



# SMALL CAN

It's evident in nature. Split the atom, and unleash thunderous force.

Plant one of the tiniest seeds on earth, and a sequoia arises.

It's apparent in history. A woman trained in civil rights activism refuses the back of the bus and spawns a movement of justice. A Pakistani girl, gunned down by terrorists, courageously recovers and receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

It's abundantly clear in Scripture. A stuttering 80-year-old leads his people out of slavery. A shepherd boy defeats a giant. A babe born in a feeding trough becomes the Savior for untold billions, teaching us that the meek will inherit the earth and that faith the size of a mustard grain

can move mountains.

It's a timeless truth: small can be mighty!

In this article you will meet congregations that may be modest in size and budget but are making an enormous impact in their communities.

Of course, not all congregations—small or large—are making a difference. In my 27 years as a Presbyterian pastor serving memberships from 50 to 700, I have seen firsthand how the power of a church's mission hinges on its answer to two questions: Are we looking inward or outward? Do we concentrate on what we have or what we lack?

Churches of all sizes can become so fixated on their internal ABCs (attendance, buildings, cash) that they lose touch with their habitat. They forget Christ's call to be incarnational, to put flesh to his love and grace *exactly* where we are planted.

Churches that understand this commission seek out the "least of these" in their locales. They see global issues, and then address them locally. They unmask idolatries and listen to the voices of people long silenced. They do not gauge the power of their ministry by standard metrics (the ones we report to GA every year) but by lives revived, wounds healed, strangers welcomed, and communities drawn into unity.



# BE MIGHTY

**Though small in size and budget, these congregations are making an enormous impact in their communities.**

BY KRIN VAN TATENHOVE



These congregations also tend to focus on abundance rather than scarcity. By stepping out in faith, believing that God will send the Spirit and necessary resources, they learn a precious faith lesson. By ourselves we accomplish limited objectives. With God's help, we can do things we only imagined!

At Emmanuel Presbyterian Church—in the heavily Latino south side of San Antonio—hundreds of people every Thursday morning gather before dawn, rain or shine. They form a line that wraps around the chapel and out to the street. Many of them are on fixed incomes, their meager funds depleted before the end of the month. In partnership

with the San Antonio Food Bank, Emmanuel offers supplemental food for their households.

The church, which I formerly pastored, has a membership and budget far below the PC(USA) average. (The average size of a Presbyterian congregation is 171 members; the median size is 87.) But they are touching many lives, and not just through groceries. One of their greatest joys is to see a Spirit-filled process at work. They call it a “holy domino effect.” Those they feed often become volunteers. They meet a faith community who loves and supports them through every trial. They are drawn to worship, some of them for the first time in their lives.

Recently, Emmanuel experienced the joy of welcoming them into membership as disciples of Christ.

One of them, away from the church since fleeing Christian legalism in his youth, said this the day he joined: “God knew my loneliness, and through a series of events brought me here to work in the food bank alongside a wonderful group of people. I attended a Sunday service, and you accepted me with open arms. Your loving hearts made me want to be part of this community of faith. Praise God!”

*Krin Van Tatenhove is an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who lives and writes in San Antonio.*