

Pastors are driven by the number of people who attend their churches believing that alone validates their ministry.

If we would pull back the cover from this false narrative we would discover that 90% of all churches in America have fewer than 500 people. Therefore a MEGA-Small Church becomes achievable.

MEGA-SMALL CHURCH

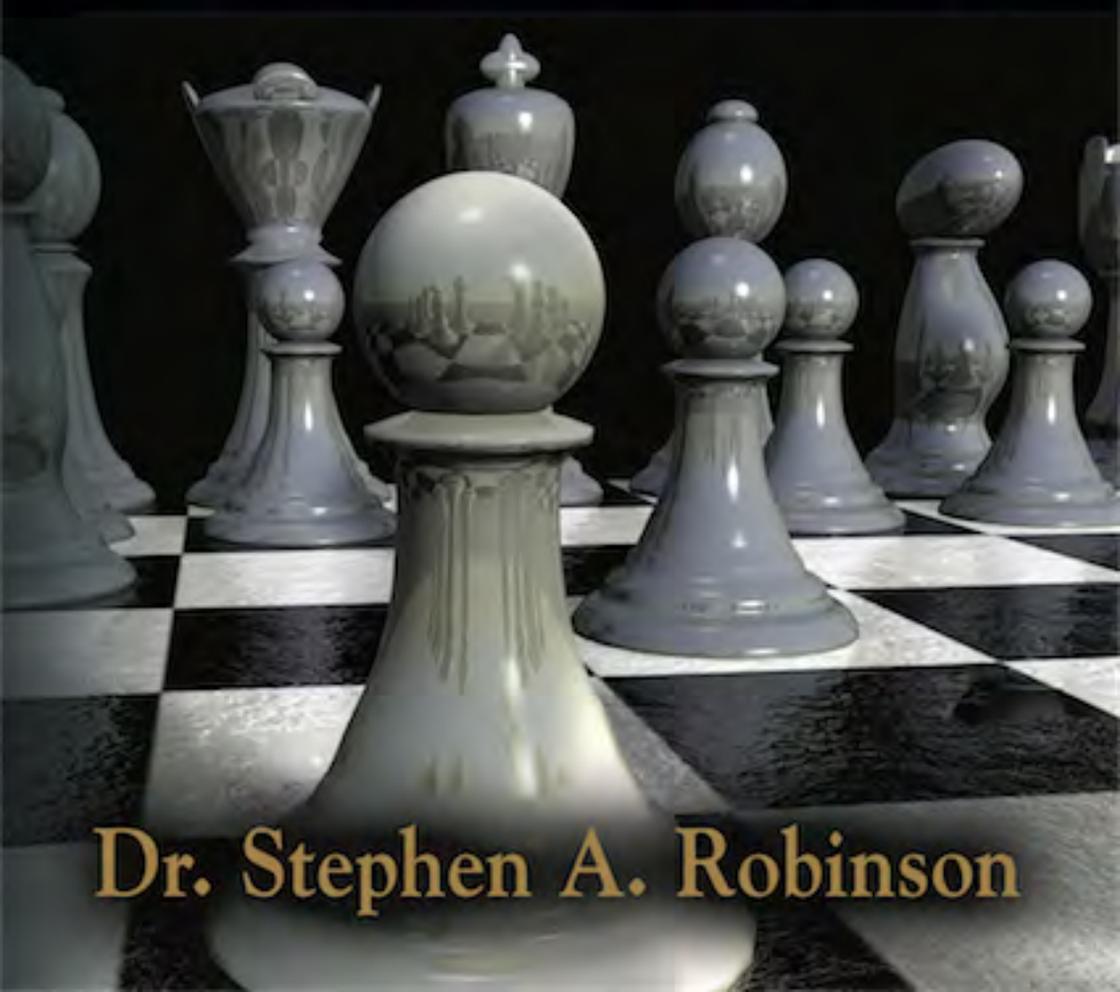
by Dr. Stephen A. Robinson

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MEGA-SMALL CHURCH

MAKING BIG THINGS SMALL



Dr. Stephen A. Robinson

Endorsements

"Dr. Robinson's courage to show us the reality of church in a post-modern era is both refreshing and invigorating. This is more than a book, it's a manual on how to be huge regardless of the numeric size of your ministry. He redefines what success is and shows us, through precept and example, that you don't have to be mega in size in order to have a major impact in your community. This ought to be required reading for every pastor."

