



REPLANT ASSOCIATIONAL GUIDE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Endorsements	4
Introduction	5
The Priority	7
The Commitment	10
The Process	13
Exploration	15
Examination	22
Recommendation	28
Presentation	36
Affirmation	38
Implementation	40
Multiplication	42
Things We Have Learned	44
Resources	
The Revitalization Replant Window	48
Recommendations Quick Reference Guide	54
Church Recommendation Report	60
On Not Being Nice “For the Sake of the Gospel”	70
Replant Consultation Covenant	74
Funnel Graph Consideration Timeline	75
Calendar of Meeting Revitalization/Replant Process	76
Governance Change Proposal	77
Affirmation Letter	84
Developing a Replant Team	85
Vision Leadership Team	87

FOREWARD

“Then Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the same names which his father had given them.” Genesis 26:18 (NASB)

Make no mistake, when Southern Baptists experience the closure of more than 10,000 churches in one generation, the enemy is at work attempting to rob God of His glory and limit the impact of the gospel on the lives of people. The declining and death of churches in the midst of communities of people who need the gospel is an act of spiritual warfare. Thousands of churches that once provided life giving water to their community have been buried by the enemy in such a way that they can no longer effectively provide a source of life.

Just as Isaac dug again the wells, we too are committed to the recovery of churches all across our land. God, for His glory, has placed hundreds of missionary leaders in every region of North America. These missionary leaders love the bride of Christ, they love pastors and they work tirelessly to expand the kingdom. These leaders are Associational Missions Strategist, and they are the ones with the pick and shovel digging again the wells.

This Associational Replant Guide was created and compiled by men who have dug and are now digging again the wells. I fully commend the efforts of these men and the great information, process and practices you’ll discover in the timely resource. Even with the best efforts of men, we know without the activity of the Holy Spirit, the mere activity of men is not effectual. Yet, when we are obedient to follow our Lord in this work. When we do all that we can and through prayer and plead with the Father reclaim His church for His glory, we will see fresh water springing forth all across a dry and thirsty land.

This Associational Replant Guide has been prayerfully and carefully crafted to provide to you the best tools possible to dig again these wells. Even with the best tools, this is backbreaking, and at times heart-breaking, work. But it is worth every last bit of our effort. It is for God’s glory and the salvation of lost people that we engage in this work.

Mark Clifton

Executive Director of Replant
North American Mission Board

ENDORSEMENTS

“The *Associational Replanting Guide* has been a tremendous value to me and Lexington Baptist Association’s (LBA) leadership since its initial release several years ago. In addition to annually training and retraining LBA’s Revitalization Team, I use the *Associational Replanting Guide* to recruit and equip potential leaders to serve in one of our several pipelines (interim pastor, revitalization pastor, replanting pastor or a helping church pastor). It’s been my experience that not only is it important for the church to be ‘ready’ to go through the revitalization/replanting process, it’s also important that the AMS/DoM be ‘ready’ to lead them. The *Associational Replanting Guide* is an excellent tool to equip you and your Revitalization Team for readiness!”

Johnny Rumbough, AMS

Lexington Baptist Association
South Carolina

“The *Associational Replanting Guide* has equipped denominational and pastoral leaders to engage in intentional and impactful conversations with churches facing uncertain futures. As a trusted strategic resource, it has helped guide associations and leaders toward renewal and mission to the glory of God. This revised edition rightly emphasizes that spiritual renewal must precede strategic action, addressing the core reasons many past efforts faltered. May God use this version for even greater kingdom impact—for His glory, His Church’s good, and the transformation of every community.”

Bob Bickford

Executive Director
Nashville Baptist Association

“Essential. Logical. Reproducible. NAMB’s *Associational Replanting Guide* has been a game changer for multiplying the work among struggling churches. The process flow and tools are equipping AMS partners, interim pastors and state convention staff to engage and assess churches in any context. We have found it helpful to bring life to many churches as they understood the reality of their current conditions, the community they have been called to reach and the options to recapture the mission of God so that future generations may be transformed by the gospel.”

James Nugent

Director Church Strategies
South Carolina Baptist Convention

“How can state and association leaders help churches navigate uncertain and unclear futures? For leaders in Missouri, the answer has been to use the NAMB Replant Associational Guide. The guide has proven to be an effective, reproducible, and spiritually grounded resource used in all contexts around the state. The guide empowers leaders to shepherd congregations with clarity, intentionality, and hope towards a preferred future for the glory of God.”

Buddy Funk

Church Renewal
Missouri Baptist Convention

INTRODUCTION

The fact that close to 1,000 SBC churches cease to exist each year is a sobering reality. Sadly, even when churches don't close many still experience long slow decline and have lost hope. But this does not have to be the reality. The gospel gives us hope that every church can be renewed.

We firmly believe that no local church is without hope if they have the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the People of God. One of the statements you will often hear in this work from churches that don't want to change is, "Well, God can do anything. We don't need to follow your recommendation." God can certainly do anything but from what we see in Scripture He most often chooses to work through the sacrificial obedience of His people in submission to His Word and the leading of His Spirit.

When God's people will humble themselves, take an honest assessment, and seek God together, new life can take root. Jesus has a plan for every church, and it is our job to help churches pursue and submit to that plan.

What we see in the field as we work with struggling churches can be discouraging: aging buildings that sit empty and quiet for most of the week, people who are faithful yet weary, and habits that once served well but no longer match a changing neighborhood.

Thankfully, there is hope! Not because we found the perfect model, but because the Lord still delights to breathe life into dry bones. The temptation is to reach for a quick fix or the latest program. But renewal is not a formula. It is first and foremost a work of God among a humble people who courageously seek out and submit to Jesus' plan for His church.

What MUST we do to help churches seek renewal?

Renewal is God's work, and our part is to adopt postures that make room for His Spirit to bring life. Below are four postures we have found helpful while walking alongside churches seeking renewal.

Prioritize spiritual renewal

Decline is ultimately a spiritual issue before it is a strategic one. No plan guarantees life. Renewal is God-given, and we ask for it in prayer, dependence, and obedience. Don't rush past spiritual renewal when it seems hopeless. No real and lasting transformation can happen in the lives of the remaining members without spiritual renewal before strategic renewal.

Lead with Humility

Churches that experience renewal tell the truth about their present reality and model a learning posture in every setting. We lay down expertise, receive counsel, and seek God's wisdom wherever He chooses to speak. We aren't seeking the most strategic next step for the church. Instead, we are seeking Jesus' plan for His church.

Practice Encouragement

The remaining members of struggling churches are tired and often lack hope. As you lead a church to seek renewal, look for and celebrate signs of God's grace, faithfulness, and fruitfulness in the legacy of each church. Throughout the process, take time to celebrate obedience and small steps, not just outcomes.

Lead with Patience in the Process

This guide provides associational leaders a way to walk with declining churches to name reality, seek God's direction, and take right-sized next steps that fit their situation. The goal is Spirit-led discernment that restores health and mission, not a formula. By moving at a wise pace and adjusting as you learn, churches can rediscover a faithful future together.

How this guide helps

This guide is not a one-size-fits-all program. It is a practical process for associational leaders to come alongside plateaued and declining churches, helping them discern God's direction and take next best steps toward health and mission. We've seen congregations near closure rekindle life, reengage their communities, and rejoice as new disciples are made. By God's power, it can happen again.

Join the Renewal Movement

As you use this guide, I strongly recommend pairing it with the Renewal Movement resources at renewalmovement.com. These materials provide field-tested tools for prayerful dependence, leader development, and congregational engagement that complement and strengthen the work outlined here. Together, they form a clear pathway to seek God, build healthy culture, and move forward with unity and purpose.

Our team is grateful to serve alongside you in this work. May the Lord revive His church for the good of our communities and the glory of Jesus' name.

JimBo Stewart

Associate Director, Replant

THE PRIORITY

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL



NAMMB
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THE PRIORITY: SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Our God is a God of the new. From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture reveals a God who delights in bringing new life where there is decay, new hope where there is despair, and new joy where there is sorrow.

This truth sits right at the heart of Christianity itself. At its core, our faith is about renewal; God making all things new again through the power of His Spirit and the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is true for individuals, but it is true for churches as well. The Lord loves to renew his people again and again because His love never runs dry, His mercy never runs out, and His purposes never fail.

This theme of renewal isn't a minor thread in the Bible, it's one of the great melodies of God's redemptive story. From beginning to end, the Scriptures sing of a God who brings fresh life out of what's broken and worn out.

Just listen to a few examples:

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** - "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."
- **Romans 12:2** - "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..."
- **Psalms 51:10** - "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."
- **Psalms 40:3** - "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God."
- **Lamentations 3:22-23** - "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases... they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
- **2 Peter 3:13** - "According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

We could go on and on, but the message is clear: **our God is a God of renewal**. This truth about God's renewing heart is exactly where we must begin when talking about helping dying or declining churches experience true revitalization.

Before we talk about strategy, structure, or style, we must talk about spiritual renewal. Why? Because this is what the Lord cares most about, and what He has always cared about. Every lasting revitalization story begins not with clever plans but with God's gracious renewal of hearts; pastors and people alike being humbled, awakened, and filled again with love for Jesus and His mission. Everything else whether it be church growth, healthy systems, or creative outreach strategies, flow downstream from spiritual renewal. Nothing can substitute the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit bringing renewal to His church.

In our day, it is easy for pastors and leaders to lean on methods, marketing, and man-made ideas. Don't get me wrong, these things have their place, but none of them can raise the spiritually dead. What we need more than any man-empowered method is God-empowered renewal. We need the Lord to move in power. We need Him to bring new life where there is little to no life. We need Him to bring hope where there is little to no hope. We need Him to bring joy where there is little to no joy. Only God can do this. And when He does, no one can take the credit, only give Him the glory.

Before we plan new programs or polish new strategies, we must humble ourselves before the Lord and ask Him to move among us again. We must cry out for renewal, through prayer, repentance, dependence, and obedience. We must ask Him to do in our hearts and churches what we cannot do ourselves.

Because where the Spirit of God moves in renewal, everything changes. Hope is reborn. Hearts are softened. Churches come alive. Communities are reached. And the name of Jesus is lifted high.

Our God is a God of the new. He delights in renewal. And He loves to make all things new, again, and again, and again, all for His glory. This is why the cry of every pastor, every leader, every follower of Jesus should be this: "Lord, do it again. Bring renewal to your people. Renew our churches for the fame of your great name!"

Mark Hallock
NAMB Replant Team

THE COMMITMENT

IT BEGINS WITH YOU



NAMRB
Replant

THE COMMITMENT: IT BEGINS WITH YOU

Those who have been called to work with churches from a denominational role play an important part as advocates for the health and vitality of churches. Healthy and vibrant churches demonstrate and declare the gospel in their local context, experience growth and make their communities noticeably better places.

At times churches may fall into malaise. They endure conflict. They are led poorly or harshly by less than capable leaders. They experience years and even decades of decline. Some churches have a reputation of “chewing up” pastors. Their histories are replete with accounts of forced terminations or campaigns that eventually create a climate in which the pastor simply has no other choice than to leave.

Some churches are paralyzed by family cartels, bullies or gatekeepers who control the church under the guise of protecting or preserving it from compromise or the latest idea from the new pastor.

Some churches have simply lost their missional vitality as the community has changed, but they have remained the same. They are faithful saints who have pledged to keep the doors open and carefully steward their remaining resources, even as their numbers and bank accounts dwindle. They are sweet, well-meaning folks who are unsure of how to turn things around.

They are looking for help, and they have come to you. Be it by phone, office visit or email, they have reached out to you hoping you have some answers and advice that can remedy their situation and give them a vision of a better future.

A church that has been in decline for a long time has issues that cannot be adequately addressed by the latest revitalization resource or book study alone. Significant issues have been occurring for decades.

As we have consulted churches and spoken to and learned from others, we have identified several key commitments that are vital in helping a church recognize its state, consider its condition and determine a course of action for its future.

KEY COMMITMENTS FOR DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS

Truthfulness: I will speak truthfully about the conditions revealed during the consultation process knowing that some of the information will be challenging to hear and likely make the church uncomfortable.

Courage: I will have the courage to confront and correct sin and theological error when it arises and where it has contributed to the church's decline.

Hard Work: I will put in the hard work. The consultation process is time consuming and laborious. There are no guarantees that the church being consulted will choose to accept and implement the recommendations presented.

Team: I will develop a team. Consulting the declining churches in your association or convention is well beyond any one person's ability to fulfill. Those who are both meeting the needs of their churches and seeing success are those who have created teams of pastors, associational and convention leaders and staff to share the work of serving the local church.

Prayerful dependence: I will ask God to change the church. God is the one who moves in the hearts and minds of people. It is up to them to respond to His leading. In some cases, a church will gladly follow the leadership of the Lord. In other cases, they will not. We must depend on God's work as we work with the local church that is in decline and near death.

Hope: I will engage churches with the hope of the Gospel. The fuel of church renewal is hope, and apart from that, churches will not change. Engaging churches with confidence that God is not done with them and avoiding predetermined assumptions or solutions are vital for discovering God's next steps.

Having made these commitments, it is time to begin the process of consulting a church who has reached out for your help.

THE PROCESS



THE PROCESS: AN OVERVIEW



EXPLORATION

An initial conversation with church leaders to listen and share how your team can come alongside their church.



EXAMINATION

An in-depth assessment of the church and community to gain a clear perspective on the past and current realities.



RECOMMENDATION

Based on what is learned during the examination phase, your team develops recommendations for the church's best path forward.



PRESENTATION/AFFIRMATION

Your team shares the findings and recommendations with the leaders and the church, and the church votes on the recommendations.



IMPLEMENTATION

If affirmed, your team coaches the church through implementing the recommendation.



MULTIPLICATION

The end goal of the process: multiplication of healthy disciples and churches for the glory of God.

EXPLORATION: BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

By the time a church in crisis calls for help, its leaders are aware that things are critical; they understand that if something doesn't change soon, they will have to close. As a group, their feelings span a wide spectrum, from fear to hope, and desperation to denial. The leaders are carrying a heavy burden in trying to navigate the uncertain future of a congregation in which many of them have served and sacrificed for years.

This process is not merely theoretical for them—it's personal and painful.

In writing these words, I see the faces of people I've met who are grieving, sad and scared about their church's future. Some come to you hoping you will be able to offer suggestions that will address their needs—so long as they are suggestions that won't cost them too much or create division in the body. Some will want things to change without changing anything. Others, however, will realize that radical change is necessary and will understand that it is time to face the dreadfully painful reality: *The church is dying.*

Such a harsh reality is a lot to deal with for those who have been invited to speak words of truth and hope to a people who haven't had much of either. It is therefore crucial we understand that when we walk into a dying church, we are not walking into a sterile laboratory. We are walking into a history more complex than can be discerned in a couple of conversations.

Seek to understand their story

It has been said that the first task of a leader is to define reality. When we are called in to consult a struggling congregation, everyone in the room will likely know (or at least have a general idea of the fact) that things are not looking good for the church. However, it's not likely everyone will know just how serious things are. They must come to recognize the seriousness of the situation they find themselves in, but this recognition must come from self-discovery through prayer and reflection.

So before asking about attendance and finances, it is important to understand the backstory of the church. Typically, every church has something positive to recall from its past. Invite the people in the room to reflect on the days when God was blessing the church, and the pews and the children's classrooms were full. When was the church last reaching people for Christ on a regular basis? When was attendance at its peak and the church had an influence on the community? What drew them to become part of the congregation, and why have they stayed? Find something to celebrate. Take time to practice the ancient discipline of meditating on God's faithfulness in years past (Psalm 78).

Then, take time to identify the common concerns. Without fail, you will discover that some individuals in the room will be highly critical of the current state of the church, while others will have a far more idealistic perspective; this contrast creates a healthy tension. The critic brings a much-needed dose of reality, while the idealist offers hope for the future. Both are usually passionate in wanting to see the church regain vitality.

You can practice this exercise by asking the following series of questions.

Question one: What led us to this meeting today?

The point of asking this question is to get these leaders—the committee, group of deacons, or whoever was responsible for calling you in—to begin putting together a picture of the

true condition of the church. Let the room sit silent awhile if necessary. Don't be afraid to let these leaders soak in the thickness of the air. They need to recognize for themselves why a meeting like this is even taking place.

Once the conversation begins, keep it going by asking for clarity and rephrasing, checking for consistency and truthfulness. Guard against dominating personalities and those who are not participating in the conversation. It's not uncommon to experience both strong emotions and some conflict as the discussion flows. Don't shy away from interjecting as necessary to keep things moving in a constructive direction.

Tip: It is often helpful to record the responses to this discussion on a whiteboard or flip chart. Having one of the members of the church write the responses down gives you an opportunity to focus on the responses both verbal and nonverbal. Also, have someone take notes or pictures for production of a post-meeting summary.

It is important to understand the level of clarity these leaders have about the true condition of their church and to assess their understanding of the severity of its immediate needs. When the discussion appears to be winding down, it is beneficial to ask, "Is there anything else to add before we move on?" It's important to get everything out on the table to avoid a potential derailing fact, opinion or circumstance later in the process that may later prove to be difficult to expose. Using diagnostic questions can aid in bringing clarity over emotion.

Mark Clifton, Senior Director of Replant for the North American Mission Board (NAMB), has identified several key indicators that a church needs to be Replanted. These following questions help unearth these indicators:

- Has your church seen an active decline in attendance for more than three years?
- Is your church struggling just to pay its bills in a timely manner?
- Has your church been unable to pay your pastor the amount you think he should be paid?
- Are you unable to attract young people and young families to become members and be involved in the life of your church?
- Do you feel that your church is somehow disengaged from the surrounding neighborhood?
- Would anyone in the neighborhood care if your church closed?
- If your current trends continue, in both attendance and giving, do you fear your church will have to close within the next five years?

Question two: How did the church get to this place?

One of the key objectives in this first meeting is to discern the leaders' understanding, not only of the church's present condition, but also of what contributed to bringing them to such conditions. Standard answers can include internal conflict, change in the demographics of the community, frequent pastoral succession and lack of resources.

Often, these leaders will identify problems or issues outside their influence as the primary reasons for crisis and decline. On such occasions, it is important to bring the discussion back to a personal note, in order to identify how those in the church have contributed toward their arriving at wherethey are presently. The goal is for the church to be able to honestly identify

exterior contributors to their decline, while owning and accepting what they are responsible for as a congregation.

Explore the Need for Spiritual Renewal: *Falling In Love With Jesus (Again)* by David Jackson. The first step is to commit to a focused season of pursuing spiritual renewal. This resource will prepare hearts and reveal needs leading to better examination and more receptivity to recommendations. Access the *Falling In Love With Jesus (Again)* resource at www.replanthub.com/fallinginlovewithjesusagain/

Question three: What can be done?

This is the question they are asking you, even if it has not been stated explicitly. At this point, an important shift in the meeting takes place, in which you will ask them to commit to a process whereby possible solutions can be discovered that will address the church's need for spiritual and missional renewal.

This process, should they commit to it, is designed to reveal certain congregational realities that exist in the church. The process utilizes surveys that yield insights into congregational readiness for change, preexisting conflict, belief biases and options, economic, demographic information and missiological contexts existing in the congregation and in the community. The process leads to discovery of missional alignment between those in the congregation and the community in which it resides.

In other words, we are trying to answer the question: Does the church look like those who live in the immediate community? The gathering of data, church history, demographics and evaluation of the spiritual condition of the congregation provide the information necessary to understand the conditions inside the church and to make suggestions regarding its future.

