

Liberty University School of Divinity

**ATTRACTIVE TO MISSIONAL: A STRATEGIC TRANSITION PLAN FOR
ANASTASIA BAPTIST CHURCH.**

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“ATTRACTIVE TO MISSIONAL: A STRATEGIC TRANSITION PLAN FOR ANASTASIA BAPTIST CHURCH.”

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2018

“Attractional to Missional: A strategic transition plan for Anastasia Baptist Church.”

Anastasia Baptist Church (ABC) has existed for fifty years and has grown into a church of roughly sixteen-hundred regular worshipers. Over the last five years, ABC has plateaued in growth due to its focus on maintaining an attractional church structure. For ABC to grow and be healthy again, it must shift from an attractional model of discipleship to a hybrid one that utilizes both attractional and missional models of discipleship. This thesis seeks to investigate how ABC can strategically shift from an attractional to a hybrid model of discipleship. Research for this project will examine a biblical model for discipleship, healthy modern churches that have transitioned to a hybrid discipleship model, and empirical data gathered about ABC. The goal of this thesis is to formulate a step-by-step discipleship strategy that will move ABC from an attractional-based church to a hybrid-based one.

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Chapter One

Introduction

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you." Exodus 3:14

God had heard the cry of His people to be freed from the bondage of slavery and oppression under the Egyptian rule. The response from God to the people of Israel came not in the form of a massive army, but rather in a single man named Moses. The scriptures say that "I AM has sent me to you," denoting that Moses was sent to the people of Israel to bring them out of Egypt and slavery. Moses would relationally walk with the Israelites in their darkest moments each day, bringing them new wisdom and insight from the Lord, freeing them from the bondage of slavery, and taking them toward the promises and blessings of God. The task Moses was given is not that different from the duty entrusted to current church leaders: to free people from the bondage of slavery to sin, addiction, and brokenness. Had Moses not accepted his call and left the comfort of his home in Midian, he would have never allowed God to use him to emancipate the Israelites. In the same sense, the church is being called by God to walk in relationship with all people to bring hope to the broken, hurting, and lost.

There must be a greater emphasis on the process of making disciples and less on the physical building of the church. A disciple as being defined by one who has faith in Christ, is being transformed by Christ and is engaged in Christ's mission. The church has operated for many years under the mindset that "*If we build it, they will come.*" The paradigm that church buildings, ministries, and activities can continue to draw people to the church is a broken way of thinking.

The process of making disciples should be an active process that involves sending and going rather than enticing. Sending, being the process of missionally placing individuals into unreached communities and people groups. Barna Research Group recently found that less than one half of the unchurched population is even interested in being invited to church, and this number has dropped nearly 20% over the last two decades.¹ Further “All the major research agencies report declining attendance and conversion. The Pew Report, Barna Research Group, Ed Stetzer, and others are in general agreement about the overall characteristics of the trend.”² This evidence suggests that the church must change in order to better reach people outside the walls of the church.

Some have defined this change as the “missional model” of discipleship for the church. The missional model is often referred to as the model of discipleship that occurred early in the book of Acts. “The Bible is very clear that the apostolic church met in homes. Upon returning from the Mount of Ascension, the believers prayed together in an upper room (Acts 1:12-14). On the day of Pentecost, the believers were gathered in a house when the Spirit fell on them (Acts 2:2). After the baptism of the three thousand, the believers not only met in the temple court, but they also met in houses (Acts 2:46).”³ The apostolic church was defined more by homes and communities than church buildings. This had an unforeseen benefit in that it forced the church to expand by constantly reaching new homes once it outgrew its original space.

¹ "Five Trends Among the Unchurched," Barna Group, October 09, 2014, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-trends-among-the-unchurched/>.

² Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim and Mike Breen, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 273.

³ Jervis David Payne, *Missional house churches: reaching our communities with the Gospel* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008), 1.

This type of expansion process exemplifies the missional church model, which targets homes and communities as places for the Gospel to reach.

One of the most significant ecclesiological points the missional church makes is that discipleship efforts should be extrinsic rather than intrinsic. For many churches, the reality is that most resources and efforts are devoted to discipling people through internal ministries and programs rather than focusing on reaching people outside the church.

This thesis will examine how Anastasia Baptist Church (ABC) in St. Augustine, Florida can strategically shift from an attractional model of discipleship to a hybrid model of discipleship that utilizes principles from both the attractional and missional model. ABC has existed for fifty years and has grown to a church of roughly sixteen-hundred regular worshipers. Over the last five years, ABC has plateaued in growth due to its focus on maintaining an attractional church structure. Like many other churches, in order to grow and thrive again, ABC must shift from an attractional model of discipleship to a hybrid one that utilizes both attractional and missional discipleship models. Research for this project will explore a biblical model of discipleship, healthy modern churches that have transitioned to or are utilizing a hybrid discipleship model, and empirical data gathered about ABC. The goal of this thesis is to provide steps in a discipleship strategy through which ABC can move from an attractional to a hybrid church.

Statement of the Problem

In proceeding with this thesis, one of the most visible challenges will be to change the DNA and culture of discipleship at ABC. For nearly fifty years, this church has operated on an attractional model of discipleship. ABC has found this model to be successful in creating church growth and health but use of this model has engrained within church culture that discipleship is a process dependent upon providing events, ministries, and services. As a result, the staff and church congregation possess an unknowingly broken mentality when it comes to discipleship, believing that a lack of growth is the result of not enough programming. This mentality can, if unchecked, create an overly-complex church that is run by its programs rather than by relationally making disciples.

Currently, the missional church discipleship movement generally thrives in new church plants or startups. Church plants and startups being characterized as communities of faith that are planted by other churches or simply emerge to reach unchurched demographics. Church plants are frequently considered the most natural vehicle for the missional church because starting a church based on a new model is often easier than trying to implement change within an existing church. In fact, some of the prolific leaders and thinkers of the missional movement would suggest “that the planting of new, culturally diverse, missional communities is the best way forward for the church that views itself in a missional context.”⁴ However, this project seeks to reveal ways in which the traditional model of discipleship can use existing resources and momentum to serve as a launching pad for the missional church.

⁴ William O. Avery and Beth A. Gaede, *If This Is the Way the World Works: Science, Congregations, and Leadership* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2007),

Determining how to strategically transition ABC into a missional church without unintentionally causing division within the church itself has been the most challenging aspect of this project. The project will demonstrate that other traditional discipleship model churches can shift to become missional bodies, and that the birthplace of the missional church does not always need to be a church plant. The ultimate purpose of this research will be to produce a comprehensive strategy and formula for ABC that will model how churches can transform into missional or hybrid model churches.

Special Terminology Defined

Another challenge in producing a missional model of church discipleship out of a traditional model is defining those models. Currently, many definitions of these two models exist, thereby requiring the writer to define the models. For this project, the traditional model or also known as the "attractational model of church discipleship is based upon the paradigm of intrinsic discipleship. The attractational church being "where the majority of resources are showcased in order to grow the attendance are the public space. Churches typically spend eighty-five percent of their budget on this space. This is typical of the come and see approach to the mission, which can harvest some low-hanging fruit that, people who are attracted to what the church provides." ⁵In other words, the most prominent method by which the traditional model church seeks to disciple is by drawing in the unchurched to be discipled by the church ministries.

⁵ J. R. Woodward, *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove,; InterVarsity Press, 2016). Kindle

Frequently, seeker-friendly churches employ an attractional discipleship method. In such churches, the majority of resources, staffing, and energy is spent on creating an environment to which people are drawn. Services, ministries, and events are designed to pull people in with the hopes of creating new disciples. This is not to say that the traditional model of churches does not employ other techniques, but rather that their main goal is to be attractional in their methodology. While attractional churches will often have considerable ambitions to reach people, the mindset of these churches is to build the community within the church rather than build the church out of the community.

As stated early a real challenge associated with the emergence of the missional church is to come up with an agreed upon definition or understanding. Apart of this challenge is centered around “The missional church cannot be codified in a simple definition. It is more than a new word for evangelism, church planting, or meeting someone in a coffee shop for conversation. It is not about restructuring or a new program. Missional church is about an alternative imagination for being the church.”⁶ The missional church seeks methods through which the church can be extrinsic in its reach. In turn, the missional church intentionally sends believers out into communities, schools, and homes with the desire to make disciples. In this model, efforts are focused on creating intimate environments in which people can find meaningful communities and relationships. The belief is that deep relational community can build a bridge to the Gospel that can be shared in doing life together. The best examples of churches that embody the missional movement are those that intentionally reach out to specific communities and demographics in hopes of establishing a presence and dialogue therein.

⁶ Roxburgh, Alan J., M. Scott. Boren, and Mark Priddy. *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009. 45

This missional church model is suggestive of the early church discipleship method: in the book of Acts, the church strategically sent disciples into specific areas and destinations to be ministers of the Gospel.

Lastly, the term hybrid will refer to a combination of both the traditional and missional model of discipleship.

The hybrid church model combines elements from both the attractional and the organic church to form a model that is both attractional and missional. It is both “come and see” and “Go and Be.” The hybrid church is usually led by a senior pastor and a professional staff. It is primary Sunday morning and building focused. It is also extremely complex. The hybrid church believes in making disciples, but it goes about this task in a variety of ways. In short, the hybrid model has taken a small-group system and laid that system on top of an existing traditional/attractional model.⁷

A hybrid church may still contain attractive ministries, services, and buildings, but the main focus will remain to intentionally send people into communities and homes to missionally reach people. Within a hybrid model of discipleship, the idea would be to attract individuals to join the church, so they would then in turn be sent out to reach people outside the of the church building.

Statement of Limitations

The most significant limitation of this project is strategizing ways in which to reprogram the DNA structure of a church, since not every church can handle a substantial amount of change. Creating cultural change within a church depends on factors like church history, church demographics, background, and the willingness of a church to change.

⁷ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013). 233

This limitation will apply to the research and findings of this project, as the project seeks to formulate a strategic plan of action for ABC. As a traditional church seeks to change and be more missional in its practices, a hybrid model that integrates both methods is most likely to develop. The goal of this project is not to produce a model through which all churches will be able to transform their practices of church discipleship, but rather to offer ways in which churches can use existing momentum and resources to become more missional in their approach. Ultimately, this project seeks to provide a foundation on which ABC can use the current platform as a launching pad to propel the traditional church toward the missional model. Although this thesis may not offer an exact guide for other churches wishing to change their discipleship methodology, it will provide some key insights into the process and highlight a potential plan for success at ABC.

Theoretical Basis

The two main areas of discussion for this thesis are based on the methods of discipleship and a theoretical understanding of church ecclesiology. In this project, these two concepts will often coincide since discipleship should be the heart of the church. This paper does not provide a comprehensive guide to discipleship; instead, it presents a discipling strategy that the church may follow. The process of discipleship will not be explored in detail, but the approach to discipleship will be. It is the author's understanding that the biblical process of becoming a disciple of Christ is significantly more precise than the church's methodology for making disciples.

Firstly, the most important understandings of discipleship should come from the careful study of The New Testament. Although little is explicitly stated therein regarding the recommended strategy of discipleship, much can be perceived through a closer examination of the apostolic church. Secondly, concerning church ecclesiology, this research intends to examine the initial design and creation of the church. Understanding the manner in which God not only established the foundation of the church but also intended it to thrive is essential. For this project, the most significant aspect in understanding the church's creation will be establishing that the church was not intended to be weak but rather an energetic epicenter from which God works. This understanding will reinforce the premise of this paper, as its purpose is to reveal ways in which shifting to a missional model of discipleship could revitalize ABC.

Statement of Methodology

To this end, this thesis will research modern churches who have changed or are in the process of changing discipleship models. Many current traditional model churches face challenges in making disciples and adding to the kingdom; this difficulty comes from a strategy that prevents these churches from exponentially multiplying the kingdom.

Chapter two of this project will elucidate why ABC needs to change its methodology of discipleship in order to thrive, examining past successes and failures of the current model of discipleship. This project will work with church leaders that have a background in the traditional model of discipleship and are seeking to become more missional in their discipleship approach. This research should present a case not only for ABC's need for a shift in DNA, but also for other traditional churches to make such changes as well.

Chapter three will present and discuss the findings of both the academic and applied research in order to strengthen the case for a missional discipleship model based upon the growth and success of other traditional churches that have shifted to this model. To this end, steps will be revealed through which ABC can use its current position and momentum to launch a more missionally-modeled church.