Dr. Jeffery A. Williams
Bishop, The King's Cathedral
Providence, Rhode Island

You're about to benefit from one of the very best leaders I've known over a 30 year military career chock full of exceptional leaders. Seriously. You'll learn personal leadership from a man committed to his family and God's calling on his life. Professional leadership from a business-savvy pastor growing a fledgling staff through many challenges into an effective ministry team impacting thousands of lives over many decades. Integrative leadership that peels off divisive labels to capitalize on New England's social, racial, economic and Christian diversity and capture the power inherent in a united Body of Christ. And spiritual leadership from a man humbly but relentlessly led by God to return souls to their Father. Oh - and fair warning - you'll be confronted by a leader that looks you straight in the eye and asks, "Why not you?"

I was blessed to hear many of these stories over coffee when LeAnn and I served as elders under Steve and Mary at CrossPoint. I have no doubt that you and the folks you share this book with will be blessed and inspired too.

Captain Don Bosch
United States Navy, Retired

Calling, vision and being Spirit led does not void strategic planning. Through the narrative of CrossPoint's journey from a store front church to a multicultural ministry making regional impacts, Dr. Robinson show us how praying and planning are crucial components to ministry. More than the history of a ministry, Mega-small presents to us critical principles that all pastors would do well to appropriate. Dr. Robinson's work gives us both overarching principles and checklists for ministry. Wherever you find yourself on your ministry journey, this book will serve you not only as a resource but as encouragement as you fulfill God's calling in your life.

Rev. Michael Perez
Executive Pastor
CrossPoint Church

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Chapter 1: THE STOREFRONT SEASON

I am a third generation preacher. My grandfather planted a church in Newport, Rhode Island in 1955. My grandmother was a traveling evangelist and one of her journeys brought her to the smallest state in the union, Rhode Island. She fell in love with the coastline and the quaint feel of a community that was both a Navy town and a place where everyone knew everybody's name.

My grandfather was a visionary and it was his desire to create a church that was integrated both ethnically and culturally - to build a community that would be racially diverse and denominationally neutral. As an African-American man born in Arkansas, that dream would be difficult to implement, especially in New England.

New England was 85% Caucasian and 15% people of color at that time. The African-American community represented only 6% of the population. It was also 65% Catholic. Given its history, it would be extremely difficult for Christians of different races and denominations to embrace each other as equals.

My grandfather died in 1966 and my grandmother took over the small church and began to implement many of her husband's ideas. The church grew but never achieved the lofty goals envisioned by my grandfather.

That church community - at this stage was operating in what I call "storefront" mode - moved from place to place, trying to establish a sense of permanence in a city that didn't quite know what to expect from the small church on the corner - the holiness church with loud music that seemed to be always open for services.

Divergent Dreams

Church was in my blood. I knew what it meant to go to church, Sunday School at 10am; Sunday Service from 11am to 2pm; Sunday night service from 7pm to 10pm; Monday night prayer at 7pm for 1½ hours; Wednesday Midweek Service at 7pm; Friday Night Pastoral Service at 7pm and choir rehearsal on Saturday at 7pm. I knew a lot

about church. Unfortunately I did not know a whole lot about Jesus Christ. To me they were one and the same and would remain so until much later in my life.

Early in my Christian life I knew about two important things: going to church and going to church when it was in what I call “the storefront phase.”

When my grandmother died in 1985 my younger brother was left with the task of bringing the family church back into prominence, maybe even bringing it there for the first time. I had been out of the church from the time I was 19 until 29 years of age. I was the prodigal and it was now time for my return.

I teamed up with my brother who was three years younger than me at 26 and together we began to rebuild our grandparent’s dream. We took a small church of about 20 and grew it to about 150 people in a couple of years.

During those eleven years together I began to realize that my brother’s dream and vision were quite different from mine. His desire was to reach “his” people and my vision was to reach “people.”

Those years were difficult but necessary. People in our circle of believers were constantly sharing about how our church, because it was biblically literate, was better than those down the street. I thought how can a church, at that time of 50 people, be the only one that has the truth of God’s Word?

There was a time I had invited a friend of mine to come and share the Word of God at our church. He was a white minister and my brother seemed to be bothered by this fact. I don’t know if it was because he was white or because he didn’t know the gentleman well enough but it said to me that he didn’t trust my judgment when it came to people.

It was at this point I knew our days working together were numbered. He wanted to reach a specific community; I wanted to reach anyone who was lost and to do that across racial, cultural and denominational lines.