We recognize that every church possesses local and autonomous authority; they have both the right and the responsibility to make decisions under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, governed by His inspired Word. Therefore, it is crucial we carefully define our function as it relates to the church. Our role is not to do something to the church or for the church, but rather with the church.

How we work with the congregations we are consulting:

- We don't do things *to* the church.
- We don't do things *for* the church.
- We work *with* the church in determining its future.

Leaders in struggling congregations may approach this process with fear they will lose the power of decision making. It's also possible they may be so deeply discouraged and tired of the conflict and struggle they want to yield the decision-making responsibility to someone else. Assure them that you will work with them, but they will need to work with you and lead their congregation through this process. Ultimately, it is the leaders of the church who will have to give an account for how they kept watch over the souls of their congregants, not you (Hebrews 13:17).

Explaining the process

As you turn attention to what's next, it's helpful to unpack the process for this leadership group. It's important to take time to explain each step and allow for questions. Likely, there will be some mental fatigue from discussing difficult topics that have thus far been addressed, so you may consider taking a brief break before moving on to this section of the meeting.



Step one: Exploration

The goal of this step is to gain an understanding of the church in its present condition through guided conversations with key leaders in the congregation. Hopefully, this step will simply be a summary of what has been covered already.



Step two: Examination

This step involves an in-depth study of congregational dynamics, statistical analysis of finances and attendance patterns, a facilities audit, community demographic research, comparative analysis of Annual Church Profile (ACP) data for the past 10-20 years, etc. If the decline has persisted for a long time, ACP data should be gathered prior to the point of decline to determine when the church was most healthy.



Step three: Presentation

Having compiled and organized the data, it is time to present the findings to the church. We recommend beginning with the leaders, then key congregational members and then the larger congregation.

| **Tip:** Steps three and four are usually done together in expanding circles of influence.



Step four: Recommendation

Based upon your findings, the team walking with the church through this process will submit one or two recommendations for the church leaders to prayerfully consider. They could include any of the following.

- **Renew through revitalization**

An existing church acknowledges that their future is in serious doubt. After prayerful deliberation and church affirmation, they determine to accept or enact and implement significant and drastic changes in the decision-making processes, leadership style and ministry approach. They willingly receive outside guidance and leadership to shepherd them through a revitalization process.

- **Renew through fostering**

The declining church agrees to be fostered for a defined time by a stronger, healthier church plant or established church. Through a defined mutual agreement, the struggling church accepts leadership, guidance and in some cases resources. The goal is to reestablish vitality so the church has greater kingdom impact.

- **Renew through adoption**

The declining church makes an official decision to become a strategic campus or family network church of a stronger, regional partner church and accepts their leadership, ministry style and philosophy.

- **Renew through Replanting from within**

The declining church surrenders assets, including property and day-to-day decision making to one of the following: an association, state convention or Sending Church. A new leadership group is formed and is tasked with day-to-day leadership. The church will then call an assessed and qualified Replant pastor and launch as a new congregation.

- **Repurpose through closure and donation**

The declining church closes and donates its building and assets to an approved Southern Baptist church plant or a Southern Baptist partner, such as the local association or state convention.

We will offer an in-depth explanation of these and other options in the Recommendations section.

Your first presentation of recommendations will be to the initial group of leaders who contacted you for assistance. Upon the leaders' affirmation and selection of one of the recommendations (step five), the presentations and recommendations will be made to an expanding circle of leaders and influencers and, last, to the entire church body.

Tip: Equipping and empowering the existing church leaders to participate in making the presentation and recommendation is key. We have found that a congregation is more likely to receive this news from its own leaders within the congregation, rather than from an outsider.

We recommend conveying to church leadership that a careful examination will reveal which the option might be best for the church and that it is best to wait until the findings come in during the process before making a determinative call.

Step five: Affirmation



After a series of townhall meetings, the church is asked to affirm the recommendation by vote. This is an important step for the church to take. This is the step where the church is officially acknowledging its need and intended course of action.

(*For reference, see the letter in the resource section from First Baptist Church Affton, Mo., for an example of a church's affirmation of recommended actions.)

Step six: Implementation



Once the church votes to affirm and approve the recommendation, it is time to begin drafting the plans for leading the church forward. If the congregation is without a pastor and is conducting a pastor search, we recommend the leadership team begin implementing the changes needed so the church will be ready to move forward once a Replant pastor is found. This step might include dealing with designated funds, working through the church membership roll to remove deceased, transitioned and absent members who cannot be found or contacted, taking care of facility needs and streamlining ministry and or decision making. We do not recommend that this team draft a ministry strategy or develop new ministries. Changes of this nature should take occur once the new leadership is in place.

Step seven: Multiplication



Churches plant churches and Replanted churches Replant churches. As the congregation moves forward and regains health and vitality, we encourage the newly Replanted church to consider Replanting another congregation. This may mean sending people, supporting the work at a church beginning the process of Replanting or telling the story of God's work in and through their church as they prayerfully walked through the process of being Replanted.

Concluding the Conversation

At this point in the meeting, you have presented a lot of information that will be exciting for some and concerning for others. It may be the first time that an honest, public conversation has taken place among this group about the realities the church is facing.

Give the group an opportunity to ask questions and then seek to draw out observations, feelings or concerns about anything you have presented. It is key to read verbal and non-verbal responses within the group. At times many will ask a question related to their greatest fears and some could use the opportunity to dismiss the realities of their true conditions.

Statements Frequently Made During Initial Conversations

“So, you are saying we should just give up the building?”

“Do you think we should just partner with another church?
And wouldn't that mean we cease to exist?”

“I don't think we're really that bad off. We have money in the bank and a good group attending. We just need a little more time.”

“I think if we can hire a younger pastor and get some young people in here, we'll do better.”

As consultants to the church, we cannot see into their future and neither can they. It's best to allay any fears that a decision has been made already and to simply indicate that only after taking a deeper look will the best options become more clear.

Secure an Agreement to Consult the Church

As you conclude the meeting, you will want to assess the church's readiness to agree o take intentional steps to pursue spiritual renewal and to let you perform a consultation through the recommendations stage, which would allow you to present the findings to the entire church in a town hall meeting for discussion and dialogue.

This in no way obligates the church to act on your recommendation; it only serves to inform the broader congregation what the findings of the consultation process have revealed.

This is often called the first “Yes,” and it is an important agreement affirmed by the church which, at minimum, means the findings and data will be presented to leaders, key stakeholders and finally to the entire congregation.

This agreement is very important for this reason: The entire church needs to see the findings. We at times have found that gate keepers and controllers seek to keep information from the larger congregation as a way to exercise control, to maintain influence and to thwart necessary change.

Have at the ready a printed copy of your **consultation covenant** or agreement and then discuss how the church can affirm its desire to work with you in this very important process. Once the church affirms the desire to work with you and returns the signed and dated covenant, your work can begin.¹

¹A sample covenant is available in the resource section

EXAMINATION: GETTING AN ACCURATE PICTURE

When given the opportunity to talk about ourselves, we tend to downplay our weaknesses and emphasize our strengths. The same holds true for a congregation, especially a declining one. Assisting a church in getting an accurate picture of its current condition, health and potential future requires a great deal of both research and relational work.

Tip: The examination stage is a great opportunity to lead the church to pursue spiritual renewal through a focused season of Biblical reflection and prayer. Reflecting upon the Biblical standard for church health and maturity prepares them well to evaluate their condition and receive recommendations. Consider leading them through [*Falling in Love with Jesus \(Again\)*](#) or the [*Renew & Resound Guide*](#).

Create a church portfolio

Developing a composite profile will require the cooperation of a key leader, or leaders, and those who have access to church information. We have found that choosing one or two people who have congregational authority (e.g., chairman of the deacons, treasurer, church moderator or clerk) to view and record financial and vital statistics as your immediate research team will provide you the contacts necessary to obtain the information you need to develop your recommendations.

As mentioned previously, securing an agreement to conduct the consultation is vital during the exploration stage. Information discovery and document gathering will be required. Establishing a positive relationship with church administrators and or secretaries is required. At times these individuals may view the church information as confidential and not readily grant it. You will need to assure everyone involved that this information will be kept in confidence and refer to the approval the church granted during their affirmative vote to begin the consultation.

We have found it helpful to create an online portfolio with or for the church that allows those involved to import the data and documents necessary for this phase. This practice is especially helpful as you work with other associational staff or Replant team members in a collaborative way.

Tip: Creating an online church portfolio allows for document creation, storage and access for you as a consultant, the church leaders who are responsible for gathering data and additional team members who will assist in the consultation. We recommend using a free platform that allows a variety of documents to be created and accessed, such as Google Drive, Dropbox, Evernote or Trello.

With agreement for information discovery and contacts secured, you will then begin the work of populating the church portfolio with information.

What are the major trends?

Our best source of historical and statistical information is the Annual Church Profile (ACP). We recommend obtaining, at minimum, 10 years of data from this source. If possible, it's even better to go back 20 years or more in order to understand the trends over time.

We also recommend creating a spreadsheet from which you can create a visual trend line for the leaders—and later for the church—that depicts the statistics reflected in the ACP.

As you are creating the trend lines, note key moments in the life of the church. Pastoral terminations, transitions, building projects, economic changes, crises and other events could be reflected in the visual portrayal of the church's slide in attendance and budget.

Where is the congregation spiritually?

Numbers are part of the story, but they are not the only part of the story. Downturns in attendance and decline in funds are often due to spiritual struggles in the life of the previous pastor(s) and members of the congregation.

Recommended Resource: Find a variety of quality surveys and assessments under the Define Reality section of the [Leading Renewal in Your Church Quick Start Guide](#).

Key Practice: While we must saturate the whole process in prayer, practicing prayerful dependence is critical during this stage. You and your team must seek the Lord's wisdom and discernment. Often God's plan for the church is not the easiest or most palatable. Seeking His plan will require faith from your team and the church."

Assessing the spiritual health of a congregation is both a science and an art. As far as the science aspect of this exercise goes, surveys can be very helpful. The use of surveys like "Natural Church Development" by Christian Schwartz and "Transformational Discipleship" from Lifeway are helpful in evaluating a congregation on several differing points related to maturity, evangelism and serving.

This step is important and necessary. Here's why: Many declining churches are not suffering from a belief deficit but a doing deficit. They may know the Bible intellectually, however, members of declining churches have often failed to adequately heed James' warning to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only (James 1:22).

Tip: Selecting the Right Assessments

There are many different assessment tools you can use as a consultant. How do you know which ones are best? We recommend selecting assessments that survey the following:

- **Actual behaviors not just beliefs and opinions:** Some surveys ask for opinions that almost any church member would affirm. It is important to get to the core issues of what a church member actually does, not just what he or she believes or prefers.
- **Readiness for change:** Any church seeking to revitalize or Replant must change. You will need to know how ready a congregation is to accept the required changes that could lead to health and vitality.
- **Key questions/data points:** How long have they been Christians? How far do they live from the church? What level of involvement in ministry do they have? When was the last time they invited someone to church? When did they last share their faith with someone (evangelism)? Will they stay at the church regardless of what option it may choose for its future?

How do visitors see the church?

As part of the consultation process with our metro association, we offer “secret shoppers” who attend services of the church with whom we are working. These intentional guests have been trained to evaluate and record their experiences from the viewpoint of an un-churched guest or a churched guest looking for a place of worship. Such a personal experience and report is often powerful when disclosed to the church. A congregation may view itself as friendly, as having a winsome corporate worship service (from the singing, to the praying and teaching), as having a building that is easy to navigate and as having clean and up-to-date children’s areas. But much of the time they have simply grown familiar with the lack of signage, older furnishings and outdated toys.

Often, it is only after seeing themselves through the eyes of a visitor—formally documented in an official report—that a struggling church finally learns how it comes across and why guests may not be coming back a second time.

What are the demographics?

Likely, at the founding of the church, its members and attendees looked like the residents in the immediate area. In many declining churches, those who attend on Sunday morning do not resemble those living nearby. Whether it is in age, ethnicity, socio-economic or personal profile, the congregants are often disconnected from the community in which the church resides, and unless a church is reaching the people in the neighborhood, it is on a course headed for closure.

If a congregation doesn’t reflect the community, it’s likely going to struggle in reaching the community in which it resides. This is not to say there is no value in a diverse congregation or that a group unlike another can have no gospel impact—in fact the mystery of the gospel is that groups who appear mutually exclusive can miraculously be bound together in love (Ephesians 2:11-22). However, a mono-demographic congregation can unknowingly communicate an exclusiveness that the gospel is expressly intended to eradicate simply by failing to reflect its community accurately.

[NAMB offers free demographic assessments.](#) Additionally, several other options are available commercially and can be accessed for free through local associations or state conventions. Focus the survey in one- to two-mile concentric circles with the church as the center. Depending upon your context, you may need to limit the area of study to five miles if in an urban area or widen it greatly if you are in a rural context where it is common to drive more than five miles to attend a church.

Tip: Setting Your Demographic Survey Area

We recommend the following as a general guide in setting the parameters of your demographic survey data:

- **Rural:** 10–20 miles or the average length of time it takes to drive to the grocery store or Walmart
- **Town and County Seat:** 5–10 miles
- **Suburban Metro:** 1–3–5 miles accounting for natural barriers like highways, rivers, neighborhood boundaries
- **Urban:** 1–3 miles

Compiling this data and comparing it to the composition of the congregation paints a powerful picture of the church's ability—and track record—to meaningfully connect with the community. A good survey will include psychographics, which will explain the core values, traits and perspectives of the residents within the community.

Discern the church's reputation

A declining church may have a bad reputation in the community, and it could have such a reputation for any number of reasons. Some churches suffer from no reputation at all, meaning people just don't know they are there, and if they are aware of the church, they may know very little about it.

Discerning a church's reputation takes some legwork and networking. You can find ways to get this data, but you will have to be creative. Interviews with people on the street, conversations in restaurants and contacting city and government officials or nearby schools can provide you with helpful narratives. Approaching people with this kind of sterile, research-driven approach can be helpfully disarming. You'd be surprised at how honest people will be if you tell them you're trying to get a random sampling around the area for community exegesis.

Here a few questions we find helpful to ask:

- When you hear (church name), what comes to mind?
- Have you ever heard of the church?

With an affirmative answer to the questions above, we continue the survey and ask these questions:

- What is the church known for in the community?
- How does the church contribute to the good of the community?
- Do you know anyone who worships at the church?
- If you had needs or spiritual questions, would you consider attending _____ church?
- If _____ church closed its doors, would anyone notice?
- If _____ church closed, what impact would it have on the community?

We strongly recommend assigning the responsibility of conducting the survey to the members of the church you are consulting. Getting them out into the community is vital. It's possible they have not engaged with non-Christian, non-church attending community members for quite some time.

Tip: Create a Google Survey

One of the great resources in Google Drive is Forms. You can take the survey questions above and create a form that can be accessed by any smart phone or sent by email. Members can conduct door-to-door or community coffee shop surveys without clipboards, entering the data into their smart phone, or by allowing the person being surveyed to complete it themselves. Data is automatically tabulated and recorded and formatted into charts and comment sections that can easily be shared during the presentation phase of your consultation.

Surveying non-church attendees is a must. When those interviewed are church goers, responses are often misleadingly favorable. To learn the real reputation of the church among the unreached of the community, you will need to specifically obtain responses from people who do not attend church.

Evaluate the condition of the facilities

Physical environments communicate powerful messages to outsiders and newcomers. Unfortunately, most churches in decline have grown accustomed to their facilities and are often blind to the messages they unwittingly communicate.

While the church is much more than a building, the condition of the facilities in which the church gathers matters a great deal. We have found it helpful to document this area with pictures for use during the presentation to the leaders and congregation. Aside from general cleanliness, the following need to be assessed:

- **Exterior appearance:** paint, landscaping, signage, parking lot, playground equipment, etc.
- **Interior decor:** color scheme, age and condition of flooring, wall finishes and decorations, signage, furniture, condition and color of paint in high traffic areas, etc.
- **Children's areas:** age of toys and furnishings, condition of carpet, lighting and proximity to worship areas, security and check-in and pick-up procedures.
- **Restrooms:** condition of fixtures and partitions, type of soap/towel dispensers, cleanliness and lighting.
- **Mechanical:** HVAC and other systems should be assessed for condition and age, roof and drainage systems, note any deferred maintenance of existing facilities. Often overlooked are lighting fixtures, which may produce noise and inferior light quality as many churches have fluorescent tube or ballast applications. We also include the baptistery in this section. In some cases, it has been infrequently and will require reconditioning.
- **Accessibility:** Are all areas accessible to those with disabilities? Where are the ramps, lifts, elevators and parking spots for those who require them?
- **Audio visual:** sound systems and visual technology in the sanctuary, fellowship hall and classrooms
- **Information systems:** computer systems in office, online database systems, Wi-Fi access, copiers, phones, etc.

In assessing the facilities, we are looking specifically at condition, age and functionality. In other words, we are simply looking for minimum standards that one would expect to find in a local office building or coffee shop, where people in the community spend time convening for meetings and everyday interactions.

We ask questions like, "Would newcomers and outsiders feel comfortable spending time here?" "Do our facilities represent a contemporary, comfortable environment, or are they dated?" "Do our facilities match the appearance and feel of the local watering holes in our community?"

In some assessments, we included conservative cost estimates of required/preferred upgrades to bring the facilities up-to-date and make them functional. Included in our resources section is a sample site visit report.

Should you evaluate the church governance?

Increasingly, we're finding that those interested in Replanting and revitalizing churches are concerned about the way a church makes decisions. Many who are considering accepting a call to a church in decline or crisis are hesitant, in some cases rightly so, due to the reality that some church constitutions and bylaws give safe harbor to dissenters, bullies and other groups who are entrenched in church tradition and resistant to making the changes necessary to move the struggling church forward.

Additionally, it is common to discover that some churches practice an annual call reaffirming pastoral leadership or voting for a termination. When possible, we suggest that an annual call be set aside as a regular practice as long as there are provisions for congregational action to address pastoral call.

In working with struggling churches, it is important to determine early if the day-to-day decision-making processes are so heavily weighted that every step forward will require congregational approval. In cases such as these, we recommend the congregation adopt a form of transitional governance regarding decision making, which will help expedite the process.

Questions that assist in the evaluation of church governance:

- How often does the church gather for business meetings?
- Is there adequate representation from the overall body, or do those who make decisions for the entire church represent a smaller subset?
- Do the meetings focus on mission or administration?
- Are committees free to make decisions within the scope of their responsibilities and budget lines? Do they feel they have to have congregational approval before acting on matters within these parameters?
- How many in the congregation are serving on multiple committees?
- Have there been contentious votes in recent history? Over what decisions?
- Are these meetings scheduled at times that allow for maximum participation? Are these meetings restricted by time and date requirements specified in the bylaws?

We have found in our work with declining and nearly dead churches that the current bylaws are often structured for churches well beyond the size of the current church's active membership and attendance. When we have suggested adopting transitional bylaws and have provided a plan for decision making that honors both leaders and congregants working together, the stage has been set for forward progress. We suggest implementing transitional governance prior to the arrival of a new pastor, so that upon his arrival, focus can turn from theoretical administration of ministry to practical application of ministry.

In making changes and recommendations in this area, we encourage you to consult with local legal and denominational officials to ensure that the church is functioning in ways that are compliant with state and local ordinances and regulations.

