieve one-time projects. Others seasonal, others a short-term project. If a team is given an objective and they can clearly define a success, they will invariably be ready for another challenge.

Pastors peak in their 6th or 7th years. There are three reasons for this:

1. Shepherding: It takes time to set up caring networks
2. Learning: 6-7 years is enough time to have made some excellent mistakes.
3. Leading: It takes time to get from loving, listening and learning to leading.

How do we know that we have the right person in the right job?

1. Their competencies match the task.
2. Solid work is being done and the person is having fun.
3. The person is growing
4. People are being helped

- They appreciate informality: Whether in a town or city, whether large or small, a congregation can be informal. Leadership is simple, informal, flexible and in-touch with the grassroots. Decisions are shared and easily discussed. Communication is simple and processes are transparent. Once decisions are arrived at, it is with a sense of “Why didn't we think about this sooner?”

Even disagreements and conflicts are handled well.

Small Strong Congregations

- don't repress conflict
 - aren't dominated by conflict
 - don't chronically avoid conflict
- but resolve it effectively.

- Small Strong Congregations share power. Congregations that get into trouble are the ones where people cling to power positions. In Small Strong Congregations this does not happen, people step back when their time is done.

In our congregation we find home. We include everyone. We share power. We

help one another. We affirm a diversity of gifts. As we share and pass the power, we grow forward our distinctive strengths and gifts. We find that some people have gifts of mission, some compassion, some community, some hope, some leadership, and some generosity; many have gifts other than these. God's grace blesses us.

We discover that one of the qualities present in our congregation is our gift for living and sharing together as team, leaders, and congregation. We share the quality of leadership well. With compassion, continuity and competency we are a small, strong congregation. We will be healthy for years to come.

8. *Space and Facilities*

A house does not make a home. People do

Gives examples of congregations that meet in homes, apartments, offices, community centers and schools. They are all Small Strong Congregations.

There are 3 principles that inform the mission and mortar of Small Strong Congregations:

- Their facilities are adequate for their mission
- Their spaces are sacred and shared
- Their facilities are a blessing and not a burden.

8.1. **Adequate for Mission.**

Small Strong Congregations have just enough space for their mission. Mortar follows Mission, not the reverse.

A house does not make a home or a family. Neither does a building make a congregation. When a group of worshippers find a mission, they become a congregation.

There are four steps for a new congregation:

1. Mission: Discover the people with whom God is inviting you to be in mission.
2. Team: Develop a team: congregation, volunteer-staff and pastoral staff (in full-time or part-time capacity)
3. Future: Build a future blueprint for mission, compassion, community, self-reliance, hope, leadership and generosity.
4. Service: Helping, richly and fully, the community God gives us for mission.

Where we meet will shape our mission. Our mission will be limited or enhanced by our location. It is vital for us to have a clear picture of the mission. Who we help is far more important than where we meet.

There is another approach: This is the *big bucks approach*:

1. Land: Buy land in a good spot at a reasonable price.
2. Minister: Find a minister who is a good church planter, and get a salary subsidy for 5 years.
3. Members: Recruit membership
4. Build: Phase one of a 3 or 4 phase project.

This approach works, but it has 2 major drawbacks:

1. It needs lots of money.
2. The Mission is completing the architect's plan.

(Gives a good example of a congregation that completed the “footprint” on the architect's plan and found themselves “lost”.)

The New Testament does not emphasise buildings, but people. We are called to preach the Good News – not put up buildings.

There is nothing in the text that suggests “For I was hungered, and you bought a piece of land, I was thirsty and you hired a pastor, I was a stranger, and you held a committee meeting, I was naked and you sought an architect, I was sick and you raised money, I was in prison and you raised a building.

Some try to make a feeble case that the land, minister, members and buildings are necessary before we can do the mission. The difficulty is that by the time the land is bought, the minister hired, the members acquired, and the buildings built, amnesia set in and we have forgotten why we did all of this in the first place.

There are 7 kinds of meeting place: Under a tree (very rural), apartments, homes, offices/warehouses, schools, community centers and traditional church buildings. There are 4 “ownership” options. Volunteer (someone lets us use their space), Rental, Lease, and Ownership. It is interesting that many successful groups like scouts, AA, quilters, etc all use rented spaces.

People who live in castles build cathedrals. People who own houses want to own churches. In the 21st century people who own a mission build a congregation.

8.2. Sacred and Shared.

A building by itself can do nothing. It is like a ship sitting dead in the water. It is lifeless. It cannot sail itself. It wobbles back and forth, the victim of waves and currents. It takes the wind of grace, the crew of compassion and the course of mission to stir the idle ship. With these forces, the ship then becomes a moving, breathing, living thing that races across the water to the future that God is promising and preparing.

