LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

NARROW YOUR FOCUS

A STRATEGY FOR REVITALIZING SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED PLATEAUED OR DECLINING TRADITIONAL CHURCHES

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By

Johnny Lamar Kendrick

Kingsport, Tennessee

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ABSTRACT

Narrow Your Focus: A Strategy for Revitalization of a Small to Medium Sized Plateaued or Declining Traditional Church

Johnny L. Kendrick

Liberty Theological Seminary, 2009

Mentor: Dr. Ron Hawkins

Reader: Dr. William Wegert

This thesis attempts to identify reproducible principles for the revitalization of small to medium sized plateaued or declining traditional churches. These principles were identified by the author in his experience serving as the pastor of three small to medium sized plateaued traditional churches. The principles involve the importance of preparation for Sunday morning worship and Sunday school, the importance of developing leadership, the importance of evaluating and implementing successful ministries, and the importance of indentifying with the community. The principles were studied and validated in the author's interaction with two churches during a year of research in which he consulted with the two churches four times each on the four areas of focus. The principles were also validated in the current literature available. It is the purpose of this thesis to give pastors of small to medium sized plateaued and declining traditional churches the tools necessary to achieve revitalization.

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Chapter One

Introduction And A Case Study

I. Introduction

I grew up in the home of a pastor and my dad was the pastor of a thoroughly traditional, sometimes plateaued, sometimes declining, yet sometimes growing, "red brick" church. That is not the whole story. There were times that the church my dad served really grew. In fact, there was a time when it grew significantly, but it did not last. Eventually, it began to decline, and try as he may, it did not make a come-back. It still has not made a comeback to this day.

I began serving that church as a Sunday school teacher during my teenage years. Later, I served the church in other capacities. I served as a part time minister to youth and then as a bi-vocational minister of music. It was in those days that I began to wrestle with the quirks of a small to medium sized plateaued traditional church. It really bothered me because it was my charge, as it is every pastor in a similar situation, to build the church, and when you are the pastor of a small to medium sized congregation there is not much room for error.

In my middle twenties, God called me to preach and I went to Bible College in Kentucky. I also became the associate pastor of the church that I now serve, First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia. From there I moved on to Duffield, Virginia and assumed my first full-time pastorate. Thomas Village Baptist Church was a young congregation. It

was only twelve years old when I arrived. It was a church plant of my local association, the Clinch Valley Baptist Association, along with the Virginia Baptists Mission Board. While I was there, we sold the church property, moved into a funeral home for two years, and completely relocated the campus of the church. It was a huge work that God did in the life of that little congregation, and I never did get any credit for that and did not deserve any credit for that accomplishment. The only good thing that I can say about my involvement in that project was that I did not split the congregation. There were many mature Christians in that congregation and they helped to lead that congregation. I am very thankful for their leadership.

Not long after that church was built, I felt called to go to south Alabama to become the pastor of Tompkins Baptist Church in Grove Hill, Alabama. My desire, and plan, was to go to seminary. I could not attend seminary from Duffield, Virginia so off to south Alabama I went. I began to pastor that church and attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Tompkins Baptist Church was a thoroughly traditional plateaued church. It began in a community school house in 1949. For the next forty seven years, the church averaged a new pastor every 2.7 years. I came to the church in 1996. I served the church for the next seven years. It was during those years that I began to synthesize my experiences, my reading, and the things that I was learning in seminary, and ask, what it would take to revitalize a church that is small, traditional, and had been plateaued, or declining, for several years. It was also during those years that I really began to identify a call on my life to minister to traditional plateaued churches. My heart began to be drawn to them and I longed to see them grow. I began to put faces and names with the phenomenon that

could be referred to as plateaued traditional churches. They dot street corners of every county in the south and across this nation. In each one of those churches there are faithful people who have ministered to that congregation under pastor after pastor, and no one wants the congregation to grow more than they do but they do not know how to do it. They listen to preachers who say that they know how to do it, and preachers who say that they are committed to helping the church grow, but time after time they are proven wrong when these pastors prove that they do not know how to grow a church or, after seeing a little growth, bolt for a bigger congregation. So, their trust is mistaken and they are sorely disappointed once again. It absolutely breaks my heart.

In these small churches, which many people view insignificant, are the memories of a lifetime for the families that make up that community. And, in that church there are people who love that church as they do their own families. They love the Lord, and they long to see their church grow. Can it be done? Some say it cannot really be accomplished, but it can be accomplished.

Some people want to “burn” the church. This could be called the “flash in the pan” approach. They want to pour fuel on the church and set it on fire resulting in an impressive display. The problem is that it is not lasting growth, and in the process the church is burned. Then, all too often the one who started the destruction blames the congregation in the end. The members are accused of “not wanting to grow.” They are accused of being “behind the times.”

Are there churches that do not want to grow? There are probably individuals in churches that impede growth, but there are probably not many churches in existence that as a whole do not want to grow. For the most part, they want to grow and they are

longing for someone to come in and show them how to achieve lasting growth both numerically and spiritually.

It is possible for a plateaued or declining traditional church to begin to grow? I believe it is possible. Is it difficult to achieve? Yes, for the most part it is difficult. Revitalizing a small/medium sized plateaued traditional congregation is some of the hardest work that a minister or church leader will ever do. It requires the participation of the whole congregation. It is the job of the pastor to bring them together and point them in the direction of growth. The church and the leader cannot afford many mishaps. A "mishap" might be a disagreement between the church leaders or members. A mishap might also be in the form of a moral lapse on the part of the pastor or one, or more, of the members of the congregation. "Mishaps" impede a church's ability to grow, and could even doom the pastor's ability to revitalize the congregation depending on the circumstances. It will take patience, forbearance, and the wisdom that only comes by prayer.

Do I have all the answers? I do not have all the answers. Do I have some of the answers? I think that I do have some of the answers. The goal of this project is fourfold: The goal is to set down, in a systematic way, some of the principles I have used during 20 years of ministry, to uncover church growth principles found in literature which apply to small to medium sized churches, to assess the application of these principles in different church settings, and ultimately to sharpen my ability to revitalize the small to medium sized plateaued traditional church that God and the church has entrusted to my leadership.

II. A Personal Case Study

God has blessed me in the churches that I have been privileged to serve. Perhaps the greatest blessing was the privilege of serving as pastor of Tompkins Baptist Church in Grove Hill, Alabama.

When I arrived in Grove Hill Alabama in 1996, the church was averaging around 85 in Sunday school attendance and 140-150 in Worship attendance. The church did not have any staff members. Previously, the church had employed staff intermittently, but with no regularity and no purpose or plan. For the most part the church had maintained a pastor and a part time secretary. The secretary came in to the office on Saturday morning and typed out the bulletin that was prepared by the pastor. The church office was an eight by twelve foot room with no computer.

A year after I arrived, the church hired a bi-vocational minister of music. He was a wonderful Christian man who was the president of a local bank. He could sing exceptionally well and he had a heart for worship. After he was hired, he and I would meet each week to go over the order of worship and talk about future worship services. We worked hard and the worship services improved in terms of the quality directly related to the preparation. We would start on time, the music was more prepared, and the service had a consistent theme. Later we hired another part time secretary. So, now, we had a secretary that worked part time during the week, and another secretary who came in on Saturday to prepare the bulletin. Next we hired a person part time to minister to children. Finally, we hired a full-time minister to youth. This person also had some other duties relating to worship.

This congregation did have its challenges, but it grew significantly. In 1996, the church was averaging less than 100 in Sunday school. By January of 1999, we were averaging 107 in Sunday School Attendance.

By June of 2003, we were averaging 180 in Sunday school attendance. In 1996, the church was averaging 135 in worship. By January of 1999, we were averaging 149. The growth in worship continued. By June of 2003, we were averaging 236.

The finances of the congregation also grew. When I arrived in Grove Hill, the church was taking in an average of $12,000 per month. By 1999, we were averaging $14.000 per month. Each year the finances increased. By June of 2003 we were averaging $29,000 per month in tithes and offerings.

We prepared to build a new Fellowship Hall with additional educational space. That facility is now built and paid in full. There were several things that we used to generate growth in that congregation. We updated worship with a mix of newer music and a more contemporary worship order. We were able to use some media but that was met with some opposition so we were not able to use as much media as I would have liked for us to use. We focused on Sunday school. We started new classes. We used the FAITH Evangelism Strategy. Still, for me, the ministry was sporadic at best. Perhaps growth was so easy in Alabama that I did not have to ask myself the hard questions of how is it that a plateaued traditional church is revitalized.

In July 2003, I accepted the call to move from Grove Hill, Alabama to Weber City, Virginia to assume the pastorate of First Baptist Church Weber City. It would not be an easy task. First Baptist Church has a tremendous history. I am only the third pastor in the history of the congregation. The church was founded in the mid-1940s. The church

has many longstanding members. The church has never split. There has really not been a major disruption in the congregation. The church has lots of advantages not the least of which is its location. First Baptist Church is located north of the state line between Weber City, Virginia and Kingsport, Tennessee on the main thoroughfare out of Southwest Virginia south into Tennessee. Nearly forty thousand vehicles a day pass within fifty yards of the front door of our congregation. The church consists of good people who are willing to work.

The church also had some challenges. The congregation had a full-time secretary, custodians, a part time treasurer, and a minister of music that was hired to work ten hours a week. In fact, he was hired one month before I was hired. That is not exactly how I would have liked for everything to be done upon my arrival but it has worked out beautifully.

In the last five years, I have honed my methods for church growth, for lack of a better term. Perhaps the reason that I have done so is because it has been absolutely necessary. Here is what I found when I arrived at First Baptist Church.

Sunday school and worship attendance had declined, and had been declining, for quite some time. It was not a steady decline. It was sporadic, but an overall decline was evident in both Sunday school and worship attendance.

The church staffing was definitely a problem. Other than a full-time secretary and a part-time worship leader the church did not have any staff. Also, the only musician that the church had was an organist. Finding and employing other musicians was one of the most important and urgent tasks we faced.

Additional deficiencies hampered the growth of the church. One deficiency was community identity. In spite of the location of the church, it had almost no connection with the community. For the most part, the community operated everyday as if the church did not exist.

Another deficiency the church was experiencing when I arrived was the lack of development of deacons. The church had twelve deacons when I arrived. Most of the existing deacons were older men. They were, for the most part, hard working men who cared deeply about the congregation. Two of the deacons had really dropped out of the ministry and were no longer attending the meetings. As a unit, the deacons knew that they needed to develop younger deacons to follow in their footsteps.

Faced with the task of rebuilding this congregation, and given the material that we had to work with, I began to formulate how we were going to rebuild this congregation. Through experience, studying church growth material, attending classes, and talking with other church leaders in the same situation I began to develop a formula for growth at First Baptist Church, Weber City. It is still a work that is very much in progress. It is not perfect. I am sure that there will be changes later on. One purpose of this thesis is to investigate what those changes should be and to implement them in this congregation.

At First Baptist Church Weber City I have learned that there are four critical areas on which to concentrate attention. These could be called a “narrowing of your focus” in several areas of the church. I have felt this way for years but I did not have the confidence, or the knowledge, to express it. When I arrived as the pastor of First Baptist Church Weber City I found the necessary impetus to disregard a lot of “ministry jargon” and focus my mind on my church and focus the minds of those in my congregation on

specific ministries in the church. Perhaps it was because I am older now. I finally grew tired of feeling like everyone else knew more about what I was supposed to do than I did. I finally came to the point that I was not going to receive my ministry direction from other people, but from my instincts based upon prayer, my training, and my experiences in that church setting. And, I determined that I would not be timid regardless of success or failure.

If a pastor, and other church leaders, are going to revitalize a small/medium sized plateaued traditional church they must focus. Those leaders cannot do everything. The pastor is only one person. Generally, a church in this situation does not have enough peripheral leaders, and there are not enough people to do everything and every ministry under the sun! If a church had enough people to do everything it would not be a small/medium sized plateaued traditional church. The pastor and church leaders cannot be timid. Timidity watches the years go by! Consequently, focus, and work.

In their book, *Simple Church*, Thom Ranier and Eric Geiger have a chapter titled, "Focus: Saying No to Almost Everything." It did my heart good to read that chapter and have my feelings validated. In my experience, then, there are four important areas in which small to medium sized plateaued churches need to focus. Each one will be further described in a section in chapter 3.

- Focus Your Preparation and Attention on Sunday Morning

Perhaps the biggest area of work in revitalizing a small/medium sized plateaued traditional church is Sunday morning. It seemed to me, in the churches that I have served, that Sunday morning was largely a collection of entities that were all independent of each other prepared, or ill-prepared, by people who never speak to each other from one Sunday

to the next. This lends itself to Sunday mornings which are mostly inadequate. This is a serious problem because Sunday morning is vitally important if a church is going to revitalize and grow. Visitors who attend a church for the first time usually attend Sunday morning. This is supported by the research done by Tim Stevens and Tony Morgan in the book titled, *Simply Strategic Growth*.[1] I did not agree with everything in this book, but this is a principle that is probably true. And, if people attend church on a Sunday morning then the Sunday morning service needs to be excellent. If the music, the sermon, the media, the Bible study class, and the childcare are not excellent chances are that those people will move on and try the next church. In chapter 3, I will further discuss preparation for Sunday morning.

- Focus on Developing Leaders

Leaders are essential in a growing church. One way to revitalize a plateaued church is to begin to develop leaders. One area is the staff. If a pastor takes a church, like I did, that only has one staff member, how will that pastor move from one staff member to a full staff? The new pastor has to accomplish the development of leaders. The new pastor will, in all likelihood, have a limited amount of money to do so. The pastor and congregation cannot hire a complete staff in one day, or even one year. So, how will the staff be built from one staff member with an average attendance of 125 to a staff of perhaps four, or more, with an average attendance in the neighborhood of 325?

If a pastor, and congregation, needs deacons, how are they going to bring in new deacons and empower them to serve effectively? If they need Sunday school teachers how are they going to recruit them, train them, and establish new classes in which they

[1] Tim Stevens and Tony Morgan, *Simply Strategic Growth* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2005), 15

can teach and minister? It has to be accomplished. In their research for their book, *Comeback Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson found that leadership is the number one ingredient in churches that were able to revitalize.[2] There are many other leaders that need to be developed, but we will focus primarily on the development of deacons in chapter 3.

- Focus on Your Community

A pastor and leaders cannot grow a church if the church does not have a real connection to the community. I call this a "Community Identity." If the reader can imagine, his or her community like a large piece of striped fabric. Each stripe is a different width, a different color, and a different distance from the center of the fabric. The reader's congregation has a color stripe in the community of which the church is a part. It might be so small that it is barely discernible. The church will want to broaden that stripe and move it closer to the center of the fabric through ministry to the point that the community can identify with the congregation. I like to get to the point where the community *depends* on my congregation for things they need that they cannot do for themselves. This gives the church an opportunity to interact with people on a regular basis who otherwise would not give the church the time of day.

In this chapter 3, I will discuss what our church has done to enlarge that influence in our community. During this time of study, I was privileged to be able to work with two other churches. One church is in Kingsport, Tennessee, and the other church is in Millry, Alabama. Community identity was an important issue as I looked at those two churches. I

[2] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman &Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 34

was interested to see their identity in the community. I will discuss their community identities briefly in chapter three as it relates to the rest of the material on the subject.

- Focus On Successful Ministries

The culture is different in every community. There is no one formula which will work in every community. Consequently, the pastor and leaders must identify ministries in their church which are worthwhile because they meet the needs of the community and thereby grow the congregation. Not everything the church does needs to be a fruit bearer in terms of numerical growth, but the church must have some ministries on which to focus that will help introduce people to the congregation. If a church does not have ministries that provide growth for the congregation then sooner or later the church will not have any ministries whatsoever. A church cannot decline year after year and continue to exist. Cultivate those ministries that help the church grow. A pastor, leaders, and the church cannot be involved in every ministry known to mankind. The thing, or things, that the church feels led as a congregation to be involved in is what the church needs to do, and do well!

III. A Statement of the Problem

As a pastor of three small/medium sized congregation in Virginia and Alabama, I have struggled with the issue of revitalizing such churches. Over the years, for me, the subject of revitalization of a small/medium sized traditional church has been distilled to the four areas discussed above based on my reading, church experience, and classroom discussions. This project is my interpretation and summation of those experiences and encounters.

As described above, there were two churches that I interviewed during 2008. I spent time with each church on four occasions apiece with the discussion centered their church setting as it related to the four areas of concern mentioned above.

These sessions gave me a “live look” at a real church for the purpose of achieving a more thorough look at my own suppositions concerning the revitalization of a small to medium sized traditional church. These two churches and their pastors were very candid about their own congregations and the issues that they faced, and their input into this project is invaluable because it allowed me to look inside two other churches in similar cultures and settings without actually having to become the pastor of that congregation, a feat that could not be accomplished in a year’s time.

In summary, the time that I spent with these two churches helped broaden and deepen my perspective of the subject. This paper is not a summary of those two churches or the three churches this I have served. It is a summation of the things that I have learned through my pastoral experience, readings, education, and the two churches that I was able to assess through the year of 2008.

IV. Definition of Terms

A. Plateaued or Declining Church – The general definition for a declining church is a church that has experienced a decline of more than 10% over a five year period. In the same manner, a church that has had more than a 10% increase over a five year period is considered a growing congregation. Consequently, a congregation

that resides somewhere in the middle is considered to be a plateaued church.[3]

B. Small to Medium Sized Church – For the purposes of this project, it is a church that has less than four hundred in attendance for both worship and Sunday school.

C. Community Identity – Community identity evaluates how well the church is connected to the community. Is it involved in the community, is it important to the community, and is the church a vital part of the community even to people who do not attend the church?

D. "Sunday Morning" – Sunday morning encompasses everything that takes place from the time the church opens its doors on a Sunday morning until it closes its doors at noon. This includes everything that is considered "Sunday School," worship, childcare, parking, or security.

E. Staff Blue Print – The staff blue print is the long range plans the church has for its staff. It includes the final "foot print" the staff will occupy and how the church intends to achieve the building of the staff.

F. Ministry Blue Print – The ministry blue print is the list of ministries the church formulates as a part of its evaluation of how it is going to achieve its ministry theme.

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[3] Michael McCormack, *Study Updates Stats On Health of Southern Baptist Churches*, Baptist Press http://www.bpnews.org {Accessed September 2009}

G. Fabric of the Community – Every community has its own unique components. Every component is a part of the fabric from the religious life of the community, the civic life, the social life, etc. By way analogy, imagine every component in the community as a stripe in the fabric, and every stripe is a different width and a different color. The broader the stripe in the fabric and the closer the stripe to the center of the fabric the more important the component is to the community. The church probably cannot be the very center of the community. There are other components that the church cannot overtake such as the schools or universities. However, the goal is to broaden the stripe that represents the church as much as possible and position it as close to the center of the fabric as possible.

H. Great Commission Ministry – A Great Commission ministry is a ministry a church engages in simply because it is the job of the church to preach the gospel. For these ministries, there is no need to evaluate them on the basis of return to the church, but simply in terms of obedience to the Great Commission given to the church by her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I. Profitable Ministry – "A profitable ministry" is a term for evaluating ministries for the ministry blue print and the ministry theme. A profitable ministry is a ministry from which the church gains new members.

J. A “Dead” Ministry – The term “dead” ministry is another term for evaluating ministries for the ministry blue print and the church’s ministry theme. A “dead” ministry is a ministry which does not bring new members into the church, does not help the church fulfill the Great Commission, and is not compatible with the church’s ministry theme or ministry blue print.

K. Ministry Focus – Every ministry has a focus. The ministry is either focused on people outside the church, people inside the church, or a mix of the two. The ministry blue print should be balanced between ministries inside the church and ministries outside the church.

L. Ministry Theme – Every church has a ministry theme to some greater or lesser degree depending on its location and culture. The ministry theme is the implementation of the church’s stated, or commonly understood, plan for ministering in the community. A church may be an event based ministry of some type ranging from worship events to civic and social occasions. A church may be more community based with almost no “events” on the calendar in a certain year. Of course, there are many other “themes” through which a church can express itself, and a church can be very inwardly focused. To be inwardly focused would not be a good theme, but it would be a theme. A point of evaluation would be for a church to consider its own theme and adjust the theme for the

effectiveness of the gospel in its own community based upon the community, the passions and gifts of its pastor, and the passion and gifts of its congregation.

M. “Revenue Stream” – What I have termed a “revenue stream” has nothing to do with money, but members. A revenue stream is a profitable ministry from which the church is constantly receiving new members into the congregation.

V. The Statement of Limitations

The focus of this project will be limited to the four “focus” areas listed above. In the chapter three, in the section on Sunday morning, the project will only focus on those aspects that are necessary for the church to be the best that it can be on Sunday morning for worship and Bible study. In the chapter on developing leaders the focus of the project will be to develop staff, Sunday school teachers, and deacons. There are many other leaders that a church needs, but they will not be addressed in this project.