We have included in the resources section an example of a transitional governance document that is used for churches who are planting from within. In the cases of churches being Replanted via partnership, the governance from the stronger church is adopted as the organizational document.

RECOMMENDATION: OPTIONS FOR THE STRUGGLING CHURCH

There is no one-size-fits all approach to revitalizing and Replanting churches. Let that sink in for a moment. This means the work is often messy and there are no road maps or recipes that allow you to follow a linear, step-by-step process that will necessarily lead to success.

Granted, some approaches are easier or more successful than others. There are approaches that take a great deal of time and effort and involve greater risk. But the reality is that no two churches are identical; therefore, no two revitalizations or Replants will be identical.

It's tempting for us as we work with churches to recommend the easy and sure methods over the difficult and uncertain. We may find ourselves justifying choosing the former over the latter because we are busy, we are leveraged, and we are dealing with fickle people and valuable properties, which means we are dealing with a lot of "what if's," a great number of variables and the real prospect of seeing hours of work and millions of dollars lost if a church chooses to say no or chooses a path that is high-risk. Despite all this, opting to take the easy route simply because it's easier isn't an option. Our duty is to labor to discover the faithful route and recommend it to the church.

God doesn't call us to easy—He calls us to walk by faith. He receives more glory when we exercise great faith, which leads to greater praise for Him as He shows himself faithful.

Having completed the exploration and examination phases, you now find yourself at the point of asking, "What is God's best for this church?" This is the recommendation stage. Much like a physician, you have conducted tests and concluded your examination. Having determined that the church you're working with cannot continue as it has, your task is to recommend a course of action.

Church Renewal Options: In our work with churches, we focus on six primary recommendations. Each has inherent risks, benefits and success rates. Some are more difficult to accept, others are easier to implement. Each one is valid and is an option for a church to prayerfully consider. The leaders of the church you are working with need to understand each option, and they need to hear which one or two you recommend they prayerfully consider.

Tip: Typically, we offer no more than one or two recommendations. We explain our reasons in a written one- to two-page document, which is given to the leaders during the presentation. An example of a recommendations report is in the resource section of this book.

Church Revitalization

Revitalization: The supernatural work of God that restores health and vitality to a plateaued or declining church, evidenced by submission to God's Word, right relationships among members and a renewed commitment to Great Commission ministry.

Revitalization = existing church + existing leaders + existing structure + history + renewed/new effort

Characteristics

- This is the least invasive approach.
- It utilizes existing structures, leadership and congregants.
- It requires less change up front.
- The church is less likely to experience conflict overall.
- Revitalization may be led by an existing or a new pastor. It is less likely to occur successfully with a long tenured existing pastor; more likely, a new pastor is the best way to move forward.
- The pace of change is slow.
- It is risky as the church may reject the efforts of the pastor and leaders and ask them to leave or remove them through elevated conflict or forced termination.
- The church is less likely to experience lasting change and more likely to be a continuation of the same practices.
- This is the least effective approach for churches facing imminent closure.

May recommend this option when:

- The church is not ready/resistant for drastic change
- The church is unwilling to partner or give up control to a Supporting or Sending Church
- The church has adequate funds (5-10 years) to continue doing ministry
- The congregation is motivated and unified
- The congregation is contextually congruent with the surrounding community
- The majority of the congregants live in the community. General rule: The farther away congregants live away from the church (true of urban and suburban areas) the less likely that group is going to be able to revitalize the church.
- They are willing to follow a new leader

Can our church be revitalized?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions by churches we consult. First, it is important to be clear about the general distinctions between revitalization and Replanting.

Revitalization is generally described as a deliberate, dedicated and protracted effort to reverse the decline or death of an existing church. While much may change in the way the church approaches ministry, the church most often retains its existing leadership, identity (name) and decision-making structures and processes.

As the name implies, a church that is going to be revitalized must still have enough in the way of people, resources and energy to become vital again in proclaiming the gospel in its context. We have discovered that not every pastor is skilled or equipped to lead a church in revitalization. As a rule, pastors who have presided during a time of active and or accelerated decline—that is not due to dire external circumstances—and have not slowed or reversed that decline are not likely able to turn the church back toward health.

Though most of these churches want to be revitalized, we have found that those same churches who have long been in decline have passed over or missed key opportunities to address internal leadership and spiritual issues necessary to become revitalized.

Frankly, revitalizations are risky. According to Thom Rainer, up to 80% of churches who seek to be revitalized fail in their efforts. Why? We have found the following to be contributors.

Why Revitalizations Often Fail:

- The existing pastor is not skilled or equipped in revitalization.
- There are few revitalization leaders within the congregation.
- The church has simply run out of time and resources necessary to engage in a protracted revitalization effort.
- Those resistant to change oppose the necessary actions which could lead to revitalization

Most churches prefer to be revitalized rather than Replanted. This is because revitalization offers a much less invasive approach, it requires less surrender, and it is more likely to preserve much of what the church values and holds dear.

Is church revitalization possible? Of course, God can do anything. Is it probable? In many cases no, it is not. The long-declined church often does not possess the courage, will and the right kind of leaders to pull itself out of its prolonged slide.

Tip: The Revitalization Window

Churches experiencing decline have windows of opportunity in which they can address decline and see a turnaround. If they fail to address the underlying issues of decline, they could miss the window and head toward irreversible decline and eventual closure. For more on this topic, consult the “Revitalization Window” document in the resources section.

Replant

Replanting a church is different from revitalizing a church, though there is often a great deal of overlap. Replanting is the decision to close an existing church and re-launch as a new church with new leadership (pastor), new name, new identity, new governance, new ministry approach and overall new philosophy of ministry. In some cases, it is not necessary to adopt a new name but to simply adjust it. In some instances where a denominational label is a hindrance to reaching the community or where the name is unnecessarily long or confusing, or where the church has a bad reputation in the community a name change may be appropriate.

Replant = new leader + new people + new structures/approaches + history

Replanting: The process in which members of a church facing imminent closure discern God’s leadership to dissolve their current ministry and work with other churches or denominational bodies to begin a new church for a new season of ministry in their community.

Characteristics

- Builds on the history/legacy of the previous church
- Requires new leadership (assessed and approved replant pastor)
- New decision-making structure and new decision makers who handle the daily decisions (replant leadership team, transition team)
- Offers a break with the past (end date) and a fresh start for the future (launch date)
 - Historical factors may linger among those who were part of the previous church
- Resource hungry: salary for replanter, money for redecorating, facility upgrades, re-branding, need for new congregants, volunteers and staff.
- New identity can create momentum and enthusiasm and interest in the community
- This is the most drastic approach and is often rejected or not entertained by existing churches
- May be eligible to apply for funding as a new church plant (according to State Convention Process)
- High risk and high reward
- Often takes 5-7 years for the replant to become established culturally
- May not grow to be self-sustaining

May recommend when:

- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change
- The existing community and facility are in a highly unreached and underserved by a gospel-proclaiming church.
- The existing church facilities are in adequate shape and the community context is growing and or stable.
- The congregation is aged and disconnected with the surrounding community
- The church will not survive financially in the next three years and an end date is imminent and may be hastened by departures of members, church splits, deaths of long time congregants.
- There are existing people groups who are not being reached with the gospel
- When the church is “all in” and ready to do whatever it takes to reach others
- A potential replanter has been identified and the church is willing to call them as pastor

Two Styles of Replanting

There are generally a couple of types of church Replants—those Replanted from within and those Replanted through partnership. Both require the church to bring to a close its existing style of ministry and start over as a new congregation. Associations and state conventions refer to them by different names, but they have this characteristic in common: The old church ends, and the new church begins.

- **Replant from within:** the intentional restarting of a local church by a new pastor with existing people/leaders and without partners from the outside. The church adopts new decision-making structures, ministry focuses and programs and usually a new name. Replanting from within requires 5-7 years on average to see a turnaround, and it is the least likely to succeed due to the lack of outside partnerships.
- **Partnership Replant:** the intentional restarting of a local church with the help of outside partners through one of the following actions: marriage/merger, adoption/campus church or family network. The church being Replanted allows the partner church to lead directionally and surrenders its assets and facilities.

Partnership Replanting

Marriage/Merger

Marriage/Merger = one struggling church + a strong church or church plant = combined history and combined church. The strong church takes the lead.

The joining together of an existing unhealthy or declining church and a healthy existing church or church plant.

Characteristics

- Two churches come together to form one new church.
- A healthy church plant in the area is looking to launch.
- The healthy church takes the lead position.
- The unhealthy church gives up assets, control and decision making.
- It requires lengthy process meetings and clear communication as the specifics of the merger are developed, addressed and agreed upon.
- Legal consultation is required as one church closes and ceases to exist and assets are transferred to the other church.
- Can be a blessing to both churches with increased members and a greater number of volunteers.
- Requires caution as some may develop an us and them posture toward one another.
- It often requires the assistance of a third party to facilitate discussion and decision making between the two congregations.

May recommend when:

- There is a strong effective gospel proclaiming church in the immediate community
- The church is open to forming a partnership with another congregation
- The struggling church is willing to follow the leadership and adopt the ministry style of the other congregation.
- The legacy/established church is “open handed with their facilities”
- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change and new leadership
- There is a short window of opportunity in which to act for the future of the church.

Adoption/Campus

**Adoption/Campus = (strong church and its resources, leadership and brand)
+ struggling church**

The adoption or absorption of an existing church that is in decline or near death by a larger healthy church.

Characteristics

- The adopted church gives up all control and assets to the adopting church.
- New leadership replaces existing leadership.
- It results in immediate growth numerically.
- It typically yields abundant resources for facilities and ministry.
- It most often results in a loss of historical identity and legacy.
- There is the strength of a recognized brand in the community.
- The risk is much lower than revitalization, Replanting and merger.
- Existing church members have the option of becoming members of the adopting church.

May recommend when:

- A nearby, healthy partnering church has a sizeable group of people attending worship gatherings at their location, who are driving from your church's neighborhood
- The existing church is not able to or willing to take radical actions to address its true condition.
- There is a good match between ministry philosophies and a commitment to the greater work of the kingdom.
- A church is resource deprived and in great need financially and strategically.
- The existing or established church is humble and receptive to outside leaders and families.

Church Fostering

Foster = a struggling church + a stronger church or churches + a defined relationship + a defined time frame (temporary) + the desire to for the struggling church to regain health and autonomy.

In a fostering relationship, a healthy, established church provides wisdom, support, and resources to assist a struggling church for a defined period of time so that the struggling church regains vitality and full autonomy.

Characteristics

- a time bound temporary relationship in which a stronger church provides care for a struggling congregation
- a compassionate response to provide aid not enlarge a campus or network church system
- guided and guarded by a defined written agreement between the fostering church and the church being fostered
- the church being fostered willingly agrees to receive guidance and follow leadership
- a return to autonomy is the goal
- any consideration of or a request for a formal partnership or permanent relationship is the responsibility of the fostered church to initiate

May recommend when:

- The church is not ready for (or resistant to) drastic change
- The church is unwilling to give up complete control to a partnering church, but open to outside help from sister church(es) and the Associational Revitalization/Replant Team
- The church's main need is equipping, coaching, and resourcing
- The congregation is motivated and willing to receive outside leadership Further development required

Two Additional Options

Option One: Further Development Required

During the consultation process, you may become aware that the church is experiencing significant and severe conflict and lacks unity in seeking options for its future. When this occurs, it is wise to recommend specific actions to address the spiritual condition and unity in the church. This would likely involve a very intentional prayer campaign, sermon series, biblical study and focused discussions on revitalization and Replanting options.³ Any factions or individuals stirring up or fostering conflict must be addressed personally and encouraged to unify with the body as they engage in the process and consider the options or depart from the congregation if they are not inclined to seeking the Lord with the congregation.

May recommend when:

- A church is evenly split for and against the recommendation.
- There is strong opposition on the leadership team working with your consultation team.
- A shadow campaign of unofficial meetings working against the process or recommendations arises.
- Negative emails and letters, anonymous or not, are being sent to the church body regarding the recommendations or proposals.
- The discussion in townhall meetings devolves into serious accusations and conflict.

Communicating this option

“We hear your hesitancy about moving forward. Please understand that we will always support the congregational form of church governance and will never override your concerns or ignore your burdens. It could be that we are missing some insights or that the proposed pace of change might be too rapid at this juncture.

“However, that being said, this could be the time in which the Lord is graciously allowing division and disagreement to surface so it might be dealt with in a godly, respectful and direct manner. Perhaps the addressing of these problems and the removal of barriers to kingdom engagement is the biggest part of the work we have to do together.

“Our recommendation is that your congregation engage in an intentional and prayerful process over the next number of weeks/months and that we revisit the openness to future options at the conclusion of that process.”

³We recommend leading a congregation through the church study series [Reclaiming Glory](#) by Mark Clifton, [Falling in Love with Jesus \(Again\)](#) by David Jackson, or [Developing a Christ-Centered Church](#) by Henry & Richard Blackaby.

Option Two: Church Closure

Closure of Church/Disposition of Property

Closure = depleted resources, tired congregation, no ability/desire to continue + willingness to let go for the sake of the kingdom.

The existing church closes, and deeds assets and property are transferred to a denomination or church.

Characteristics

- This is the least desirable option, since it fails to build upon the history and legacy of the pre-existing church. It is the option of last resort.
- It is the easiest approach.
- It is administratively burdensome on the entity receiving the assets and property.
- It allows for the potential creation of a ministry center that could house multiple congregations.

May recommend when:

- The people are done and there's no desire/ability to keep going.
- Most of the congregation is highly unrepresentative of the surrounding community.
- The church may have declined because the community around them has transitioned to a non-neighborhood.
- The church facility is in great disrepair.
- Large established or healthy church plants are in the immediate area and serving the neighborhood in which the church meets.
- Financial resources are completely exhausted.

PRESENTATION: COMMUNICATING WITH THE CONGREGATION

Having done your due diligence in assessing the condition of the church, it is time to communicate your findings to the leaders and the church. Because you are working with a church long in decline—and perhaps in imminent crisis—this will be an important meeting, which will require prayer, preparation and pastoral care. It's likely that the news will be difficult both to deliver and to receive.

Presenting material of this kind and scope will require, at minimum, two hours. We have learned from experience that scheduling this meeting as a stand-alone gathering, rather than following a worship service or business meeting, is the best practice. Moving forward in this way sets the stage for the meeting to be taken seriously. The attendees will see that it is important and critical enough to take place on its own rather than as an add-on gathering.

Tip: We recommend when possible that two leaders from your consultation team participate in the presentation process. We have found that during the question-and-answer phase having an additional team member present can provide help during times of challenge, confrontation or in cases where parties are struggling to understand one another.

Here are a few things you will have to establish during this meeting:

Remind them why you are there

Referring to the invitation or request you received to get involved, helps them re-center their focus and reminds them that you are for them and with them. Recall together the chain of events that led up to this point and then define for them the stage you are in and what the focus of the gathering will be. Remind them that you are relaying the information they gave you, and you are there to help them consider the future God has for them. Don't underestimate the value of reminding them that you are on their side and that you have their best interest in mind.

Begin with the leaders

Every congregation places a level of trust or delegated authority in their leaders. Meeting with the key influencers as you unpack your findings will help you gauge the overall readiness for change that could possibly take place in the church. It's important to present the findings with leaders and then to the expanding circles of stakeholders or key influencers.

Present the findings

In sharing the findings of the evaluation, we have found it helpful to use a combination of printed information in the form of handouts and visual information, such as a PowerPoint presentation. Rather than handing out all documents at once, we have learned that staging them one at a time keeps the team on the same page and helps to strategically build toward the recommendations for the church. It is also important to pause and have a discussion around each section you present, asking for questions and giving clarifications. Allow time for discussion and response.

It's not uncommon for nonverbal reactions to range from tears to affirmative nodding, to frustration or acceptance. A wide response range is actually helpful, as it often best represents what you will encounter from the congregation.

As you complete the presentation, ask for feedback with the following questions:

1. What in the presentation did not surprise you?
2. What in the presentation did you find surprising?
3. What in the presentation was difficult for you to learn? Why?
4. Which parts of the presentation cause you to have questions?
5. How do you anticipate others in the congregation will respond to this information?
6. Which key leaders need to hear this presentation next?

Widening the circle

As a next step in communicating with the congregation, it is important to include key stakeholders from various leadership positions within the church. We also recommend equipping leaders from this initial group to assist in communicating the findings to their fellow church members. This is especially important when communicating with the entire congregation.

When the congregation's own leaders communicate to their own people it gives a level of authority and importance to the information and increases the likelihood of acceptance of the findings, since it is relayed by those whom the people see as their own leaders and members of the church.

A proposed communication and decision-making schedule

- Week 1: Presentation of evaluation findings to the leadership team
- Week 2: Leaders discuss and pray and follow up with consultation team
- Week 3: Presentation to key stakeholders and other church leaders. Adjust recommendations and wording as necessary.
- Week 4: Leaders decide which recommendation to take to the larger church body
- Week 5: Presentation to the church body
- Week 6: Townhall Q&A 1
- Week 7: Townhall Q&A 2
- Week 8: Church prayer gathering
- Week 9: Church body convenes to decide on recommendations

During the congregational communication phase, it is important to produce a brief one to two page summary of the findings and the recommendations. Often it is helpful to have members of the association or revitalization team present to assist in answering questions or providing feedback.

We have learned from experience that congregations need adequate time to process the recommendations, and as such, we do not recommend a time frame of less than two to three weeks. Initial reactions to recommendations are often strong, but they also soften over time as the truth sinks in and the weight of the realities regarding the congregation have time to settle into the hearts and minds of the church members.

We also realize that this is a spiritual journey and process. Allowing time for prayer and discussion is vitally important as a congregation discerns God's will together for the future of their church.

AFFIRMATION: THE CHURCH CHOOSES AN OPTION

As a final step in the recommendation process, the leadership team of the church asks the congregation to come together to vote on—or affirm—the recommendations brought as a result of the exploration and evaluation process. This is done at an officially-called, special business meeting of the church.

When the leaders have led the congregation well through a process, which includes a time for questions and answers (i.e., through town hall meetings with the members), we have found that people are typically ready to vote and move forward.

Should the AMS/DOM or consultant team be represented at the affirmation meeting?

In most cases we say yes, it is helpful. Though not a church member, you can ensure the leaders are fulfilling the process according to their bylaws. Regrettably, we have witnessed firsthand and heard second hand about the process of affirming the recommendations being hijacked by conflict, moderators refusing to operate by the bylaws, introducing additional options that were not part of the original recommendations and other unfortunate actions taking place.

We do not recommend holding an open discussion the day of the scheduled vote on the recommendations. In some cases when this has taken place, high emotions and last-minute efforts to add or remove recommendations arise explosively, causing both confusion and division. In some cases, we have seen individuals and groups derail the meeting and the vote on the recommendations.

Congregants who are active members in good standing should be allowed to vote by signed written ballot. Those who are voting should have their membership verified via the church membership roll. In most cases, this is done informally due to the size of the church body. Local church leaders often need encouragement and guidance in handling conflict and questions related to voting.

Since each church is unique, this process will need to follow the unique bylaws and must be within the guidelines specified for voting.

Cases of extreme conflict or dissension

You may have heard stories about churches experiencing a sudden influx of members who have been long absent showing up for a key vote regarding the future of a church. Unfortunately, such instances are based in reality. Churches, particularly ones who have experienced long decline, often fail to uphold commitments to faithful membership. We have rarely seen actions like this come as a surprise to the leaders of the church; they are aware of this possibility well ahead of time.