Chapter four will condense the methods that ABC can utilize to shift the culture and DNA of the church to a more missional approach. These steps will be placed within a general timeline and broken into phases of implementation.

Chapter five will offer perspective and vision for future churches that might seek to reinvent their DNA to reflect a more missional model. Finally, this chapter presents insights gained on the subject regarding ABC and the greater church.

Review of Literature

The literature review for this project will showcase the resources and ideas that have helped influence the author to write about the given subject. Most of the scholarly resources used in the paper's research will deal directly with the missional church model or the pursuits of churches wishing to transition to a missional discipleship mode. The other books referenced for this project discuss church discipleship and methods of formulating discipling strategies. Lastly, some academic studies and models utilized in this research provide a basis for detailing the attractional and traditional models of church discipleship.

Scriptures Referenced

The foundation of this research project will center on examining biblical principles of church discipleship and how these principles can be implemented in the church today. The author acknowledges that God's Word is the truth and the fullness of His will for humanity and the church. Without scripture as a guide for the church, there cannot be a guide for which to understand the mission of the church. This thesis will explore in detail the early movements of the church in the book of Acts. More than any book of the Bible, the book of Acts provides a clear account of how the power of the Holy Spirit can move within the context of the church. While the author fully understands that the current circumstances of the church appear different from the early church, the principles revealed are foundational.

A verse that has helped shape this project and the understanding of the need for churches and ministry leaders to do more to reach beyond the bounds of church walls is Exodus 3:14, which reads, "*God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you."*"⁸ This passage speaks to the journey Moses undertook to bring the Israelites out of slavery and bondage. For church leaders today, there is a similar call to escape the comfort of what is known and to understand in a greater way evangelism and discipleship. If church leaders want to reach people with the Gospel, they must be willing to be the people sent by God to reach broken individuals around the world.

One of the primary scriptures that serves as a basis for discussion in this thesis is Acts 1:8.

⁸ Exodus 3:14.

Jesus said to the disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”⁹ This passage establishes the power given to the church but also highlights the church’s sending of disciples out to make new disciples in other lands. This understanding is essential to the potential that disciples of Christ have today to make an impact.

Another key passage from the book of Acts comes in 4:13, which states, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”¹⁰ Although Peter and John were both uneducated and not formally trained in their understanding of the church, both had profound faith, which was a direct result of the time they spent with Jesus. This point demonstrates that discipleship equals time invested by a mentor into the life of a mentee. Discipleship is a product of relational time spent investing in the lives of others.

Beyond the book of Acts, the other driving scripture behind this thesis is Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹¹ This passage outlines the nature and power of the church. Christ intended the church to be strong, not wavering against the opposition. This passage in many ways establishes a case for the church to change its methodology. The church currently exists not in a manner of power but more of weakness, which is due not to God’s lack of faithfulness but to man’s. If the church was intended to thrive, why is it not succeeding in the West as it was created to do? This passage informs the readers that the church must change to fulfill the intent and commandment of the Father.

⁹ Acts 1:8.

¹⁰ Acts 4:13.

¹¹ Matthew 16:18.

For the church to thrive in the way Jesus intended it to, it needed to rely on a relational model for ministry. Very early in His ministry, Jesus sought out the first twelve disciples, asking them to follow him on a journey He refers to as becoming “fishers of men.”¹² This passage suggests not only Jesus’ intentions of discipling these fishermen to have a more significant faith, but also His plan of sending them out to make disciples. This mentality of *be one, make one* discipleship was essential to the mission and heart of Jesus. This passage describes how the church should go about changing lives, first by being a disciple and then by making a disciple.

Jesus’ process of discipleship is highlighted throughout the Gospel, detailing how He would often teach and lead by example. A passage that portrays this process is Luke 8:1, which says, “Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him.”¹³ Jesus taught the lesson of making disciples by investing in people’s lives and preaching the hope of the Gospel to all. This practice of preaching and evangelizing would be one that He would later expect and send the disciples to perform.

The importance of sending can be found in Matthew 9:37-38 when Jesus states, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”¹⁴ This passage discusses the need for workers to tend to the harvest. Moreover, this passage addresses both the need of a Savior and for the unchurched to have a minister sent to them. For the harvest to be reaped, there must be those who are trained and sent out to tend the harvest.

¹² Matthew 4:19.

¹³ Luke 8:1.

¹⁴ Matthew 9:37-38.

Matthew 10:5-11 tells of how Jesus sent out the disciples to specifically visit homes to share the message of repentance and hope. In this passage, Jesus instructs the disciples by saying:

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart.”¹⁵

This passage instructs the disciples to go into the communities and villages and share the hope of Christ by healing and making a difference in the land. The principles of community outreach and seeking out the lost and broken are critical in this passage and also foundational to the Gospel. For this thesis, Matthew 10:5-11 helps point to the importance that Jesus placed on the sending of the disciples to minister to people. This passage is pivotal to perceiving how Jesus intended disciples to be made in the future.

It is essential, while discussing the church and therefore the making of disciples, to place the Great Commission scripture at the forefront. Matthew 28:16-20¹⁶ expresses the will of the Father through the words of the Son by saying,

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

¹⁵ Matthew 10:5-11.

¹⁶ Matthew 28:16-20.

This mandate stands as the most definitive directive that Christ shared with all believers. Therefore, it is for the church as a foundation of faith to go and make disciples.

The idea that the church should shift its methodology to be more intentional in reaching people with the hope of Christ is made more evident when John 1:14 is understood: “Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁷ This scripture speaks of a Savior who humbled Himself and became flesh. Jesus pursued those whom he would save by going to where they were. This passage speaks volumes to the way that Christ sought to save and redeem people. It also sets a precedent that if Jesus Himself sought out humanity with grace, the church should likewise seek out humanity with that same attitude.

Romans 10:14 emphasizes the task of the church, which is to be an agency of sending out disciples. Paul wrote, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?”¹⁸ Paul makes a further point concerning the lost when he says that they are in fact not waiting for a church to be built but rather for those who are sent to minister to them. Paul then more clearly defines the process of discipling the lost by saying, “You have heard me teach these things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.”¹⁹ This passage is essential to fully understanding the discipleship process especially as it correlates to the missional church.

¹⁷ John 1:14.

¹⁸ Romans 10:14.

¹⁹ 2 Tim. 2:2.

Thus far, many scriptures have been presented concerning the correct design and mission of the church. However, there also exists within the scriptures many warnings regarding characteristics that the church should *not* contain or embody. The following passages provide a foundation for certain aspects of the church that God has instructed against. These passages will be used as a basis of instruction to defend the calling of the church that God has made apparent in the scriptures for His church.

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”²⁰

In the book of Revelation, the writer describes a vision of a church that is neither hot nor cold but rather lukewarm, which becomes a sight vile to God. This passage paints a clear image of a church that is not making disciples or being a factor of change for its people. The call for the church is to be committed to the building of the kingdom of God. Many of the churches in Revelation, like the church of Sardis, struggled with betraying their faith in order to assimilate culturally. As for the example of Sardis, they were instructed as follows:

Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.²¹

As the passage explains, the church of Sardis had essentially traded spiritual soundness for cultural relevance, which in turn cost them their Gospel integrity as a church. Although other instructions in the book of Revelation were offered in correlation with warnings against the church, these two passages directly relate to the drive and intent of the church to make disciples.

²⁰ Revelation 3:15-17.

²¹ Revelation 3:3-4.

In contrast to those characteristics a church should not embody, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 provides a highly descriptive account of how God desired the church to function. In these scriptures, Paul relates the church to a body with many parts. Though the entirety of the passage has profound meaning about the church, specific verses refer to the sending of the church body. In verse 14, Paul writes, “So the body is not made up of just one part. It has many parts.”²² This passage suggests that the church has many servants who are gifted with the task of edifying the church. This passage is also important for understanding that the church was not created to be a place where twenty percent of the people perform eighty percent of the work; rather, one-hundred percent of the church should be doing the work God has given them to follow together. “The Pareto Principle is observed and is an accepted pattern of behavior, but not an immutable law of nature for churches. It may happen that roughly twenty percent of your congregation is active while roughly eighty percent too often stand on the margins, but it does have to be so.”²³ Culturally, most traditional model churches fail to meet this standard, leading to the conclusion that the traditional church model fails to make disciples in a substantial way that would translate to the equipping of the saints.

Lastly, in verse 26-27 Paul hints at something profound relating to the design of the church. Paul states, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part shares in its joy. You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.”²⁴ In these two verses, Paul makes a statement concerning the community that should exist within the church.

²² 1 Corinthians 12:14.

²³ Thumma, Scott, and Warren Bird. *The Other 80 Percent: Turning Your Church's Spectators into Active Participants*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:26-27.

A church should be a place in which its members sincerely care for one another on a level that goes beyond surface level, sharing in moments of suffering, joy, and fulfillment. This verse makes a strong case for churches to distinguish themselves as places of genuine community and caring.

Books

Many books have intrigued and challenged the author in attempting to write the presented thesis. Although numerous books have been written about the missional church, few have been able to provide a pathway of transition for the traditional or established church to follow. This thesis is largely based on this lack of literature. However, most missional church books do provide a healthy representation of the missional church's end goal.

One book that had considerable influence on this project is *Church 3.0*²⁵ by Neil Cole, in which Cole calls on the current church to upgrade the way it seeks to disciple and reach people; he refers to this updated path as the Church 3.0 update. Cole understands these types of improvements to be the principles of the missional church or ones that center on actively making disciples through their mission. This book more than any other has provided the author with a vision of where the church needs to head.

²⁵ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

Bob Robert's book *Transformational*,²⁶ although not subscribing to the missional church model, offers some radical ideas concerning the way in which church discipleship and growth should occur. Roberts wrote the book from his own personal perspective and experience in church planting. His ideas and thoughts concerning how the church can grow and multiply are based on the understanding that change within the church happens only when individual lives are transformed. To accomplish this goal, churches must build communities that change lives rather than believing that programs will do so. Roberts' perspective offers a realistic look at how the church can tangibly transform to be revolutionary once more.

Additionally, Ed Stetzer's book *Planting Missional Churches*²⁷ is a foundational guide and basis for planting churches that multiply. Stetzer's book does not merely provide a basic description of church planting, but also highlights ways to plant missional churches. In the second edition, Stetzer took time to further expose readers to issues facing churches that seek to grow disciples. What makes Stetzer's work an essential part of this thesis is that Stetzer has engaged in the missional church longer than any other author who has written on this topic. Stetzer's latest revision of *Planting Missional Churches* provides a greater understanding of the difficulties facing the missional church plant. Collectively, Stetzer and David Putman co-authored the book *Breaking Missional Code*,²⁸ which, like *Planting Missional Churches*, offers a guide to unlocking missional strategies.

²⁶ Bob Jr. Roberts, *Transformation: Discipleship That Turns Lives, Churches, and the World Upside down* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

²⁷ Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im, *Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches That Multiply* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016).

²⁸ David Putman and Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Discipleship Code: Becoming a Missional Follower of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2008).

Although the book *Launch*²⁹ by Nelson Searcy is intended to be read by church planters, the principles discussed in the book hold true for existing churches. For this reason, the book has much to offer existing churches in regard to building teams and creating systems for discipleship. The thoughts presented in this book make it a practical read for both existing churches and new church plants. The principal objective for the authors of this book is to discuss creating systems for practical discipleship and maintaining healthy churches.

The book *Real-Life Discipleship*,³⁰ by Jim Putman, explores what authentic discipleship looks like within the church. The book states early on that the first issue within the church is related to a lack of intentionality. If the church is going to become intentional, as Putman puts it, there must be a transparent discipleship process, which he discusses at length in the second section of the book. At its core, this book shares ways in which the missional shift for a church that adopts a missional model should achieve a truer sense of discipleship.

Similar is the book *Irresistible Community*,³¹ written by Bill Donahue, which outlines the components of creating a community that models the one Jesus had with his disciples. Donahue describes a path in which small groups can be a place where people can be challenged, embraced, and trained to be disciples of Christ. The principles discussed in this book address what the missional understanding of community and small groups could be like if modeled correctly.

²⁹ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Launch* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2006).

³⁰ Jim A. Putman, *Real Life Discipleship* (Colorado Spring: Nav Press, 2010).

³¹ Bill Donahue, *The Irresistible Community* (Ada: Baker Books, 2015), 1.