An Integrated Church

In 1980 - some years before these events - I married the girl next door. I was 23 years old and she was 18. Mary and I had been living together and had a child and my grandmother thought it best that we should get married.

Now remember my grandmother is from the holiness background and there are certain things you should do, and if you didn't, you should get them rectified as soon as possible - the reason being that you never know when Jesus just might come back.

Our marriage alienated a lot of people, especially her family. She was an Irish-Portuguese, Catholic, white girl who had just had a baby with this African-American kid fresh out of the United States Air Force. What's ironic is that we were both project kids. We lived in government subsidized housing next door to each other and fell in love. Thirty-six years later we are still married and doing ministry together. We never thought that would happen but God's vision is bigger than our dreams.

So I bring my white Catholic girlfriend to my little holiness church - the one my grandmother was pastoring at the time - and she heard the message that all her sins would be forgiven if she would just accept Jesus as her personal Savior. Well that was it. My girlfriend took that message to heart and she has been pursuing God with intensity all the years I have known her. My wife was 18 years old when she began to pursue God but it would take me almost seven years to join her.

When my brother became the pastor, my wife was already at this church when I finally stopped running from God. She became the head intercessor and had a mantle of prayer on her life that could only have come from the very throne room of the Most High. As you will see later in this book, it was her prayer life that eventually would save her from certain death.

As our grandparent's church began to increase in numbers, my brother and I started to grow apart. I realized that my future was not with him, or my mother; it was to pursue my grandparent's dream - a dream to bridge the gaps between the people of God and to purchase a church property that would guard this enduring legacy.

Who Do You Think You Are?

The journey from a “storefront church” to one with a church building is probably the most difficult one to navigate. Your dream can begin and end in the storefront. What, then, do I mean by the “storefront”?

The storefront represents that first meeting place, whether it’s your living room, a local coffee shop or a public school. This is the place where God tests every minister and every ministry.

I have read many books that tell of epic, supernatural moves of God in which a storefront church of 50 people transitions to a church growing to several thousand people in less than three years.

This book is not about those epic moves.

This book is for the men and the women who have stayed years in the storefront, years wondering whether or not God told them to do this, years wondering if any of this will ever make any sense to anyone - especially them.

My brother and I had come to the point where it was time for me to depart. I would not say it was a mutually agreed decision - more a prompting of the Holy Spirit. My wife had become so disillusioned with ministry that she wanted out.

It was now my turn to declare that God had called me, of all people, to launch out and start a church. My wife - no surprise to me - was not filled with awe.

Let’s just say she was filled more with shock than awe.

I remember her saying, “I can’t believe you want to do this. Who do you think you are anyway to start a church?”

“I’m just trying to follow God,” I replied.

“Well we will see. Won’t we?”

Statically most start-up churches are similar to start-up businesses; more than half of them fail in the first five years. However, I arrogantly stated and believed that I would succeed where others had failed. Little did I know that God tries everyone who goes into ministry and I was about to receive the lessons of a lifetime.

I was like the Apostle Paul, or so I thought. As one born in the smallest state in America, a preacher from a line of preachers, a third generation church planter, and a servant in the church most of my life, I was ready to tear down the kingdom of darkness!

So with my wife, my four-year old son and five people who believed in me, a world-changing ministry was launched. I was about to change the city through my ministry. What I did not realize was that ministry was about to change me.

Time to Grow Up

That first Sunday we were in a community center and ten people showed up. My wife and I were now pastors and we would have to set up the room used during the day for day care and feeding the homeless.

When we arrived we were greeted by ripped up vinyl chairs as we tried to turn an old room into a sanctuary.

For the last eleven years I had served under my younger brother and somehow I believed that those years would not only prepare me for ministry but that I would also get to bypass some of those learning curves that most young ministries go through. Let's just say I was wrong.

I had mapped out my future in my storefront church.

I would spend approximately one year in the community center and grow to 75 people.

I would then find a building that could seat 300 people.

Five years after that I would have a church of over 1000 people.

Needless to say things didn't quite work out like that. In fact, after four years it looked similar to the way we started.

Two-and-a-half years later, we were still in the community center with less than fifty people. I became discouraged. I approached God like any other pastor in my position and began to complain about the people, the vision, and the time it took to build ministry.

After all, I had paid my dues working under my brother for all of those years yet somehow I was not benefitting from all of those years of service. God owed me. He owed my wife for the years she spent on

the altar crying out to Jesus on behalf of our community. He owed us more than what we were receiving and I was going to let Him know about it.

