

### **Book Review:**

Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).  
by Michael R. Jones

Gary L. McIntosh's book *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing Out the Best in Any Size Church* is a terrific book with many important insights into the way churches actually function. Some of his insights seem so obvious once he states them that one wonders how it was so easy to overlook them before. The book addresses twelve questions relating to various aspects of church life and polity, beginning with things like size and orientation and continuing to confront such issues as who really sets the direction, who makes the decisions, and how does change happen, and ends with three chapters dealing with church growth addressing not only how churches grow but obstacles to and strategies for growth. The final chapter presents concluding thoughts and suggestions to maintain focus during the process of change and growth.

This book has many strengths that commend it, not only for classroom muse, but also as a guide to pastors struggling with change or growth issues in their own churches. Perhaps the strongest point to commend this book is its easy, conversational tone. It is written as a dialogue between two pastors, one who has been in ministry six months, and the other a church-ministries veteran. A scenario is presented, much like the plot of a novel, which forces the less-experienced pastor to seek advice and mentoring from the more experienced churchman, Bob Morrison. McIntosh uses the resulting meetings and dialogue to convey his information about church growth and how to go about it.

McIntosh also manages to present views that some may reject without being confrontational or sanctimonious. He simply puts his information out there without much argument and lets the reader accept or reject it as they choose. This serves to make the book more accessible to those who traditionally reject some, if not all, notions of church growth as being too much like the Church Growth Movement (CGM), Purpose-Driven, or Seeker-Sensitive. The closest McIntosh comes to making a case for something is on pp. 115-116 where McIntosh makes a strong case, through the person of Bob Morrison, for the Lord's desire to see his church grow. He does this in such a way that one has little choice but to accept Morrison's (really McIntosh's) conclusion. In the rest of the book, however, the information is simply presented for the reader to accept or reject or modify as they choose, given their own unique circumstances.

McIntosh also does not put down the small church nor does he present them necessarily as being ingrown or as being characterized by infighting and personal concerns, though he does acknowledge that this could be the case in a given church. McIntosh also does not limit his presentation to a certain size or type of church. His "Typology of Church Size" explains the ways in which certain elements are demonstrated in churches of different sizes without passing judgment on any size church. He is generous in pointing out potential problems and pitfalls in all sizes of churches and acknowledges that each faces its own unique set of difficulties.

Especially helpful, though one wishes McIntosh had fleshed it out even more, is the chart on p. 80 labeled "Five Guiding Principles of Effective Ministry." Though McIntosh does spend quite a bit of ink fleshing out the chart (and admittedly this could be a book in itself), one wishes that more space could have been given to it, perhaps in an appendix. This chart does serve to point out that, despite the size of one's church, the same principles are at play in turning that church into a functioning community that is set for growth. One would also like to have seen how each of these principles plays out in each size of church. But again, this writer

acknowledges that such information was outside the purview of this particular book. Hopefully McIntosh will devote more time to developing this in another book, or at least in an appendix to a future edition.

One last thing this writer found intriguing was McIntosh's discussion, on p. 123, regarding the importance of proclamation and its various forms. He rightly points out that growth is often in the hands of the people, not the preacher. McIntosh, however, limits this proclamation model to the larger church whereas it can be equally as true of any size church. Though McIntosh does not address this, people often assume that pastoral proclamation is sufficient to draw a large crowd. People also often presuppose that really good preachers will find their niche in a large church, though this is not often the case. Sometimes large church pastors are only average preachers and some small churches have really good preachers. This model should not be limited to the large church, however, and there is practically speaking, and should be, in this reviewer's opinion, significant overlap between the "Attraction Model," the "Program Model," and the "Proclamation Model" and that each has its place in any size church, provided it fits the unique culture of each church.

This last point is one of the drawbacks of this book, though, admittedly, one wonders how McIntosh (or anyone else) could possibly correct it beyond the mere mention of it. McIntosh fails to spend enough time pointing out that each church is unique and these principles are just that: principles, rules of thumb, guideposts. They are not necessarily true across the board nor will each of them work in every church of a given size. Principles must be chosen in light of an individual church's culture and outlook. Some small churches are full of people who left megachurches and, though they like the small church model and its close relationships, they expect that some of the government will function more like a large church. The pastor of an established church reading *One Size* will do well to remember to pick and choose and not to skip over the sections on middle-sized churches or large churches simply because he pastors a small church.

One last criticism is the lack of emphasis on church health as opposed to mere church growth. While it is implied that a church must be discipling, etc., there is little said explicitly about it and its importance. It is not only necessary to maintain a church, it is necessary to getting an established church to a readiness position for growth. While one may point out that this topic is outside the purview of *One Size*, its notable absence will be viewed as confirmation of what many critics say of the Church-Growth Movement (often used a pejorative term for any book or movement that seeks growth in terms of numbers). An "honorable mention" at least would have made it more acceptable to many critics, not to mention, would have maintained a good focus on an important aspect of church life.

Overall, *One Size Fits All* was a helpful book and this reviewer is glad he came into contact with it. After two readings, one for class assignments and another for this review, there still remains much to be thought about, mulled over, and worked out in practical ministry. While one wishes for an appendix with further resources (beyond the seminar "advertised" in the story), *One Size* does give a good foundation for further study.