Leaders often feel trapped between following the bylaws and being nice, even in the face of blatant un-Christlike behavior.

Such conflict must be addressed biblically and firmly with grace and truth. As one who may be facilitating or walking a church through this process, you will likely need to coach and encourage the leaders you are working with to be faithful rather than fearful and to be biblical in their approach to dealing with sin and division.

Bill Easum has written a very helpful article on the importance of dealing with difficult people in the church. It is titled “Not Being Nice for the Sake of the Gospel” and is included in the resource section of this book.

Schedule and structure

This meeting ought to occur immediately after the morning worship gathering. Because the official time of discussion will have taken place in previous meetings and this is a specially called business meeting, no discussion ought to be held regarding the matter up for vote.

Church bylaw Example Regarding Special Business Meetings

Special business meetings may be called at any time by the moderator alone or by the church clerk upon written request of 5% of the members of the church who are eligible to vote as determined by letter F of this section. Notice of such a meeting and the object for which it is called shall be given from the pulpit not later than the preceding Sunday. Only business pertaining to the stated purpose of the meeting may be transacted.

The question should be read again to the congregation with instructions for voting.

Paper ballots that list one or two options regarding the decision being recommended ought to be distributed to the members who are gathered. These ballots should include places for the members who are voting to print and sign their name, which will be checked against the current membership roll of the church.

Designated members from the leadership team will then receive the votes and tally them.

The announcement of the result of the vote can then be made via phone calls from the leaders of the church or revealed at a midweek gathering or simply announced via email. (Note that it is often best to announce the results in person when the church is gathered again, but if that is not feasible the other means listed are acceptable).

Recording the results

It is important to have the church clerk, moderator or designated leader draft a letter with the results of the vote, which will be delivered to the congregation via mail or in person at a church gathering.

This letter should state specifically the terms of the decision and the resultant actions to be taken. It should be entered into the business meeting notes for official documentation. This form of documentation is crucial, as referring to this letter and church decision can be helpful if questions arise from members as to the details of the church’s vote.

All bases, in other words, should be covered in an effort to wipe out any trace of ambiguity or vagueness; clarity is the name of the game. You will find a sample letter included within the resources section of this guide.

IMPLEMENTATION: TAKING NEXT STEPS

Moving forward

Upon receiving affirmation from the church, implementation of the approved course of action can take place. This is a critical point in the life of the existing leaders. Some, relieved the decision has been made, will likely feel they can now transition out of their roles. For some this is appropriate, but key leaders will need to stay in place as the church works to implement the plan as it has been approved.

Focus the congregation spiritually

Replanting and revitalizing a church is first and foremost a work of the Holy Spirit. The best strategies and plans cannot and will not equate to a vibrant, healthy and fully-functioning church. Changing the name, the decor and the ministries of the church may all be necessary, but the first and most important work in implementing a Replant plan is the work of God in the spiritual lives of those who are part of the church. Prayer campaigns, house meetings, strategic sermon series, retreats and fellowship gatherings all play an important role in shaping the church under the authority of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Details and logistics cannot supersede the work of focusing the congregation spiritually.⁴

Designate the transitional leaders

Outside leadership is often required to facilitate the process of moving forward. A denominational leader or pastor serving on the transitional leadership team can fill this position. Working closely with a key leader or leaders from the congregation is important during this initial season of transition. In the case of a Replant or merger, a team is typically designated to formulate steps toward change and make the decisions on behalf of the congregation. In our experience, establishing a team of leaders comprised of some from within the congregation and some from outside is necessary to lead the church forward. See our resource titled "Developing a Replant Team" for more information.

Care for and celebrate the congregation

As the church moves forward, it will be important to provide pastoral care for the people who remain. Many times, there is a good deal of uncertainty as the transition progresses. An appropriate continuation of basic church gatherings and meetings provides the stability necessary to keep people connected to one another and moving in the right direction. Those needing to change should be given an end date and celebrated as they cease.

Communicate clearly and frequently

In most cases the decision-making responsibilities have shifted from the entire to church to a smaller group of leaders. An advantage is the speed with which decisions can now be made—the correlating disadvantage is that fewer people are in the know about what is taking place. A communication strategy that includes written and in-person updates helps to keep people on the same page and prepares the congregation for upcoming changes.

Develop a Plan

After the congregation has voted to be Replanted, a draft plan will need to be developed. We recommend that this be done by a new Replant pastor along with the new leadership team. Sample plans are included in the resource section.

Recommended Resource: The Replant team has developed two resources to support the pursuit of renewal. These resources highlight the principles and practices of renewal leaders and churches as well as the best resources developed by our team and partners. Check out the [Growing as a Renewal Leader](#) and [Leading Renewal in Your Church](#) Quick Start Guides.

⁴Several state conventions have developed great prayer guides for this purpose. Consider the KY Baptists' [40 Days of Prayer](#) or the Missouri Baptists' [Renew & Resound Guide](#).

Determine a transition schedule

Some changes can begin immediately and should; others will follow depending upon logistic and legal considerations. Programmatic changes can be delayed for a while

Some changes can begin immediately and should; others will follow depending upon logistic and legal considerations. Programmatic changes can be delayed for a while or staged over time, which will allow people to step toward their future in a measured way. If the church has determined to close, it will be important to set a schedule that allows for celebration and recognition of ministry and history. A timeline for transfer of assets and legal designations will need to be carefully considered as you continue this transition. We recommend consulting with a lawyer who specializes in church law.

Legal considerations

Each state and local municipality has regulations regarding the cessation of organizations, transfer of property and assets and merging of two separate organizations. It is incumbent upon the transition team to designate a member or members to discover and discern the legalities in the implementation of the approved plan.

In some Replants, we have found that it is helpful to retain the original church as the legally recognized organization or entity and let the newly Replanted church function as the public face of the legacy church via a Doing Business As (D.B.A.) designation from the Secretary of State. This often enables the church to move forward without incurring costly facility upgrades.

We strongly recommend consulting with those who are experienced in property and church law. Most Baptist state conventions have recommendations regarding legal assistance. Additionally, organizations like the Church Law Group (churchlawgroup.com) have experience and can offer solid counsel.

Celebrate

Replanting and revitalizing is difficult work. It is emotionally difficult for remaining members to have the sense that the church they now attend is no longer the church they knew and loved. Some legacy members in church Replants have described it this way, "It looks like the church I knew on the outside, but when I come inside it doesn't feel like the church I remember." Those who join in the effort and those who are new to the congregation may grow restless and impatient wondering when the church is going to finally be the church they were hoping to help create. Celebrating people and historic ministries as well as new advances helps the congregation move forward together.

Address conflict

The goal in Replanting is to redeem a once dead and dying church for the glory of God, the good of the community and the mission of the gospel. With that work, conflict is bound to emerge. Our enemy, Satan, has held the church in his grip, and he likely won't let go easily. His greatest attack will come in the form of congregational conflict. Conflict can emerge from anyone, anywhere, anytime. As a leader and with your leaders, you must lovingly address conflict when and where it appears. Realistically, not everyone who has been part of the church or has come to be part of the Replant will stay with you. Therefore, we view Replanting and revitalization as long-term projects. The average time in which one can expect the church to turn around is between 5–7 years for a Replant from within. Addressing conflict will enable the church to continue moving forward.

Evaluate and redirect

Plans on paper are just that. New opportunities and obstacles will present themselves regularly, which means your team will need to consistently evaluate and potentially change course. Often, God ordained delays serve to build prayerful patience in the lives of the leaders and congregation. Adopt the mentality of a distance runner rather than a sprinter.

MULTIPLICATION: REPLANTING AGAIN

Churches are closing at an alarming rate, nearly 900 per year. By God's grace, we have seen, over the past five years, that rate slow. We are confident—and prayerfully hopeful—that we will eventually see it reverse. But that will require more than an effort from a few at the denominational level. We would like for all Christians to be desperate to see God glorified as dying churches are resurrected into vibrant bastions of truth and godliness. This should be an obvious characteristic of Christians in general and church leaders (including future church leaders) in particular.

A replanted church must replant

Likely, it's very difficult for a church that is near death or in significant decline to ever imagine themselves as being a reproducing church. However, that's precisely what they ought to be imagining, and not just in some vague, future hypothetical sense either. They shouldn't be thinking, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could do that eventually?" but rather, "How can we take concrete steps toward such an end?" After all, who better to coach, support, encourage and resource another church facing death than one who was very recently in the same situation and for whom God intervened and brought back to life?

It may seem counterintuitive, but one of the most beneficial things a struggling church can do to become healthier is to look outside themselves to other churches who need help. In God's economy, we are filled as we empty ourselves for others. This is true of individual Christians and corporate bodies of Christians. So, it is incredibly important to inject the multiplication impulse into the DNA of a Replant in its infancy.

Recommended Resource: The Replant team has developed a key resource to support the multiplication of renewal. The [Becoming a Sending Church](#) Quick Start Guide highlights the principles and practices for partnering to replant other churches.

How can a church with few resources and few people contribute to the work of Replanting and revitalizing other churches? You might be surprised to discover that opportunities abound. Here are a few examples.

Tell the story

Word travels fast, especially among churches. When God moves and restores a church, it is an opportunity for that church to glorify God by sharing the story of what He has done to bring back life and vitality. Key leaders and congregants from the church can visit with leaders from churches in decline or near death. Their story and testimony give evidence that God can move and work, despite the apparent bleakness of any given situation. This brings hope and the potential for renewal. Additionally, it may give struggling churches the convicting dose of realism they require. When they hear about the sacrifice, hard work and flexibility that goes into seeing a dying church (much like their own) become healthy again, they will often be convicted and challenged to step out in faith in the same way.

Send people

It's counterintuitive to think that a church who has worked so hard to grow and retain people should entertain the idea of sending people to Replant another church. One of the primary needs of a church in the early days of Replanting is people, especially those who understand and are experienced with the work and all it involves. However, when churches get the vision to send and give away people, we have seen God do incredible things. This axiom has been proven true time and time again: The church who gives is the church who receives.

Share your wisdom

A benefit and blessing provided for us within the body of Christ is that we are given one another. We are privileged to learn from one another's experiences. God often speaks to His people through His people. The work of Replanting is often uncertain and unsure, and those who have survived the valleys and have come out on the other side can offer counsel on every aspect of a church's life. This counsel is valuable in that it directs, reassures and reminds a church in the process of Replanting that God is with them and will see them through.

Support and pray

One of the benefits of Replanting and revitalizing a church is that the church usually has a building and property. And, as strange as it may seem, one of the difficulties is that the church has a building and property. Facility issues often must be addressed. Where possible, other churches can come in and assist with building modifications, cleaning, painting, grounds keeping and the like. This is where the Replanted church comes in. Physical and material support serves as an accelerant to a Replanting and revitalizing church, as well as providing much needed encouragement.

THINGS WE'VE LEARNED



NAMMB
Replant

THINGS I HAVE LEARNED AS A REPLANTER

I am not an expert in Replanting or revitalizing churches, but I have experienced many things as a Replanting pastor. I pass these along as one who hopes your experience may vary or be even better than mine and some of those with whom I have worked. Years ago, when I was going through a church planting assessment, the facilitator shared his own story and used a phrase that has stayed with me—one that has guided my own experience. He said, “God always works to redeem your pain, and He most often does that when you share what you have learned with others.” Here are a few things I have learned. I pray that it may be helpful to you and your team as you Replant and revitalize for God’s glory.

- Replanting is spiritual work, which means there will be spiritual warfare. Be prepared for it. Enlist a prayer team from outside the church to regularly pray for you and prepare for battle.
- The longer the term of decline and the greater the average tenure of existing members, the greater the time required for renewal.
- The more acute the crisis, the more vigorous the action steps must be to address and arrest the declining condition of the church.
- Outside leadership, resources, new members and attenders are necessary to truly create a new culture and positive change.
- When longtime members say they want change, they probably mean they want more people doing the things the church has historically done.
- Dead and declining churches have lots of clutter and things that need to be thrown away—proceed carefully and wisely.
- The church bylaws can wait—most churches aren’t abiding by them anyway. Lead the church to function according to the biblical commands for churches. Adopt transitional or temporary bylaws to aid with decision making.
- You will be blindsided by conflict—be prepared but don’t be fearful. Conflict often comes from people and places you don’t expect, so be faithful and be biblical, and God will see you through.
- The cost is great—Replanting and revitalizing will cost you time, comfort and friendships. Your confidence will likely take a hit or two as well. Keep going, Christ is sufficient.
- You can’t and won’t keep everyone because some people like the church the way it was. They have been hanging around to see what it would become. When change happens there will be something that will be an ender for them—a straw to break the camel’s back—and they will have had enough and will leave. Bless them and thank them publicly and privately for their support.
- Church finances will decline, and you will lose givers. When changes begin occurring, people withhold their money. This is the first sign of progress and a sign of where the conflict in the body may be occurring. Someone on your team needs to watch for this and respond appropriately.
- Some guests may not return. This can be discouraging and devastating. You’re trying to grow and keep people, but you’re not quite big enough yet to offer anonymity to guests who want to check out your church. Persevere. Be who you are. Don’t apologize for the size of the crowd and practice good follow-up. God will grow His church at the rate and to the degree He sees fit.
- Focus on change in terms of five years. Turning a church around takes time, on aver-

- age, five years. Give yourself grace, work hard and labor faithfully.
- Encourage and bless. Replanting is difficult, there may not be a lot to celebrate, so find something you can celebrate and praise it; bless your people. Publicly thank those who have stayed and those who are sacrificing for the work of God.
 - Faithfulness is success. Few churches explode numerically. If your church doesn't, understand that is not an indication of failure. Failure is defined as not being faithful
 - You will want to quit. It probably won't be over some major crisis, but rather a multitude of small ones. Persevere, watch your health (spiritually and physically) and take time off to refresh.
 - You will uncover sin. Be like Jesus, who in the book of Revelation acknowledged the strengths of the seven churches of Laodicea, but who also addressed their sin and rebuked them accordingly. Churches that are in decline or near death usually have sin issues. Pray that God reveals such sin—be it historic or current—address it and move on in God's grace.
 - God is faithful. God always provides what you need, typically not before you need it, but when you need it. This increases our dependence upon Him, and that is a good thing.

THINGS WE'VE LEARNED AS CONSULTANTS

- Assessing the readiness of a church for consultation and change is imperative. Don't skip this step! Disengage from a church, allow it to season before pushing it toward facing its realities if it's not ready to do hard work and engage in honest reflection.
- Don't assume anything good or bad; approach the process with an open mind and discerning spirit.
- Expect the process to go sideways somewhere
- Make sure the interim pastor has a job description and is not seeking to become the next pastor. If so, he needs to resign, or the consultation process may need to come to an end until the church decides what their next steps will be.
- Help the church to focus on the gospel and becoming a biblically functioning and God honoring church.
- Don't relax after an affirmative vote. The work now begins in earnest.
- Existing pastors who have presided over prolonged decline will likely need to transition away—not always but often. Respect them, be gracious to them and gently assess their potential to be a Replanter or Revitalizer.
- Become an expert on the church's bylaws. Help them manage the vote, according to the bylaws.
- Expect heartache and headaches.
- Communicate often and seek to provide the church leaders with as much information as possible, especially during the early phases of consultation.
- If a protentional partnering church or church pastor is pushy or aggressive in the discussion stages of partnership, there will likely be problems down the road.
- Letting questions and issues simmer can be wise. They have a way of working themselves out.
- There is usually one, maybe two saboteurs who will work against the process, trying to keep the church as it is.

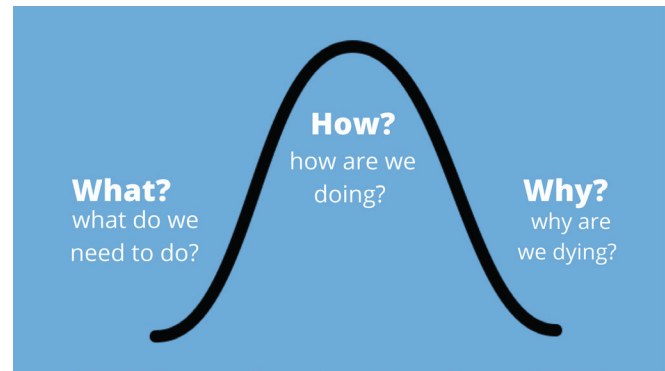
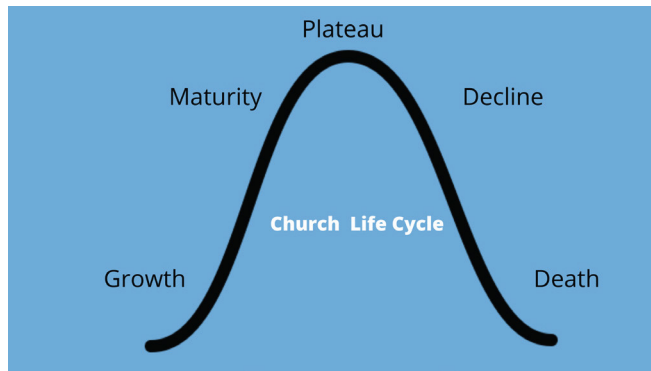
RESOURCES



THE REVITALIZATION/ REPLANT WINDOW⁵

Developed by Bob Bickford

Seasons of growth, plateau and decline are present in almost every church at some point in its history. For some churches, a season of decline could lead to its eventual demise. The task of every church is to be keenly aware of where it is presently and what steps toward its future it must take.



The question a growing church asks: What must we do?

A growing church is a blessing and, if you ask some pastors, that growth can be a challenge. Handling ever-growing crowds, demands for finding, caring for and equipping children's ministry workers, and assimilating guests are all good, though challenging, things. A growing church focuses often on answering the "what" questions on a regular basis.

What can we do?

- What can we do about parking?
- What should we do about membership?
- What would improve our discipleship and assimilation strategies?

The question a plateaued church asks: How are we doing?

Most churches in North America find themselves in a state of plateau. Experts estimate up to 80% would fall in that category. A church in this condition may feel neither a sense of urgency nor a sense of celebration. Often, plateaued churches ask the "How are we doing?" question as a sort of status check. When the answer comes back that we are neither growing nor declining, it can lead to a sense of apathy, which rarely sets off alarms. The church continues, perhaps stumbling into continued growth or slipping into decline.

The question a declining church must ask: Why are we not growing?

You will rarely meet a declining church who isn't aware of the decline. Yet, this church may not have a clear picture of just how steep the decline may be, nor how long it has been occurring, and members may not have a clear idea of when the downward trends began. After a while, this church may ask the "why" question. The answers often fall along these common replies.

⁵In the course of working with hundreds of churches from 2015-2021 consistent observable patterns emerged related to a church's self analysis and that of church renewal consultants engaged in conversations and consultations to address and remedy their condition for a better future. These are the observations of myself and my colleagues. A church typically has three windows in which to address their issues related to decline, these are evident in their historic numerical trend lines.

Why are we not growing?

- The community has changed.
- We have had a few pastors who didn't work out.

People are not interested in church much these days. Frequently the answers given are external to the body or assigned to a circumstance or someone or something beyond the declining church's control. Yet, in reality, the reasons for church decline are often attributable to the church and the actions of its leaders and the attitudes and spiritual condition present in the congregation. Add in historical conflict, hidden sin and divisions, and it's easy to begin piecing together why the church is where it is in terms of health and vitality.

