

Church Planters Corner

Keys and Issues in Planting the Local Church

Before you Join a Church or Checklist of Essentials to Mediate On

by Missionary David R. Cox

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[Before you Join a Church](#)

Introduction

On this page I will try to bring together some of my thoughts in the above studies and add some new things to consider.

1. What do I expect from a church?

Before joining a church (and every single Christian should be an active, participating member of a good local church), you should sit down and write down your expectations. What do you think a good church should offer you? What do you think a church should demand from you?

2. What do I bring by way of talents, offerings, gifts, and services to the church?

Here you should honestly evaluate what you are and what you can do for a local church. If there is more than one good local church in your area, you should see where your gifts and talents can best be used.

The Problem of a Big Church

Many people gravitate to big churches. I have been a member of a big church (1000+) and small churches, and as a pastor, we have had mostly small churches over our ministry. Many times big churches are very deceptive and problematic from a spiritual point of view. Here I want to alert you to these problems before you choose a church. At times a big church may be a really good church, and at others, they may not be. Size is immaterial in many aspects to being a good or bad church in general. The exception is the spiritual oversight and care that a church can offer you. Simply put, almost all big churches have a serious oversight problem. To be big, you need a good administrator-promoter. These types of pastors are seldom good at dealing with individuals and their spiritual problems, especially if it requires a lot of time and effort on their (the pastor's) part.



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If you are going to join a large church, see if there is an individual recognition of members. In other words, is this church like a rock concert where everybody goes in, and nobody knows anybody's name except their neighbors that happen to be coming with them? If that is the type of church it is, best to stay away. There needs to be social gatherings where people get to know people. There needs to be an active interest by the membership in getting to know one another, and active promotion of this from the structure of the church, and especially from the pastor and pulpit. Without personal friendship and knowledge of one another, it is impossible to fulfill our biblical commands towards our brethren. In a big church, that becomes next to impossible without an extreme amount of effort. In a small or medium sized church (under several hundred), it becomes much more easier.

Another problem of a large church is the personal attention that church is supposed to provide for EACH AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL SHEEP in the fold. If you have difficult personal problems that need counseling, then a big church may seem to offer you a better "deal", but in actuality it does not usually. Some churches have full time paid "spiritual counselors". As a pastor I laugh at that. First of all, God does not separate the spiritual food from the spiritual needs of the sheep. The one who decides and preaches the sermons on Sunday needs to be the same person who does the counseling. Anything else is simply short circuiting what God has established. In other words, from a pastor-counselor point of view, some of the problems the pastor deals with in dealing with his sheep exist in others, but needs to be dealt with publicly, so that everybody hears the biblical position on a subject. For example, if a person is severely hurt by others gossiping, then that needs to be dealt with publicly as a sermon topic. Spiritual counselors seldom have access to the pulpit on regular monthly basis, and their counseling problem seldom are taking under consideration by the pastor.

Another situation that will arise in a large church (sometimes in other churches too) is that a Sunday School teacher or other Christian worker will take on counseling. This is rarely good, because most of them do not understand the Scriptures sufficiently to deal with counseling issues. (Most pastors rarely understand Scriptures in this way as a matter of fact.) There is a forced education that a pastor suffers through when he has to deal with the problems that are thrown at him, and this forced education makes him dig deep to understand and confront these problems, or he goes and hides his head in the sand. It is amazing to hear of pastors who "don't do counseling", and I would take it that such a pastor has contended in the past with problems, and refuses to do the dirty leg work of study and confrontation to be able to deal with problems.

As a pastor who does do counseling all the time because all my people have problems at some time, I would remark that probably half of all new situations I am unprepared for. I have to go back and study and think and meditate over how to deal with a situation or problem and what verses present principles bearing on the issue at hand. Nobody's an expert at this counseling thing, and we all have to "work" when new situations arise. But novices are notoriously wrong on their counsel. Schooling does not fix this problem, because all Christian schools have not a clue in true church life of Christians. This church life is what really nurtures and promotes growth, not book knowledge which puffs up and causes haughtiness.

3. What baggage am I dragging behind me?

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