

stuff you wish they taught in seminary



5 Ways

**CHURCHES THAT WANT TO BREAK THE 1,000
BARRIER STAY PERSONAL & RELATIONAL**

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The only people who like big churches are pastors.

One of the paradoxes that churches face as they grow beyond 1,000 in attendance is that they actually need to act more like a small church in some ways. **The “competition” of large and growing churches is actually much smaller churches where people are “known” by others.** Your church is going to need to find new ways to ensure people feel connected to your church if you are wanting to grow beyond the 1,000 barrier.

People stick and stay at your church because they find community and care there. They find a sense of “home” and relationship. They may be attracted by the great teaching, fantastic kids programs, and amazing music; but they will only stay if they find relationships with real people to help them stay connected. **Ultimately, they need to find friends who they recognize at the church. There are a number of ways your church can work in, in order to ensure people perceive your church as relationally connecting people.** You need to be seen as a warm and caring community long before people will find an actual community. (This is true of all churches regardless of their size.)

On the journey of growing your church to this size, you probably went through a phase where you needed to “play bigger”...

do things that larger churches do in order to instill confidence in people to invite their friends. Ironically, **as you grow, you actually need to dial back some of those things because your size can work against you reaching people.** If people perceive that you’re just obsessed with being bigger they will be turned off. Here are 5 ways to ensure your church is staying personal and relational as you grow:

Avoid generic @ Email Addresses

Stop using those generic email inbox accounts. Let people know that there are real live people who answer the emails as your churches and not a faceless organization. When you use those generic email addresses you are subtly communicating to your people that your team is untouchable and unreachable. The sorts of addresses we’re talking about are:

- info@
- office@
- hello@
- team@

Managing email is a lot of work, yes. Often leaders are overwhelmed by how many inbound emails they receive. The “generic” email account is an attempt to stem that tide and deal with requests by a group of people. Rather than doing that, **have a team manage your leader's email inboxes.** People from your church will understand

when they email a team member of your church and that email is passed onto another person who helps solve their problem. When done well, that contact makes your people feel special—not ignored or treated like a number.

Pick up the Phone!

How do you feel when you call a business or organization and you hear the call automatically routed over to voicemail?

What happens inside of you when you need to “push 1 for customer service... push 2 for support...”?

A “simple” way your church can stay relationally connected is to have a real, live person pick up the phone and answer it. **It’s not as “efficient” as just making people route their own calls through the menu and such, but the human interaction speaks volumes about the importance of people to your church.** As your church grows, there are volunteers who can be trained towards this role. Alternatively, a service like [Call Ruby](#) could also handle phone calls for you for a cost lower than a full-time staff member.



I’ve known the pain of people who have a serious pastoral care situation only to be met with a “voice jail” and an inability to navigate the tree to find the right people, largely due to the fact that they are in the midst of a pastoral care crisis. **Our voice mail system just added insult and injury to a tough personal situation.** Our system reinforced a lingering suspicion that our church was only interested in “being bigger” and “lost touch” with people. We earned the criticism... it was, unfortunately, true in this case.

As I was writing this article, I picked up the phone and called Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL; Life.Church in Oklahoma City, OK; and North Point Church in Alpharetta, GA. The combined attendance of these three churches is over 100,000. **If these churches have figured out how to scale this one aspect of staying personal, I’m sure your church can too!**

Clear & Obvious Path for People to Get Connected

There seems to be an inverse relationship between the number of programs a church talks about with their people and its size. The larger the church—it seems like—the less “programs” they talk about. **They’ve figured out how to narrow the focus and move people to get connected.** However, smaller churches seem to list a long menu of lots of programs and ministries that people might want to connect with.

Churches that have been able to jump the 1,000 barrier had made a clear and obvious pathway for people to walk to get connected. There are simple steps that people don’t need to wonder about. It’s overtly stated and simple to follow. **Your church would be wise to constantly look at this part of what you do and ask if there is anything else you can do to make it clearer and more obvious as to how people can get connected to your church.**

Although it is nuanced across a wide variety of styles and approaches to the church, there are some common elements to this pathway that we’re seeing in prevailing churches:

- **New Here Gifts** // Both to thank guests and to ask them for contact information.
- **Next Steps “Class”** // A simple & regular event to get people to learn more about the church and to make a few new friends.
- **Teams & Groups** // For a clear understanding about the paths for [serving on a team](#) and [building community in a group](#).

Name tags... seriously

Where can you insert name tags into your experience? (I know... some people hate name tags!) I'm a convert when it comes to using name tags in churches. I used to think it was a crazy idea, but I've been convinced that every church should be looking at adding them to their game. Of course, you won't be able to get 100% of your people to take a name tag, but it's worth the effort. I'm talking about trying to get people to wear a name tag sticker that your team fills out their name on, not a predone name tag that people pick up somewhere.