In the chapter on community identity the project will focus on events and ways that a congregation can develop an identity in the community. This will leave out some evangelistic outreach programs. Evangelistic outreach programs are a useful tool for church growth and to a degree help build community identity. Sunday school outreach is a given and every growing church should use it as a means of carrying out the Great Commission. However, evangelistic outreach, per se, will not be addressed in this project.

In chapter three, in the section on ministries, the project will not focus on ministry to every strata of the congregation or community, but rather will focus on specific ministries that help that particular church grow in its setting.

This disclaimer is not unique to this paper. Thom Rainer and his group have a similar disclaimer in their work *Breakout Churches* in which the author says,

> I have attempted throughout this book to be very careful not to imply that the churches that moved to greatness did so with some magical, methodical, quick-fix formula. To the contrary, the opposite was true. Because we have been careful to note the unique characteristics of breakout churches, you may sometimes get the impression that these unique issues explain the totality of the move to greatness and the momentum that followed. While I hope readers find these characteristics to be helpful and informative, I do not for one moment want to suggest that the basics of Christian ministry were abandoned.[4]

It is not my intent to claim to address the totality of church ministry. It is the intent of this author to say that these four areas are very important, but they do not preclude the necessity of basic church ministries.

VI. The Research Methodology

The method used to birth this thesis is backwards to what most would think of a "research method." I originally identified the four areas of focus, as mentioned in this project, based on my ministry experience, discussions in and out of the classroom in Bible College and Seminaries with professors and classmates alike, and discussions with other colleagues on the local level over a period of approximately twenty years. For me, all of this culminated in my efforts for five years in Alabama serving as the pastor of Tompkins Baptist Church, and the, now, six years that I have served as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia.

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[4] Thom S. Ranier, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 172

During that time, I developed a style of ministry as the result of necessity as I tried to revitalize, first, Tompkins Baptist Church in Grove Hill, Alabama, and then First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia.

Given the opportunity to study at the doctoral level at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, I did not have to think long about what I would address in the thesis. There was really only one choice for me as a person and a pastor. I would address that with which my ministry had been consumed: how to revitalize small to medium sized plateaued or declining traditional churches.

The first goal is not to discover ideas as much as it is to validate my experiences and observations and to make sure that I am on the right track. Secondly, it is also to learn more about the revitalization of small to medium sized plateaued or declining traditional churches. My research is focused on two areas; current literature on the subject and the two churches that I evaluated. The goal was two-fold. First, I would ascertain if the four areas of focus I identified were evident in the literature, and if so, what was being said about them. Secondly, I wanted to meet with other church leaders to assess how these four areas of focus were being treated by their congregations. The value of discussing the four areas with two other churches was to determine if the four areas could be applied in a congregational setting different from my own. Every church and community is different. I asked myself the question, “Would the four areas be applicable to another church in another community, or would the model for church revitalization, as I understood it, collapse when applied outside my own church setting?

Hopefully, this project will either validate the principles that I have or will point to a completely different way, or ways, to revitalize small to medium sized plateaued or

declining traditional churches. One premise is that these four areas of focus are identified, although perhaps not in exactly the same terms or manner, in leading books and journal articles on the subject. Another premise is also that focusing on these four areas can and will lead to the revitalization of any small to medium sized plateaued or declining church. I make no claim that these are exclusive areas, but they are four very important areas that are certainly worthy of consideration.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

I. Comeback Churches

The first book to be considered is by Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson.[1] The fundamental driving principle behind the book is that revitalization of churches is possible.[2] The author's goal of the book is to identify Churches that have accomplished revitalization and that in identifying the characteristics of those churches readers of the book will be able to duplicate those principles in their own churches. This is where the main difference between the book, *Comeback Churches*, and my project is located. In the book, the authors identify the characteristics of successful churches and then it is left up to the reader to identify the principle and develop a method for implementing that principle in their own congregation. In this project, I will attempt to use my experiences, other books, and the two churches that are a part of this project to identify four different principles for the revitalization of small to medium sized plateaued or declining churches.

Chapter one in the book gives the authors' rationale for the endeavor of church revitalization. It answers the question, "Why do we need a "comeback?" The authors' rationale for revitalization of churches is because there are so many churches that are dying. There is another rationale for church revitalization that I think is equally as

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[1] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007)

[2] Ibid, ix preface

important. Declining and plateaued churches are a gold mine for growth. It is fine to plant new churches, but what if a significant percentage of declining churches could be revitalized? Would that not be monumental news in Christian circles?

In chapter two of the book, the authors identify the first principle as being leadership.[3] The authors identify the role that leadership has played in the revitalization of other churches that have been successful in their endeavor to revitalize. They also define leadership. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to identifying the characteristics of good leadership and on how successful congregations have developed leadership. The difference between the book and this project is that in this project I will attempt to learn better ways to develop leadership in difficult situations. For example, if a congregation only has one staff member or one full-time staff member and some other part-time bi-vocational staff members how can a congregation move from that situation to a full-time staff of four or five staff ministers?

There is a chapter in this book entitled, "Worship and Preaching Matters." There is also a section titled, "Sunday morning." The material here, while not identical, is very similar. The authors identify the importance of worship and preaching in a church that is attempting to revitalize. They outline the characteristics of good worship, and they identify the worship characteristics of successful churches. The difference between this book and this project is that in the book it is primarily limited to worship and preaching and in this project I will attempt to show, not only the importance of worship and preaching, but also the importance of all aspects of Sunday morning to a church that is attempting to revitalize. It is one thing to say that worship and preaching are important,

[3] Ibid, 34

and the authors did an incredible job, but it is another thing to show people how you take a bad Sunday morning situation and turn it into a flowering situation.

In the book the authors discuss two other critical factors in revitalization, facilities, and marketing. The authors of the book describe how a change in facilities has facilitated revitalization in certain churches. The authors describe marketing. Regarding marketing, I particularly appreciated this statement; "Every church markets itself in some way…Every person who speaks about your church to someone in the community, every piece of literature you produce, every sign at the church building or rented facility makes a statement about your view of yourself, the Lord, and the people you are striving to reach. Why not do it with a high degree of excellence?"[4] While I will not deal with marketing in the strictest sense, in the chapter three of this project in the section titled "Community Identity, I will discuss marketing churches in their own community in that same way and how a person or organization can manage that marketing.

In chapter ten entitled "Comeback Change agents: New or Renewed Leaders," the authors discuss one of the most important subjects in the whole book. The truth is that revitalization is due largely to the leader. Churches are not generally revitalized in spite of their pastor.[5] This chapter discusses the condition of the leader in churches which were able to revitalize. In this project I will also address leadership and the development of leadership. However, I will not address the role of the pastor in revitalization although the role of the pastor is vital. Instead, I will deal with the role of deacons, Sunday School Teachers, and Staff members, and how they play a part in the revitalization of the congregation.

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[4] Ibid, 166

[5] Ibid, 177

Chapter eleven discusses the top ten areas of change in churches that were able to revitalize. This fascinating list is as follows:

- Prayer
- Children's ministry
- Evangelism
- Youth ministry
- Leadership
- Missions
- Assimilation
- Worship
- Sunday School/Small Groups
- Organizational structure

Several areas on the list will be discussed in this project. For example, in the chapter in the project entitled "Ministries" children's ministry and youth ministry will be mentioned prominently. This list should give a prospective comeback pastor clues about where to look initially for ministries that help churches revitalize.

II. The Church Of Irresistible Influence: "Bridge Building Stories To Help Reach Your Community"

A second book which provides great insight on the subject of church revitalization is "The Church of Irresistible Influence" by Robert Lewis.[6] This may be my favorite book on this subject. Any person who serves a congregation should read this book. The introduction to this book is perhaps more insightful than the entire text of other books. That may be an exaggeration, of course, and is not meant as an insult to other books and other authors. However, very seldom does one find a book that strikes a chord with one's own heartfelt beliefs and values. This book hits squarely on the premise of the subject of community identity. When I read this book, it was like finding someone who understood

[6] Lewis, Robert with Rob Wilkins. *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001)

completely my heart on the subject. It was incredibly affirming to read that someone else had actually wrestled with the same issues of church ministry as I have and had come to very similar conclusions.

Here is an extended quote from the introduction.

> Can you imagine the community in which you live being genuinely thankful for your church? Can you imagine city leaders valuing your church's friendship and participation in the community - even asking for it? Can you imagine the neighborhoods around your church talking behind your back about how good it is to have your church in the area because of the tangible witness you've offered them of God's love? Can you imagine a large number of your church members actively engaged in, and passionate about, community service, using their gifts and abilities in ways and at levels they never thought possible? Can you imagine the community actually changing because of the impact of your church's involvement? Can you imagine many in your city, formerly cynical and hostile toward Christianity, actually praising God for your church and the positive contributions your members have made in Jesus' name? Can you imagine the spiritual harvest that would naturally follow if all this were true?[7]

In part one of the book entitled "Spanning the Great Divide," the author points to the "disconnect" between the not-so-modern church and modern society. It is not a call for technological advances as much as it is a call for churches to reconnect with their communities! The author points out that for the church to reconnect with culture it will take reconnecting with the community. In chapter two the author calls it "Proof." Churches prove the genuineness of their faith and their relationship with God by their ministry to and interaction with the communities! "Our postmodern world is tired of words. It wants real."[8] This "realness" as the author so aptly points out, is not some new modern strategy contrived to face the unique constraints of modernity, but actually a return to the very simple strategy with which the church was founded in infancy. He says,

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[7] Ibid, 13-14

[8] Ibid, 40

"All historians in the early church link this compelling witness of proof to the explosion of early Christianity."[9]

In chapters three through five, the author discusses the theology of his premise in the person and ministry of Jesus. Even a successful church can become a stranger in its own community self absorbed in meeting its own needs, not the needs of the community.[10] The remedy for this malady is believers who have reached spiritual maturity who are serving the community out of the ministry of the church based upon their spiritual giftedness. This is not merely an idealist approach but a very pragmatic presence in the community that touches the community physically.

The book concludes by casting a vision for the future. How does a church go from where it is in the present to where it needs to be in the future? The author's answer is directed toward evangelicals specifically. He says that congregations must get back on the track of ministering in their communities after a century of battling heresy to the point that social ministry was almost completely ignored. "As people who pride themselves in their loyalty to scripture, how can we ignore the call to good works in the community that the Bible so emphatically exhorts us to?"[11] I could not agree more with the premise of this book, and it will be used and discussed in chapter three of this project in the section covering the subject of "Community Identity."

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[9] Ibid, 45

[10] Ibid, 55-60

[11] Ibid, 210

III. Simple Church

The book, *Simple Church*,[12] by S. Thom Ranier and Eric Geiger, reflects many of the principles about church and discipleship.

The author's premise is that a simple revolution has begun because people are hungry for simple.[13] They not only crave simple, they need simple! They point out another reason that churches should simplify: theologically simplifying is the correct approach to church and discipleship. Jesus himself had a very simple approach to life as opposed to the very complicated approach of the Jewish religious system. This is extremely insightful. In years past, people had more time and were willing to give more time to the church, but today they no longer have that time and are unwilling to give that kind of time to the church and so the church must accomplish its task of making disciples in the simplest manner possible.

The authors contrast the characteristics of a complicated church, what they call a schizophrenic church, with a simple church. There is a real difference between a complicated church, which is really a program driven church, and a simple church from the way they worship, how they hire staff, and how they manage their calendar. This quotation provides a good summation of the difference between the two; "First Churches [a formal traditional church and a program driven church] staff members view numbers vertically (to evaluate the effectiveness of the individual program) and Cross Church (simple churches) views them horizontally," which means they view the "numbers" as

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[12] Ranier, S. Thom and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2006)

[13] Ibid, 8

helping them accomplish the process of discipleship as a whole in the lives of individuals. What genius! Why did it take the modern church so long to realize that concept?

In a chapter discussing the actual principles of Simple Church, the authors define a Simple Church as a *"congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through stages of spiritual growth."*[14] Based on an impressive research methodology they outline four aspects of a simple design which are clarity, movement, alignment, and focus. These are four great principles with which I agree wholeheartedly.

Clarity involves the communication of the simple goal at every level of leadership and throughout the congregation as a whole. Movement is the process that is intentionally put in place to move people from one level of commitment to a greater level of commitment as it relates to discipleship. Alignment is the "arrangement of all ministries and staff around the same simple process."[15] Finally, focus is the commitment on the part of the congregational leadership to abandon everything except that which falls into the endeavor of the simple discipleship process.

While the present project differs from the Simple Church model in some ways it also shares similar principles, particularly in regard to clarity and focus. This project, while not a discipleship model, will emphasize clearly communicating focus points for the congregation for the purpose of revitalization. This project will challenge churches to focus on four areas to lay a foundation for growth: Sunday morning, community identity, leadership development, and ministries. However, similar principles are also involved.

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[14] Ibid, 61

[15] Ibid, 74

Churches can become so spread out that they cannot adequately accomplish their mission. Churches must focus on the key areas and make tough decisions that leaders have to make to achieve that focus. In the Simple Church Model, the goal of the process is to make disciples. While I do not have anything against making disciples or Simple Church, this project differs in that it is not asking churches to focus on a discipleship model, but rather to focus energy, strength, and resources on certain elements of the congregation as a foundation for revitalization and growth.

There are certain areas of this book that have much in common with this project and therefore will be referred to below. The two most important areas of common ground are chapter 7 where the authors discuss maximizing the energy of the individuals in the congregation, and then again in chapter 8 where focus is emphasized. Again, the authors of Simple Church are talking about focusing on a single model for producing disciples. This project is not about a model for discipleship. Instead, this project is about the revitalization of a small to medium-sized plateaued traditional church. Consequently, this project asks its readers to focus, not on a model for discipleship, as valid as that might be, but on certain tasks and areas of church ministry. The most important similarity between the texts of this project and Simple church is the principle of focus! A church cannot accomplish anything, whether it is a model for discipleship or revitalization without significant focus!

IV. Breakout Churches

Another important book on the subject of revitalization, *Breakout Churches*[16], was inspired by the book, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. Even the framework of this book is

[16] Ranier, Thom S. *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005)

borrowed from Collins' book. The definition for a "breakout church" is a church that "made the leap to greatness" under the same pastor.[17] The idea proposed by the author of this book is that there are many churches which experience a change in pastor and consequently begin to grow. Almost no church under the same pastor, after several years of being "so-so" then changes its make-up and becomes great. The research in the early portion of this book defined criteria of a "breakout church." After the definition of a "Breakout church is defined, then, you must find the churches that meet the criteria as well as the comparisons churches to have a measuring stick for the Breakout churches.

Perhaps the most important part of this book and related research is the discovery of the Chrysalis factor. "The chrysalis is the pupa of a butterfly encased in a cocoon. It is the former caterpillar and the future butterfly."[18] The goal of the researchers for this book, as I understand it, is the identification of "what is in the Chrysalis."[19] That is a genius analogy and genius principle. Everyone would like to know if there is a secret formula that enables a church to explode in new growth. If there was a secret it could be randomly applied and plateaued and declining churches everywhere could begin to grow again.

According to Rainer, the author of this book, the "chrysalis" for revitalization of churches begins with an Acts6/7 leader. An Acts 6/7 leader is a one who equips others for leadership positions and deflects the conversation from self to the ministry. Acts 6/7 leaders are not only concerned about the ministry of the church in the present but the future of the congregation. That is great insight.

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[17] Ibid, 16

[18] Ibid, 24

[19] Ibid, 24

Next, in the chrysalis, is the ABC moment which occurs when the pastor, leaders, and leadership, in that order, become aware that there is a problem in the congregation and for whatever reason, or reasons, the congregation is not accomplishing their best for God. This revelation is accompanied with a realization that good is an enemy of the best. This is the crisis moment when the pastor and other leaders become resolved to do whatever it takes, and make any changes necessary, for the church to reach it supreme potential for the Kingdom of God.[20] The ABC moment is followed by a time of seeking God's will for what is the potential of the church by beginning to put the people in place to help the church attain that potential. The next step is the VIP factor which includes the passion of the leader, the needs of the community, along with the gifts, talents, and passions of the congregation.

Two parts of this book are important and complementary to this project. The Vision Intersection profile is the first, which is called the VIP factor, has much in common with the areas that this project will address in the sections on community identity and ministries. The Vision Intersection Profile is the area that connects the needs of the community with the talents and gifts of both the congregation and the pastor. This will be addressed in this project more fully below. Suffice to say that a church can find its theme for ministry and it ministries forging a community identity as identified in the Vision Intersection Profile. (see 2.1)

[20] Ibid, 72

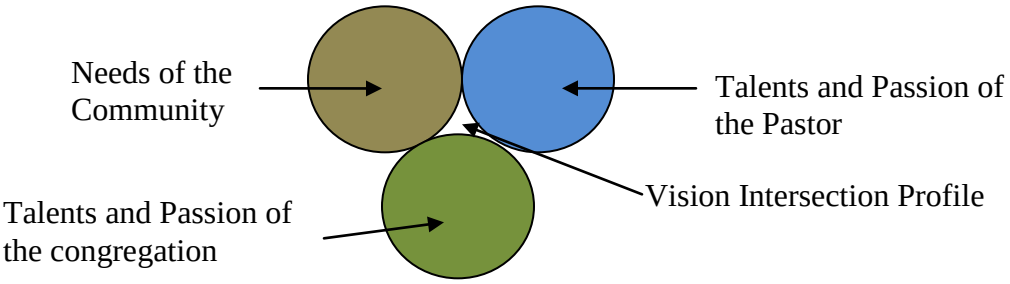

Figure 1. Vision Intersection Profile, Thom Ranier and Eric Geiger, Breakout Churches, p. 111

The second part of this book that has an important bearing on this project is what Ranier and Geiger call a "Culture of Excellence." This is the fifth step of progression in a breakout church. This principle is similar to the role of preparing for, and focusing on, Sunday morning. If a church is going to revitalize it cannot do so without an excellent worship service on Sunday morning. But not just the worship service, it requires excellent Bible study, music, media, and nursery. In short, whatever a congregation does on Sunday morning must be excellent.

Here is an incredible thing about the book *Breakout Churches*. The researchers of this book interviewed or reviewed the numbers of 400,000 churches. Only thirteen churches met the criteria of a breakout church![21]

V. The Come Back Congregation

Another relevant work on the subject, *The Comeback Congregation* by Randy Frazee with Lyle Schaller,[22] is part of a series of books called the *Innovators in Ministry* series. The premise of this book, and every book in the series, is the renovation and

[21] Ibid, 16

[22] Frazee, Randy w. Lyle E. Shaller. *The Come Back Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995)

revitalization of large churches as told from the lips of the senior pastor who led the revitalization.

Frazee became the pastor of a troubled congregation, Pantego Bible Church, in the aftermath of more than 1000 people walking away from the ministry. In approximately four years, the church was revitalized to its former glory and beyond. Frazee tells the story in his own words. He describes the process of how the church accomplished this feat.

The author lists two main reasons for writing this book. He said that he hoped other "practitioners" would be able to see the steps this congregation took toward revitalization and would thus be able to learn from the practical examples things that might enable them to revitalize their own congregation.[23] The second stated reason for writing the book is to give hope to people who are in seemingly impossible situations.[24] Both of those goals are familiar to this author who wants the same for this project.

The author addresses the issue of a "change agent," claiming that almost always revitalization of a church requires a change of pastor.[25] The author also says that the pastor is always the change agent. That probably is accurate. However, a congregation cannot think that it can just change pastors and then everything will be better. Things might not be better. In fact, they might be a lot worse. Frazee and Schaller discuss the characteristics of a change agent. He is charismatic, spiritual, respected, stable, patient, and is able to communicate a vision for a new tomorrow to his people.

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[23] Ibid, 24

[24] Ibid, 25

[25] Ibid, 41

In chapter four, the author explains that a church must develop a direction. "[A church] cannot think that it can become all things to all people."[26] The church must focus and decide what it is going to do. For their vision, the Pantego Bible Church focused on eleven areas. They had goals and certain ministries that were presented to them just because of their location and heritage. They said that they wanted to be a large church and that they wanted to focus on ministry to youth and children. They also wanted to focus on Sunday morning. This paper will refer to this section because the things that Randy Frazee felt are the same things that this author felt as well.

The congregation adopted a mission statement which gave birth to a discipleship model. In a way, they were becoming a "Simple Church" even before people read the book, "Simple Church." They developed a streamlined plan for "moving" people from the sanctuary to a place of service in the Kingdom of God. "Our mission [they said] is to transform people through the work of the Holy Spirit, into fully developing followers of Christ."[27] They called it their "spiritual fitness' plan.

