



Small churches; big visions

By [Elizabeth](#), December 6, 2007 in [North Carolina](#).

CHAPEL HILL, NC—Although the mega-church phenomenon gets a lot of attention these days, tens of thousands of small churches across America are still thriving. This is the first of several posts on what these “ordinary” small churches are doing to solve problems and serve people in their communities.

These churches represent the range of small churches in America — one started just several years ago and has a membership that is almost all under the age of 35; another began at the time of the Revolutionary War and has a mostly elderly membership. But they are all serving their members and their community in many effective and innovative ways.

The [Antioch Baptist Church](#), pastored by David Atwater, has been around since soon after the Revolutionary War, when, in 1806, Haw River Mountain Church formalized the gatherings that community members had been having for years.

Church members provide a long list of services to its own members and the community:

- a toy closet where mother's in prison can pick out toys to give to their kids;
- mortgage payments for community members close to foreclosure;
- canned food drives;
- work at the Ronald McDonald house;
- donation of basic items newborns need to health departments and hospitals;
- clothing for children in Baptist children's homes in North Carolina;
- boxes of Christmas presents for children all over the world at Christmas (through [Samaritan's Purse](#));
- assistance in allowing kids to see and communicate with their mothers in prison (transportation to and from the prison, for example);
- gift bags, a Christmas party, and bingo prizes for individuals living in an assisted living facility in the community;
- a Relay for Life team that raised over \$9,000 this year;
- tuition, school supplies and fees for Chinese orphans;
- coat drives for kids;
- a yearly senior citizen banquet;
- and various other projects for families who are in need.

When you consider all those services and programs, and then multiply that by the tens of thousands of similar small churches around the country, you get a picture of the small church as a major social service provider in America.

Antioch Baptist also participates in service ministries led by a local Baptist Association. The Association runs a number of innovative programs in the community, splitting up the work between member churches to lighten the load. Antioch Baptist goes to a local prison once a year to hold a birthday celebration for prisoners whose birthdays fall in that month; other churches in the Association cover the other months. The Association runs an English as a Second Language program for prisoners — and a reciprocal program where the inmates can teach Spanish to pastors and church members. They even set up a system that enables prisoners to cater church events, which will be valuable experience to list on resumes when they leave prison.

Antioch Baptist has only 160-170 people in attendance every Sunday. But this small group of believers have decided to pool their strengths and talents to serve each other and their community. As the church evolves and grows, Pastor Atwater says, they will always be looking for new ways to serve.