



## Celebrating Healthy Small Congregations

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+ Pr. Eric Hullstrom (Pr. Eric shares some of his learning's from a recent presentation by Dr. Johns from Virginia Theological Seminary shared at a presentation at Salem in Jackson.)

*Celebrating Healthy Small Congregations* is not focused on growing numbers in the congregation but about growing faith. It is about encouraging congregations to be who they are and not be ashamed of their status as a small congregation. Through this work, growing numbers may be a byproduct but this is not a 12 step program to put people in the pews. That was one of the first things that was emphasized and one that caught my attention since there are many books about church growth. But too many people want church growth for the wrong reasons (i.e. More money, status in the community, validation that they are doing something right). After all...we live in a culture where bigger is better. But any healthy congregation needs to be focused on the mission of Jesus Christ first and foremost. *Celebrating Healthy Small Congregations* encourages small churches that they have something to offer the world around them.

Through my time at Virginia Theological Seminary attending the summer collegium in 2010 and through reading and study, I have changed the way I think about ministry in the small church. I used to be focused on traditional ways of doing worship; the way that most churches do things, but this may not be possible with small churches. Case in point: At Belmont (a rural small membership congregation near Jackson) we no longer do Wednesday Lent worship services at the church building; instead we meet in someone's home for an intimate worship and study time. This model wouldn't necessarily work in a larger congregation but works great at Belmont. Small congregations should not lament what they do not have but focus on what they DO HAVE and use that for the glory of God.

Another key learning for me is focusing on "One Excellent Mission". Kennon L. Callahan in his book, "[Small, Strong Congregations](#)," talks about this. One excellent mission is focusing on one or a few things and not spreading one's self too thin. Small congregations don't have the resources that larger ones do and may not be able to do everything larger congregations can do. Once again...focus on what you have; focus on one excellent mission and do that one mission really well.

Website: <http://www.vts.edu/smallchurches> - a web site that focuses on Celebrating Small Membership Congregations.