A book that reveals the impact of Jesus's relational style of ministry is the book *The Jesus Revolution*,³² by Leith Anderson. Anderson follows the book of Acts and the early church journey the disciples took in spreading the Gospel. What Anderson offers in each chapter is almost a commentator's reflective perspective of the mindset and actions of the church's early believers. Anderson brings perspective to how little the early church possessed tangibly, yet how great of an impact it was able to make on the world. The book opens readers' minds to understanding the fullness and power of the Gospel to change lives by ratifying the church. Similar to *The Jesus Revolution* is the book *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission to Passion and Confidence*³³ by Dave Early and Rod Dempsey. This book reveals the principle of relational discipleship which Jesus modeled for his disciples and provides both a biblical and a practical approach to disciple-making that can help build confidence in relational discipleship building.

Additionally, *Transformational Discipleship*,³⁴ authored by Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Phillip Nation, is an examination of discipleship methods and practices that help people grow. The book is beneficial for helping examine the current church and its methodologies for discipling people and comparing those methodologies to ones that are more effective. These experienced authors have brought forth a highly educated understanding of the church and the methods of discipleship that work best for church growth.

³² Leith Anderson, *The Jesus Revolution: Learning from Christ's First Followers* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).

³³ Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013).

³⁴ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012).

The book *Discipleship that Fits*,³⁵ by Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, offers an in-depth look specifically at the types of relationships in which discipleship occurs. This book in particular helped the writer gain a greater understanding of environmental discipleship and further interpret types of spaces, relationships, and communities that are conducive to making disciples.

One of the key components of relational discipleship is creating dialogues with people in which to share the Gospel. One book that highlighted the importance of Gospel intentionality was *Turning Everyday Conversations to Gospel Conversations*,³⁶ by Jimmy Scroggins. Conversations act as a sub-component of relationships and it is therefore important to consider how every conversation can be used in the disciple-making process.

Author J.R. Woodard produced two books related to the missional movement, the first being *Creating a Missional Culture*,³⁷ which focuses on re-envisioning the church to look more like the one Jesus led and disciples followed. The second book, *The Church as a Movement*,³⁸ offers an intriguing look at the identity of the believer and the church as an integral part of church success. Specifically, the book details how the identity of the church is the core of the transition to a missional church. Much of *The Church as a Movement* discusses the importance of the identity formation process of both the church and the believer in the missional church.

³⁵ Bobby Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

³⁶ Jimmy Scroggins, Steve Wright and Bennett Leslee, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016).

³⁷ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

³⁸ J. R. Woodward, *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-incarnational Communities* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016).

In the book *Pilgrim Practices*,³⁹ author Kristopher Norris also discusses the importance of the formation of the disciple for the sake of becoming more Christ-like as well as for carrying out the mission of being a disciple-maker.

Significantly influencing the writer's thoughts on the subject matter of the thesis is author Alan Hirsch, a Christian visionary in understanding the current and future state of the church. In many ways, Hirsch is the leading mind on the missional approach to church discipleship. Hirsch has written numerous books describing his beliefs and visions of what the church could and should look like. This thesis relies heavily on the perspectives and writings of Hirsch.

Four of his most influential books impacting this project are *Forgotten Ways*,⁴⁰ *On the Verge*,⁴¹ *The Shaping of Things to Come*,⁴² and *The Permanent Revolution*.⁴³ All four are key to understanding the framework and need for the missional church. *Forgotten Ways* and *The Permanent Revolution* both examine the early church and the practices of the early church that led to the explosion of the early church. *On the Verge* explores the idea that the Western church must shift to what he refers to as the apostolic movement. This shift is both necessary and unavoidable for the future of the church within the West.

Continuing this thought process is the book *The Shaping of Things to Come* by Alan Hirsch, which focuses more on the how the church can adapt to the needs of the culture before it.

³⁹ Kristopher Norris, *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012).

⁴⁰ Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways Reactivating the Missional Church* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Alternate Formats Library, 2014).

⁴¹ Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

⁴² Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publisher, 2013).

⁴³ Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim, and Mike Breen. Hirsch, Alan, Tim Catchim, and Mike Breen. *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

This book further examines how the church can be relevant to these needs while also being obedient to the Gospel. Due to his leadership and vision, Alan Hirsch is considered the missional or apostolic movement visionary. Others have come alongside him in furthering his ideas of missional church, including author Craig Van Gelder. Van Gelder's book *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*⁴⁴ sheds light on what the missional church should look like in the context of the Western church.

While Hirsch and others have shared this vision, Gelder seeks to provide a more tangible approach to how the church can arrive at that destination.

On a related area is the book *Missional House Churches*⁴⁵ by author David Payne. This book offers an exploration of the missional church as carried out specifically in the house church setting. Furthermore, the book provides a detailed look at how the house church model emerged from the first-century church and how the relevance of this model still endures in the 21st century church.

One crucial topic about which perspective was required centered on leading change within the church, specifically as it relates to implementing change in the context of the discipleship strategy and becoming more missional. One of the books that helped the researcher gain an understanding of this topic was *The Unstuck Church*,⁴⁶ which guides readers through the various life-stages of a church.

⁴⁴ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Ada: Baker Books, 2007), 1.

⁴⁵ Payne, Jervis David. *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel*. (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008).

⁴⁶ Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

Author Tony Morgan discusses identifiers of each life-stage of a church and helps church leaders strategize ways to help their churches become healthy and vibrant. Also addressing the topic of leading churches to become healthier is the book *Leading Missional Change*,⁴⁷ which specifically relates to transitioning churches to a more missional approach to discipleship. This book specifically helped the researcher explore key factors in identifying the readiness of a church to implement change. Similarly, the book *DiscipleShift*⁴⁸ by authors Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert Coleman discusses five steps churches can take to make disciples more effectively.

Lastly is the book by Rob Wegner and Jack Magruder entitled *Missional Moves: 15 Tectonic Shifts That Transform Churches, Communities*⁴⁹, and *the World*, which looks specifically at 15 strategic ways for churches to make this shift. This book was essential to helping the writer understand some basic steps to transitioning the church from an attractional to missional model.

While most of the previously-mentioned books that discuss the missional church movement focused on the reason why the missional church must emerge, few covered this subject in as much detail as *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*⁵⁰. Reggie McNeal, the author of this book, highlights some of the most significant challenges facing the future of the church as well as what responses must take place to overcome these challenges. Ultimately, this book makes an excellent case for the need for the missional church.

⁴⁷ Paul J. Dunbar and Anthony L. Blair, *Leading Missional Change: Move Your Congregation from Resistant to Re-energized* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2013.).

⁴⁸ Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington and Robert Emerson Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

⁴⁹ Rob Wegner and Jack Magruder, *Missional Moves: 15 Tectonic Shifts That Transform Churches, Communities, and the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012).

⁵⁰ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

Another topic in which it was important for the researcher to become knowledgeable was that of tangible and practical ways for creating movements of change within the church; one of these ways is staffing a church with the right people to lead a vision and strategy for change. The book *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches*⁵¹ offers readers some valuable insight and perspective on how to hire staff with intentionality and purpose. On the topic of identifying strong leadership and building teams that grow the church is the book *Eldership and the Mission of God: Equipping Teams for Faithful Church Leadership*⁵² by J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt. This book more directly examines building an elder leadership team to lead the missional change within the church.

Church function, culture, and leadership were all very important aspects to consider in preparing for this project. A book that had much to offer on this subject is *If This is the Way the World Works: Science, Congregation, and Leadership* by William Avery and Beth Gaede. The aim of the book is to provide a new understanding and basis for which to structure church leadership. Overall the book provides keen insights regarding church structure and leadership and ultimately how to align these two important foundations of the church in a more functional way.⁵³

⁵¹ William M. Easum and William Tenny-Brittian, *Effective Staffing for Vital Churches: The Essential Guide to Finding and Keeping the Right People* (Ada: Baker Books, 2012).

⁵² J. R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, *Eldership and the Mission of God: Equipping Teams for Faithful Church Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁵³ Avery, William O., and Beth Ann. Gaede. *If This Is the Way the World Works: Science, Congregations, and Leadership*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007.

More focused on leadership of the missional church is *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*⁵⁴ by Reggie McNeal. This book was highly valuable in assessing what steps pastoral leaders must take to shift their church to become more missional. This book was a follow-up to the *Present Future*,⁵⁵ which was used to help define and elaborate on the initial understandings of the missional church. Both this book by McNeal and *The Missional Leader*⁵⁶ by Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk may be considered the two leading books that discuss missional leadership changes and shifts. This subject was especially important to researching and writing this thesis, as part of the discipleship strategy for ABC will depend upon implementing change from top to bottom.

*Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church*⁵⁷ by Alan Roxburgh offers more of a middle ground concerning the missional church movement. While Roxburgh agrees that the church is desperately in need of change, he is skeptical that seeking to start new churches or changing the old without taking time to consider ramifications, could be dangerous. The book helps provide balance between viewing and perceiving the missional as a viable alternative to the current Attractional church model. On a similar topic, the book *The Missional Church and Denominations*⁵⁸ by Craig Gelder places the missional conversation within the various denominational contexts and considers the challenges of implanting the missional church.

⁵⁴ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

⁵⁵ McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

⁵⁶ Alan Roxburgh, Fred Romanuk and Eddie Gibbs, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

⁵⁷ Alan Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission: Renewing the Culture of the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

⁵⁸ Craig van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denominations: Helping Congregations Develop a Missional Identity* (Grand Rapids.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

*Sent Together: How the Gospel Sends Leaders to Start Missional Communities*⁵⁹ by Brad Watson discusses how the Gospel should send disciples out to reach communities. Watson offers a detailed examination of how the missional community is formed out of the call of the Gospel. Further, he provides structure and understanding regarding the composition of the missional community. Overall, this book provides a valuable understanding of the purpose and methods of the missional church.

Similarly, *Return to the Margins: Understanding and Adapting as a Church to Post-Christian America*⁶⁰ by Terry Coy offers a look at the future of Christianity in the United States. Coy's response to the decline of Christianity in Western culture is not necessarily the insertion of the missional church, but instead more of a reflection on where the church has thrived in the past and where it must thrive in the future. Understanding the context of strategies considering the past, present, and future of the church movements, it is always valuable to have balance and wisdom to before assuming that one model is right.

Dissertations

It was essential for the creditability of this thesis to showcase the relevancy of transitioning traditional church models of discipleship to missional models of discipleship. In order to establish relevancy and creditability, certain dissertations of doctoral and Ph.D. students were evaluated to assess any other work that has been or is currently being done in the given subject area. Although there were not many dissertation projects that directly relate to the topic, there were enough to substantiate further pursuit in the area.

⁵⁹ Brad Watson, *Sent Together: How the Gospel Sends Leaders to Start Missional Communities* (GCD Books, 2015).

⁶⁰ Terry Coy, *Return to the Margins: Understanding and Adapting as a Church to Post-Christian America* (Abbotsford: Life Sentence, 2014).

Nicholas Dimmick's dissertation, written for Indiana Wesleyan University and entitled *Transitioning Traditional Churches to Missional Communities*,⁶¹ helped provide some relevancy and credibility to the topic. Although Dimmick's dissertation did not suggest that traditional churches can be launching pads for the missional churches, many of the principles and ideas he discussed were relevant to the subject area. He also presented some invaluable wisdom and understanding for churches wishing transition to missional churches.

The basis for study in Dimmick's research included four Midwestern churches that made the transition from traditional to missional model churches. Dimmick interviewed one key leader or pastor from each church to look for any common factors that had helped the churches make this transition. In his research, Dimmick not only found some of the key factors that helped churches transition but also uncovered some similar challenges that the churches faced. Dimmick's work helps to provide a foundation upon which further study can be accomplished regarding the topic of the traditional-to-missional transition.

Although Lance Cole's dissertation for Liberty University, titled *Homiletical Discipleship: Developing an Approach to Small Group Based on Sunday Morning Exposition*,⁶² does not relate as closely to the subject area as Dimmick's does, this paper was also significantly valuable to the author. Cole's dissertation provides an in-depth look at how pastors can use the pulpit as a means to disciple the church. Cole spent a great deal of time in his thesis discussing the problem of church attendees who never become fully involved in the work of the church.

⁶¹ Nicholas Dimmick, "Transitioning Traditional Churches to Missional Communities" (Diss., Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, 2012).

⁶² Lance Cole, "Homiletical Discipleship: Developing an Approach to Small Group Based on Sunday Morning Exposition" (Doctoral diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, Lynchburg, 2016).

The problem as Cole discovered it was that many people walk through the church doors to only see and hear what is going on, but few become engaged in the discipleship process. Although Cole's work was indirectly related to the subject area of the thesis of this project, most of the groundwork and academic sources were closely related to the subject area. It was through Cole's work and understanding that a solid basis and framework were established for further pursuing the missional church transition.

