

# When It Comes to Community, Bigger Is Not Necessarily Better

When it comes to the coolness factor in the religious world, leading or attending a “megachurch” would likely be towards the top of the list.

But according to [new research](#) out of Duke University, megachurches might not want to be so quick to flaunt their success.

Examining a variety of Protestant and Catholic denominations in the U.S., researcher David Eagle tracked churchgoing attendance in churches of all sizes. In doing so, he discovered that those with large congregations have a significantly smaller percentage of weekly attendees. From [Phys.org](#):

*“Across the religious spectrum, Eagle’s study found a reverse correlation between church size and attendance of its members. For example: about 40 percent of members of white, mainline protestant churches with a membership of 50 people attended services each week. But at a far larger white, mainline Protestant church of 10,000 members, just about 25 percent attend weekly services.*

*Small, black protestant churches of 50 members reported a 50 percent rate of weekly attendance, the study found. But at a far larger church of 10,000 members, just 40 percent of members attended weekly.”*

Looking at these results, Eagle suggests that the larger format of the megachurch enables attendees to get lost in the shuffle and have less of an incentive to participate or get

involved. Smaller churches, however, foster more connections and responsibility.

Such findings are strangely reminiscent of Alexis de Tocqueville's [observations](#) on American local government. Tocqueville praises the idea of township, largely because it is small, local, and provides the individual with a sense of ownership and responsibility:

*“The native of New England is attached to his township because it is independent and free: his co-operation in its affairs ensures his attachment to its interests, the well-being it affords him secures his affection; and its welfare is the aim of his ambition and of his future exertions. He takes a part in every occurrence in the place; he practices the art of government in the small sphere within his reach; he accustoms himself to those forms without which liberty can only advance by revolutions; he imbibes their spirit; he acquires a taste for order, comprehends the balance of powers, and collects clear practical notions on the nature of his duties and the extent of his rights.”*

Just as religious organizations have drifted toward the oversized megachurch, so have Americans drifted away from the small, local government which Tocqueville praised, choosing instead to be governed by a massive bureaucracy situated far from their individual lives.

Americans often bemoan the lack of civic engagement and knowledge in our country. Would a return to the more local form of community be a way to remedy such a problem?