The author explains in detail the relationship of the pastor with the governing board. The comeback concepts in this area include a pastor and governing board that have the power to direct the congregation and make changes that are necessary. They must be on the same page. They must be loyal to each other, and the board must be able to interact with the congregation. He also said something else that struck a chord, which is that the board meets every Monday night.[28] That idea will be further evaluated in this project. The pastor, staff, and board, [or deacons] cannot minister to a church thirty days

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[26] Ibid, 50

[27] Ibid, 61

[28] Ibid, 74

at a time. Planning ministry every seven days in tough enough. This will be addressed in more depth later in the project.

The author also addresses the concept of the development of the staff and team. He offers some things that are very interesting because they are very similar to themes that will be developed later in this project.

For example, the author says, "There is no sense starting something new unless you have factored in the resources and staffing necessary to sustain it."[29] Staff persons, in the opinion of this author, are the foundation for revitalization of a congregation. Without good staff revitalization cannot occur. The author goes on, "…Look at fulfilling many of your staffing needs from within the church with part-time positions."[30] This idea will be dealt with further below in the chapter on leadership development.

One chapter is titled, "Preparing for the Twenty-first Century," where the author emphasized the importance of Sunday mornings. He also mentions the importance of having "intentional systems" in the church to accomplish discipleship, and structuring a congregation relationally so that people will feel like they are a part of the church. If a new member can be assimilated very quickly into the church, that can also begin to grow as a believer. The author also discussed motivating and mobilizing volunteers. One very interesting things that he said was that you must narrow your focus where ministries are concerned to those ministries that are effective and those ministries that the congregation

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[29] Ibid, 79

[30] Ibid, 81

is able to staff.[31] Staff and leadership development is the one vital concept that I will take from this book.

Here is a useful statement from this work: "The process of revitalization comes to an end when the church recovers, but the process of "Re-visioning" does not. One thing our church has learned for sure is that it doesn't matter how strong you are today if you lose your vision for the future you will surely decline."[32]

VI. "Turning Plateaued and Declining Churches Around"

David Odom's doctoral dissertation, *Turning Plateaued and Declining Churches Around*[33] shares a similar purpose to this work. Odom had a desire to help the many churches and pastors who are experiencing a numerical and or spiritual decline. In the abstract, the author says, "The purpose of this project is to reveal that there is a danger of churches being lulled to sleep and becoming plateaued. This project also offers several reasons why churches stop growing and possible solutions to turn a non-growing church into a growing church."[34]

The author provides a short list of things that he thinks contribute to churches being in the state of decline or plateau. The first is tradition. The author says that the word tradition most often carried a negative connotation when spoken by Jesus. He says tradition makes the word of God powerless. Personally, I do not think tradition per se can necessarily be accused of making the word of God powerless. I do agree harmful traditions, or Godless traditions, can make the word of God powerless. On the other hand,

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[31] Ibid, 99

[32] Ibid, 124

[33] David Odom, "Turning Plateaued or Declining Churches Around" (DMin Thesis, Liberty Theological Seminary, 2002)

[34] Ibid, v

godly traditions are very helpful. Now, it is possible that in many declining churches, ungodly traditions have been passed down from one generation to another and that those traditions have hindered the growth of churches.

Another reason given by the author for churches to be in a state of decline or on a plateau is apathy. I am more inclined to think that this is a bigger issue than tradition. Apathy, as it is defined, is simply a lack of interest or desire. Without question, there are many churches that have lost all desire to see God work in their congregations.

Another reason given by the author is worship. The author says, "…A vast majority of churches today are not experiencing a face to face encounter with God on a weekly basis."[35] I agree with this reason as given by Odom for the decline of churches. Although this project will deal more with the preparation for worship the two go hand in hand. It is hard for God to bless worship that is inadequately prepared and therefore is shoddy.

The final reason cited by the author is a lack of leadership. In the section on leadership, Odom questions the spiritual capability of most pastors to lead their congregations. The author also indicts churches for failing to allow capable pastors lead their congregations. I believe the author is correct on both accusations. Later in the chapter, the author cites a reason for ineffective leadership being a lack of real leadership skills. In this project, I will focus more on the pragmatic development of leaders. However, I wholeheartedly agree that growth falls squarely on the shoulders of leadership.

Odom provides a personal strategy for revitalization of a plateaued or declining church. The first step is a willingness to change. Coming to the point of willingness is

[35] Ibid, 40

synonymous with what Ranier and Geiger call the ABC moment. The ABC moment, according to Ranier and Geiger is the moment when the pastor and leadership of a congregation recognize that any serious revitalization of the congregation will require change. The first thing that the author changed in the congregation that he served at the time he wrote his thesis was worship, moving it from a traditional format to a blended style of worship. In this project, I will not take up the issue of worship style as much but rather a preparation for worship. I do not believe it is as much the style of worship that prevents a church from growing because there are many churches of different styles that are growing. It is not the style of worship that necessarily prevents a church from growing, but shoddy worship will hinder worship every time, a concept that will be further developed and addressed below.

The author discussed prayer, a section with which I could not agree more. In the section of this project dealing with Sunday morning, prayer will be one of the issues addressed. There are not many churches which have a healthy corporate prayer life.

VII. From Embers To A Flame

This book begins by outlining the need for church revitalization, and the news is grim. The author, Harry Reeder, says that the typical church in almost any denomination is either on a plateau or declining in membership and participation. Rapid growth is atypical, and among older congregations the pattern is even more pronounced. Plateau and decline are the rule; growth is the rare exception."[36] Churches are sick, the author says, because they focus on programs looking for that magical formula for church

[36] Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame* (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ 2004), 8

growth.[37] Dying churches often are reluctant to break free of burdensome traditions that are clouded by nostalgia. Dying churches are too dependent on the personality of a single leader.[38] Rather than looking to grow with bold new ventures, they are in a maintenance mode trying to hang on to the past. They develop a victim mindset. Often in a dying church one will hear excuses for their lack of growth such as, "People just don't go to church like they used to several years ago."

There are two other symptoms of a dying church. Many times, a church is dying because of the perception it has in the community. "Remember that your reputation is not what you write in a bulletin, but rather what the community actually thinks of you."[39] Finally, and worst of all, churches die because they become distracted from their goal of preaching the gospel. God has no desire or obligation to bless a church that is not interested in preaching the gospel.

The author makes some valid points that are relevant to this project. One is that not every person has given up on the traditional plateaued or declining church. There are some who really want to see these churches flourish and believe it possible. The opportunities for growth in the Kingdom of God are limitless when a person considers how many churches that are dying. All of these churches are currently in communities with at least some people living nearby. These congregations own property and buildings. All they need is a vibrant pastor and a vibrant evangelistic congregation with a vision for reaching their community for Christ.

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[37] Ibid, 9

[38] Ibid, 11

[39] Ibid, 17

In developing this concept further, the author offers a biblical paradigm for church revitalization based on the life and experiences of the church in Ephesus. Early on, the church in Ephesus was very effective. However, false teachers entered the congregation and the church became ineffective.

For the church at Ephesus, the path to revitalization would begin with a remembrance of the things that made them successful in the past from the stand point of doctrine. Likewise, every church has a history that should be researched and respected as a part of the revitalization process. That is a very good point, and one that is easily forgotten.

In the process of considering a church's past, there might be some things for which the congregation as a whole, and certain individuals, might need to repent. As long as there are open sins in the congregation, God cannot bless. Then, it is back to the basics. A church must be fundamentally healthy if it is going to experience revitalization.

The author tells a wonderful story of revival in the congregation he served, revival which began with his first message on the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful chapter because it reminds pastors that one of the most often overlooked principles for revitalization is a commitment to preach the gospel. It is like rain on thirsty parched land. The author calls this "the first of the first things."[40]

The second of the "first things," according to Reeder is prayer. In the chapter on this subject, it seemed to me the author drifts a too much into a treatment of the prayer of Jabez. However, I am in total agreement that prayer is an area of great concern for churches wanting to revitalize and grow. It is the same as in a marriage relationship. There can be no vibrant relationship where there is no communication. In the next section

[40] Ibid, 57

the author addresses the ministry of the Word from a teaching stand point. Immature believers cannot lead revitalization.

The author devotes the next two sections to leadership and ministry vision. Again, these two areas are both subjects that will be covered in chapter three of this work. It is amazing to me how often, in different publications, that same subjects appear as they relate to the revitalization of a plateaued or declining church. The final chapter is about Great Commission discipleship. The author begins by discussing worship. He says that worship is a vital part of evangelism. That is true. A congregation that does not worship will not be evangelistic.

He continues talking about how different people view worship and the different types of evangelism. In the last section of the chapter the author gives his opinion about small group discipleship and its importance for revitalization.

This excellent book will be referred to in many different areas throughout this project, particularly the chapters entitled, "The Need for Church Revitalization," and, "The Role of Prayer."

VIII. The Incredible Shrinking Church

In the beginning of this book, Dr. Frank Page's book *Who Can Save the Incredible Shrinking Church*[41], the author quotes a statistic from *Leadership* magazine that is almost unbelievable. *Leadership* magazine reported that 85% of the congregations in the country are either plateaued or declining. While that does not sound particularly bad, when a person puts the numbers to the percentages, it becomes staggering. According to that statistic, of the 400,000 congregations in America, over 340,000 are either plateaued or

[41] Page, Frank w/ John Perry, *Who Can Save The Incredible Shrinking Church* (Nashville. Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2008)

are actually declining. The book is worth the cost for that quote alone. The sheer number of churches that are on a growth plateau, or are actually declining, should shock church leaders everywhere. Revitalization of plateaued or declining churches is a major issue. One surprise is that there are not more books and articles written about this issue. Proportionately, one would conclude that there is very little concern. It is my opinion, and fear, that most churches in this condition never hear from a denominational leader or church growth consultant offering his or her help for a church that is struggling.

In this book, Page primarily discusses the role of the pastor in the revitalization process. In this project, I assume the role of the pastor and its importance, a subject which Page addresses with great knowledge and warmth. The author encourages pastors who are in struggling churches. However, encouragement alone is not going to grow a church and encouragement alone will not enable a pastor to revitalize a struggling church. Being the wrong kind of person will certainly prevent the church you pastor from growing. Being the right kind of pastor will not necessarily grow your congregation. There are many men who are convinced that God “called” them to be a pastor. They are consistent, reliable, knowledgeable, and they lead with love, but their churches are not growing. Being a catalyst for revitalization requires more. I am not saying that Page does not know what it takes to revitalize a church. Of course he knows what it takes to revitalize a declining congregation. I just think that there are many wonderful men out there trying to revitalize a declining congregation and they are asking questions, but there are very little answers. The question that I am trying to give some answer to is the same question that I was recently asked by a young pastor going to his first full-time congregation. He said,

"What do I do on Monday morning?" That is the question that I am trying to answer for struggling pastors of struggling churches.

In the remainder of the book, Page addresses two issues that are closely associated with this thesis. In chapter seven, he talks about leadership. He quotes Collins, in the book *Good to Great*, who said you have to get "the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seat on the bus!"[42] It is a fine chapter, but my problem, as with most books on this subject, is the author spends more time talking about the problem than the solution. For example, it would be better, after identifying the importance of leadership, if the author would have identified the leaders he was talking about rather than only identifying the characteristics of good leadership.

Elsewhere in the book, Page discusses community ministry. His chapter is entitled "Taking it to the Streets," and it focuses on evangelism. Page identifies several ministries through which the First Baptist Church in Taylor, South Carolina engages the community meeting their needs with the gospel of Jesus Christ. These ministries, labeled under the umbrella name, *Impact Greenville*, help the church identify with the community and facilitate their preaching of the gospel in their own community. That concept coincides closely with the sections in this thesis on "Ministries" and "Community Identity."

This is a small but excellent book, and its content is applied in the following chapter of this thesis.

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[42] Frank Page w/ John Perry, *Who Can Save The Incredible Shrinking Church* (B&H Publishing: Nashville, Tennessee, 2008) [79 from Jim Collins, *Good To Great* (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, New York 2001) 41]

IX. Left Behind in a Megachurch World

A very interesting book on the subject of church growth is a book written by Ruth Tucker entitled *Left Behind in a Megachurch World*.[43] I chose this book because of its unique argument against church revitalization. Tucker accuses the mega-church culture of obsessing on numbers instead of quality of ministry. She says plateaued, old, and small churches often more accurately live out what a church is supposed to be in terms of actual ministry to the community. She claims that a new paradigm is in order in terms of how the small, left behind churches, are viewed in culture. She calls on the church to abandon the quest of being number one in terms of numbers for a different goal of being faithful in spite of failure. Her penultimate argument is that mega-churches have left behind smaller communities and the people who inhabit those communities, and she gives examples of "saints" who have persevered, yet failed, in failure trying to revitalize dying churches in dying communities.

I can empathize with the author's concern for small plateaued and declining churches in small "out of the way" communities. This thesis has those very churches in mind, but to accuse the mega-church movement with being responsible for their demise is irresponsible and short-sighted. To say that small churches have a better perception of and commitment to community ministry is equally short-sighted and irresponsible. I think that Tucker should examine the ministry of Page's church in Taylor, South Carolina and try to deny that that congregation is not reaching community with the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that is both meaningful and genuine. She ought also to look at the congregation of Fellowship Bible Church under the direction of Lewis in Little Rock,

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[43] Tucker, Ruth A., *Left Behind in a Megachurch World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books 2006)

Arkansas and then honestly say that she does not think that church is reaching its community with the gospel of Jesus Christ in a genuine and meaningful way.

If a small church fails, then the ministry ceases. Tucker's central example of such a congregation is the congregation in which she was raised. The church is now closed, and by her admission, has grass growing through the floors and cob webs crowding the front door! The premise of this thesis is developing a strategy to keep such churches open using the same church growth principles that she decries and rejects!

I do not know the good people who attended the Green Grove Alliance Church, and therefore I cannot make judgments about why that church closed. However, using her logic, it would have been great if there had been someone who was consumed with numbers when that church was struggling to survive. If that had been the case, perhaps that fine congregation would still be alive today shaping the lives and spiritual future of boys and girls the way that she claims the church shaped her life.

Chapter Three

The Four Areas Of Focus: Explanation And Application

This chapter will identify and discuss the four areas of focus that, in my opinion, are vital to the revitalization of a small to medium sized plateaued or declining traditional church. In this chapter I will attempt to defend the areas of focus based upon my experiences, my reading in this area of scholarship, and my experiences with two churches that I had the distinct pleasure of working with during the research phase of this thesis. This chapter does not attempt to identify the total ministry of a church, but rather four areas of focus for the specific purpose of generating revitalization of the type of church as I described it above.

I. Sunday Morning

Without doubt, the most important thing that a church does occurs on Sunday morning. Allan Taylor is the Minister of Education at First Baptist Church in Woodstock, Georgia. In 2007, he put out a video training series on DVD for Sampson Resources. The title of the series is *Sunday School Done Right*.[1] The first lesson is entitled, "What Does It Mean to Make Sunday Special."[2] In the introduction to that lesson, the author says,

[1] Allan Taylor, *Sunday School Done Right* (Sampson Resources, Dallas Texas 2007) DVD #2, Lesson #1

[2] Ibid, Lesson #1

"Sunday morning, for the church, is the Super Bowl fifty two weeks a year!"[3] The author goes on to say, as far as everything else in the church is concerned, "Sunday morning rules."[4] No other thing in the life and ministry of the church can supplant Sunday morning in terms of importance. The author says one more thing of great importance. "Your resources, your leaders, and your facility need to be used with Sunday morning in mind."[5]

The premise of this chapter is that same. Declining and plateaued churches in almost all instances have drifted away from Sunday morning. The first thing that needs to be re-established is the importance of Sunday. What does it mean that Sunday morning is important? It means that the preparation for Sunday morning takes precedent over other things in the life of the church.

This premise shows up in other writings about revitalizing plateaued and declining churches. In Rainer's book, *Breakout Churches*, the author addresses this premise in several different areas and on several different levels. The author does not have a chapter entitled "Making Sunday Morning Special" like Taylor, but he explicitly deals with the same principle. Chapter seven of Rainer's book is entitled, "A Culture of Excellence." In the chapter, the author uses the example of First Gethsemane Baptist Church, in Louisville, KY and attributes the excellence of Sunday morning as a factor that helped this congregation grow significantly over a twenty year period. This is how the author describes the situation at First Gethsemane this way, "Walker [the pastor] and the other

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[3] Ibid, Lesson #1

[4] Ibid, Lesson #1

[5] Ibid, Lesson #1

leaders at First Gethsemane believe that anything attempted for God should be done with excellence. For instance, Walker insists on excellence in *music and worship*…His *preaching* reflects hours of labor that could only be described as *excellent.*[6] Each of the things listed here is "Sunday morning!" The chapter goes on to mention many other things that do not occur on Sunday morning, but make no mistake that one of the factors recognized by the author of *Breakout Churches* as a revitalization prerequisite is excellence on Sunday morning.

Stetzer and Dodson, the authors of *Comeback Churches* came to a similar conclusion. In their chapter entitled "Worship and Preaching Matters." The authors explain that almost all of the comeback churches they identified attributed a re-emphasis on worship as a significant factor in their revitalization.[7] The authors stated, "It seems obvious worship matters to comeback churches. Most growing churches we know have dynamic worship and excellent preaching!"[8] The authors quote Kevin Hamm, pastor of Valley View Church in Louisville, Kentucky, who led a declining congregation of 300 to be a vibrant congregation of more than 2000, "We worked from the premise that worship is the front door of the church. So we spent a year looking at our worship service without expending energy trying to draw visitors. After that first year, we had our worship settled and we started to reach out to the community."[9] While Page does not have a chapter devoted to "Sunday morning" he does conclude his chapter on evangelism by saying,

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[6] Thom S. Ranier, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 131

[7] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 78

[8] Ibid, 78

[9] Ibid, 79

> At the same time our evangelism work has thrived, we've kept close watch on our Sunday morning worship services. Many people, especially visitors and recent members, know us only by what they experience at Sunday church. While all these areas of worship and outreach are important, Sunday worship is the most prominent and visible part of our community of faith. So we have to make sure is shines as brightly as possible.[10]

So, how does a church make Sunday morning important and special? It is not as complicated as one might think. To make Sunday morning special, or excellent, it must be the focus of the church and its leaders.

For most churches, there is a "disconnect" between the churches activities and Sunday morning. If you were to ask almost any church if Sunday morning was important, they would almost unanimously affirm Sunday morning as important. Yet, in the life of the church, they are not treating the Sunday morning activities as important.

Sunday morning is treated as important by giving each event that takes place on Sunday morning a high priority and by placing the preparation for necessary items in the primetime slots of the weekly schedule. Taylor, in his video series entitled *Sunday School Done Right*, "You can have a great Sunday Morning and your church can grow even if your Sunday night and your Wednesday night are not as good as you would like for them to be. If your Sunday morning is not very good, then your church cannot grow and it does not matter how good your Sunday night and Wednesday night are."[11] I completely agree with that statement. Conceding that Sunday morning is of supreme importance, how should one approach the weekly schedule of church activities? Consider this statement. If Sunday morning is of supreme importance, and it is, then the weekly schedule should

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[10] Frank Page w/ John Perry, *Who can Save The Incredible Shrinking Church* (B&H Publishing: Nashville: Tennessee, 2008), 123

[11] Allan Taylor, *Sunday School Done Right* (Sampson Resources, Dallas: Texas 2007) DVD #2, Lesson #1

have a direct and intimate connection with Sunday morning. In other words, activities in the weekly schedule must be those that help a congregation prepare for Sunday morning, *first*. The best way to approach such a schedule is to place preparation for Sunday morning in the primetime slots of the schedule.

If a congregation is small to medium size many of the same people are likely doing different jobs in the church such as singing in the choirs, teaching Sunday school classes, teaching or working in the children's ministries, etc. A church leader must optimize the time of these volunteers all the while doing the necessary preparation for Sunday morning that allows Sunday morning to be consistently excellent. The best way to do that is to place the preparation for Sunday morning in the primetime slots of the weekly schedule. This allows key personnel to prepare for Sunday morning while maintaining their energy. This is a hypothetical weekly schedule for a small to medium sized church.

Sunday	
Sunday School	9:45 AM
AM Worship	11:00 AM
Discipleship	6:00 PM
Children's Activities	6:00 PM
Youth Activities	6:00 PM
PM Worship	7:00 PM
Wednesday	
Children's activities	7:00 PM
Youth Activities	7:00 PM
Adult Bible Study	7:00 PM
Choir Rehearsal	8:00 PM

In a schedule of this type, there is an obvious "disconnect" between the weekly schedule of normal activities and Sunday morning. Even if this schedule is expanded to include weekday and weeknight ministries to adults, youth and children, mission trips,

camps, and other outings for people of all ages, there is still a disconnect between Sunday morning and the weekly schedule. The “disconnect” to which I am referring is a time of preparation for the Sunday morning service and ministries. For everything that that takes place on a Sunday morning, especially the activities that require participation by large groups of people, there needs to be a time of preparation during the week scheduled in a primetime slot on the weekly schedule.

