

**LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

**PLANTING CHURCHES IN THE CHANGING CULTURE OF  
SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

**A Thesis Project Submitted To  
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary  
In Partial Fulfillment Of The  
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**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**By**

**Tommy Allen Jessee, Jr.**

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**THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **PLANTING CHURCHES IN THE CHANGING CULTURE OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

Tommy Allen Jessee, Jr.

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Mentor: Dr. Homer Massey

This project is a review of the churches planted in a specific region of Southwest Virginia for the past twenty years. The project covers the church planting methods of four counties in Southwest Virginia. The purpose of the project is to look at the changing culture of Southwest Virginia, review the approaches being used in planting churches in this area, and develop a future plan to plant and transition churches. This would be a plan for the local church as well as the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Abstract length: 92 words.

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## ***CHAPTER ONE***

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Purpose of the Project**

Southwest Virginia has been separated from the rest of the state for such a long time. Within the Appalachian areas of Southwest Virginia, people are separated from each other. One town competes with the next. County governments don't cooperate with each other. Often, in order to get state and federal aid, one county has to declare it is in worse shape than the others. Much of Southwest Virginia reflects this type of society, but much has changed in Southwest Virginia. The increase of a four-lane highway has brought diversity to the economy.

This is a region that is shaped in a coal tradition. It has seen cycles of prosperity and depression as the price of coal fluctuates on the world market. As Southwest Virginia moves away from a coal economy to a variety of employers, the shape of its churches has changed as well. Once regarded as a closed area to outside ideas, Southwest Virginia has been forced to embrace new methods to survive.

This project is about planting successful churches in a specific area of Southwest Virginia. It provides insight on transitioning plateaued churches. The data covers four counties known as Russell, Washington, Tazewell, and Buchanan. Primarily the author used information from several Baptist Associations, primarily Lebanon and New



Lebanon. These two Associations account for over seventy churches in these prospective counties. Many of these pastors of this region are bi-vocational. Most of these men are paid a very meager salary and work a full-time job to support their family.

This project looks at churches that have been planted in the past twenty years in these counties. It evaluates the type of church plant and the progress of the church until the present. It looks at the cultural changes and examines the reasons why the churches must change.

The purpose of this project is to understand the culture of the region and determine future locations for planting churches. This paper will benefit future church planters that may not be natives of the area and provide information that will help them be successful. The region typically has been closed to people born outside the area. The older traditional church has been lay driven with minimal pastoral leadership. Recent church plants have been more pastor-led with lay involvement. This project will provide helpful information to new church planters coming to Southwest Virginia. The project also seeks to aid new pastors coming to churches that have plateaued. It is the hope that this project will offer encouragement, insight, and specific principles for church planting.

The author is a native to this region. He has planted a church and has continued to pastor this same assembly for seventeen years. In his tenure, he has seen many talented and qualified ministers come and go in this area. Some have been intentional, but most have resulted out of discouragement and failure. Hopefully, this project will better equip the area ministers and church planters to accomplish the job God has called them to do.

## STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION

What is the most effective way to establish successful church plants in Southwest Virginia?

## QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. What is it about the culture of Southwest Virginia that makes it different from other locales?
2. What are the steps involved in planting new churches in this area?
3. What are the main types of churches that have been planted in this area in the past twenty years?
4. What are the similarities and differences of each of these types of church plants?
5. Which of the two are most successful?
6. How can this project be used to help future church planters and new pastors?
7. What areas provide the best locations for future church plants?

## DEFINITIONS

**Southwest Virginia:** The area located from Marion to Bluefield and to the western end of the state.

**Buchanan, Russell, Tazewell, and Washington Counties :** These are four counties that border each other in Southwest Virginia and surround the author's current church. These counties consist of over 176,000 people. They represent an emergence from the coal industry (Buchanan County) to a diversified market (Washington County).

**Church Plant:** This is a process that involves risk and faith to begin a new local church based on Jesus' promise in the Great Commission.

**Church Planter:** A person whom God has burdened to start a new church in a particular area.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT**

The focus of Chapter Two will be a description of the culture of Southwest Virginia. The author will explain why this area is separate from the rest of the state, and he will describe what needs to be known about the region where the church will be planted. He will address the changes of the culture in this specific area.

The third chapter will assess the steps of getting a church started. It will discuss the spiritual life of the church planter and the church planting process itself.

The fourth chapter will focus on several church plants that have occurred in Southwest Virginia in the past twenty years. It will reflect an evaluation of a survey sent to the pastors of these churches that have been planted. It will focus on things that have worked well and things that have failed in this growth process. It will also address facility concerns. This chapter will include insights from an interview with a pastor in Southwest Virginia that pastored a traditional church for twelve years and then planted a new contemporary, purpose-driven church eight years ago. This new church has had the most growth of any church plant in the past twenty years. His entire ministry has been in these counties of Southwest Virginia.

The fifth chapter will describe the purpose-driven church model. It will cover the five purposes and provide an overview of the characteristics of the purpose-driven model.

The sixth chapter will focus on a plan to develop and plant churches. It will provide an evaluation of what types of churches need to be planted in the future to reach this area of Southwest Virginia. This chapter will provide helps to begin a small group ministry and offer several ideas to aid in transitioning existing churches.

The seventh chapter will share several conclusions. This chapter addresses the cultural differences of Southwest Virginia. In most cases, a native of the area will be more successful in planting a church. This chapter covers the traditional values and lack of trained church leadership in the area. It encourages a team approach to church planting and offers a purpose-driven network to a new church planter.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT**

The project is not an exhaustive study of the entire area of Southwest Virginia. It only deals with a specific cross section of the Southwestern Virginia area. It is not an exhaustive explanation of the culture of the area. Many others have written detailed works of the Appalachian culture as included in the Bibliography. This is not a study of church plants from all denominations and backgrounds, but rather a comprehensive gathering of facts from like-minded Southern Baptist churches which adhere to the doctrine of the Baptist Faith and Message.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA’S CHANGING CULTURE,  
AND WHY THE CHURCH MUST CHANGE**

After preaching in the Burke’s Garden section of Tazewell County, Virginia, Evangelist Billy Sunday said that he believed that, “If the angel Gabriel were to jump out of heaven and seek a more beautiful country, he would land in Tazewell.” <sup>1</sup>

The author has traveled to many states and several countries including Tanzania, Africa, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and the Bahamas but has seen none as beautiful as the region of Southwest Virginia. What a beautiful area to plant a church! Natives call this region, “God’s country”. The beautiful country of Southwest Virginia, specifically Tazewell, Russell, Washington, and Buchanan Counties, is certainly part of what makes the people who they are, but according to Aubrey Malphurs, in order to plant significant, biblically based Great Commission churches, church planters need to design tailor-made churches that are compatible with their unique and changing culture.<sup>2</sup>

Southwest Virginia was part of America’s eighteenth century frontier where

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<sup>1</sup> Ross Weeks Jr, Virginia’s Tazewell County: A Last Great Place (North Tazewell, Virginia: Clinch Valley Printing Company, 2000), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, Planting Growing Churches For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 16.

people of many different cultures merged for the first time on this continent. Daniel Boone traveled through Tazewell, County as he went from West Virginia to Russell County, Virginia.<sup>3</sup> Castle's Woods was the first settlement in Russell County and became the county seat. As the frontier progressed westward, the local church lagged behind. Many areas had no churches. The Presbyterians, the Baptists, and the Methodists came to fill the void.<sup>4</sup>

Not all of the religious groups kept records of their origins. According to Weeks, the first recorded service in Tazewell County was a Methodist evangelical camp meeting at Pisgah in 1793. In 1796, the second recorded service was a gathering of Baptists in Baptist Valley.<sup>5</sup>

Methodism was an evangelical movement, and that denomination was only nine years old when the first service occurred. The Pisgah United Methodist Church claims to be the first recorded Christian church in Tazewell County. The first log house of worship was built along the banks of the Clinch River in 1797.<sup>6</sup>

In 1798, the Reverend Samuel Doak met with a group of Presbyterians. Until 1776, the earliest families who established farms in Tazewell County were under the jurisdiction of the Church of England. Doak was known for being very well dressed in

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<sup>3</sup> Weeks, 17.

<sup>4</sup> James W. Hagy, Castle's Woods: Frontier Virginia Settlement, 1769-1799 (Virginia: Washington County Technical School, 1967), 110-111.

<sup>5</sup> Weeks, 237.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 238.

the rough country of the Appalachian wilderness. He had already founded what later became Washington College in North Carolina and went on to found Tusculum College in Tennessee in 1785.<sup>7</sup>

Not much was known about the Presbyterians until 1838 when Reverend Isaac Newton Naff came over the mountains from Abingdon to meet with Presbyterians in Thompson Valley and Jeffersonville. The Methodists allowed the Presbyterians to use the Methodist Church to meet for services. Naff organized the first Tazewell Presbyterian Church in 1851, and a building was erected in 1854. Ironically, Naff returned the favor to the Episcopalians and shared their building. Naff actually postponed his service until the afternoon to accommodate the Episcopalians.<sup>8</sup>

This is one thing that has not changed. This winter, our area churches canceled several services because of snow. One of the Pentecostal churches is located along a river and experienced flooding. The author offered the sanctuary and facilities to that church so that they could still have their service and also be able to meet their budget. The author's home church allows other denominations to use the gymnasium for games and practices. The area has a Ministerial Association that consists of pastors from different denominational churches across the area. In this way, they are able to work to meet the physical needs of the population such as food, clothing, and electricity in a more organized and efficient manner.

Colonial leaders had specifically authorized the creation of Presbyterian churches;

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 241.

however, Baptists were often arrested and were refused the right to worship altogether. The Baptists came to Castle's Woods early. The Clinch River Church, in its early history, was a union of Baptists and Methodists who alternated Sunday services. Squire Boone, Daniel Boone's brother, planted the church. It disbanded during the Revolution with the Indian scare, restarted, and then disbanded again in 1788 when another church was formed at Glade Hollow. Both times, the church reorganized, and it continues today as the Brick Church.<sup>9</sup> According to tradition, Daniel Boone selected the hilltop that the first brick church was built upon. The first group of eighteen members crossed more than the cultural barrier of denomination; for six of these eighteen were black men and women.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the pastor of Brick Baptist Church today is the retired Director of Missions for the New Lebanon Association and the first pastor of the author's home church.<sup>11</sup> Southern Baptist religion in Appalachia dates from the early days of settlement. Revivals in New England and on the western frontier in the early nineteenth century led to the planting of new churches which became part of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>12</sup>

Although the area now has a large number of small and large churches in the Holiness, Church of Christ, Church of God, and Pentecostal traditions, records are not

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<sup>9</sup> Hagy, 110-111.

<sup>10</sup> The Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Inc., The Heritage of Russell County, Virginia 1786-1986, Volume I (Marceline MO: Walsworth Publishing, 1985), 55-56.

<sup>11</sup> Lester L. Ferguson, Messages of Hope, (Pounding Mill, Virginia: Henderson Publishing, 2003), viii-ix.

<sup>12</sup> Bill Leonard, Foxfire 7, ed. Paul F. Gillespie and His Students (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 481-484.



clear on when the first congregations of these denominations were established. These faiths emerged from Methodism in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

The preachers of Appalachia have been stereotyped as “Bible-thumping, hell-fire preachers.” Although this was a hallmark of growing churches, this has changed.

Preachers spoke, and some still do, in a choppy rhythmic style of delivery interspersed with explosive “huuhs” or “haahs”. They may speak at rates exceeding two hundred words a minute, and their voice may raise like an auctioneer’s chant. Air intake is forced into patterns that coincide with the rhythmic flow of words.<sup>14</sup> Today; however, the Baby Boomers and the Generation X tend to prefer more of a teaching style without screaming.

The discussion of religions in the Southwest Virginia region would not be complete without mentioning the stereotypical religion that this region is known for and that is the Serpent-Handling Believers.<sup>15</sup> Serpent-handling churches began in 1909 when a Tennessean, George W. Hensley, came preaching the need to follow the practices of Mark 16. By the 1930’s and 1940’s, the movement had spread throughout the Appalachian region. Court cases became common as more and more cases of deaths from snakebites and drinking the venomous poison occurred. Still to this day in the coalfields there are pockets of serpent-handling churches. The few that remain are in

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<sup>13</sup> Weeks, 250.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Dorgan, Giving Glory to God in Appalachia: Worship Practices of Six Baptist Subdenominations (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 59.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Burton, Serpent-Handling Believers (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

remote areas to escape the “long arm of the law”.<sup>16</sup> A few of these churches actually remain. In fact, the author understands that there is still one existing in Grundy, Virginia.

In the early days, travel by wagon was difficult because of the rugged terrain; therefore, most of the pioneers arrived on foot or horseback bringing only the “meagerest” of possessions. Although they did not carry many material possessions, they carried other important properties including the capacity for hard work, determination, patriotism, loyalty, and a belief in God which upheld them through the difficult Frontier Period and even through today.<sup>17</sup>

A false image of the people in this region exists that portrays the people as slovenly,<sup>18</sup> but this is far from the truth. In fact, to be an accepted and effective church planter in this region, the author has found that the pastor needs to be willing to roll up his sleeves and work side-by-side with the lay people to literally build the church building brick by brick.

The Post Office remains a place to meet and exchange jokes, bits of news, or plans for upcoming meetings.<sup>19</sup> The Post Office’s atmosphere portrays the close-knit community of each area town. Even the media knows that the Post Office is the meeting place. About a year ago, the regional news station came to the Lebanon Post Office in

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard, 481-484.

<sup>17</sup> The Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Inc., The Heritage of Russell County Virginia: 1786-1988, Volume II (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing, 1989), 28.

<sup>18</sup> Weeks, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

Russell County and approached the author's wife about her feelings about bringing a Wal-Mart Super Center into town.

Commercialized businesses such as Wal-Mart Super Centers are one way the culture is changing. The region has had several Wal-Mart Super Centers open their doors. This has been very controversial. The old-timers prefer to support local business, but local businesses have not been able to keep their doors open. The Wal-Marts also are a great place for the area pastors to make their visits.

The author compares the town he lives in to Mayberry on The Andy Griffith Show. Each of the area towns has the local barbershop, the beauty shop, the diner, and the old-timey drug store. These are the "happening places" and where people share the latest news. One can learn about the latest revival, the tragic death that shook the town, the local politics, or buy the local church Women on Mission Cookbook. These are the meeting places. The pastor makes more visits at these places than he does in homes. On any given day, the author can eat lunch at the drug store and visit with five to ten church members. Door to door visitation is becoming a thing of the past for the growing churches of the area. Most of the Baby Boomers' wives have entered the work place, and no longer have the time, energy, or desire to provide the hospitality passed down through other generations.

Thirty years ago, the congregation had the pastor and visitors over to eat to get to know each other. Today, the church offers morning welcome centers with donuts and coffee and Wednesday night fellowship dinners that the women do not have to cook for and that the church provides at a minimal cost. This is very attractive to a Baby Boomer

wife. It makes mealtime easier.

The region of Southwest Virginia places great value on land. Land is one's private property. A man's property is felt to be his own, and something he holds on to, no matter what. Reluctance to part with land is one of the defining characteristics of Burke's Garden. History records that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, even the very wealthy Vanderbilts were unable to acquire land to construct what is now Biltmore near Asheville, North Carolina. Because land is a precious resource, those who inherit large tracts of land usually hang on to them. This adheres to the Scots-Irish culture. The Scotch-Irish arrived in the New World in 1776 and settled in this mountainous region. Because people cling to their land, real estate needed for large new business enterprises is rarely available. This certainly impacts the economy. Likewise, land needed for church growth and development is also difficult to acquire.<sup>20</sup>

The region is known for being a very closed community. Part of this stems back to the county divisions. In 1786, Russell County was formed from Washington County and in 1799, the eastern extremity of Russell County became Tazewell County. In 1858 Buchanan County was formed from Russell County.<sup>21</sup> Because of these divisions, the people became very territorial and closed to "foreigners" and "transplants".<sup>22</sup> It is not that the individual from outside will not be accepted eventually. He will just have to prove himself. Natives, on the other hand, have less barriers to cross and are more

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<sup>20</sup> Weeks, 27-29, 105.

<sup>21</sup> The Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Inc., 7.

<sup>22</sup> Weeks, 28.

readily embraced. Compton contributed this to the way “foreigners” stole land from the natives.<sup>23</sup> On a personal note, the author is a native who married a lady raised in Sullivan County, one hour away. Right before he proposed to his wife, he found a letter on his office door saying that he should not marry a “foreigner” and that he should marry one of his own. The community embraced the author’s wife when she began to work and live among the people and give to the people. To the people, this equated with an acceptance of them and their very precious land which is so much a part of who they are. The author’s local hospital has realized the truth in this principle as well and now requires new recruited physicians to sign a contract to live in the town as opposed to a nearby town in the opposite county.

Southwest Virginians are use to outsiders moving in and trying to change the mountaineer on every level. The author’s wife, who happens to have a very southern accent, actually had faculty at University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia suggest that she take speech classes so that she “could be respected”. What they do not understand is that people in Southwest Virginia respond to people who sound like, look like, and act like people from Southwest Virginia.

The definite county lines contribute to the territorialistic competitiveness in politics and perpetuates the intense rivalries between the high school football teams. In this “neck of the woods”, everyone goes to the football games. With little local entertainment, it is the social highlight of the communities. The rivalry became so intense in a couple of counties that these two counties were banned from playing against

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy William Compton, “Church Planting in Appalachian Culture.” D. Min. diss., Liberty University, 1999), 23.

each other indefinitely.

Because local entertainment is limited, sports are a highlight. The majority of the children participate in softball and baseball in the spring season. It is an inexpensive sport for an impoverished region. Traditionally, and even today, the region values sports over education.

The land is very important to the people, because it is from the land that they made their living by the sweat of the brow. Agriculture provided a self-sustaining livelihood. Native bluegrass was a pest to the farmers. The farmers tried to kill it out, but instead, it thrived. Eventually, the farmers discovered the pest was ideal pasturage for all kinds of livestock. Russell County became one of the top counties in the state of Virginia for production of livestock, especially cattle and fine horses.<sup>24</sup>

Tobacco was a native crop and was used in lieu of currency in the early days.<sup>25</sup> In 1978, tobacco production totaled 92,115 pounds and was the number one source of cash farm income, but its production is on a gradual decline due to labor costs and the availability of high wages in the local coalmines.<sup>26</sup> Today, tuition assistance is granted to former tobacco producers. Farmers are given an allotment of poundage for growing tobacco. Over the last 25 years, this poundage has gradually decreased to encourage farmers to diversify.

The steep slopes of the region were covered with the world's most valuable

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<sup>24</sup> The Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Inc., 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> Erdman W. Mullins, Virginia's Baby Grows Up (Dickenson County, Virginia: Dickenson County Centennial Corporation, 1980).

timber, and hidden beneath the timber, approximately 84 square miles of coal lay dormant. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great demand for timber. After the lumber was sawed, stacked, and allowed to season, it was hauled on wagons to railroad cars for shipping.<sup>27</sup>

In 1847, the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad from Lynchburg to Bristol was completed. The Civil War and Reconstruction Period slowed down the economy; however, on June 20, 1887, construction began on the Clinch Valley Division of the Norfolk and Western Railroad. Progress was very slow because of blasting cliffs, erecting high trestles, and digging tunnels. Finally, in June 1891, the Clinch Valley Division met the Louisville and Nashville Line in Norton.<sup>28</sup>

In 1893, industrialist and financier George L. Carter, a native of Hillsville, Virginia, bought the right of way for what was to become the Clinchfield Railroad. Then, he put together 300,000 acres of coal lands in Southwest Virginia for the primary purpose of furnishing freight to the Clinchfield Railroad.<sup>29</sup>

Coalmines were first developed on Clinchfield property in 1906 along the Clinchfield Railroad and the Norfolk and Western Railroad. The Pittston Company was organized in 1930 in Pennsylvania. In 1944, Pittston acquired a majority of the stock of Clinchfield Coal Corporation. In the mid and late 1970's, Pittston was operating sixty mines in Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky and employed more than 10,000 people.

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<sup>27</sup> Elihu Jasper Sutherland, Meet Virginia's Baby (Clintwood, Virginia: Diamond Jubilee, 1955), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>29</sup> The Russell County Heritage Book Committee, Inc., vol II, 537.

Since that time, Pittston has suffered along with other major coal producers from the effects of depression in the coal market. Even though coal mining and the railroad have, until recently, helped drive the economy, in many cases, the companies themselves were managed distantly. Thus, their leadership has not been a factor in the region's approach to its future.<sup>30</sup> In 2002, Pittston's coal reserves were sold out to another major coal company due to a lagging coal economy, and as a result of this, many area residents lost their jobs.

New industries bring skeptical hope to the communities. The opening of the Wal-Mart Super Center brought the closing of the doors for the Magic Mart in one of the towns, and an area Food Lion is rumored to be closing too. A big Food City opened a couple years before the Wal-Mart opened. After the Food City opened, Acme closed. It is no wonder that people have little hope. One business opens, and another closes.

This past year, Alcoa Aluminum, a relatively new business which employs 350 people in the area had not proven to be profitable. The employees were informed that they would be losing their jobs, but the town worked with the company officials and politicians and managed to give Alcoa another grace year.

Another industrial business is Lear which manufactures automobile parts. It employs approximately 850 people. This business is dependent on the national economy and hinges on the automobile industry.

One of the two apparel industries which employed men and many homemakers including single women, married women, and widows has closed. The other is rumored

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<sup>30</sup> Weeks, 26-27.



to be in serious trouble. The first relocated to Mexico with the passing of the NAFTA Treaty.

With the closing of so many jobs, some of the Baby Boomers in Southwest Virginia have completed college educations and now work in white-collar jobs. Southwest Virginia Community College is beside the author's church. With more white-collared workers, churches such as the author's church are becoming less formal in dress but more formal in presentation. The men trade in their ties on Sunday for sports shirts, and more and more of the women are wearing pantsuits to church.

Choir robes are becoming a thing of the past. This generation of professionals demand professionalism in the church as well. They desire state-of-the-art media equipment including elaborate sound systems and big screens for power point presentations of the gospel. These busy professionals value their time, and want it to be respected by the church staff. They want church to start at the predetermined time and end accordingly on time. This busy workforce is embracing an early morning service that frees up the remainder of the Sunday for family time.

In order to plant effective twenty-first century churches, the author agrees with Malphurs, that the church will have to be more relevant to the changing culture. The author has learned a lot from Rick Warren and has found that the people in the region respond to the same gospel when it is presented with a purpose-driven approach. This makes the gospel appear more relevant to the people.<sup>31</sup> The purpose-driven ministry is

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<sup>31</sup> Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

not a new philosophy at all. Jones depicts the purpose of life as being to follow Christ, study the Bible, keep His commandments, and to raise children who will love and serve the Lord. According to Jones, the Upland people understand that the meaning of life is to fulfill the plan of God.<sup>32</sup>

Leonard discusses the controversy over the role of women in the church. Southern Baptists in Southwest Virginia have maintained the view that women are not to have leadership roles in the church in which they would be considered to have authority over men.<sup>33</sup> They base this on the scriptures that women are to keep silent in church found in 1 Cor. 14:34-35. In 1 Tim. 2:11-12 it says that women are not to be in authority over men. Other denominations in the author's region have not held to this view. The author anticipates that the role of women in the church will change unless more male leaders are disciplined, trained, and developed. In many churches in the Appalachian region, women are the only ones holding any leadership positions, with the exception of the pastor. According to Compton, the development of male leadership is one of the most important goals if mountain churches are going to be indigenous. The principle that will result in success in the goal of planting the indigenous church is the training of leaders in the church.<sup>34</sup> This is a tremendous need in Southwest Virginia.