Do we have need for sacred spaces? Yes. They remind us of the grace of God. Do we have an even deeper need to live a sacred life? Yes, yes, yes! A sacred life is a richer, fuller sign of the grace of God. Sometimes, a sacred space can point us toward a sacred life, and sometimes it can distract us. It is true that – sometimes – a little bit of something can immunize us from the real thing.

A place of worship is sacred not because it is a certain shape or size. It is sacred because the congregation senses the moving, living, stirring grace of God. The building, in itself, is like the idle ship. It takes the wind of God's grace, the crew of compassion, and the course of mission to stir an idle ship. *God's grace* makes a place sacred.

The art is to sense the sacred in our lives, not our buildings...

All the architects, building committees and dedications we can think of cannot make a space holy. A space becomes holy not from anything we do; it is a gift of God.

In day to day life there are many sacred spaces: The kitchen table, the cabin on the lake, and many others. The places where we share space. In many congregations the most sacred space is the one where the most meetings and gatherings happen.

Small Strong Congregations generously and efficiently share space. The space feels inclusive rather than closed and exclusive. They are simple, elegant and uncluttered. They go through their buildings and clear the clutter regularly.

Well-kept facilities send a message of life, energy and vitality. Faded facilities speak of a faded, withering and declining church - "Our best days have been."

Gives a stunning example of a church with dilapidated building and fence – it was so dull, people didn't even notice it. There was no money to fix it. Callahan found two retired guys with a love for flowers who strategically put some beds in places where they could be seen. Soon people started noticing the church with the flowers and they two guys started a gardening club that brought new members to the church.

Small Strong Congregations can't afford single use unshared spaces. Such spaces promote compartmentalization and fragmentation.

8.3. Blessing not Burden

Many buildings are burdens. We are preoccupied with filling them, paying for them and maintaining them.

Often congregations have badly dilapidated buildings and badly depleted funds.

This is what Callahan did in one cong:

- He found a volunteer interior decorator to give him good advice on colours etc.
- Got a seven year rotational preventative maintenance programme in place.
- Put an emergency repair and liven-up programme in place.
 - They started with low-cost, high-visibility items. Entrance halls and vestibules. Helps motivate people and send a message of new life.
 - He "cornered" the building – did upgrades on left and right, and front and back. This emphasised the need in the middle and people were motivated to help with fixing it.
 - They did a bit each year and when they reached the end of the cycle, they started again with a new colour-scheme and theme to promote an ongoing sense of life and vitality.

Sometimes a congregation that has an overburden of facilities should consider selling and moving. We do this in our homes when families shrink and children leave home. It is hard, but necessary and sensible.

When the following are in place, the building is a blessing and not a burden:

- The congregational focus is on the mission.
- We have just enough facilities – not too much.
- We sense the sacred in our lives and not in the building.
- We practice shared and multiple use of the facilities.
- Our facilities help the mission – they don't hinder it.
- We develop the wisdom and generosity of enduring gifts.

Enduring Gifts is an investment fund that will yield an annual dividend that will take care of all the preventative maintenance needs. It means that we don't have to budget for routine maintenance in the annual budget. Use the following principles:

1. We never touch the capital.
2. Use the interest for preventative maintenance.
3. Calculate 3% of the building value. Aim for an investment that will earn that 3% annually.
4. People will willingly give to a cause where they know that the principle will remain intact – they like to give enduring gifts.

There is a time for temples and a time for tents. This is a time for tents. There is a time for castles and a time for community. This is a time for community. There is a time for cathedrals and a time for congregations.

This is a time for congregations.

The message of the Christmas is not that there was no room in the inn. The message is that God's Grace can help us in Mission – wherever we are.

9. Giving and Generosity

This chapter is the least clearly structured. The summary has attempted to group things a bit.

We love God because God first loved us.

1John4:19

9.1. Different kinds of Giving.

Spends quite a bit of time emphasizing that most people give in a more spontaneous fashion than in a clear, structured and planned fashion. Typically on a given Sunday, a trusted face presents a concrete need that involves real people and the congregation responds generously – spontaneously. They see that the money will go straight to the needy and they give.

Givers fall into two groups: Marathon Runners and Short Sprinters. The planned giving caters for the marathon runners, but not the sprinters.

He also makes the important point that many people give seasonally. This is not just a rural occurrence – even in the cities there are many who receive bonuses and commissions at certain times of the year. Planned Giving Schemes ignore these patterns.

It is a good idea to develop a number of celebration Sundays to accommodate Spontaneous and Seasonal Giving. Some churches have an annual service celebrating births, an annual service remembering bereavements, and other major services where major offerings are received and earmarked for missional needs.