Chapter Two

Understanding the Context and Background Of Anastasia Baptist Church

Context For Change

This chapter will provide a context for why a shift from an attractional discipleship model to a missional model is essential for the future growth of ABC. Many churches like ABC have struggled to carry out the mandates of the Great Commission, in which Jesus simply stated to the church “Go make disciples.”⁶³ For many churches, the loss of intentionality and focus on fulfilling the Great Commission has been the result of losing sight of what is most important. Typically, a church will start out with a sense of urgency about reaching people beyond the walls of the church in order to make disciples. Eventually, however, “the ministries begin to focus on the people who are already connected to the church rather than the people they are trying to reach. The scale tips toward sustaining systems and structure rather than staying focused on the vision, methods supersede mission.”⁶⁴

Churches have struggled in their ability to translate the Great Commission into a strategic plan to make disciples. Instead of healthy churches rising from the methods of attractional-based discipleship, over-programmed yet still under-achieving churches emerge.

Program-driven churches and ministry organizations operate on the suspect but often unchallenged assumptions. These assumptions are that people will be better off if they just participate in certain activities and processes that the church or organizations has sanctioned for its ministry agenda. The problem is that study after study continues to reveal that active church members do reflect a different value set than the culture at large.⁶⁵

⁶³ Matthew 28:16-20.

⁶⁴ Morgan, *The Unstuck Church*, 200.

⁶⁵ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 10.

Most attractional churches have become ineffective and weak in regard to reaching people with the Gospel and making disciples.

Jesus, however, painted a different image of what the church should look like. As He told his disciples, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”⁶⁶ Although this is the image of the church in the Gospel of Matthew, for most people it is not the image of the 21st-century Western church. In fact, research suggests the opposite of this image: Christianity in the West is fleeting and failing to reach people with the message and hope of Christ. Barna Research found that 50% of Americans agree that Christianity is no longer the religion of America.⁶⁷

This does not mean that the work of Christ on the cross for the redemption and empowerment of the church is failing. Instead, the opposite is taking place: those who are intended to lead the church in the power of the Holy Spirit are failing. As Jesus ascended into heaven the power of the Holy Spirit descended, bringing forth the formation of the early church. In those early days of the church, the Gospel began to spread like wildfire. The early church operated not on the principle of mere kingdom addition but rather of kingdom multiplication. Meaning the church was centered on making disciples who could be sent out to make other disciples, in essence grow the kingdom exponentially rather just looking to add and individual to the church. This movement is the type of spark the church of today needs. For this spark to happen, however, a drastic change within today’s church and its methods of discipleship is necessary.

⁶⁶ Matthew 16:18.

⁶⁷ "Christianity Is No Longer Americans' Default Faith," Barna Group, Accessed May 08, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/christianity-is-no-longer-americans-default-faith/>.

In establishing a strategy to alter the DNA of a church, it is first essential to understand the church's context. The historical background of the church should be heavily relied upon in determining future receptiveness to change. Much can be understood about a church's ability to adapt or change by the ways the church has dealt with change in the past. Ed Stetzer explains this point well in *Breaking the Missional Code*: "In order to break the code you must seek to know your community before you choose your model. As you decipher your own community, you may discover similar methods and models that have been used effectively in other like-minded communities."⁶⁸ It is therefore important to understand that "if an environment of trust is nurtured within local congregations, people may be more open to embrace missional change."⁶⁹

Establishing the readiness and willingness of ABC to shift to a more missional model of discipleship will be dependent upon many factors specific to the congregation. These factors will include the church's background, history, and demographics, along with its current model of discipleship, the church leadership, and other unforeseen influencers. It is essential to take all these factors into consideration for two main reasons. Firstly, these factors will help determine whether a future change will inevitably help or hurt any upcoming shift in methods. Secondly, this data will be essential to provide a basis on which to compare and contrast other churches that are similarly seeking to change their congregations' discipleship strategy.

⁶⁸ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 155.

⁶⁹ Dunbar and Blair, *Leading Missional Change*, 74.

History of Anastasia Baptist Church

One of the unique aspects of the research for this thesis is that it seeks to use existing church momentum, resources, and staffing as a launching pad for the missional church. Many leaders in the missional movement would mostly agree that the most conducive platform for establishing the missional church is the new church plant. Ed Stetzer, who has emerged in many ways as one of the pioneers of the missional movement, considers the church plant the healthiest environment in which to start a missional church. In his book *Planting Missional Churches*, Stetzer states, “The first major message of this book is to understand missional. Establishing a missional church means that you plant a church that’s part of the culture you are seeking to reach.”⁷⁰

Often overlooked are the health and resources that an existing church can offer in launching new methods and outreach principles. For nearly fifty years, Anastasia has existed as a healthy, thriving church, impacting the local and greater community through the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. As ABC and other once-thriving faith communities look toward the future of the church, all resources must be available and considered as assets for implementing a new strategy of outreach and discipleship. For this reason, the researcher felt it important to include the background and history of the church to better establish its potential as a missional church.

ABC began in 1967 as a church plant of Ancient City Baptist Church which was located in downtown St. Augustine, just outside the area from where ABC would be planted.

⁷⁰ Stetzer and Im, *Planting Missional Churches*, 226-227.

The goal in planting ABC was to establish a church on Anastasia Island, approximately eight miles from downtown St. Augustine, that could extend the reach of the church St. Augustine Beach. After meeting for two years in an office front, ABC broke ground on a new building in 1969. In 1971, ABC called its first full-time pastor Rev. Glen Taylor. By 1973, membership was at 137 people and the yearly budget was \$35,705.28. During the period of 1972-1980, the church continued to grow and add believers to the kingdom. Despite ABC's continued growth, the church struggled to keep a pastor for an extended period of time. However, in 1981, Rev. Ron Moore was called to be the Senior Pastor of ABC. In 1982, ABC invested \$175,000 in renovating the current sanctuary and then added an educational building. By 1993, the church had grown so much that it had become evident it was time to build a new sanctuary to hold weekly worship services. On May 19, 1996, the church broke ground on the new worship center.

By 1997, ABC grew to a weekly worship attendance of 546 people with a Sunday school enrollment of 803. In 1997, the church voted to add two contemporary worship services during the weekend, for a total of three worship services on Sundays. From 1997 to 2006, the church almost doubled in membership and tripled in the yearly budget. This incurred growth required the church to expand the worship center once again to accommodate more seating. In 2006, the Christian Life Center, or CLC as it was later known, was built to be a multipurpose venue to keep pace with the substantial growth. The CLC housed a worship venue, industrial kitchen, eating area, and multiple classrooms. The total cost of the building was approximately 3.5 million dollars. The CLC was and remains the most significant single purchase ABC has made. By the early 2000, ABC had grown to about 2,000 average weekly attendees and expanded to become the largest church in St. Augustine.

In 2007, the church was presented with an opportunity to expand in order to reach to new areas in the community by opening a satellite campus in a foreclosed church building in the northern end of St. Augustine. After this building was purchased, Anastasia SR 16 campus opened its doors in 2008 and held services in both English and Spanish. Currently, ABC offers eight different services in three different languages and at three different locations, known as the Anastasia Baptist Church, Anastasia 16 Church, and Anastasia Elkton Church.

Anastasia offers six contemporary-style and two traditional-style worship services. The average attendance among all three campuses varies between 1,600-2,000 people weekly. Much church's success has been credited to Pastor Ron Moore, who faithfully led the church for twenty-five years before retiring. After Pastor Moore's retirement, former education pastor Dr. Walter West was voted to become the senior pastor. Pastor West has now occupied the senior pastor role for ten years and has led the church to have a greater impact on the community. Just recently, the church was named as was one of the top twenty-five Baptist churches in Florida and was recognized as one of the top ten churches in the state of Florida in its commitment to giving to missions.

Over the last twenty years, the church has maintained a remarkable status of health, even during the recession in 2008. All current full-time pastors on staff have been serving at Anastasia for longer than six years and some as long as twenty years. The church's health is credited to both the faithfulness of God and the devoted members of the church. ABC continues to strive to fulfill its mission statement, which is "Helping people embrace the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ."

Although ABC has maintained a high measure of health in the last ten years, it has struggled to grow much beyond its current membership. In many ways, the church membership, lifegroup attendance, and financial giving have plateaued. Over the past five years, the writer and the church staff have examined the current demographics, empirical data surrounding the church, and discipleship strategies utilized in order to better understand potential strategies for future growth.

Congregation

One critical demographic factor in analyzing ABC for future potential growth was to consider the makeup of the congregation. Much of the data for analysis was pulled from ABC's database, which provided a vast amount of information to be researched.⁷¹ However, the data collected from ABC's database only provided information specific to the church and its members, attendees, and visitors. The goal of this project was not to exclusively conduct research on those who attend the church, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to consider those outside the walls of the church. To provide a better overview of the demographics of the people who live near the church, the researcher utilized the North American Mission Board's area and site-wide demographics in hopes of better understanding outreach potential.⁷² The intent of the missional side of this project is to extend the church's outreach by focusing on reaching the unchurched.

⁷¹ "Anastasia Baptist Church," Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

⁷² "Demographics Request," NAMB, Accessed May 15, 2018, <https://www.namb.net/demographics-request>.

In order to achieve this goal, specific age groups and communities to which the church can be sent with the goal of discipling the people in these groups must be explicitly targeted. To accomplish the transitional aspect of this project, the researcher had to consider how to utilize the existing congregation and resources to reach the church's full potential. For ABC, the only pathway to the missional church is through transition. For this reason, both internal and external demographical data is essential in helping the leadership of ABC understand how to better achieve full potential.

Currently, the church body at ABC is a diverse congregation comprised of multiple age groups, socioeconomic classes, and ethnicities. Basic research and surveys of those congregants who currently attend the church reveal the existence of multiple faith communities under one church name. For example, most people over the age of sixty visit either the Sunday 8:15 am or 11:00 am traditional services on the Island campus, while those between the ages of twelve to sixty largely attend the contemporary services at the Island, SR16, or Elkton campuses. As such, the diversity and makeup of the church only increases as one moves from campus to campus.

Additionally, the Spanish-speaking congregation brings substantial cultural diversity to ABC. At the newest campus in Elkton, Florida, the demographic consists of a rural community where most of the congregants live below the poverty line. The main campus church sits on an island, which due to the cost of living puts most of the immediate surrounding population into an upper- to upper-middle-class demographic. These demographic differences among the two other ABC campuses translate into a highly diversified community of believers. Although many of the church members can attend multiple services at various locations, a sense of unity runs deep with the congregation.

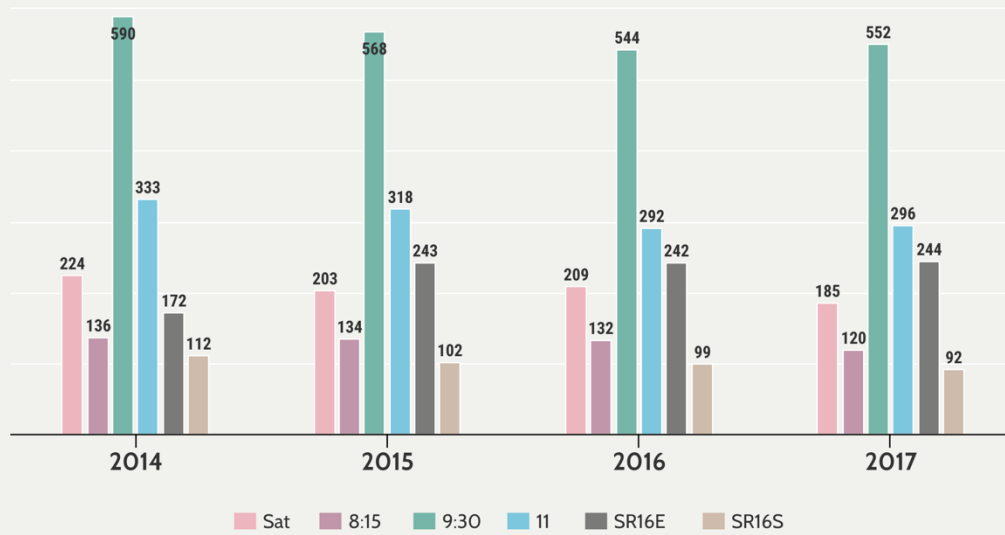
ABC has employed a wide-ranging attractional discipleship approach in targeting certain age demographics or portions of the community, rather than a precision-based approach. This attempt to reach all age groups in the approach to discipleship has led to the creation of an attractional and program-driven church. On the one hand, Anastasia has been especially skilled at attracting people to the church, but on the other hand it has often struggled to make disciples of people because so much of the ministry leadership is focused on maintaining programs. The continual focus and effort placed on maintaining has resulted on many people leaving the church after a short period of time due to do lack of engagement.