The church of tomorrow and possibly the church of today will no longer tolerate less than adequate teachers on the basis of their sex. The Baby Boomers and Generation

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<sup>32</sup> Loyal Jones, Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1999), 54.

<sup>33</sup> Bill J. Leonard, ed., Christianity in Appalachia (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 185.

<sup>34</sup> Compton, 19.

Xers demand perfection and “nothing but the best”. If the local Southern Baptist churches in Southwest Virginia can offer this via men, area tradition will continue, but if the local church can not attain this standard, the author suspects that women will rise to the occasion as they have across other areas of the country and shine as our biblical women did in days of old.

Leonard refers to the “full-service” church. He states that churches in Appalachia have “begun to market religious services to seekers who are not religiously affiliated.”<sup>35</sup> These market strategies include “charismatic worship styles, multiple services, and fast-paced programs”.<sup>36</sup> Many of the most dynamic churches in the area are offering contemporary early morning services in addition to the traditional service at eleven o’clock. The Baby Boomers are especially attracted to the early morning service that provides a music style they have grown up hearing. The author began such a service several years ago amidst controversy. It has been very successful, and continues to outpace the growth of the traditional service.

The primary difference between these two services is the music. Historically, hymns came from denominationally produced resources such as the Broadman Hymnal or Baptist Hymnal.<sup>37</sup> The early morning service offers praise and worship music as opposed to traditional music. Music is a controversial topic and the church offers a blended style of music in the eleven o’clock hour to please a variety of people. The

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<sup>35</sup> Leonard., 186.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 175.

Minister of Music provides traditional hymns, bluegrass music, opera style music, and southern gospel music to meet the tastes of different folks in the eleven o'clock hour. Recently, the church began to offer a monthly Saturday night service to target youth or Generation X. A potential member of the church is a lay pastor and his wife who recently went through a church move. He and his wife visited churches throughout the region and found that hymnals are a thing of the past. Many of the old hymns and styles of worship are being replaced by contemporary praise and worship music. Aubrey explores the area of music as one reason why Baby Boomers do not attend church. The author certainly hears many Baby Boomers and Generation Xers state that they do not like the old traditional music. They think it is too old fashioned.<sup>38</sup>

The author, also amidst controversy, expanded the traditional Wednesday night service to include Bible studies that are relevant to the lives of the people. The Wednesday night attendance tripled, and people began attending Wednesday night services who had never attended the traditional Wednesday night prayer meeting. Topics have addressed the needs of the changing culture of the region. As divorce has spread through the culture<sup>39</sup>, the church is addressing the needs of the congregation by offering "Divorce Recovery"<sup>40</sup> support groups. To address the needs of families, the majority of which both parents have entered the work force to meet the growing economical needs of the home, the church offered "Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours".<sup>41</sup> This

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<sup>38</sup> Malphurs, 37.

<sup>39</sup> Leonard, 185-186.

<sup>40</sup> Larry Burkett, Divorce Care Video (Wake Forest, North Carolina).

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Kevin Leman, Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours (Dallas, Texas: Sampson Ministry Resources, 2000).

ministry has been attractive to a people who value family and where everyone, unless they are a transplant, is related to someone. Living in an age and a region where obesity and physical fitness is a growing concern, and in a generation where exercise can become a god itself, the church offered “Fit Four”<sup>42</sup> to explore the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual areas of fitness. Other studies include “The Purpose Driven Life Series”<sup>43</sup> and “Celebrate Recovery”<sup>44</sup> to address the growing major problem of Oxycontin addiction and other drug addictions in the area, etc. This region, specifically the counties of Tazewell and Russell, have the largest Oxycontin drug abuse problem in the state of Virginia.

According to Jones, the people of the Southern Highlands, tend to believe that it is not possible to improve the basic human condition. Because of this belief system, the people may not always work to modify the behavior of others or solve social problems.<sup>45</sup> Years ago, when the author first attempted to introduce the program, “True Love Waits” to promote abstinence, he met some resistance. On the other hand, “Celebrate Recovery” was launched without resistance. Hopefully, this cultural aspect is changing.

Within the small groups, the people share and pray for the needs of the people on a more personal level than was taking place in the traditional service. Amidst controversy, the traditional prayer service has continued so far but has only been attended by two or three members. Because prayer was so much a fundamental part of the first church that we read about in the book of Acts and because the prayer ministry of the

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<sup>42</sup> Branda Polk, Fit Four, (Nashville, Tennessee: LifeWay Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Rick Warren, Celebrate Recovery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Jones, 206.

church needed a revival, the church created a unique prayer ministry called the “Upper Room Prayer Ministry”. Rick Warren says that, “a prayerless ministry is a powerless ministry.”<sup>46</sup> Certainly, we see evidence in Mark 6:46 that Jesus bathed His ministry in prayer.

The traditional church altar is becoming a thing of the past. Cook traced the altar back to the days of Noah and Abraham.<sup>47</sup> Genesis 8:20 says that Noah got out of the ark, and the first thing he did was build an altar to the Lord. When Abraham began his journey, he also built an altar to the Lord, according to Gen. 12:8. Today, the altar may more likely be a member’s home at a small group meeting. In a sense, just like Noah and Abraham, the altar is “where we are.” Many churches in Southwest Virginia are moving away from the idea that people must come to the altar to make a decision in their life. Several churches ask attendees to fill out a card that gives several options of the kind of commitment they would like to make.

Bi-vocational pastors are still predominant in Southwest Virginia. The small churches cannot afford a full-time pastor’s pay. The author began his ministry at Community Heights as a bi-vocational ministry with twelve members. As the church grew in number, the church was able to pay him a full-time salary. Most churches in Southwest Virginia are in rural communities. The average church size is probably seventy. Thus, bi-vocational pastors are forced to juggle two jobs to support their family. In the New Lebanon Association which consists of thirty-seven churches, twelve of the churches are able to support a full-time pastor.

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<sup>46</sup> Warren, Purpose Driven Church, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Cook, 39.

According to Sweet, the invention of the microprocessor will have a greater impact on planet Earth than the invention of fire.<sup>48</sup> At Saddleback Church, Rick Warren has made every member a part of an intranet.<sup>49</sup>

We read in Dan. 1:1-7 that God took Daniel out of a comfortable culture where he had lived all of his life and placed him in a different environment with a different language, a different lifestyle, and a different culture. Hawkins uses this illustration to portray what is happening in the world today even in Southwest Virginia.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sweet, 83.

<sup>49</sup> Warren, Purpose Driven Church, 144.

<sup>50</sup> O.S. Hawkins, Culture Shock: Advice from Daniel for Addressing Today's Culture (Dallas, Texas: Annuity Board, 2002), 19.

## ***CHAPTER THREE***

### **STEPS TO GETTING A CHURCH STARTED**

#### **Step One**

This chapter will outline specific steps that should be taken in order to plant a new church in Southwest Virginia. Before planting a new church, one must recognize what a church is. A church is best described “as a fellowship of believers committed to obeying the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> A common question asked by those seeking to fulfill God’s call to plant a new church is, “What plans do I need to make in order to start a new church?” There are two major aspects required: the spiritual aspect and the technical aspect.

The spiritual life of the church planter can make or break a new church project. There are several items that the planter should possess to confirm a call from God to plant a church. First, he should have a burden from God. Many Old Testament prophets began their books of the Bible speaking of the burden they received from the Lord. Second, he should also have a great desire to follow God’s plan for him. Just as Jeremiah experienced a burning inside his heart (Jeremiah 20:9), a modern-day church planter should feel the same desire to spread the gospel. The third thing needed in the life of the

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<sup>1</sup> George Patterson, Church Planting Through Obedience Oriented Teaching (Pasadena, California, William Carey Library, 1981), 1.



church planter is evidence of the fruit of his ministry prior to the church plant (John 15:16).<sup>2</sup>

## **Step Two**

One cannot talk of the spiritual readiness to serve God without focusing on prayer. C. Peter Wagner puts it this way, “The more deeply I dig beneath the surface of church growth principles, the more thoroughly convinced I become that the real battle is a spiritual battle and that our principal weapon is prayer.”<sup>3</sup> It is clear in the New Testament that each and every church was started by prayer and grew only as Christians diligently prayed. A good rule to remember when planting a church or working for God in any kind of ministry is, “prayer is of paramount importance, so pray, pray, pray, and then pray some more.”<sup>4</sup> As mentioned earlier, the success of the new church is greatly dependent of the founder’s commitment to Christ and his personal spiritual life. This is crucial because it is easier to backslide when working in the ministry than almost any other place. People become so focused on ministering that they forget to let God fill their own lives.

There is one more preliminary thing to remember. Each new church is different. There cannot be expectations that the new church will be exactly like some other model church. “A mistake that many aspiring church planters make is that they try to model

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<sup>2</sup> Elmer L. Towns, Getting a Church Started (1982), 30-31.

<sup>3</sup> C. Peter Wagner, Church Planting for a Greater Harvest (Ventura, California, Regal Books, 1990), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Ken Chapman, How to . . . Plant, Pastor, and Promote a Local Church (Lynchburg, Virginia, James Family Christian Publishers, 1979), 53.

their new ministries after some highly successful contemporary church. While this may work, the failures far exceed the successes.”<sup>5</sup> Successful church planting only occurs when salvation is the top priority of the church planter and his leadership team.<sup>6</sup> Ezra Earl Jones comments: “The first five years of a new church’s life are probably the most critical. During these years traditions are set, leaders are appointed and put to work, and a constituency is recruited that is large enough to make the operation viable.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is crucial that a plan be made and followed to assure the vision made for the new mission is fulfilled.

### **Step Three**

The planting of the church, itself, is a process. In 1 Cor. 12, Paul compares the church to the human body. In many ways, birthing a church is comparable to birthing a child, according to the Life-Cycle illustration of Malphurs.<sup>8</sup> There are six stages in the human birth process that correspond to the six stages involved in church planting: conception, development, birth, growth, maturity, and reproduction. “Just as a baby is conceived in its mother’s womb, so the idea of planting a church is conceived in a person’s mind.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Malphurs, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Brock, Indigenous Church Planting - A Practical Journey (Neosho, Missouri, Church Growth International, 1994), 154.

<sup>7</sup> Ezra Earl Jones, Strategies for New Churches (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Malphurs, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 233.

### Conception

The conception stage of church planting consists of three steps. The first of which is developing a vision. “The process of church planting begins with a vision. Without a vision, ministry organization and church planting will go nowhere. Vision is crucial to ministry; a ministry falters without one!”<sup>10</sup> There are six steps involved in the envisioning process. First, the church planter must understand the importance of a vision. “The vision provides direction, encourages change, provides motivation, encourages giving, and is the basis for evaluation.”<sup>11</sup> The planter must create a vision in his mind. Long before a church appears on the street corner, it has been formed in the heart and mind of the church planter.<sup>12</sup> Second, one must be aware of the definition of a vision. A vision is not simply a goal or objective. “It is clear, challenges, consists of a mental picture, relates to the future, can be (has great potential), and must be (sense of urgency).”<sup>13</sup> Third is the development of a vision. Fourth, one must communicate the vision. There are many ways through which a vision can be communicated to both the future leadership of the church and the public in general. Some of these include brochures, audio and videotapes, sermons, skits and drama, life, and newcomer’s classes.<sup>14</sup> The fifth involves the implementation of the vision that includes the building of ministry teams. Aubrey Malphurs suggests:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 234-236.

<sup>12</sup> Towns, 104.

<sup>13</sup> Malphurs, 237-238.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 241-244.

The leader must win a commitment from a group of players with different interests, backgrounds, gifts, and opinions to join others on the field and move down that field together as a team toward the same goal. The leader must help the team once it's moving down the field to overcome various obstacles that will appear in its path.<sup>15</sup>

Sixth, the planter must assure that the vision is preserved. When things are not going exactly as planned and they get a little tough, the leader should remember to ask God for strength to endure the bad with the good. Discouragement is not limited to him; it is universal. It is so easy to give up when challenges present themselves. But God never told us that completing His will would be easy. In fact, He repeatedly warns us to stand strong in the face of battle.

The second step in the conception stage is to recruit a leadership team. A key to remember when planting a church is to never try it alone. Having a team of committed believers surrounding the initial planter to share the vision as well as the work load will not only be an encouragement to the planter but will also be an avenue to provide a greater, more wide-spread ministry to the target community. When recruiting a team of leaders there are some personal qualifications to look for in prospective individuals: character, vision, desire, and design.<sup>16</sup> “Allow the Lord to send workers to you; don’t get desperate and pick just anyone.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, during conception, a strategy is designed. “Designing an effective ministry strategy for any church, whether planted or otherwise, involves three crucial questions: Who are we trying to reach? Where are they located? How will we reach

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>17</sup> Chapman, 102.

them?”<sup>18</sup> New ministries are established when they make strong presentations of the gospel. “New churches can be successfully planted by communicating the gospel to every available person in the new area of outreach, at every available time, by every available means.”<sup>19</sup> With this goal in mind, one must be realistic and remember that there is no way the new church will have the ability to meet every need that presents itself. However, it is important to know what the strengths of the new church are, and use them to meet the most needs possible.<sup>20</sup> After the new church begins to grow, the pastor should look at the specific needs that have arisen and strive to meet the majority of those as well. When developing a strategy, determine to go first class. Everything done should be done to the glory of God. Most importantly, write down a schedule to avoid running in circles.

### **Development**

The second major step in planting a church is the development stage. This is perhaps the biggest step in the entire process. Malphurs explains: The primary issue concerns what takes place during the development stage. What does the new church need to accomplish to become ready for its birth in the target community? In other words, what happens between conception and birth?<sup>21</sup> There are two parts to this stage. The first consists of gathering, cultivating, and growing a core group of leaders. “The whole church planting program succeeds or fails depending on the type of men who enroll in the

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<sup>18</sup> Malphurs, 255.

<sup>19</sup> Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, Churches That Multiply (Kansas City, Missouri, Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Wagner, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Malphurs, 274.

training program.”<sup>22</sup> Services in the new church should not begin until a board of local men who are ready to serve and train others has been organized. As mentioned in the strategy portion of the conception stage, when gathering a core group of leaders, one should spend much time in prayer seeking God’s guidance to assure the men chosen are true followers with a heart to serve God. A good piece of advice is: “Do not begin churches working with women and children. For effective evangelism, call men to faith and repentance, then help them win their families. The Apostles, following our Lord’s example, established congregations with adult male leadership.”<sup>23</sup> Another important aspect of building a leadership team is to build by gift. Paul discusses spiritual gifts in Romans chapter twelve. To cover the widest area of ministry with competence, it is best to have leaders who as a team exhibit all seven of the major spiritual gifts.<sup>24</sup> “Make sure that every man elected to a job in the church knows exactly what he is to do. Avoid confusion of responsibilities. Write a separate job description for each man.”<sup>25</sup> This core group does not need to be large. However, it is necessary that there are enough committed and responsible men to fill each leadership space. It is also imperative that these men be on fire for the Lord, living out His plan in their private lives as well as in their specific ministry position. “Modern-day apostles . . . are the catalytic agents of God who, led by the Spirit, determine a field where a new work should be established and set

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<sup>22</sup> Patterson, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>24</sup> Wagner, 128.

<sup>25</sup> Patterson, 20.

about to make it happen.”<sup>26</sup> The workers required to make a new church run smoothly are a pastor, musicians, Sunday school teachers, organizational leaders, ushers, deacons, and committees. “Perhaps a good rule for committees in either a new congregation or an established church is simply ‘as many as necessary, but as few as possible.’”<sup>27</sup>

Cultivating a core group involves, “assessing the core group, implementing a strategy, meeting corporately with the core group, selecting and training lay leaders, implementing a small group program, advertising the church, and administering the church’s affairs.”<sup>28</sup> Make cultivating the core group a priority. These are the men God has given to lead the new church. It is the planter’s job to pour his life, vision, and strategy into the lives of those committed men around him. Begin a Bible study with the core group to train them for the leadership positions to which they have been called.<sup>29</sup> This process of training and growing the leadership team is so vital because every attitude and every action of the leader is being observed by others, conscious of it or not, young spiritual eyes are looking, learning, and being influenced by the leader’s life. The planter is soon aware that new believers are great imitators, and in time, the leader sees himself mirrored in the lives of those under his influence.<sup>30</sup> These Bible studies should contain plenty of prayer time. Spend more time in prayer than simply talking about it and taking requests. “Above all, the pastor of the new congregation should be a prayer leader. He

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<sup>26</sup> Larry L. Lewis, The Church Planter’s Handbook (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>28</sup> Malphurs, 279-283.

<sup>29</sup> Brock, 214.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 214.

must be sensitive to the needs of the congregation, praying individually and corporately for those needs.”<sup>31</sup> This time should also be used to plan and prepare for the developing church. A prayer ministry should be planned first to develop the prayer life of each leader then the congregation as a whole. It is greatly beneficial to have a group of believers committed to praying daily for the church planter and the core group.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, growing the core group requires evangelizing unbelievers and recruiting believers for the new congregation. “Even if your goal is to reach the unchurched, it is good to have people around you who have had some experience in what a church is and how it usually functions.”<sup>33</sup> Part of the envisioning process shows that the purpose of the church is to bring together a group of people and train them to preach the gospel to every nation. Personal evangelism is not taught successfully through a class or sermon. One must take the men out to the community and show them how to minister to and win their friends and family to Christ.

The second part of the developmental stage involves managing the finances, evaluating the team, leaders, and programs, monitoring attendance and growth, naming the church, incorporating the church, locating a place to meet, preparing the facilities, and planning for the future.<sup>34</sup> When a man feels the call to plant a church, one of the biggest challenges that awaits him is raising the money to get started. Elmer Towns explains:

How shall finances be given to help a new church get started? At times, the more help that is given to a new church, the less it seems to grow. On the other hand, some mission churches die because they do not get needed help. It is better to

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis, 146.

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>34</sup> Malphurs, 283-284.



give to support the church planter. Let his work build the church and let the church raise money for its land and building.<sup>35</sup>

Money for a new church should be received up to six months prior to the birth. A budget should be planned to assure the money is spent in a manner pleasing to God. Some divisions of a church budget may be: administrative expenses, building and grounds, general office expense, missions, study programs, and Sunday school.<sup>36</sup>

Preparation for a new church includes recruiting members. It is easiest to build a new church from churchgoing believers who agree on denomination. However, it is not profitable to begin a new church simply due to differing opinions in the cliques of a former church. Door-to-door visitation is a much-used method to inform people about the new church. However, this takes a great deal of time, can be frustrating, and often reaps few results.<sup>37</sup>

Churches are often started by other prospering churches. This mother-daughter relationship has proven to be very effective. However, it is important not to restrict a new church with rules and bylaws of the mother church. There are some God-given commands concerning churches and these should be followed closely. But bylaws should be left to the discretion of the leaders and congregation of the new mission.<sup>38</sup> It is imperative that covenants are made and stuck by later. “A covenant is a ‘solemn and binding undertaking to do something or get something done.’”<sup>39</sup> There are several areas

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<sup>35</sup> Towns, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Chapman, 277.

<sup>37</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, 44 Questions for Church Planters (Nashville, Tennessee, Abingdon Press, 1991), 85.

<sup>38</sup> Patterson, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Chapman, 71.

in which churches should set guidelines. They need to set forth a New Testament model for leadership, decide what church officers are needed and the qualifications of each, how these leaders should be elected and retired, as well as the relation of the officers to the pastor and congregation. Included in these bylaws should be the way the church plans to discipline sins such as heresy, troublemakers, laziness, immorality, open wickedness, and an unforgiving spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Locating a place to meet is of utmost importance. “One of the most common errors made is locating a new church too close to existing churches of the same denomination.”<sup>41</sup> When choosing a location, one must choose one of two starting points. The first is geographical location, and the second is the target audience. “When you select a site for the new church, locate it in a place where the members of the social networks of your target audience or audiences can most easily get together.”<sup>42</sup> For instance, the author’s church is located in an area between three towns in southwest Virginia. The church provides a good meeting place to attract individuals from each of these areas. Three commonly used meeting places for temporary use are school buildings, other church buildings, or temporary (portable) buildings located at the site of the permanent meeting place.<sup>43</sup> The author’s church began in a doublewide mobile home that was set at the site of what is now the permanent church building. There are constant expansions taking place to meet the needs of the growing congregation.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 271-273.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Wagner, 82.

<sup>43</sup> Schaller, 60.

## Birth

The third major stage of church planting involves the actual birth of the church. This birth event is commonly known as the start of public services. Knowing when to start services is very important. Before this can occur the leadership team must agree on the style of services. “One of the immediate implications of rapid culture change is that many members of the new generation will not be won to Christ in their parent’s churches.”<sup>44</sup> The leadership must decide which generation they will focus on. The church will be identified to suit the age of the first hundred members. There are many forms of congregation to choose from. Six of the major forms are mission, minority, style-centered, new (in a redeveloped area), traditional suburban, and ecumenical (consisting of two or more denominations).<sup>45</sup> Regardless of the style chosen, there are some commands in Scripture as to what should take place in a Bible-believing church. They include faith and repentance from sin, baptism, love, the Lord’s Supper, prayer, giving, and witnessing.<sup>46</sup> Baptism should take place immediately after conversion as was done repeatedly in the New Testament.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the birthing stage is planning the first service. Things should be well planned to assure they run smoothly. Specific things to plan for are ushers, greeters at every door, Bible study, worship service, and a way of recording the service.<sup>47</sup> It is also necessary to do careful follow-up after the first service. Larry

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<sup>44</sup> Wagner, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, 20-23.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis, 112-113.

Lewis gives some suggestions: a letter should be sent, as well as a personal visit to all who attended the first service. Prospect cards can be sent out and collected. A weekly (or monthly) newsletter keeps interest. Be sure to involve every member in the service and ministry of the new church. Expand the structure to meet rising needs. Systematic visitation and witnessing are a good way of evangelizing the lost. And it is vital to constitute as a new church.<sup>48</sup>

Time needs to be set aside for both large group meetings as well as small groups. The large meetings hold three major purposes: evangelism, preaching, and teaching. Small groups help develop a sense of belonging by providing encouragement, prayer, worship, provision, and evangelism.<sup>49</sup> The author's church tried a new approach to small groups over the summer. Instead of the traditional Sunday night service, small groups were formed and took place in host homes. Each group studied Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*. It was a great time of fellowship. When asked what the best part of the summer, one church member said, "The bonding, the becoming family." That is precisely why time spent within small groups is priceless. "There is one major, all-encompassing purpose for small groups. That purpose is the transformation of a person's life or life change through community."<sup>50</sup> Aubrey Malphurs puts it this way: "Small groups aren't limited by facilities, are geographically expandable, promote vital, interpersonal relationships, encourage lay ministry, aren't limited by finances,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 123-132.