Congregations will give when:

- They feel they participated in the selection of the need
- There are clear people pictures of those being helped
- They can see their money going directly to those in need
- They are encouraged to give in a way that matches how they live and give.

They **don't** give if:

- They were excluded from the need-choosing
- There is no clear picture of those being helped
- It is vague as to whether the money gets to those it was collected for
- They are pushed into a giving pattern that does not match their lives and giving patterns

People like to give to people needs. They like to give informally, seasonally and generously. Planned giving schemes are fine, but they are a form of giving that is more a duty than an act of thankful and spontaneous generosity. Try to keep a balance between formal giving and informal giving. Allow space for seasonal giving and always show the congregation who the *people* are that benefit.

One can also have major fund-raising projects. These must be clearly explained:

- Who we are planning to help and how?
- Who is going to be doing the helping? Who are the volunteers?
- Who are the leaders?
- How much are we going to invest?

9.2. Six Sources of Giving

1. Spontaneous – as the need is presented
2. Major Community Sunday Giving. Don't be shy to use high and holy days to ask for special giving.
3. Special Giving – Like a day of Giving.
4. Major Project Giving – For an children's outreach.
5. Annual Giving – Budget Driven. Good, but don't be a slave to the line-items!
6. Enduring Gifts – See previous chapter for details.

Many congregations only bargain on Annual Giving and thereby miss out on the many other sources of income.

9.3. Strengths for Giving

Small Strong Congregations have the following strengths which allow generous giving:

- Giving is Compassion Driven
Small Strong Congregations are high in Compassion. They give to people and not to a budget.

People give for five reasons (In descending order of importance...)

1. **Compassion**: sharing, caring, giving, loving and serving.
2. **Community**: Good fun, roots, place, belonging, family and friends.
3. **Challenge**: Attainment, accomplishment, achievement.
4. **Reasonability**: Data, analysis, logic – it makes good sense.
5. **Commitment**: Duty, vow, obligation, loyalty.

- A Mission Budget is presented. A budget that shows one or more *projects* (Kids, Music, Shepherding, Outreach, etc.) where we say:

1. These are the *people* we will be helping.
2. These are the *volunteers* who will be helping with the work.
3. This is our *leadership* team for the project.
4. This is what we want to *invest*.

Folk respond to this kind of clear leadership,

- Solid Financial Leadership.

- Marked by **respect, integrity** and **transparency**.
- Has a strong ethos of **gratitude**. Gives examples of two June Letters.

○ #1

- We are behind in our bills
- The Utilities (rates etc) were higher than we anticipated
- Please could we ask you to give a *little* more...

There are three things wrong with this kind of letter.

- Everyone battles with their bills – we've just given them a reason not to give.
- The Cause of Christ is reduced to utilities
- We ask for a *little*!!

○ #2

- We are doing solid work and have celebrated an amazing Easter
- These are the people we have been helping in our mission so far
- Thank you for your help in this major mission!

This is a much better letter!

- A Solid Financial Team has **three priorities** (in descending order of importance)
 1. Mission Development
 2. Giving Development (Teaching People to be Generous)
 3. Budget Development

If you have to do only 2 then do 1 and 2!

- A Solid Financial Team uses **Positive Reinforcement**.
Some churches send out quarterly statements to people on the status of their planned giving pledges. Callahan challenged one treasurer to write the two words “Thank You” instead of signing her name. People responded incredibly positively.

9.4. A Spirit of Giving:

Small Strong Congregations have a clear sense of God's Grace and are generous.

They are Christmas People – full of wonder and joy

They are Easter People – full of hope and new life.

They never have enough and they celebrate it because they know that God supplies their needs. They give away more than they have and God blesses it.

Small Strong Congregations are always looking for more people to help. They are generous because they have discovered that love lasts and hope endures.

10. *Living with the Spirit of Promise*

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why we call it the present.

God invites us to live with promise. The promise is not that we will never have problems, but that He will always be with us.

Small Strong Congregations live with:

- the promise of our lives together.
- the promise of the possibilities God gives us
- the promise of resurrection and new life.

Small Strong Congregations are not preoccupied with growing bigger, but growing stronger.

They centre on their strengths and not on their weaknesses.

10.1. The Promise of our Lives Together.

Small Strong Congregations

- Live for what they are: Tells the story of a Small Strong Congregation that called a minister who had been in a large congregation. He was a good man, faithful, caring, dedicated, and worked hard. But there were problems. They realised that he was subconsciously working toward large congregation goals, mindsets and methods. He had to adjust his mindset and expectations to being comfortable with a smaller, but in many senses more comfortable environment.
- Live richly and fully in the present: They do not live in the past, but learn from it. The present is more about being than doing. It is all about relationships. They do not live in the future in a way that leaves them identity-dependent on the future. They don't miss out on the present.