Here is a general list of activities that are included in Sunday morning.

- Preaching
- Singing
- Teaching (Sunday School Bible Studies)
- Media
- Child care
- Heating and cooling
- Parking
- Prayer

Each of these items needs to be adequately prepared for each Sunday. When a leader loses sight of even one of these principles the potential for disaster on Sunday morning enlarges.

A. Preaching

The preaching in the Sunday morning worship service is very important. In fact, nothing is of greater importance than the Sunday morning sermon. Sunday morning is the time when most visitors are in the worship service. Consequently, it is vitally important that the Sunday morning Sermon be excellent. It is a foregone conclusion that the sermon

must be biblically based. It is not my intent to expound upon that aspect of the sermon. I am assuming that the reader possesses a high view of scripture. The truth is not everyone who possesses evangelical doctrine preaches excellent sermons. Often, the sermon in a worship service is poorly done.

In Stetzer and Dodson's book, *Comeback Churches*, the two spend several pages documenting the necessity of preaching in the revitalization of a congregation. They say, "Another key component of worship involves communicating the Word of God in a biblically faithful, practical, and relevant way." [12] I would add to that, "It must be excellent."

Reeder, in his book, *From Embers to a Flame*, also has a section on the importance of preaching in the revitalization process of a church. The title of chapter five is "The Ministry of the Word." In that chapter the author says,

> By the time Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, which was probably the last book he wrote before his death, Timothy may still have been involved in the revitalization ministry at Ephesus, or perhaps at other churches as well. And 2nd Timothy contains the same preponderance of passages about the ministry of the Word and its central role in all church work. The climax of the book, in fact, is a series of nine verses where Paul gives his final charge to Timothy, and all nine verses are about the preaching and the teaching of the scriptures.[13]

Like Stetzer and Dodson, the author discusses the necessity of biblical preaching which he defines as Christ centered and God-given. The author also discusses the life of the preacher and the different types of messages that a preacher must preach. All of this is

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[12] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 90

[13] Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: R&R Publishing, 2004), 99

assumed by the author of this project. I would only add to Reeder's comments that the preaching of the Sunday morning Sermon must be excellent.

Both of the authors mentioned above prefer expository sermons. Stetzer and Dodson state that the "slight majority of Comeback Churches used expository preaching as their method of proclamation."[14] I think that statement is somewhat misleading. In fact, in their own research, Stetzer and Dodson found that 53% of Comeback Churches used expository as their method of proclamation while the remaining 47% was split between several other methods combined. When the percentage of pastors preaching expository messages is compared to all other methods combined it is only a small majority, but when you compare expository preaching to other individual methods it is not even close.

However, it is not my intent to prescribe a particular method of proclamation. I use primarily expository preaching. Occasionally, I use other types of proclamation. The method of proclamation is personal, and it should vary depending on the circumstances. The most important points where preaching is concerned as it relates to this project is that it must be biblical and excellent!

Excellent preaching is preaching that is thoroughly prepared. One of the best things that pastor can do for his church is take the time to prepare good sermons. This can be a more difficult proposition than it seems on the surface because there are many things that vie for the time of a pastor of a small to medium sized church of any persuasion. Visitation, hospital visitation, administration, and many other things threaten to steal the sermon preparation time of the pastor. Those things cannot succeed. Fatigue can be a

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[14] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 91

factor as well. On many occasions, after the weekend the pastor might not feel like getting right back in the study for sermon preparation but it is a must.

Excellent sermon preparation begins early in the week, preferably on Monday morning. Desperate sermon preparation begins on Thursday. Even more desperate preparation begins on Friday, and preparation that begins on Saturday is simply unacceptable." Church staff and the congregation need to be aware that the pastor begins sermon preparation on Monday morning. Sunday morning is king, the king of Sunday morning is the sermon, and it cannot be what it needs to be in terms of quality unless the necessary preparation time is observed. So, the pastor of a small to medium sized church need not apologize for setting aside time for sermon preparation. The congregation may hate it on Monday morning, but they will love it on Sunday.

When I arrived at the church I am currently serving, it was the "habit" of some in the congregation to drop by the pastor's office unannounced for impromptu casual conversations many of which were endless in nature. These conversations might last an hour or longer. Having served this congregation as an associate pastor previously, I knew full well about this characteristic of the congregation. Consequently, when I arrived at the church and assumed the role of pastor one of the first things that I relayed to the congregation was that I would be busy studying in the mornings and would not be free for non-essentials until after lunch. Emergencies are always a possibility and no one would turn away a church member in crisis, but unless it is a crisis, the pastor needs to spend the mornings studying for his various obligations throughout the week. If a pastor does not like to study in the mornings he can do it in the afternoons or some other time. It is just vitally important that the pastor find the best time of the day to study. If a person

wants to revitalize a congregation, it begins with the sermon. If the congregation cannot sit through the sermon, then they cannot stay at the church.

B. Music

The music also must also be excellent, and the only way for the music to be excellent is preparation. If Sunday morning is king, to use the terminology of Taylor, and at least the second most important thing that takes place on a Sunday morning is the music, then why is it that preparation for the music for Sunday morning is an afterthought to most church leaders?

For most small to medium sized churches, choir practice is either after worship on Sunday night or after Adult Bible study or worship on Wednesday night. This poses a problem and a stumbling block for the revitalization of the congregation. First, it sends a message that there are many other things that are more important than the music because it is the last item of the agenda for the day and it is placed at the most difficult place on the schedule for most people especially families with children.

Preparation for the music on Sunday morning needs to be placed on the schedule in such a place that the most people can attend and childcare needs to be provided. If a congregation does not accomplish anything but music rehearsal on Sunday night or Wednesday night that is fine, but it must be accomplished!

One church that I worked with throughout the year illustrates this point sufficiently. This church is a small church in Kingsport Tennessee. This was their schedule for Sunday evenings as of February 2008.

“Sticking With God Practice”	4:30 PM
God’s Kids Choir Practice	4:30 PM
Discipleship	5:00 PM
Evening Worship	6:00 PM
Adult Choir Practice	7:00 PM

This is not a “bad” schedule, but as is evident, adult choir practice is the last thing on a Sunday evening. It is not all that late, but it is the last thing, and there was no childcare for those who are singing in the choir. Preferably, the time for the rehearsal of the choir needs to be earlier in the day at a time when nothing else, or the least possible, is competing with the adult choir rehearsal.

The church I currently serve was in the same mold. Previously, adult choir rehearsal took place at 8:00 PM on Wednesday Evening. Consequently, the choir consisted of mostly senior adults because no person with children could stay for rehearsal on Wednesday evenings. The church wisely moved the choir rehearsal to 7:00 PM on Wednesday evenings, primetime, during the time when all the youth and children’s activities were taking place allowing people with children to participate in the adult choir. The choir has grown, and the music on Sunday morning has become more excellent. The church is not placing a choir of ten or twelve in the loft on Sunday mornings, but now the congregation is presented with a choir of twenty on Sunday morning. A choir of twenty that is well-rehearsed sends a much different message to members and visitors on a Sunday morning as opposed to a small group that is poorly rehearsed and only fills half of the choir loft.

This was the Wednesday evening schedule for the church when I arrived to assume the role of pastor.

Children's Activities	7:00 PM
Youth Activities	7:00 PM
Adult Bible Study	7:00 PM
Adult Choir Rehearsal	8:00 PM

As is evident, the adult choir rehearsal was too late for anyone with children to attend. Obviously, the adult choir had already become a "senior" adult choir by the time this pastor arrived.

This is the change in the schedule that was made by the church to help resolve this problem. This is a list of the Wednesday schedule of worship and ministry opportunities.

Church-wide prayer	6:00-6:30 pm
Nursery	6:00-8:15 PM
AWANA	6:30-8:15 PM
Sunday School Teacher Training	6:30-7:15 PM
Instrumentalists' Rehearsal	6:30-7:15 PM
Youth Worship	7:00-8:15 PM
Adult Bible Study	7:15-8:15 PM
Adult Choir Rehearsal	7:15-8:15 PM

Changing the time of the rehearsal for the adult choir made it much easier for different people to be a part of the choir. The result has been a much better choir, and a much better choir has meant better worship service on a more consistent basis. Excellence in music is one thing that my staff and I have preached to those participating in the music ministry.

The adult choir is not the only group leading worship, and the principles have applied to the rehearsal times for other groups. "Spirit Wind" is a contemporary vocal ensemble. There are nine vocalists in the group a rhythm guitar player, lead guitar player, a bass guitar player, keyboard player, drummer, and a piano player. This group rehearses on Sunday at 4:30-6:00 pm. The Adult choir (Sanctuary Choir) and Spirit Wind alternate leading worship from one Sunday to the next.

To sum up the premise of the chapter; if music is important in worship, and it is very important, then preparation should be accounted for in the prime-time weekly schedule of church activities. If a high priority is given to music preparation during the week, then the level of performance on Sunday will rise accordingly.

C. Sunday School Teaching

Another area of great concern is the preparation of Sunday school lessons by the Sunday school teachers. Sunday school (Bible Study) is extremely important. Sunday school attendance is what churches are built on. It is their point of evaluation for health and effectiveness. There are a few numbers that are primary sources for evaluation of a church and one of those numbers is Sunday school attendance.

Evangelicals emphasize Bible study and Sunday school, yet, all too often, there is a disconnect between the preparation of the weekly lesson by the teacher and the pastor, the staff, and the members of the class. Usually, teachers are left to prepare their lessons in isolation. For an older more experienced teacher this may be acceptable, but for the younger less experienced teacher it can be more difficult. For the less experienced teacher, this leads to more errors in the teaching and more discouragement overall.

It is much better if there is a corporate time of preparation as early in the week as possible in a prime-time slot in the church's weekly schedule. In most small to medium size churches, this type of preparation is non-existent. In both churches I worked with as a part of this thesis, both small to medium size churches, neither had any type of weekly training and preparation for Sunday School teachers. Consequently, both churches were experiencing a decline in Sunday School attendance. One church was experiencing a slight decline while the other was experiencing a sharp decline.

When I arrived at First Baptist Church Weber City, Sunday school attendance had been declining for several years. One of the first things that the church did was institute a teachers meeting every Sunday morning at 9:30 AM for all teachers, assistant teachers, and outreach directors. The church provided breakfast for the teachers. I was able to begin to share with the teachers my philosophy for Sunday school. The meeting only lasted 15 minutes, but it allowed me to address any needs a teacher might have in his or her class. The rest of the time was spent with fellowship and Sunday school preparation. This was also the place where I shared the Sunday school numbers with the teachers and other Sunday school personnel. It was a great time of celebration as the Sunday school attendance grew from one semester to another. Finally, it also meant that every teacher had to be there early. Consequently, this solved the problem of teachers showing up late to teach a class. A teacher showing up late, or not at all, for a class is death for a Sunday school class. This can be curtailed almost completely if there is a teacher's meeting every Sunday morning.

The church also began a teacher's training session each Wednesday evening. This is reflected in the schedule of activities below.

Wednesday Schedule of Worship and Ministry Opportunities

Church-wide prayer	6:00-6:30 pm
Nursery	6:00-8:15 PM
AWANA	6:30-8:15 PM
Sunday School Teacher Training	**6:30-7:15 PM**
Instrumentalists' Rehearsal	6:30-7:15 PM
Youth Worship	7:00-8:15 PM
Adult Bible Study	7:15-8:15 PM
Adult Choir Rehearsal	7:15-8:15 PM

The Sunday school teacher training is perhaps the best forty-five minutes of the week. The church has been doing this for several years now, and the teachers absolutely

love it. The camaraderie between teachers is incredible. During the training time I teach the lesson to all of the adult teachers. (The children and youth classes use a different curriculum.) This gives the teachers a time to ask questions about the text. It allows the older teachers to share wisdom and insight with the younger less experienced teachers. It allows the team of adult teachers to “get on the same page” as far as the text is concerned. Consequently, the lesson that is being taught is now much more consistent across the broad spectrum of classes, because the teachers have had an opportunity to discuss the text and come to a consensus on its interpretation. One of the things that amazed me as I began to teach the adult teachers each week, was the difference in interpretation from one class to the next. One other advantage of having a weekly teacher training session is the benefit that it provides the younger teachers. After having gone to a training session on the weekly lesson, the younger teacher now feels more confident about the lesson. Therefore, he or she teaches the lesson with more boldness and confidence. The students enjoy it more, the teacher enjoys it more, and the class grows as a result. A weekly training session for teachers is an absolute must for a church trying to reverse a pattern of decline or plateau in terms of attendance. Students of all ages love an excellent Sunday school class and they equally abhor a poor class. A church cannot grow with poorly executed Sunday school classes.

D. Media

Media is the next area of preparation that must be considered. Most churches use some form of electronic media at this point. Learning to use media is not difficult, most every church has people who are gifted with computers and who would love to build and run the media for the church given the opportunity. Assuming that the reader is in a

church where media is routinely used for worship in the music and the sermon, here is a key point: media must be excellent. No asset is more beneficial and helpful to worshippers in the technological age than the good use of media. Media, graphics, and video, can set the mood for worship and assist the fellowship of worship like almost nothing else. However, just because a church uses media does not mean that their media is a benefit to the congregation. In fact, it is quite likely that the media will be a hindrance if it is not utilized properly. There is not anything more bothersome and more of a distraction in a worship service than media done poorly. In one of the two churches that I worked with as a part of this thesis, the question of media arose. The answer the pastor gave as to why there was no media for the sermon was because they tried to do it on one occasion and it was such a bad experience that they chose never to do it again, and they have not used sermon Power Point presentation to this day.

Like other components being discussed in this chapter, media must be used with excellence. Preparation for media must be something for which there is an accounting. Obviously, there are many ways a pastor and staff could manage the preparation for media. Here is the system that is used by First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia. The worship order is finalized earlier in the week, the sermon, and the sermon Power Point are also finished as early in the week as possible. Generally, the sermon, and sermon Power Point, and the worship order are finalized on Wednesday and are placed in the hands of the administrative assistant in charge of gathering items for, and printing, the bulletin. The Administrative Assistant gathers the remaining announcements, prayer requests, and other items for the bulletin, and prints the bulletin no later than Friday morning. For First Baptist Church, Weber City, the Youth Minister also doubles as

person who prepares the media for each weekend. It is important to have one person responsible for taking the sermon Power Point, the worship order, and all the announcements and putting them in Media Shout in preparation for the Sunday morning worship service. On Friday afternoon, it is the job of the youth minister to take the prepared components and put them into the computer in the sanctuary in Media Shout software. It is also this person's responsibility to prepare the schedule for those who actually run the Media Shout software each weekend. It is this person's responsibility to train these people and also to make sure that the person who is scheduled to run the media on a given weekend actually shows up to perform this task. If the person who is scheduled to run the media does not appear for the service, then it is the job of the youth minister to run the media for the worship service. It is expected that the person who is scheduled to run the media will call the Youth Minister if he or she cannot be at the service for whatever reason, but whether they call or not, it is the job of the youth minister to make sure that the media is run properly for the worship service.

I would like to be able to say that the media in First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia, is always run properly. It is not perfect. That is to say that there are minor mistakes that are made from time to time, but these days they are mostly minor glitches that do not affect the worship service as opposed to the major weekly issues that the church experienced at the outset. The difference is the principles behind the preparation of the media.

- ✓ Put one person in charge of "building" the media each week. Preferably, this could be a staff person simply because there would be very few weeks in the year when that staff person would not be at church as opposed to a volunteer

who might miss many Sundays during a given year. It is also better for this person to be a paid staff member because you can supervise a staff member and you cannot really supervise a volunteer.

- ✓ Set a schedule for the media to be prepared, and a deadline for it to be completed. For First Baptist Church, it is Friday afternoon, and it must be completed before the youth minister leaves work that afternoon.
- ✓ Train other people to run and build the media. It is best to allow one person to build the media each week, and have other people to run the media on the weekend. There will be times when the person who builds the media might be absent or even sick. On those occasions, it will be absolutely necessary for someone else to build and perhaps even run the media for the weekend.

It is not an option for a growing church to suddenly have no media for a given weekend. One weekend might not be that bad if there is a good reason, but if that becomes habitual it will put the church in a bad light where members and prospects are concerned. Here are a couple of bad experiences the First Baptist Church of Weber City, Virginia had in the early days of trying to do media for the worship services. First, the church was trying to rely upon volunteers to build and run the media. There was no set system for who would build the media each week. Each week was an adventure to find a person to build the media for that particular week. Also, there was no time frame for when the media would be built or deadline for it to be completed. It was a nightmare. The media was approximately a fifty percent proposition. Fifty percent of the time the media would go well, and the other fifty percent there would be major problems. Fifty percent is nowhere near close enough to perfection. After a few bad experiences, the young staff

established a procedure for building the media and a schedule for people who would run the media. This gave the media the stability and the consistency of excellence that a growing church requires.

After a routine is established, the next battle is consistency. On one occasion, the staff became a smidge lax and casual on the weekly preparation of the media. The pastor's Power Point for the sermon had more than one error in the text. It was the result of simple oversight as a consequence of not proofreading the Power Point after initial preparation. One of the young mothers in the congregation, a professional in her own right, chided the pastor after the service, in a tactful way of course. She was embarrassed by the errors because of the visitors in the congregation. The pastor apologized profusely. The pastor understood the embarrassment of this young mother and professional because the pastor was equally embarrassed. This incident reinforced the importance of relentless media preparation and caused the pastor and staff to re-commit themselves to excellence in media presentations for worship.

E. Child Care

Child care is another area of importance in terms of preparation. Most small to medium sized churches struggle with child care because they rely on volunteers to plan and implement child care for the church. Several years ago, I was serving a church in Virginia. On the last Sunday I preached, before moving to South Alabama, the church scheduled my wife to serve in the nursery! And she did! Child care can be difficult to manage for small to medium sized churches.

However, some of the most important preparation for Sunday morning involves the churches preparation for childcare. If a congregation can schedule volunteers, then

fine, but if not the congregation should strongly consider hiring a childcare worker. The money that it costs to hire a person for childcare is the best money that a congregation can possibly spend in a year because a congregation simply cannot grow without quality childcare.

First Baptist Church, Weber City did not have paid nursery workers when I arrived to serve as their pastor. One of the first areas of concern for the newly hired Minister to Children was to shore up the child care area. So, the new Minister to Children advertised for the position in the local papers, began to interview applicants as they applied for the job, and eventually hired a new paid childcare worker. The money that is spent on the "nursery worker" is minimal. It only cost three to four thousand dollars a year to hire a childcare worker. Depending on the hours needed, it may even cost less, but the benefits are enormous.

Prior to hiring a childcare worker, the congregation relied on volunteer staffing to 'keep" the nursery. It was woefully inadequate, and its inadequacies were evident to all young families who would visit the church and the nursery area. Plus, the workers were not consistent in their attendance. When a worker did not show up, there was no one who was checking to see if the nursery workers were present. Consequently, on many occasions the only manner the congregation would have to know if the nursery workers were not present was when a young mother would wind her way through the congregation trying to find out from anyone who might possibly know if the nursery workers would be there on that given day, or should she just plan on keeping her child with her in the service. Not more than a few occasions like the one just described and that young mother will be looking for the church across town with the paid nursery staff.

The first response from many leaders in a small to medium sized congregation is that they simply do not have the money to hire someone to take care of the children. It is not an option. This is not a high ticket item. For much less than ten thousand dollars a year a congregation can hire someone to care for the bed babies and or toddlers. Whatever a congregation has to do to provide the money for childcare it will be worth it, because it is an absolute necessity. A congregation simply cannot grow without excellent childcare. Sunday morning is the most important service of the week. One of the most important aspects of the worship service is childcare. Change your budget to reflect the importance of childcare on Sunday morning because a congregation will not be growing without quality childcare. It is unconscionable that a congregation with a budget of any size would not pay for childcare if they needed to pay for it. That's how important childcare is to a church's ability to grow.

When a congregation hires that person, several things must be demanded of that person. She must be clean, kind, and on time. If she fails to meet those three requirements, then she should be fired and someone else hired. A congregation should not do everything else right and then forfeit their chance to grow because of the lackluster performance of a childcare worker. There is not anything that will cause a young family to come to a church faster or leave a church quicker than childcare.

F. Heating and Cooling

Heating and cooling is very important. If a congregation has custodians with weekly responsibilities they must be carried out with Sunday morning in mind. The doors must be unlocked and the heat and air must be turned on prior to service so that the building is open and comfortable when the congregation arrives. When there is inclement

weather the physical preparation of the building becomes even more important. If the building is habitually cold when worshippers arrive for Sunday morning people will decide to stay home on a frosty Sunday morning.

