

## CHURCH SIZES AND CHARACTERISTICS

### **The Family Church:** Up to 50 attending worship weekly.

The family church is also called the matriarchal church or patriarchal church, or both, because strong lay leaders control interactions. It feels like a tribe or committee of the whole. Often, these fellowships are stable and long lasting.

#### **Membership**

- High ownership for survival.
- Groups are usually very homogeneous, with little conflict and little anonymity.
- Members are assimilated by “adoption” and nourished by intimacy.
- Members are very devoted and hardworking. Everyone participates.
- Members know every person by name, and they minister to one another.
- Visitors may find it hard to become a part of the community.

#### **Minister’s Role**

- The minister, if there is one, is generally part-time. He or she assumes the chaplain role, leading worship and giving pastoral care.
- The minister maintains a direct pastoral relationship with each member and provides home and hospital visits.
- The minister provides quality sermons.
- The minister’s term is often short because of funding issues or fit problems in the close-knit community. He or she may find it difficult to work with the matriarch or patriarch and may leave after a short tenure.

#### **Organizational Structure**

- Single-celled organism. The social system resembles an extended biological family.
- The minister acts as a consultant to the matriarch or patriarch.
- The governing board arranges much of the day-to-day life of the congregation.
- The organization often functions as a committee of the whole. Not everyone has equal influence, but members define and change ways of operating in their own characteristic ways.
- Leadership is group centered.
- Communication is informal, usually one to one.

#### **Standards for Leadership**

- Leaders collaborate; unity of the team is important.
- Standards (for accountability) are usually set by the whole community and can be voided by objections from any member. The matriarch or patriarch has final authority.
- Few policies or procedures are written, because “everyone knows.”
- Decisions are usually based on history.
- Matriarch/patriarch are parental figures and control leadership.
- Minister (M), if present, is pastor and consultant to matriarch and patriarch.

**The Pastoral Church: 50 to 150 attending worship weekly.**

The pastoral church is a coalition of two or three family and friendship networks unified around the person and role of the minister. The congregation has a sense of family—everyone knows everyone else. The majority of all churches in the United States are this size.

**Membership**

- Members recognize one another's faces and notice if someone new is present at worship.
- Membership inclusion is easier; more diversity exists.
- Subgroups form in the community like spokes of a wheel, with the minister at the hub.
- Opportunities for conflict grow.
- Members have stronger voices and look to the minister for leadership.
- Most members are involved and take responsibility for the functioning of the church.

**Minister's Role**

- The minister is central and relates to everyone. Expectations for the minister are high.
- The minister maintains a direct pastoral relationship with each member and cares for members in times of need.
- The minister attends many activities and leads small-group programs.
- The minister coordinates the work of a small leadership circle.
- The minister personally conducts worship.
- The minister recruits and shepherds new members through the membership path.
- Church growth depends on the popularity of the minister.
- As the church grows, it becomes more difficult to maintain a personal relationship with everyone.

**Organizational Structure**

- A leadership circle made up of the minister and a small group of lay leaders replaces the matriarch/patriarch paradigm.
- The governing board usually operates like a committee, arranging much of the day-to-day life of the congregation.
- The effectiveness of the leadership circle depends on the minister's ability to delegate authority, assign responsibility, and recognize the accomplishments of others.
- The organization has an organism structure with minister-centered leadership.

**Standards for Leadership**

- Leaders facilitate.
- Standards for lay leaders and staff are usually informal and not well communicated.
- Tension may exist around who has authority for decisions and for performance evaluation.
- Standards for leader accountability are usually set by the whole community and can be voided by objections.
- Standards for staff are usually established and maintained by the staff as a team, with the minister at the head of the team.
- Minister is central.
- Leadership circle is minister and small core of lay leaders.



**The Program Church:** 150 to 350 attending worship weekly.

The program church is known for the quality and variety of its programs. A small team of leaders, led by the minister, creates separate programs for children, youth, couples, seniors, and other age and interest groups.

**Membership**

- Entry points through programs are readily available for a wide range of visitors. Members take an active role in the ministry (pastoral care) of the church.
- Many interest groups, committees, and programs emerge to create the sense of
- belonging that people miss as the church grows. Members sometimes feel loyal to a smaller group rather than to the larger church community.
- A newcomer may find it more difficult to feel attached.