Why are we not growing? (Answers that are true, but you probably won't hear)

- We run off pastors when they challenge us to mature in Christ or let go of our preferences.
- We have moved out of the community and don't really want to reach the people who replaced us and now live near our church.
- We have tolerated sinful behavior. We haven't addressed divisions and conflict, and good people have left our church.

Whenever a church is in decline, it is first and foremost a spiritual issue.

A declining church often asks the wrong question. It asks, "What can we do?" rather than, "Why are we dying?"⁶

Members seeking to do something may engage with resources that are more rightly utilized on the growth side of the lifecycle. Much of what is marketed to churches in need of revitalization has been rebadged as church growth material. (e.g., outreach, guest assimilation strategies, etc.) A church in decline must deal with the internal and underlying issues that are leading to its decline first. Then it can move on to "what" to do after it has answered the "why" question.⁷



⁶The concept of a church asking the right question at the right time emerged from several Church Revitalization and Renewal Practitioners. Largely mirroring the work of Simon Sinek in his business book, *Start with Why*, Portfolio Publishers, January 1, 2009.

⁷References on asking Why before What are noted from the following practitioners: Stetzer, E. (2015). *Why Are Churches Dying?*. Christianity Today. Rainer, T. S. (2014). *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. B&H Publishing. White, J. (2016). *ReChurch: Healing Your Way Back to the People of God*. Baker Books. Macchia, S. A. (2003). *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry*. Baker Books, and Dr. Rob Peters ReFocus Materials, Corpusvitae.org

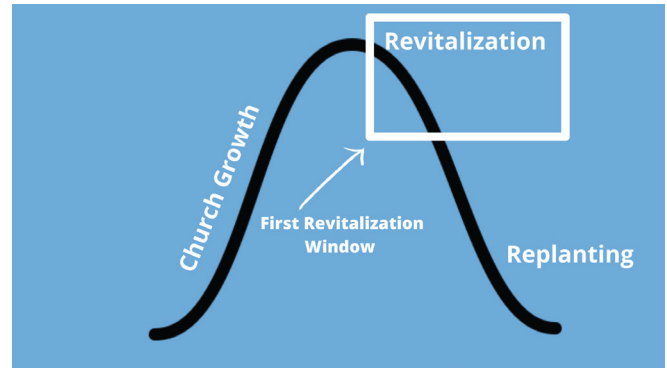
The Revitalization Window

There is a time period in the life of a church when it has the opportunity to ask the right questions, discern the answers and then chart a course in a new direction. This is called a revitalization window. There are perhaps one to three revitalization windows in the life of a church.

Revitalization Window 1 - Plateau stage or onset decline
 Revitalization Window 2 - Persistent/continued decline

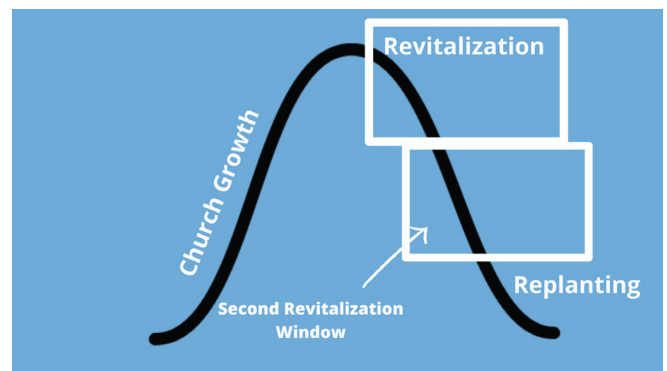
The First Revitalization Window

The decline is in its early stages, budget and attendance are waning but there are a good number of folks still active in serving, missions and leading. If the church asks the right questions, focuses on finding the right answers and then responds and plans accordingly, with God's help, the church may be revitalized.



The Second Revitalization Window

If decline persists and the underlying causes remain unaddressed, a church will enter its second revitalization window. This window is characterized by further declines in attendance, decreased giving and continued and perhaps accelerated departures of lay leaders and active missional laborers. Full-time staff may be reduced and a bivocational pastor may be required due to lack of resources. Mortgage payments may go to "interest only" and ministry and missions budgets are cut so the church can simply survive financially.

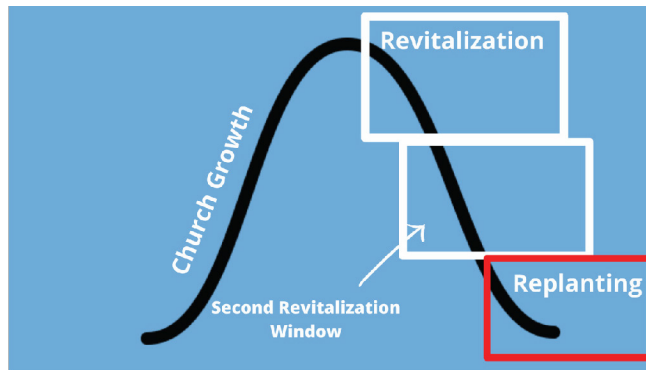


Visualize an airplane in a steep dive. The longer the dive, the sharper the decrease in altitude. The more accelerated the descent, the quicker the aircraft will arrive at an inevitable point of no return, after which no matter how skilled or determined the pilot may be, the forces of decline cannot be overcome, nor the aircraft saved.

We often say it this way; ***“Church revitalization is possible, but in some cases it is just not probable.”***

The longer the decline and the farther down the life cycle a church goes, the more radical the changes required to arrest and reverse the churches trajectory.

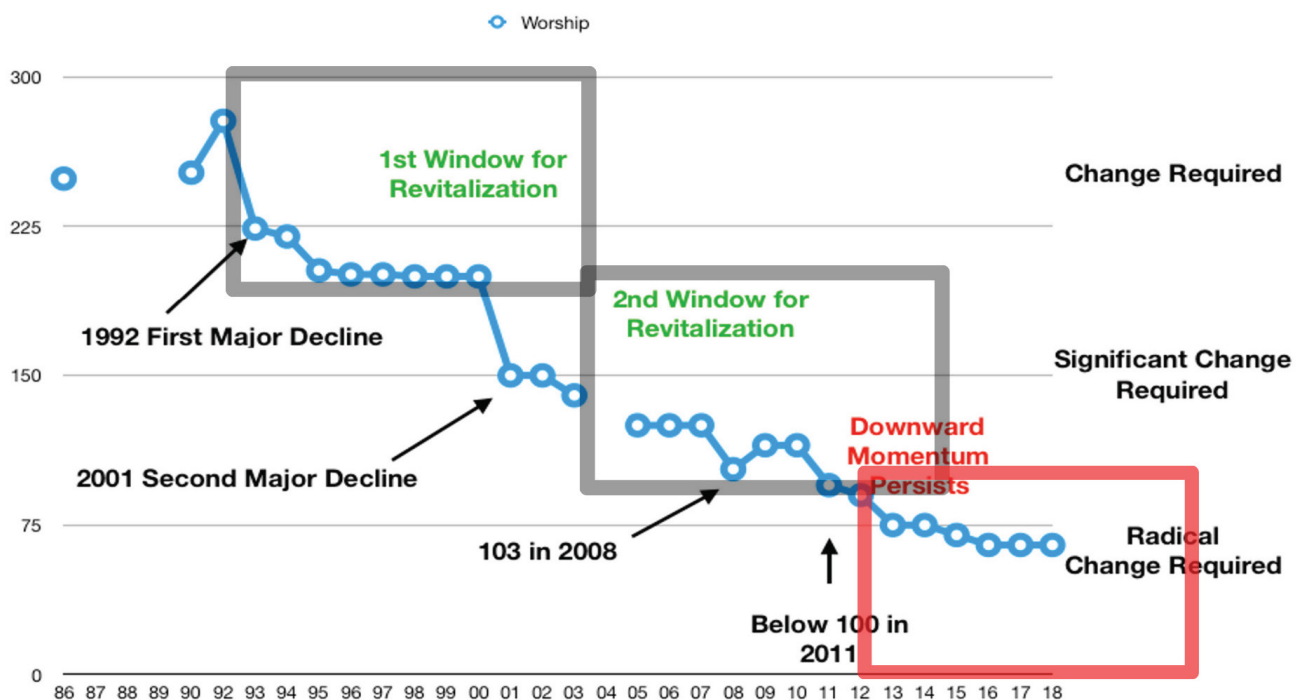
Let's return to our window guide. Notice now the inclusion of the Replant window.



Revitalization Window 1 - Plateau stage or onset decline (Change required)

Revitalization Window 2 - Persistent/continued decline (Significant change required)

Replant Window (red) - Late/critical/significant decline. (Radical change required)



First major decline in 1992 due to internal staff conflict and member departure. This was their first revitalization window with required change.

Second major decline in 2001 due to continued conflict, pastoral transition and a new church planted in the immediate neighborhood, which drew away young families. This time significant change was required.

Downward momentum persisted, and the church dropped below 100 (critical mass) in 2011. The church did not address the underlying issues that were perpetuating the decline.

A new pastor was called in 2013, and though he was faithful, a good preacher and a good pastor, he could not overcome by himself the decades of decline that preceded his tenure.

The aged congregation of 40 people had \$200K+ in restricted reserves in the bank, very few young families and internal conflict over worship and other matters. Very few guests ever visited and certainly did not stay.

The church had determined that the pastor would likely have to become bivocational in order to pay for building expenses. Revitalization is no longer an option for this congregation, radical change is now required.

The Replant Window

This season in the life of a church is when factors clearly indicate that revitalization is not a strong probability. The congregation is aged, unable or unwilling to engage the unchurched/lost community, resources are few or unavailable due to account restrictions, budgets are continually being reduced and morale is low. Infighting may be present, and departures of members and leaders regularly occur. The mission becomes survival, not reaching people for Christ.

When revitalization is beyond probable, a church must be Replanted. Generally speaking, Replanting is an intentional reset, much like the reboot of a computer but with a new operating system. The old goes away, and the new works within the framework of the facility and history of the original congregation but with new leaders, new decision-making structures and a qualified and called Replanter.

Options and the Church Life Cycle

What options should a church consider as it faces decline? Which ones are best for it as it faces an uncertain future and a continued downward trend? The following are offered as representative suggestions for a church who finds itself in steep or prolonged decline.



Revitalization: a deliberate, dedicated and protracted effort to reverse the decline or death of an existing church, facilitated by that church.

Assisted Revitalization: a deliberate, dedicated and protracted effort to reverse the decline or death of an existing church with outside help and oversight from a partnering denomination, association or consulting agency.

Covenant Revitalization: a mutually agreed upon process involving a pastor, a church in need of revitalization, and at least one outside relationship for mutual accountability for the accomplishing of the stated benchmarks indicative of a vital gospel proclaiming, disciple-

making congregation. Decision making and day to day leadership are temporarily ceded to the outside partner.

Replant from Within: the intentional and official decision of a church to discontinue its previous way of ministry and call a qualified and assessed Replanter and to relaunch as a new church with existing people on the foundation and legacy of the historic church. Often occurs with minimal or no outside partners or resources.

Partnership Replant: the intentional and official decision of a church to surrender their assets and facilities and accept leadership of a healthy partnering congregation for the purpose of relaunching a vital gospel-proclaiming, disciple-making church in their location. (Several types are described in general terms below.)

- **Adoption** - the adoption of a struggling church by a healthy church
- **Marriage/Merger** - the joining together of a stronger church and a struggling church
- **Fostering** - the temporary partnership of a stronger church and a struggling church
- **Family network** - the absorption of a struggling church by a stronger, regional church

Closure and Donation of Property: the intentional and official decision of a church to cease operating and donate its property and assets for kingdom purposes through church planting and Replanting.

Diagnosing a Church

Determining the condition of a local church requires expertise and insight. It is art mixed with a little science. Surveys, studies and congregational interviews are helpful in presenting an overall picture of the church as it is today. Assessing the level of readiness for change and commitment to do critical self-reflection and hard work on the part of the congregation must be part of the consultation process.⁸

As a consultant your role is to help a church identify trend lines and to dialogue with them about the realities revealed in the consultation process. Assist them in recognizing in which window their church presently resides.

⁸ The St. Louis Metro Baptist Association Church Revitalization Team produced a process document, the [CR Process Manual](#) in 2016 which documents concepts related to discovering the conditions and needs of declining churches. This served as the source guide and foundation of the Associational Replanting Guide in both its initial and subsequent version.

RECOMMENDATIONS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

1. Revitalization: a deliberate, dedicated and protracted effort to reverse the decline or death of an existing church. *Revitalization = existing church + existing leaders + existing structure + history/legacy + renewed/new effort*

General Characteristics:

- The least invasive approach.
- Utilizes existing structures, leadership and congregants.
- Requires less change up front.
- Less likely to experience conflict overall.
- May be led by an existing or new pastor. (A revitalization is less likely to occur successfully with a long tenured existing pastor; more likely, a new pastor will be the best way to move forward).
- Requires a great deal of time—the pace of change is slow.
- High risk as the church may reject the efforts of the pastor and leaders and ask them to leave or remove them through elevated conflict or forced termination.
- Is less likely to lead to lasting change and more likely to be a continuation of the same.
- Is the least effective approach for churches facing imminent closure.

May recommend this option when:

- The church is not ready for or is resistant to drastic change.
- The church is unwilling to partner or give up control to a stronger/Sending Church.
- The church has adequate funds (5-10 years) with which to continue doing ministry.
- The congregation is motivated and unified.
- The congregation is contextually congruent with the surrounding community.
- Most of the congregants live in the community. As a general rule, the farther away congregants live from the church (true of urban/suburban) the less likely that group is going to be able to revitalize the church.
- They are willing to follow a new leader.

Can long tenured pastors lead a congregational turnaround? If they haven't in the span of 10 years, odds are they cannot. (either due to their leadership/or willingness of the congregation to follow, or rigidity of structures)

Challenges of this option:

- Is less likely to overcome historical patterns and thinking that have kept the church stagnant or in decline.
- Congregants are typically older and less likely to be able to engage their community in mission and ministry, which is required for a church to be revitalized.
- Difficult to break the overall inertia typically present in a declined or dying church.
- May provide a false sense of hope to the congregants or leaders; "this time it will work."

- Often relies on programs and campaigns that create activity and busyness but do not address core issues of discipleship, surrender of preference and opinion and disunity that resides within the church members.

2. Replant: A decision to close an existing church and re-launch as a new church, with new leadership (pastor), new name, new identity, new governance, new ministry approach and overall new philosophy of ministry. In some cases, it is not necessary to adopt a new name but simply to adjust it. In some instances where a denominational label is a hindrance to reaching the community or where the name is unnecessarily long or confusing, a name change may be appropriate.

Replant = new leader + existing people + new structures/approaches + new people + history

General Characteristics:

- Builds on the history/legacy of the previous church.
- Requires new leadership (assessed and approved Replant pastor).
- New decision-making structure and new decision makers who handle the daily decisions (Replant board of directors, transition team, leaders from the denomination or other churches).
- Offers a break with the past (end date) and a fresh start for the future (launch date).
- Historical factors may linger among those who were part of the previous church.
- Resource hungry: salary for Replanter, money for redecorating, facility upgrades, re-branding, need for new congregants, volunteers and staff.
- New identity can create momentum and enthusiasm and interest within the community.
- Is the most drastic approach and is often rejected or not entertained by existing churches.
- Is the option with the highest risk factor.
- Average turnaround 5-7 years, so patience is required.
- May be eligible to apply for funding like a new church plant (according to state convention process).

May recommend when:

- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change.
- The existing community and facility are in an area that is unreached and underserved by a gospel-proclaiming church.
- The existing church facilities are in good shape and the community context is growing and or stable.
- The congregation is aged and disconnected from the surrounding community.
- The church will not survive financially in the next 3 years, and an end date is imminent. End date may be hastened by departures of members, church splits, deaths of long-time congregants.
- There are existing people groups who are not being reached with the gospel.
- When the church is all in and ready to do whatever it takes to reach others.
- A potential Replanter has been identified and the church is willing to call him as pastor.

Challenges of this option:

- Deconstruction and reconstruction of the church happen simultaneously.
- Potential for high conflict and frustration.
- A replant is often very resource hungry: Replanter salary, facility upgrades and repairs make it necessary to have available funds.
- To adequately shift culture, an influx of new people is needed quickly.
- The Replanter and family may suffer greatly and will need a strong support network.

Types of Replants:

- Solo Replant
- Replant Within
- Assisted Replant

3. Merger/Marriage: The joining together of an existing unhealthy or declining church and a healthy existing church or church plant.

Merger/Marriage = a struggling church + a stronger church (or plant) + existing facility + new approach to ministry + new or assumed identity + commitment + humility

General Characteristics:

- Two churches coming together to form one new church.
- The healthy or stronger church takes the lead position.
- The unhealthy church gives up assets, control and decision making.
- Requires lengthy process meetings and clear communication as the specifics of the merger are developed, addressed and agreed upon.
- Legal consultation is required as one church closes and ceases to exist and assets are transferred to the other church.
- Can be a blessing to both churches with increased members and a greater number of volunteers.
- Requires caution as some may develop an “us” and “them” posture toward one another.
- Often requires the assistance of an outside third party to facilitate discussion and decision making between the two congregations.

May recommend when:

- There is a strong, effective, gospel-proclaiming church in the immediate community of the struggling church.
- The struggling church is open to forming a partnership with another strong congregation.
- The struggling church is willing to follow the leadership and adopt the ministry style of the other congregation.
- The struggling church is open handed with her facilities.
- There is a high receptivity and readiness to embrace change and new leadership.
- There is a short window of opportunity in which to act for the future of the church.

Challenges of this option:

- Blending the two congregations into one unified new church body.
- Territorialism over facilities and resources.
- The struggling congregation may feel taken over by the incoming congregation, especially as size differences are pronounced.
- Requires costly legal counsel in order to close one organization and deed assets and finances to the church taking the lead.
- At times may require staff transitions and severance payments as not all staff can be retained.

4. **Adoption/Campus:** The adoption or absorption of an existing church in decline or near death by a larger and more healthy church.

Campus/Adoption = a struggling church + a healthy larger church in the immediate area + an agreement/commitment by the struggling church to be adopted/absorbed by the larger/healthier church

General Characteristics:

- The adopted church gives up all control and assets to the adopting church.
- New leadership replaces existing leadership.
- Results in immediate growth numerically.
- Typically yields abundant resources for facilities and ministry.
- Most often results in a loss of historical identity and legacy.
- Strength of recognized brand in community by the adopting church.
- Much lower risk than revitalization, Replanting and merger/marriages.
- Existing church members have option of becoming members of the adopting church.

May recommend when:

- A nearby healthy partnering church has a sizeable group of people attending worship gatherings at their location, who are driving from your church's neighborhood.
- The existing church is not able to or is unwilling to take radical actions to address its true condition.
- There is a good match between ministry philosophies and a commitment to the greater work of the kingdom.
- When a church is resource deprived and in great need financially and strategically.
- The existing or established church is humble and receptive to outside leaders and families.

Challenges of this option:

- May be characterized as a takeover by those in the church being adopted or absorbed.
- The identity of the church being adopted is often lost.
- Requires a lengthy process to define, refine and clarify what will happen as the struggling church is brought into the stronger church.

5. Church Fostering

Foster = a struggling church + a stronger church or churches + a defined relationship + a defined time frame (temporary) + the desire to for the struggling church to regain health and autonomy.

In a fostering relationship, a healthy, established church provides wisdom, support, and resources to assist a struggling church for a defined period of time so that the struggling church regains vitality and full autonomy.

