

## WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR CHURCH?

*This the second in a series of articles on the dynamics of church size.*

*“This isn't the same place it used to be!”*

That's true for many people at Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church. The size of our congregation makes everything about us different. In the church, size matters. Large churches like ECRC cannot function the same way smaller churches function.

One major difference is that larger churches are much more complex than smaller churches. The larger the church the less its members have in common. There is more diversity in factors such as age, family status, ethnicity, etc. At one time at Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church it was very rare to not have a Dutch surname. Currently very few new members have Dutch surnames. We are diverse not only in ethnic origin, but also in religious backgrounds, family status, cultural backgrounds, and race. All of this diversity complicates ministry.

In addition, we have multiple services, multiple groups, and in some ways multiple congregations. One size fits all doesn't work in the larger church. Elected leaders may attend one service, but many congregants attend a different service. Staffing becomes more complicated with specialists in areas where generalists once did the work.

An example of this would be our Care Department. In smaller churches the pastor makes the hospital calls, does the counseling, visits shut-ins, and meets with members who are seeking life guidance. In a church our size we have a Care Department with a full-time Director of Caring and Community, Lisa Capozzoli, and a part-time Congregational Care Associate, Bert DeJong. Lisa and Bert are specialists in the area of caring and support and lead our ministries in those areas.

The larger a church the more staff per capita needs to be added. In smaller churches the first ministry staff persons may be added for every increase of 150-200 in attendance. But the larger you get you need to add staff for every 75-100 people.

Larger churches also have to shift the decision-making responsibilities to staff rather than elected lay leaders. As the complexity of a ministry grows, only those who are involved in the ministry daily can truly understand what is taking place and what is needed. Elected leaders increasingly deal with only top-level, big-picture issues. This requires a shift in the mental model for everyone. Several years ago Elmhurst Christian Reformed Church adopted a staff-led approach to ministry.

In an article on Leadership and Church Size dynamics, Dr. Timothy Keller writes:  
*“Generally, in smaller churches policy is decided by many and ministry is done by a few, while in the large church ministry is done by many and policy is decided by a few.”*