- Look with anticipation to the future: The future gives direction to the present. The future doesn't replace the present, but fills it with purpose. Gives a great example of setting a wedding date. Couples that do this are more likely to marry than those who do not, and the relationship develops towards that goal.

10.2. The Promise of the Possibilities God gives us.

The strengths and possibilities found in Small Strong Congregations are God's gift to them. In order to grow stronger, not bigger, the following steps should be taken.

1. Claim your strengths: He suggests a congregational retreat where as many of the congregation as possible can share some time together.

We think. We pray. We study and review the material in the previous chapters. We gather in a good fun, good-times planning session. We have fun. We Pray. We share together. Then we decide which of these 8 qualities are strengths in our congregation.

Then the group gives themselves a 1-10 score on each of the following 8 characteristics.

1. Mission and Service
 2. Compassion and Shepherding
 3. Community and Belonging
 4. Self-Reliance and Self-Sufficiency
 5. Worship and Hope
 6. Team, Leaders and Congregation
 7. Adequate Facilities
 8. Generosity and Giving.
2. Expand a Strength: Many leadership approaches start by trying to address a weakness. Callahan suggests that one start by expanding one or two strengths. It is easier to start here and often a success will pull all the other areas up too.

We do better what we do best. Choose a strength that matches your competency and community.

To expand a strength look for two key objectives that advance a present strength. Find to goals that will enhance these strengths *now*.

3. Then we add a new strength:

As we expand a current strength, we are in the strongest position to add one new strength. We are at peace. We do not hurry. We are realistic. We focus on what is achievable. In our enthusiasm we do not try to do too much too soon. We think progress not perfection. We keep that old friend, a compulsion to perfectionism at bay.

Identify one of the 8 characteristics of Small Strong Congregations that could become a strength and set 4 key objectives to advance it as a strength. (Don't select the weakest weakness. Go for the most achievable. Select from the midrange between strengths and weaknesses.)

Therefore:

1 st Year:	- Rank the 8 characteristics - Identify 1 strength and improve it.
2 nd Year:	- (Upgrade another strength) - Work on a midrange weakness and turn it into a strength.
3 rd Year:	- Upgrade a strength - Turn a midrange weakness into a strength

Repeat the cycle.

4. Aim for 5 strengths out of the 8 characteristics: There is no point in trying to achieve all 8. This is just perfectionism. Stats show that Small Strong Congregations have 5. The other good news is that as we upgrade one characteristic, the others will improve too.

Small Strong Congregations act in the present to:

- Claim God-given strengths
- Expand a current strength
- Deliver 5/8 characteristics strongly
- Live as a Small Strong Congregation.

To delay would be to lose the privilege of helping people with their lives and destinies.

10.3. The Promise of Resurrection and New Life.

Our promise is in the new life God gives us. We can live as people of the resurrection.

- We discover new life together.
Life is a journey. Small Strong Congregations teach the values of life: Family, Community, Excellent Mistakes, Wisdom, Constructive Living and forgiveness.
Small Strong Congregations think in terms of participation – not membership.
- We encourage new disciples.
 - Sharing a joyful invitation to become disciples.
 - Helping people to live whole and healthy lives
 - Develop qualities that will keep us small and strong.
 - Help other small congregations to become strong.
 - Start new Small Strong Congregations. (Large Congs start Congregations that are “genetically coded” to become large. Small Strong Congregations are the best to plant Small Strong Congregations.)
- We live as people of the resurrection. We are people of the open tomb, the Risen Lord and New Life.

When all seems lost, God gives new life. When we despair, God gives us signs of new hope. When we waver, God supports us with steadfast grace. We we doubt, God gives us new faith. When we are lost God gives us a new way. When we are lonely, God sends us new joy. When we think it is over, God gives us a new beginning.

People and congregations have the dynamic of living, dying and discovering new life. If we concentrate on living, we live well and discover new life. When we become preoccupied with dying and survival, we do not do well.

When congregations get caught up in dying, looking at declining numbers and finances becomes their death dirge. Well-meaning church consultants say “If you do not do x,y,z your church will die.” Even good news is interpreted as a temporary turnaround in their decline instead of a celebration of their life. *There will always be trouble. The promise is not that things will get better, but that God is with us.*

Every time an alcoholic quits, every time a marriage reconciles Resurrection happens. Every time the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed and the gospel goes to the poor Resurrection happens.

The 1st Millennium was about the Incarnation.

The 2nd Millennium was about the Cross.

The 3rd Millennium is about the Resurrection.

We are God's people, fashioned by the steadfast love of God. We are God's people, led by the strong hope of God. We are a Small Strong Congregation. We live in the grace of God. Love lasts. Hope endures. We live with the assurance of the promise of God. We are the people of promise. We are a Small Strong Congregation.