<sup>49</sup> Malphurs, 213.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 213.

decentralize pastoral care, facilitate leadership training, and promote the assimilation process.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Growth**

The fourth stage of the birthing process of a new church is the growth stage. One of the greatest factors of growth is the leadership. George Patterson gives some great advise, “If your church isn’t growing well, don’t hold bigger and better campaigns, spend more and more dollars and multiply human efforts; just teach your people loving obedience in simple faith.”<sup>52</sup> A farmer spends innumerable hours planting seeds, watering them, weeding, and shooing away birds to assure his plants grow well. This is the same process a church planter goes through. And in the end, it is God who gives the harvest. The leaders must be careful not to inhibit growth but through obedience to God promote growth.<sup>53</sup> So many churches start out on fire for God but soon wither and find themselves in a religious rut. This is sure to happen unless evangelism and reaching the lost is the purpose of existence.<sup>54</sup> Tom Cheyney teaches of six ingredients necessary for growth: climate, structure, health, priorities, people, and the pastor. The climate of the church is affected by the church unity, expectations, self-image, attitude toward growth, appearance, worship services, and acceptance of visitors. The structure is made up of small groups as well as the congregation as a whole. The health of the church should be measured in the following categories: a sweet spirit, Bible centeredness, group

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 215-218.

<sup>52</sup> Patterson, 31.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>54</sup> Chapman, 51.

ministries, visitation, missions, and prayer.<sup>55</sup> Priorities of a growing church come directly from the Great Commission to go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. “Wendell Below lists five characteristics of growing churches. The church has a purpose. The church has leadership that speaks with authority. The church has developed a strategy for growth. The church has knowledge of its community. The church has called for people involvement.”<sup>56</sup> Churches that are not growing have a very hard time keeping dynamic pastors. In short, “Churches which refuse to change, do change . . . for the worse!”<sup>57</sup>

### **Maturity**

As the church continues to grow, it steps into the fifth stage, the maturity stage. A maturing church can be described by a vision of the Great Commission, well-trained lay workers, modern-day ministry, genuine worship, culturally relevant evangelism, and strong small groups.<sup>58</sup> A maturing church must be full of mature leaders. This includes more than the pastor and staff, but also the lay leaders in the congregation. Third, the maturing church includes expanding land and permanent facilities. A common mistake is to build to fit the need of the current status of the church. This often stifles growth. Instead, there should be a constant vision and planning for the future. In faith, believe what God is going to do in and through the new church and plan the facilities around

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<sup>55</sup> Tom Cheyney, The Church Planting Group, “Breaking the Faithful Four Barrier in Church Planting” ([http://www.namb.net/cp/About\\_CPG/ff\\_barrier.asp](http://www.namb.net/cp/About_CPG/ff_barrier.asp)).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>57</sup> Schaller, 162.

<sup>58</sup> Malphurs, 329-333.

those dreams. When choosing a location there are three things to keep in mind: visibility, accessibility, and size.<sup>59</sup> Location is a big part of a church's success in reaching its target audience.

### **Reproduction**

The final stage of the process is reproduction. This is probably the last thing in the mind of the church planter when he begins planning for a new church. However, the New Testament provides us with example after example of churches that are started and then reproduce themselves to reach even greater masses. The process is not complete when a new church is started. As was mentioned earlier, the Great Commission requires that the world be reached. Each gathering of believers has a responsibility to grasp the vision and in turn start other churches. Malphurs says that the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches.<sup>60</sup> The time of reproduction takes place depending on the size and growth of the parent church. This process again follows the six steps of birthing a church. It begins with praying, developing a vision, identifying a target group, choosing leadership, and financing the church.<sup>61</sup>

### **Conclusion**

There is no automatic step-by-step process to starting a new church that assures one hundred percent success. Each of these steps simply offers practical advice for the

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<sup>59</sup> Wagner, 93-94.

<sup>60</sup> Malphurs, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 351-354.

men of God looking to establish new churches. It rarely happens that a church is planted without the planter going through a time of discouragement. This easily occurs due to the exhaustion caused by the hard work of the planter. Through even the greatest problems, one should remain confident of God's work in his life and His promise to continue working in it until the day of completion. And in each of these trials; somehow glory will be given to God.

Trials will cause the church and its leadership to pray. Only a praying church can make a difference in its community. The church's real power is in prayer rooms and closets where intercession rises day and night. A praying church produces holy, praying members. The world will never believe in a religion in which there is no supernatural power. It is not enough that a church's membership prays. Rarely will a church be found whose members pray if its leadership doesn't. Leaders cannot afford to wait for their congregations to begin praying. They must assume the responsibility of prayer for themselves. The leadership needs to provide a method for training members how to pray. A church that has no program of prayer certainly will not produce people who pray. For the church to grow, it must elevate prayer above all other programs. So many churches today have many types of organized programs, but no program of prayer. If a church is to grow with true spiritual depth, it needs a special department of prayer, fully organized, to carry out this important aspect of spiritual life. Just as a church has its Youth Program, Sunday School, small groups, ladies' ministry, and Music Department, it needs a well-ordered program of prayer. Praying helps leaders to keep a positive attitude. The greatest barriers occur in the mind. Keep the vision, keep faith, and keep praying. In the



end, it is the Holy Spirit who works in and through men devoted to carrying out the Great Commission to plant churches that reach the world.

## ***CHAPTER FOUR***

### **PASTOR SURVEY RESULTS**

Southwest Virginia needs good church planters. Men who are called to grow the church through all areas of ministry. The results of the survey suggest these areas of church growth need to be based on the five purposes of the Purpose Driven Church. Church planters have a unique ministry. They are the builders of God's Kingdom fulfilling the Great Commission. Like those who have gone before us, Southwest Virginia needs church planters that will give their heart away to the area.

The large percentage of pastors coming to Southwest Virginia sees this as a beginning step of their ministry. Most believe if they can come and learn some skills, this will prepare them for a larger church in a more desirable place. From Chapter One, the Appalachian culture does not embrace this kind of pastorate. The harvest in Southwest Virginia is truly plenteous and can no longer be called a Christian community. Sixty-eight percent of the Southwest Virginia counties covered in this project claim to be unchurched.<sup>1</sup> Far too many pastors fail to see the opportunity of this harvest.

The church planter has to be a person of great strength and dependence on God. John Maxwell claims that effective ministry relies and falls on leadership.<sup>2</sup> Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Baptist Resource Center, Consultation Services, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> John G. Maxwell, Principles That Guide My Life, (California: Injoy Publishing), 26.

planting a church in Southwest Virginia must not be entered into lightly. Rather, the church planter must be willing to continue to sharpen his skills and keep a teachable spirit. Traditionally, this has been the case in Southwest Virginia.

### **Responses to Survey of Church Planters**

For this thesis project, 25 surveys on church planting were sent out and 16 responses were received (See Appendix D). These responses share in-depth some of the failures and successes of church planters in Southwest Virginia during the past 15 years. The survey indicates that the most effective church starts in Southwest Virginia have used the Purpose Driven church model.

#### **Question 1: Are you a Southwest Virginia native?**

Ten of the participants who responded to the survey were from the Southwest Virginia area. Six had moved from different parts of the country. The ten pastors native to the area were better received into their churches from the beginning. All six from outside the area stated that they were treated as outsiders for an average of 18 to 24 months. Those native to the area started with a core group, which added to the success of their church.

#### **Question 2: Did you plant the church you currently serve?**

Out of the 16 responding to the survey, eight of those respondents were

the original planter of the church and eight became pastors later on during the church plant. Six of the respondents actually planted from the result of a church split. These were all natives to Southwest Virginia and a part of the beginning stages of the churches. Three of these pastors were a part of the split. These three pastors have all struggled in their plants with the largest congregation being around seventy people.

**Question 3: How would you define a church planter?**

A church planter was defined in four different areas. First, someone who consciously decides to plant a church and is aware of his own abilities and resources. Secondly, someone who starts a church from the beginning. Third, one who has a burden for the lost and responds by seeking God's help and the help of others to plant a church where the need exists. Fourth, a person who lays the groundwork, develops the vision, recruits the team, and launches a new church.

**Question 4: Did you have a mother church to support you?**

All 16 churches responding did have a mother church that provided different areas of support. Some mother churches only supplied prayer. Others gave advice, chairs, tables, and material things. Four of the mother churches gave not only these qualities, but also supplied finances for the church start and paid

the pastoral salary for the first 12 months. The four churches that had the major support from a mother church had a better beginning within the first year than the other churches responding. The other churches responding went through very difficult times. Some almost deciding to stop and cease the church plant. While these four continued to be able to fulfill their vision of not having to worry about financial support. The mother churches that gave financially to these four church plants recorded no fallout or lack of funding within their home church. All four mother churches stated that the church plant process was a very positive endeavor within the mission of the mother church.

**Question 5: Did you start with a core group?**

All sixteen churches responding did start with a core group. Some were sent from the mother church. The average size of the core group was 30 and those still presently active from the core group averaged 15 percent. This demonstrates that a core group is essential for the startup of a new church plant, but the leadership of the church plant needs to realize that the majority of the core group will not stay over the long process of planting a new church. Some of the pastors responding wrote notes of how discouraging it had been for them when some of the key members of their core group left. At this point in the church planting process, the planter must realize he is there to plant a church on the vision that God has given him and he cannot give up, but he must

continue forward with that God-given vision in spite of loss. Three of the pastors responded that their core group resulted from a church split. In these cases the pastors came from that core group that had left the previous church.

**Question 6: Is your church self-supporting? (financially independent)**

The majority of the churches that have been planted in Southwest Virginia over the past twenty years are now financially independent. This process took an average of five years for this to happen. Although a mother church in most cases did not supply finances, individuals from other churches did supply finances in order for the church plants to establish themselves in their community. The churches that had a mother church supplying finances the first twelve months were able to become financially independent on an average of two years compared to those who had no mother church contributing financially. Also, one of the contributing factors that led to financial independence was the help of the sponsoring state conventions. In ten cases, Virginia Baptist Conventions helped support the start up stages of the church plant. In Virginia, there are two State Conventions and each of these conventions have helped plant churches in Southwest Virginia. The Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia have designated funds for new church plants. Some church plants received start up grant money to buy needed equipment such as sound equipment, chairs, or to rent facilities. This money is awarded based on the number of church plants being started and those that have

the greatest need. Each convention has a list of guidelines that church plants must meet in order to qualify for start-up monies. One church received twenty-five thousand dollars to help purchase a tract of property. Another church received seventeen thousand to buy start up equipment. Both State Conventions also supply salary supplements for the church-planting pastor for the first few years of the church plant. The author received salary supplements for the first five years at Community Heights Baptist Church. The salary supplement is decreased by ten to fifteen percent each year which allows the church to continue a slight salary increase.

**Question 7: Are you full-time or bi-vocational?**

In Southwest Virginia it is difficult for new churches to support a full-time minister. Out of the 16 responding churches, ten now have full-time pastors and six are still bi-vocational. Out of the six responding bi-vocational pastors, only one of them is receiving any kind of additional salary support from a mother church. Two of the six received salary supplemental support for the first few years of the plant. They were forced to find extra employment to support their families when that support ran out. This loss of funds caused additional stress on their families. Both of these pastors shared that they were exhausted. They had a lack of energy associated with feelings of tiredness and trouble keeping up with all their duties. They are both struggling with their futures and described their overall mental state as being burned out and depressed.

The author had the opportunity to talk with these two bi-vocational pastors at a recent Pastor's Conference. Both seem to be under too much stress and it has started to affect their family relationships. Although a certain amount of stress is common, too much stress over too long a time can result in burnout. If something is not changed, burnout will eventually lead to depression. The author shared his own limited experience in counseling with these two pastors. Burnout victims show the same three factors. Feeling physically and emotionally exhausted, victims frequently cannot face the future, and they detach themselves from work and relationships<sup>3</sup> Each of these pastors could relate to these feelings.

One of the pastors called the author a week later and asked for help. This pastor knew he was over-committed and felt his biggest problem was that he tried to please everybody in his congregation and felt guilty when he couldn't. He showed up for every committee meeting, every church workday, and oversaw every service. He was in charge of visitation, weddings and funerals, and taught the Adult Sunday School Class. He was even in charge of keeping the grounds mowed and his wife cleaned the building each week. Whenever anyone asked him for something else, such as counseling, he went ahead and saw them even when his schedule was already full. As a result, he was ignoring his own personal needs, was not getting enough sleep, and was not spending enough time with his wife or children. He felt guilty about not spending enough time with his family which was in danger of falling apart, and he also felt guilty whenever he said no to anyone in his congregation. He suffered from exhaustion, detachment from his

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<sup>3</sup> Frank Minirth, Don Hawkins, Paul Meier, Richard Flournoy, How to Beat Burnout, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 14 and 15.



family, and depression from guilt. The author's church agreed to provide professional Christian counseling for this pastor and he is doing much better.

**Question 8: What other support do you have?**

At times the State Convention contributed funds to planting churches with salary supplements. In two cases, a Mission Agency helped with the church planting process and in another case, an individual gave regularly to further the cause of the church plant.

**Question 9: What is your educational background?**

Southwest Virginia has never valued education. Many early pastors in the Appalachian culture looked at education as a weakness. Some pastors believe that if preachers used notes in the pulpit, they were not relying on God to supply them with the words they needed to share with their congregation. It was demonstrated to be a lack of faith rather than a reliance on God to provide proper sermon material. Gradually over the course of the last twenty years this has changed in Southwest Virginia. Many are going to Bible institutes for further education as they are called to the ministry. In the sixteen responding, fifteen have graduated high school and one is currently working on a GED program for that equivalent. Eight are college graduates and seven of the eight have gone on

to seminary. Four have Master of Divinity degrees. Three are involved in continuing their education in Bible study.

**Question 10: How would you describe your church plant?**

Five listed their church plant as a contemporary/purpose-driven church plant with new ideas concerned with music although holding to the traditional values of the Word of God. All agree that the Word of God is inerrant and infallible. The mentality of Southwest Virginia still holds to a conservative church. Three of the church plants listed themselves as traditional and eight of the church plants listed themselves as purpose-driven. Two of these church plants would use Rick Warren's model as a way of doing church. Their churches are based on his Constitution, which is in the Appendix, and also revolves around the five purposes of the church. Certain ingredients must be present in the proper proportions for church growth. Church planting is a complex issue. It is imperative that the church understand its purpose. This purpose or vision statement is the crux of the next question.

**Question 11: Does your church have a Mission Statement?**

The results of this question were as follows: twelve churches did record a Mission Statement and four churches recorded no Mission Statement. One Mission Statement that was shared from a church is as follows: "The Vision: To

be a people who have a major spiritual impact on our locale by reaching large numbers of people with the Good News of Jesus Christ, seeing them enter the fellowship of the church, helping them mature, and challenging them to active ministry involvement with the result that they discover and pursue the true purpose for which they were created.” This is an excellent Mission Statement. It covers the purpose of the church and develops a strategy for growth. It demonstrates the church has a knowledge of its community and calls to people for involvement as the mission is fulfilled. Several other Mission Statements were recorded, but they were covered within this particular statement above.

**Question 12: What areas of ministry have contributed the most to church growth?**

All churches responding said that inviting people by word of mouth was the largest contributing factor to the growth of their churches. The purpose-driven model states in its Membership Class that this is the way to grow churches. It encourages each member to look at their core of influence and begin to invite those that are unchurched to the church. This represents a multiplication process rather than the staff trying to do all the inviting like the traditional plant has done for years. The next response that had contributed the most to church growth was small groups. Again the purpose-driven model and the traditional church plant, which conducts its small groups through Sunday School, see this as a major factor in growing the local church. In order for the church to grow, it must have good

Bible teaching and an emphasis on evangelism. When a church knows its purpose, it will delegate its ministries around these purposes. After reviewing the responses during the survey, it is the author's opinion that the purpose-driven, contemporary church model is way ahead of the traditional church by knowing its purpose and its community that it wants to reach. The traditional churches that responded had no Mission Statement and saw their worship services as being the most significant factor contributing to their church growth.

**Question 13: Do you rent or own your current facilities?**

This was evenly divided. Eight own their current facilities and eight rent their current facilities. Most are meeting in high schools or community buildings that are renting their facilities and the other eight took an average of five years before they had their first facility owned.

**Question 14: Have you developed a strategy to reach your unchurched community?**

Eight of the churches responding have developed a strategy to reach their unchurched community. The best response was from a new church just starting in Christiansburg. They state: "Our mission: To create a church of such power, excellence and love that it becomes a magnet for the entire community drawing non-churched people in large numbers to high energy seeker-sensitive worship services, and, once saved, to dynamic small groups and challenging avenues of

ministry and mission involvement.” The author noted several of the churches reporting had no strategy to reach their unchurched community. All the traditional churches have not thought about a strategy for reaching their unchurched community. The purpose-driven model, again, causes churches to think about the unchurched people around them, provides a passion for them to do things differently, to break out of the mold, and reach into their community for the cause of Christ. The author senses the passion for lost people is much greater in the contemporary purpose-driven church plant model.

**Question 15: When do you think is the best time of year to launch the first service?**

Most of the churches responding to the survey agreed that the spring of the year is the best time to launch the first service. Twelve of these church plants launched their first service on Easter Sunday. This seemed to be an appropriate response because the unchurched are looking for a place to go on Easter Sunday and will often go to a place that is new. One pastor shared how their core group had a preliminary service the Sunday before Easter and actually launched their first service on Easter Sunday. He shared the importance of this preliminary service. It allows for a check on all the sound equipment and to see that all systems are in place in order to have a successful first service.

**Question 16: What has been your greatest obstacle in church planting?**

To summarize the responses that were given, the first obstacle dealt with the development of the pastor's faith and willingness to risk everything in beginning a church plant. Church planters are a different breed in that they are willing to go out into a territory that has not been charted before. One pastor shared that an assessment through the International Mission Board had helped him determine he needed to be in church planting. His advice to church planters was to also contact the International Mission Board to have an assessment to see if the church planter is actually a viable candidate. This process of assessment could be used with various categories of church planters from professional monovocational to lay church planters. Many people believe they want to plant a church because they have had problems in traditional settings. However, when they have the opportunity to plant the church, they soon realize they were not equipped to do so. The second greatest obstacle seemed to be dealing with a core group of people that started the church plant. One pastor said the core group was not on the same page as to what was the most important activity of the church. Another pastor shared that, starting with the core group with preconceived ideas about what the church should be, became a hindrance early on during the church plant. The third response dealt with facilities and finances. The finances from a core group were limited and at times there was no support from a mother church to help in the proper development of the church plant. The facilities were a concern for all the contemporary purpose-driven model churches. They have

agreed to meet in high schools or community centers until they can develop a strong congregation before they ever launch out into building their first building. Those churches that were planted traditionally moved into facilities early. The facility became an identifiable characteristic within the community of their ministry. It was a stationary facility not to be moved. The purpose-driven contemporary churches met in several different facilities. When they would outgrow one, they would move to another from storefronts, to tents, to gymnasiums at schools. One pastor of a purpose-driven model said that he liked the non-importance of the facilities because many churches, as they began to plant, built facilities too small and find land too small to do any kind of life-changing work within the community in which they are planted. The purpose-driven model gives its allegiance to developing and training leadership within the new church rather than focusing on facilities.

**Question 17: What has been your greatest asset in church planting?**

Several of the pastors said their wives were their greatest assets because of her commitment to her husband during the difficult first steps of planting a church. A church planter without the support of his wife will probably fail. Other responses had to do with a core group that had gifted leadership and able financial resources. One pastor talked about his core group having a solid biblical background. Another pastor said that the greatest asset in planting his

church was a core group that was well grounded in their Christian faith and were supporting from day one financing the vision and mission of the church.

**Question 18: What advice would you give to a person planting a new church today?**

Several responses intrigued the author's interest to this particular question concerning advice. One pastor stated that the church planter must be willing to plan well and listen well. He must be able to meet with interested people and find out what they have in mind as far as the important factors of developing a church. It is crucial at this initial meeting to develop a strategy for keeping the core team focused on one vision and mission purpose. Another pastor said to go slow and work on quality, not quantity. He discussed that church plants have a tendency to want to grow numbers more quickly than they are able to equip the numbers that come. His strategy has been to work on the quality of his staff and training and only offer programs when much thought has gone in to the purpose of why that program exists. Another pastor said that the church planter must take some time to think through what he wants the church to be before he gets started. He said that he did not have a clear view of what the church needed to be in the initial startup process. As a result, time and money were wasted because there was no clear purpose as to what kind of church he and the core wanted to plant. Finally, another pastor said to look for a good location, get to know the people that are interested, and offer opportunities for people to get



involved. He believed that one of the greatest assets to church planting is having a spiritual gifts inventory for the people that God brought from the core group and then for each one that joined. It helped each individual find their spiritual gift and develop ministries around the giftedness of the people whom God sends. He encouraged the church to develop a strong sense of family in order to let each member know they are extremely important and vital for the church to continue to have an outreach in its community.

**Question 19: How do you get people involved in ministry?**

The traditional church plants get people involved in ministry through a Nominating Committee that recommends them to the church. Two of the other pastors said they just enlisted people directly themselves and the rest of the churches enlisted their people through spiritual giftedness and a strong volunteer program. These pastors encouraged each member to use the gifts that God had given them in ministry. Most agree that in the beginning phases of the church, the pastor had to enlist those people who could serve as teachers, or music leaders, etc. All responding pastors agreed there must be easier ways for lay people to volunteer through the church to be involved in ministry.

### **Common Characteristics**

Examining the four most successful church plants provides some additional insight. These four churches were all started by a pastor that felt called to a specific area of Southwest Virginia. He had committed his life to planting and growing the church. All four started with a core group and were sponsored by a mother church. Three of the churches were planted in growing areas of Southwest Virginia. All four pastors are Southwest Virginia natives. Two of the pastors returned after being gone from the area for several years.

In each of these four churches, finances were provided by the mother church, state convention, and all four pastors received salary supplements. It appears the most successful church plants started with the best candidates and fewest struggles.

### **Analysis of Survey Results**

After looking at all the data and information that has been gathered and the responses from pastors who are in the frontlines of pastoring churches, several conclusions can be drawn. First, it is a definite advantage to be a native of Southwest Virginia. Pastors are better received and are able to implement ministry if they are from the area. The survey also indicates that original church plants formed from a core group are more successful than church plants resulting from church splits. Church plants that began with a mother church providing resources were able to have a better beginning than church plants without a sponsoring church.

All of the responses indicated that a core group was essential for the startup of a new church plant. The core group provides lay leadership, resources, and power to implement the pastor's vision. In most cases the majority of the core group will eventually leave the church. The pastor must understand that as he communicates the vision God has laid on his heart, some of the core group will not be able to buy into his vision. Thus, people who helped in the beginning of the church plant will gradually leave. This process of core group members leaving was one of the most discouraging events for the new pastor.

The average time it takes for a church plant in Southwest Virginia to be financially independent is five years. The economy in Southwest Virginia is a major factor in churches becoming self-supportive. Many of the churches are only able to afford a bi-vocational pastor. Most churches are small and dependent on one or two families within the church. Salary supplements from mother churches and state conventions are critical to helping churches become self-supportive.

The survey indicates that education is not valued in Southwest Virginia as much as it is in other places. Over the years, the value of education has increased, but it still pales in comparison to other localities. Most believe the reason for this is because the average layperson lacks education. Educated people in Southwest Virginia tend to move to other places to find jobs and better pay.