After complaining, God spoke to me. I had suggested to Him that the problem was the fact that these people He had sent to me were not ready. God reminded me it wasn't the people that weren't ready; it was me. I was shocked that God would lay the blame squarely upon my shoulders - not His shoulder, nor the people's shoulders, but mine!

This caused me to pause and reevaluate my situation. I told God that the ministry was not moving in the direction I desired, that somehow it was moving in a direction opposite to what I wanted. This was one the times I heard God distinctly speak to me and this is what he said, "I will not build this ministry based upon your personal preference."

I mean, what do you do with that? What do you do when God tells you that it's His desire to build a ministry through you that is not based upon your personal preference? This was hard for me to hear but I yielded to the voice of God and began to get out of His way.

Four years after launching in the community center God decided now was the time to move. It was not my timing but one orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Remember, my goal for my next move was a place that could seat at least 300 people.

As an act of faith we had purchased 220 chairs for our new facility. I figured I would buy 80 more when God opened the door; we wanted to be ready to move when that happened.

The time in our storefront ministry was a time for me to grow up spiritually. When I had left my grandparent's church under the leadership of my younger brother I thought I was ready to lead. The truth was I was just a sheep learning to become a shepherd.

This is why the storefront phase is so important. It cannot be bypassed. It is the place of making. The first pastorate is more about growing and maturing the minister than it is about growing a ministry. I have seen many people get stuck at the storefront level simply because they started ministry not understanding that this is their time to grow and mature and not necessarily to grow a large ministry.

Learning to be Businesslike

It was now time to leave the storefront. We were excited about a door of opportunity that had opened and I sensed greater things were about to manifest. It was time to look for that church building. The search would begin with 50 people, 25 thousand dollars in the bank and 220 chairs.

I was ready to take that next leap of faith but I was about to learn that there were some more baby steps I had to master before I was able to leap. Thank God for my wife Mary who had enough faith and common sense to help me make the right decision for our next move!

This move would not just require great faith; it would also require us to exercise business acumen.

Now my brother was great at teaching us how to pray and fast and at communicating the fundamentals of Christian ministry but he really didn't know much about the business side. This is quite typical of most small ethnic ministries; they are good at preaching and teaching but poor at strategic, businesslike thinking. It is this that has kept many ministries in the storefront longer than necessary. They have had a fascination with spiritual titles more than with spiritual and kingdom advancement. They didn't know the difference between preaching and advancing. This is another reason why I've written this book - to educate those who have not had the luxury of being mentored by individuals who have moved successfully from the storefront to a church building.

Anyway, for the first nine months after my wife and I left my grandparent's church we went on a journey. The year was 1999. We had been so isolated from the rest of the Body of Christ except for our denominational friends that we had no idea that church existed outside of that circle.

The first church we attended was predominately a white Charismatic church. They had a worship band and there were people dancing in the aisle. I was amazed by all of this. I had never seen white people dancing in church and their music was something I had never heard before. It was called "worship music".

I grew up with choirs who marched in with their pastor every Sunday in a processional but here were white people dancing and celebrating, waving flags and showing a level of excitement befitting a holy pageantry. It was new but somehow right. I was fascinated.

My wife and I felt as if we had been let out of some denominational prison. We learned in those few months that the wider Church body had been evolving and yet we had not been a part of it. We had been stuck in a kind of bubble and somehow our personal history had been pulled over our eyes like in the movie, *The Matrix*, preventing us from seeing the truth.

We were alone and outside of our comfort zone trying to discern our next move, by ourselves with only a dream, a vision, and a word from the Lord to build a ministry. Sometimes all you need is a Word from the Lord to get you to a place of purpose but you also need people if you're going to get the process right.

No Mentors, No Growth

Enter the Rezendes - Tony and Beverly Rezendes, a Portuguese couple who had built a ministry in Massachusetts. They had been successful at taking a storefront church and buying property that would house both a church and a Christian school. They became our mentors.

Someone once said that a mentor is a shortcut to your destiny. The Rezendes would become our shortcut. They would help fill in the blanks in our ministry that neither my grandparents nor my brother could fill. They knew the business side of ministry where Mary and I only knew the spiritual side.

“Papa Tony and Rev Bev” - as they are affectionately known - began to ask us questions about our ministry.

- Did we have a lawyer?
- Did we have a CPA?
- Did we have a bank account?
- Were we incorporated?
- Did we have Bylaws?
- Did we have a Constitution?

