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☆ An Annotated Bibliography For Small-Church Ministry



By Dan Yarnell

When I began my ministry in the United Kingdom, I responded to the call of God to go wherever he would send me. I didn't realize that I would be working in a small church (essentially a church plant) and that I would spend many years of my life seeking to be both faithful and effective in that setting. What I also didn't realize was that my essential theological and pastoral training, while good and worthwhile, didn't adequately prepare me for ministry within a small community of believers.

I soon became acutely aware that I would need some help in this journey of faith. The following books have been essential guides for me in this work for the Lord. I have divided the books into three broad categories, which should aid the reader in a helpful approach to this unique and important ministry.

Understanding the Small Church

My first choice of books is Lyle Schaller's classic work *The Small Church Is Different* (Abingdon, 1982). Here is one of the clearest treatises available on the life and ministry of the small church. I first came across it in a ministers' fraternal where local pastors and leaders were studying together how to enable our churches to be more effective in mission and evangelism. A colleague from the States introduced the book to all of us, and I was immediately struck by how relevant and helpful it was. (I have nearly worn out my copy.)

Schaller identifies twenty areas of ministry that have a unique expression within a smaller church. Although a few of them may now look dated, many still hold true. (In my book listed below, my colleague and I have listed seven of the areas that are extremely relevant for churches in the U.K.) Schaller is certainly knowledgeable about the life of the small church and how its uniqueness requires a specific response to leadership ministry.

My second choice would be *Entering the World of the Small Church* by Anthony G. Pappas (The Alban Institute, 1988). This book is a real "user's guide" to life in the small church and the kind of leadership required for it. One of the specific strengths of the book is the author's sociological analysis of the small church as a folk society. He writes not only as one who has expertise and understanding in this area, but also as one who has many years of experience on which to draw.

Pappas encourages his readers to consider that small-church ministry is so unique that it is almost like entering another world or a foreign country for which we have probably not been adequately prepared. He speaks as a leader to leaders and offers sound advice about the type of leadership required. Pappas is also the editor of a news sheet that networks small churches in the United States (The Five Stones).

Third, I would commend Carl S. Dudley's work *Making the Small Church Effective* (Abingdon, 1978). This

book is often referred to as the “bible” of the small church. Dudley works around the three themes of caring, conserving, and coping to help the reader explore the issues and opportunities of small-church life. He includes some exercises for the reader that help work out some of the issues and tensions of life and ministry.

Ministry within the Small Church

Once we begin to understand what the small-church community is like, the next step is to ask about the appropriate ways of responding to this unique ministry. This next list of books are those which are more practical, offering approaches to the pragmatic issues of ministry within the small church.

Leadership is a hot topic in the Christian and secular press, with books and seminars by the dozens being offered each year. It is equally important within the smaller church; however, as with much else, it is expressed differently within this context. My first choice of books in addressing this theme is Doran McGrathy’s *Leading the Small Church* (Broadman, 1992). This work is published from the perspective of the Southern Baptists in the United States, but it has useful insights for ministers from other traditions as well. The issues McGrathy covers include the pastor and power in the small church, the job of a small-church pastor, lay leadership, pastoral leadership, and preparing to be a small-church pastor. McGrathy is a wise and helpful guide.

Another important volume on leadership is Steve Burt’s *Activating Leadership in the Small Church* (Judson, 1988), a part of the Small Church in Action series. The author uses personal experience and anecdotal humor as well as practical guidelines to illustrate the important work of motivating and enabling leadership, both pastoral and lay, within the smaller church. This work could be carefully used with lay leaders within a small-church context.

The topic of leadership brings us to the issues of particular areas of ministry. I have listed a few books covering some of the basics.

Preaching with the Small Congregation by Laurence A. Wagley (Abingdon, 1989) provides helpful (and, for some, a few radical) ideas and approaches to preaching. The strength is that the author seeks to recognize and value the small church and find appropriate ways of preaching that reflect that concern.

Money, Motivation, and Mission in the Small Church by Anthony Pappas (Judson, 1989) is a further contribu-

tion to the Small Church in Action series. Pappas tackles the thorny issues of money and mission and provides many valuable insights into how the small church thinks on these important issues. He also faces up to the three tensions of paying the minister, maintaining the building, and being involved in mission with often limited resources.

Youth Ministry in Small Churches by Rick Chromey (Group Books, 1990) is a book that understands the small church. It speaks to and illustrates youth ministry from this perspective. The author has had experience in various small churches in the United States and so speaks as a fellow laborer. I found especially helpful his contribution of a shared youth ministry approach, with local churches working in partnership.

Donald L. Griggs and Judy McKay Walther’s *Christian Education in the Small Church* (Judson, 1988) is another volume in the Small Church in Action series. It is a very practical book covering issues of leadership, training, resources and curriculum, and integration of worship and education, especially with regard to the Sunday school.

Developing Your Small Church’s Potential by Carl S. Dudley and Douglas Alan Walrath (Judson, 1988) is still another volume in the Small Church in Action series. Dudley and Walrath offer valuable assistance in enabling the small church to face its culture, community, and the process of change within the congregation, as well as ways the church can impact its surroundings. Since change is one of the major obstacles within the smaller church (which loves continuity and therefore resists quick change, although not necessarily steady progressive change), this book is a must read.

All of these works offer specific approaches to some of the most difficult and demanding areas of leadership for small-church leaders and their congregations.

Small-Church Ministry with a European (U.K.) Perspective

Finally, it would be impossible not to mention at least two books from the context of my own ministry and work. Two books have been published so far in the United Kingdom that have looked at the issue of the smaller church. The first one is *Growing the Smaller Church* by Mike Breen (Marshall Pickering, 1992). It is not so much about the small church in general as it is the story of how one small church grew to become a much larger church. It is an exciting read, but it doesn’t present specifics of leadership within the small church. However, in the foreword to

the book, Paul Simonds of CPAS (Church Pastoral Aid Society—a Christian organization providing resources for churches) writes, “If we are to halt the decline in church attendance and membership it is the small churches which will be the most important. . . . Eight out of ten worshippers [in England] are in a congregation with under 120 people.” It is an important reality of mission in the United Kingdom that the small church is strategic in reaching the lost. That is likely also true in much of the Western world, where church attendance and membership is in decline.

It is an author’s prerogative to mention at least one of his own publications, so I will end this discussion with a brief mention of my own book. *Celebrating the Small Church* by Martin Robinson and Dan Yarnell (Monarch, 1993) is still the only British book on the small church to date. We not only attempted to Anglicize some of the contributions of American books but also made our own unique contribution from research and from our own years of experience as Church of Christ ministers. Our aim was to enable the small church to see its unique position within the kingdom of God and to seek to encourage and equip it for mission and witness.

I have not mentioned some older works, even others recently published. What I have attempted to do is to convey from my reading, my experience in ministry, and my own spiritual pilgrimage the books that provide insight into how ministry in the smaller church is different from, but just as exciting and rewarding as, that in a larger church. We need to be effective and faithful by thinking in a mission context, realizing that the small church is still a strategic place in the kingdom of God, especially in a postmodern and a post-Christian and pagan environment. These are a few of the tools that have helped me along the way. I pray that they may be a good starting point for you in your ministry within the smaller-church community.

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