As new churches are planted in Southwest Virginia, the style of the church plant has changed. Over the past twenty years, church plants have moved from the traditional model to the purpose-driven model. These purpose-driven churches are all doing very well in reaching the people of Southwest Virginia. The purpose-driven church plants

have a well-defined mission statement and a clear vision of where they want to go. They understand what business they are in. The traditional model has struggled in defining its purpose and vision which has resulted in stagnated growth and conflicting ideas.

All the pastors surveyed agreed that the best way to grow a church was by members inviting their friends. The purpose-driven model churches use a membership class to explain upfront what is expected of each member, and what each member can expect from the staff. The next response that had contributed the most to church growth was small groups. Small groups helped in the assimilation of new members into the church. The traditional churches believed their worship services were their greatest asset to church growth.

The majority of the purpose-driven churches are renting their facilities. They are located in all kinds of facilities from gyms to high school auditoriums. A building is not the focus for these churches unlike the traditional church plants. The traditional church plants have been weak on defining a strategy for reaching the unchurched in their community; whereas, the purpose-driven church plants have a well-planned approach to reaching the unchurched. This is defined in the mission statement of purpose-driven churches.

Out of sixteen responses from pastors, most agreed that their greatest barrier in planting a church dealt with the development of their faith and their willingness to risk everything in beginning a church plant. Other barriers were a lack of finances, facilities, and trained leadership. The greatest asset for the pastors was the support of their wives. Other responses included the benefits of a supportive core group and available resources.

It is apparent from the survey that the purpose-driven model church plant is growing better than the traditional model. The difference is in the driving factors of the church. Every church has principles by which it is driven. Some churches are driven by programs, others by the pastor's personality, others by reaching budgets, others by tradition, and sometimes even certain events govern the church.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**PURPOSE-DRIVEN CHURCH MODEL**

**The Five Purposes of the Church**

Rick Warren claims that churches need to be driven by purpose rather than other forces.<sup>1</sup> The church must realize that plans, programs, and personalities do not last, but God's purposes will last.<sup>2</sup> Churches must be willing to ask the question, "Why do we exist?"<sup>3</sup> A church with no purpose will eventually plateau and die. In a purpose driven church, once the course is set, decision-making becomes far easier and less frustrating.<sup>4</sup> Warren says a clear purpose for the church will do five things: 1) Build morale, 2) Reduce frustrations, 3) Allow concentration, 4) Attract cooperation, and 5) Assist evaluation.<sup>5</sup> He also believes that it takes several years for a pastor to know the people of the church. As mentioned earlier, Southwest Virginia is an area where pastors only stay on the average of 18-24 months. Thus, many churches in Southwest Virginia lack purpose and are controlled by families that have maintained a presence in the church for many years.

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Church , 80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 103.

Warren maintains the church has five biblical purposes. He believes the church is committed to fulfilling all five of these purposes and sees it as the highest priority. Each purpose is based on Scripture and will produce a stronger church when met. They are as follows:

### **Worship: Love The Lord With All Your Heart**

This purpose flows out of a heart for worship. The only way to love God with all your heart is by worshipping Him.<sup>7</sup> Worship is more than a few choruses and a sermon. Worship is a matter of the heart where the heart magnifies and glorifies the Lord with genuineness. Worshipping God must be the consuming passion of the heart, whether we express it in old ways or new ways. It is only as we spend time worshipping God, concentrating on the nature of His Person, that our faith begins to rise. Worship provides a way for the Christian to reflect on the wonder that he, a soiled sinner, can come into God's presence and linger there as long as he likes. It allows the believer to rejoice in the fact that he can never be separated from God's love.

### **Ministry: Love Your Neighbor As Yourself**

This purpose flows out of heart for ministry.<sup>8</sup> God has given each of His children a spiritual gift to fulfill a ministry. God uses His children as conduit in which He flows to meet the needs of others. The church has an opportunity to minister to every facet of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 104

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 104

human beings. There are wounded people crying out to be healed, while the church sits silent. So little ministry takes place in many churches.<sup>9</sup>

### **Evangelism: Go and Make Disciples**

This purpose is centered around the concept of evangelism.<sup>10</sup> God has entrusted His people, the church, with the tremendous task of communicating His good news to all of humanity. This purpose is derived from the Biblical mandate of sharing the Gospel to unbelievers. Evangelism then is the process of dispensing the Gospel with the purpose of reaching the lost. This is a privilege for the believer. He has the opportunity to be an agent in changing a person's eternal destiny.

### **Fellowship: Baptizing Them**

Baptism is the process of identification with the body of Christ. This is the purpose of fellowship.<sup>11</sup> As new believers get baptized, they are assimilating into the membership of a local church. Baptism serves as a rite to membership. Once the new believer is baptized, he enters into a covenant with other believers in the body of Christ. He agrees to support the ministry, expenses, and purposes of the church. Baptism should be an act of worship during the service of the church.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 106.



### **Discipleship: Teaching Them to Obey**

This purpose revolves around discipleship. The church exists to edify, or educate God's people.<sup>12</sup> Not only does the church exist to reach people with the Gospel, it also is commanded to develop people to spiritual maturity. Discipleship continues throughout the believer's life. The Christian life is a journey whereby discipleship is an integral part of the growth process. These are the five purposes of the purpose-driven church model.

At times the purpose-driven model has been confused as being a model based on contemporary music styles. Being purpose-driven is not about being contemporary.<sup>13</sup> Warren says in one of his Ministry Toolbox letters that a purpose-driven church is about being biblical and eternal.<sup>14</sup> The five purposes of the church are taken out of the Scriptures and they are eternal. These purposes are not here today and gone tomorrow, but provide a consistent foundation in which to build the church. These biblical purposes can be applied to different groups and ages, as well as different locations.<sup>15</sup> Purpose-driven churches come in all shapes and sizes, are found all over the world, and are made up of many different worship styles.<sup>16</sup> One church surveyed in this project has three services consisting of a country, a contemporary, and a traditional worship style. A purpose-driven church is a church that maintains the five biblical purposes in a balanced

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>13</sup> Rick Warren, Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox Letters (Issue No. 51, 2002), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1.

format. Every church needs to grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through evangelism.<sup>17</sup>

### **Characteristics of Purpose-Driven Churches**

There are several characteristics that are unique to purpose-driven churches. A purpose-driven church has a purpose statement that describes the church's commitment to building the church around the five purposes that have previously been discussed.<sup>18</sup> These churches use a planned strategy to fulfill the purpose-driven statement. This strategy moves people from committing their lives to Christ to being mature believers. There is also a unique structure that insures balance and gives equal emphasis to all five New Testament purposes.<sup>19</sup> Purpose-driven churches are organized by teams rather than committees. Each team is responsible for one purpose and a target group. Purpose-driven churches commit to programs that will aid in fulfilling each of the five purposes. There is no program that does not conform to one of the five purposes. This eliminates useless commitment. Staff positions are started by volunteers and are eventually developed into full-time paid positions.<sup>20</sup> Each staff position would be created to fulfill one of the five purposes.<sup>21</sup> The pastor preaches his messages in a planned method to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

insure a balanced approach to each of the five purposes.<sup>22</sup> The best textbook for church growth is the Bible. In order for the congregation to buy into the vision of the church, it must be communicated regularly and it must be biblically based. Purpose-driven churches communicate the vision through the preaching of the purposes. Pastors provide symbols, slogans, and tell stories to communicate the vision.

Another characteristic of purpose-driven churches is a small group ministry. The purpose of the small groups is to help the members fulfill the five purposes. Small groups help to personalize the purposes of the church. These small groups can provide support, provide a service, develop spiritual growth, or evangelize the lost. Small groups will not fulfill every purpose, but should be organized to meet at least one purpose.

Purpose-driven churches plan their calendar around the five purposes of the church. The calendar is divided into certain segments allowing two months for each purpose. For instance, January and July may focus on worship while February and September focus on fellowship.<sup>23</sup> Unless it is planned, it will not get emphasized.

Every item on a purpose-driven church budget is categorized to a purpose it supports. This insures that the church spends its time and money on the correct priorities. Buildings are seen as a way to enhance ministry, thus buildings are constructed to be a tool in fulfilling the purposes.<sup>24</sup> Most purpose-driven churches do not start out in a building. Warren believes that the church must continually evaluate everything it does.<sup>25</sup> In a purpose-driven church, the purposes are the standard for evaluation. Evaluation

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 3.

insures effectiveness. As the purposes are applied to every area of the church, the church should grow stronger and stronger.

This model has proven very effective in new church plants in Southwest Virginia. Out of sixteen churches responding to the survey, eight were completely purpose-driven models. These eight churches have been very successful at reaching the unchurched in other communities. Highlands Fellowship in Abingdon, Virginia, is the largest and fastest growing church in Southwest Virginia. This church uses the purpose-driven model and has planted several other purpose-driven churches. The church's Constitution is recorded in Appendix A. An interview with the pastor, Rev. Jimmie Davidson of Highlands Fellowship, is listed in Appendix C. This interview provides a detailed story of how Rev. Davidson has planted and developed a purpose-driven church. The author's church is currently in transition to become a purpose-driven church. This has been a slow process and involves much preparation and planning.

The first step in transitioning is to prepare the leadership for the vision God has given to the pastor.<sup>21</sup> Once the leadership of the church is united to be purpose-driven, a plan can be implemented. The church assigns certain tasks structured around fulfilling the five purposes. For instance, if Christians are disciplined, they are committing themselves to studying the Bible, providing a foundation to live on, and principles to live. If Christians are encouraged to fellowship with each other, they develop supportive relationships.

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<sup>21</sup> Dan Sutherland, Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), 21.

### **The Importance of Balance**

The emotional benefits provided by a church balanced in the five purposes are enormous. The church is able to be a provider for the basic needs of human beings. The process involved in balancing the five purposes that Warren suggests is to evangelize the community, stimulate the crowd through worship, encourage the congregation through fellowship, disciple the committed and equip the core to go back out and serve out their mission in life.<sup>22</sup>

The problem many churches in Southwest Virginia have is that they are small and out of balance concerning the purposes of the church. Some churches are predominantly evangelistic in their approach while others center their effectiveness on worship. These churches desire to get their people to focus on the power and presence of God, omitting the other purposes. One pastor shared how his people never come to church unless a meal is involved. This would be a church that is focused on fellowship. Many times the passion of the pastor tends to dominate in one area of the purposes. The author's church has a tendency to focus on discipleship. Community Heights has a reputation for being a strong teaching church. Although churches tend to emphasize one purpose or area of the church there is no one key to church growth. The church has many responsibilities that require all five purposes to be in balance.

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<sup>22</sup> Warren, Purpose Driven Church, 119.

### **Assimilation and Outreach**

Warren says balance produces health and health will grow churches.<sup>23</sup> Church outgrowth is the natural result of church health. But church health can only occur when the message is biblical and the mission is balanced. Each of the five New Testament purposes of the church must be in equilibrium with the others for health to occur. Balance in a church does not occur naturally, so imbalance must be continually corrected. Healthy churches are built on purpose.

Warren keeps Saddleback Church balanced by focusing on two simple concepts. The first is a baseball diamond diagram whereby people are moved through five classes indicated as follows: 1) Class 101 – Discovering Membership, 2) Class 201 – Discovering Spiritual Maturity, 3) Class 301 – Discovering Ministry, 4) Class 401 – Discovering Mission, and 5) Class 501 – Discovering Worship.<sup>24</sup> These classes are designed to move people from no commitment to Christ to deeper levels of commitment and maturity.<sup>25</sup>

The second concept is a system consisting of circles of commitment. The circles represent a way of understanding the different levels of commitment and maturity in the church.<sup>26</sup> The five circles demonstrate where people are in their level of commitment. These circles are designed to move people from the unchurched level (community) to a member of the core group (lay minister) of the church. The community encompasses the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 129.

largest number of people connected to the church. This group is interested in every person within driving distance of the church. The church, through its mission team efforts, will seek through bridge events to evangelize the community. The second circle is called the crowd, and represents the regular attendees of the church. The magnification team would encourage the crowd to exalt Christ through worship. The next circle is called congregation. This circle represents all the actual members of the church at all levels of spiritual maturity. The role of the membership team is to encourage the congregation through fellowship. To be included in this circle a person must complete Class 101. The fourth circle is referred to as the committed membership. These are the members of the congregation that are committed to maturity. They have completed Class 201 and signed a covenant to be a part of a small group and regularly tithe their income. The maturity team seeks to educate the committed through various methods of discipleship.

Finally, the last circle is called the core. This core group represents the smallest number of people, but the most effective. This group has completed Class 301 and agreed to serve in a place of ministry. The ministry team is relentless in equipping the core for ministry. The goal of the church is to move people from being in the community to being in the core. The core goes back out into the community through multiple ministries to begin the process again.

The greatest advantage of the purpose-driven model is that both of these concepts can be measured and evaluated. The number of people completing each class can be calculated and the teams can keep a record of the amount of people being funneled through the five circles of commitment. The evaluation process constantly helps

churches know how balanced they are in fulfilling the five purposes. Adjustments can be made fairly easily with a checks and balance system from the five purpose-driven teams.

The purpose-driven method would be very effective in many of the churches in Southwest Virginia. The beauty of this method is that it can work in any size church. Since many of the churches in Southwest Virginia have less than 100 members, the five purposes can still be applied successfully. It may be possible to replant some of the existing churches in order to bring new life and growth into the congregation. This method also is a great way to plant new churches in Southwest Virginia.



## ***CHAPTER SIX***

### **A PLAN TO DEVELOP AND PLANT CHURCHES IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

The intention of this project is to develop a plan that will help existing pastors and future church planters coming to Southwest Virginia. Obviously, it is easy to see the culture of Southwest Virginia is different and unique. It is a necessity that churches in Southwest Virginia become more effective in fulfilling the Great commission and working together as a team for Christ. Casting a vision, church health, small groups, and pastoral health will all play an important part. Pastors must be the leaders of change and churches must be willing to make some risks.

#### **Example of a Church That Failed to Change**

In 1994, the author traveled to speak at First Baptist Church of Norton in Southwest Virginia. This church had a tremendous reputation in years past as an active, growing, and energetic church. First Baptist has a rich history originating over one hundred years. The author was asked to conduct a leadership conference. The church had a membership of 820, but on that Sunday morning, there were only eighty-three in attendance. The leadership complained about how difficult it was to reach the people who lived in the immediate neighborhood. The average age of the present active members was sixty-eight and only two children were present that Sunday.

Norton had changed. The neighborhood had changed. Society and culture had changed. Southwest Virginia had changed. But, this church had not kept up with the changes. The problem is that in Southwest Virginia this is the norm rather than the exception. Once great churches are barely surviving. Some of this is just part of the normal life cycle of the churches. Some churches do fulfill their purpose and die, but for many it is easier to die than to have the courage to change.

No institution likes to change. Some resistance to change can be good. If there were no resistance to change, some churches would be caught up with every kind of new program going. Unfortunately, without change, it usually results in church decline and death. One of the major problems in Southwest Virginia churches is a focus on the institution rather than the purpose of that institution.<sup>1</sup> Already, the case has been made that the best organizations are purpose-driven. They understand what business they are in and they give all their energy, resources, and passion to fulfill those purposes. The breakdown occurs when the institution fulfills its purpose.

For example, if the major purpose of a church is to reach the lost in the community and that purpose is achieved what will happen to that church? It will either move from growth to decline or disband unless the purpose is changed. It will not continue simply because it has so many members to support. If that happens, the focus has shifted from purpose to institution. In Southwest Virginia, most churches that were planted in the past fifteen years began with a sense of purpose. Some wanted to build a building, some wanted to reach younger people groups, some wanted to represent their denomination. The survey among these churches demonstrated that after the first ten

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<sup>1</sup> Leith Anderson, Dying For Change ( Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990), 111.

years the purpose was either fulfilled or forgotten. At this point most of these planted churches moved from being purpose-driven to a program that kept the institution going. Presently, any time change is presented it appears as a threat. The church has moved from mission to maintenance. This is not only true in our past church plants, but is much more evident in the older churches of Southwest Virginia. Thus, newcomers often are viewed as threats to the status quo and they are rejected or extremely limited.

This was the case at First Baptist Norton. There were eight deacons at First Baptist that served as a ruling board. Six of the eight deacons held their position for over thirty years. The other two deacons were relatively new to the church. They were both in their early forties and had been elected to the office of deacon during the past two years. It was these two deacons that gave the invitation to the author to come and lead the conference. One of the younger deacons introduced the author and the conference began. Within the first couple of hours, the older deacons became resistant to any change ideas. This was a very frustrating afternoon for all involved. It was suggested that an early morning contemporary service would bring in new people, but that idea was negated. Several of the deacons thought a second service would split the church. The six older deacons saw another service as a threat to their power dominance. They also believed that contemporary music was “of the world” and they refused to allow “their” church to embrace liberal views. The end of the conference resulted in a defining resolution. The six deacons introduced a motion that the church would remain as it was, refusing to change or embrace new methods. They used their power to control the future direction of the church. The conference was concluded and all left frustrated.

Several weeks later, a phone call was received from one of the younger deacons. The resolution was proposed at the church business meeting and passed by a vote of thirty to twelve. The two younger deacons resigned and later left the church. Today, the church continues to decline and has only 20 to 30 people attending. It is the opinion of several people that have left, that this group of six deacons will let the church die rather than give up their power. This is the case for many older churches in Southwest Virginia. Sometimes openness to change does occur when church death is imminent, but it is too late.<sup>2</sup>

### **Barriers To Growth**

Another resistance to change in the churches of Southwest Virginia revolves around the idea of the churches reaching people groups very much like those who are already members.<sup>3</sup>

### **Closed Churches**

Most churches in the region are fairly closed to reaching people groups unlike them. As a result, change is very slow in coming. The churches in Southwest Virginia that seem to show growth are actually looking at new methods to attract and assimilate

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 113.

persons who are different. Leith Anderson says there are only two types of churches:<sup>4</sup> those that incorporate people that are different and those that institutionalize self-perpetuation with rules that keep out anyone who is different.<sup>5</sup> It is a fact when a church opens its doors to new people groups, it will change the church.

### **Lack of Education**

In Southwest Virginia, many of the churches are closed to people who have attained higher education. Two of the churches in Tazewell County have a rule that no one can be in leadership if they have a college degree. Higher education is seen as a weakness and a non-reliance on the Holy Spirit. All a man must be is a spirit-filled Christian, and his only source of information must be the Bible. Some of the Tabernacle churches have a dress code and the women must agree to not use makeup and leave their hair uncut. The men must wear a tie and jacket and the women must wear a dress to all services. Shorts are not allowed even in the privacy of their own homes and men must have clean-shaven faces. The Old Regular Baptist churches meet only once a month, but usually meet for several hours. They do not believe in hell, and think it is sin to pay their pastor. These types of churches were dominant in Southwest Virginia in the 60's, 70's, and 80's. Today they are beginning to fade in their influence as many have died out.

The author's church has been highly criticized by the majority of religious institutions in Southwest Virginia. The church was one of the first in the area to open its doors to African American Christians. When Community Heights Baptist Church was

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 113.

planted there were no African American residents in this end of the county. Community Heights today has several African American families within the membership and leadership. Community Heights has a casual dress code that was rejected from other churches in the area. Although Community Heights Baptist Church teaches Scripture as inerrant, it is considered to be a liberal church by many of the more legalistic assemblies. God has richly blessed Community Heights for breaking through much of the legalism in the Southwest culture, but it has come with a cost.

### **Family Ruled**

A third barrier to change for the churches of Southwest Virginia deals with the family owned concept or the dominant leader role. Most of the churches in the area are small with an average attendance of one hundred or less. Many of these churches have been blessed with families or leaders who founded the church. In the beginning the dominant family appears to be open to new people and new ideas. The problem comes when the family that planted the church is often the family that rules the church. The family in power is the one with the most members present. They become the majority voice in the church, when they may be a minority as a whole. The rest of the membership is unwilling to go against the family in charge. The others in the congregation may see the need to change and accept new methods of outreach, but it is never mentioned because the family in power would never embrace the ideas. Under these circumstances, introducing change becomes very difficult.

### **Pastor Ruled**

There are also many churches in Southwest Virginia that have been blessed with powerful pastors who planted the churches. During his ministry, great things were accomplished. The pastor was young, energetic, and motivated. He did everything, and was involved in everything. His signature was everywhere, and he was extremely gifted. He oversaw all the services, committees, building programs, etc. Some leaders in Southwest Virginia grew churches, and stayed in power for several years. The problem occurs when he leaves, retires, or dies. This guy was too good, and his abilities cannot be matched. The church recruits a new pastor that is almost destined to fail. All the new pastor hears about is the way his predecessor preached and accomplished miracles. When the new pastor introduces new ideas, he comes across as being disloyal to the former pastor. As a result, in Southwest Virginia, the average pastor only stays between fifteen to eighteen months. Either the new leader cannot please the family in power or match the hero-like qualities of his predecessor.

### **Resistant To Change**

Another reason many churches are resistant to change in Southwest Virginia is because change involves risk. Most of the churches are not open to risk taking and as a result they hardly ever embrace new methods. Leith Anderson suggests four reasons why churches in general resist risk:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 116.

1. The church is rooted in tradition.
2. As church leaders grow older they are less likely to take risks. Therefore, the older the church becomes the leaders age as well. As the leadership ages, most of the positions of power will be held by non-risk takers.
3. The church leadership places a higher value on maintaining the present, rather than on risking to grow more and get better.
4. The church membership tends to place a higher value on stability rather than innovation. The church in general rewards faithfulness, not the ability to change.<sup>7</sup>

### **Tradition Rich**

Many of the churches in Southwest Virginia are steeped in tradition. In a changing culture and world, the church is one place that remains the same. Southwest Virginia prides itself in being at least ten years behind the change process that is happening in the rest of the world. Also, the majority of church leadership in Southwest Virginia is fifty years of age and older. Several pastors shared with the author that their church leadership is unwilling to take any risks. This is a detriment to the pastor and his vision. Unless the pastors have a maintenance ministry mindset, conflict is often the result. Many of the present pastors in Southwest Virginia churches would be better off to start over by planting a new church. Some of these pastors are loaded with skill, talent, and passion to do God's work, but are constantly hindered by church leadership that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 116.



refuses to seek any agenda but their own. When a maintenance mindset prevails within the church, the church begins the process of plateau and decline.

Of the seventy churches covered by this project, only twelve churches are in the growth mode. A small percentage of the churches have plateaued with the vast majority in decline. For many of those churches, it is already too late to turn the situation around. In many cases, the fault cannot be placed on resistant leadership.

For instance, in Buchanan County, the collapse of the coal industry forced thousands of people to leave the area. In 1970, the pupil population in Buchanan County schools was 11,415 students.<sup>8</sup> In 2003, that same student population has been reduced to 3,862.<sup>9</sup> This population exodus has caused most of the churches in Buchanan County to see a decline. These churches are often hindered by the good old days and how great things used to be. However, in all the depression in this county, the author was amazed to find a church that had grown consistently over the past six years. Vansant Baptist Church has been able to overcome the storms of a horrible economy and a huge population loss.