Church Growth & Plateau

Over the last ten years, ABC has experienced a remarkable amount of growth both financially and numerically in membership numbers. However, over the last three to five years much of the membership and attendance growth has plateaued. Despite this plateau in attendance, overall the church has maintained, and in some years increased, its financial giving. Although overall attendance has remained steady over the past five years, many Island campus services have declined while the other campuses of ABC continued to grow. This contrast indicates that although the overall numbers are the same, individual services and campuses have declined, ultimately revealing that most, if not all growth achieved over the last ten years came from new growth.

Worship Attendance Report & Analysis

Worship Average by Service



Yearly Attendance Average

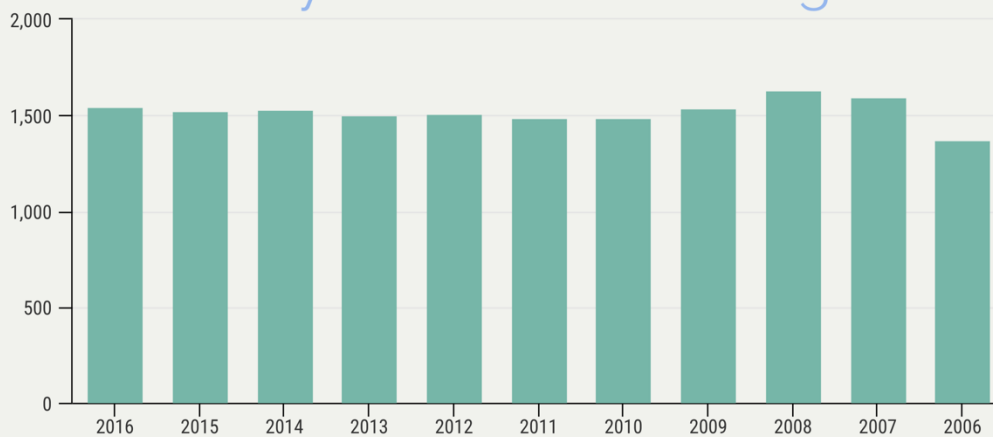


Figure 1.1 ABC Attendance ⁷³

⁷³ Date for infograph gathered from, Anastasia Baptist Church,” Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

Discipleship & Evangelism

In recent years, ABC has put a greater emphasis on discipleship and evangelism. The executive leadership team has worked to provide a discipleship vision for the next seven years. The plan was titled the M28 vision, and contained multiple aspirations and goals to be reached in the coming years. Of those goals, the largest centered around discipleship and evangelism. The pastoral and ministry staff of ABC noticed a substantial need to increase their discipleship profile in the coming years. One significant goal that came from this observation was to create a more intentional process for making disciples instead of relying on church programming. Within this vision, a tangible goal was set to start one-hundred new small groups and make one thousand new disciples in the next seven years. Although the vision contained many other aspirations, those related to increasing the church's discipleship profile were considered most important. Time and strategic planning would be required to achieve these goals. The researcher of this paper was tasked by the senior pastor, to be one of the leaders to begin analyzing and studying methods for bringing the M28 vision of ABC to fruition.

The first step in analyzing the effectiveness of ABC in reaching and discipling believers was conducting a study to assess the efficacy of the previous discipleship strategy. The infographic below highlights several indicators necessary for understanding the current overall spiritual state of the congregation at ABC.

Previous Discipleship Strategy

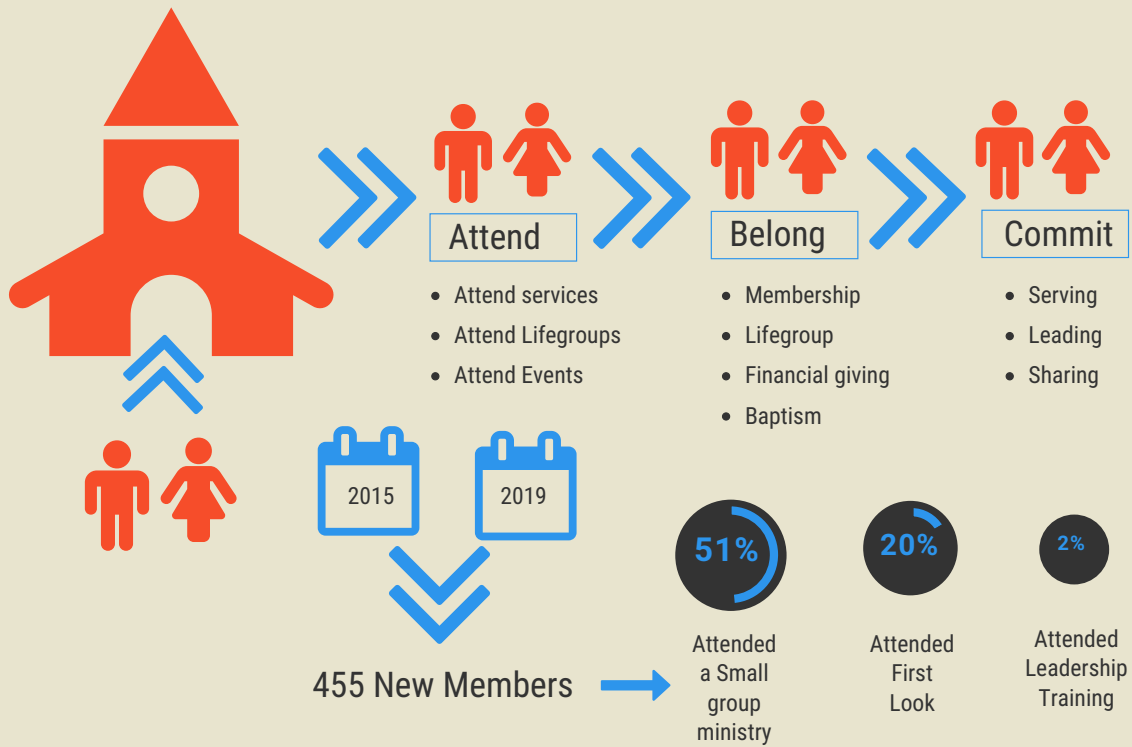


Figure 1.2 Previous ABC Discipleship Strategy and Effectiveness ⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Data for infograph gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, Anastasia Baptist Church, Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

The pre-existing discipleship and evangelism strategy was attend, belong, and commit. This strategy is centered on an attractional discipleship mentality, in which most efforts are focused on getting people to attend worship services, events, and ministries in hopes of inspiring these individuals to take the next step. In the belong stage, those who have attended the church would proceed to join the church, thereby supporting the church's vision and direction. In the final step, those individuals who had joined the church and participated in some of its ministries would commit to serving in some capacity.

The data from Figure 1.2 provides a keen insight into ABC's ability through the previous discipleship strategy to engage new people. The data is broken down into a four year period which includes: approximately 455 people who joined the church, fifty-one percent of those attended a small group ministry opportunity, less than twenty percent attended a first-look discipleship class, and less than two percent attended a leadership development class. Most all of these indicators have to do with the churches ability to guide and direct people in to taking next steps towards discipleship and is not necessary an insight into spiritual maturity of the church. These factors reveal that ABC struggles in helping people take next steps in the discipleship process. If ABC was to continue to in its current discipleship strategy it needed to consider in a real way that strategy struggled to engage people. The data reveals that most people are likely in a place of attending but not necessarily being discipled into the community of the church. With a little more than half of those who attend actually taking the next steps towards belonging, many who enter through the church doors do not feel a sense of belonging in order to move forward into a place of serving. The intent is that people will not just come to church, but instead will be the church. Unfortunately, many indicators in ABC revealed a lack of engagement through its current discipleship process which is to move people into a deeper relationship with God.

These indicators also helped to identify the need for a strategic change that would seek to engage people in a more relational ministry.

Ten years ago, the church experienced steady growth that in many ways it has struggled to sustain. During the last five years at ABC, maintaining staff and building space in line with the church's continual growth has proven difficult. However, in more recent years, the struggle has been to provide environments and small groups in which adequate discipleship opportunities exist. What the church needs most is a strategy to build intentional communities in which disciples can be made, although converting a thriving traditional church to solely a missional church would not be feasible. There are some aspects of the missional church that could work within the current traditional model at ABC. One feature of ABC that has remained healthy is the lifegroups, and this feature will be where the most significant change must take place.

Previously, leaders have worked to maintain lifegroups on campus with an inwardly-focused mindset. The most effective way to duplicate the missional model within the small groups will be to create a mindset within leaders in which they are constantly considering ways to recreate intimate community. Rising up and encouraging new leaders to be sent out should be the primary goal of all lifegroups going forward. Essentially, the mindset would be changed from that of a centralized community, to a sent community. A sent community centers around the homes, schools, and areas of reach rather than the church, essentially looking to move the walls of the church outward. The book *Missional Church* further defines the church as a sent community saying,

The apostolicity of the church is expressed by its witness to the gospel, its obedience to the mandate to go out as Christ's ambassadors. "Based on [the commissioned apostles'] testimony which is preserved in the New Testament and in the life of the church, the church has as one constitutive mark being apostolic, its being sent into the world." Such a sent church cannot let the need to maintain itself organizationally eclipse the mission for which it is called and equipped.⁷⁵

Figure 1.3 illustrates the potential for growth of off-campus small groups at the ABC and its potential to be a sent community. The data displays where church members physically live, while the red icons represent the different locations of the church. Using the geographical information presented in this chart, each region of the county can be assessed as a potential area for new off-campus small groups to start. With so many individuals traveling to attend ABC, there is an invaluable opportunity to train and send small group leaders to all corners of Northeast Florida.

⁷⁵ Barrett, Lois, and Darrell L. Guder. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009.

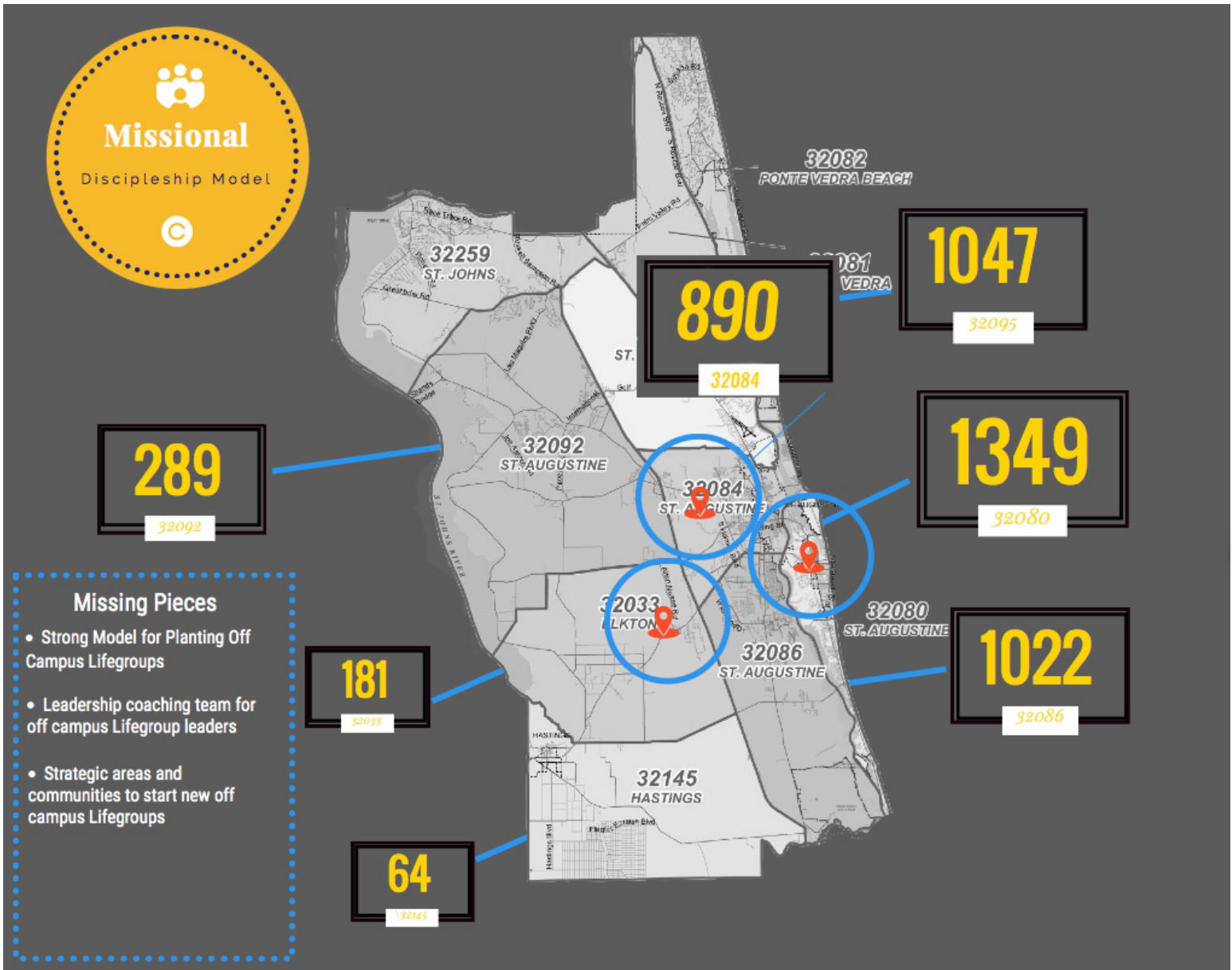


Figure 1.3 Church Membership by Area Code ⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Data for infograph gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, Anastasia Baptist Church, Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

