



Good Morning, Church!

By Rev. Dr. Carl K. Ellis, Founder and Executive Director
The Academy for Small Membership Church Ministries

The Power of the Small Membership Church

By Rev. Dr. Carl K. Ellis

Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.'

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

~Luke 15:4-7

The small membership church has the power to help young children and youth discover God's love and grace. In fact, the small membership church is important to children and youth. I know that we don't have the large Sunday School with a designated paid person to run the program, a dozen children and a dozen youth with leaders, a class for every grade, and more children and youth than we can count on our fingers and toes. Many parents choose the large church because they want their children to be surrounded by others their own age.

So, what does the small membership church have that the large church does not? We have the ability to reach out, and children can know, for at least a short time, that they are not lost in the crowd. Let me give you an example.

During spring break, our small membership church, with an average attendance of 12 worshippers on Sunday morning, held a spring break VBS, which we call Kid's Camp. Destiny, a high school senior, designed the program with the theme "Fruits of the Spirit." She had crafts, science experiments, scripture, and lessons. Allandra, a high school sophomore, chose and led the music. Adam, an 8th grader, designed and ran PowerPoint, which four other youths helped lead.

We averaged 12 children a day and reached a total of 15 children. They sang, learned, played, and ate together. At the end of the week, parents shared how thankful they were for the Kid's Camp and the youth who shared their talents.

We did not have store-bought decorations, t-shirts for all the children and leaders, printed materials, and professional videos. The children did learn about the fruits of the spirit, heard the stories of Jesus, and experienced God's love and grace. This was a week they will always remember.

I am thankful for the medium and large churches who have the staff, the volunteers, and the budget to reach lots of children and youth. They are doing a great job and many are reaching the one lost child.

I am also thankful for the small membership church, which reaches out to those who need a smaller group, a little more attention, and thrive in a smaller group.

Let us remember that our small membership churches have the power to help the lost sheep. We are important to the children in our neighborhoods who are looking for a place to belong. Let's not bemoan that we have fewer children than the large membership church. Let us give thanks and commit our lives to reaching out to the one lost sheep so both the church and the children who grace our doors might thrive.

No, we did not have a hundred children, fancy decorations, or highly trained professionals. However, our youth are learning to be leaders as they learn by teaching, and our children once again learned about God's love and the fruits of the spirit.



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