Vansant Baptist Church is pastored by Stan Parris, a Texas native that has been there for ten years. Under Stan's leadership, the church has transitioned to a purpose-driven model. This transition started six years ago and is still in progress. Stan believes it will take at least six more years before the church is completely purpose-driven. Stan pastored Vansant Baptist for four years before he suggested any changes. He earned the trust and respect of the congregation before he tried to change any direction. Stan is obviously a gifted leader that God has used to help the church dream again. He told the

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Hankins, Personal Interview.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

church that he would stay at Vansant Baptist Church for at least fifteen years before he asked the members to embrace the purpose-driven model. The church voted to embrace Stan's vision and the rest is history. Vansant Baptist is a church that greatly encouraged the author during the writing of this project. It is an example of a declining church transitioned by the purpose-driven model. The transition has given the church new life and a renewed sense of mission. The growth of this church has made a loud statement to the entire Southwest Virginia community. The belief is that if growth can occur at Vansant Baptist Church, it can occur anywhere. It is possible for churches to transition and dream again. Vansant Baptist Church is living proof.

### **Lack of Planning**

Another barrier to church growth in Southwest Virginia is the way churches have been planted in the past. A church-planting plan needs to be in place for each Association rather than haphazard decisions made by individuals. No church-planting plan has ever been considered before. Because no planning has ever been in place, Southwest Virginia has had a chaotic church planting agenda. The major way churches have been planted has been through church splits. As a result, several locations in Southwest Virginia have same denominational churches within a half-mile of each other.

For example, in Buchanan County there is a five-mile stretch of road with five Baptist churches all resulting from church splits. Three of these churches are Southern Baptist and two are Independent Baptist. These churches ranged in age from 12 years old to 97 years old. The oldest church is still the largest church and the only church to have a

full-time pastor. The other five churches have split from the oldest church and have attendance of between thirty and seventy-five. The oldest church has averaged around two hundred for the past fifty years. The church has suffered declines in membership during each of the splits. The four churches resulting from church splits have suffered over the years, but have been unwilling to reconcile these differences. Two of the four churches have bi-vocational pastors that make very little income from the pastorate. They both work full-time jobs and are often discouraged and worn out. The author met with these two pastors and the full-time pastor to begin a dialogue process. The goal of the meeting was to share a plan of bringing the churches back together. The pastors all agreed this would be the best-case scenario, but that the churches would never agree. They agreed to pray for God to bring about the reconciliation process between these three churches. The meeting served as a time of encouragement for all the pastors involved.

This story serves as a reminder as to why a church-planting plan needs to be in place for each Association. If a plan had been in place, these churches may not have split in the first place. The author has encouraged the Director of Missions in each of the Associations represented by this project to begin the process of a church-planting plan. The process of selecting a church planting team with several guidelines for a church plant to be recognized by the Association has begun. This has been very exciting that each Association is finally willing to address the need of establishing some church plant guidelines. As mentioned earlier these teams will look at regions that are conducive to planting new churches. Locations that are not on the plan would not be recognized as legitimate church plants. This guideline keeps church splits from being recognized as Associational church plants. The author believes this is a much healthier way of starting

new churches. By in large, the Associations represented in this project have only considered new churches started from splits. The actual intended church plants, such as Highlands Fellowship and Bluefield Community Church were met with resistance from the Associations. Today, several Associations are trying to get both of these churches to become member churches, but the church memberships have declined the invitations. Their logic is that these Associations were unwilling to be identified with them in the beginning when they really needed the help and support of the other Associational churches. Both of these churches have done extremely well without Associational involvement and have been forced to find resources and support elsewhere. The Association can offer very little benefit to them today.

This is tragic. Both of these locations could have been pinpointed by the Association as a legitimate place to plant a church. By having these places secured as church plant opportunities, the Associational churches would not have seen these new churches as threats but as blessings. The Associations could have offered support, resources, prayer, etc. to help in the beginning stages of the church plant. Many other Associations throughout the state have adopted church planting plans and have had very successful results. Establishing Associational church plant teams is a great first step in producing healthy church plants.

The two main types of churches that have been planted in this area over the past twenty years are the traditional program-driven church plant and the purpose-driven model church plant. Many problems still exist with the traditional church plants and the traditional church plants are doing very poorly on reaching the unchurched of their community. The main reason for this is due to the ways these churches were planted.

Several resulted from a church split while others had no purpose or vision. Many were led by lay people and have been unable to support a full-time pastor. Most of the traditional church plants have plateaued and some have even declined in the first few years of origination. However, the purpose-driven model church plants have excelled in reaching the unchurched and continue to grow in some places at alarming rates. The traditional church plant tends to be driven by programs and personality whereas the purpose-driven church plant is driven by the five purposes of the church straight from the Bible. The purpose-driven model could bring revival to many of the existing churches of Southwest Virginia if they could transition from being program-driven to purpose-driven.

When changing to a purpose-driven model, the two major changes that would have to take place in a traditional church would be worship style and government change. The government change would be moving from a congregation-ruled church to a pastor/staff led church. Rather than the congregation making all the decisions for the vision and direction of the church, the pastor and staff would lead the church and guide the church in fulfilling the vision God has placed on their hearts.

The vast majority of the churches in Southwest Virginia have either plateaued or are in a state of decline. The Directors of Missions over the two associations represented in this project were able to conclude that the overall welfare of the church in Southwest Virginia is in a state of emergency. They believe that their churches need to begin to revision the purpose of their existence and they are extremely interested in finding locations to plant new churches.

The author has helped the Directors of Missions to implement two teams for this purpose. The Directors of Missions are willing to work alongside their teams to locate

several areas where new churches could be planted. These locations have not been determined as of yet, but within the next twelve months these associations have committed to coming up with several places they believe would be ideal for planting new churches. This will be a tremendous help to pastors coming to the area who want specifically to plant churches and it will be a help to the associations to have identifiable places already in reserve to lead these pastors to plant. The Associational teams will work alongside the Chamber of Commerce and other entities within the community to find the areas of growth within the county and will also find areas within the region where no church exists at present.

The Associational teams have also agreed to identify strong churches in their associations that would be able to partner with church planters coming into the community to aid them in the church planting process. This will be invaluable to the new church planter. He will be able to have a mother church that will help possibly with finances as well as sharing resources and people to develop the church in its initial phases. One of the problems church planters have had in Southwest Virginia is a lack of resources and finances when they began their church plant. This process will help aid church planters to be more successful and they will not be alone in the planting process. This will help strengthen the supporting churches. Many of the churches in Southwest Virginia are landlocked or have been in existence for well over a hundred years. There seems to be no area for growth within the churches so they have turned to a maintenance ministry. The pastors of these churches would welcome an opportunity to be a part of something exciting such as a new church plant to involve more people and continue

growth outside of the four walls of their building. This process will not only be helpful in planting new churches, but will also revive some older existing churches.

In Southwest Virginia, the population is declining rather than increasing. Thus, some of the existing churches that have plateaued need to transition in order to be more effective in their outreach. These churches should look at a transitioning process from program-centered approach to the purpose-driven model. The first step of becoming a purpose-driven church is the preparation part of the vision of transitioning an existing church or planting a new church.<sup>10</sup> The vision process is a lifelong journey, not an end in itself. Henry Blackaby says, “we must see where God is working and join Him in His vision.”<sup>11</sup> Obviously, God has a vision for His church and the leadership must prepare the church to join God in what He wants to do in His church. How is it possible for the leadership to do this? First, one must find out everything possible about the unchurched people in driving distance around the church or the place the church is to be planted. Surveys, questionnaires, polls, and canvassing are all excellent ways of collecting data.<sup>12</sup> Also, studying other churches that are reaching unchurched people can be very helpful. If the concentration is on transitioning a traditional church, the church must be discontent and desperate to move to a purpose-driven model. If the church is content and not passionate about reaching lost people, it will be extremely difficult to change.<sup>13</sup>

This preparation must be thorough and not rushed. As stated earlier, many pastors coming to Southwest Virginia are only looking to stay a few years until

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<sup>10</sup> Southerland, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Blackaby, Experiencing God (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 1990), 72.

<sup>12</sup> Southerland, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 32.

something else becomes available. If a pastor is on his way to another ministry and he cannot commit the best years of his life to his church, he should not pursue any changes. This is a tremendous problem in the existing churches of Southwest Virginia. Many young pastors right out of seminary come to the area and try to change everything. Many of the churches have trusted their pastor and agreed to some of the changes only to have their hearts broken when the pastor heads to another more prosperous ministry. In most cases, the next pastor coming to the church meets immediate resistance when he tries to change anything. Pastors need to understand the process of changing traditional churches is very, very slow.<sup>14</sup>

After the vision has been prepared, the second step is to define the vision to the core group or the present leadership of the church.<sup>15</sup> In order to define vision, the church must understand its purpose. The purposes have been covered in the previous chapter. The purposes of the church are not up for debate. They have been given directly by God through His Word. The methods used to meet those purposes should be specific for each church. Once the church or core group has been educated on the five purposes, the target to be reached has to be determined. Businesses spend a lot of time discovering their primary customers. Church planters and existing churches need to do the same. Looking at collective data will help determine the primary target of unreached people. The leadership must decide who they are best equipped to reach with what they have to offer.<sup>16</sup> It is not possible for a church to reach everyone in their community. So they

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 52.



must decide their target. The immediate target geographically is between five and ten miles around the church. Church planters and existing churches need to research the education, income, occupation, and marital status of the people in this area. There are some things that can be learned by knowing the culture of the area.

Church should be done differently for different cultures. Once a purpose and target have been determined, a strategy must be decided. A strategy will be based on the mission statement of the church. The author's church's mission statement is, "To Know Him and Make Him Known." There must be a well-defined strategy in order to hit the intended target. After preparing and defining the vision, the vision must be planted into the hearts of the leadership of the church.<sup>17</sup> If the church is being planted, then the church planter must be able to convey his vision to his core group. The tendency at this point is to move too quickly. The existing church staff or church planter has had possibly years to prepare for the vision and define the vision for themselves. At this point, the process is often rushed and not dealt with slowly enough for the leaders to grasp and understand what is needed to proceed with the next step. Southerland believes, in order to plant the vision in existing churches, you must give attention to three groups of leaders.<sup>18</sup> First, the approval of the power brokers must be secured. Second, the assistance of those who help the pastor/planter is going to be needed. Third, the advice of a vision team. These three groups of leaders will determine whether the vision succeeds or fails. Once approval has been granted by these three groups, the next step is to share

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 81.

the vision.<sup>19</sup> Since vision is both caught and taught, it must be shared in multiple ways.<sup>20</sup> The vision can be shared in the following ways: preaching, small groups, purpose statements, vision phrases, vision verses, faith stories, conferences, tapes, books, one-on-one, and living it out in your own life.<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, the author would like to speak specifically to pastors believing God would have them transition the church in which they serve. According to an interview with church planter, John McAlister, “To transition an established church, the pastor must transition or slowly give the ministry of the church to the people. Likewise, the pastor must turn the maintenance of the church to the staff or volunteer persons.”<sup>22</sup> Paul refers to this in Ephesians 4:11-13 where he writes, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>23</sup> In order for the ministry of the church to transfer to the people as opposed to the pastor, the pastor and/or staff must commit to empower the people to do ministry. The pastor must teach the church the role of the pastor versus the responsibilities of all believers according to the scripture is to carry out the work of the church.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>22</sup> John McAlister, Personal Interview.

<sup>23</sup> New King James Version of the Bible, Ephesians 4:11-13.

According to McAlister, the motto of the transitioning church must become “every church member a minister.”<sup>24</sup> First, start a gradual worship style transition. Focus on preaching for change to set the stage to determine the purpose of the church. The pastor can help the church form a purpose statement and then aid the church in embracing the five New Testament purposes for the church. It is important to emphasize the church’s responsibility to reach the unchurched. The author’s church has launched a New Member’s Class that has been extremely effective in helping new members find Christ as Savior and Lord of their lives and realize what is expected of them if they join the church as well as what they can expect of the staff when they join.

### **Small Groups**

One of the most successful ways in transitioning traditional churches to purpose-driven churches is by launching in-home community groups. Small groups are the place where all five purposes can be met within individuals’ lives. The predominant complaint of the traditional program driven churches in Southwest Virginia is that the churches are unable to care for their members in a meaningful way. Church members feel neglected and overlooked when they have sickness or other needs. The traditional church looks primarily to the pastor to meet all these needs, which is literally impossible, if the church is very large. Some of the larger churches in Southwest Virginia have instituted a deacon ministry plan to care for the members. This plan assigns a certain number of church families to be cared for by the deacon.

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<sup>24</sup> McAlister.

The author's church has had this program for the past several years. It has failed miserably and the author has been unable to find one church in Southwest Virginia where it is working well. The church has twenty-one deacons each supposedly caring for eight to twelve families. Four of the twenty-one are doing a good job with this ministry. All four of these deacons are retired and have gifts in serving others. The majority of the other deacons do not even know who their families are. There have been repeated attempts to make this ministry effective all to no avail. Many of these elected deacons feel as though they are not gifted for a ministry such as this. Several of these men are already spending between sixty and eighty hours a week at their employment. They simply have nothing left to give. Most of these deacons are involved in several other ministries already. Seven of these men teach a Sunday school class, eight of them are AWANA leaders, four are involved with the music ministry, and so on. All the deacons have agreed to transition to a small group ministry.

Traditionally, Sunday school has served as an example of small group ministry. Sunday school can still be very effective if it is organized to do more than provide discipleship. Over the years, Sunday school attendance has declined and represents less than forty percent of the church membership of Southwest Virginia. The Bible teaches small groups and celebration. The role of celebration takes place during the corporate worship and proclamation. The role of the small group is the place where the church accomplishes ministry, discipleship, assimilation of members, and deeper levels of fellowship. In the past, the role of the small group has been carried out in the Sunday school class. Recently, the growth of the small group movement is taking the place of Sunday school teaching in many churches.

Small groups are a biblical concept. In Acts 4:4, the early church started with one hundred twenty and quickly grew to five thousand. This large church presented some obvious problems. The apostles and elders solved this problem by structuring the churches around both large and small groups.<sup>25</sup> The large group meetings were used primarily for evangelism, preaching, and teaching.<sup>26</sup> The early church endured heavy persecution and scattered throughout several regions. Many times the believers met in homes for encouragement and support. The small group meetings had a variety of purposes. It was in these small groups that the early believers shared their material possessions with each other. Acts 4: 32 – 37 states that people were willing to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to those in need.<sup>27</sup> The small groups also served as a place where the believers shared in the Lord's Supper. On some occasions, worship and evangelism took place. These early believers gathered from house to house to pray and offer exhortation to one another. During some small group meetings, Paul shared the Scriptures for the purpose of discipleship. Every purpose is met in the small group setting proposed in the purpose driven church model.

The one major purpose for small groups is the transformation of a person's life through Biblical community.<sup>28</sup> Through small group interaction, one was able to get to know God better. Many theologians believe the small group movement is what caused such explosive growth in the early church. The reality is the lives are changed as a result

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<sup>25</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1992), 229.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 230.

of a significant relationship with either an individual or a small number of individuals in community.<sup>29</sup> It is clear that churches need to offer some type of ministry to encourage individuals to grow to spiritual maturity. Since the establishment of the church, God has worked miraculously through small groups to do just that.<sup>30</sup>

### **Advantages of Small Groups**

Several advantages are obvious. Small groups are not limited by facilities.<sup>31</sup> In many churches, Sunday school is considered a small group ministry. The fact of the matter is, due to a lack of classrooms in most church buildings, Sunday school classes become too large to have an effective small group atmosphere. Small groups are not bound by this problem since they usually take place in homes. A second advantage is location.<sup>32</sup> Small groups can be set up in neighborhoods with the specific purpose of reaching the people in that area. The author's church established small groups for a summer Sunday night Bible study. Since the church members live in several surrounding towns, special care was taken to establish at least one group in each area that was represented. The level of commitment rose as small group members took their job of ministering to their own neighborhood seriously. Often in congregational meetings, members do not get to know each other. And if they do, conversations usually consist of small talk at best. Even during the greeting time in a service, it seems most people do not

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 232-233.

leave their pew, but merely shake hands with the same people sitting around them each week. “Fifty-nine times the Bible exhorts believers to minister in some way to one another.”<sup>33</sup> It is impossible to meet the needs of fellow believers, if you do not know what those needs are.

Small groups encourage a family atmosphere where one can express their needs and concerns to people they know care and receive the needed prayers and assistance. A common problem pastors complain about in churches today is that approximately twenty percent of the members do about eighty percent of the work. However, small groups make it easy and non-threatening for laypeople to minister to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>34</sup> Tragic circumstances or unbearable problems may often lead someone to a church as they are in desperate search for something to fill the void they are experiencing in their life. Yet, too often these people slip in and out of our congregations without ever establishing significant friendships within the church. Small groups help this assimilation process.<sup>35</sup> It may be difficult to notice a new face among five hundred, but in a small group of twenty, each person is recognized.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of small groups is the flexibility they provide in organization. As mentioned before, groups can be formed according to town or neighborhood. However, having a group close to their home is not the only thing that attracts potential members. They may be looking for a particular age group, the number of children in the group, meeting times that fit their schedule, etc. These are all practical

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 235.

concerns of those looking for a group to join.<sup>36</sup> One of the biggest factors in the decision making process may be common interests. These could include focuses on missions, prayer, topical study, book study, children's ministry, family, or singles. Also, special groups can be formed to support those struggling with particular addictions, abuse, depression, or other issues that effect their daily lives.<sup>37</sup>

Establishing small groups is a big step toward ministering to the needs of a church. And forming groups according to geography, age, need, etc. will help make their ministry more effective. Each group will differ and must adjust to meet the individual needs of its members. However, there are some basic building blocks that must be present in every group in order for this ministry to be carried out successfully. Bible study is required to properly nurture each member spiritually.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, Bible study alone does not create an ideal small group. The group should also be a place of support, where trust is built, and needs are met.<sup>39</sup> There should also be a common goal or mission for the group. This often involves reaching a certain type of people or focusing on using a particular spiritual gift to serve others.<sup>40</sup> Dwayne Carson, campus pastor at Liberty University, teaches his student leaders what small groups should consist. "The small group is a sanctuary. It is a place of worship. The small group is a learning center. It is a place of instruction. The small group is a connecting center. It is a place of fellowship.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 238.



The small group is a support center. It is a place of encouragement.”<sup>41</sup> Carson also stresses the importance that every member of the group is loved, prayed for daily, prayed with, and disciplined.

### **Leadership of Small Groups**

One of the most challenging aspects of establishing a small group ministry is choosing and training the leaders. Each leader must take on the role of shepherd and lead and care for his flock as Christ Himself did and continues to do.<sup>42</sup> There are certain qualifications that every leader should meet. The first is an ever-growing passion for Christ.<sup>43</sup> It is impossible for one to lead others to spiritual maturity if he himself does not have the desire to deepen his walk with God. In addition to a passion for Christ, a small group leader must show strength of character. No one is perfect. However, a leader needs to realize that they will be watched, criticized, and possibly imitated. Therefore, they must continuously maintain a character worthy of leadership.<sup>44</sup> A leader must also be called to disciple God’s people.<sup>45</sup> Author Allen Hadidian gives a definition of what a discipler is and does.

Discipling others is the process by which a Christian with a life worth emulating commits himself or herself for an extended period of time to a few individuals

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>42</sup> Bill Donahue, The Willow Creek Guide To Leading Life-Changing Small Groups (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1996), 38.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 39.

who have been won to Christ, the purpose being to aid and guide their growth to maturity and equip them to reproduce themselves in a third spiritual generation.<sup>46</sup>

The greatest example we have of a leader is Jesus. In Mark 10:45, He said that He did not come to be served, but to serve.<sup>47</sup> Each leader must be competent in the skills needed for the position.<sup>48</sup> Dwayne Carson uses the words minister, mentor, and mobilizer to describe the job of a small group leader. They should minister to the needs of each member, mentor and disciple them as they grow in their spiritual lives, and mobilize them so they are ready and in a position to use their spiritual gifts to live for Christ and serve others. Leaders must be compatible to work with others as a team to reach a common goal.<sup>49</sup> They must have a high level of commitment to the members of their group, their ministry, the church, and Christ.<sup>50</sup> In addition to this, each leader needs the capacity to serve and care for others.<sup>51</sup> One who works long hours on the job and barely has time for his own family would not be a good candidate for the position even though he may be a strong Christian leader. A small group leader needs to be free to properly care for the members of his group who may be experiencing trauma in their lives.

As a church is looking for leaders to be involved in the small group ministry, they should be careful to check the motives behind each candidate. The New Testament lists several appropriate motives for leaders. These may include the desire to spread God's

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 40.

Word, to glorify God, to use one's spiritual gifts to serve others, to bear good fruit, to shepherd the flock, and to be an example.<sup>52</sup>

It is essential that prospective leaders understand the role they are required to serve. They will be responsible for forming a leadership team. It is important for each leader to surround himself with others who will be diligent to pray for and support his ministry. In 1 Timothy 2:2, Paul gave this advice to Timothy when he said to teach faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Leaders will be responsible for conducting the group meetings.<sup>53</sup> This may include choosing materials or adapting them to fit the needs of the group. The leader should not do everything at the meetings though. Small groups should provide the opportunity when each member has the opportunity to express themselves, their opinions, and their needs. The group leader should act as the facilitator of discussions. He should acknowledge each person who speaks, clarify what is said, generate discussion, and summarize the discussion.<sup>54</sup> Leaders must be willing to take care of their sheep.<sup>55</sup> They should pray for members, serve and encourage them, as well as creating a trustworthy atmosphere where the group can share problems, hurts, and worries.<sup>56</sup> It has been said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. It is also the leader who should take the initiative to invite others to the group.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> Donahue, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 46.

## Small Group Meetings

Once leaders are assigned and the groups are formed, the decision must be made concerning format and what exactly will take place at a meeting. Churches usually adopt one of three structures to apply to their small groups. Set structure takes place when every group within the church does the same thing (Bible study, format, etc.). Open structure gives flexibility to the leaders and their groups to choose an agenda that best works for them.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes churches give a list of materials and agendas to choose. Other times the groups may have complete flexibility to decide on their own. Varying structure occurs when several formats are rotated between groups.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of the structure the church and groups decide on, there are some things to be mindful of when it comes to the actual meetings. First, God made each individual unique.<sup>60</sup> Since this is the case, the leader should be aware of each personality and understand that members will respond and interact in different ways. Just as a schoolteacher must adapt to the learning styles of the students, small groups must take into account the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.<sup>61</sup> Meetings should be interesting and add enough variation to keep away from boredom.

Dwayne Carson trains his student leaders at Liberty University to take specific steps to be prepared for their weekly small group meetings. The first step is to plan the

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<sup>58</sup> Neal F. McBride, Ed.,D., Ph.d., How to Build A Small Group Ministry (Colorado Springs, Colorado, NavPress, 1995), 87.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>60</sup> Donahue, 104.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 103-104.

lesson. The leader should introduce the topic explaining why it is important, use the Bible to research what God has to say about it, and apply it to the lives of each member. The leader should ask opening questions as an icebreaker. Launching questions should be used to initiate conversation on the meeting's topic. Guiding questions are strategically asked throughout the meeting to keep discussions focused. Also, application questions can be used at the end of the meeting to help members discover how they can apply what they have learned.<sup>62</sup> Preparation is the next step. One should prepare himself or herself through prayer, Scripture reading, and establishing a caring attitude. Other things to prepare include the lesson, the format, and the meeting place. The place should be clean and free of clutter that can distract those present. It should be a warm, friendly atmosphere that feels like home. Third, is the invitation step. The leader should be in contact with group members and spark anticipation about the group meeting. The fourth step is presentation. A leader should be open and real when presenting the lesson. It should be exciting and obvious that the needed preparation was done and the leader is ready and excited about the meeting. Last is the process of evaluation. After each meeting, the leader should talk to members and get their input about what could be done differently to improve the effectiveness of the meetings. One should not get discouraged, but keep in mind that there is always room for improvement.