The figure provided above was created two years ago and helped establish what new priorities and efforts should be placed on specific areas of the community to reach new people. In many ways, this infograph is the baseline for understanding in what direction, in missional terms, the church needed to begin directing its efforts for off-campus lifegroups. Although the above figure indicated that portions of the community were primed for outreach potential, an infrastructure to maintain a missional church small group model was still lacking. A strong model that could be recreated to plant off-campus lifegroups was needed, as well as a system of coaches who could help individuals plant small groups in their spheres of influence. There needed to be a vision for multiplication.

In late 2017, a vision for missional lifegroups was initiated by ABC; this vision was in many ways merely a small step in transforming the church to become more missional. The model was named the Me-to-You strategy, which reads, “God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.” This passage speaks to the journey Moses had to endure to bring the Egyptians out of slavery and bondage. More importantly, Moses was sent to help release the people of Israel from the bondage and slavery of sin. Similarly, ABC’s Me-to-You strategy was for lifegroup leaders to be sent into their communities in the power of the Spirit to release those enslaved to sin, addiction, and brokenness.

When efforts to plant off-campus groups began to accelerate, twenty-four such off-campus lifegroups already existed among the three campuses. For there to be a hope of launching the missional church, there had to be a vision for replication.

Just as a new small group starts, a prayer and vision must already exist for new leadership to rise out of that group and start another. The figure below illustrates the twenty-four lifegroups that existed at the beginning of 2017.

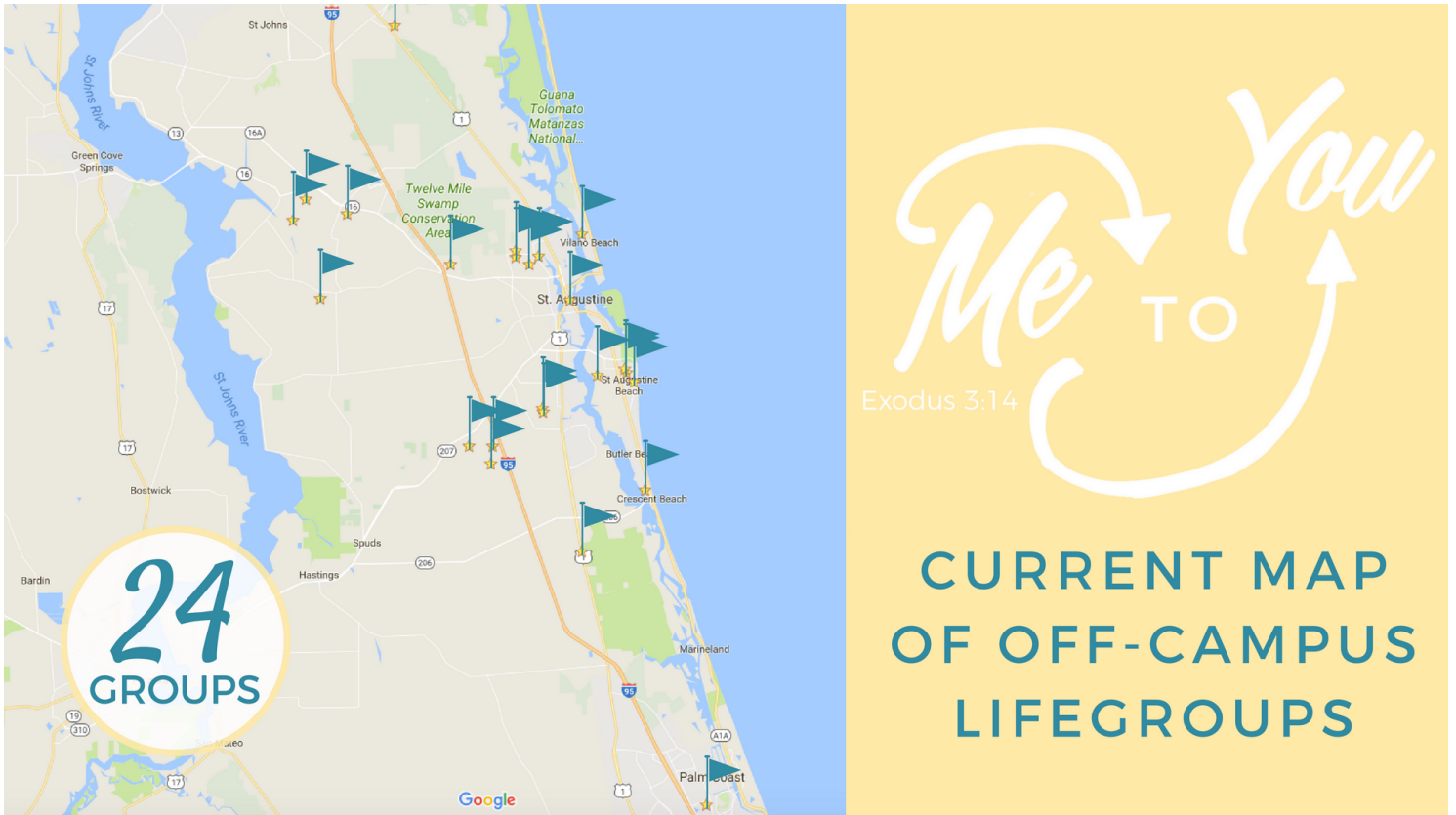


Figure 1.4 ABC Off-Campus Lifegroups in 2017 ⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Data for infograph gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, Anastasia Baptist Church, Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

The hope and vision was not for only these twenty-four groups to remain extant; instead, an opportunity existed for each established group to launch a new group, in hopes that every two years a new group of leaders could be sent out into the community to start a new lifegroup. With this model and vision for replication, ABC could potentially double its lifegroup numbers every two years, which could in turn provide a potential pathway for reaching the M28 goal of planting one hundred new lifegroups during the seven-year vision.

For this momentum to carry forward, ABC would need to become more missional in its ways and efforts. Although ABC has already taken some steps in this direction in its lifegroup approach, much more work lies ahead. To achieve a higher level of discipleship training and sending, ABC will be required to do more than just formulate visions and set goals; a deeper understanding of the missional church and a blueprint for implementing that knowledge will be necessary. This is the question that the writer has been inspired to answer: how to implement a greater depth of discipleship within the church of body of Anastasia.

Shifting to Missional

The missional church in its simplest form takes the strategies and model for church growth described in the book of Acts and used by the first-century church and reemploys those methods to be used in the 21st century church. This model in and of itself is what some might consider an organic and simple model for growing the kingdom of God.

The missional model sees homes and families as the strongest means for taking the Gospel across cities, states, and nations. The early church met in many homes where families shared with one another a sense of community and a deep relationship in which the Gospel could be shared and taught.

Because the early church had no buildings in which to meet and no staff to run the church, it depended on each family sharing and teaching the Gospel with other families. The method for growth in the early church required people to share the Gospel with the people in their community.

Whether through re-working the traditional church model or expanding the missional church, the need for stronger discipleship in the Western church is desperately needed. When Jesus told His disciples to “go make disciples of all nations,” He did not specify what model to use or reveal what the church should like; He just said go. Ultimately, Jesus called His followers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit: to be the church. For ABC, the next chapter in becoming more missional is learning from other church leaders and experts who have helped transition attractional-based churches to a more missional-based approach. Though the first steps have been taken by gathering background and empirical data concerning the congregation of ABC, what is missing is the external research. The next chapter will present this research and the basis for the process by which other attractional churches have shifted their congregations to become more missional, while also examining the data collected thus far in order to pinpoint strategic change.

Chapter Three

Basis for Change

The goal of chapter three will be to formulate conclusions based on the information gathered from both academic research and formal interviews conducted by the researcher. From these conclusions, some potential steps and ways that ABC could use their current position and momentum to launch a more missional model church should be revealed. Much of the applied research for this project was gathered from church pastors and leaders actively seeking to implement a missional discipleship model within their church or community. In the interviews, church leaders were given a formal prompt before the discussion and then asked a series of questions related to the topic. The interview questions and the prompt were used as a part of the research for the paper.

One of the most significant challenges for the writer in the research phase of this project was finding churches and academic writing on shifting existing churches to a missional discipleship model. Churches that follow a missional model of discipleship are primarily recent church plants, which can be attributed to two leading causes. The first is that the missional movement is relatively new within the context of the Western church. Although the missional church movement could arguably be considered as existing since the time of the first-century church⁷⁸. The trail marked for the missional church in the West may only recently been blazed, but more churches are emerging on the path of the movement. This emergence has in recent increased the dialogue and conversation of the missional church among church leaders.

⁷⁸ For more information on the emergence of the missional church see the following books: *The Forgotten Ways* and *The Shaping of Things to Come* by, Alan Hirsch, *Missional Renaissance* by, by, Reggie Mcneal , *The church as Movement* by, J.R. Woodard and Dan White Jr.

Secondly, most missional churches are new plants or startups because it is often more difficult to shift an existing congregation to a new model of discipleship than it is to start a new church. It has been the theory of many church leaders and planters that it is often easier to plant a church than try and change an old church with a new model. Missional church planter Ed Stetzer states that “Church revitalization does not happen much, but it does happen sometimes. I have been struck by how infrequently it actually occurs.”⁷⁹ There is no question that missional church plants far outnumber long-established churches that have shifted or are shifting to a missional model. Nevertheless, the need to revitalize existing attractional-based churches transform them to a more missional model is considerable.

In *Church Planting: Laying the Foundations* author Stuart Muarry states, “Churches have been leaking hundreds of members each week for many years. Planting more of these churches is not a mission strategy worth pursuing. But planting new kinds of churches may be a key to effective missions and a catalyst for the renewal of existing churches.” The future of the Western church is uncertain; if the cultural change is not combated with a greater focus on relational discipleship, decline will continue. Therefore, in the minds of many church scholars and leaders, the missional approach is the only way for churches to survive and thrive in the West. It is also important to note that the missional model provides a basis not only for the sustainability of the church in the West, but also represents a plan for the growth of the kingdom.

Author Alan Hirsch believes that from the beginning, the missional church has existed whenever a body of believers has endeavored to become more like Jesus and to carry out His mission.

⁷⁹ Murray, Stuart. *Church Planting: Laying Foundations*. Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2004. 25

Even more significant is the idea that the missional movement lives within every Christ-follower, which Hirsch explains thusly: “Forgotten Ways; namely, that all God’s people carry within themselves same potencies that energized the early Christian movement.”⁸⁰ This basis suggests that the missional church existed in the context of the people more so than in the church itself. Throughout the history of the church, the missional church has been manifest in the people who were empowered by the Spirit in the same way the early disciples were. However, “In every case, though, it is Christ who builds his church and if He is in each of us then the seed of a massive and spontaneous expansion of His kingdom is within us all. It is Christ who gives those very gifts to His church (Eph. 4:9-11). We must never lose sight of this.”⁸¹

Sample Size and Demographics of Research

The most pressing question for most church leaders and thinkers is how can existing churches start implementing change, and specifically that of the missional church. Though the need for meaningful change to occur within the church is universal, the processes of implementing that change may differ significantly within the culture of each church. Understanding each church’s context, leadership, and readiness for change could significantly alter the process for creating movement. It was therefore crucial for the writer to focus on interviewing churches with similarities to ABC. This approach was designed to help the writer construct a precise methodology and set of steps to begin as the basis for change for ABC.

