

GOING & GATHERING · PART II

The Small *(Effective)* Church

Deploying the Gifts God Has Given

The Rev. Canon Michael D. Vinson
NEMA Synod · Reformed Episcopal Church · November 6, 2026

LET US PRAY · THE COLLECT FOR GOOD FRIDAY

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

ST. ANDREW, ON A HILLSIDE IN GALILEE

There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

JOHN 6:9



THE SHAPE OF OUR HOUR

Reframe · Diagnose · Discover · Deploy

1

Reframe

the story we tell about smallness

2

Diagnose

why our parish is small

3

Discover

the gifts already in our hands

4

Deploy

limitations into solutions



Then: gather up the fragments — one next step for every parish.

"The chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth."

DONALD McGAVRAN

"There is, after all, something very dangerous in rejoicing in growth — the result of a statistical calculation — instead of rejoicing in the salvation of a person."

STEFAN PAAS, PILGRIMS AND PRIESTS

I · REFRAME

Joy over one; seed for all

"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." — Luke 15:7



Sow widely

The Gospel must be sown as widely as possible.



Expect few

Most seed will not take, or will take only shallowly.



Trust the harvest

The good ground bears fruit, "some an hundredfold."

Faithfulness is measured first by the sowing. The harvest belongs to God.

“The church that is in thy house”

Romans 16:5 · Philemon 2

“Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you.”
Romans 16:23 — written from Corinth

“Modern denominations tend to think of any congregation less than 100 as failing, but the congregations at the beginning of Christianity were mostly as small.”
James D. G. Dunn

≈ 40

the whole church at Corinth, gathered in one home

13

Columba and twelve companions: Iona, 563

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

LUKE 12:32

What if small churches are God's idea, not our failure?

Size is not an obstacle to effectiveness. **Rather, it is a catalyst for missional imagination.**

Is something wrong with small churches?

- Inward-focused
- Threatened by change
- Not reaching their community
- Poorly managed
- Under-resourced
- Settling for less

Not small-church problems.

Sick-church problems.

The question is not "Are we small?" but "Why are we small?"

Stuck or strategic?

STUCK

Small by mistake
doing important things poorly

Small by exclusion
barriers that keep others out

Frozen in time
unwilling to change or adapt

STRATEGIC

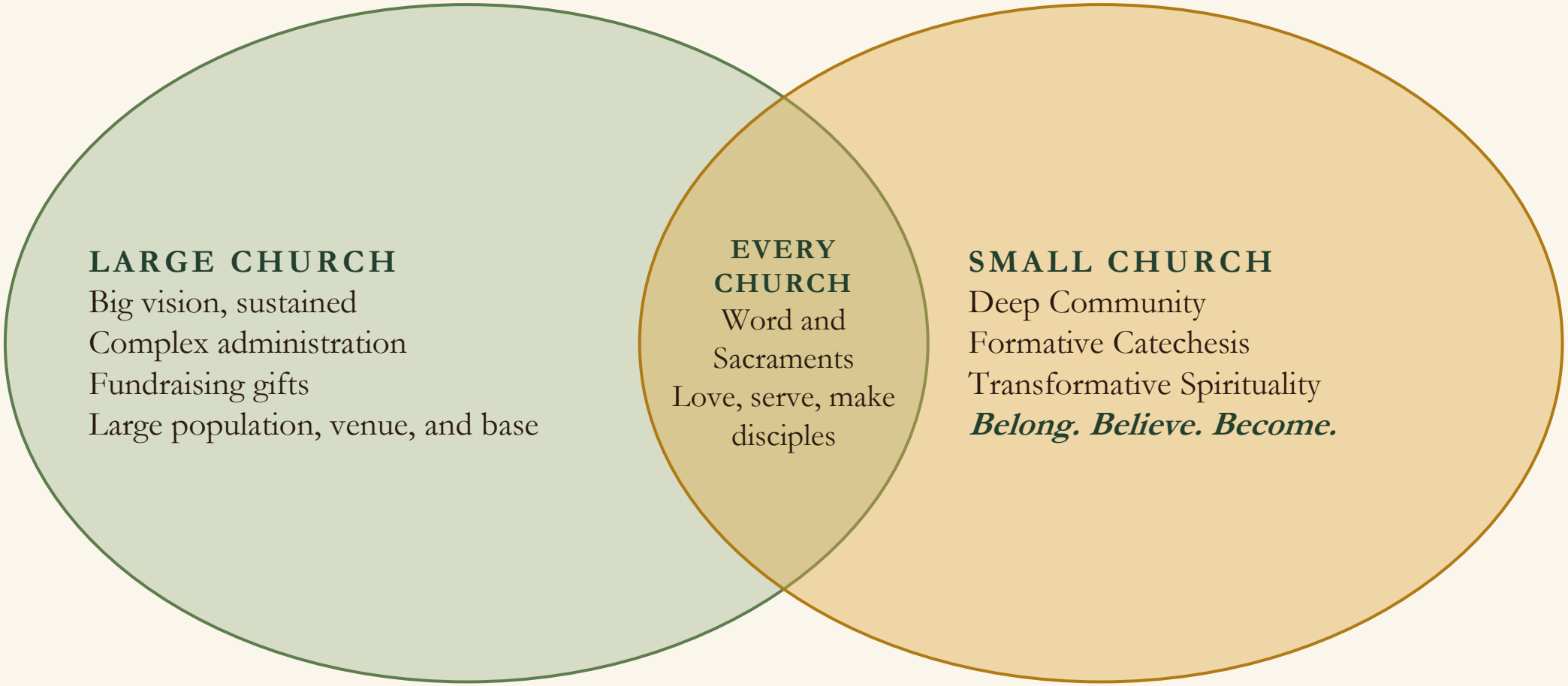
Small with a purpose
to know, pastor, and love by name