G. Parking

Parking is very important on Sunday morning. The parking lot must be adequate, clean, and convenient. If the parking area is not all three things, the worship service will be affected. Worshippers will endure a crowded parking lot for a while but not for long.

H. Prayer

Perhaps the most overlooked part of the preparation for Sunday morning is prayer. Churches must find the time to call Sunday morning by name and petition God for the success of Sunday morning. "Prayer Meetings" are almost extinct. Yet, prayer is a grave necessity in the revitalization of a plateaued declining congregation.

In Stetzer and Dodson's book, *Comeback Churches*, the leaders of the churches studied were asked to identify the top three factors that led to their church being revitalized. The factor that garnered the most mention was prayer.[15] Over 44% of the respondents reported prayer as the top factor in the revitalization of their congregation.

Stetzer and Dodson, in their discussions with the leaders and pastors of churches which were able to revitalize, conclude, "Comeback leaders reported that prayer permeated many aspects of ministry within the churches. In addition, the survey pointed out that revitalization was impacted by *strategic* prayer. Many comeback leaders described that praying in their churches was systematic and intentional." [16]

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[15] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 200

[16] Ibid, 200

Reeder, in his book, *From Embers to a Flame,* devotes an entire chapter to prayer. Concerning the necessity of prayer in the revitalization effort of a plateaued church, the author states, "If the first of the *'first things'* is the gospel of God's grace, then the second would have to be prayer. (Or, prayer may be tied for first.) And if there is anything that a dying church needs, it is prayer. The early church at Jerusalem was successful in every way imaginable, and there was no bigger reason than the fact that it was founded on prayer."[17]

Yet, vibrant prayer is often missing in plateaued or declining churches. Not only is vibrant prayer missing, there is almost always no connection between their prayer life and Sunday morning. If Sunday morning is the most important event of the week there should be a real connection between the prayer life of the congregation and Sunday morning.

Any desiring to revitalize should schedule a time during the week, in primetime no less, when the membership assembles to pray, and that prayer time should include at least one intentional item, Sunday morning! God loves to answer prayer, and he does not refuse to answer requests that are asked according to his will. Nothing could be closer to the will of God than for a congregation to experience the presence of God in their worship service each Sunday morning. That request should be made every week.

Several years ago, I was serving a church in Alabama. One Wednesday, an older lady approached me and said, "Pastor, we call the Wednesday evening service *prayer meeting*, but we pray very little and sometimes we do not even pray at all. Do you think that it would please God if we would pray a little more?"

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[17] Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 76

I was immediately pricked to the heart, because I knew that she was exactly right. The next Wednesday, when the congregants arrived, the lights were turned off, soft instrumental music was playing on the sound system, and the church began to pray. (After, of course, the pastor informed the congregation that no, no one had died, there had occurred no great tragedy in the community or the church, but that they were simply going to pray.) Over time, that prayer time on Wednesday evenings (it lasted 30 minutes) was refined. Eventually, the last thing that the congregation would do before they ceased praying was to gather on the altar and pray for the service on Sunday morning.

The results were amazing. Now, it was a no *second manifestation of Pentecost* or anything the like, but over time the congregation and its leadership began to notice a consistent manifestation of the presence of God in the Sunday morning worship service.

As I pen these words, it is Wednesday, and tonight the congregation will walk to the front of the sanctuary, gather on the altar, and I will lead them in the closing prayer of the night. It is the same prayer that we have been praying each Wednesday evening for the last ten years. It goes like this.

> Father, now we ask that you will be present in our service this Lord's Day. We ask that you will help us to live in such and manner and prepare for the service in such a manner that your presence can be manifested to every individual who enters this place on Sunday morning. We pray that all will be drawn to you, and that when they leave this place on Sunday morning they will know that they have been in the presence of the God who created them and loves them. And to you be all glory, honor, and praise! Amen.

This is the Wednesday evening schedule for First Baptist Church, Weber City. Notice the prominence of prayer in the Wednesday evening schedule.

Wednesday Schedule of Worship and Ministry Opportunities

Church-wide prayer	**6:00-6:30 pm**
Nursery	6:00-8:15 PM
AWANA	6:30-8:15 PM
Sunday School Teacher Training	6:30-7:15 PM
Instrumentalists' Rehearsal	6:30-7:15 PM
Youth Worship	7:00-8:15 PM
Adult Bible Study	7:15-8:15 PM
Adult Choir Rehearsal	7:15-8:15 PM

Thirty minutes of prayer in a weekly schedule does not make a church a praying church. The point is that a congregation must find a time to pray for Sunday morning. It does not matter when it is, or even how long it is, but it is a must!

"Well, pastor, we do not have time to do it." What do you mean that you do not have time to do it? You do not have time *not* to do it! What are you doing on Wednesday that is more important than praying for Sunday morning? I can answer that for you, nothing! How can a church expect to receive the blessing of God's presence when they exclude him from their physical and spiritual preparation? The truth is they cannot!

There is one more issue about prayer for the Sunday morning service. Some will say, "My people will not come and pray." That is correct; many people will not come and pray. However, it is better to have two people praying fervently for the Sunday morning service than forty people in a Bible study and no prayer.

The testimony of Jim Cymbala is powerful. Early in his ministry at the Brooklyn Tabernacle, he was at wits end, discouraged, and physically depressed. On a fishing trip in Florida he cried out to God. This was God's reply.

> If you and your wife will lead my people to pray and call my name, you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that's

> needed, both for the church and for your family, and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds that I will send you.[18]

Cymbala knew that he had heard from God. He says that he made an immediate determination in his heart. "From this day on, the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church. What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we will judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us."[19]

The rest, as they say, is history. Today, the Brooklyn Tabernacle is one of the most vibrant churches in America. If ever a church was declining, it was the Brooklyn Tabernacle, but God answered the prayers of his people and he poured out his blessings on them when they began to pray!

This is not new. As Cymbala points out, there was another quite well known speaker God used mightily who took the same approach nearly one hundred years previously. He said,

> The condition of our church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace barometer, and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be slothfulness in prayer.[20]

The minister's name is Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

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[18] Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1997), 25

[19] Ibid, 27

[20] Ibid, 28 (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted from *Spurgeon At His Best.* Tom Carter, comp. Grand Rapids Michigan, 1988, 155: selections from the 1873 edition of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 218)

So, pray. Prayer is the last item in this outline, but it should be one of the first things that pastor does when trying to revitalize a congregation, and if he does not pray for anything else, he should pray for Sunday morning!

II. Staff and Leadership Development

Leadership is an area of great concern for any effort to revitalize plateaued traditional churches. In reading literature on the subject of revitalizing plateaued or declining churches, the area of leadership is always a topic of prominent discussion. Many of the prominent authors today lay great importance on leadership.

Reeder, in his book, *From Embers to a Flame*, has a chapter entitled, "Leadership Multiplication." In the chapter, Reeder never informs the readers how to multiply leaders. Instead, he devotes the chapter to discussing the characteristics of a leader who multiplies leadership. That is fine, but at some point readers need to know how to multiply leadership and who it is that they are supposed to multiply! Reeder has this statement in the chapter, "Leaders have such an impact on people…that a church cannot be revitalized without good ones." [21] More truth has never been spoken.

In a conversation I had with a pastor of a church that I worked the question was asked, "Do you think that churches *rise and fall with leadership?* The answer is an emphatic, "Yes!"

In Stetzer's book, *Comeback Churches*, the author has a chapter entitled, "Rising with Leadership." In the first part of that chapter, Stetzer says, "Let's face it; 'Everything rises and falls on leadership' is a cliché. We hate clichés, but we can't help pointing out that they often reflect reality. [In the churches that were polled] Leadership was rated as

[21] Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers to a Flame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 117

the number one factor by the churches that experienced revitalization. Leadership and vision are major keys to any type of turnaround in churches."[22] Again, Stetzer and Dodson devote the rest of the chapter discussing the characteristics and character of leadership. They really do discuss which leaders a pastor should seek to multiply and how to multiply them.

In *Breakout Churches*, Rainer discusses the six levels of leadership. His goal is for a pastor to reach the top of the leadership pyramid. The highest level of leadership is *Legacy* leadership. Legacy leadership is a vision for the congregation that goes well beyond the tenure of the visionary. His statements are contained in chapter two and three of his fine book. Again, the author really discusses the characteristics of a "legacy" leader, and the "eight keys" to becoming a "legacy" leader. It is great material. Yet, the author does not really say anything about who to multiply and how to multiply. This chapter in this thesis is more about who to multiply in a small to medium size church setting.

A. Deacons

One thing that often characterizes the leadership of a plateaued or declining church is that it is usually led by the deacons. In a smaller church, the deacons often take on more of a prominent role in the leadership of the church. This can be a good thing for the church. It can also be a very bad thing for the church. In either case, it is the place to start the revitalization the process. Unless the church is in such poor condition that it does not even have a functioning deacon body, and that is certainly a possibility, the deacons are the place to start. For sure, a person cannot start the revitalization process of the church

[22] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 34

and by pass any influence or participation from the deacons. But there is no reason a leader would want to do that anyway.

The office of deacon is ordained by God as a part of the leadership of the church. To circumvent the leadership of deacons would be to disregard God's plan for the leadership of the church. Naturally, as a congregation grows, there are other dynamics which come into play as far as leadership is concerned. Even after a congregation begins to grow there is never a time when the deacons should be ignored as a part of the leadership of the congregation. Misinformation about the ministry of deacons and pastors has probably done much to tarnish the relationship between deacons, the church, and the pastor to the point that many pastors, and churches, have thought that the church would do well to ignore the role of the deacon. This is a major mistake. Even if a church and deacon body has a faulty definition of deacons, the answer to the problem is to begin to work on a correct definition rather than excluding deacons from the leadership tree of the congregation.

Many define deacons from the passages dealing with the qualifications for deacons. The classic passage would be 1st Timothy 3.8-13.

> Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.[23]

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[23]*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

These are qualifications for deacons. The problem is that too many churches and leaders focus more on the qualifications than they do the job description. They might occasionally find a man who meets the qualifications to be a deacon, but have they found a deacon? Perhaps it is safe to say the qualifications are not more than the job description for a deacon. Here is the job description for deacons. It is found in Acts 6.1-7

> Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, which we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. **7** The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.[24]

The office deacon was established to help the pastor with the physical ministry of the church. It was created to relieve the pastor of enough of the burden of ministry so that he could spend adequate time in prayer and preparation for the Sunday sermon. This does not mean that the pastor is absolved of his duty to visit the sick and shut-ins. It does not imply anywhere in this passage that a pastor is absolved of his duty to visit the sick. It simply states that the pastor must have enough help visiting the sick that he has enough

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[24]*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

time to prepare to preach and teach the Word. The pastor and deacons work hand in hand to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation.

To that end, it is imperative that the pastor and deacons meet together on a regular basis. It is the opinion of this author that pastors and deacons should meet together on a weekly basis. If deacons are going to assist the pastor in the leadership of the congregation then they should meet on a weekly basis. It is difficult to meet the needs of the church family meeting every seven days, but it is impossible to meet the needs of the church on intervals of thirty days. It is inconceivable that not anything would take place in a growing church with more regularity than every thirty days! To use a family analogy, I cannot imagine a husband and a wife meeting every thirty days to discuss the physical and spiritual needs of the family. Three days would be a long time between conversations about the needs of the family. A congregation is an even larger family. The pastor and deacons are the ones charged with the care of the congregation. They must communicate amicably on a regular basis about the needs of the congregation. This principle for revitalization was the product of trial and error in my life.

On incident in my own ministry illustrates this point. Late one evening, as I was returning home from Birmingham, Alabama after a long day of seminary classes at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Extension Center on the campus of Lakeside Baptist Church, nearly halfway on the 158 mile trip, I received a call from the chairman of deacons. The deacon's first words were, "Pastor, we have a problem." In the hustle and bustle of everyday life, the mother of one of the prominent members in the congregation had been overlooked in the visitation ministry of the congregation. This lady lived over two hours away from the church field, she had not attended the church,

and the family had not informed the pastor, deacons or staff about her being placed in a rehabilitation facility nearly three hours from the church field. She was quite elderly. None of that mattered, the family was upset and in a complete uproar because this lady had not been visited and neither had the family. She had been on the prayer list for several weeks, but neither I nor the deacons even recognize this lady's name or her connection with the congregation. Sadly, but honestly, she was just one name in a long list of prayer concerns in the weekly bulletin.

As you might guess, the pastor was the target of all the heat for the oversight. It was even suggested that I should resign because I had offended such a prominent family in the congregation. A meeting was convened to discuss my egregious error at which it was determined since I was not native to south Alabama and since no one, not even anyone in the family, told me about this dear lady, I could stay for the time being notwithstanding the extenuating circumstances of the lady residing a considerable distance from the church field. Nevertheless, it was a horrid and unpleasant circumstance for me, my family, the deacons, and the congregation.

When the dust began to settle, the deacons and I did some soul searching. True enough, I had been absolved of most, if not all, culpability for the incident. The culpability of the deacons was never really questioned. Yet, it was still a most difficult and unfortunate situation for the congregation. The question was asked in the subsequent deacon's meeting, "How could we possibly avoid such a lack of communication in the future?" The only adequate answer was to meet every week. People die and are buried even in a seven day period. Multiple people die and are buried in a 30 day period! In meeting every week, my hope and the hope of the deacons was to not leave even one

stone unturned in giving the congregation the finest ministry possible. And, so was born the weekly Deacon Family Ministry Meeting. Every Sunday afternoon at 6pm the deacons and I would gather, go over the prayer lists, pray for the families, and discuss any issues facing the congregation. It is still practiced today in my current place of service. Truly, it has been the single greatest blessing of my time in the ministry. It is an honor to meet with dedicated men each week who are doing deacon ministry. It is an unbelievable honor to lead an army of men caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation. It is comforting to have a large group of men with whom to share the burden of ministry. It is even more fulfilling to have such a large group to share the joy, the camaraderie, and friendships which ministry makes possible. Enmity should not be such a common occurrence between pastors and deacons. How can there be such enmity between pastors and those who hold the office created to assist the pastor in ministry?

How many deacons should a congregation have to assist the pastor? Is there a limit? I do not think there is such a limit for the reason that the office of deacons was created to help the pastor do family ministry. That is it. There is not another reason given in the Bible for the ministry of deacons. Problems arise when the office of deacons is altered from its scriptural roots.

If deacons are to be family ministers, then to how many families should they be required to minister? I suggest a limit of twelve to fourteen families per deacon. When a deacon is asked to truly minister to more than twelve to fourteen families he is going to become discouraged and frustrated. It will begin to seem as if every afternoon there is a message on his answering machine informing him of a family in need of ministry. He cannot sustain that kind of ministry. Not only can he not sustain that kind of ministry, he

cannot get to know that many families. A number much smaller is ideal for real family ministry. There are many churches which would claim to be doing family ministry. The truth is that they are not doing family ministry. They might have a family ministry list, but there is not much family ministry taking place. This is evident because they have 20-25 families per deacon. There is no way that a deacon really doing family ministry can minister to that many families. Ideally, a deacon should be assigned to ten families or less. This figure provides a starting place for determining the number of deacons needed for a congregation.

Five years ago, when I arrived to begin to serve as the pastor of First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia, the church had eighteen active deacons. No more than seven or eight of those were actually attending the monthly meetings. The deacons and I began to meet on a weekly basis. The weekly meetings had a basic agenda as follows:

Discussion of Family Needs
Prayer for Families
Discussion of Church Needs

There was no other agenda. Occasionally, there is very little to discuss, but often there are many issues to discuss. Sometimes, the discussions are very light, and at other times, the discussions are quite intense. The discussions concerning the needs of the church are always related to the spiritual condition of the church. Deacons are not the treasurer, the building and grounds, or the personnel committee. They only discuss these matters as they relate to the spiritual condition of the congregation.

Next the congregation called and ordained additional deacons. Each year additional deacons have been added. In five years this congregation has gone from eighteen active deacons, with seven or eight actually attending the meetings, to twenty-

six active deacons with an average of eighteen to twenty-two actually attending the weekly meetings. The level of leadership has increased tremendously. Business meetings are mostly routine because by the time an item arrives at the business meeting it has been thoroughly discussed by the majority of the key leaders in the congregation.

B. Sunday School Teachers

The next group that the pastor should focus upon is the Sunday School Teachers. If a plateaued or declining church has any chance to grow again, it must have strong Sunday School. This does not have to necessarily take place on a Sunday morning, but it has traditionally taken place on a Sunday morning. Teachers must be prepared to teach each week. They must be on time to teach their class. They need to have a relationship with their students. If the pastor and leaders of a plateaued church does not have multiple contacts with Sunday school teachers on a weekly basis there is very little chance that the church will be able to revitalize.

C. Staff

Another group of leaders that must be developed is the staff. Small to medium size plateaued traditional churches usually have small uniquely crafted staff. That is, they are not all the same, and they should not be the same because every situation is different and has different requirements.

The church that I studied with as a part of this project in Alabama had a mixed staff of full-time and part time workers. The pastor is full-time. The secretary works forty hours a week. Twenty of her hours are charged to the church as a secretary and the other twenty hours are charged as a minister to children. The minister of music is full-time, and the youth are led by volunteer parents from the congregation.

The church that I studied with in Tennessee has a much smaller staff. The pastor is full-time. The rest of the staff is volunteers. This includes a youth worker and a minister of music. Both churches have a desire to see their staff grow beyond the point they are now, but neither has implemented a plan to make that happen. How does a church of one hundred go from being a single staff church, or a church with mostly part-time staff and volunteers, to a church of four hundred with four full-time staff members?

I believe that staff is the foundation upon which a good church is built. Leaders cannot wait for the congregation to increase before the staff is hired. In fact, quite to the contrary, a congregation should hire a staff and increase the staff as the congregation expands. A congregation can hire a staff in increments steadily inching toward its staffing goals.

First Baptist Church Weber City is a perfect example of this principle. When I was hired to lead this congregation, the church had one staff member. This staff member was a minister of music, and he worked ten hours per week. His responsibilities were to produce a worship order and lead worship. He also rehearsed with the choir each week. He was actually working approximately twenty hours a week at that time. The church did have a full time secretary but did not have any other staff members.

The pastor, staff, deacons, and personnel committee outlined a plan for building a staff. This consisted mainly of accessing the needs of the church and the community.

The first step the congregation took was to hire a full-time youth minister. The personnel committee and the youth minister search committee advertised nationally for this position, and the church hired a wonderful man with a family. They were from Florida. This took place about six months after I arrived.

Immediately the deacons and I evaluated what should be the next move and determined that the best plan of action would be to hire a minister to children. However, the problem with hiring new staff in a small to medium size church is the issue of money. At that time, the staff consisted of a full-time minister to youth, a full-time secretary, a minister of music who was working 10 hours a week, and a full-time pastor. The goal was to eventually have a full-time staff and a congregation that could sustain them financially. Again, the real question is how does a church grow a staff? Does the chicken come first or the egg? In this issue, it is hard to know which is the chicken or the egg! Where churches are concerned the issue is much clearer. The staff comes before the growth. The staff is the foundation for the growth. Still, if a congregation does not have the money, how does it hire a full time staff? The answer is "incrementally."

In the circumstance of First Baptist Church, Weber City, the congregation had hired all the full-time staff they could hire at that point. So, it was time to begin to grow a staff incrementally. The next move was to hire a minister to children, which would need to be a part-time or bi-vocational position initially. When a congregation gets to this point in the growth of their staff, they should look within their own church or their own community for a person to fill this position, and this is where First Baptist Church was very blessed. In their children's department, a young lady had been working part-time for the past few years to spend more time with her children. Now, she was looking for additional hours, and she had a heart for ministry. She had graduated from Carson-Newman College, a Baptist College near Knoxville, Tennessee, and she had a Master's degree from East Tennessee State University in child psychology. She was the perfect fit

for the job and she was already a member of the congregation. The church hired this person to work for ten hours a week.

Each year, as the congregation grew, and the budget grew, the church increased the hours of the two remaining part-time staff members. For the minister to children, her hours were increasing faster than the church could pay her. Each year, she was increased in hours but her job description was writing itself. For the minister of music, as the church grew, he took on other responsibilities to fill out his forty hours. His job duties came to include all of the scheduling for the new multi-purpose facility. He also spends Mondays leading the shut-in visitation. The minister of music did not start at forty hours. He started at ten hours a week. Obviously he had another job at that point. He was a professor in the music department at East Tennessee State University in nearby Johnson City, Tennessee. In less than four years, the two remaining positions had become full time employees. Recently, the congregation has brought on a volunteer minister of Education. Like the other two positions, he too, will work a few hours a week and start building a job description that compliments his talents and the church's ability to pay him, with his salary increasing each year.