Characteristics

- a time bound temporary relationship in which a stronger church provides care for a struggling congregation
- a compassionate response to provide aid not enlarge a campus or network church system
- guided and guarded by a defined written agreement between the fostering church and the church being fostered
- the church being fostered willingly agrees to receive guidance and follow leadership
- a return to autonomy is the goal
- any consideration of or a request for a formal partnership or permanent relationship is the responsibility of the fostered church to initiate

May recommend when:

- The church is not ready for (or resistant to) drastic change
- The church is unwilling to give up complete control to a partnering church, but open to outside help from sister church(es) and the Associational Revitalization/Replant Team
- The church's main need is equipping, coaching, and resourcing
- The congregation is motivated and willing to receive outside leadership Further development required

6. Further Development Required: During the consultation process, you may become aware that the church is experiencing significant and severe conflict and lacks unity in seeking options for the future. When this occurs, it is wise to recommend specific actions to address the spiritual condition and unity of the church. This would likely involve a very intentional prayer campaign, sermon series, biblical study and focused discussions on revitalization and Replanting options. Any factions or individuals stirring up or fostering conflict must be addressed personally and encouraged to unify with the body as they engage the process and consider the options or depart from the congregation if they are not open to seeking the Lord with the congregation.

May recommend when:

- A church is evenly split for and against the recommendation.
- There is strong opposition on the leadership team working with your consultation team.
- If a shadow campaign of unofficial meetings working against the process or recommendations arises.
- When negative emails and letters, anonymous or not, are being sent to the church body regarding the recommendations or proposals.

- When the discussion in townhall meetings devolves into serious accusations and conflict.

Suggested responses include:

“We hear your hesitancy about moving forward. Please understand that we will always support the congregational form of church governance and will never override your concerns or ignore your burdens. It could be that we are missing some insights or that the proposed pace of change might be too rapid at this juncture.

“However, that being said, this could be the time in which the Lord is graciously allowing division and disagreement to surface so it might be dealt with in a godly, respectful and direct manner. Perhaps the addressing of these problems and the removal of barriers to kingdom engagement are the biggest part of the work we have to do together. Our recommendation is that your congregation engage in an intentional and prayerful process over the next number of weeks/months and that we revisit the openness to future options at the conclusion of that process.”

7. Closure of Church/Disposition of Property: The existing church closes, and deeds, assets and property are transferred to a denomination or church.

General Characteristics:

- Least desirable since this option fails to build upon the history and legacy of pre-existing church.
- Easiest approach.
- Administratively burdensome on the entity receiving the assets and property.
- Allows for the potential creation of a ministry center that could house multiple congregations.

May recommend when:

- The people are done and there is no desire/ability to keep going.
- Most of the congregation is highly unrepresentative of the surrounding community
- The church facility is in great disrepair.
- Large, established churches or healthy church plants are in the immediate area and serving the neighborhood in which the church meets.
- Financial resources are completely exhausted.

CHURCH RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

Steadman Baptist Church

Leesville, S.C.

November 2020

An assessment report created and presented by Johnny Rumbough, Associational Mission Strategist / Executive Director of Missions of the Lexington Baptist Association

OVERVIEW

Assessment report and recommendation for future gospel proclamation and ministry at Steadman Baptist Church, 1011 N Edisto Road, Leesville, S.C.

GOALS

1. Make objective assessment of the current state of Steadman Baptist Church and the community she seeks to serve.
2. Make recommendations to the Steadman Baptist Church leadership for consideration in how they can continue the Great Commission ministry for generations to come.

ASSESSMENT

Current Leadership

1. **Interim Pastor:** Johnny Rumbough, since August 2020
2. **Deacons:** Tracy Gunter III (Chairman), Jeremy Gantt, Lewis Broome, Joey Scruggs, Cody Gunter, Steve Gantt and Johnny Sanders
3. **Revitalization Team:** Tracy Gunter III (Chairman), Louise Amos, Wynette Gunter, Carson Bedenbaugh, Matt Flake, Cody Gunter, Joey Scruggs – 7 members who are actively leading in the making of a decision regarding the future of Steadman Baptist Church.

History of the Church

Steadman Baptist Church was constituted on October 7, 1900.

“He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” (Matthew 16:15-18).

Upon this confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and these verses of Scripture, Steadman Baptist Church was founded. Steadman was surrounded by a number of church families, but the people of the little village saw the need for a church in their midst. So, with the help of the Father, and the zeal and courage of the people, Steadman Baptist Church was organized October 7, 1900.

November 11, 1900, a building committee was organized and an offering taken, which led to the first building, a wooden structure. November 18, 1900, the first pastor, Rev. C.B. Avery, was called. April 24, 1924, the church house was totally destroyed by a tornado, but with faith, a willingness to work, and sacrifice, the present brick building was constructed in 1927.

In 1965, the people saw a need for a new sanctuary, which as soon built. The dedication service and a homecoming took place on November 13, 1966. The old building then began to be used for educational space for the growing Sunday School program. The steeple was erected on Christmas Eve, 1979. On February 26, 1995, Steadman Baptist Church held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new Sunday School building. Then, in 1997, the original sanctuary was converted into a beautiful fellowship hall.

Her heritage and history is filled with decades of vibrant and transformative ministry to the community of Steadman and beyond. Under the leadership of faithful pastors, hundreds of people have responded in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and ministries have flourished from her vision and engagement. The church's outreach ministry was expanded in the year 2000 with the annual Judgement House Ministry that included nineteen years of performances that led to thousands viewing and hundreds professing faith.

As characterized in her name, "Steadman" Baptist Church, she has been a church in and for the community for 120 years. Steadman Baptist Church has promoted the kingdom of God to neighboring families and beyond as they have been faithful to fulfill the command of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to "Go, make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:18).

Over the past ten years, for the most part, church attendance has been stable. However, the church has experienced a significant decrease in attendance over the past eighteen months. Members describe the church as having faced some significant challenges, both internal and external, which resulted in a decrease in revenue and resources.

There is both apprehension and excitement among members concerning the church's future.

In recent months, a revitalization team was elected and charged with the assignment to lead the congregation in seeking God's direction for the future of Steadman Baptist Church. The team requested the assistance from their associational leader, Rev. Johnny Rumbough (Executive Director of the Lexington Baptist Association, Lexington, S.C.).

After spending much time in prayer, member meetings, individual meetings, surveys, hallway conversations and informal conversations with the church's membership, leadership, deacons and staff, and with the collection and study of the church and community data, the assessment and recommendation that follow are a result of everyone's cooperation and prayer.

State of the Church

Steadman Baptist Church has excellent attraction potential in a stable community with young families. It is like a spiritual oasis in the midst of a needy world. The Steadman community is a great place for young families to live and raise their children. However, the church is at risk of decline if significant changes do not occur to reach and keep families with children.

Worship & Sunday School/Small Group Attendance

Currently the average attendance of those gathering for worship is approximately 75 attendees (See Figure 1). With approximately one-third actively serving in ministry and less than one-tenth teaching or leading discipleship. Members estimate 10-15 children and youth are actively attending weekly services. Of the 75 active members reported by the church, most live within a 5-mile radius area of the church facilities.

Figure 1. Worship & Sunday School (Actual Numbers)

Worship Attendance / Sunday School			
2000 - 65/46	2006 - /46	2012 - 75/50	2018 - 75/50
2001 - 53/53	2007 - 75/37	2013 - 65/50	2019 - 74/40
2002 - 100/60	2008 - 75/38	2014 - 75/50	
2003 - 100/70	2009 - 75/50	2015 - 75/50	
2004 - 100/57	2010 - 75/50	2016 - 75/50	
2005 - 100/55	2011 - 75/50	2017 - 75/50	

According to the reported Annual Church Profile data, the church has been static for most of the past 20 years with a decline in the past year. From a high of 100 worshippers in the early 2000s, the church has averaged about 75 worshippers or less for the past thirteen years. The Sunday School ministry has experienced a more significant decline over the same period of time from a high of 70 to around 50 in recent years (See Figure 1).

Baptisms

The church reported double-digit numbers of baptisms in the year 2000 and year 2001 with additional good numbers through year 2007. However, their baptismal celebrations have declined significantly since year 2007. As is typical, their baptisms declined on about the same schedule as their worship attendance (See Figure 2). Also, it is noteworthy to mention the church saw large numbers of conversions through an outreach program titled “The Judgment House;” however, few connected with Steadman Baptist Church.

Figure 2. Baptisms: Actual Numbers (based on Annual Church Profile)

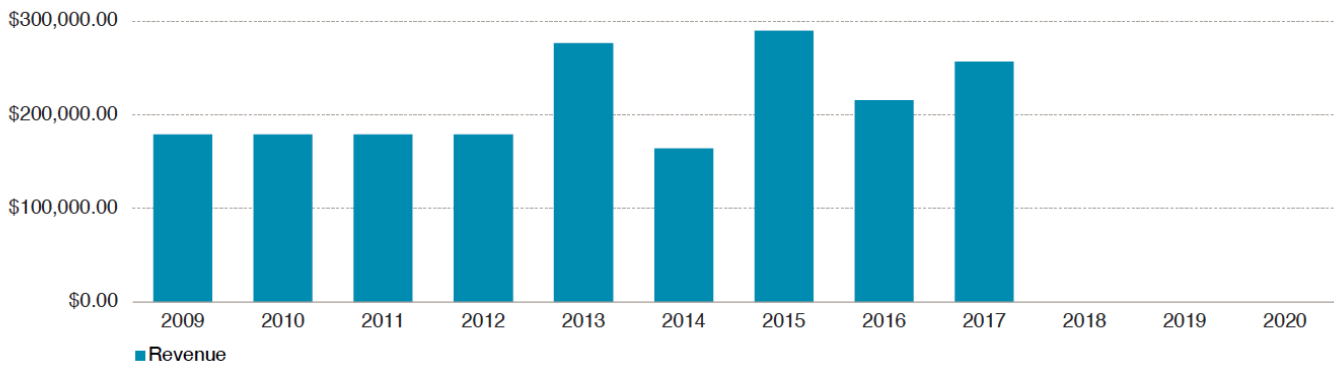
2000 - 13	2006 - 3	2012 - 2	2018 - 0
2001 - 11	2007 - 6	2013 - 9	2019 - 1
2002 - 3	2008 - 2	2014 - 0	
2003 - 9	2009 - 4	2015 - 3	
2004 - 8	2010 - 2	2016 - 0	
2005 - 5	2011 - 1	2017 - 0	

Finances

Financially, Steadman Baptist Church is stable. Based on the church’s income and expenses for December 2019 through February 2020, income is exceeding expenses. As of August 31, 2020, the church has \$73,853 in cash-on-hand. The only debt the church has is a mortgage on the Family Life Center, which is \$228,540 (as of October 7, 2020). Looking ahead, the challenge is with having an average monthly income of approximately \$16,141 and an average monthly expense of approximately \$15,436, the church has little to no ability for projects beyond normal monthly expenses. This could impact future ministries of the church.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Revenue	\$179,180	\$179,180	\$179,180	\$179,180	\$276,750	\$163,844	\$209,286	\$215,888	\$256,749	\$	\$
Expenses	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$

Steadman Baptist Church - 11-YEAR BUDGET ANALYSIS



Steadman Baptist Church does have \$73,853 cash-on-hand at the close of August 2020. The church is a strong and generous financial supporter of missions with 10% of undesignated offerings going to support missions through the Cooperative Program, 3.3% to support missions through the Lexington Baptist Association and 1.3% to Connie Maxwell Children’s Home.

Above Average Mission Support

10% = CP
3.3% = LBA
1.3% = CM

Facilities



Figure 6. Satellite imagery: Steadman Baptist Church

The church property includes approximately 8.75 acres of land. The facilities at Steadman Baptist Church are comprised of a worship center, educational space and multi-purpose

space. Some areas are well maintained and utilized, while other areas need significant attention. According to membership responses and a Building & Grounds Committee assessment, there are many places around (interior and exterior) where the church needs cosmetic repairs (e.g. painting, flooring, minor restroom repairs, minor wall and ceiling repairs, debris removal, landscaping). However, some ministry improvement items may involve a higher cost (e.g. sound and data projection improvement, signage). In addition, the nursery/children and youth areas and in general much of the facilities need cleanup and/or updating so as to look more inviting to members and visitors. All of the HVAC systems are within their normal average years of usage. The worship center will seat approximately 200 people. The education facilities are primarily used for Sunday School, discipleship and missions ministries.

Building & Grounds Visual Needs Assessment

FAMILY LIFE CENTER

Outside the building

- Remove broken concrete seat
- Fix bricks on flower bed
- Need a couple of splash blocks
- Throw away old grill
- Remove old stage
- Remove nails/screws in playground equipment

Lobby

- Repair clock
- Paint

Outside Rooms/Lobby

- Paint
- Clean floors
- Replace water-damaged ceiling tiles
- Replace missing tile-base pieces

Men's Restroom

- Patch sheetrock/paint
- Repair left urinal
- Gym
- Clean floors
- Paint
- Install acoustical panels
- Patch hole on left side of stage
- Broken tile entering storage room
- Replace water-damaged tiles in storage room

Kitchen

- Clean floors

SANCTUARY BUILDING

Outside

- Needs pressure washing
- Paint doors/handrails/speaker
- Check gutters and re-attach
- Remove bird nests
- Replace cross
- Cover of door or re-swing door

EDUCATIONAL ROOMS/HALLWAY

- Paint
- Clean
- Check lightbulbs
- Repair molding around water fountain
- Preschool room – paint door and trim/floor tile
- Remove wood and clean out hallway

WOMEN'S RESTROOM

- Replace water-damaged ceiling tiles

SANCTUARY

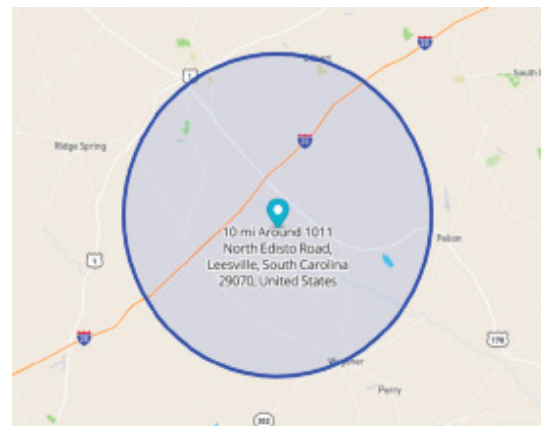
- Add handrails
- Improve sound system
- Improve camera for recording services

Community Exegesis

Steadman Baptist Church is located in an area of about 4% growth with a projected 24,201 people living within the 10-mile study area by 2024. These households are predominately Anglo (76%), with 16% African-American, 6% Hispanic and 2% other. In this study area, the estimated current year average household income is \$55,216. The average household income is projected to grow by 11% to \$61,209 by 2024. Projected income will trend upward for many of the households over the next four years, with more household incomes ranging between \$50,000 to \$149,999. Concerning population, the average age is 39. Over 11,603 (63% of adult residents) are in their childbearing and child-raising years of adulthood (18yrs-54yrs). Currently, 5,436 (22%) of the residents are 17yrs old or younger, while 4,069 (17%) are school age. Amazingly, 10,998 (45%) of the residents are under the age of 35. The Millennials (1982-2004) are the largest generational segment representing 31% of the population (past, present, future). Singleness is growing (never married, divorced, separated and widowed) while married is decreasing. Yet, households identified as married couples with children is higher than the state average (61% compared to 59%). There are more than 2,800 families with children (64% married couples and 34% single-parent). Of the 24,201 resident population, 47% (11,503) have been born since 1981.

Summary: 10 Mile Radius of Steadman Baptist Church

- Population: 2010 (23,112) / 2019 (24,201) / 2024 (24,838)
- Last 12 Months: 267 Births / 222 Deaths
- Gender: Female = 12,240 (51%) Male= 11,961 (49%)
- Average Age: 39 (2000 Census = 35)
 - 63% (11,603) of population: age 18-54
- Elementary age by 2024: 74% (2,791)
- Largest Age-Segment: Millennial (7,438) 31%
- Senior-Adult Population (60yr+): 1,652 (7%)



The Study Area

Community Views

Adult activities	69%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Bible or Scripture study/prayer groups	59%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Christian education for children	53%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Contemporary worship experiences	55%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Family oriented activities	66%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Holiday programs/activities	67%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Marriage enrichment	53%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Senior activities	60%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Traditional worship experiences	67%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Warm and friendly encounters	81%	Modestly Important / Very Important
Youth activities	51%	Modestly Important / Very Important

Community Views (per Year 2017)

Personal relationship with one living God, who is Lord and Savior	47%
Belief in Jesus does not require participation in a church	23%
Affiliation with a Roman Catholic Church (#1)	18%
Affiliation with a Southern Baptist Church (#2)	17%
Affiliation with a United Methodist Church (#3)	13%
No concern about alcohol/drug abuse	83%
No concern about increasing rate of divorce	84%
No concern about marriage problems	74%
No concern about financing the future/savings/retirement	24%
No concern about Unemployment/losing job	62%
Facebook weekly (or more) user	67%
Population considered “unreached”	61%
Population active in church	decreased 10%
Believe same-sex marriage should remain legal and protected	44%
Believe abortion should become illegal	31%
Do not believe children are adequately taught good moral standards today	73%
Believe marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman only	49%

Vital Signs ScoreCard (overall score is 30 out of 50)

Evangelism: Score is 27 out of 50

- Church emphasizes prayer for spiritually lost people to come to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord.
- Members are often encouraged to identify people in their social network and to build relationships and share Christ with them.

Sunday School/Discipleship: Score is 21 out of 50

- Appropriate Bible study/discipleship curriculum materials are provided for each age group.
- Church encourages and resources families to have a weekly “family Bible study” time together.

Fellowship: Score is 33 out of 50

- Church teaches on and encourages believers to unite with the church through baptism or statement of faith.
- Church is careful not to overburden staff members and volunteers so they have time to build relationships.

Mission/Ministry: Score is 25 out of 50

- Church has a plan to identify and appropriately meet the benevolent needs within the congregation and community.
- Church involves individuals and groups in ministry/missions projects.

Worship: Score is 42 out of 50

- Church acknowledges Jesus as Lord of all and responds by expressing love for Him in worship.
- Church services are designed to lead individuals to actively participate in corporate expressions of worship.

Leadership: Score is 32 out of 50

- Leaders are effectively enlisted, equipped and empowered to oversee their area of responsibility.
- Church leaders demonstrate love to volunteers through public and private acts of appreciation.

Stewardship: Score is 31 out of 50

- Interior appearance is clean and inviting; adequate and clean restrooms, children and preschool area is child-friendly, safe and clean.
- Church encourages missions giving through the Cooperative Program, the association and SBC/SCBC special missions offerings.

Revitalization Team & Leadership Survey, Member Meetings, and Congregational Thoughts

- Membership in general sees a need for the church to take a serious look at her future.
- Membership realizes the need to reach young, unchurched families who have children.
- Attendance and participation is increasing.
- Membership has a concern for the small number of children or youth under the age of 18 in attendance.
- The church is prepared to welcome and assimilate visitors, even those who have young children.
- Most of the church's current ministries serve the members.
- Some members are involved in outreach.
- Membership is familiar with the church's history and leadership.
- Membership expresses the need to know more about the church's finances.
- Church members understands the importance of slowly regathering
- The church's best growth years were a couple of decades ago.
- Most people see the church as warm and welcoming.
- A core value expressed by the church membership is solid Bible teaching and preaching.