⁸⁰ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 9.

⁸¹ Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, 67.

From this basis, the author will take methods acquired from the research and streamline them into a specific set of strategic transition goals for ABC. This set of goals and models for ABC will be presented in chapters four and five of this thesis.

The churches examined for this project differed in size, location, demographics, and history. All churches interviewed ranged in size from roughly one hundred people to two-thousand in weekly attendance. However, one common thread for all of these churches was that they were actively engaged in implementing a missional discipleship model within their church. Additionally, each of the churches was in some manner affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This commonality was necessary for the writer to establish some neutral ground on which to compare strategies for implementing a missional model. Overall, ten church leaders were contacted by the researcher and interviewed as a part of this study. In the interview process, each church leader was asked a series of ten questions related to their church history, demographics, size, discipleship model, leadership style, and missional strategies utilized. Interviewees were also asked to give suggestions and advice regarding the steps they recommend for ABC to implement a missional plan within the context of the church. The following sections summarize some of the critical components and shared practices of the various church leaders interviewed. The applied research of this project will then be linked to the academic research in formulating a strategy to present the process of change.

Missional Communities

What sets the missional church apart from the attractional? The most dominant factor of the missional church is community, i.e., a community that is centered on being the incarnational body of Christ, meaning that those who belong to the missional community are defined by a new identity that comes with a new purpose. “Disciples who covenant to a rule and rhythm of life cultivate a hospitable space for others to belong to and a platform for creating a missional-incarnational-community...A movement needs the energy that a vibrant community provides”⁸² Paul described this missional way of living as an exchange process in which the new self in Christ overtakes the old self, stating, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, your life is hidden with Christ in God.”⁸³ It is both the individual and collective pursuit of Jesus, as well as the seeking of things that are above, that drives the missional church. The church has been marked by revolutionary leaders and thinkers who embodied this type of missional thinking. These so-called missional individuals may not have been labeled as such during their time, but their way of thinking set them apart from others. The missional movement

... starts with our imitation of Christ, the person in whom all wisdom abides. From Jesus, we learn why we live, how to live and how to involve him in our everyday living. Transformation comes by following Christ through the Spirit with others. We must die to our self, our infatuation with speed and size, and devote our selves to the work of making disciples, training the few.⁸⁴

⁸² Woodward, *The Church as Movement*, kindle

⁸³ Colossians 3:1-4.

⁸⁴ Woodward, *The Church as Movement*, kindle.

A sense of intimate community moves powerfully within the missional church, and is the unity, drive and focus on making disciples relationally that provides this missional approach with an advantage over the attractional. While the attractional is characterized by what it can accomplish with sizable events, immense ministries, and large services, the missional is defined by what it can achieve through the small number of people devoted to the mission of Jesus:

A missional community is a group of approximately 20 to 40 people who are seeking to reach a particular neighborhood or network of relationships with the good news of Jesus. The group functions as a flexible, local expression of the church and has the expressed intention of seeing those they are in relationship with become followers of Jesus with them. They exist to see God's kingdom come to their friends and neighbors.⁸⁵

In “Missional communities the goal is to then balance discipleship and mission within the small group.”⁸⁶ When these two elements of discipleship and mission are sought after with intentionality and focus, what emerges is a type of super-community.

Building Strong Community

In understanding the process for building strong communities it is important to consider, “Attractional churches that become missional begin to look like movements. If we can capture the heart and vitality of the reborn global missional impetus, we will see high-impact congregations transforming their wider communities.”⁸⁷ One of the repeated themes uncovered in the research interviews and readings for this thesis was the foundation that missional churches are dedicated to building healthy communities.

⁸⁵ Mike Breen, *Leading Missional Communities: Rediscovering the Power of Living on Mission Together* (Pawleys Island: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2013), kindle.

⁸⁶ Ibid, kindle.

⁸⁷ Hirsch, *On the Verge*, 11.

This is not to say that attractional churches are incapable of making strong communities; many attractional churches seek to establish small groups out of those who attend worship services and events. Essentially, the foundational difference between the attractional and missional approach to building community is that the attractional approach seeks to build community internally out of the church, while the missional approach seeks to build the church externally from the community. This outward mentality for establishing the church creates a culture of constant disciple-making, taking those who are Christ-followers and sending them out to build relationships among those who are unchurched. This principle considered in the context of the current Western church may in some ways seem radical, but Jesus modeled this philosophy throughout His ministry. The Gospel of Mark recounts Jesus's challenge to his followers to refute the inward model of discipleship:

“He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”⁸⁸

A community that is centered only around those who already deemed righteous marginalizes those who are unchurched. Attractional churches thrive on building internal relationships and community; missional churches thrive on external community and relationships to carry out the mission of the church as set forth by the Gospel.

⁸⁸ Mark 2:13-14.

In this thought process “The Missional Church recognizes that it does not hold a place of honor in its host community and that its missional imperative compels it to move out from itself into the host community as salt and light.”⁸⁹ The basis of change is built on the understanding that the church can only attract and compel so many people by trying to perfect its methods and ministries. Ultimately, for the church to thrive, it must intentionally seek to build community outside of church walls. The church should then, in essence,

Seek to love and serve in such a way that the world is drawn to Christ through our peculiar communities and our salty engagement with the world. Ironically we are not seeking to transform the culture as much as we are presenting an alternative culture, the church of Jesus Christ. This means discipleship is just for Sundays or in the Christian community and never simply personal or privatized. This discipleship is for every aspect of life, whatever the cost maybe.⁹⁰

A community is at its strongest point when it is committed to a common goal or mission. This commonality of purpose can act as a catalyst for building strong and powerful relationships for change. Jesus knew that it was essential to deliver unto his disciples a common mission and purpose to achieve, which represents more than just a destination for the church to reach. Such a mission serves as a place of united journey and pursuit to which every believer is called.

The Great Commission given by Jesus to His disciples, though immense in its totality, was intended to be carried out in micro-movements. These types of micro-movements were what sparked the early New Testament church. The book of Acts describes the essence of this community thusly:

⁸⁹ Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 35.

⁹⁰ Coy, *Return to the Margins*, 100.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.⁹¹

It was this type of commitment to fellowship, the teaching of God's word, and the focus on making disciples of all nations that created such a strong sense of loyalty within the early church. Although this small community of believers may have at the time seemed to be merely a micro-movement of Christianity, the reality was that this small movement of people grew with exponential potential. This principle reveals the power of what a strong community has the potential to achieve for the kingdom of God. While the West has previously considered the large church to be the instrument through which to go forth and make disciples, there is strong evidence suggesting that power lies not in the large but in the small. The strength of a small group of disciples gathering together and unifying under the mission, dedicating themselves to living out God's word, has the highest potential for creating change.

Efforts to realign the church with its mission by launching a new model or style of church is not a new tactic. Church writer Alan J. Roxburgh says that "There seems to be a regular stream of proposals for some new form of church, together with plans and strategies to arrive in some new place as quickly as possible. A few illustrations can only indicate the growing length of these proposals: sticky church, emergent church, fresh expression church, simple church, new parish churches, missional churches, organic church and so on."⁹²

⁹¹ Acts 2:42-27.

⁹² Roxburgh, *Structured for Mission*, 46-47.

Roxburgh makes a valid point that the missional church is a response to a need for change within the Western church. However, what makes the missional response different from the other approaches is that centers on a biblical mission and model of discipleship.

The Power of Small

If small is the new big for churches going forward, how do existing churches structure for small when everything is centered on the idea of growing big? The basis of this conversation begins with the idea that just because small is more conducive to making disciples, that does not mean the end goal isn't big. Focusing on the aspect of building small group communities trades an additive growth mindset for an exponential one. In the attractional model of discipleship, the methodology is that a person who attends a service, ministry, or event can then be disciplined within the ministry of the church. The missional model seeks to train individuals who can be sent with the task of discipling people within the context of missional leaders sphere of reach. The goal is to send out to disciple rather than to bring into the church to disciple. Exponential growth "is the kind of process we want to put into the DNA of our church and plant from the very beginning, but it's easier said than done. It is always easier to grow by addition than by multiplication. It will always be easier to simply attract more people to a meeting than it is to train someone to multiply what you're doing, because the results are quicker and more easily quantifiable."⁹³

⁹³ Breen, *Leading Missional Communities*, Kindle.

The missional church has both the agility and ability to engage the specific needs of those in the community, meaning that the ministry can be more flexible in making relational connections with those in the smaller groups versus catering the ministry to the context of the larger church. The challenge in the larger church is engaging the individual who needs ministry while also caring for the majority. This challenge is the difficulty facing many churches, in that there might not be a program, ministry, or event that can specifically connect with individuals' needs in the discipleship process. Jesus's ministry on earth was not defined by hosting events, holding massive church services, or leading a specific ministry; instead, His ministry was characterized by walking alongside people and meeting them exactly where they were:

Jesus modeled the importance of relationship in the way He taught His disciples: He followed the Deuteronomy 6:7 exhortation we talked about earlier. God's commands were upon his heart, and He talked about them as He spent time with the disciples. He talked about the truth when they ate and when they went to bed. Jesus was with his disciples because His relationship with them was the conduit by which he could deliver all that they needed.⁹⁴

In the small missional community, more one-on-one discipleship can occur. This approach to disciple-making functions almost more like a coach helping a group of players to play to the best of their abilities. Coaches are aware of each player's individual strengths and weaknesses and can individually encourage each player to grow and meet his or her full potential. Similarly, the missional leader has the capability to become acutely aware of the spiritual state of every member of the community. Within the missional community, leaders are committed to the idea that "It will take time and will not feel great or exciting most of the time.

⁹⁴ Putman, *Real Life Discipleship*, Kindle.

Longevity is a substantial element to successful community that's growing the gospel. A leader must be invested in the marathon of making disciples."⁹⁵

Jesus Himself embodied this type of mentoring strategy with His disciples, and it was His long-term commitment to walking alongside the men of Galilee that produced disciple-makers. The discipleship process is not fully complete unless mentees are sent forth for the sake of the furtherment of the Gospel. For the first-century church, there was no other option but to continually start new communities of faith, since there were no large churches to which to send believers once they had converted to Christianity. For the early church, the home and society became the background and context for which the Gospel thrived:

The Bible is very clear that the apostolic Church met in home. Upon returning from the Mount of Ascension, the believers prayed together in an upper room (Acts 1:12-14). On the day of Pentecost, the believers were gathered in a house when the Spirit fell on them (Acts 2:2). After the baptism of the three thousand, the believers not only met in the temple court but they also met in houses (Acts 2:46). It is no wonder that Luke later uses the expression house after house to describe the environments in which Saul made his arrests (Acts 8:3); the house was a common place to find believers.⁹⁶

The house church represented a central place for both believers and unbelievers to come and eat, learn, worship, and grow in faith and understanding of Jesus. The early church emerged from what may seem an uncommon place for Christianity to begin to thrive and gain momentum. However, the basis of the house church was built upon the parameters of intimacy, familial design, and community. It is the organic nature of the home church that created an atmosphere conducive to making, growing, and sending disciples.

⁹⁵ Watson, *Sent Together: How the Gospel Sends*, 95.

⁹⁶ Payne, *Missional House Churches*, 2.

The future of the Western church, as well as the fulfillment of the Great Commission, will require a return to an environment and culture conducive to creating disciple-makers:

Right now, as the most important game in the world is being played, the church is preparing for the final play of the game. The ball is within reach of the end zone, yet most of the players are clueless about where they are on the field, what position they play, and how much time is left on the clock. Many of the time do not realize that the game is on the line. The arena they play in? the nations of the world. The end zone? The finish of the Great Commission. The team? Every member of the church.⁹⁷

Efforts in the West have predominantly focused on building large healthy churches that can act as epicenters for Christian ministry, fellowship, and outreach. In the process of making large-scale churches, two essential keys have been lost that have the ability to unlock the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The first key is the focus on the mission of the church, which is inherently to make disciples of Christ, while the second is the strong sense of unity, fellowship, and community the church is intended to experience that is often missing in large church settings.