Two principles apply here that bear emphasizing because they are so useful for churches that are growing or seeking to grow. The first principle is to hire from within, and, if necessary, start with a part-time position. These principles are not original with me, although I felt the need to hire from within long before I knew that it was an established principle for building a staff. I was actually surprised to read and hear others talk about the principle of hiring from within your own church or own community.

Frazee agrees when he writes, "...When you are taking on a comeback project, you can be assured that the resources needed are far greater than the funds available. You have to develop a creative stair step approach to get your ideas into play…As an area of ministry grew and developed, I either moved part-timers to full-timers, or I hired a team of part-time people to handle the job. I experienced exceptional success with both strategies."[25]

Frazee goes on to address the issue of hiring from within a person's own congregation. He says,

> While I am not against hiring from the outside, I have found that due to the costs and the unknowns, hiring a person from the outside often does not work. A person on the inside knows and understands the mission of the church, the culture of the church, and believes in the church's purpose. It can take up to a year or more for an outsider to acquire a working knowledge of these same areas. On top of that, you never really know what you are getting when you hire someone from the outside…Outside of four people, two of whom are for the same part-time position, I have hired all my staff internally.[26]

Gary L. McIntosh, the author of a book titled, *Staff Your Church to Grow*, agrees with Frazee. He says that a church should look to hire from within first before ever going outside the church for a potential candidate.[27]

As church leaders might realize, it can be nightmare to hire someone from the outside only to find out that he or she is not a suitable match for the job or community. It is even worse when a congregation discovers that the person they hired has some major

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[25] Randy Frazee, *The Come Back Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) 81-82

[26] Ibid, 82

[27] Gary L. McIntosh, *Staff Your Church to Grow* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House, 2000), 57

moral or financial problems. Hiring from within the congregation does not always work but the chances for a disaster are much greater when a church hires from the outside.

A Methodist Church just a few doors down from where I serve as a pastor is just beginning the journey of growing a staff. Here is part of their story.

This particular Methodist Church is a medium sized church in Weber City, Virginia on the border between Kingsport, Tennessee and Gate City, Virginia. The church has a day care and preschool that employs 19 full-time and part-time workers. These workers are funded, not from their church budget, but from the proceeds directly from the day care and preschool. However, the ministry staff of the church consists of a full-time pastor and a full-time secretary. They are beginning to see the need of a staff, and they are applying these principles of "building" a staff. Currently, they are working on hiring their first part-time staff member.

The process began with the Pastor/parish relations committee. This would be the same as a personnel committee in a Baptist church. The Pastor/parish relations committee established a plan of action based upon their felt needs for the congregation. They determined that a staff position needed to be established to minister to children and youth. A job description was developed to meet this need. This new staff member would do the planning for their Sunday night youth worship activities and would also organize their Sunday morning worship training for children. (This would commonly be called the "children's church" in the Baptist tradition.) The hours required were determined to be twenty hours a week. The pastor/parish committee voted unanimously to establish the position, approved the job description, and sent the proposal to the churches' governing

board. The governing board consisted of the chairpersons of each committee. The governing board unanimously approved the position.

The next step was to secure funds to pay this individual. The pastor/parish relations committee and the governing board decided to secure pledges from individuals in the congregation to pay the salary for the first year, and then at that time, to place the salary in the budget.

Finally, the church was ready to publish the job description in their parish and the neighboring parishes. In the process they discovered a lady attending a nearby church. She had recently moved into the area. She had a background in ministry. Her husband had been working in Charlotte, North Carolina with Young Life. She had been helping him with Young Life. She had also been working in her church in Charlotte as an assistant to a youth minister and in that position she did all the planning for the youth activities. They interviewed this lady, perused the job description, and eventually offered her the job, which she accepted.

According to the principles discussed above, hiring two individuals at ten hours per week each might have been a better decision for this church, one to focus on the Sunday night youth activities, and the other to focus on the Sunday morning children's activities. A year later, both positions could be increased by 3-5 hours to include additional responsibilities. In the process of the same twenty hours, the church could be growing two areas of ministry at the same time and the gift set of two people and the time available for two people would be much greater than for one person alone. As it now stands, I think the wisest thing to do would be to increase the responsibilities of this lady they hired in the area she is most proficient and hire another person to work in the other

area. The only problem with that is it is going to take the church longer to hire that second person and the flexibility of hours available for another ministry and the gift set of the two people will take much longer to develop. The principle that I suggest is to start with one person, working less hours, focused on a much more narrow ministry. Where possible, do not hire a person with multiple areas of responsibility. If a church does that, they are generally setting that person up for failure in at least one if not both areas they are called to serve.

A second necessity for a church wanting to do something similar is to establish a strategy for what the staff should look like after the staff the church is desiring to build is complete. Once the congregation has established what the staff should look like when it is complete, then they can begin to work toward the completion of the staff incrementally year after year.

This means that staff development takes priority over other increases in the budget until the staff is complete. Every year, the budget should increase. The increase should be used to fund the building of the staff. It would not be a bad idea to cut unproductive items in the budget and allocate those funds toward the development of the staff. This is the essence of the title of this thesis, “A Narrowing of the Focus.”

The staff is the foundation of the church. The church cannot grow bigger than its foundation. How does a church with one staff member grow to a church of four or more staff members? The answer is incrementally year after year. If a church hires beneficial staff the church and budget will grow. That may well be the most important principle in this project as it relates to growing small to medium size churches.

Start with a blueprint for what the staff should look like in the setting of that local church. It is not really feasible for every church to have a staff of four to eight full time employees. If the church is in a rural setting, it might be best to plan on a smaller staff. That is fine. Plan for a smaller staff, set the blueprint for the end result, and begin to work toward building the staff each year.

Church leaders can gauge each year how much staff to hire by the percentage of the budget that is being spent on staff. An article in the Leadership Journal declared that churches should be paying staff somewhere between forty to sixty percent of their annual budget.[28] I believe if a church is not paying staff at least forty percent that church is wasting time and capacity for ministry. I believe the church should be hiring staff because they have the money to hire staff. It might require that they cut some ministries and programs, but in my opinion if they are not paying staff forty percent they are understaffed. A church that is trying to grow can pay as much as sixty to sixty five percent of their annual budget for a period of time understanding that the staff is the foundation for growth.[29]

III. Community Identity

Every church is in a community of some kind and identifies with the community to some degree although it might be a larger or smaller degree. To revitalize a small to medium sized plateaued or declining church, the goal should be to enlarge the community identity of the congregation.

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[28] *Leadership Journal*, Summer, 2000, Vol. XXI, No. 3, pg. 88, Prism Leadership Group: consultprism@cs.com {date accessed, September 2009}

[29] Ibid

A church in a community can be portrayed by a stripped fabric with each stripe being different widths and colors and each stripe being a different distance from the center of the fabric. The more vital, vibrant, and essential a church is in its own community the broader, brighter, and more central is the stripe that represents the church in the community fabric. Here is a good way to evaluate your church's community identity. Do not ask yourself how many people attend the church, but rather ask, "How many people who do not attend the church would miss the church if it ceased to exist today, and who are these people?" Hopefully, they are the mayor, the principals of each school, the business owners, and the parents of children. The church should be important to each of these people in spite of the fact that they do not attend the church. What makes a church important to these people? It is all about the church's ministries in the community. It is possible for a church to be very important even to the people who do not attend. And here is the point: If the church becomes important to people who do not attend, where will they attend when they decide to attend church? They will attend the church that ministered to them even when they did not attend church.

The more a church declines, the smaller the stripe and the more that it moves from the center of the fabric to the edges. A church can decline to the point that it is almost indiscernible in the fabric that represents the community.

When I arrived at First Baptist Church, Weber City, to assume the role of pastor, the congregation had declined to the point that the church was literally on the outer edges of the fabric of the community and indiscernible by people in the community who did not attend the church. I became increasingly aware of this in the days after assuming the position of pastor. There were other churches in the community doing great things.

Everyone knew those churches, their pastors, and the ministries of those churches, but First Baptist Church was not known by very many people in the community in spite of the fact that it was located on the most strategic route in the community. First Baptist Church was known for one thing. It was known as the place where “old people” go to church, and they were right. Almost no young couples attended First Baptist Church. The first Wednesday my wife and I attended the church there was one child in attendance and he was my son. It is not as if the church had never been relevant in the community. In the past, the church had done great things in the community. But, for various reasons had become a very insignificant church in the community. So, from the outset, it was apparent that this would have to be reversed if the church would have a chance to revitalize and grow. At that moment, the community did not need the church. Nothing that First Baptist Church did was important to the community. If you had asked people in the community what it was that first Baptist Church did in the community, you would have been hard pressed to find anyone who could have given you an answer. In fact, I did ask that question to many people in the community and was startled by how insignificant the church was in the community.

Community identity is very important to a church, but community identity is not the same as marketing. Although marketing is important, marketing alone cannot give a church community identity. Community identity is achieved as the church is immersed in the community and becomes important to the community.

Community identity is not my invention. In most books on this subject, community identity is treated in some form or another. In Rainer’s book, *Breakout Churches*, the author has a chapter entitled “The VIP Factor.” The VIP stands for “The

Vision Intersection Profile, which involves three interlocking circles representing three paradigms that must be present for a church to be vital and vibrant in its community. First, is the passion of the leadership, second, the passions and gifts of the congregation, and third, the needs of the community. These are represented in figure One.

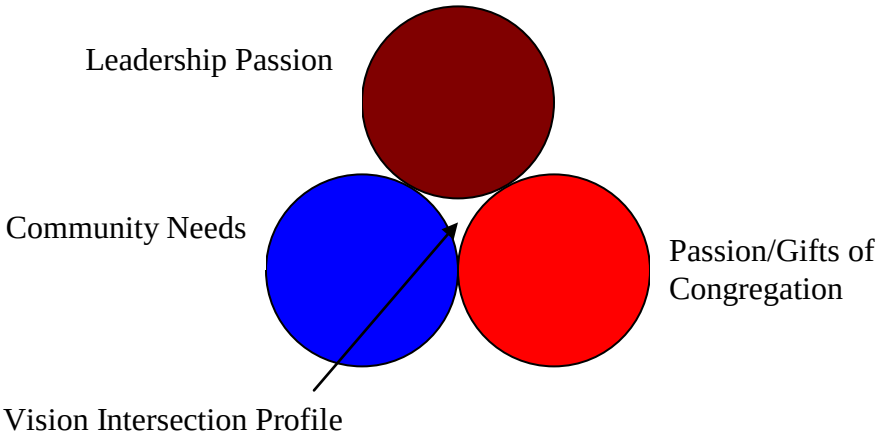

Figure 2. The Vision Intersection Profile, (Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005. P. 114).

In the area where these three paradigms intersect, the church finds its vision and ministry defined in the needs of the community. What good would it do to have a passion or a gift and no one to whom that particular passion of gift can be a ministry? God is much smarter than that. He places pastors with certain gifts and passions in congregations with certain gifts and passions in communities with certain needs, and when those match, the result is a glorious ministry. When those do not match, the ministry can be a miserable experience for the congregation, the pastor, and the ministry does not usually benefit the community.

In his research, Stetzer found community outreach to be one of the top three factors for the revitalization of a plateaued or declining church. “Respondents were asked to

identify the top three factors that led to their church being revitalized. Overall the top three responses were prayer, evangelism/outreach (community identity) and preaching." [30] The author describes the evangelism/outreach of Comeback Churches as follows. "Comeback churches also engaged in strategic outreach efforts; they made outreach efforts that *connected people with their communities*. In addition, numerous comeback leaders reported that church members were methodically trained to engage in outreach efforts, and events that were planned that allowed people to *reach out to friends and neighbors*."[31] This is community identity!

Again, Thom and Sam Rainer, in their new book, *Essential Church*, discuss the importance of a church forming a community identity. This is found in chapter two entitled, "*Looking for a Different Kind of Community,"* where they explain that an inwardly focused church is a dying church.[32] They go on to say, "Churches should relate to and serve their communities so that people will come to know Christ."[33] Churches should minister to the community to the point that the church becomes the "third place" in the community, a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg.[34] The first place is the home, the second place is work, and the third place is where the community meets each other after work and before it is time to go home.

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[30] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 200

[31] Ibid, 201 (Emphasis added)

[32] Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H publishing Group 2008), 50

[33] Ibid, 55

[34] Ibid, 61

The third place might be a ball field, a bar, a club of some type, or a church. Rainer's point is that essential churches achieve third place status. He says, "We believe the church must reclaim the status of the third place."[35] In the churches I had the opportunity to work with this was a glaring weakness. Neither of the churches really had much contact with the community. First Baptist Church, Weber City, had very little contact with the community at the time I arrived to be the pastor of the congregation. The leaders, the congregation, and I worked vigorously to change the perception of the church and to broaden and brighten the "stripe" in the fabric community.

Growing up in Weber City, I had more than a little head start on developing a vision for the church because I knew certain things about the church before I ever returned to the community. These were things that I did not have to spend time learning. The number one thing that I knew about Weber City, Virginia before I ever set foot in the community to be the new pastor was that anyone who was going to minister to the people of Weber City and Gate City must identify with Gate City High School. Weber City and Gate City are two small communities adjacent to Kingsport, Tennessee. They comprise the school district for Gate City High School. The way to identify with Gate City High School is to identify with their athletics. The whole community centers on Gate City High School athletics. When I arrived in Weber City, I immediately began to work to identify the church with Gate City High School. The leaders of the church and I wanted to communicate a message to the community that First Baptist Church Weber City was their church!

One of the first things that the leaders and I did was to change the color scheme of all signs, printed material, and even the staff shirts to royal blue, the color of the uniforms

[35] Ibid, 62

of Gate City High School. The first year I was here, I asked the church to do an event for Halloween called Trunk and Treat. It was the first community event for the church. For the event, I bought shirts for the workers. They were royal blue polo shirts and on the front was stitched the name, “First Baptist Church.” It was a subtle message but a very valid message that said to the people of Weber City and Gate City, “We are your church! This is your color, and we are your church!”

The church did not stop there. When the church built the new Family Life Center, the only thing that I insisted was that the décor in the new gym be royal blue. When a person walks into the gym, it looks like the gym at Gate City High School. It sends a subtle, but powerful message that this is their place, it belongs to them, and they are at home in their church in their community.

Previously, the church had selected the color of lime green as their color. All their signs, their umbrellas, their choir robes, everything was lime green! I could only ask, “Why would our church select lime green as the color for our church when the color for our community is royal blue? Lime green is the color for Clintwood, Virginia, but it is not the color for Gate City and Weber City.

A person might be skeptical and think that something as shallow as the color of signs, brochures, and décor is trivial and not worth the effort. Others might reject the idea of marketing as secular and unspiritual. Think again. Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson states, “Every church markets itself in some way…Every person who speaks about your church to someone in the community, ever piece of literature you produce, every sign at the church building or rented facility makes a statement about your view of yourself, the

Lord, and the people you are trying to reach."[36] For First Baptist Church, it meant identifying with Gate City High School.

Not every church would have a similar circumstance. Each church and each community has its own set of unique characteristics. For another church, it might be an annual festival of some kind, a community college that is more academic than athletic, a farming community, or a community that is at the heart of civic activities. It might be an inner city that ministers to the social and physical needs of the community.

The church that I served in Duffield, Virginia was heavily involved in the "Duffield Days" festival and parade. This festival was a big deal in the community. For the church to not be involved in that weekend of activities would have been a death knell for the church. For a pastor not to be a part of the activities would have been a death knell for his ministry in that community. It simply was not an option for the pastor of that church to skip the weekend's activities. It would have been unthinkable! That community was also defined by the two nursing homes that cornered the church on either side. Actually, one was a nursing home and the other was an assisted living facility. For that church, the yearly festival and the nursing homes were the large part of the church's community identity.

In Alabama, the church that I served was known as the "private school" church. In the small town, of Grove Hill Alabama, there were the public school and then a private school, Grove hill Academy. The church had adopted, almost by default, the Academy as their school. Most of the children in the church attended the academy which is a private school. It made it very difficult for kids from the public school to attend the church

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[36] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 166

because they were not like the private school kids. This pastor was never able to affect a positive change in that area, but that was their community identity. If you lived in Grove Hill and you went to Grove Hill Academy, then you attended that church.

For First Baptist Church Weber City, community identity begins with Gate City High School. Of course, you cannot build community identity simply by changing the color themes of your church building. Building community identity takes work. One of the big things that the church did to identify with the community was to offer its gym for the middle school basketball and volleyball practices and games. One of the big problems that Gate City High School has is the availability of gyms for it athletic teams to practice and play. In the fall and winter, the school has Volleyball teams for 7th grade, 8th grade, Junior Varsity, and Varsity. It also has basketball teams for boys and girls for 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, Junior Varsity, and Varsity. That is a total of ten teams which must practice and play. They have two gyms to accommodate the schedule. They actually have another gym at one of the area elementary schools but it is not pleasant to play, or practice in, and the county's "after school" programs occupy it most of the time. So, in stepped First Baptist Church. The church offered the middle school its gym for usage for volleyball and basketball. Now, the middle school has the church gym reserved for practice time from 3:30 pm to 6:30 PM every afternoon. Usually, two teams practice at the church every afternoon. (The youth minister at the church and another deacon are middle school coaches!) And, the middle school will play twelve basketball games at the church this year (2008). Why is that important? It is important because the community is coming to First Baptist Church to watch their boys and girls play basketball. Not only are the parents and administrators from Gate City attending the games, but, of course,

parents, kids, administrators, and others fans from all over the region are coming to First Baptist Church to watch the opposing team. The church staffs the event with the exception of the referees. The referees have to be approved by the Virginia High School League. The church directs the home team and the visiting team to and from their dressing rooms! The youth and parents of the church run the clock, the scoreboard, keep the books, and man the concession stand. On many occasions, players from the church are dressing in their youth Sunday school room, which are often used for dressing rooms, with their other teammates! The church has seen a tremendous increase in youth Sunday school attendance and it should be no surprise!

It all began with a community that had a need, a need that affected a significant number of families, and a church that wanted to be an integral part of the community. On game nights, the church's leaders instruct the members, who are not busy performing some task, to sit in the stands and meet the parents of the players. There is not a parent or grandparent anywhere that does not want to tell a person which player out there is his or her child. And, when a kid practices and plays his or her volleyball games at First Baptist Church and it comes time for them to go to church, where do you think they will attend first? You are right, First Baptist Church.

First Baptist Church uses the gym in other ways to reach and identify with the community. The church also hosts a basketball league for teenagers. First Baptist Church, Gate City has always hosted a league for children through Upward Basketball. There was no need to host another league for children. In fact, many of our children and parents play and coach in that league if their children are of a certain age. So, First Baptist Church hosted a league for teenagers. At first, the church just used the Upward basketball

material and uniforms for the teenagers. Upward basketball is one of the sports offered by Upward Unlimited and its president Caz Macaslin out of Spartanburg South Carolina. Using the Upward basketball materials did not work very well, because the teenagers viewed the Upward basketball league as being for children. The church decided that it would create league just for teenagers. The rules were altered slightly, the music was changed, and, most of all, the uniforms were changed. The league began to grow.

Again, the basketball league was a way to identify with the community. Being the only league of its kind in Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee, the church attracted teenagers from miles away to play basketball in this type of environment. People who would never have been on the campus of First Baptist Church were now coming weekly from the beginning of November until the middle of February.

Fantastic Fridays was the invention of the Church's Children's Minister and represents another way the church identifies with the community. Fantastic Fridays take place every March before the weather turns warm and just before moms and dads pull out their hair from being penned up all winter with their kids. Fantastic Fridays is a collection of classes and activities that kids can be involved in every Friday night in March. The classes can be anything from chemistry, arts and crafts, baseball, basketball, wood-working, cooking, and many other things. Parents can bring their child to First Baptist Church on a Friday night at 6:00 PM and return at 8:00 PM to pick them up. There are many parents in the community who will allow a church to keep their children for two hours on a Friday night. For four straight weeks, the church has more than one hundred kids from the community every Friday night for two hours. The church members have the

opportunity to meet new people and new people have the opportunity to become acquainted with the church and its people. That is community identity!

The church also hosts a car show every year. One of the members in the church owns the local NAPA auto parts. He was looking for a place to host a car show, and the only place big enough to do the car show was the church. The church obliged. The youth of the church manned the kitchen, under the watchful eye of the kitchen staff, and received all the proceeds from the concessions for their winter retreat youth trip. More than one hundred and fifty fine cars line the parking lot of the church, and hundreds of people walk over the church property on a golden afternoon in early October. The pastor and members met people from all over the area. These are people that the church would never encounter in any other area of life. When they will need a church is not known, but now they know the pastor and many of the members at First Baptist Church.