**Minister's Role**

- The minister is seen as a leader, shares information, and provides continuity across program areas.
- The minister must recruit, equip, develop, and inspire a small group of program leaders, both paid and unpaid.
- The minister spends less time with members and newcomers.
- The minister takes on administrator duties, delegates, or burns out. The presence of additional paid staff is essential.
- Lay leaders minister to one another in a healthy church.

**Organizational Structure**

- Stretched cell structure, with many activities and programs expanding faster than the resources required to support them.
- The church has an organizational structure in which the variety and complexity of relationships require attention to matters of identity, purpose, structure, and the role of leaders.
- Important decisions are made by a relatively small number of the members.
- Decision making is broadly distributed within the wider leadership circle (perhaps 50 people).
- Two-thirds of program-size churches operate with no more than three full-time paid staff of any kind. About 40 percent of all churches of this size make extensive use of part-time workers.
- The church has a group-centered structure.

**Standards for Leadership**

- Leaders coordinate.
- Staff members view themselves as participants in a common cause.
- Standards for staff are formalized, as are performance expectations. Volunteer evaluation strategies take shape.
- Core lay leaders are experienced in leadership roles, causing processes to be formalized.
- Standards must be consistent and be communicated across subgroups.
- Many cells of activity, headed up by lay leaders.

**The Corporate Church: 350+ attending worship weekly.**

The corporate church is known for excellence in worship and music, as well as for the range and diversity of its programs. Specialized ministries provide for narrowly identified groups of people. Half of the individuals in the United States who participate regularly in the life of a congregation are found in congregations with 400 or more regular participants.

**Membership**

- Visitor follow-up and new-member tracking systems are very intentional.
- Members are willing to sacrifice personal connections in favor of variety in programming and excellent worship services with professional musicians.
- Members must join smaller communities or feel disconnected.
- Leaders generate energy and enthusiasm.
- Distinct subcongregations often form around multiple worship services.
- Loyalty and responsibility to the church as a whole must be fostered.
- Most members find spiritual support in small groups, as well as from lay visitors.

**Minister's Role**

- The senior minister is a symbol of unity and stability.
- The minister acts as head of staff and must be skilled at working with diverse staff members.
- The minister spends quality time on sermon preparation and worship planning.
- The minister is expected to be visible in the community and to recruit new members.
- The minister knows fewer members on a personal level.
- The minister provides pastoral support to leaders.

**Organizational Structure**

- Decision making is carried out by a multilayered structure of staff, boards, and committees.
- The church has an organizational structure in which the variety and complexity of relationships require attention to identity, purpose, structure, and the role of leaders.
- About a third of corporate-size churches have at least ten ongoing groups in addition to their classes, committees, and choirs.
- The structure is minister centered rather than group centered because of the need for a skilled head of staff, administrator, and symbolic presence to unite the congregation.

**Standards for Leadership**

- Leaders provide a symbolic presence, unite the congregation, and dictate policy.
- Staff members serve as advisors to the leaders (board president or minister).
- Several staff members represent special interest groups.
- Many cells. Senior minister (SM) unites church and leads several full- and part-time staff members, and core of lay leaders.
- The senior minister bears major responsibility for staff performance, sets standards, and provides feedback to individuals and the group.
- Volunteers are recruited for specific reasons; their performance is monitored and shaped.
- Leadership development becomes a unifying force across subgroups.
- Formal staff and volunteer evaluation systems are in place.