In addition to the leader evaluating how the small group meetings are going, the church should establish a means of evaluating the leaders and goals of each small group. First, it must be decided who will need to be evaluated and who will evaluate them.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 112-114.

Often the pastor or a ministry team is responsible for this.<sup>63</sup> Also, a timetable should be set up to evaluate monthly, quarterly, yearly, etc.<sup>64</sup> Finally, it should be decided what needs to be evaluated.<sup>65</sup>

### **Transitioning to Purpose-Driven Model**

The purpose and goals that were set at the beginning should not be forgotten. Efforts must be made to keep the group focused on their ministry. There must be a commitment to the plan of transition in spite of the challenges that arise. There may be people who will leave the church and there will be others who will try to take the vision hostage by imposing their preconceived or traditional ideas on the church. One must give people an opportunity to buy into each step of the transition plan. Every church is unique and cannot be cloned, but must find its own uniqueness in order to be effective in its community. The transition process will take years. It cannot be accomplished in a few months. The author has committed his life and ministry to stay where he is so that he can continue to take his church through this transition.

The pastor must stay focused on the vision of the transition and evaluate everything that happens in the church in light of the impact it will have on the transition. There will be numerous distractions and problems that will arise, but the process of change must continue. Hopefully the transition will ensure a legacy that will continue in future generations of the church.

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<sup>63</sup> Malphurs, 246.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 247.

## **Senior Adults and Transitioning**

One group of people that is often overlooked in transitioning churches is the Senior Adults. It is imperative that Senior Adults become a part of the transitioning team. Not only do Senior Adults give a larger percentage of their finances, they also have credibility within the church where they can be trusted as transition occurs. A wise pastor will enlist the Senior Adults to lead the way in making the changes of transition. It is the Senior Adults that have seen the most change in their lifetime. Although they may not be happy with all the changes they have had to experience, they do know change is fact of life. McAlister says Senior Adults could be the legacy leaders in giving credibility to the changes the pastor would like to make within the church.<sup>66</sup> Senior Adults must be honored through each step of the process, not manipulated, but given the respect they deserve for their years of faithfulness. They need to be kept informed, enlisted as prayer partners, and given an important part in the transition process. It is the author's opinion that if Senior Adults can embrace change or new ideas, the rest of the church family will generally follow. The church family must continually be told that the heartbeat of the church must rest in reaching those who do not know Christ as their personal Savior. No church will turn away members from other churches, but the priority must always be on reaching the lost.

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<sup>66</sup> McAlister.

## **Conflict and Transitioning**

One of the most difficult processes for pastors or church planters will be conflict that arises through the process of change or planting a new church. Pastors seem to be wired to please people. When people begin to abandon the vision or leave the church, pastors often panic and change direction. Each pastor must remember that pleasing God is really what matters. Pastors are simply called to do what God says is best for His church. No church will be perfect nor be able to please everyone. The church does not belong to the pastor, it belongs to Jesus Christ. Thus, Christ should always be honored and lifted up in the transition or planting process. As He is lifted, He will draw men to Him.

For those planting new churches, risk will always be part of the future. No great churches are built without risk. The author has had to risk several things as he has seen his church transition over the past eighteen years of ministry. One of the biggest risks happened five years ago when he decided that God was leading the church to move to two services. Much opposition came as a result, but the church voted to pursue with two services for a six-month trial period. There was a risk because the opposition that was involved was fierce at times. Some believed the church would split. Others believed there would be two churches formed. Hardly anyone saw the vision that God was leading the pastor to see that new people could be reached in a contemporary style worship service. Today, six years later, the church believes it was one of its best moves ever. The early morning service has almost matched the traditional 11 a.m. service in attendance. Most of the growth and new converts have come through this early morning service.



There will be a risk anytime pastors decide to build buildings, buy property, hire staff, create new programs, and develop new methods. Risk is part of ministry. During these times of stress in the ministry, it is important for the pastor to keep a sense of humor, to pray constantly for God's wisdom, and to maintain personal integrity in his own walk with God.

### **Stress and Transitioning**

Recently the author attended a local Pastor's Conference consisting of pastors serving in Southwest Virginia. The topic of the conference dealt with stress and burnout in the ministry. Many of the pastors in attendance shared about the tremendous amounts of stress they were under due to the ministry of the local church. Some shared they felt as if their lives were out of control. Several of the pastors shared about how church members had tried to manipulate them into being what they thought they ought to be rather than what God made them to be. It was a basic principle of identity where these pastors were unsure of who they were. As a result, major stress had come into their lives because they were trying to be somebody they were not. They had put on masks and hidden their real selves. They feared that some of the church would find out what they were really like. So they put a mask on and the result was stress. The speaker shared that the way a minister can compensate with external pressure is to have an internal sense of satisfaction about who God had made them to be.

Other pastors shared about the stress of trying to please everybody within the congregation. It seems in Southwest Virginia that many of the churches expect the pastor

to do many things that is impossible for him to do. It is impossible to try to please every person in a church even if the church is small. The speaker encouraged these pastors struggling with this issue to live for an audience of one. He used the example of Jesus who committed His whole life to please His Father. In the process, Jesus Christ made some enemies along the way, but His goal was accomplished and His Father was pleased. The speaker encouraged these pastors to do the right thing by trying only to please God. In working with people, there are going to be conflicts of expectation. When these conflicts arise, stress is the result. Thus, each individual must answer the question, “Who am I going to please?” If this question is not answered early on in the ministry, pastors will face discouragement, depression, and eventual burnout. Jesus Christ never let the fear of rejection manipulate Him. He was not controlled by the opinions and the approval of others. If pastors focused on trying to please everybody, they eventually cave in either to competition, or conflict, or criticism. Thus, eventually many pastors will blame other people for the pressure they have allowed themselves to be under.

A third factor that surfaced during this Pastor’s Conference centered around the principal of organization. Pastors whose lives and ministries were organized were a lot less stressed than pastors whose ministries and lives were out of control. The speaker encouraged the pastors to set priorities and define basic goals in their lives. If goals are not set in the life of the pastor, it is easy to become manipulated by the opinions of other people. Warren says that the pastors who are most stressed in life are pastors who have no purpose.<sup>67</sup> Good organization and preparation reduces stress. Preparation prevents pressure, but procrastination produces pressure. If pastors in Southwest Virginia would

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<sup>67</sup> Warren, Purpose-Driven Church, 271

become more organized and have clear-cut objectives as to what they wish to accomplish within ministry, stress levels could be significantly reduced. Jesus Christ knew who He was and knew whom He was trying to please. Once these goals and objectives have been established, pastors must stay focused to the direction in which God has led them. There will always be interruptions and tragedies that tend to cause our focus to be shifted. The speaker encouraged each of the pastors to remain persistent and continue to be determined to focus on the direction and vision God had placed in his life.

One of the greatest problems that surfaced during this conference was pastors trying to do too many things. Many of the pastors had refused to delegate areas of ministry and were trying to accomplish all the ministry themselves. One pastor shared how he was on every committee within the church and attended all committee meetings as well as was responsible for church finances and all the teaching from the pulpit. He said that he suffered a major heart attack ten years into his ministry. He resigned from the pastorate and chose denominational work. He encouraged the other pastors struggling with stress in their lives to delegate areas except for biblical requirements upon the pastor. Two of the pastors shared how they thought the whole life of the church depended upon them. As a result, they bore the entire responsibility of the church's growth. The speaker tried to encourage the pastors to see that this is not a biblical approach to ministry. He used the example of Jesus and reminded the pastors how Jesus had focused on twelve other people to help Him out. If pastors cannot learn to delegate responsibilities in life, they hinder their own growth and development spiritually. One pastor shared how he had struggled with delegating responsibilities within the church. Because of his perfectionist attitude, He believed that the times he had delegated ministry

in the past that it was not accomplished as well as he could have done it himself. He became reluctant to share any ministry objectives and decided that he would try to accomplish these things himself. He tried to keep this pace for four years before eventually resigning his situation and going into secular work. He shared how he learned that he had to allow people to make mistakes. Not only did he grow in that process, but he saw others grow as well. Today he is in the ministry pastoring a local church doing much better because he has learned to delegate ministry responsibilities.

This particular conference opened the eyes of the author to see that many of his closest pastoral friends were burning out in their own ministry. The author has been in full-time ministry for the past twenty years. He was asked how he remained focused in the ministry for twenty years. The author shared two things in response. First, the importance of abiding in Christ and developing a daily quiet time to allow God to speak was a discipline he learned early in the ministry. Second, to apply consistent Bible reading each day allowed him to stay fresh over the years of ministry. As a believer, one realizes that Christ must be the center of the Christian life. Spending time with Jesus Christ is a must for pastors as well as believers. This time is known as the quiet time or personal devotions. The author knows of nothing else that has been as important to him personally as his daily quiet time with the Lord. Every believer can spend a short period of time with God each morning. Once this time becomes consistent, one can move from ten minutes to the possibility of several hours in fellowship with the Lord. A quiet time is more than just a discipline. Rather, it is an appointment at the beginning of the day with Jesus Christ who desires to be the center of our lives. The author encouraged these pastors struggling with stress and pressure to make a personal quiet time the first priority

of their day. It is important to select a time to spend with God that fits their schedule. The morning hours may be preferable, but a quiet time can be accomplished at any time during the day.

Next, the author encouraged each minister to develop a balanced plan of Bible reading and prayer. Other pastors shared how reading through the Bible during the year had been such an encouragement to them when they went through stress within their ministry. One pastor shared how he had kept a journal over the years. It had been the greatest encouragement to growing faith in his life as he looked back to see how God had brought him through time and time again. Another pastor shared how his time of prayer used an acrostic “ACTS” which stood for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. He began his prayer life by praising and worshipping God followed by confession of sins. He spent several minutes of just asking God to cleanse his life in order to be a vessel that could be used for God’s purpose. He then shared about how God had made him a thankful person through his prayer life and how God had met every need that he had had within his ministry. The author encouraged these ministers to be persistent until they were consistent. The quiet time should not be a ritual or another meeting, or a habit that becomes mundane. The focus must be kept on the Person in whom you are meeting.

Since the Pastor’s Conference there have been many conversions. Numerous pastors called upon the author while he worked on this project to sit and to share a strategy to overcome stress and burnout within the ministry. There is a tremendous need among pastors to find fellowship with one another because pastors cannot establish best friendships within their local church. Pastors need other pastors. They need to be able to

trust one another and to pray for one another that God would keep them focused on the vision in which He has implanted within their life.

## ***CHAPTER SEVEN***

### **CONCLUSION**

When church planters or new pastors come to Southwest Virginia, this project could be a real help for their ministry to be successful. It is obvious to see there is a great need for churches to be planted in the Southwest Virginia region. Some existing churches in Southwest Virginia are growing, but the vast majority are plateaued or in decline. There is much work to be done. Sixty-eight percent of the people in the region are unchurched.

### **Cultural Differences**

In many ways, Southwest Virginia is a unique culture. It seems that this region is about ten years behind the times of other localities. This can serve as an advantage to pastors because it gives some time to discern what is working in other church cultures. Instead of always trying to be on the front lines, pastors in Southwest Virginia can take some time to study other ministries and implement proven strategies for church growth. The church must continually evaluate everything in order to effectively fulfill the Great Commission.

### **Advantage For Native Pastors**

It is an advantage for the pastor to be a native of Southwest Virginia. It takes a

special person to be effective in ministry in this region. There is room for an “outsider” to have a successful ministry in Southwest Virginia if he is willing to stay long enough and earn the trust of the people. If the church ever perceives that the pastor does not respect them, his ministry will fail. Likewise, the pastor must also adapt to the culture of Southwest Virginia. For example, a larger church in the area called a pastor from the north with a long list of accolades. During the first week of his pastorate, he decided to mow his yard one Sunday afternoon. A member drove by the parsonage that day and saw what the new pastor was doing and was shocked. She shared this with other members and he was never able to overcome what he did. He was soon asked to leave because Sunday is still a “day of rest” in the region.

### **Conservative and Traditional**

Southwest Virginia is a conservative area holding traditions that other localities did away with years ago. The most effective pastors in Southwest Virginia have been those that have made and kept long-term commitments. They have given the best years of their lives to the region. Churches respond to a leader that has given his heart to his ministry. The people know he loves them and they are willing to follow his plans. He does not try to lord over, manipulate, or bring them up to his level. He learns and works alongside his members and they grow together. This kind of leader can accomplish great things in Southwest Virginia.



### **Lack of Trained Leadership**

Another conclusion that can be drawn is tremendous need for lay leadership in Southwest Virginia. Most of the churches surveyed had a lack of trained leaders. As a result, the pastor assumed the majority of the ministry. In order for the church to grow and be all God intends for it to be, leaders must be trained and challenged. True leaders take people to places they have never been before. The pastor must be willing to share in his leadership. He must provide opportunities for leadership training. There are many resources and helps available to nurture future leaders. Leaders search for opportunities to challenge the status quo and, using their insight, challenge the membership to move toward opportunities. Leadership training will involve experimentation and risk-taking. Good leaders learn from their mistakes and refuse to give up. Leaders must share their vision and be willing to give their lives to it. Personal conviction goes a long way in attracting others to help fulfill the vision.

Pastors must promote cooperative goals and mutual trust. A joy in ministry is the opportunity to build trusting relationships. Values that are shared will make a difference and unify membership. As people are empowered to lead, ministry is shared and much more is accomplished.

Leaders set the example for others to follow. They must be people of integrity and willing to do what they say they will do. Leaders are able to make major change by a process of small steps. Major change does not come overnight, but rather through a consistent commitment to a future vision. The accomplishment of small steps toward change must be celebrated and valued as victories. Leaders can help church members understand their giftedness. Once the spiritual gift has been identified, the leader can

assign a ministry based on that gift. Leaders are human and make mistakes. No leader is a saint; however, a leader must be willing to adhere to a firm set of values in order to convince others the worth of those values. Lay leaders will be the key in sharing the vision, enabling others to act, and modeling the way.

### **Lack of Vision**

Many pastors in Southwest Virginia have no vision or planned direction for the church they pastor. Without a planned destination, no one knows where to go. For churches, that leads to people doing ministry without a purpose. The challenge of sharing Christ with this post-modern world seems overwhelming at times. The church must pursue a “new thing” by constantly analyzing whether or not yesterday’s methods still bear fruit. There will be times that church programs need to die with dignity. The leadership must continually dream new dreams and look at new ways to reach people with the Gospel.

### **Need For Mentors**

In Southwest Virginia, pastors are often isolated. As the surveys were received, one of the main concerns from pastors was a lack of involvement with other pastors. It is difficult to develop a healthy church when pastors are lacking healthy relationships. Pastors need peers to talk with and receive encouragement. Many pastors feel overwhelmed with their workloads. The church they serve expects them to be the fourth

person of the Trinity. Many churches place much more on their pastors than they can ever accomplish. Pastors struggle in developing close friendships for fear that the other members will be jealous. As a result, seasoned pastors need to develop mentoring relationships with church planters and new pastors to Southwest Virginia. Most pastors would welcome this kind of relationship in their lives. This would allow pastors, serving as mentors, the opportunity to make investments in others that will impact eternity.

### **Church Planting Teams**

One of the major accomplishments of this project was to aid Directors of Missions to establish church planting teams. The teams in each association are in the process of finding the best locations to plant new churches. These teams will aid church planters with resources that were not available before this project was undertaken. These resources would include church support from a mother church within the association, financial support from that particular church and the association, and lay people who would be willing to serve on a volunteer basis to help the new church get firmly planted. Several larger churches have also agreed to share technology equipment with new church plants. This list would include sound equipment, computers, audio/visual equipment, musical selections for praise and worship, etc.

### **Purpose-Driven Network**

One of the greatest benefits of the project has been the establishment of a network for church planters through the ministry of Highlands Fellowship located in Abingdon, Virginia. The Senior Pastor, Rev. Jimmie Davidson, has developed a church planter network that consists of a cluster of several new church plants in Southwest Virginia and upper East Tennessee. This network meets once a month and has been invaluable in helping church planters to be more successful as they plant the church God has laid on their heart. The network provides church planter mentors and church plant support leadership. The monthly network meeting discusses problems and praises, and future vision. The mentors serve the church planters by providing someone to talk with and a willingness to address the personal growth of each church planter. The network also provides basic training for church planters and their spouses for the development of an effective ministry. Rev. Davidson has also agreed to help financially with early church plants. His church gives regularly, along with other established churches that are involved in the network, to help church planters as they locate in Southwest Virginia. The network also provides conference scholarships and related materials as well as a shared library for resources to train leadership within each of the church plants.

This network will have a profound effect in planting churches for the future of Southwest Virginia. The network has already been very effective in equipping new pastors and church planters to Southwest Virginia. The effects, Davidson believes, will be eternal in the scope of reaching the lost here in Southwest Virginia.

This network is made up of purpose-driven churches only. The purpose-driven model has proven very effective in Southwest Virginia. Purpose-driven churches are able

to understand and identify their purpose. The purpose is clearly defined and shared in a Mission Statement. The Mission Statement helps everyone to know why the church does what it does. This model helps people to connect with the church and grow toward spiritual maturity. It enables people to serve in ministry, share their faith, and surrender their lives to Christ.

The purpose-driven model is extremely effective in helping churches share their vision. Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” A good vision statement clarifies the ideal future of the church. This statement aids the church to set expectations and make decisions that are designed to have a specific outcome. Vision statements help the church maintain a focus on the priorities that God has called them to accomplish.

One reason purpose-driven churches have been so effective in Southwest Virginia is because they operate on a plan that defines steps of action. The plan is well organized and carefully developed. It is a plan that has been adopted by the entire congregation. This plan unifies the body to accomplish the vision.

Evaluation and reflection are keys to the purpose-driven model. In order for a church to impact its community, it must create methods for measuring its effectiveness. Evaluation enables the leadership to determine whether or not the ministry is in line with the mission vision and values of the church. Good measurements will help the leaders forecast an accurate future for the church. Not only should the church keep attendance records and track financial giving, it should evaluate how well it is accomplishing the mission of the ministry. God wants to reveal His plan and direction to each ministry. God is ready for His church to fulfill the Great Commission.

Any church can be purpose-driven. Many of the plateaued and declining churches in Southwest Virginia need to consider transitioning to a purpose-driven format. This would enable these churches to move from a program-driven, committee-based model to a model that is balanced between the five purposes of the church. Many of the plateaued churches have developed a maintenance mindset. This mindset looks inward and focuses on meeting the needs of those already in attendance. The church actually does not exist for Christians. Rather, the church is designed for those who are not yet members. God's design for the church is not that it exists to make people comfortable, but He instituted it as an equipping station to literally transform our communities with the Gospel.

The church is God's plan in redeeming the world to Himself. He intends to use the church to confront the godlessness of our culture. When the church turns inward it loses its effectiveness in the world. It is at that place that the church robs hope from individuals who are on a collision course with eternal separation from God. This is the state of the average church in Southwest Virginia. It is a hope that this project will enable churches to share the Gospel outward and follow God's leadership. By focusing equally on all five of the New Testament purposes of the church, it will develop the healthy balance that makes lasting growth possible. A stagnant, unfocused church can transform into a congregation committed to the purpose of reaching spiritually lost people, but it takes vision to make that transition. As transitions are made, leaders need to be sensitive to opportunities for making course alterations and dealing with those who feel neglected.

Hopefully the church will not miss out on new ways to help people grow spiritually and reach out to their community. This project is all about God fulfilling His agenda in Southwest Virginia. Nothing brings more glory to God than having His churches fulfill His purpose. Southwest Virginia holds a tremendous opportunity for new pastors transitioning plateaued churches as well as new church starts for those who would like to plant. The opportunities are limitless for new church plants in Southwest Virginia.

## ***INTERVIEW***

### **Interview with Rev. Jimmie Davidson**

**Senior Pastor at Virginia Highlands Fellowship Church, Abingdon, VA**

**Interviewer: Jimmie, I have a few questions to ask you and I appreciate you taking some time to share with me today. My hope is that the Lord might use this to help future church planters in Southwest Virginia. I know that's your heart, too, that you want to help them all you can. If you could, describe for me a little bit about your ministry here in Southwest Virginia. I know you're a Southwest Virginia native. Maybe you could give me the importance of being from the area and give me a recap of where you've been since you've been in the ministry.**

Basically, having grown up here in Southwest Virginia in the Abingdon area, I think it's really been an awesome thing. Often when growing up, I felt like that and even heard in church that you can never come back home. So most of my ministry and school, I thought the one place I could never go and serve in would be Abingdon, VA. Part of that was because I thought I could never go back to my home church. Yet God, in the way that He works, the very thing that you think He can't do or won't



do is the very thing that He does. If you look in the Old Testament, God often sent the prophets to their home people and towns. So for me, the positive thing about that has been I understand the people here. I speak their language. Even though we all speak English, there is a different dialect in this area. Therefore, I relate to these people. I understand these people. I know what they like and what they don't like. I think that's been huge the fact that I'm one them. The fact that I feel that God called me back to this area, not specifically for the people that I grew up with or my home church here in Abingdon, VA. In fact, what God's actually done is He called me back here to start a church for the people that have moved to this area that felt locked out of most of the social institutions including the churches here and they had no place to go. Typically, if you didn't grow up in Abingdon and were not a part of churches here, you'd have to be here for years, and years, and years before you'd be accepted and jump through ten thousand hoops to ever be used. So Highlands has really become a church, not only for the unchurched, but also for people that are moving in here who really feel locked out of a lot of churches in the area. That's been huge.

**Interviewer: I know you've pastored a traditional church. How many years were you over at Grundy Baptist Church?**

Three years. That was my first church out of Southwestern Seminary.

**Interviewer: Can you explain the difference between what you saw in pastoring a traditional church versus planting this purpose-driven-style church here at Highlands.**

There's a huge difference. Just like night and day having grown up in traditional Southern Baptist life. While I was in seminary, I pastored a church for two years part-time on Sundays. It was a very traditional, hundred-year-old church. Then Grundy Baptist, that celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in September, a Southern Baptist Church and everything that goes with that. The difference between pastoring a church like that and pastoring Highlands Fellowship is amazing. By my second year at Grundy Baptist Church, I had totally burned out. I was in my early 30's and I didn't think I could burn out at my age. I had such a desire to succeed and to be everything that I had been taught that a Southern Baptist pastor was supposed to be. I did everything I could to meet that expectation. You can't do that! There's nobody alive that can meet the expectations that churches have for Southern Baptist pastors in traditional churches. This was a church running about 180 people and I totally burned out to the point that I stayed sick all the time. I would joke with my wife that the CDC should set up headquarters in our parsonage and track all known viruses going through because I would get it. It got to the point that I would go to the office and sit there all day and look at the wall. I was that burned out. I couldn't dream. I couldn't do anything because I had done everything for everybody. But the positive thing that happened is that I became so discouraged, often telling people the only reason I stayed in the ministry at that point was I knew God had called me and I was afraid He'd kill

me if I quit. That is the only reason I stayed in the ministry. I was hurting that bad. It made me open to God's will for my life. I jokingly tell people it was like when I reached the lowest point, the Lord kind of looked at me and said, "Are you done yet? If you're done doing everything you're doing and you're ready, I'll show you how I've built My church and how it's to be run and what I want to do." For me, it probably took that because I'm the type of person that never dreamed of second-guessing the structures of the Southern Baptist Church or the way you do church. This is the way I was taught; therefore, it has to be right. I never even thought about questioning it. My philosophy was if it didn't work, let's just do it a little bit harder. That didn't work either. So, it made me open to the Lord and things that He wanted to say to me that I probably would have never been open to any other way. Through that process, I found out about Saddleback Valley Community Church, a Southern Baptist Church, that practices the purpose-driven model.