One more contribution to community identity is AWANA. Traditionally, this would be considered a ministry, and it will be dealt with as such in the next chapter, but AWANA, for First Baptist Church, has also been a boost for community identity. Perhaps it has been one of the major contributors to the positive community identity for the church because so many parents who do not attend the church on the weekends bring their children to the church each Wednesday evening. Over the past five years, a steady stream of families has joined the church as a result of the AWANA ministry.

The church has also done many other things to reach the community. The church has hosted car washes for local teams, allowed local AAU teams to use the gym for basketball practice, hosted military events in the gym, hosted class reunions, and many

other community events. This past year, the varsity cheerleaders held their annual end-of-school banquet at the church.

A church cannot host every event. There are some events that are not suitable for a church to host. This church has dealt with those issues, and there are events that the church has declined to host. However, there are many events that a church can host, and each one helps to build the community identity of the church.

Building community identity is hard work. Sam and Thom Rainer voiced this opinion of building a gym or family life center in their book, *Essential Church*. They claim that you cannot create community by building a gym.[37] I agree. It is not the gym or Family Life Center that builds community and community identity. The people of the church build that identity and it is hard work. The Rainers, Sam and Thom, in the same passage described the hard work that is necessary for a small to medium sized plateaued traditional church to build community identity.

> The subject of community goes much deeper. It is more than just weekly gathering. It goes beyond the walls of the church. You can't create community by spiritual navel-gazing. Nor does building a gym create community. Even adding a few candles won't solve the problem. Churches that become the locus of the community have it built into their DNA. It isn't their programs, buildings, or style. The people of the church create community. Reaching your neighbors requires you to surrender time and convenience. Jesus understood what it was like to experience the coming and going of people.[38]

If a church is going to build community identity, it must become familiar with the coming and going of their people.

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[37] Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer III, *Essential Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H publishing Group 2008), 47

[38] Ibid, 47

IV. Ministries

To revitalize a small to medium sized plateaued traditional church, the fourth area that a leader should focus on is the actual ministries of the church. “Busyness” is not the answer to revitalization. Strategic ministry is the answer. The first thing that the church has to do is develop a strategy for ministry. Some authors have called it a “ministry blueprint.”

There are five things that every church should be doing. These are the five functions of the church. It begins with worship. A church need not exist if it is not leading people to worship God and providing a place where people can consistently encounter God. This is not about gaining bigger crowds. The purpose for revitalization is taking the masses and leading them to a place where they can worship God. If that is not occurring, then the church might as well be a civic organization. Evangelism is the second function of the church. This is not an option. Every church and every believer should be involved in evangelism. The third function of the church is fellowship. The church must provide a place where believers can fellowship together. The fourth function of the church is ministry. Every believer should be involved in a ministry to the community, the lost, and, to other believers. It is the job of the church to provide these opportunities and exhort believers to be involved. The last function of the church is discipleship. Believers must be fed to grow and mature in Christ for the purpose of ministry. It is the discipleship arm of the church that consistently feeds believers of all ages.

There is an obvious question that follows identifying the functions of the church. What should the church be producing? Very simply, the church should be producing

believers who mirror the image of Christ. Those are the five functions of the church. To produce Christians in the image of Christ is its intended product. That is where the similarities end and the individualism of different churches in different communities begins. While it is imperative for a church to accomplish the five functions and produce believers in the image of Christ, how they accomplish those functions can be very different. In fact, if a church simply tries to copy the ministry style of another church their ministry might not be successful.

Where does a church find the means for accomplishing these five functions? The answer lies in the community. The community will tell the church what its ministries should be. What part of the community is your ministry? Communities are multifaceted, not flat or one dimensional. The ministry is the part of the community that matches the gifts and passions of the leaders and the congregation. The answer lies in the Vision Intersection Profile shown above.[39] This is the church's "theme."

For Bishop Michael Graves, this meant a significant turn for The Temple Church in North Nashville.[40] The Temple Church, in its early years, became a ministry to upper middle class African-Americans. For a while, the congregation grew, but Bishop Graves sensed that all was not well with the congregation because he sensed a separation between the church and the community. Through much anguish, the church eventually found its ministry theme in the downtrodden of Nashville's north-side. The average income of its members declined significantly, but the church grew because it found its

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[39] Figure 3.1: Thom S. Ranier, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 114

[40] Ibid, 18*ff*

ministry theme in the community. From 1990-2002, the church increased from 659 in worship to more than 3000![41]

In the early days Xenos Christian Fellowship,[42] a somewhat unorthodox congregation that began on the campus of Ohio State University, the direction and ministry of the church was clear. Their original vision was to disciple other believers who themselves would become evangelistic in their daily walk. The church grew mightily into the 1990's. Then, a fracture occurred. Over time, the church lost its vision. A variety of visions developed in the one congregation. A counseling ministry began, a charismatic sect developed in the church, and a "weak attempt" was made to turn the church into an expression of the Willow Creek model church.

These conflicting views, as one might expect, led to much dissension in the church. Eventually, more than one-third of the people in the congregation left the church. After the exodus of many people the congregation commissioned the pastor to write a paper on his direction for the church. He did so outlining a return to the original vision for the church which was to develop disciples who would become evangelistic in their daily walk. Where did the church go to find the expression of their ministry? They expressed their stated mission in their local community, the *urban poor* in the inner city of Columbus, Ohio.

When a church has successfully defined its *locus* for ministry, it must then begin to evaluate its current ministry status to determine which ministries are helping the church to fulfill its ministries and which ministries are not helping the church. This

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[41] Ibid, 19

[42] Ibid, 115*ff*

author's simple suggestion for accomplishing that begins with a simple but exhaustive list of the church's "ministries."

Appendix 1 is a list of the ministries of First Baptist Church Weber City. Even though First Baptist Church is a small church the list of ministries available are quite extensive. These are all opportunities for a person to express themselves in the kingdom of God. The job of the pastor and other leaders is to evaluate these opportunities and determine if they indeed meet the needs of the church and if, in fact, there are ministries that need to be expanded or eliminated.

How do church leaders evaluate the ministries and determine if a ministry needs to be expanded or eliminated? This evaluation is based upon several factors. First, it is based upon the Great Commission which was given to us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. A church is not a church if it is not involved in the Great Commission! Another point of evaluation is the ministry theme of the church. Then, the leaders of the church must evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry with its stated reason for existence. Finally, there must be some ministries which are *revenue* streams for the church. In other words, the ministry must *pay* the church. Look again at the ministry list for First Baptist Church, Weber City. (Appendix 2)

The ministry theme, or expression, for First Baptist Church, Weber City is community ministry. So, an evaluator of the ministries of the church would need to keep in mind that in the ministry list there needs to be a significant amount of community focused ministries. It is one thing to say a church is community focused, but a listing of the ministries of the church might tell a different story. So, to that end, there is a place on

the list to evaluate the focus of each individual ministry. Is the ministry inward focused, or outward focused?

On the list of ministries for First Baptist Church, Weber City there are several ministries that are outward focused. At events and ministries such as Fantastic Friday's, Jacob's Well, Trunk or Treat, Play Up Basketball, and Middle School Basketball and Volleyball, the attendees might be 90% or more non-members. This is important for the church because this is in keeping with the church's stated vision, which is to be the center of the community.

There are other ministries on the list that are partially an inward focus and partially an outward focus. AWANA is partially an inward focused ministry and partially an outward focused ministry. Each Wednesday many children attend AWANA who do not attend FBC for any other service. Many of them, and their parents, do not attend a church at any other time of the week. A good portion of the children in attendance were raised in First Baptist Church, Weber City. The Youth Discipleship on Wednesday evening is both an inward focus and an outward focus. There are youth who attend the Wednesday evening discipleship class who do not attend any other service at FBCWC and many who do not attend church anywhere during the week. This is a tremendous outreach for the youth of the church. Also, Wednesday evening discipleship has an obvious inward focus.

Again, if FBCWC calls itself the church of the community, then this is an important point of evaluation for the church. FBCWC would have no right to fancy itself as a community church if nothing that took place on a weekly basis had anything to do with the community. The truth is every church must have at least some community involvement. It might not be the community expression of FBCWC. In all likelihood, it

will not be exactly like the community expression of FBCWC unless the church in question is in a community similar to Gate City/Weber City, Virginia. Community expression is different in every community, but every church must have some community expression. If a church does not have some outward focus in the community then why was the church placed in that community? If a church does not have at least some outward focus into the community then it is a dying church.

This leads to another point of evaluation. Is the ministry profitable or not? What does it mean to say a ministry is profitable or not profitable? Remember, the crux of this project is the revitalization of small to medium sized plateaued traditional churches. In an effort to revitalize said church, profitable ministries have to be discovered or generated! What is a profitable ministry? A profitable ministry in this sense is a ministry that generates a revenue stream for the church by adding new people to the church. While that may seem offensive to some people, a person must remember the context in which it is stated.

When a congregation which had 80 in Bible study on Sunday mornings five years ago has declined by 10-15 people a year for the past five years and now is averaging 30-35 in attendance the hard truth is that the biggest thing on their mind is "How are we going to stop the slide?" It is like falling off the side of a cliff and trying to find a place to put your foot on firm ground to stop the fall because the inevitable is obvious. If a church has less every year than it did the year before, then at some point is will cease to exist! Do churches cease to exist? Since the year 2000, almost 4000 churches a year closed their doors for the last time.[43] So, a small to medium sized plateaued or declining traditional

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[43] John Dart, *Church Closings Only One Percent*, www.christiancentury.org {Date Accessed, May 6, 2009}

church must find a place to stand and a platform from which to grow. If they do not, then they will be closing their doors.

Not everyone agrees with my premise in the paragraph above. Tucker, in her book, *Left Behind in a Megachurch World* displays a blatant disdain for what is *evangelical*, what is considered *church growth*, and most of all the advent of the *megachurch*. In her book, she accuses the mega church, which of course is an evangelical church, with cultural and community abandonment.[44] Tucker claims that mega church expressions cannot be authentic because they are big and successful.

> Left-behind churches (a church that is small and is not growing) are in a unique position to reach out in community service with the love of Christ and to be countercultural- particular in the area of materialism and self-centeredness. Left-behind churches can reach out in the neighborhoods more effectively in many ways than can the megachurch… to suggest that megachurches do not give money to help tsunami victims would be mean-spirited and false. They sponsor mission projects and have access to volunteer funds that no left-behind church could ever match. But in matters of lifestyle, the megachurch mentality promotes an outlook that embraces materialism for more than it repels it. In that realm, the megachurch world has abdicated its responsibility. And, considering its very nature of being defined by size and success, can it ever be a credible advocate for a Christianity of self service and self-denial?[45]

Not only is that flawed theology, it is flawed reality and flawed reason! First, churches are not a "clump" of people that are somehow chemically altered and molded together as one person despite their size or lack thereof. Whether a church has one hundred in attendance or one thousand in attendance it still consists of individual people. Megachurches do not have a different breed of people. The sum of a person who attends

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[44] Ruth A. Tucker, *Left Behind in a Megachurch World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2006), 12

[45] Ibid, 16-17

a mega church is the same as the sum of a person who attends a small church. They are both one person, no more and no less! A person is a person whether attending a large church or a small church. The ministry performed by that person, whether in a small church or a large church, is equally a sacrifice and equally effective. Not everyone who attends a large church is rich. Ministries of small churches and large churches alike can teach, be effective, and, be sacrificial on the part of that one individual performing the ministry regardless of the name of the church on their t-shirt.

Tucker's premise that a large church cannot reach and identify with the community is simply false. Here is an excerpt from Lewis' book, *The Church of Irresistible Influence*.

> As I write this, we are once again experiencing our annual spring graduation. Approximately three hundred people are making the transition from Seasons of life to Common Cause. Over a thousand people will now make up this **growing** congregation, **broken into more than eighty service groups**. Here is just a partial list of some of this year's Common Cause groups that will be connecting with our community.

- Bethany Christian Services Support
- Celebrate Recovery
- Christian Educational Assistance Foundation Support
- Community Impact Network
- Crisis Pregnancy Center Support
- Crown Ministry (Financial)
- Deaf Ministry
- Disaster Follow-up
- Divorce Care
- Divorce Prevention
- Habitat for Humanity
- Helping Hands
- Honduras Mission Support
- Jobs Partnership
- Life Skills/Medical
- LT Care Support
- Ministry to Inner City Children
- Nearly wed/ Newly Wed Support

- Nursing Home Support
- One to One Evangelism
- Open Hands
- Public Schools Mentoring
- Sportmen's Quest
- Student Venture Group
- Upward Basketball [46]

In this partial list of the more than eighty community ministries performed by the congregation of Bible Fellowship Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, people are receiving genuine personal assistance. In which of those ministries is the sacrifice not real on the part of the individual performing it because it is sponsored by a large church? In which of those ministries does the person ministered to not experience the love of Christ, community spirit, and genuine personal sacrifice on the part of the person doing the ministry?

My point is this: a church does not disqualify itself from the lordship of Christ just because it is large. Nor does large size mean that it has sold its soul for materialism and rendered itself unable to stand against the decaying of culture. Tucker says, "As the denominational sisters age and die, these postmodern sisters mix the boundaries of business, politics, and church in such a way that it makes a countercultural stance virtually impossible. Evangelicals have been swept away by culture – and megachurches are leading the way."[47] Based on the list in the quotation above, I do not see Bible Fellowship Church being swept away by culture? I see a church with a passion for meeting the needs of the community.

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[46] Robert Lewis w/ Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence,* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 82-85

[47] Ruth A. Tucker, *Left Behind in a Megachurch World,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2006), 13

Tucker misapplies individual and corporate self sacrifice. Jesus calls us to personal self sacrifice. But, he also calls us to corporate growth. While there may be a time when a church should close if community dynamics so dictate, the general rule would be growth. Churches do not have to become a mega-church, and they do not have to double in size, but unless unusual circumstances dictate a church should grow.

In the parable of the talents spoken by Jesus, the master rewarded the "faithful steward" who multiplied what he had been given by God. It is terribly irresponsible to let a church die when circumstances dictate that it should have grown! Consequently, it is not only prudent, but expedient that a church, as a faithful steward, grow to continue to provide ministry for the community.

One way to ensure as much growth as possible is to evaluate the church's "revenue sources." What are the ministries that are providing new growth for the congregation? With that in mind, what are those "revenue sources for First Baptist Church, Weber City? The main stream of new additions to the church is AWANA, our Wednesday evening children's ministry. More people have joined First Baptist Church, Weber City through AWANA than all other ministries combined. When I came to FBCWC six years ago, there were no children attending FBCWC on Wednesday evenings. When the children's minister was hired, the church began to prepare for AWANA. The children's minister was hired in February and the church began AWANA in August. Immediately, the numbers began change. Now, the AWANA program averages 70-100 children every Wednesday evening, and out of the families represented by these children there is a steady stream of people being added to the congregation.

Another “revenue” stream of new members into the church is the youth ministry. Five and one half years ago, the youth attendance averaged ten to twelve people on a given Sunday morning, Sunday evening, or Wednesday evening. Today, youth attendance averages are more than 30 per event. Forty eight youth attended the most recent Wednesday evening discipleship gathering.

Several families have entered the church because their teenager began attending the youth functions. Today, the youth ministry is a steady source for new people being introduced into the congregation.

The worship service is yet another place where people are being introduced into the congregation. Worship is a place where people are introduced into the congregation. Some come to First Baptist Church, Weber City because they like the style of worship that is presented. Though not as many as come through the children’s ministry or the youth ministry, the worship service is a revenue source nonetheless. However, worship would not really be involved in this evaluation anyway because a church does not “do” worship as a means of attracting people to the church.

Oddly enough, Trunk or Treat, the church’s alternative to the traditional Halloween activities, is a significant source of new people being introduced into the congregation. There are several leaders in the church today who first came on the property for Trunk or Treat. That is odd because it is only a once a year event. Yet, it is by far the largest single event that the church sponsors. On Halloween night, there will be between 2000 and 2500 people on the property at FBCWC. They come from all over east Tennessee and southwest Virginia. Every year, new members join the church directly from Trunk or Treat. It is a “revenue” source.

Other ministries are what I call, “Great Commission” ministries. On the list of ministries in appendix 2, there is a column with the following letters, P and GC. The P stands for “profitable.” In other words it is a revenue source for the church. The GC stand for “Great Commission.” What is a Great Commission ministry? A Great Commission ministry is one that a congregation does just because it is the church’s God-given mandate to preach the gospel. The church does not expect to gain members, money, or anything else from that ministry other than souls for the Kingdom of God. Here are some examples of Great Commission ministries at FBCWC. The most obvious would be the church’s involvement in the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist ministries in the State of Virginia. To list all of those would be redundant, but practically all of those are Great Commission ministries. The church does not receive any new members, per se, from the money that is sent to Richmond or the SBC. So, why do it? The church must do it because the God-given mandate for the Church is the Great Commission. So, the church works, it sacrifices, and it gives willingly and cheerfully to mission efforts beyond its own four walls and its own community.

There are also Great commission ministries on the local level. One example of a local Great Commission ministry is Play Up basketball for teenagers. Every year the church funds a basketball league for teenagers modeled after Upward Basketball. Every year, there are approximately 100 teenagers who participate in Play Up basketball. The league begins the last of November and ends in February. The church rarely receives new members from this league even though the work is exhausting. In fact, in five years, there has only been one direct baptism in the church from Play Up Basketball. So, why do it? The church does it because it is a great opportunity to spend time with young people

twice a week that the church would never have an occasion to speak to any other way. Is it worth it? Yes! Will it pay off? In terms of new members in FBCWC, perhaps not, but it most definitely will pay off in terms of new souls in the Kingdom of God. How can I be sure of that? Because God promised that his Word would never return to him void, but would accomplish what he intended it for in the first place. It is a Great Commission ministry.

There are many other Great Commission ministries in the church that will not be listed here. The point is to demonstrate the difference between the profitable and Great Commission ministries and then to proceed on the issue of a plateaued or declining church's response to both Great Commission ministries and profitable ministries. How does a plateaued or declining traditional church respond to the two different ministries?

The first step is to find possible revenue sources for the church because the church must expand. It cannot continue to decline. If the church continues to decline, then sooner or later it will not exist! When the church finds a reliable source for growth, it should protect that source, and provide it with the best resources possible in terms of workers, budget consideration, and consideration in the weekly schedule. When a church has a ministry that is growing the church, it must clear everything away from that ministry, water and fertilize it, and allow it to grow. A commitment has to be made to that ministry!

As I stated above, when I first arrived in Weber City, the church did not have a children's ministry. On Wednesday evenings, I would teach as many as forty adults in a Bible or book study, but the church was not growing. I was convinced that a viable children's ministry would enable the church to grow. I told the adults in the Wednesday

evening Bible study that I wanted all of them to leave the study and go work in AWANA. When they hesitated, I said, “If [the church] does not find enough teachers for AWANA on Wednesday evenings, I am going to close down the Wednesday evening Bible study and teach AWANA myself, but make no mistake about it [the church] will have AWANA for children on Wednesday evening.

The result was a congregation of people who began to understand how serious I was about children’s ministry and who then reciprocated a passion for AWANA and children’s ministries.

I was serious about closing down the Wednesday evening adult Bible study to have AWANA. If a declining church is blessed by God to find a revenue source for growth, then it must make a commitment to protect and enlarge that source or sources.

The second step is to identify the difference between a “dead” ministry and a Great Commission ministry. A church cannot do everything! If a congregation has some age to it, there is a great likelihood that the church is over-extended. It is probably over extended in terms of personnel and budget requirements. The great disease that churches have is the tendency to become increasingly wide and shallow in terms of ministry and budget. Before long the ministries and budget of the church are both a mile wide and an inch deep. Consequently, a church must evaluate their ministries to discover the difference between a “dead” ministry and what a Great Commission ministry is truly.

Every church has its limit of resources both in terms of personnel and finances. Thos limits are especially evident in a small church. The congregation must focus its resources on its revenue sources and its viable Great Commission ministries and cut away ministries that are either “dead” or that are not possible for the congregation to do either

because the ministry is dead, do not fit the ministry theme of the church, or are just not possible because the church does not have enough resources to do the ministry.

This can be a difficult process because usually, if a ministry has been a part of the church for any period of time, there will be people who are loyal to the ministry and do not want it deleted from the line-up regardless of whether it fits the theme of the church or whether the ministry is effective. One example in the life of FBCWC is the Christmas and Easter Cantata. For years, FBCWC began rehearsing for the Christmas Cantata in August. Every Wednesday evening the choir would practice for the Cantata. Then, just before Christmas, in forty five minutes all their work from August to December was consumed in one service. Then, the first of January, practice for the Easter Cantata would begin. On Easter Sunday morning, in less than an hour, three months work would be consumed. It was not a wise stewardship of the resources in terms of money and time. The church needed for those people to be involved in other ministries and they could not be involved because they were always in choir practice. Now, the church has a much smaller music presentation on Christmas and Easter. They sing only four or five songs. Special musicians are added to the regular musicians. The special musicians are students from the music department of East Tennessee State University. The choir and the special musicians rehearse twice at the most, sing in the special service, and go home with their families for dinner and fellowship. This makes their involvement in other ministries throughout the year possible because they are not mentally and physically drained from their participation in a cantata. That does not mean that every church should eliminate cantatas from their ministries. For FBCWC, it was not a necessary ministry in terms of profitability and necessity and was therefore eliminated.

