

Small-church pastors challenged to make a difference

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At the conclusion of a recent WorldconneX conference for smaller church pastors, Ridge Adams, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dublin, takes his turn leading the group to pray for a people group his church is seeking to reach for Christ.

Small-church pastors challenged to make a difference

By David Williams

WorldconneX

WAXAHACHIE—God must love small churches since he made so many of them. That was the message pastors of small churches heard at a recent conference conducted by [WorldconneX](#), Texas Baptists' missions network.

Titled "More Than You Think You Are," the meeting at Lakeview Conference Center in Waxahachie was billed as "a new conversation for the smaller-church pastor."

"It's OK to be a small church," said Bill Tinsley, WorldconneX leader. "Most churches are small churches. But every church should be a kingdom church."

Tim Ahlen, pastor of Forest Meadow Baptist Church in Dallas, told pastors a small church is not an anomaly, but the norm. He referred to anthropological studies that show the largest naturally occurring human community is 150, whether it is a village in Africa or a church in America. Larger groupings, he said, actually are groups of communities.

"This is normal," he said, adding that small churches have several advantages over megachurches such as resilience, gift-based organization, decision-making by consensus and effectiveness in evangelism and reproduction.

"They can't offer the full programs of big churches," he said. "But they can go narrow and deep in specialized ministry areas."

He compared the difference in reproductive effectiveness of small churches

versus megachurches to the difference in the reproduction of rabbits and elephants. It takes three years to go from two elephants to three, he said, but during that same time period, two rabbits theoretically could produce 476 million offspring.

Although pastors of smaller churches may feel their church needs to grow before it can accomplish something significant, testimonies during the conference showed how God used small congregations to plant churches, reach people groups and transform communities.

Robert Park, pastor of New Life Baptist Church in Houston, told how his 100-member, 6-year-old church got involved in doing missions in Cuba, where it has planted 30 churches, established 15 Bible training schools and works with college campus ministry.

Pastor Mike Fritscher told how Cottonwood Baptist Church in Dublin adopted an unreached people group in 1999 when the church averaged 270 in worship attendance. Since then, as the church has grown, it has sent nearly 200 members on short-term mission trips to Southeast Asia, Mexico and Arizona.

When Ahlen became pastor of Forest Meadow, the church averaged only 25 in attendance, but it owned six acres and a building and was receiving \$160,000 a year in offerings. Although the church was 35 years old, Ahlen saw it as the equivalent of “a great church start” and began leading the congregation to see what God wanted to do with them.

The church now averages 75 people from 11 nations at its 11 a.m. worship service and has started five churches, three of which share its North Dallas facility.

One of its church starts, Team Church—now called The Gathering—was launched solely to start other churches. Based in Fort Worth, it meets on Saturday nights so members can divide into church-starting teams on

Sunday mornings. Team Church has been responsible for 14 church starts in the last three years, two of which have themselves started churches.

In addition to its local church-planting ministry, Forest Meadow also does mission work in Sudan, where it also has helped start a church.

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