



Advantages of Small Town Ministry

Small towns are a great place to have a disproportionately large impact with the Gospel. On a percentage basis, you will probably see more results, a greater response rate. There's more religious freedom and more respect for the sacred—sometimes, it's mere lip service, but you have more access. There is less to do in a small town, so you have less competition and more opportunities to connect with people.

It is more cost effective... you have a lower cost of living... you can experience more ministry bang for the buck. So there're some real advantages.

But there are some things you need to know.

You are expected to do business in town. You can get better prices in the city. You can find a better selection in the city. But their line of logic is that they tithe in the church you pastor; you should do business in their stores. Otherwise, it's like biting the hand that feeds you. The advantage is you get better service – if your car won't start, and you're a loyal customer, they will come to your house and get your car going again.

Watch out for the unwritten rules. Those are the most important ones. They are not found in the by-laws; they are the ones everyone considers soooo obvious there's no need to write them down.

Hard to Sustain Ongoing Programming: You will not always have the high percentage of educated and talented members you may find in some larger cities. So, your church cannot always sustain ongoing programming. You handle this challenge by having events. You will be the key person in preparing, promoting, and leading the event. You can even use these events as disciple-making tools to introduce people to spiritual disciplines, etc.. You may not be able to have a sustained intercessory prayer ministry, but you can have a two-week emphasis on prayer, for example.

It can sometimes be difficult to attract talented staff members to a small town. Many want to live

and minister only in a large cities. Don't worry; they wouldn't accept your town and its people. And picking up on the rejection, the people wouldn't accept them, either.

They are all related by birth or marriage. Never discuss anyone with anybody unnecessarily. Know your family trees before trusting someone with a confidence.

Like a Peretti Book: In some small town churches, there is sometimes a small cadre of people who are deeply entrenched in positions of power in the church. In some places, they will eventually force you into a situation requiring spiritual warfare. You will feel like a character in a Frank Peretti book. But don't fall into the trap of fighting symbolic battles. Just keep preaching the Word and, over time, the right things will happen.

Small Town Media: Small towns, with their local radio stations and weekly papers, provide opportunities for cost-effective, integrated marketing campaigns. You will often be allowed to use more message-oriented content which is more explicit with the Gospel.

Known in the Community: If you go to the high school in a small town, they will know you and respect you as a local minister. In big cities, they don't know who you are and they don't always care.

From Here: If a person isn't from that community, he will never be from that community. Preachers are cut a little slack in this regard, but their children

are not. Be prayerful and careful about moving your daughter during her middle school years.

Work behind the scenes to discretely influence people. Don't make public scenes unless absolutely necessary. Your City Council and your School Board members don't want to be embarrassed in public. Instead, meet with them privately to discuss issues (it's the biblical way described by Jesus in Matthew 18). Go in with a suggestion to handle the situation constructively, rather than to just complain.

Cities are gumbos; small towns are melting pots. You are expected to assimilate. If you want to be regarded as part of the town, you have to place value on what they value. Be seen at school athletic and civic and community events. Along this line, you may find it surprising to see how much the churches and the schools cooperate. Like a church loaning chairs or choir risers to the school.

Doing it Together: You will be expected to fellowship with fellow ministers in town, crossing denominational boundaries. Sometimes in small town life that is because "doing it together" may be a higher value than the message-content of the event. So there will be times you will have to be diplomatic in excusing yourself from participation. If you general-

ly participate, you will be excused. It is often better to be the leader in the local ministerial alliance, helping make wise decisions, than to be placed in situations where you have to make awkward choices.

The Association: Your congregation will likely expect you to be involved with your Baptist Association and to know the DOM. You may feel the Association has little to offer you and your church (this can vary with the association). But, generally, the Association needs the larger churches more than the larger churches feel they need the Association. So, you will want to consider how your church might be a blessing in the Association. My personal rule of thumb is to never encourage my members to attend a training event unless I know for sure they will feel it was worth their time. Otherwise, they will never trust my recommendations on training events again. I try to concentrate my best efforts with the Association in regard to missions, ministry, and church planting projects where I can be the most help—and there are plenty of such opportunities. Also, we are always glad to host an Associational event. And the fellowship will do you some good! 🌲

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Used by permission.