# Church Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development

*The Church Life Cycle is similar to that of a person. This aspect the body of Christ is more pediatric than institutional. Church life is a matter of maturing and increasing, because we are speaking of a family, a grouping of individual believers, each in the process of spiritual maturity and social relationship.*

*At each stage, you will see four broad organizational factors (Vision, Fellowship, Program, and Leadership). All four are always present, but their dominance or preeminence will alter from time to time. On the chart that follows, the capital letter indicates a strong presence or focus, while the lower case letter indicates a subordinate or lower level of focus. For this discussion, the following descriptions will serve well:*

**Vision:** (Mission/Dream/Energy/Purpose)

*Vision is the current understanding of God's strategic spiritual direction for a local congregation that is cast by the leadership and owned by the membership.*

**Program:** (Activities/Training/ Discipleship/Ministries/Services/ Outreach/Evangelism/Assimilation/)

*Programs are the intentional, functional and organized relational process to provide involvement in a local New Testament congregation. This becomes the relational process by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ and assimilate members into fellowship life through ministries, services, activities, and training. People are related to the congregation for growth opportunities, and to utilize their skills and gifts through kingdom involvement.*

**Leadership** (Administration/Structure/Staffing/Oversight)

*Coordinated oversight of the various resources of the congregation, including congregational leaders such as staff, deacons, officers, trustees, elected leadership, and the formal and informal decision making structure of the congregation.*

**Resources:** (Buildings, Facilities, Budgets, Balances, Land or Location)

*Resources are those realized assets of the congregation that are recognized as available and applicable to the purposes of the congregation.*

**Observations:**

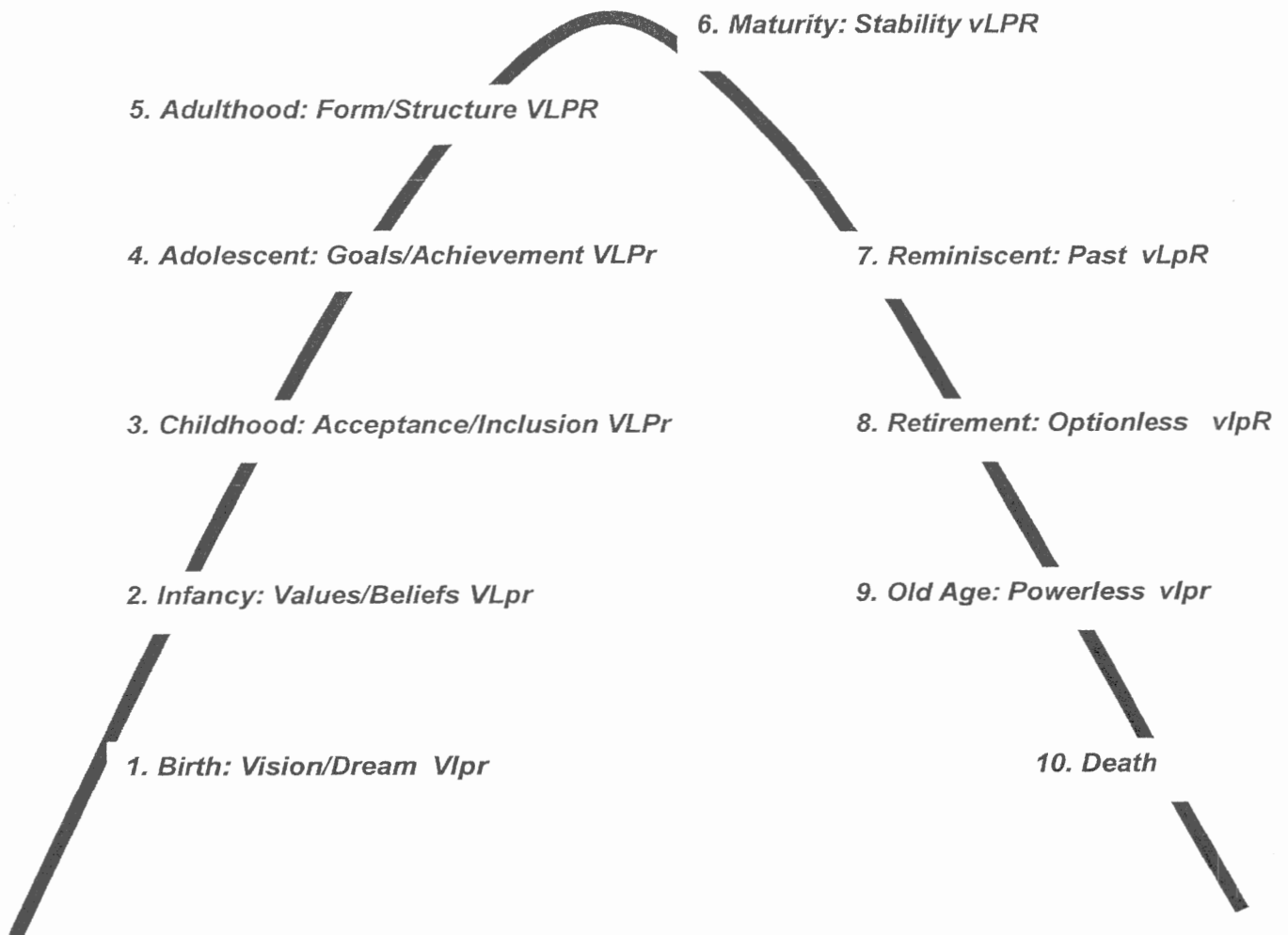
- *All four organizing factors are present at each stage, but some are more dominant than others.*
- *The life cycle is not strictly limited to one generation, (though the stages of Birth through Adulthood do tend to talk about the same generation)*
- *The life cycle is not strictly determined in terms of chronological time, but rather maturation or development.*
- *Progression through the various stages from Birth to Death is not inevitable—development can be halted, or redevelopment can occur.*