Top Five Compliments

- Love each other
- Love God
- Bible teaching and preaching
- Family is important
- Unity is godliness

Top Five Criticisms

- Need more activities for children and youth and young families.
- Not enough community outreach and evangelism and missions involvement.
- Need more participation in church leadership and serving roles — Need more opportunities for volunteers to become involved in the church.
- Need to update church sound and data systems.
- Need to strengthen church's financial health.

Summary of Impressions

1. Prayer is a priority.
2. Members love one another and enjoy their kindred fellowship.
3. Membership's appreciation for one another could yield to inward focus.
4. In the early 2000s, attendance and baptisms were up. In recent years, attendance and baptisms are lower.
5. Finances are tight, but careful planning could improve available funds.
6. Church membership wants to be informed of the important things, but not everything.
7. The membership wants to do something about reaching young families.
8. Membership is missional in thinking but challenged by vision and strategy to make it happen.
9. Successful ministries include those that grow God's kingdom, even if the SBC doesn't benefit.
10. The church's facilities are missional assets that could be used for reaching people.
11. Good preaching, solid teaching and good fellowship make for a happy church.
12. Strong deacon leadership has made unity a treasure.
13. Faithful attendance in church services is seen as missional.
14. Openness to change is not difficult because of high trust between people and leadership.
15. Sound biblical teaching and preaching are not optional.
16. The church's buildings and grounds need more attention for safety, maintenance, beautification and attraction.
17. There is high appreciation and respect for the role of the pastor and the message from the pulpit.
18. Church members want to see the church become more involved in missions.
19. Church members are optimistic about the future.
20. Prayer has been and will be the key to any success the church may experience.

Questions That Help Prepare for the Future

- What are you asking God to do in the future of Steadman Baptist Church?
- What are you willing to include in the future of Steadman Baptist Church?
- What role are you willing to have in the future of Steadman Baptist Church?

Recommendation

Revitalization – Revitalization is recommended, though it is the most difficult of options. It will require strong pastoral leadership and many laborers. We recommend the following twelve essential changes identified within the four categories.

1. Leadership

- a. Pastor Search Committee
 - i. **Revitalization Team** will transition into Pastor Search Committee effective December 6, 2020.
- b. Worship
 - i. **Church Impact Team** will update/replace/improve the sound/data for sanctuary (only) for an amount up to \$20,000 by summer 2021 (funds provided by special fundraising.)
- c. Team Ministry
 - i. **Updated Bylaws** will transition most committees into teams led by a team leader with established assignments and budgeted line-item funds, as needed.
- d. Senior Leadership Team
 - i. **Updated Bylaws** will create a Senior Leadership Team (responsibilities include: personnel, finance, administration.)

2. Administration

- a. Constitution & Bylaws
 - i. Ad-hoc Constitution & Bylaws Team will present an updated Constitution & Bylaws to church for approval prior to February 2021.
- b. Church Finances
 - i. **Treasurer** will present a 2021 church budget to the church for adoption prior to 2021 and begin monthly financial statements to report income and expenses.
- c. Building & Grounds
 - i. **Church Impact Team** will coordinate building and grounds workdays in 2021 to complete the minor repairs identified on the Facilities Assessment Report.
- d. Church Parsonage
 - i. **Deacons** will study and make recommendation ASAP to the church concerning the church's parsonage.

3. Ministry

- a. Member-Care
 - i. **Newly elected deacons** will begin member care for church membership.
- b. Local Community Outreach Projects
 - i. **WMU** will lead church to engage in local community outreach projects in 2021.

4. Missions

- a. Outreach Team
 - i. **Updated Bylaws** will create a Church Outreach & Activities Team to plan a way (or ways) to increase the church's in-reach and outreach use of the Family Life Center for children, youth, adult and families, beginning in spring 2021.
- b. Future Growth Plan
 - i. **Church Impact Team** will study and report in fall 2021 a good use of the sanctuary and all educational space to reach and accommodate more people.

ON NOT BEING NICE, “FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL”

Bill Easum

Throughout my consulting ministry, I have seen a disturbing pattern ... most established churches are held hostage by one or two bullies. Some individual or small group of individuals are usually extremely opposed to the church making any radical change, even if it means the change would give the church a chance to thrive once again. I keep hearing pastors say, “If I tried that, I’d lose my job!”

Courageous pastors often ask, “What do I do when one person intimidates the church so much that it is not willing to try something new?” My response is always, “Either convert them, neutralize them, kick them out, or kill them. The Body cannot live with cancer.” To which someone usually cries, “That’s not very Christian!”

My response describes much of the wisdom of both the Old Testament and Jesus. Maturing Christians love so deeply that they will do anything, even not being nice, “for the sake of the Gospel.” Jesus was so compassionate toward others that He could not remain quiet when He saw people holding other people in bondage.

The Old Testament story of the wilderness wanderings contains a remarkable account of how Moses responded to a group of people who insisted on keeping the Hebrews in bondage to the past.¹ A group of people led by Korah came to Moses asking him to relinquish leadership because they wanted to take the Hebrews back to Egypt. Moses responded by falling on his face prostrate before them in prayer. Then he got up and slew all of them. Not very nice, but necessary if they were going to get to Canaan. Moses knew that freedom with God was better than slavery with Pharaoh. The same is true today ... freedom to grow in grace is always better than enslavement to the status quo.

Almost every struggling church has at least one dysfunctional bully who goes out of his or her way to be a big fish in a small pond. Often, that is the primary reason the church is struggling. This person gets his or her sense of self-worth by keeping the church so intimidated, either by their actions or their money, that very little can happen without that person’s approval. The sad thing is most of the leaders know that this person is a stumbling block to the church’s future and they will not do anything about it. The church leaders ignore the bully, thinking that is the Christlike thing to do, and in so doing assist in the stunted growth or death of the congregation.

For example, I was working with a staff in a large church. The first day I met with the staff the tension was so high I could cut the air with a knife. The staff hardly said a word to one another. The next day when we met, the staff laughed and cut up together as if they were one big happy family. As I looked around the table, the only apparent difference was that one staff person was not present. I asked the staff if they sensed the difference I was feeling. They knew exactly what I meant. Finally one of them blurted out, “Jim is not here today. Staff meetings are always better when he’s not here.” It turned out that Jim was a dysfunctional bully who ran to the personnel committee every time he didn’t get his way. Because of him several competent staff members had been fired. To make matters worse, the staff knew that Jim seldom contributed anything to the health and vitality of the church.

I asked the staff if they had confronted Jim with how they felt. Their response was typical

¹Numbers 16

for church folks. “That would not be the Christian thing to do. It would hurt him deeply. After all, the church is all he has.” Sure, it’s all he has; no one else would put up with him. Who is the most dysfunctional, Jim or the staff?

A church not far from me told their bishop that they wanted a young pastor. It wasn’t long before they got one. One of the first things the young pastor did was ask the Board to change the appearance of the church newspaper. The board unanimously voted to do so. Four months later, I noticed the newspaper was switched back to its old form. I called the pastor to ask why. His response is a classic. “Most of the board were present the night we voted. However, one man was out of the country. When he returned to find that a decision had been made in his absence, he demanded that the chairperson immediately call another meeting. At the second meeting, the board voted unanimously to rescind their previous decision about the newspaper.” When I asked why, he replied: “This man always pays off any deficit at the end of year and he wanted the vote changed. The board was afraid to buck him.” The future of that church was held hostage to a bully.

I’m convinced that one of the main sins of the established church is that we have taught ourselves to be nice instead of being Christlike. In spite of aspiring to be a disciple of Jesus, we teach that the essence of Christianity is to be nice. Where do we get such a notion? Certainly not from the actions of Jesus.

One of the hallmarks of Jesus’s ministry was His constant attack on the status quo. He challenged it every time He could. He even went out of His way to upset the religious bullies of His time. He called them “white sepulchers” and by doing so attacked the very heart of their priesthood based on purity.² Jesus loved church leaders too much to allow them to remain such small persons.

When Peter showed his displeasure over the impending death of his Lord, Jesus said to him “Get behind me Satan.”³ Jesus loved His disciples too much to let them miss one of the more important lessons of servanthood. Jesus, the man who said, “be compassionate as God is compassionate,”⁴ had no desire to be nice because being nice has nothing to do with being Christlike. Being nice is often nothing more than a lack of compassion for people. Let’s explore what this means.

At one point, in a holy rage, Jesus entered the Temple with a large, metal-tipped whip and drove out the money changers. As he did, he said, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.”⁵ If we discover why Jesus responded to religious bullies this way, we will also discover why so many church leaders refuse to follow His example.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, He was in the Court of the Gentiles. This was the only part of the temple where gentiles were allowed to worship. What ticked Jesus off was that the religious leaders were using the only place gentiles could worship God as the place to sell their wares. What was to be a place of spiritual discovery and worship for the gentiles was turned into an economic opportunity for the religious leaders. (Sound familiar?) The focus of the religious leaders was on themselves, not the spiritual vitality of the gentiles. So He drove them out.

²Matthew 23:27

³Matthew 16:23

⁴Luke 6:36

⁵Matthew 21:13

Therefore, thieves are those who do religious things for their own purposes. So when we are doing things that only benefit those within the church, we become a den of thieves. When we say that we want it this way because it has always been this way, we are a den of thieves. When we focus on only the needs of our members, we are robbing the community of a chance to join us in our journey of faith. Such action is intolerable for people of compassion and love.

Church leaders are robbing people of their spiritual birthright when they allow dysfunctional people to sell their petty wares in the house of God rather than to proclaim release from bondage. We really need to get clear on this problem and do something about it. If we really love people, and if we really want them to experience the love of God, then we will not ever allow the bully to rob others of their spiritual birthright. Anyone who knows how family systems work, knows that the worst thing one can do with dysfunctional people is to give them more attention by giving in to their every whim. Instead, tough love has to be applied. The compassionate thing to do is to hold them accountable for their self-centered actions, for in doing so they may begin their journey with God.

Jesus shows us what to do with people who do not want to grow spiritually. In training His disciples how to spread the word of God's love, He told them to "shake the dust off your feet" when they encountered people who did not receive them graciously.⁶ Jesus loved people too much to let anything slow down the process of setting people free from their bondage, whatever it may be.

People who would rather be nice than Christlike do not love enough. They do not have enough compassion. Instead, they are afraid of hurting someone or of being hurt. Remember, fear is the opposite of love. "Perfect love casts out all fear."⁷

If we really care about people, we will not allow anyone to bully others into submission. Instead, we would want every person to feel free to express their hopes and dreams, to stretch their wings and to reach their God-given potential. If we really love people, we will not base our decisions on whether or not people would like us for those decisions. Being nice or being liked is never a goal for followers of Jesus.

What does being nice accomplish in the church?

- more dysfunctional people
- fewer spiritual giants
- an intimidated congregation
- an inability to spread the Gospel
- little hope of renewal or growth
- discouraged church leaders.

Being nice is not what Jesus wants from any of us.

One of the basic lessons I'm learning as a consultant is that before renewal begins in a church or denomination, it is normal that someone has to leave or be denied. Almost every time a dying church attempts to thrive once again, someone tries to bully the leadership out of the attempt. And almost every time, if a turnaround is to take place, such persons are lost along the way because they are no longer allowed to get their way. When they can't get their

⁶Matthew 10:14

⁷1 John 4:18

way, they leave. Not even Jesus got through the journey with all of His disciples. Why should we expect to?

This does not mean that we should set out to intimidate the bully or to kick people out of the church. It does mean that we care enough about the future of our church not to allow anyone to stifle its ability to liberate people from bondage or victimization. It means that we care enough about the bully to not allow him or her to intimidate the church because we know the spiritual vitality of both the bully and the church is at stake.

Matthew 18 gives us a formula for dealing with the dysfunctional bully. First, an individual privately confronts the person with what he/she is doing and asks the person to stop. If this doesn't achieve positive results, two or more people are to confront the person. If this does not resolve the matter, the person is to be brought before the entire church. Listen again to the notso-nice words of Jesus. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." In other words, withdraw from that person's presence, or in our case remove that person

The next time someone in your church attempts to intimidate or bully the church out of taking a positive step forward, go to God in prayer, and then get out the metal-tipped whip and drive that person out of the church....of course in love.⁹

⁸Matthew 18:17

⁹For more on how to do this, see William M. Easum, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.)

REPLANT CONSULTATION COVENANT

COVENANT OF CHURCH REVITALIZATION
 BETWEEN _____ CHURCH, REVITALIZATION PASTOR,
 and MISSOURI BAPTIST CONVENTION

This Covenant is a spiritual undertaking and not a legal contract. The purpose of the Covenant is the revitalization of Anywhere Baptist Church. This Covenant is made by and between the Revitalization Pastor (“Pastor”), Anywhere Baptist Church (“Church”), the Missouri Baptist Convention (“Convention”), and the Missouri Baptist Convention Revitalization/Replanting Network (“Network”).

While any one of the parties to this Covenant may terminate its involvement in this undertaking at any time and without cause, the parties agree that before any termination all parties will be consulted.

The Pastor and the Church commit themselves to a cooperative partnership for the fulfillment of this Covenant as part of the Church’s ministry of worship, education, fellowship, and service to others, as it seeks to proclaim the good news of God’s love in Christ.

The Convention desires to facilitate this Church’s revitalization. Toward that end the Convention and the Network will provide focused consultation designed to understand the Church’s history, condition, strengths and weaknesses. The Network leaders will provide a detailed report, which the Church agrees will be presented to the Pastor, a leadership group (e.g., deacons, church council, pulpit search committee, etc.) and finally the entire church body. While the Cooperative Program enables the Network to provide consultation free to Convention churches, the Church commits to covering travel expenses (meals and mileage) incurred by the Network leaders when serving the Church.*

The Network commits to serve as a support group for the Pastor, making itself readily available to the Pastor for personal and professional counsel, assistance and encouragement as he becomes acclimated to his job and his congregational relationships. The Network likewise commits to serve as a support for the Church’s congregation, making itself readily available to the congregation for personal and professional counsel, assistance and encouragement as the congregation becomes acclimated to the Pastor and his relationships. The Network will not, however, exercise any element of control whatsoever over the Church or the Pastor, and the relationship between the Church and the Pastor shall be determined exclusively by the Church and the Pastor.

Each of the parties agrees that this undertaking shall be carried out in harmony with the statement of faith shared by the Church, the Pastor and the Network. To that end, each reaffirms to the other its commitment to that statement of faith.

 Anywhere Baptist Church//Leadership

 Date

 Revitalization Pastor

 Date

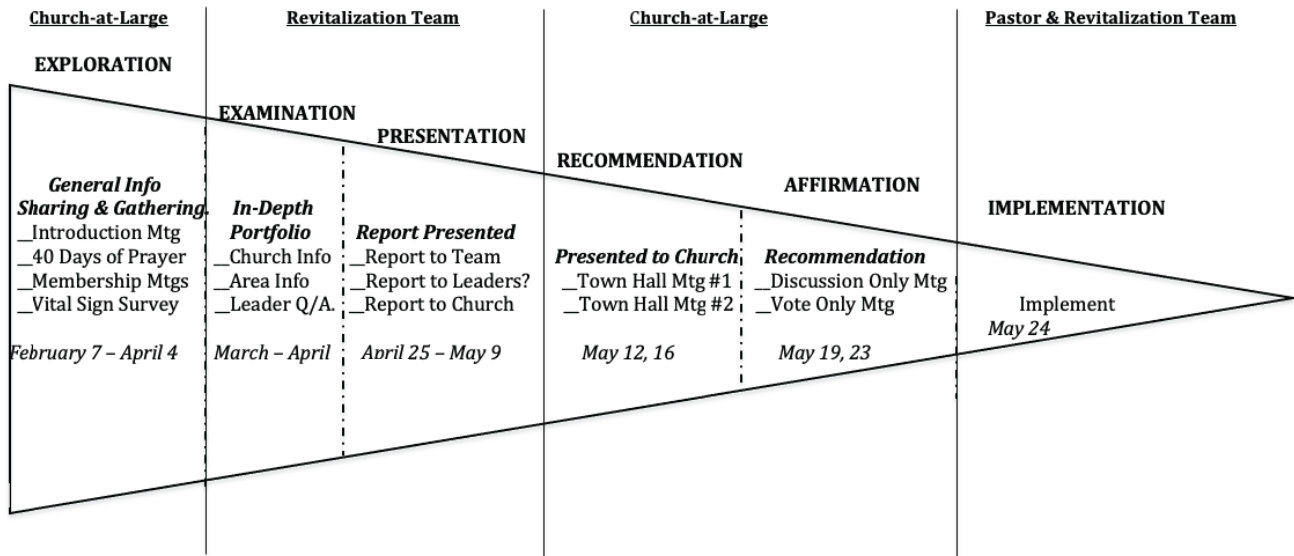
 Missouri Baptist Convention Revitalization Network By:

 Date

*While churches are encouraged to participate by covering travel expenses, arrangements can be made to discuss unique financial challenges prior to covenant agreement.

FUNNEL GRAPH CONSULTATION TIMELINE ¹

TRANSITION PROCESS FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION-REPLANTING Schedule: February 2021 - May 2021



¹Developed by Johnny Rumbough, Lexington Baptist Association.

CALENDAR OF MEETING REVITALIZATION/ REPLANT PROCESS

Tentative Schedule of Events

January

31 Deacons Mtg for Introduction to Revitalization Process & Nominations

Person Responsible

Johnny Rumbough

February

7 Church Approves to begin Revitalization Process

Pastor

Church Approves Revitalization Team

Pastor

Revitalization Team Mtg #1 - Orientation & Leadership Q/A (3pm-5pm)

Johnny Rumbough

21 Member Meetings #1 - Small Groups of 6-9 people (3pm, 4pm, 5pm, 6pm)

Johnny Rumbough

24 Launch of 40 Days of Prayer (Feb 24-April 4)

Revitalization Team

28 Member Meetings #2 - Small Groups of 6-9 people (3pm, 4pm, 5pm, 6pm)

Johnny Rumbough

Copy & Distribute Vital Signs Survey

Revitalization Team

March

7 Revitalization Team Mtg #2 - Church Profile (3pm-5pm)

Johnny Rumbough

21 Revitalization Team Mtg #3 - Community Demographics (3pm-5pm)

Johnny Rumbough

April

4 Revitalization Team Mtg #4 - Presentation of Report w/Recommendation (3-5)

Johnny Rumbough

18 Revitalization Team Mtg #5 - Finalize Recommendation (3pm-5pm)

Johnny Rumbough

May

2 Recommendation Presented to Deacons (3pm) OPTIONAL

Johnny Rumbough

9 Recommendation Announced to Church (AM Service)

Revitalization Team

12 Town Hall Meeting #1 (6pm-7pm)

Johnny Rumbough

16 Town Hall Meeting #2 (4pm-5pm)

Johnny Rumbough

19 Discussion Only (6pm-7pm)

Johnny Rumbough

23 Vote Only (AM Service)

Revitalization Team

30 Churchwide Celebration Fellowship Meal

Revitalization Team

GOVERNANCE CHANGE PROPOSAL

Background: In previous years Sherwood has discussed and considered ways to more effectively organize and lead ministry toward gospel advance and church growth. Under the previous pastor, a plan to empower a streamlined committee to research and make recommendations was suggested. The pastor later resigned and Sherwood entered a time of transition. During the interim leadership period, it was decided that this process should be placed on hold while our church awaited the arrival of a new pastor.