In their book, *Simple Church*, the authors, Ranier and Geiger, give good advice on adding and evaluating ministries particularly in their chapter entitled "Focus: Saying No to Almost Everything." The authors promote a focus on a discipleship process that is both simple and identifiable. It is a process that is clear to the congregants and fits the church's personality and theme of ministry.

This project is not about a discipleship model, but about revitalizing a small to medium sized plateaued or declining congregation. However, the thought process and the method for both are very similar. In *Simple Church* the authors promote a narrowing of the focus to a simple discipleship process. In this project, this author promotes a narrowing of the focus on ministries that are profitable or otherwise necessary for the congregation.

Simple Church describes this process as follows: "[The] fast-food approach to ministry is killing our churches…stay focused on your simple process. Say no to everything else."[48] Focus on "one thing."[49]

As a part of this focus, or narrowing, elimination of certain ministries is absolutely necessary. "Elimination is necessary and difficult because certain people are pack rats. As a result, many churches are also 'pack rats.' Many churches are littered and cluttered with floundering ministry programs that are stored on top of each other and it is hard for people to pick through the pile and find their way to spiritual maturity."[50] It is

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[48] Thom S. Ranier and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, 2007), 200

[49] Ibid, 201

[50] Ibid, 204

impossible for a church to revitalize while the church is using its resources on ministries that are outdated, unprofitable, and do not fit in with the church's theme of ministry.

Rainer and Geiger claim that this is a matter of stewardship. "Since elimination is a matter of stewardship, it is a spiritual issue. Eliminating programs that are not in the simple ministry process is choosing to be wise with the *time* and *resources* God has given. It matters to God and it should matter to us."[51] The authors of *Simple Church* further define their position, a summary of which follows.

If a church keeps nonessential ministries, it is using valuable resources that could be put to essential ministries [that have the potential to grow the church.] Congregants only have a certain amount of time each week, and that time must be maximized [to revitalize a small to medium sized plateaued or declining congregation.] Leaders only have a certain amount of time each week as well. Refusing to eliminate is a bad stewardship of your leaders' time. Instead of being able to focus on doing a few things with excellence, they lead a lot of programs with mediocrity.[52]

Refusing to eliminate "dead" programs is also a bad stewardship of money. A small to medium sized plateaued traditional church does not have access to large amounts of money with which they can just "jump start" a congregation. "Do not forget: the money is the tithe and offerings of the people. Instead of spending it on programs outside the process [ministries that are neither necessary nor profitable], invest it within your

[51] Ibid, 208

[52] Ibid, 208

ministry process…As programs are eliminated, so are the line items in the budget. And, this elimination means more resources for your essential programs."[53]

This is not a one-time evaluation. Every year, churches must evaluate what they are doing, what ministries should be expanded, and what ones need to be dropped. Thom Rainer's advice applies not only to a simple discipleship process but to the revitalization of a small to medium sized plateaued traditional church as well. Limit adding new programs to the church. Nearly every day, there are opportunities to add new ministries to the church. Almost all of these have some validity on the basis on need and goodwill. However, before a ministry can be added, the new ministry must be essential to the revitalization of the church.

[53] Ibid, 209

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Is there reasonable hope for the revitalization of small to medium size plateaued traditional churches? The general sentiment concerning "established" churches does not suggest that revitalizing a small to medium size plateaued or declining church is an easy task. David T. Olson, author of the book, *American Church in Crisis* says it is "probably five to seven times easier to plant a new church than to help an established church that is in deep difficulty to restore its vitality."[1]

One of the biggest reasons for this is the age of the majority of churches in existence today. In his book, *Planting Growing Churches in the 21st Century*, the author, Aubrey Malphurs offers the following diagram as a "life cycle" for churches.[2]

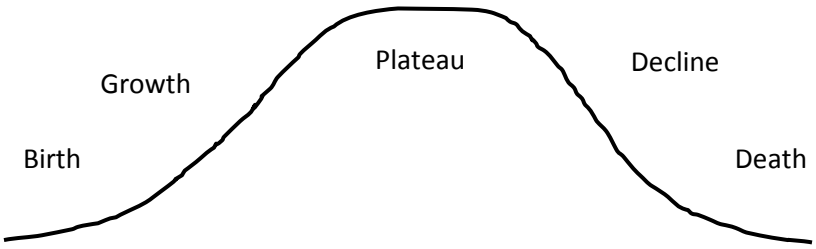

Figure 3. Growth Cycle of a Church, Malphurs

While this may represent the typical life cycle for a normal church, I do not believe that decline and death are inevitable for a church. Win Arn, a church growth researcher, points out

[1]G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Ten Minutes with David T. Olson," *Religion News Service*, February 2009: available form http;//www.religionnews.com

[2]Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2004) 33

that thousands of new churches were started after World War II.[3] Not as many churches are being planted today. From the mid-1940s until 1957, the amount of churches planted increased every year.[4] Since 1957, the number of church plants decreased every year until 1970 to the lowest point in American history.[5] Since 1970, the number of churches planted has only marginally increased each year. Arn estimates that 80-85% of existing churches are in the down cycle of organizational life.[6]

It is not surprising then, to learn that established churches, as a whole, are not growing. Established churches declined in attendance every year from 1999-2006 with the only exception being 2000-2001 when church attendance spiked by 25% for five Sundays after 9/11.[7] Why is it more difficult for traditional plateaued churches to grow? One reason is an older church usually has decaying facilities. Most traditional plateaued churches are 50 to 100 years old. In many cases, their facilities are a hindrance to attracting new members. Certain traditions in older churches may also be a stumbling block to new growth. Leadership tends to narrow in older churches and the ministry tends to broaden beyond what is tenable. When I say that leadership tends to narrow, I mean that the same people who are leading the church each year and the leadership base gets fewer each year. This pattern fosters an endless cycle of a leadership shortage and a filter on new ideas being introduced to the congregation. It also leads to an abundance of understaffed programs which are poorly carried out.

Sometimes the location of a church can be a hindrance to growth. In its past, a church might have been in a vibrant location and now be in a location that is less than ideal and growth is hindered.

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[3] Ibid, 32

[4]David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008) 144

[5]Ibid, 144

[6]Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2004) 32

[7]David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008) 130

In other instances, the spiritual condition of a congregation may keep it from being a growing congregation. It is not that the church cannot grow, but rather that the church does not want to pay the price spiritually to grow.

Is it worth it to even try to revive small to medium sized plateaued or declining churches? The premise of this thesis is that it is worth the effort. I'm not saying that every small to medium sized plateaued traditional church can be revived or even should be revived. There are instances when these types of churches should consider closing or merging with another congregation to better serve the community and the Kingdom of God. Yet, in most instances, such churches should attempt to revitalize.

There are approximately 350,000 churches in America, and 80-85% of those churches has either reach a plateau in terms of attendance or is actually declining.[8] That means that 280,000 churches fit the category of a plateaued church. Most of these churches have a building, property, and an average of 75 people in attendance.[9] That totals up to an amazing number of buildings, property, and people. By comparison, there are only about 4000 churches started each year.[10]

I am not saying that new churches should not be planted. Indeed, more new churches need to be started! However, 4000 churches is a "drop in the bucket" compared to the 280,000 churches that already exist!! Perhaps denominations and boards should devote more time, money, and leadership to revitalizing older congregations given that these are congregations have existing buildings, leadership, and property!

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[8]Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 2004) 32

[9]Hartford Institue for Religion Research, "What's the Average Size of U. S. Churches?" under "Fast Facts," http://hartsem.edu/research {Accessed September 22, 2009}.

[10]David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008) 120

Revitalization can take place for small to medium sized plateaued traditional churches. Testimonies abound from churches that have achieved revitalization, but the task is by no means easy. "There are no quick fix gimmicks to spur a declining church back to growth."[11] What will it take for these churches to revitalize?

First, it will take a leader with a special calling to the revitalization of small to medium sized plateaued traditional churches. Not every pastor has such a calling. I urge ministers to consider their calling, and ask if the struggling church is where they should minister. I remember sensing such a call in my own life while I was in seminary in, of all places, a class on church planting. I urge pastors to see these churches as more than fading ministries or as stepping stones to bigger and better ministries elsewhere.

Second, revitalization will take a commitment of time as well as a commitment to the development of the leadership necessary for the church to experience revitalization. A pastor cannot achieve revitalization in a year or two. It takes at least five to seven years to achieve significant change, and probably five more years to cement that change to the point that the church does not return to its former state should the pastor leave. And, it will take a commitment to the development of the type of leadership required to achieve lasting revitalization. In the small to medium size plateaued traditional church, those leaders are often serving as deacons, Sunday school teachers, and ministry staff.

Revitalization often requires a narrowing of the ministry focus. As I mentioned above, the slate of ministries often becomes too broad in older churches, which have neither the personnel nor the money to do everything in terms of ministry. Therefore they must narrow their focus to those ministries that help the church grow. They must also re-connect with the community and the best place to reconnect is in the ministries they provide.

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[11]David F. Nixon, *Leading the Comeback Church* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004) 11

This project has by no means exhausted the subject of revitalization of the small to medium size plateaued traditional church. There are several areas that can, and need to be further explored.

One area is the role of spiritual revival in the process of revitalization. Most books on this subject do not treat the spiritual aspect of revitalization and when they do the treatment given to the spiritual role in revitalization is usually brief and fairly shallow. Stetzer and Dodson devote a chapter to the spiritual aspect of revitalization, where they write, "Intuitively, we have believed that it is God that changes churches…A comeback requires at least three elements. First, there is spiritual energy in the lives of individual believers and the church as a whole, brought on by revival."[12]

Likewise, Bill Easum, in his book, *A Second Resurrection*, addresses the issue of spirituality in the role of revitalization. In this small, only 126 pages long, Easum writes,

> For much of the past three decades, denominational officials have been promoting seminars and programs aimed at revitalizing the church…Yet, after years of trying to revitalize these churches, the vast majority of them are still declining. What gives? Is it possible we have underestimated the seriousness of Western Protestantism's situation? What if the metaphors of reformation, renewal, and revitalization don't get to the heart of the problem? What if the situation is much worse than those words describe? What if the vast majority of congregations in the west are spiritually dead and God no longer considers them to be churches? What if God has one foot out the door of most western churches? What if the vast majority of our churches are like the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation? What if God is about to spit us out of his mouth?[13]

Regardless of what a person might think about Easum's answers, the questions are valid. There are more principles involved in the revitalization of a church other than vision, communication and organization. There is a very real spiritual aspect to revitalization and failure to revitalize.

Another area that calls for further investigation involves answering two important questions: When is it time to close a church, and when should a church consider merging with

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[12] Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Holman Publishing, 2007) 55

[13] Bill Easum, *A Second Resurrection* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2007) 3-4

another congregation? I think there is an interesting parallel that could be drawn from another very similar phenomenon that is occurring all across our nation, and that is the closing and merging of schools. This parallel phenomenon offers unique insight into the plight of churches facing the same population dynamics.

Significant resistance arises when it comes time to close a school and merge that school with another school. Parents and children do not want to give up “their” school to merge with another school even when the development of a new school means more people, better facilities, and better opportunities for everyone involved. Schools have something that churches often do not have, and that is a school board. Fortunately, for school systems, when the school board makes a decision to merge, like it or not, a new school is formed because local schools enjoy a monopoly on free education. Therefore, parents have no choice but to yield to the decision of the school board if they want a tuition free education for their child. Churches are volunteer organizations which changes the dynamics of the equation considerably. Still, even for schools, that does not mean that school mergers are always successful. Are there significant principles the church can learn from the school system where closure and merging are concerned?

Churches usually do not generally consider closing and merging with another congregation. Further investigation could uncover how church closings are handled, and find examples of how churches have successfully merged with another congregation to better serve the community.

A third series of questions that needs to be addressed includes: When is it time for a church to move from its present location to another location? What were the factors considered by churches which succeeded after relocating and why did other churches fail after moving?

These are very real issues touching on the revitalization of small to medium size churches. These are not peripheral issues, but rather core issues that affect plateaued churches as they consider their potential for revitalization. Just a brief review of my own ministry reminds me of how the churches I have served have faced this same issue.

The first church in which I served successfully relocated. Thomas Village Baptist Church was a church planted by the Clinch Valley Baptist Association and the Virginia Baptist Mission Board 1980. It was located in Thomas Village subdivision in Duffield, Virginia on one-third of an acre of land. There was no additional space for additional parking or expansion so the church moved to a larger facility on a larger piece of property closer to the center of the small town.

The second church that I served would never have considered relocating. They were emotionally tied to their location, their history, and their cemetery. As their pastor, I understood how they felt. Eventually, during my tenure as pastor, the church purchased two small portions of adjoining land and built a new fellowship hall/education space. This also provided additional parking space.

The church I am currently serving does not need to relocate. First Baptist Church Weber City, Virginia is in an optimum location. More than 40,000 vehicles pass within fifty yards of the front door every day. The church has been able to buy a large piece of land on this block, lease another building for office space, and has the right of first refusal on the only remaining piece of land on this block. Moving is not anything that this church will consider in the foreseeable future. These three examples from my own ministry demonstrate the range of options available to small to medium sized churches committed to move from their plateaued state. However, the commitment must come first, and my hope is that this project will have fostered that commitment in the lives of the pastors who read this and their congregation.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

MINISTRIES OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, WEBER CITY

Sunday School
Officers:
Director, Secretary, Outreach Director
Adult and Young Adult Divisions
Director, Teacher, Class Outreach Leader, Class Member
Secretary, Assistant Teacher, Class Secretary
Remington House Assisted Living Facility (Sunday School)
Youth Division
Director, Teacher, Assistant Teacher, Outreach director, Class Secretary, Class Member
Genesis Express (Children, age 4-grade 6)
Engineer (Division Director), Class Member
Locomotive (Gr. 5-6) Porter (teacher) ÿ Conductor (Workshop Volunteer)
Coach (Gr. 3-4) Porter (teacher) ÿ Conductor (Workshop Volunteer)
Boxcar (Gr. 1-2) Porter (teacher) ÿ Conductor (Workshop Volunteer)
Caboose (Age 4-5) Porter (Teacher) ÿ Conductor (Workshop Volunteer)
Preschool Division (nursery-age 3)
Director ÿ Teacher ÿ Preschool (Nursery) Teacher ÿ Class Member
Preschool and Children's Extended Care
Preschool Extended Care (8:30 Worship)
Preschool Extended Care (11 o'clock Worship)
"Praise Kid" Children's Church Leader (11 o'clock Worship) "Praise Kid" (Age 3-4th gr.)

Sunday Evening Ministries, Studies, Activities
Children's Praise-N-Play Leader, Adult or Youth Leadership Team Leader
Children's Choir Director, Children's Choir Member, Adult Choir Rehearsal
Praise-N-Play Leader, Praise-N-Play Kid Participant, Spirit Wind Rehearsal
Youth SNL Leader, Youth SNL Participant
Adult Youth Prayer Team Leader, Youth Prayer Team Member
Adult Discipleship Study, Children's Leadership Team

Deacon Family Ministry
Ordained Deacon or Deacon in Training (Attending Sunday evening meetings)
Deacon Visitation ÿ Deacon Ministry to assigned families (sickness, death, other occasions)

Wednesday Evening Ministries, Studies, or Activities
Church-wide Prayer Time, Youth Bible Study, Business Meeting, S. S. Teacher Tr.
Adult Discipleship Studies, Nursery Worker, Instrumental Ensemble Rehearsal
AWANA:
Director, Commander, Secretary, Game Director, Game Leader
Listeners (Volunteers)
Cubbies (2 years prior to K): Director, Leader, Secretary, Cubbie Kid
Sparks (Gr. K-2) Director, Leader, Secretary, Sparks Kid T & T (Gr. 3-5) Director, Leader, Secretary, T & T Kid
Trek (Gr. 5-6) Director, Leader, Secretary, Trek Kid

Children's Activities
Fantastic Fridays Leader or Helper, Child participant
Children's Camp Leader and/or Chaperone, Child participant
Preschool Summer Camp Week Leader or Helper, Child participant
King's Kids Leader, Chaperone and Drivers, Child participant
Trunk or Treat (Help w/rides, games, food, cleanup, etc.) Child participant
VBS Director, Leader, Helper, Child participant
Drama Director (musical or otherwise), Child participant

Youth Activities and Ministries
Mission Trip (Youth or Adult) Relentless for Christ" Youth Drama Team
Youth Camp (Youth or Adult), Youth "Trunk or Treat" Helpers
Retreats (Y/Ad.), Disciple Now Weekend (Leader, provide home/food), Youth participant
Chaperone or driver for activities such a bowling, movies, etc., Youth participant

Music Ministry
Adult Choir
Spirit Wind
Soloist
Instrumentalists
Sound Technician
Media Technician

Media/Library
Director, Library Staff Member, Helper

Senior Adult Activities
Ladies 3rd Wednesday Morning Breakfast Bible Study, Trips, Van Driver for Trips

Missions
Baptist Women I Group, Book Fair at Trunk or Treat sponsored by BWI Group
Baptist Women II Group, Caring Ministry sponsored by BWII Group, Mission Trips w/CVBA
Team, Local Mission Projects
CVBA Jacob's Well Ministry, Operation Christmas Child (Shoe Box
Thanksgiving Meal to needy
Summer Belize Mission Trip
World Changers Summer Mission Trip

Rotating Committees and Non Rotating Committees
Baptismal, Buildings & Grounds, Computer, Floral, History, Hospitality
Music, Nominating, Personnel, Recreation, Budget, Auditors
Ushers, Van, Kitchen Staff

PLAY UP BASKETBALL
Coach, Referee, Scorekeeper, Half-time Testimony, Concessions, Cleanup Crew

Gate City Middle School Volleyball and Basketball Games
Concessions, Host by coming to meet & greet the players, parents, and other guests

Greeters
Sunday Morning, Sunday Evening

Prayer Leaders
Scheduled persons who pray prior to or during the early part of the 11 o'clock service specifically for the worship service.

Appendix 2

First Baptist Church Ministry Evaluation Form

Ministry List	**Schedule**	**Focus**	**G.C/Profitable**
Sunday School	Weekly	_____	_____
Remington House (Asst. Living)	Weekly	_____	_____
Worship	Weekly	_____	_____
Children's Church	Weekly	_____	_____
Nursery	Weekly	_____	_____
Sanctuary Choir	Bi-Weekly	_____	_____
Spirit Wind	Bi-Weekly	_____	_____
Children's Choir	Seasonal	_____	_____
Young Adult Choir	TBA	_____	_____
Discipleship (A)	Weekly	_____	_____
Deacon Family	Weekly	_____	_____
Praise and Play (C)	Weekly	_____	_____
Prayer (Church-wide)	Weekly	_____	_____
Fantastic Fridays © C	March	_____	_____
Trunk & Treat ©	October 31	_____	_____
PlayUp Basketball © Y	Nov./Feb	_____	_____
Jacob's Well ©	Summer	_____	_____
Church Picnic	Sept	_____	_____
Middle School Basketball ©	Oct/Feb	_____	_____
Middle School Volleyball ©	Sept/Dec	_____	_____
King's Kids	Summer	_____	_____
Kid's Camp	Summer	_____	_____
Youth Camp	Summer	_____	_____
Youth Mission Trip (Wrld Chgrs)	Summer	_____	_____
CVBA	Monthly	_____	_____
Cooperative Program	Monthly	_____	_____
✓ VBMB (BGAV)	State	_____	_____
✓ SBC	National	_____	_____

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VITA

JOHNNY LAMAR KENDRICK

PERSONAL

Born: November 30, 1963
Married: Jill R. Hostutler Kendrick, December 21, 1990
Children: Jacob and Brandon

EDUCATIONAL

Bachelor of Arts in Ministry, Clear Creek Baptist Bible College. 1993
Master of Divinity, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. 2003

MINISTERIAL

Ordained: First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia, 1992

PROFESSIONAL

Minister of Music. Greenvale Baptist Church, Kingsport, Tennessee. 1983-1992
Associate Pastor. First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia. 1992-1993
Pastor. Thomas Village Baptist Church, Duffield, Virginia. 1993-1996
Pastor. Tompkins Baptist Church, Grove hill, Alabama. 1996-2003
Pastor. First Baptist Church, Weber City, Virginia. 2003 - Present