**Benefits of Recognizing a Life Cycle Model:**

- *The life cycle helps the congregation anticipate growth and develop the future.*
- *The life cycle distinguishes a particular congregation from the crowd.*
- *Leaders may see the congregation at one stage and the congregation may see themselves at another stage. (Perception may be stronger than reality)*
- *The congregation can understand and pursue opportunities and choices available to them.*
- *The life cycle helps the congregation pursue a solution rather than a program fix.*
- *The life cycle assists in understanding what underlies the vision and values in a particular congregation.*
- *The life cycle can assist the interventionist as to where to start.*
- *The life cycle can help the church understand that the stress and conflict it is experiencing is normal at a certain stage. (the following 2 charts may assist the interpretation of the Church Life Cycle)*

# ***Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development***

*A congregation is a living, breathing, expressive organism. Each congregation experiences a life cycle. Fortunate ones experience a series of partial life cycles. Each stage of the cycle can be identified by the dominating focus and its interplay of **Vision; Leadership; Programs; and Resources.***





STAGE	FOCUS	VLPR	DESCRIPTION
Birth	Vision/Dream	VLpr	Vision is Dominant Energy because of vision Babies must trust Minimal inclusion, programs or resources Who is our primary focus group? What are our values?
Infancy	Values/beliefs	VLpr	Passion to fulfill spiritual vision Is our inclusion intentional? Worship style is primary focus Do we understand our values and beliefs? Inclusion is a relational process
Childhood	Acceptance/Inclusion	VLPr	Programs are being established Relationships bring people to church How do we focus our staff resources?
Adolescent	Goals/Achievement	VLPr	Goal setting Decision making process Health Conflict Formalizing management system Raising the quality of programs Mission work and ministry projects Competing priorities for resources Deepening spiritual and community relationships Buildings (facilities) start to become important
Adulthood	Form/Structure	VLPR	Management strong Policy Manual Constitution and Bylaws complete Buildings (facilities) are satisfactory Best time for new vision
Maturity	Stability	vLPR	Church has plateaued (less than 5% growth or loss in three years) Change is a no-no People refuse to take risks Present generation has fulfilled their vision Old vision is usually not relevant New members don't understand old vision More passive than active Demographics may have changed
Reminiscent	Past	vLpR	We try harder (If you do the same things you have always done, you will get the same result.) Spirit of nostalgia Reflect on past pastors New and younger members press old members to recast vision People begin to leave church Programs on decline Management is dominant Conflict "Whose fault is it?" Possible Split
Retirement	Optionless	vlpR	Vision dead Despair Ashamed to invite friends Good fellowship Think they are friendly Minister to each other Management is dominant Change, new ideas and transition are necessary Need a pastor with energy and new vision Staff and building consuming most financial resources
Old Age	Powerless	vlpr	Preaching station Chaplaincy Ministry Staff and building consume all financial resources Don't have to die
Death			Close the doors Sell the church