I began to study that model and, for me, I've always had a passion for reaching people for Christ. That drives me! When I drive down the road on the interstate and I see lots of people, the first thing I think about is I wonder if they know the Lord? That's just me. When I saw this model and began to study it, it opened the New Testament up for me, things that had been there all my life. God's Word has not changed, and, yet, I didn't see it, or didn't believe, or didn't understand. It just opened God's Word to a degree that I have never grown more spiritually than I have in the eight years that I've been the pastor of this church. Rick has been my pastor and I've listened to him and studied under him and my relationship with Jesus Christ is the closest it's ever been, ever! That's pretty amazing. That has an impact on the

people that I pastor. Simply my relationship with God has grown and people see that. I'm not perfect. They know I'm a very imperfect person, but they see the desire, the relationship, and that has an affect on people that you lead. So that's a little bit of the stark contrast in the church. On the flipside of the coin, I went from a church where I did everything to a very different church. I was everything to everybody and I moved to a model that I do what God has shaped and equipped me to do. I am a pastor. That means I'm to equip His people and to lead and feed them, but the body is there to serve and do the ministry because each person has a role. There's no limit to how big a church can get when you do that. So, I went from a church of 180 in attendance and was burned out, was dying, to a church now averaging 1800 to 2000 on the weekends and I'm having a ball. I stay very busy, but I'm not doing everything and being everything for everybody.

**Interviewer: One of the things that I'm trying to figure out is how to plant churches here in our area of Southwest Virginia. I really have a heart to not only see our church grow, but also to plant new churches, reach new people groups that possibly our church will not reach, and maybe Highlands. There's groups out there possibly that you wouldn't be reaching either. I know you've been real active in planting new churches and possibly if you could tell me a little bit about some of the churches you have helped to plant and what type of churches those are – if they're very similar to Highlands and then if any future plans of church planting exist right now.**

It's been kind of a neat ride. We've helped start or have been a part of five church plants. We've learned a lot by doing that. We believe in the purpose-driven model. Depending on the culture, the purpose-driven model will fit any style so you determine what type of people are there. It could be traditional purpose-driven, it could be contemporary, it could be country. So, we believe in the purpose-driven model and have planted purpose-driven churches. One of the things that we think is very effective is that you find someone who has a passion, a person who feels called to pastor and to plant a purpose-driven church. When you find that person, you then support them, joining with them in what they're doing. We've done that. That's been successful. I think what we've learned from that is you can really improve on that model because a lot of times you've got a guy who maybe has a passion to plant a purpose-driven church, but he doesn't know enough about it. So, he jumps out there on his own. We had one in Johnson City that failed. A real passion, but was lacking some skills. So, one of the things that we've learned that we would want to do is, if we started and planted another church like that, we would want that pastor to be on staff or part of the team here under Highlands Fellowship so that person could get the wisdom of all our pastors who have been doing this for eight years and don't make some of the mistakes that could destroy the church in its early days. Another model that we're thinking about is even better than that is we're going to experiment in a satellite model church. There are churches starting to do this in California. Willow Creek is beginning to do it. Andy Stanley is experimenting with it. It's working all over the place. We just came from a conference at Saddleback and one of the things that we looked at was potentially relocating our church. We're a regional church so

where are the crossroads? As we thought about that, we thought we'd have to move this thing to Bristol. Then you're going to miss the bulk of the people you're reaching in Abingdon so we decided that's probably not what God wants us to do. But the satellite model where we have worship teams and we have a core group of people who leave Highlands, possibly at the Holiday Inn at Bristol, call it the Bristol Campus, and watch a satellite of Highlands. We've got live worship, live Children's Program, greeters, ushers all that and when it comes time for the message, it is a video message of the weekend sermon at Highlands. We could begin a congregation that way and expand not only into Bristol, but into Johnson City, Kingsport, and other areas and develop churches that way. So we're thinking about that.

**Interview: Let me ask you this, what advice would you give to a new church planter just coming into Southwest Virginia? I know you've got some good ideas on what to do and what not to do. What kind of good advice would you give to a new guy coming in?**

Well, having done this, everybody I talk to I try to encourage. I don't understand why guys are not doing this by the thousands. Why not go into a community that is not being reached and plant one of these churches and within a year have as many people as they've had in most of the churches they're going to start in. There is a potential of who knows how large that church can grow. I would encourage any pastor to plan a purpose-driven church because I think they're needed in all the communities and in the country. I think what hinders a lot of the purpose-driven

plants, in the ones that I know that have struggled and failed, is that the pastor really has to come to grips with the model and he's got to lay aside his traditional viewpoints, things that mean a lot to him, and things that he grew up with. I know that was the biggest obstacle for me that I loved the hymns of the faith. I grew up with them. For me it was only appropriate to dress up in a suit if you were going to bring a message. I had to give those things up to go with God, to reach this culture that I'm in. Pastors have a tendency to bring a lot of those things with them and when they do that, they handicap the church. The church doesn't look any different than what people are already going to. Boy, you're dead in the water when you do that so I think really buying in to this whole way of doing church is critical.

**Interviewer: I think so many times too, in a traditional church, we see the pastor almost become the bottleneck of keeping the church from doing what God wants the church to do. If we can just let the church go and give it to the Lord and realize He's a lot better caretaker of it than we are that helps a lot too. I just wonder if you could back up a minute for me and explain how if you were looking for a new church planter, you would want a guy who had a passion for that area. Can you tell me how God began to give you this passion for this area here and how He led you to Highlands?**

Having grown up here, I know that when the Lord called me into the ministry, we felt led to attend Clear Creek Bible College. So, in going to school in Kentucky, even though it was a couple of hours away, it pulled us away from the community that I

grew up in. It's amazing how much you miss when you're close to something and how much more you could see when you've been pulled back from it. God pulled us back from it so that when we would visit, we began to notice that Abingdon was changing. It used to be a farming community and all of the sudden everybody's moving to Abingdon. Look at this place. They're building all over the place. Look at what's going on here. So we began to see a community that was growing. Because I have a passion to reach lost people, my first thought is that somebody should probably start a church in Abingdon to reach all these new people. It probably needs to be a different kind of church, although I didn't have a clue what that meant. It just needed to be different. This went on for eight or nine years. Same conversation with my wife when we would visit and come home once a year. Boy, Abingdon's growing. Somebody ought to start a church here and reach these people. Finally, going to Grundy Baptist a couple hours away, we would come home on the weekends. There was a combination of coming to the end of my rope, so to speak, and being open to doing church in a different way. Finally driving home one weekend, I turned to my wife and had this conversation I've had for nine years with her, "You know, honey, somebody should start a church in Abingdon." She looked at me that day for the first time and she said, "Well, why don't we do it?" That was the Lord and it's absolutely amazing. It's just amazing how you cannot see something unless the Lord shows you. For nine years, you would have thought that it would have dawned on me that maybe I needed to do it, but typically we're always thinking somebody ought to go do this and just maybe God's saying, "You ought to go do this." When we get that thought our response is, "Well somebody ought to go do it." That's what I did until



she looked at me and said, “Why don’t we do it?” My wife is very conservative and I’m thinking, “How can we win the world to Christ?” and she’s thinking, “What are we going to eat? Where are we going to live?” For her to say something like that, it shocked me. So much so that I went to my study at Grundy Baptist, I laid down flat in the floor and I asked God, “God, could it be after all these years, You have prepared us to do it?” There was an excitement, a joy, a realization that I think the Lord is telling us to do this! It is amazing how God is able to speak to you and get your attention without an audible voice. I did not hear an audible voice, but no doubt it was God’s Spirit all these years preparing me. I also think God had called lots of other people to do this before me. I know the Association had conducted a survey where over 200 families had said, “We would be interested in a new and different kind of Baptist Church in this area.” It was put into “File 13” and so I think God had spoke to a lot of people and I really believe I was the first person willing to say, “Okay, I’ll do it!”

**Interviewer:** I know today looking at what God’s done, it’s amazing and I know you’re thankful to be a part of it, but you know it’s the Lord. Can you tell me about the early days at Highlands, what it was like because you left a job, a salary, and all the things that we think we have to have. Share about taking that leap of faith. I know you’ve shared with us that you know that God was leading you to do it, but discuss the struggles of the early days. I think sometimes guys want to plant a church and we want everything there for us and it’s just not that way usually.

It was a tremendous struggle. It was scary and the scary part is, “Lord, is this me? Is this my idea or is this You? If it’s my idea, it’s going to be a flop.” I’m taking a wife and two baby girls, no income, no home, no church, no building, no nothing. I had a lot of people stand in line and tell me that I had lost my mind. “Why are you doing this?” “You’re going to hurt yourself as far as the relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention.” That type of thing. Who’s going to want you as a pastor if this flops? So there’s a lot of fear involved, but yet there was that feeling that God’s calling us to do this. I’ll never forget asking the Lord because my wife really, really, really, really struggled thinking that we’ve lost our minds. She had that first, “Let’s do it!” but after that she went back to her normal mode. I’ll never forget opening up the “Experiencing God” book just after I had prayed for God to show us, “Lord, if this is You, would you somehow show my wife that You’re in this?” I opened up the “Experiencing God” book to the verse in Psalm 81, “Open wide your mouth and I’ll fill it.” I read that verse and it was just like God was saying, “If you’ll obey me (that’s what He told His people), I’ll meet all your needs. I am your source.” So there was a lot of fear. There was excitement, but it was scary. I felt like jumping off a cliff. I’ll never forget when we rented a townhouse for \$500 a month and I told my wife, “If we go down, we’re going down big.” We signed a year lease with no job, no nothing. So in the beginning when we first started the church, just talking about how different it was, there was no one. We did an Open House at Christmas 1994 and I had my family here. My brother lived here and he said, “You know, I’ll do the music.” My sister and her husband lived here and they said, “We’ll help out. Mom and Dad, they were here, “We’ll help you out on this.” That first night at

Open House, we had advertised to the community that we were forming a core group. We had about 27 people. We did that for a couple of times and basically I taught them Class 101. It took about six weeks and I took them through that. Then we began to prepare for Worship Services. We did not do any worship until Easter in 1995. We wanted to build momentum and prepare and we did that. We practiced. We sent out about 8000 invitations to the community. So everyone understood the vision before we started. Everyone understood the style and strategy that we were going to use so when it came time for that first public introduction to the community, we were ready and people came. Rick Warren often says, "Most churches try to do too much too fast." I think he's 100 % right. Because we're not busy all the time, we think we're not being spiritual. Sometimes I think God wants to slow us down and focus on the right things and these other things will take care of themselves. So all we did in the beginning was try to do the best public weekend Sunday Service that we could do. Then we did small groups. We focused on that for two or three years, just building that and getting people involved in ministry through the weekend service. So in the early days I went from being burned out at Grundy, 70 plus hours a week, wife never seeing me, girls never seeing me, to starting Highlands in those early days and there wasn't anything to do. There were no people. There was nothing I could do and I went from my wife saying, "Honey, when are you ever coming home?" to her saying, "When are you ever going to leave?" But it really helped. It was a healing time for me too because I was so tired and it helped me get put back together.

**Interviewer: I know you went by the model of the Saddleback early on. Did you read something or before you came Abingdon, did you decide you were going to do purpose-driven? Can you tell me how you found Rick Warren and go through that?**

I wish I knew who told me about Saddleback and Rick Warren. I knew that God had called me to plant a church. God will tell you what He's going to do, not what you're going to do, but what He's going to do through you. Then He will tell you how He's going to do it. Most people, when God tells them what He's going to do, they go out and try to do it and they fail. They don't wait on the how. The third thing He tells you is when and He did all three things in my life. He told me what He was going to do, that He was going to plant a church and He was inviting me to join Him in that endeavor here in Abingdon. He then told me how He was going to do it and somebody came up to me and says, "You know, you ought to check out Saddleback." My response was, "What's a Saddleback? Is that a horse farm? What is that? That's a strange name." They told me it was a church in southern California. I contacted the church, told them what I was going to do, and asked them, "Is there anything you have that I could read or look at?" They sent me a tape of the story of Saddleback Church. I played the tape and cried through the whole tape. The Lord spoke to me through that and this is what He wanted me to do. Rick didn't have the book out or anything at that time, but he had begun doing the Church Growth Conferences. I ordered six or seven of his Church Growth tapes, "How To Attract A Crowd", "How To Turn A Crowd Into An Army", and all that. I studied those tapes for six months. I mean I

could have quoted it to you. I breathed, I ate it on how to do church this way, the purpose-driven church. That's how I started. The Lord really gave me about a six-month preparation time. Had I moved and started Highlands before I was prepared, we would be running about 100 right now. He not only told me what He was going to do, but He then equipped me and showed me how to do it. I can't tell you how important that is because you'll end up planting the same thing you are and what you're used to. Usually that's not what the Lord is going to do. He's going to do something that's outside of your comfort zone.

**Interviewer: Can you bring me up to the present? Maybe share about your facilities? Where you started meeting at first and how you got to where you are today? The steps and the stages you've gone through.**

When we started Highlands, we began meeting in the Coomes Recreational Center. Easter of 1995 we had 156 people to show up for the first public worship service which was a huge church for this area right off the bat. It wasn't long after we started meeting there that we were such a large group that they threw us out. They said we were wearing out their facilities. We thought the world was coming to an end. Where will we go? What will we do? We wound up in Abingdon High School and they had two different auditoriums. They had an auditorium that seated 104 people that was kind of a theatre-type thing. Then they had their main auditorium that seated 940. Well the 940-seat auditorium scared us to death averaging 100 people and about 40 of those children. So we went to the little theatre-type thing and in a couple of weeks it

was full. So we moved into the main high school auditorium with about 80 adults sitting in this 940-seat auditorium. It broke every church growth rule that you could break. I can still remember walking out on stage and I would want to go, “Hello out there!!!!” And they were sitting all over the auditorium. They wouldn’t sit together and even in the early days we put up ropes to try to direct them to a certain area and they would just crawl over the ropes. So we took those down. I love to use lots of humor and I can still remember using the humor and they would just sit there and look at me! I can remember Stephen doing the worship and nobody would sing and nobody would clap. Because we were being sensitive to the unchurched, the temptation was to make them stand up and do something, but we decided, “No, we’re not going to do that!” For years we would gather up backstage after the service would be over and we would all look at each other and we’d go, “I don’t think anybody will be back next week!” It just felt that way. It felt like a Kiwanis Club. But not only would they come back, they’d bring a friend or two with them. So it started very small, but their lives were being changed and their friends saw that so they would come with them. They were witnessing and they didn’t even know they were witnessing. So it began to grow! It finally got to the point that the high school auditorium, although not nearly full, we would almost pack the place out. So we began to drop more hooks in the water. We started with a 9:30 a.m. service and maybe three years into it, we decided, “You know what? We could have people show up at Easter and not have enough seats for them if people really respond.” So we always have launched new services at Easter. So we launched an 11 a.m. service and it was a huge success for Easter weekend, but after that we ran about 100 people. It kind

of felt like when we first started there. So we met there for five years. We built our first building three years ago and finished it. It's about a 46 or 47 thousand square foot Worship Education Building and seats about 850. That's kind of been our journey on that.

**Interviewer: Could you go through how many services you have and how many in attendance at each service? I know you activities scheduled during the week, but what is a typical week at Highlands?**

We've added a few worship services here lately. We do a lot of experimentation. If it doesn't work, we cut the lights off and act like we never did it. So the people are really comfortable with that. We have an atmosphere where people embrace change. So we've launched a brand new service on Tuesday nights. Right now I think they call it "Underground." It's basically for singles. They have an "Underground" band and one of our pastors preaches at that. They're probably averaging 40 or 50 people in that service right now. We've also launched a brand new service at 12:30 p.m. on Sundays. We're trying to target the 18 to 20 something. It's a different band and different music than the 9:30 a.m. or the 11 a.m. Even though we're all strictly a contemporary worship church, this is still a little more contemporary for that age group. I preach that service and we're averaging about 100 in that service. So we're pleased. We do a Saturday night service. The Saturday night is our same style as the 9:30 and the 11, but without the choir. We probably average about 200 in that service. Then we have the 9:30 and the 11 on Sunday morning and that's with the Highlands

Gospel Choir plus our bands. We probably average 600, 700, or 800 between the two services. They're pretty much balanced. The 11 a.m. service took off after we moved into our facilities. When we left the Abingdon High School, we were averaging 700 plus in attendance. When we moved into our new facility, our attendance jumped to an average of 1200 immediately. We picked up 500 to 600 people and the 11 a.m. service took off at that point. So the building was a huge jump for us.

**Interviewer: Let me ask you this. What do you see in the future here at Highlands?**

You know, there's just so much change that takes place here in a day's time. The Staff laughs because if you miss a Staff Meeting here, if you go on vacation and come back, the Church may not even be here. Everybody's trying to catch on to what did we do this week? What did we change? This is our vision. This is our dream. It is our conviction and it is our personal belief that God is going to work through Highlands in such a way that there will not be a place that you can go on this planet that has not been impacted by a witness from this church. We're committed to that. It was interesting when I attended the Purpose Driven Conference just a few weeks ago. I got a special invitation from Rick and Kay and a few other pastors to come to a room and hang out with them for three or four hours. We got to share with Rick and talk to him a little bit and Rick stood up and he spoke. He said, "I have a Word from God for you guys." It was kind of neat because I really struggled about whether to go to the Conference or not. I had been invited to go, but felt like I had too much to do and



I can't go. Actually the day before that we were talking on Mother's Day, we decided to go. In the evening, last minute, it was absolutely crazy. I told my wife, "I don't know why I feel this way, but we've just got to go! I don't know why, but we've got to go!" We went and we ended up in this meeting with him and he says, "You're not here by accident. I have a Word from the Lord." He opened up the Bible to Isaiah 49 verses one through seven. The passage deals with Isaiah. Isaiah had reached the point in his life where he was very discouraged. It's one of the classic passages where he says, "I have spent my strength in vain and for no purpose at all." Rick said, "You know you'd think that God would have really been sensitive to Isaiah and his discouragement, but God basically told Isaiah, 'I'm going to increase your workload.'" Now here's a guy who's already discouraged and God says, "I'm going to increase your workload. Not only are you going to be a light to Israel, but I'm going to use you to touch the world." Rick said, "These are the words that God gave me for the global glory of God." Rick Warren looked at us and he said, "This is what I really believe God is saying, 'Your vision is not big enough!' I went to the Conference and I've got this spiritual antenna up, 'Lord, why am I here? Is there something you want to say to me? Am I supposed to do something?'" When he spoke those words, it was like the Holy Spirit took a knife and just cut right through my heart, "Jimmie, this is why I brought you here. Your vision is not big enough and you need to lift your eyes to the whole world in what I'm about and what I want to do." I'll never forget I took a pastor back to his hotel room and we got in the car and I told him, "That was the weirdest thing when he talked about the global glory of God." I said, "It was just like a knife cut through me!" My wife looked at me and she said,

“Well, it was strange. I felt the same thing.” This pastor from North Carolina said, “Man, I felt it, too. It was just like God’s conviction spoke to my heart as well!” So we had just recently invited the International Mission Board representative to come to tell us how we can partner with them to carry out this vision. We had an awesome time with this man. Right now we begin the process to pray, “God, we want to be available to you.” That’s the future and if it means this church goes away, if God so chooses to disband 1800-2000 people and send them to the four corners of the planet, so be it, Thy will be done! It’s not about us. It’s about Him, His glory. It’s about people coming to know Him. We want to be in on that and be obedient.

**Interviewer: Let me ask you this ... if you could go back and look over the past few years you’ve been here, what would you say is probably the one greatest success that sticks out in your mind and maybe the one biggest failure that sticks out in your mind? I think we can learn from both.**

Wow, that’s a tough one! People ask that all the time. You know, there’s been so many things. You could point to a lot of little things. You could point to the contemporary music that we’re using, being sensitive to the unchurched so they’ll feel comfortable. You could talk about messages that apply to the people’s lives. I guess the greatest success that we have here is that we’re very honest about our limitations that we don’t know what we’re doing. You know a lot of people think that a church this size, they think we really have it together. They know what they’re doing. We’re very open and honest with the congregation, if the Lord does not tell us what to do

tomorrow and how to do it, it's done for. I mean it's over. So the absolute total dependence on God is constantly on our faces, "Lord, just tell us what to do." Our passion here is that we will know and do God's will because the Lord says in 1 John 5, "If you ask anything in line with my will, I will hear you when you ask that kind of request." So we live by that here and God answers. The miracles, the stories of God's provision, direction is just an incredible story. So that's the key for us, "Lord, we're just going to follow You and be obedient no matter what it is, no matter how big it is, we'll do it." As far as the greatest mistake, the greatest failure, I have made enough mistakes in this church that it should have been dead a hundred times. Probably my biggest mistake was I had a guy who was interested in doing the same kind of thing that I was doing and said to him, "Well, let's just do it together." I didn't ask the Lord. I didn't consult Him and I joined up with a guy who had a whole different idea on church and the way to do church. It should have killed the church, but God preserved the church through that thing. For about sixteen months the church was like that in the beginning. It took me being honest with the fact that I was the one who made the mistake. I did this. I brought this on the church.

**Interviewer: One of the things that traditional church plants would say is that you've got to look for land, look for a building right at the first. How important are facilities to you at Highlands?**

They're nice to have. Church goes on seven days a week here. This building is open at 8 a.m. in the morning and it's closed at 11 p.m. at night. It's open seven days

a week so there's some awesome things that can happen, but, by no means, we don't think about the building. There's so many places that you can rent facilities, schools, Holiday Inn Conference Rooms. That's not the key. God grew a church in the Abingdon High School with an average of 700 to 800 in attendance. When we were running at 100 everybody would say, "You can't grow larger than 100 people in a high school." Then it would go to 200 and they'd say, "Well, you just can't grow it bigger than 200 in a school." Finally at about 400, people quit saying that and God just kept growing it. So the facility is not the point. It's the Lord, the people, and what He's doing. So it freed us up by not having to have rent and everything. When we were ready and God was ready, He gave us a building. Believe me, when we moved into this thing, it scared us to death. It felt like we were not even big enough to take care of it, but God knew. Had we moved in it six months earlier, we could have been in a huge mess. God's timing is everything. So just like our church now, as we're looking at expanding satellite churches, we're not looking at buying land. We're not looking at building buildings. We're going to use the stuff that's already out there. Let somebody else take care of it. Pay rent, that's a cheap way to do it. Grow a church and when it gets large enough, then you can look at the land and look at these other things. Let the church grow and then go after 50, 60, 70, 80 acres of property or whatever you need.