The only thing we had was a bank account. We were not aware how important those other things were. My brother used to say that accountants were too expensive and we could do it ourselves. I learned later on that you need all of these things if you want to purchase property.

These six questions and our responses to them would determine if we would ever leave the storefront. Even fifteen years later, when I speak to young pastors and new church planters, I ask them those same six questions. I am still amazed that many people, especially people of color, go into ministry without ever addressing these six questions. Their theology of how God builds ministry is faulty at best, dangerous at worst.

I have asked several young leaders, as well as older pastors, how they will fund their ministries, their answer is always the same: “God is going to do it.” While that sounds spiritual, it isn’t practical. God is a God of principle and when the right principles are applied, you see the desired result.

I remember trying to help one of my relatives who pastors in the inner city. I shared an idea with him and his response was that this would not work in the ghetto. I then said, “A God idea will work anywhere.” He didn’t listen and he is still stuck doing the same thing he has been doing for the last twenty years.

You will never get out of the storefront if you don’t have good mentors.

Remember, a mentor is someone who has already been where you’re trying to arrive.

You need mentors. Most people in the storefront surround themselves with people just like them. They invite people just like them to come and preach and teach God’s people a dysfunctional type of ministry that keeps them stuck in a spiritual wilderness for generations. They preach well enough and they pray well enough but when it comes to advancing in their communities they have not been properly trained to seize opportunities.

You can only lead others as far as you have gone yourself.

If you haven't mastered the principles for advancing, you will simply die in your wilderness.

Faith with Feet Attached

I coined a phrase years ago called, Ed McMann Faith. You remember Ed McMann? He was Johnnie Carson's sidekick for years on the *Tonight Show*. Well, Ed was also the spokesperson for the Publisher's Clearance House Sweepstakes. If you were a winner, Ed would come to your house and bring you the check.

For some that is a mirror image of how they see God and how He responds to their faith; God is just going to show up, knock on your door, and give you a check. But real ministry does not operate that way. Faith has feet attached to it and it moves in the direction of God's will. There are far too many pastors waiting for God to knock on their door but they have not prepared themselves for God to move them from the storefront into their place of purpose.

Ministry requires both a call and training. Training does not always have to be formal but it needs to be relevant. The training I received from the Rezendes did not take place in a classroom but in their living room. There they poured their lives and their experiences of ministry into me.

Their ministry had seen its share of victories as well as failures but they were survivors. What they poured into me saved me many years of trial and error trying to figure out the complexities of ministry. They allowed me to be me but helped me to understand how a church functioned properly.

Too many people surround themselves with people just like them - ministers and ministries that are not qualified to train and mentor. These people are more interested in building an organization of followers than training individuals equipped to destroy the works of the devil.

If someone who is still in a storefront is trying to train and mentor you to leave the storefront, don't walk away. Run away! Why? A mentor is there to help you get to a place where they have been, not keep you in the same place where they themselves are stuck.

Titles without fruit are meaningless.

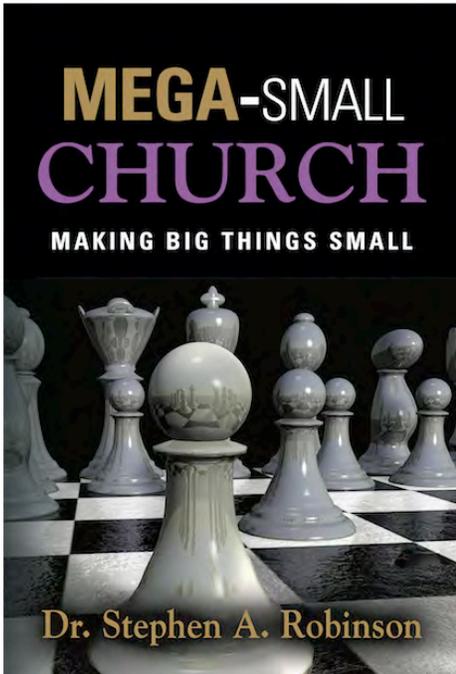
I have seen people call themselves Apostles of Worldwide Ministries and yet they have never left the storefront. Now they are ministering to people and telling them how to build and expand the Kingdom of God.

I have a rule: I will not try to teach something that I have not conquered in my ministry and life. I will not try to equip others in areas where I have not myself been fruitful.

Be careful before you let unqualified people speak into your life and mentor you. If they have a title but not the fruit then find someone else who has both.

The length of time you stay at the storefront will be determined by whether or not you find the right person to mentor you.

That person is the one who has already arrived at the place you long to go to.



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