

Bonsai Theory of Church Growth:
**Grow Your Church to Its Natural God-
Given Size**

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What is a Bonsai Tree?

A “Bonsai Tree” is a tree that is maintained at a tiny size through artificial means. These means include:

- -Keep the pot small
- -Prune the roots
- -Pinch off new growth
- -Select Appropriate soil to maintain small size.
- -Create age and direction

What is a Bonsai Church

A “Bonsai Church” is a church that is artificially or unnaturally kept smaller than its true potential.

The following are some ways to keep a church extra small.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

Just as keeping a bonsai tree in an extra small pot will keep it from growing to its natural potential, maintaining a church in an extra small “pot” will keep it from reaching its growth potential also.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

1. Education Space “Pot”

Church is commonly limited in size to about 80% of its educational space.

The education space can be increased by having a larger building... moving training outside of the church building, or having multiple times for training.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

2. Worship Space “Pot”

Church is commonly limited in size to about 80% of its worship/sanctuary space.

Larger building, multiple services, or multiplication can help.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

3. Land Space “Pot”

Land Space is particularly important when it comes to parking spaces.

As such, it is commonly not as important for Filipino churches. However, ensuring transportation access is important.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

4. Organization/Leadership “Pot”

If staff, deacons, and teachers are overworked, it probably means that members are not receiving needed pastoral care and discipleship.

The church is being starved. It can't grow.

A. KEEP THE POT SMALL

4. Vision “Pot”

Resources follow vision (vision, trustworthiness, competence). As long as the vision for the church is small, the resources will be small. If the resources are small, the ministry and growth of the church will be starved.

B. PRUNING THE ROOTS

1. Trimming Member Rolls

One shouldn't maintain an artificially large member roll.

However, your vision, communication, and nurture shrinks when you say that certain people are no longer part of your church and should not be cared for and sought out.

B. PRUNING THE ROOTS

2. Trimming Ministry and Discipleship (including trimming resources for these)

“Where your treasure is, your heart is also.”

If you shift resources away from ministry,
your priorities are not on God's priorities.

B. PRUNING THE ROOTS

3. Limiting ministry to the work of “professional staff.”

When the gifts/talents of the members of the church are not utilized, the church will be artificially small.

C. PINCHING BACK NEW GROWTH

1. Dampening enthusiasm of new believers, new members.

Limiting ministry opportunities to “old-timers.”

Many feel they were “courted” to join the church. After, they are half forgotten. Sought to “show up and tithe.”

C. PINCHING BACK NEW GROWTH

2. Crushing New Ideas with Tradition

Sometimes we need “new wineskins”

However, change must be for a purpose...
not just change for the sake of change.

C. PINCHING BACK NEW GROWTH

3. Removing new members from old connections

New members have community relationships that are great for outreach and growth.

Encouraging these people to disconnect from those relationships hurt the church.

C. PINCHING BACK NEW GROWTH

4. Lack of Affirmation

We all need to be recognized and affirmed for our role in the church and God's kingdom.

Churches often affirm the old-timers, leaders, and “superstars.” But what about the new people, the role players, and the quietly faithful?

D. KNOWING YOUR SOIL

The wrong type of soil will ruin a bonsai tree. So one must know the soil it has.

We need to know the soil the church exists in. The community demographics (walk-throughs, surveys, research) is needed. Find out what are the felt needs and real needs of the community.

Not knowing the community “soil” may do worse than keep the church small, it may kill the church.

D. KNOWING YOUR SOIL

A Bonsai tree needs dry soil to stay small.

A church stays small with the “dry soil” of lack of pray, joy and commitment.

A Bonsai tree may die from wet soil.

A church may die when it “drowns” its roots, focusing too much inward (member care) and not on outreach and community ministry.

E. Creating Age and Direction

A Bonsai tree has its branches twisted and constrained by wires to make it grow in such a way to give a false sense of age or weathering.

A Bonsai church is made to look big in some ways that are “fake.”

E. Creating Age and Direction

One way is to have false fellowship. False fellowship focuses on social events.

However, true Christian fellowship is based on real member interaction based on the body concept of church membership.

Real fellowship is linked to our mutual interdependent roles in ministry.

E. Creating Age and Direction

Consider I Cor. 12:25-27

“That there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members in it.”

E. Creating Age and Direction

1. Wire of Tradition. “We have always done it THIS way.”
2. Wire of Imitation. “We need to be like THAT church.”
3. Wire of Comfort. “We like things the way they are.”

“The bonsai church may be cute, but it's not practical. It is ornamental rather than fruit-bearing. It is a distortion of God's original plan.”

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“The growth of the church is both natural and supernatural. The church was designed by God to grow naturally, but all church growth is a supernatural miracle. In truth, the church will experience growth if we remove artificial and often selfish barriers we have used to keep our church artificially small-- to keep it a bonsai church.” p. 107