**Interviewer:** I have a question regarding to being a new church planter trying to plant a church here in Southwest Virginia. What do you think would be some books or some tools that have been pertinent to your life?

Right off the bat, of course, *The Purpose-Driven Church* is going to be a book that you would want to read and study. I find a lot of pastors that I talk to they really want to do this and I'll say, "Okay, here's some books you could read and some things you could do." They'll go off two or three months and then call me back and they will ask me to give them some help. I'll ask them if they read the book and they haven't. You've got to be serious about it. So *The Purpose-Driven* book and the Church Growth Conferences that Rick continues to teach at Saddleback, you need to get all that information, study it, and learn that. *Experiencing God* is an awesome tool that God has used in my life personally and in the life of this congregation about how to understand and know where God's at work so you can join that relationship with God. There's another book that's called *The Saving Life of Christ* by Major Ian Thomas. Just an incredible book about our relationship with Christ and walking with Him. There's so many books that I'm reading. I'm reading books on missions right now. If you want to get started on the purpose-driven model that's the basic. There's a ton of books out there, but that will get you started.

**Interviewer: When you were in the traditional church, you burned out because you were trying to be this fourth person in the Trinity, but here in the purpose-driven model, you're doing what you're shaped to do. What would you tell the rest of us personally to stay fresh and to stay where we need to be with the Lord? Give us a hint on what you do to be that person.**

This is has been the greatest thing for me – the time that I spend with the Lord.

Every day when I get up the first part of my day I spend with Him, forty-five minutes to an hour. The first thing that I do is I bring my requests to Him. I love what Andy Stanley said on a tape. So often the first thing we want to do is start confessing sin and we do all this stuff. Andy Stanley said, “You know, Jesus said in Revelation 3, ‘If you’ll let Me in (He didn’t say, ‘I’ll come in and jerk you around’ or ‘I’ll come in and nail you for everything you’ve done wrong’) ... He said, ‘I just want to come in and spend time with you. I want to sup with you. I want to fellowship with you.’” Andy challenged us and said, “Why not in the morning just say, ‘Good morning, Lord, let’s talk.’” So I do that. I talk to Him. I bring my requests. He said to do that, ‘Come into My throne room.’” One of the most liberating verses in the Bible is where God says, “I don’t want you to come to Me as a cowering slave.” Sometimes that’s how we feel because we’re imperfect people and we want to come crawling in with our head down. But our Father said, “I want you to come in as My son or as My daughter. You come walking right in.” Just like my little girls do. They don’t get an appointment. They come bursting right in. I don’t care who I’m talking to, ‘Hey, Dad! How are you, Dad!’” That’s the relationship we have with God. So that’s what I try to do. In the morning I go to Him, “Hey, Dad. I’ve got all this stuff here. I don’t know what to do. So what do we do?” And then I open the Word. Today I was in Acts 14 and it’s just incredible how God speaks through His Word. It’s just incredible! We’re doing this missions thing, “God, how do we do it?” And, lo and behold, the church at Antioch, who did they send? They sent the best they had. Paul and Barnabas, they’re on staff at Antioch. That’s the ones the Holy Spirit said to send

out. That was amazing. Then you look at the diversity of the staff at Antioch and how the Holy Spirit puts diversity together to do His work. Then today in Acts 14 and 15, I'm looking at the passages how wonderful things can be in the ministry. Here's Paul and Barnabas having all this success to the point the whole town is wanting to sacrifice to them. But the very next day they're trying to kill them. The Scripture says that some of the Judaizers came and stirred up the people against Paul and Barnabas. Just the admonition from the Lord and that it's through much tribulation that we must enter the Kingdom of heaven. Basically God is saying, "Folks, you're not going to escape through. Even at the center of My will there's going to be trouble and difficulty. You're going to be misunderstood and these things are going to happen." So that daily time opening the Word up and asking, "What's the Lord saying to me today?" Then the third portion of my time with Him is I'm just still. I think a lot of folks leave that part out. We run in and we tell Him everything and we read His Word and He speaks through that, but they don't take the time to be still and know that He is God. One of my favorite passages is, "Those who wait upon the Lord will never be disappointed." It's amazing what's come out of those moments of ten, fifteen, twenty minutes of just sitting there. When you realize who you're talking to, you realize who He is, and that He's promised, "Commit your work to Me, I will direct your paths." I don't have any problems that He's not going to handle, that He can't handle. I can't tell you how valuable that is. So the time with God and then the time that I'm listening to people like Rick Warren or Andy Stanley and others God is using to enrich my life. They're teaching me, they're training me. I'm taking this in. I'm growing through that. I didn't always do that. I was just too busy. I read an

article by Paul Cho who said the average pastor in America spends less than fifteen minutes a day in prayer. That so convicted me. Here's a guy who was spending three and four hours and basically said there was so much going on in the spiritual realm out there that it is only through time spent with God – prayer. I have found, and the staff has found answers to problems that we never could have accomplished on our own. Barriers fall down simply by spending time with the Lord.

**Interviewer: I want to thank you for your time this afternoon. We'll be praying for you that the Lord will honor your vision and use you and Highlands Fellowship in a global world way for His glory.**



### Responding Churches

CHURCH NAME	TYPE	YEARS	PASTOR	AVERAGE ATTENDANCE
1. Community Heights Baptist	Blended	22	Allen Jessee	700
2. Bluefield Community Fellowship	Purpose Driven	6	Mike Baker	250
3. Highlands Fellowship	Purpose Driven	8	Jimmie Davidson	2200
4. Fellowship Baptist	Traditional	6	Jeff Sloan	72
5. Greenbriar Baptist	Traditional	17	No Pastor	32
6. Rosedale Baptist	Blended	12	J.C. Steele	75
7. Fellowship Baptist	Blended	3	Rick Blevins	15
8. New River Valley Community Fellowship	Purpose Driven	6	Mike Neuse	375
9. Blue Ridge Christian Fellowship	Purpose Driven	5	Scott Flippen	510
10. Sunny Hills Community	Purpose Driven	5	Alan Wilder	121
11. North Pointe Community	Purpose Driven	3	Tony Connors	118
12. Life Community	Purpose Driven	2	Chris Alford	120
13. North Star Baptist	Purpose Driven	4	William Houck	380
14. Maple Grove Baptist	Traditional	1	Les Ritchie	15
15. Mountain View Fellowship	Blended	1	Jimmy Meadows	28
16. Celebration Church	Purpose Driven	5	Joe Barber	725

**PURPOSE DRIVEN CONSTITUTION**  
**VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP, SBC**

**PREAMBLE**

We declare and establish this constitution to preserve and secure the principles of our faith and to govern the body in an orderly manner. This constitution will preserve the liberties of each individual member and the freedom of action of this body in relationship to other churches.

**ARTICLE I: NAME AND PRINCIPAL OFFICE**

The body shall be known as the *Virginia Highlands Christian Fellowship, SBC* of Abingdon, Virginia. It will be further referred to in these bylaws as the “Church.” The Church maintains its current offices at 793 West Main Street, Abingdon, Virginia. Its mailing address is P.O. Box 553, Abingdon, VA 24212-0553. Until such time as the Church purchases property and builds a permanent facility for worship, the Co-Pastors of the Church shall have full power and authority to change the principal meeting place and offices from one location to another. Any change of the location shall be recorded by the Co-Pastors on these bylaws opposite this section, or this section may be amended to state the new location.

## **ARTICLE II: PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Church is to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). To accomplish this purpose we shall structure and organize ourselves to promote the following:

- 1. EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS:** *“To share the good news of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible in our community and throughout the world.”* (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 3:9).
- 2. EDUCATION:** *“To help members develop toward full Christian maturity and to train them for effective ministry to others. To promote personal spiritual growth and discipleship through purposeful Bible teaching.”* (Ephesians 4:11-13; Matthew 18:20, 1 Timothy 2:2)
- 3. WORSHIP:** *“To participate in public worship services together and to maintain personal daily devotions.”* (John 4:24)
- 4. MINISTRY AND SERVICE:** *“To serve unselfishly, in Jesus’ name, meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those in our Church, our community, and the world.”* (1 Peter 4:10-11; Matthew 25:34-40; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Galatians 5:13)
- 5. FELLOWSHIP:** *“To encourage, support and pray for each other as members of the family of God. To share our lives together.”* (1 John 1:7; Acts 2:44-47; Hebrews 10:23-25; Romans 15:5, 7; John 13 34:35)

The Church seeks to benefit the people of the Virginia Highlands Community by providing opportunities for spiritual, physical, intellectual, social, and cultural development. (Luke 2:52)

### **ARTICLE III: STATEMENT OF FAITH**

We affirm the Holy Bible as the inspired Word of God, and as the only basis for our beliefs. This Church accepts “*The Baptist Faith and Message*”, a 1963 affirmation of basic Christian beliefs, as a general statement of our faith.

### **ARTICLE IV: AFFILIATION**

This Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denominational control. We do recognize, however, the benefits of cooperation with other churches in world missions, and voluntarily affiliate with the Southern Baptist Convention in its national, state, and local expressions.

### **ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP**

#### **SECTION 1: GENERAL.**

Membership in this church shall consist of all persons who have met the qualifications for membership and are listed on the membership roll.

#### **SECTION 2: QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP.**

1. A personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
2. Baptism by immersion as a testimony of salvation.
3. Completion of the Church’s basic membership class.
4. A commitment to abide by the membership covenant.

### **SECTION 3: DESIGNATION OF MEMBERSHIP.**

In an effort to properly reflect the membership of the Church, two membership rolls shall be maintained. These rolls shall be updated at least once annually.

#### **1. Active/Resident Members.**

All members who reside within the Church's ministry area or who are currently active in the Church.

#### **2. Nonresident Members.**

Members who have become inactive as a result of moving outside of the Church's primary ministry area and have not joined another church.

### **SECTION 4: RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP.**

The responsibilities of membership are described in The Membership Covenant.

### **SECTION 5: VOTING RIGHTS OF MEMBERSHIP.**

Each Active/Resident member 14 years and older is entitled to one vote. Voting by proxy is prohibited. Every Active/Resident member shall have the right to vote on the following matters:

1. The annual budget of the Church.
2. The election, or removal from office, of the legal trustees.
3. The disposition of all or substantially all of the assets of the Church.
4. The merger or dissolution of the Church.
5. The acquisition of real property and any indebtedness over and above budgeted items.
6. Amendments to this Constitution and its bylaws.
7. The calling or removal from office of a Co-Pastor.

## **SECTION 6: TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP.**

Members shall be removed from the Church roll for the following reasons:

1. Death.
2. Transfer of membership to another church.
3. By personal request of the member.
4. Dismissal by a council of the Pastors and lay ministers according to the following conditions:
  - A. The member's life and conduct is not in accordance with the membership covenant in such a way that the member hinders the ministry influence of the Church in the community.
  - B. Procedures for the dismissal or restoration of members shall be according to Matthew 18:15-17.

## **SECTION 7: RESTORATION OF MEMBERS.**

Members dismissed by Pastors and lay ministers, shall be restored by the same according to the spirit of 2 Corinthians 2:7-8, when their lifestyles are judged to be in accordance with the membership covenant.

## **ARTICLE VI: MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS**

### **SECTION 1: PLACE.**

Meetings of the members shall be held at the place or places so designated by the Co-Pastors, until such time as adequate property for continued growth and expansion is purchased and a permanent facility is built for membership meetings.

**SECTION 2: GENERAL MEETING.**

A general meeting of the members shall be held in the last quarter of each year at such time and place as determined by the Co-Pastors. This general meeting shall be the annual membership meeting. The purpose of this meeting shall be to adopt an annual budget and to elect the Trustees. Subject to Section 4 of this Article, any other proper business may be conducted at this meeting.

**SECTION 3: SPECIAL MEETINGS.****1. Called by the Co-Pastors.**

Special meetings shall be called jointly by the Co-Pastors at any time, provided that proper notice is given to the membership.

**2. Called by the membership.**

A special meeting shall be held, following proper notification of the congregation, upon written petition, such petition stating the reason for the meeting, and having been signed by 20% or more of the Active/Resident Membership.

**SECTION 4: NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS.****1. General Requirements.**

Whenever members are required or permitted to take any action at a meeting, notice shall be given to members no less than two (2) weeks prior to a meeting. Notification of membership meetings shall be given in any of the following manners which shall be deemed to be a reasonable method of calling a membership meeting.

- A. Distribution of written material to the congregation in attendance at a Sunday service and the following mid-week service.
- B. Announcement of the meeting in the Church Newsletter.

- C. Oral announcement to the congregation at a Sunday service and the following service (at a midweek service if the church has one, or on the following Sunday).
- D. Delivery by United States mail to each member identified on the Active/Resident Membership Roll. Failure by the US Postal Service to deliver such notice to any member shall not hinder the progression or decisions of any duly called and noticed meeting.

## **2. Notice of Certain Agenda Items.**

Approval by the members of any of the following proposals, other than by unanimous approval by those members entitled to vote, is valid only if the notice specifies the general nature of the proposal:

- A. Calling or removing a Co-Pastor.
- B. Amending this Constitution and Bylaws.
- C. Disposing of all or substantially all of the Church's assets.
- D. Adopting or amending a merger agreement.
- E. Approving the election to wind up and dissolve the Church
- F. Approving the acquisition of real property or any indebtedness over and above the adopted budget.
- G. Amendment of the annual budget.

## **SECTION 5: QUORUM.**

Those members present and voting at a meeting duly called and properly noticed shall constitute a quorum of the membership for the transaction of business.



## **SECTION 6: PARLIAMENTARY RULES.**

*Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised* and this Constitution and Bylaws shall be the authorities for parliamentary rules of procedure for all business meetings of the Church.

## **ARTICLE VII: TRUSTEES**

### **SECTION 1: NUMBER AND TERM.**

The Co-Pastors shall from time to time, designate the authorized number of Trustees of the Church. However, this number shall never be less than three (3). The Trustees shall be nominated by the Co-Pastors and elected by the members at the General Meeting each year. A Trustee may only be removed from office by resignation or a vote of the members at a properly called business meeting.

### **SECTION 2: RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS.**

The Trustees shall have the following powers and duties:

1. To provide financial counsel to the Pastors concerning the administration of the Church.
2. To arrange for monthly, quarterly and annual financial statements of all Church accounts, including all sources of income and expenditures. Such statements to be made available to any church member upon request.
3. To arrange for an annual audit of all Church accounts, including all sources of income and expenditures.
4. To determine and recommend annually the compensation and benefits of the licensed and/or ordained ministers of the Church. The Co-Pastors will provide the Trustees with current and appropriate information from the Annuity Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and other such applicable material as may be appropriate for their

study, to assure that the Church's pastors are adequately, and lawfully compensated according to the laws of the State of Virginia and the United States of America, as well as any and all IRS regulations and rules that may apply to licensed and/or ordained ministers.

5. To fulfill the responsibilities of trustees for a non-profit religious organization (i.e. church) as defined and ordered by this Constitution and Bylaws, by the laws of the State of Virginia, and/or the United States of America.
6. To conduct such other duties and activities as the Co-Pastors or the Church may designate from time to time.

## **ARTICLE VIII: CO-PASTORS AND PASTORS**

### **SECTION 1: NUMBER AND TERM.**

The authorized number of Pastors shall be such number as may from time to time be authorized by the Church. The Pastors shall consist of the Founding Co-Pastors, or their successor(s), as defined in Article IX, and any other ordained minister(s), appointed by the Co-Pastors to the Pastoral Ministry Team of the Church.

### **SECTION 2: POWERS.**

#### **A. General Powers.**

Subject to the provisions and limitations of this Constitution and Bylaws, the laws of the State of Virginia, and the United States of America, the ministries, programs, activities, business and affairs of the Church shall be conducted by or under the direction of the Co-Pastors and the Pastoral Ministry Team.

#### **B. Specific Powers.**

Without prejudice to the general powers set forth above, and subject to the same

limitations, the Co-Pastors shall have the power to:

1. Select and remove all ministers, officers, agents, and employees of the Church except for the Co-Pastors; prescribe any powers and duties for them that are consistent with law, and with this Constitution and its Bylaws.
2. Change the principal executive office or the principal business office of the Church in the State of Virginia from one location to another and designate any place within or outside of the State of Virginia for the holding of any meeting or meetings of the Pastoral Ministry Team.
3. Exercise all other powers conferred by this Constitution and Bylaws, by the Nonprofit Religious Corporation Laws or other applicable laws of the United States of America, and the State of Virginia.

## **ARTICLE IX: OFFICERS**

### **SECTION I. OFFICERS.**

#### **1. Co-Pastors.**

The executive officers of the church shall be the two Founding Co-Pastors, or their successors, who shall share equally in the responsibilities of overseeing and shepherding the Church. They shall divide their pastoral responsibilities according to their specific spiritual gifts, education, training, experience and interests for the best benefits to the Church. They shall make major decisions regarding the ministry and administration of the Church only after close consultation and much prayer together. In all manners and ways they shall set forth a model of Christian cooperation that will spur the church and its members toward a similar cooperative spirit. They shall issue a job description for their respective responsibilities at the General Meeting each year,

or at any other time as seems necessary, for the purpose of informing the Church of any adjustments or changes in their relationship and/or joint or separate responsibilities. Neither Co-Pastor holds any power or authority over the other, for they are and shall remain, in all aspects of pastoral leadership and authority, Co-Pastors in partnership with each other, with the Church, and under the headship of Jesus Christ, the only true Head of the Church. They shall alternately serve as President and Vice-President of the Church on an annual basis.

## **SECTION II: ELECTION OF OFFICERS.**

Upon a vacancy in the position, the members at a special membership meeting may call a Co-Pastor, where the remaining Co-Pastor shall present a recommendation to the Congregation of a Co-Pastor Candidate for election. All other officers of the Church shall be chosen by a joint decision of the Co-Pastors, and each shall serve at the pleasure of the Co-Pastors, subject to the rights, if any, of an officer under any contract of employment.

## **SECTION III: REMOVAL OF OFFICERS.**

A. Co-Pastor may only be removed, with or without cause, by the members at any regular or special membership meeting for which proper notice has been given. Subject to the rights, if any, of an officer under any contract of employment, all other officers may be removed, with or without cause, by a joint decision of the Co-Pastors, provided that New Testament guidelines for reconciliation have been followed. Officers removed by the Church, who are also employees of the Church, shall be given a severance pay package including salary and regular benefits of not less than one month. Christian compassion for, and a desire to minister to the officer so

removed, and to his or her family, should be the rule of the day.

#### **SECTION IV: VACANCIES IN OFFICES.**

A vacancy in any office because of death, resignation, removal, disqualification or any other cause shall be filled only in the manner prescribed in these Bylaws for regular appointments to that office. Such vacancies shall be filled in an orderly manner as they occur.

#### **ARTICLE X: AMENDMENTS AND REVISIONS**

The Bylaws of this Constitution may be amended or revised at the General Membership Meeting, or any specially called business meeting for which proper notice has been given to the membership, provided the proposed amendment or change has been presented in writing to the membership with the notice. Amendments and revisions to these Bylaws shall require a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.

## LETTER AND FORM SENT FOR SURVEY

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to read this letter and fill out the survey.

My name is Allen Jessee. I have been the pastor of Community Heights Baptist Church for the last seventeen years. The church is located on the Tazewell/Russell County line. This was the church God laid on my heart to pastor and help move from a mission to a self-supporting assembly. In these past years, Community Heights Baptist Church has been blessed to help plant two other churches. I continue to believe there is a great need for new churches to be planted in Southwest Virginia; thus the reason for this survey. If we are going to reach this area for Christ, I am convinced the most effective way would be to plant new churches. Since you are church planter and have had experience in pastoring a new church, I would appreciate your help and insight as to what you have learned. The only ones who actually have anything to offer are the ones out there like you in the trenches of ministry every day. My hope is to develop a plan for future church planters in Southwest Virginia that would aid them in becoming a successful plant.

This is to be the subject of my Doctor of Ministries thesis from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. I would greatly value any help you could offer me. I also want to encourage you by saying I do not know of any greater work than that of our Lord Jesus.

I have a heart for Southwest Virginia. My goal is to see many more self-supporting churches in our area reaching the lost and making disciples for Christ. As a native Southwest Virginian, I have given my life to try to further His cause. With your help, my plan is to provide future church planters the things that have worked and the things that have failed us in our ministry.

Enclosed you will find a survey and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for taking the time to share your insights and provide this information. If you need to call me for any reason, my phone number is 276/963-8385.

In Him,

Allen Jessee

**CHURCH PLANTING SURVEY**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CHURCH NAME \_\_\_\_\_ ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

YEAR CHURCH WAS STARTED \_\_\_\_\_ AVERAGE ATTENDANCE \_\_\_\_\_

SUNDAY SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_ SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you a Southwest Virginia native? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If not, how long have you been in Southwest Virginia? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you plant the church you currently serve? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

3. How would you define a church planter?

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4. Did you have a mother church to support you? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, what did the mother church provide for you?

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5. Did you start with a core group? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

How many were in the core group? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what percentage of the core group is still with you? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Is your church self-supporting? (financially independent) \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how long did this process take? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Are you full time \_\_\_\_\_ or bi-vocational \_\_\_\_\_?

8. What other support do you have?

\_\_\_\_ State Convention \_\_\_\_ Mission Agency \_\_\_\_ Other

9. What is your educational background? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_ High School Graduate

\_\_\_\_ Seminary Graduate

\_\_\_\_ College Graduate

\_\_\_\_ Involved in Continued Education

10. How would you describe your church plant?

\_\_\_\_ Contemporary

\_\_\_\_ Purpose Driven

\_\_\_\_ Traditional

\_\_\_\_ Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Does your church have a Mission statement? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please share the statement:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. What areas of ministry have contributed the most to church growth? (Number from 1 to 8 with 1 being the most significant contribution)

\_\_\_\_ Sunday School

\_\_\_\_ Sunday Night Worship

\_\_\_\_ Small groups

\_\_\_\_ Visitation

\_\_\_\_ Prayer Meeting

\_\_\_\_ Youth Programs

\_\_\_\_ Children's programs

\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you rent or own your current facilities? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Have you developed a strategy to reach your unchurched community? Explain.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15. When do you think is the best time of year to launch the first service? \_\_\_\_\_



16. What has been your greatest obstacle in church planting?

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17. What has been your greatest asset in church planting? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. What advice would you give to a person planting a new church today?

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19. How do you get people involved in ministry?

\_\_\_\_\_ Nominating Committee recommends them

\_\_\_\_\_ Pastor enlists them directly

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual volunteers and signs up

\_\_\_\_\_ Individuals are assigned to ministry based upon their spiritual giftedness

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

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## **VITA**

**Tommy Allen Jessee, Jr.**

### **PERSONAL**

Born: November 28, 1961.

Married: Brenda T. Jessee, April 13, 1991.

Children: Martha Ann, born December 28, 1995.

Joseph Allen, born April 19, 1999.

### **EDUCATIONAL**

B.A., Emory and Henry College, 1984.

M.B.S., Liberty University, 1991.

M.Div., Luther Rice Seminary, 1994.

### **MINISTERIAL**

Ordained: November 17, 1985, Lebanon Baptist Church, Lebanon, Virginia.

### **PROFESSIONAL**

Associate Pastor, Lebanon Baptist Church, 1984-1986.

Pastor, Community Heights Baptist Church, 1985-present.

### **PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES**

Member, American Association of Christian Counselors, 2000-present.