Small for a while
a young mission, a season of rebuilding

Small for infiltration
leaven hid in three measures of meal

Small by nature and gifting
one member of the body

Small churches are different (and that's okay)



Six gifts of the small parish

Known

No one is anonymous. The newcomer is noticed — and missed.

Needed

"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee."

Household

Born in homes: prayer, meals, catechesis in a circle of chairs.

Nimble

Decide on Sunday, begin on Tuesday.

Rooted

Leaven in the Parish Mile: known in shops, schools, and pubs.

Real

Reverent and friendly in an age tired of spectacle.

Five loaves and two small fishes

8 min

5 at your table · 3 to share

Take inventory of what is already in your hands. Write what comes to mind; don't edit.



People

who, and what they do well



Places

homes, building, Parish Mile



Practices

what we already do well



Relationships

schools, work, civic, neighbors



Character

our parish's personality

Then circle your two strongest gifts.

◆ IV · DEPLOY

“Make the men sit down.”

JOHN 6:10–11

1

He ordered

the crowd — “Make the men sit down.”

2

He gave thanks

for what was there, not for what was missing.

3

He distributed

it through his disciples.

The miracle was his; the passing of the baskets was theirs.

Real and perceived limitations

LIMITATION		SMALL-CHURCH SOLUTION
Lack of clergy and staff	→	Raise up lay leaders; the priest equips the saints
Limited finances	→	Friendship and hospitality cost almost nothing
Inadequate space or location	→	Homes, parks, a pub's back room, a borrowed hall
Time constraints	→	Fewer things, done well; fold mission into existing rhythms
Low or no visibility	→	Be seen in your Parish Mile; keep feasts out of doors
Difficulty shepherding all	→	Share the care: each member shepherds one or two

WORKSHOP 2 · WORKSHEET 3

Limitations into solutions

10 min

7 at your table · 3 to share

1 Choose the two limitations most real for your parish — or name your own.

2 For each, write one small-church solution.

3 Share one solution worth stealing.



The rule: every solution uses a gift from Worksheet 2. No wishing for more money, clergy, or people.

Declutter before you add

1. What ministries have ceased to be effective?
2. What costs more time, energy, and resources than it is worth?
3. If we were planting this parish today, would we begin this?
4. Can this ministry be refreshed, or should it be ended?
5. What are we doing that we wish we didn't have to do?



Ending a ministry well is not a failure.

Give thanks for it, bless those who carried it, and lay it down.

Clarifying missional effectiveness



8 min

at your table

	Belong	Believe	Become
Existing			
Evolve · Adjust · Conclude			
New			

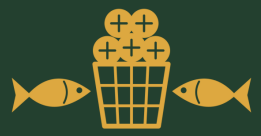


Then agree on **one next step** — and write it in the box.

"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost."

JOHN 6:12

Stop saying, *"What are we among so many?"*
Begin saying, *"There is a lad here."*



Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Amen.