Some of the reasons I've become convinced of this first hand are:

- **Guest Oriented** // People want to be known. I know that there is a school of thought that says that people want to be totally anonymous when they arrive at church. The dangerous application of this belief is that we go out of the way to make it hard for people to connect. We want to give people space to control their experience with our church, but we also want to meet them when they are ready to connect. The goal is to move them from anonymity to community. Asking them to fill out a simple name tag is a small step toward being part of the community.
- **It's an Invitation to Talk** // Our hope is that when people come to church they connect with the community... the goal is to get people talking to each other! People love to hear their own name... it's the sweetest word they hear all day. By offering name tags, we are multiplying out lots of great conversations in church. What a positive emotion to associate with our church!

- **Creates Service Opportunities** // In order to make name tags for large crowds, you need a lot of people who are ready to make them up. This creates more service opportunities... more service opportunities mean more people are connected to the church!
- **Helpful for Your Team** // Let's be honest ... you can remember maybe 200 people's names when you see their faces, but you can probably remember stuff about 1,500 people when given their face and name. (Think about Facebook... the fact that you see people's names and faces boosts your recall about the details of other people's lives big time!) The name tag helps your team remember a little bit more about your people by just giving them a little bit of information about your guests.
- **It's Not About You...** // Name tags by definition are about the other people around us, not ourselves. It's a declaration that I'm not the center of this universe... that I acknowledge that everyone doesn't know me... that I'm not that big of a deal. When we put on a name tag we are serving other people who might feel uncomfortable coming up to you.

The challenge for your church is to see where in your ministry you could add name tags to make it more relational. **Maybe you don't want to dive headlong and add them to the main adult service but there are lots of other places where you can use them.** Put them out on a table when your volunteers show up for training. Encourage your small groups to do them for the first few weeks when they meet. Get them on people at your "new here" receptions. As you see the impact of people having these simple tools in your midst, I'm convinced you'll want to add them to more environments.

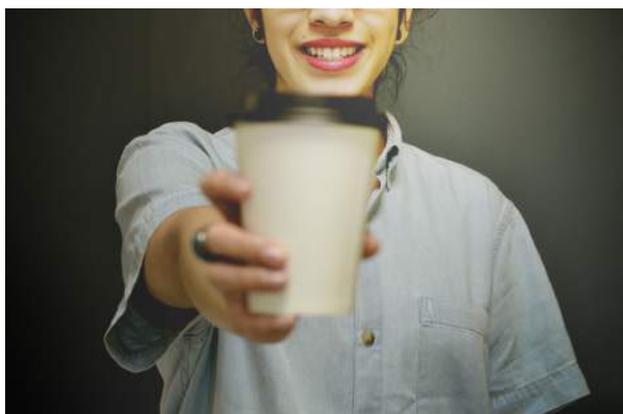
Add Coffee to Your Foyer

The smell of coffee means welcome and community. Our culture has been trained to associate drinking coffee with connecting with people. (Thanks Starbucks!) **Many churches remove coffee from what they offer as they grow because of the cost and complexity of doing it at scale.** That's a mistake. Coffee slows your community down as they come and go from your services and

encourages people to talk with each other.

[Crossroads Church in Cincinnati](#) has been named the fastest growing church in two of the last three years. Nearly 30,000 people attend their services regularly. Coffee is a big part of their front-end guest experience. In fact, for years they had a picture of a coffee cup on the home page of their website. (At the time of writing this, they still had that coffee cup as their icon on their various social media profiles.) **If you bump into their leadership and ask them what the deal is with coffee, they will effuse about how it speaks to a larger reality of what they are looking at being as a church.** Clearly, they have a lot more going on than just great coffee that is driving their growth, but they are a good example of a church using coffee at scale to help build community and connection.

I'm not even a huge coffee drinker and I've seen this dynamic play out in my ministry over the years! **The campuses that we had where we offered coffee do have a more relational feel to the foyers, and those that don't are lacking something.** I know it's a stretch financially as you grow because it becomes increasingly complex to offer a lot of coffee at scale in a short amount of time, but it may help to consider it!



I'd love to hear from you.

Only 2% of churches push beyond 1,000 people in attendance. It's a complex adventure leading your church into that territory. I'd love to hear from you about what you are learning as you attempt it. Here are some past articles from unSeminary to help you:

- [5 Reasons Kids' Ministry is So Important to Churches that Want to Break the 1,000 Barrier](#)
- [5 Characteristics of Church Staff Teams that Break the 1,000 Barrier](#)
- [7 Pivots Churches Make to Break the 1,000 Barrier](#)

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