Since calling Bob Bickford as our lead pastor, we have seen Sherwood move forward and begin growing once again. As a result, we have much to celebrate:

- Growth in our average attendance of nearly 30 each weekend
- The addition of 15+ new members
- A steady stream of guests and visitors
- Celebration of two baptisms
- Refreshing and supplying our children's classrooms
- The opening of additional children's church classrooms
- An attendance of 20-25 in our children's church on a regular basis.
- A sense of excitement and enthusiasm within our congregation and the community.

As we look toward the future, we anticipate continued growth and impact. This being the case, we believe as the pastor liaison team believe it is time to address our governance structure and decision making processes here at Sherwood.

Our current governance model and present bylaws are typical of most Southern Baptist churches constituted in the 1950s and 1960s. Those structures worked well at a time when committee work was common and understood. They functioned well when a congregation was considerably large, and individuals did not have to serve on multiple committees in order to carry out church business. These structures were adequate in making decisions in a culture where time constraints were not as immediate, and an organization's decision-making processes did not need to adapt and adjust quickly.

Our congregation at large has recognized that our present bylaws need to be changed as we have experienced pain points as a congregation in both leading Sherwood and in our decision-making processes.

The following have been noted as a few examples that point to the need for change.

Our Present Bylaws

Our bylaws as written:

- Create a focus on administration of ministry rather than participation in gospel ministry.
- Require members to serve in multiple roles because of low attendance.
- Place a heavy time burden upon those who currently serve in multiple committee roles

¹ Article V Church Business Section I
The Church shall hold a regular business meeting the second Wednesday of each month.

- Limit larger congregational participation in directional decision making due to the mandated schedule of business meetings.¹
- Limit our ability to be responsive to congregational needs due to a cumbersome decision-making process.
- Reinforce a climate of suspicion and lack of trust of leaders•
- Allow loopholes for disconnected members and inactive leaders to have unduly influence over church direction without demonstrating commitment to the overall body. See Absent Members Guideline² and Deacon Emeritus Rule.³
- Create frustration for those serving on committees
 - » Everyone can say “no”, no one can say “yes”
 - » Grant responsibility and expect accountability without giving authority
- Reinforce division and create conflict within our body during the decision-making process ⁴
- Make revising or changing the bylaws are difficult and the process cumbersome.⁵

Recommendation: Given the present reality, and need of our church to move forward in its process of revitalization, the following changes are recommended.

1. Amendment of the existing bylaws for the period of one year while new bylaws are being drafted.
2. Establishment of an interim governance structure as explained in the following pages.

Safeguards: During the interim governance period the following will hold true.

1. Our church will remain an autonomous Southern Baptist Church.
2. There will be no move to dispose of church property.
3. Three standing committees will retain leadership and function as specified in our existing bylaws: Trustees, Personnel, Finance.
4. Members meetings will be held quarterly and additionally as necessary to update on progress and gathering congregational input during the rewrite of bylaws.

Governance Leadership Roster

Board of Directors

- Lead Pastor
- DOM STL Metro Baptist Association
- Key representatives from inside the church

Key Committees

- Finance Committee
- Personnel Committee
- Trustee Committee

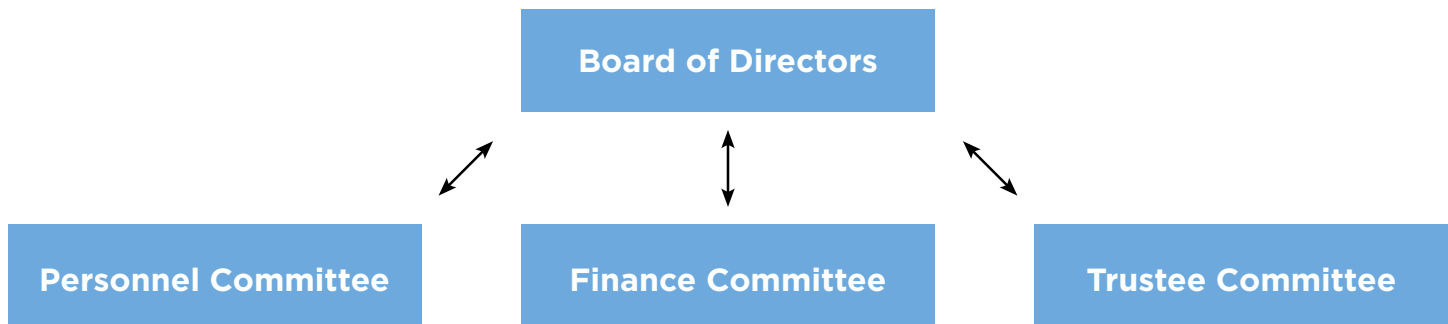
² Article II Discipline Section 1 Continued and unexplained absence from the meetings of the church shall be considered sufficient reason for examination as to the cause thereof, and, after two years of such absence, the Church may direct erasure of the name of such person from the roll.

³ A Deacon Emeritus has the same authority as an Active Deacon and may attend and vote at all Deacon Committee meetings. b) A Deacon Emeritus is not assigned families for which he is responsible, nor is he a part of the normal rotation of Active Deacon Duties.

⁴ Any Church member present at a business meeting may request that the vote on any item of business be taken by ballot, and the request shall not be denied.

⁵ Article VII Amendments The bylaws may be amended at any regular monthly business meeting of the Church by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the members present, provided a quorum of 20% of resident Church membership exists, and provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at a previous regular monthly business meeting, and provided announcement of the proposed change shall have been made from the pulpit at least 2 regular meetings of the Church prior to action on the proposed amendment.

Sherwood Baptist Church – Temporary Governance Shift



Board of Directors

- Vision and direction for congregation
- Affirmation of committee decisions/actions
- Watch-care and accountability for lead pastor
- Safeguard of doctrine, discipline and order
- Oversight of membership through shepherding

Finance Committee

- Oversight of approved annual budget
- Accountability for financial integrity
- Oversight of church treasurer
- Development and recommendation of annual budget to congregation

Personnel Committee

- Care and accountability for paid church staff
- Oversight of policies and procedures for employees
- Consult with Board of Directors on matters of compensation, evaluation and retention of church staff

Trustees Committee

- Serve as legal officers of the church
- Evaluate condition of and respond to facility needs
- Consult with Board of Directors on facility needs and issues

Congregational Affirmation: The larger body of congregational members will participate in the decision-making process during members meetings through voting on the following matters:

1. Call of the lead pastor
2. Approval of the Annual Budget and Ministry Plan (each November)
3. Acquisition or disposition of property
4. Changes in the church constitution

Decisions outside the above will be handled by the Board of Directors in consultation with the appropriate standing committees.

Members Meetings: Regular gatherings of members will be held on a quarterly basis. At members meetings, the following will report:

- Board of Directors
- Pastor
- Finance
- Standing committees as necessary (personnel, trustees)
- Ministry teams (as necessary)

These gatherings will focus on vision, sharing of accomplishments, ministry needs and updates. Each meeting will allow for member questions from the floor and close with a prayer time.

Motion: The pastor liaison team moves that at the May 8, 2013, business meeting, the present bylaws be amended and that the temporary governance structure above be approved. Additionally, a new set of bylaws will be developed and recommended for congregational approval no later than one year from the above date.

A town hall forum question and answer session will take place no later than one week prior to the May 8 business meeting when the vote is to occur.

What matters will the church continue to vote on?

1. Call of the lead pastor
2. Acquisition or disposition of real estate
3. The annual budget and ministry plan
4. Changes to the constitution/bylaws

How were these men chosen to serve on the board of directors?

Following the guidelines given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, for those holding the office of an overseer, the selected men were recommended for service by the pastor to the pastor liaison team.

After the transition period and upon the adoption of the new bylaws and constitution, we anticipate the board of directors would increase to five.

How will decisions be made?

Any decisions that fall outside the above will be decided upon by the board of directors and the appropriate standing committees or ministry teams as necessary. For example:

1. Personnel matters such as the hiring or termination of staff would be considered by the board of directors and personnel committee.
2. Adjustments in the annual budget that do not increase the overall budget but merely reflect adjustments or reallocation of funds within the approved annual budget would be decided upon by the board of directors and the finance committee.
3. An increase in the annual budget would be reviewed by the board of directors and finance committee and brought to the church members for approval as it represents a change in financial responsibility for the entire congregation.

4. A request for missions support would be reviewed by the missions team and recommendation sent to the board of directors for approval.
5. Necessary repairs to the facility would be reviewed by the trustees who would operate within their authority and financial approval per approved budget categories. They would notify the board of directors of their recommendations and actions, and their decision would not require a vote from the board of directors.

How will the congregation give input on matters important to the life of our church?

Quarterly members meetings will be held in order to both listen to and inform the church family of relevant and important information pertaining to the life and mission of our congregation. Members will be given time to ask questions and share feedback.

Additionally, any member is free to contact and speak with any of the members of the board of directors to ask questions, share comments, concerns or express needs.

How will the board of directors serve the congregation?

Each member of the board of directors will take an active role in serving the congregation through leading and serving not only as a director but a member of a standing committee or ministry team.

The board of directors will have “skin in the game” in that they are not separated from the real life of ministry in the trenches. They will model what it means to lead well by serving well.

Do the members of the board of directors vote and decide by majority rule?

Following the model given in Scripture, the board of directors will make decisions by consensus. When guided by the Holy Spirit and having the same mind in Christ, there should be unanimity in the decisions they make. When there is not unanimity they will study, pray and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Unity and harmony in the church begins with the leadership (Acts 15:28, 1Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 1:27, 2:2).

How long will the board of directors be in place?

The present proposal provides for up to a year amendment of the current bylaws and the drafting of new bylaws within one year from the date of May 8, 2013. The board of directors will serve for that time period or until new bylaws or constitution documents are drafted and approved anytime within that one-year time frame. If a board member resigns or becomes unable to fulfill his duties due to any circumstances, an additional board member will be nominated/recommended by the remaining board of directors according to the qualifications stated above and proposed to the standing committees for approval.

What happens to existing committees under the new structure?

1. Certain committees essential to the functioning of the church will be retained but will operate as ministry teams rather than committees.
2. Committees not essential to the functioning of the church or whose functions will be absorbed by the board of directors will be dissolved.

Committees Retained (Standing Committees)	Committees Dissolved	Committees to become Ministry Teams
Trustees	Nominating	Counting
Finance	Constitution Review	Deacon
Personnel	Church Council	

3. Certain activities/activity coordinators will be combined into new ministry teams that have similar functions.

Activity Coordinator	New Ministry Team
Fellowship, Kitchen	Special Events
Security, Ushers	Guest Services
Deacon, Home Bound, Intercessory Prayer	Pastoral Care
WMU, Rock Hill Food	Missions
Worship, Flowers and Decorations	Worship
Children’s Church, VBS	Children’s

What are the differences between ministry teams and committees?

Ministry teams and committees are similar in many respects but different in others. The following table notes some of the differences and similarities:

Committees	Ministry Teams
Do church work	Do the work of the church
Hold meetings/make decisions	Plan and do ministry
Members nominated and approved by outside committee	Recruit, train and develop members on their own
Task oriented	Vision oriented
Majority rules	Consensus rules
Respond to needs	Initiate ministry
Defined and structured	Flexible and adaptive
Ongoing	As needed

A good article on the differences between committees and ministry teams and how they function can be found here: baptiststart.com/ministry_teams.htm

How will ministry team members be recruited or assigned? How long will they serve?

Ministry team leaders will be recruited and placed within areas of gifting and passion and will be empowered to recruit other like minded individuals to serve within their area of ministry. Ministry teams will compose and develop their own ministry vision plans and budget requests as part of an all church annual planning process.

Ministry teams will serve in their respective roles for a one year term and will evaluate their participation annually.

At the end of their terms each year, team members will be asked to complete a selfevaluation questionnaire. This questionnaire will include these four questions:

1. Am I in Fellowship? — with Jesus
2. Am I being Faithful? — in my place of service
3. Am I being Fruitful? — and seeing “Grace Results”?
4. Am I being Fulfilled? — or is it time for a change in my service?

The team members will then return a reply card to their team leader expressing whether they would like to be considered for another term or if they have interest in pursuing another area of ministry.

It is to be expected that changes will be made from time to time to keep fresh people in places of service, to prevent burnout and to help people experience well-rounded growth.

How will planning and communication take place between ministry teams, standing committees and the church at large?

Annually the board of directors and all standing committee and ministry team leaders will meet over a series of weeks to discern vision and direction and to pray for our church and the upcoming ministry year. At these meetings, key goals and objectives will be discussed and identified.

After these meetings take place, the standing committees and ministry teams will gather with their respective members to begin planning ministry for the upcoming year. These plans will include:

1. Key ministry objectives for the coming year
2. Events or initiatives to achieve those objectives
3. Resource requests necessary to fund those key objectives

These teams will present their ministry plans and budgets to one another. A time for questions and dialogue with ministry team leaders and the board of directors will take place. The board of directors, along with the finance committee, will set budget parameters, and the board of directors will then give initial approval of the ministry plans and budgets to be brought before the congregation.

Consideration regarding timing, sequencing, resourcing and calendaring will be part of the approval process.

Once the plans are approved by the congregation, all ministry plan dates will be entered into the church calendar and the financial information into the annual budget.

Teams will then be accountable to the board and the congregation for the implementation of their ministry plans and management of their approved budget.

AFFIRMATION LETTER

First Baptist Church of Affton

8751 Mackenzie Road
St. Louis, MO 63126
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November 24, 2014

Mr. Jim Breeden
Executive Director
St. Louis Metro Baptist

Mr. Breeden:

On Sunday, November 23, 2014, the First Baptist Church of Affton held a special business meeting to vote on the proposal from the St. Louis Metro Baptist Association offer of aide to assist us with our efforts to replant our church. The First Baptist Church of Affton accepted the proposal by 87%.

By accepting the proposal, the First Baptist Church of Affton agrees with all three of the conditions specified by the proposal. Those conditions are:

- 1) A new Pastor or church planter to be called with the financial resources of First Affton, SLMBA, MBC, and NAMB/IMB to start a new type church to reach the changing community. This allows for the history of First Affton and the Gospel to continue advancing on the same corner in the city of Affton.

The First Baptist Church of Affton has elected a search committee and is in the process of actively pursuing a candidate.

- 2) The current Constitution and Bylaws of First Affton be suspended for a minimum of one year. During the year period a new leadership team would have oversight and authority with the exception of the following items which would require full church vote: buying and selling property, annual church budget, hire and fire of Senior Pastor, and changes to Constitution and Bylaws.

The First Baptist Church of Affton has agreed to suspend our Constitution and Bylaws and create a new leadership team consisting of seven individuals. Those members will consist of, the new pastor, three members elected from our congregation, two members appointed from the association, one of whom is trained as a church planter and one of whom is trained as in church revitalization, and the final member will be a volunteer from a larger, successful church. The church accepted nominations for our three members of the leadership team after the vote on Sunday morning. The church elected the three members during the evening service on 11/23/14. Those members are: Jim Kopp, Tony Beddendorf, and Roger Grider.

- 3) The church recognizes and accepts that changes to the ministries of First Baptist Affton are necessary. These changes might include items such as: stopping some ministries, starting new ministries, changing the church name, changes to the facilities, changes in the type of services and style of worship, changes in how decisions are made. The church understands that these changes will be made by or with the direction from the new leadership team.

“The Church with a glorious past, present and future where everlasting relationships are built.”

DEVELOPING A REPLANT TEAM

Part of the dynamic in Replanting a congregation is changing the way the church makes day-to-day decisions. In many instances, congregations have made decisions at monthly business meetings at which they may have voted on everything from the color of paint for the children's room to the hiring of a custodian. Actions like these could adequately be handled by those in the congregation to whom oversight has been granted.

For a Replant and revitalization effort to move forward, the decision-making process must change. The congregation still participates in decision making for the church, but does so only on a few primary things.

1. Call of the senior or lead pastor in case of a vacancy
2. The annual church budget
3. Changes to the bylaws or constitution
4. Acquisition or disposition of property or encumbrances related to debt

Every other decision is entrusted to the Replant leadership team or board of directors. For background on what this might look like in the life of a church Replant, we recommend you view the “Governance Change Proposal” document.

Who should serve on the Replant leadership team or board of directors? Often a group like this is the precursor to developing elders. We recommend that those being considered for this role meet at minimum the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, which describes elders and deacons.

Leaders from within or without?

Our experience has shown that when a church seeks to take strides forward, it must have both new leadership and renewed leadership. Outside leaders bring fresh perspectives and are not bogged down by baggage and history. They are not stuck in dysfunctional patterns or priorities that grow up inside dead and declining churches. The dead and declining church needs fresh eyes and fresh ideas.

Where do you find these leaders?

Outside the existing church

In putting leadership teams together for Replants, we have found that pastors who have demonstrated history in revitalizing or Replanting and experienced church planters who have led their congregations to self-autonomy are great resources for potential team members. In addition, key denominational officials who possess similar experience in working with churches can be valuable assets to this new leadership team.

Inside the Replanting church

It is important not to overlook key leaders who may be present in the existing congregation. Longtime leaders have knowledge and relationship capital that shouldn't be discarded or dismissed simply because they have been with the church through its decline. Often these leaders have hung on because they possess a strong vision and conviction that God wants to do something new within the church. We recommend that these leaders be chosen with care and caution—longevity in a congregation does not always correlate with maturity and wisdom.

Composition of the potential Replant team

- The newly assessed and approved Replanter
- A pastor with experience in revitalizing or Replanting
- A church planter who leads or has led a church to self-sustainability
- An existing church leader who is supportive of the new direction needed for the church
- A denominational leader (local, state or national)

We recommend obtaining a commitment of two years from each team member and that this team meet, at minimum, monthly but preferably twice a month. In the early days of Replanting and revitalizing, a more frequent schedule is necessary to handle the concerns and logistics associated with implementation. As the effort progresses, meetings can be backed down to once monthly.

Connection with the congregation

It's best if the members of this team can participate in members meetings and attend worship services occasionally in order to speak with and connect with the larger congregation. At minimum, the contact information of each team member must be made available to the congregation.

VISION LEADERSHIP TEAM

Sherwood is a church in transition and in need of focused leadership in the context of a team in order to restore health and vitality to our congregation. Bringing life back to a congregation is ultimately a work of God who works through individuals. A team focused on discerning God's vision for our church will play a crucial role in charting the course for our church as we seek God together.

Vision leadership team description:

A diverse representative group of key members who serve together as a committed and trusting community in order to discern and implement God's vision for the congregation.

- Not a committee or task force
- Central purpose is to discern together God's vision for the church
- Possess the capacity and willingness to develop community, care and trust
- Serve together as a team for at least one year or until the major objectives have been defined and decided and implementation has begun

General team member characteristics:

- Cross generational (young and old)
- Men and women
- Longtime and brand-new Sherwood members
- Influence with positivity—not those who seek to influence with criticism or complaining
- Selfless, humble, gentle
- Committed to Jesus more than their personal preferences
- Persons of prayer
- Willing to work hard
- Able to debate, disagree strongly, and remain unified
- Willing to make difficult and unpopular decisions in order to lead our church into the future

Specific commitments

- Vision Leadership Team (VLT) retreat @ Sherwood (TBD) Friday 6:00 p.m.–9:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m.–Noon
- Ongoing meetings (schedule TBD); Likely 1x monthly (Sunday post service or Wednesday evening)
- Commit to read assigned resources prior to meetings
- Site visits to local congregations
- Small VLT group meetings with pastor in 2s or 3s
- Commitment to confidentiality and unity



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