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"...Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together in My Name..."

By Royce Money

*For where two or three are
gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them.*
Matthew 18:20 KJV

I preached my first sermon in a small Church of Christ between my junior and senior years of high school. I was nervous; they were forgiving. In college, I preached in tiny churches all across West Texas.

When my wife, Pam, and I were first married, I drove many miles to preach at a little church north of Stephenville, Texas, in an area where there was no town—just an abandoned schoolhouse and a graveyard. Six families met in the schoolhouse on Sunday mornings. Of the six, five were on fixed incomes, yet they never failed to minister to others in times of need.

I was amazed at the disproportionately large amount of mission work supported by the small churches where I worshipped and preached. I was amazed at the

amount of benevolent work done on behalf of neighbors—whether members of the church or not.

Again and again they'd say, "The Jones family lost their home in a fire. They need our help," or, "The Davis family just suffered a terrible tragedy. Let's help them through this rough time." Through the loving examples of many faithful Christians in small congregations, I learned lessons that permanently imprinted my life.

The average Church of Christ congregation (a cappella) has about 150 members. Out of approximately 13,400 congregations, 12,635 have 200 or fewer members. In these smaller churches, young people have greater opportunities to develop leadership and teaching skills. They can work closely with role models and gain experience in leading in worship, teaching classes, and engaging in acts of ministry. One-on-one mentoring often occurs. In churches with fewer members, more individuals can be directly involved

in the training of young people.

During potluck suppers, holiday gatherings, and other times of fellowship, various generations listen to one another's stories, hold the new babies, give parenting advice, and generally draw closer together. Many individuals in smaller churches feel they have adopted grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. College students hug their favorite widow, ladies make quilts for newlyweds and the new babies, and everyone shows up for weddings and funerals.

The unique talents of individuals really shine in smaller congregations, where nearly every church has a "gum man." Eager children would gather around an elderly man in a little church in Jasper, Texas, as he generously handed out gum to them after every worship service. When he died, the children made their own special tribute to him: a gum wreath to be displayed at his funeral. His wife carried on the gum legacy.

The church is a family, and it is especially in smaller congregations that everyone experiences a member's joy, grief, success, or suffering. When someone is absent, people notice. They call to see if their friend is ill or in need of help. If a family is in emotional, physical, or financial crisis, the church asks, "What can we do to help?" If an individual begins drifting away, members of a small congregation call and visit, asking, "Can we help?"

Many young people seek out the megachurches today, where they may

sing more contemporary songs or hear sermons that rival the best speakers in America. Yet the largest congregations are trying to be small. They create small-group programs, small Bible classes, and small ministry teams to give people that same chance to grow closer and to feel that they're a special part of the church.

Churches of all different sizes minister to the Lord's people in a variety of ways, and they reach out to serve others in their own styles.

But there's something special

about a place where people know your name. Where people notice when you're gone. And where no matter what the personal sacrifice, people help others in need.

Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, he is with them. And I believe the thousands of small churches across America and around the world are doing "big" work for the Lord.

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