The essence of the missional community flows out of the centrality of Christ being the focal point. Author Bill Donahue describes this type of bonding as an irresistible community; as such it is a community where healing, forgiveness, grace, and peace can be experienced through Jesus.⁹⁸ Donahue explains that each person can experience this type of community only by sitting at the table at which Jesus sits at the head. The table represents a small group or missional community that actively invites Jesus into their conversations, lives, and fellowship to experience the fullness of what it means to be in a relationship with God and others.

⁹⁷ Wegner and Magruder, *Missional Moves*, 74.

⁹⁸ Donahue, *The Irresistible Community*, Kindle.

Building relationships with others in which these types of intimate conversations, fellowship, and unity exist cannot typically be accomplished in large group settings; this type of intimacy can only be found in the context of small. These “Churches that break the missional code focus on building environments in both large and small groups, both on and off campus, where the gospel can thrive.”⁹⁹ The early church accomplished this principle remarkably well because collectively they lived out what they individually pursued.

Much can be gleaned from exploring the foundations of the early church and the methods employed for expanding the kingdom. Simply put, the strategy involved the followers of Jesus deeply devoting themselves to the teaching of God’s word, commonality of mission, communal living, and use of the home as the epicenter of the church. It was this environment that helped spread the Gospel at an expeditious rate. Even more fundamental was the absolute pursuit of the early church to fulfill the mission of God, which came at the cost of great sacrifice.

This concept of sacrifice led the followers of Jesus to be willing to live in such a way that they would sell all their possessions for the advancement of the kingdom of God. The first-century church defined missional living. Therefore the “ working definition of missional church is a community of God's people that defines itself, and organizes its life around, its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world.”¹⁰⁰

Although much has changed in the past 2000 years, the need for new believers to be nurtured in an environment where mentorship and encouragement can be given is essential.

⁹⁹ Putman and Stetzer, *Breaking The Missional Code*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 60.

Most home churches, whether deliberately or not, are following the missional model for the church, which is centered on building small, intimate relational communities in which the Gospel can be shared.

These models for community can be places in which real “Intimate relationships and bonds can be built. Intentional involvement in long-term small groups is often the place where a change process can best occur.” These groups may be therapy groups facilitated by a trained and licensed professional, or peer-led groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or celebrate recovery). Groups situations that are transformative must present persons with opportunities for real, immediate; and authentic interpersonal interactions.¹⁰¹

Another aspect of the missional church that should be considered is its intentionality to raise new leaders. In home churches, there are only so many people that can be added to the confines of a home and community before the community becomes too large. This mentality creates a constant need for new leaders to be trained and then sent out. Craig Van Gelder wrote about the importance of the small group community in his book entitled “*The Missional Church and Denomination*”:

We might re-conceptualize the office of the presbyterate within a missional polity of focusing on the following three elements: cultivating missional communities, interpretive leadership, and leadership multiplication/sending. Rather than the presbyter merely sharing with the bishop in the governance of the church, she or he should also share in the bishop’s apostolic function of teaching and sending leaders. One striking thing about the ministry of Jesus is the extent to which he focused on replicating his own leadership in a team of followers, whom he empowered with the Holy Spirit and sent to continue the announcement and embodiment of the reign of God that he began.¹⁰²

The key to creating small group environments in which discipleship can occur is devising ways to go smaller.

¹⁰¹ Stassen, Peterson and Norton, *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-century Discipleship* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 218.

¹⁰² Van Gelder, *The Missional Church and Denominations*, 147.

Ted Richards, the pastor of the Church of Cherrydale, adopted a strategy for better creating such environments by encouraging each small group to break down into even smaller cell groups. For the Church of Cherrydale these groups are identified as cell groups which are “gender-based groups of no more than two-three individuals that gather weekly to study the Bible, hold one another accountable and evangelize.”¹⁰³ These cell groups act as more intimate and natural settings for one-on-one discipleship to happen. Each cell group is encouraged to include within their group at least one new believer or unchurched person. This type of smaller group encourages further intentionality. It is this type of technique that has the potential to promote exponential discipleship growth. One of the keys to unlocking the missional community involves strategically moving from large to small as a means to create healthier environments for discipleship.

Church Structure and Leadership

“When choosing a biblical structure, you want one that protects the church, forms disciples and advances the mission.”¹⁰⁴ What the researcher found the most surprising in surveying churches that adhere to the missional model was the shift in church structure and leadership. Nearly eighty percent of churches interviewed for this project that had transitioned to a more missional approach had not only changed their discipleship strategy but also their church structure. Most churches reported that prior to a missional shift, they had adhered to a congregationally-led church governing body with one lead pastor acting as the shepherd and visionary leader.

¹⁰³ Phone interview with Ted Richards, Pastor at The Church of Cherrydale, August 23, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Stetzer and Im. *Planting Missional Churches*, kindle.

After shifting to a missional model, most churches also changed to an elder-led church model comprised of both lay ministry leaders and pastoral leadership. In addition, there was change from a single lead pastor to a plurality model of pastoral leadership, with the pastors serving a dual function of pastor and elder and sharing insight, wisdom, and direction on the elder board. Although this model can be considered somewhat standard in other denominations or even non-denominational churches, this model is a significant departure from most churches affiliated with the SBC. Such a change in SBC churches as defined by the book, *Eldership and the Mission of God* would look truly different;

If we truly want to create mission-oriented churches, we must begin with mission-oriented elder teams. One person cannot lead a church in to the mission of God in the world, and that was never the case. From the beginning, God in drawing us into community of Christ, has seen fit to rest the leadership of the church teams. These smaller communities within the community shepherd, teach, equip and lead their churches out into their neighborhoods as they cooperate with God in the rescue and renewal of the world.¹⁰⁵

For missional churches, a plurality leadership model creates an environment more conducive to utilizing the leadership gifts of multiple leaders rather than relying solely on one. This model creates a healthier environment for discipleship and accountability within leadership, as well as internally producing a healthy leadership team that can thrive because of a deep relational community. In essence, a leadership team in the missional church can function much like a missional group, dedicated to living out the mission of Jesus together, caring more about the making of disciples and less about who is taking the lead role.

¹⁰⁵ J. R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, *Eldership and the Mission of God: Equipping Teams for Faithful Church Leadership* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 128.

In essence, “Successful communities, even those with long traditions of organized community leadership, will continue to broaden the circles of leadership to create a system that is neither centralized nor decentralized, but rather polycentric. The polycentric view of community leadership assumes that there are many centers of leadership that interrelate.”¹⁰⁶ One of the goals of the missional church leadership team should be to broaden the circles of leadership.

Targeting

Targeting age groups and demographics in an effort to reach certain generations is certainly not a new tactic for the church. The principle behind reaching specific demographics has always been as follows:

While it’s true that you want to share the gospel with as many people as possible, you will need to develop a clear picture of the specific demographic your new church is targeting in order to effectively reach the greatest number of people. Diffused light has little impact, but focused light has the ability to cut through steel. Take time to focus so that you are able to reach the specific people God has called you to.¹⁰⁷

Utilizing this tactic in the past has helped churches reach new groups of people for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Previously, the end goal of these efforts was to attract a certain age groups in order to add these groups to the community of the church. While many of these efforts have been effective both in the past and present, the goal is to attract and add to the local church. What often happens in such targeting efforts is that people are removed from the current context of their community and placed in an isolated community within the church. Once in the church, little effort or intentionality is placed on sending these individuals back out into their original spheres of influence to reach people with the message of the Gospel.

¹⁰⁶ Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Searcy and Thomas, *Launch*, 177.

The missional approach to targeting, on the other hand, seeks to incorporate people into the church community while also equipping them to return to their original context and reach people in their sphere of influence. Essentially, the key is to target people with the goal of making disciple-makers who can then be enabled to go back out to the places where they live and work.

A missional community that is sent to reach a certain group of people understands that “The body of Christ is God’s physical representative in your neighborhood, workplace, school, and city. Even as you may enter those places alone, it truly takes a village to make a disciple. As you send your community into each independent sphere of life, send them as God’s messenger.”¹⁰⁸ Missional churches have taken this mentality and focused their efforts to reach neighborhoods, communities, and cities. This drive enables the missional church to focus on the end goal of reaching people for the sake of sending them out again.

Pathway for Growth

Creating a pathway for “Discipleship is more than an educational program or a list of obligations; it is primarily an identity requiring a pilgrimage of transformation that cannot be developed apart from the church community (Rom.12:2).”¹⁰⁹ Few churches would argue that the mission of the church is to make disciples who are mature Christ-followers. What has been challenging for most churches determining is how to get people to engage into a transformational process. Churches spend a vast amount of time, resources, and energy to reach a place that provides the opportunity to make disciples.

¹⁰⁸ Watson, *Sent Together: How the Gospel Sends Leaders*, 73.

¹⁰⁹Kristopher Norris, *Pilgrim Practices: Discipleship for a Missional Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), xviii.

Although the small, intimate feel and nature of the missional community is highly conducive to making disciples, this environment still demands a pathway for growth. Just as in farming, a seed that is planted in fertile soil has the maximum potential to grow and flourish. Even as a healthy seed sits planted in fertile soil, it requires a process for growth; the seed requires water, sunlight, and protection to become a healthy and established plant. The same can be said about the missional approach to discipleship: while the nature of the community is an ideal place for growth, a growth process is still required for disciples to be made.

In an interview with Gabe Forsyth, Discipleship and Missions Pastor at Mosaic Church, the pastor stated that the key process and strategy for the missional communities of Mosaic is to “Learn as disciples, live as family, and serve on mission.”¹¹⁰ Although this is a simple description of a pathway, it accurately depicts the thought process for the missional community. Each of these goals should have a subsequent set of strategies and sub-goals to achieve the primary goals. These goals may be attained with slight variation from missional community to missional community, meaning that different methods and approaches may be employed to accomplish the same goal.

Although it is not the aim of this paper to identify all the various pathways for discipleship within the missional community, discipleship does require a process. The temptation anytime the word “process” is used is to associate it with some type of program or event; consequently, the process for the missional church could quickly be put forth as a ministry, class, or service.

¹¹⁰ Phone interview with Ted Richards, Pastor at The Church of Cherrydale, August 23, 2018.

This is not to say that these factors cannot be used as a resource in creating healthy community and growth. However, the missional vehicle moving people into a deeper level of discipleship is not programs or ministries but relationships. The process for the missional community is not to create something that can streamline or take the place of relational discipleship; it is instead a thought process of determining how to make every relationship intentional.

Furthermore, every relationship is built upon dialogues and conversations. Therefore, to be intentional with relationships and establishing a deep community means leading every conversation with purpose and mission. Jesus mirrored this type of intentionality with His disciples; every teaching moment was embedded within the continual dialogue He had with disciples. Whether it was on the fishing boat, eating dinner, ministering, or at the temple, Jesus found and created opportunities to be relational. The process for each missional community is therefore to determine how to create opportunities for intentional and Spirit-filled conversations, deciding what conversations and teaching moments must occur to help people arrive at a place of maturity. Though the ways in which these type of dialogues are created in the community may differ, such through a home church, small group, cell group, or outward community reach, the end goal is the same: to make disciples by teaching people all that Christ has commanded, which is accomplished the same way Jesus taught His disciples, i.e., relationally.

Chapter Four

Creating A Culture for Change

The presentation and findings for this thesis project thus far have centered around understanding the context of ministry at ABC and building a conceptual idea of the missional church. Chapter three more significantly defined the characteristics of the missional church, while also keeping in mind the differences between the attractional and missional. This foundational information has been collected both from academics and experts in the field of the missional church and has helped identify some key factors and criteria for the implementation of missional change within ABC.

Chapter four will therefore assemble a strategy through which ABC can actualize some, if not all, of the steps to become more missional in its discipleship process. This process will be presented in four different phases to be carried out over the next five to ten years of the church. Each phase offers a practical step in which ABC can use its existing platform and momentum as a launching pad to become increasingly more missional in its discipleship strategy. It was important to the researcher in developing these phases to keep in mind the end goal of enabling ABC to bring to fruition in a greater way its mission statement, “Helping people embrace the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ.” This goal in its raw form is centered on making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission. The missional way of thinking provides both a strategy and a biblical process for achieving ABC’s mission. The following figure provides a visual overview of the four phases that will be discussed and utilized to give future momentum to ABC. Under each phase is a synopsis of what each step in the process entails.

Strategical Phasing

Attractional to Missional Phasing for ABC



Phase 1 Build a Greater Gospel Dialogue

Phase one, in establishing a missional culture of change within the context of ABC is to create more external conversations centered on the Gospel. This outward dialogue, however, is not a one-time conversation; it is instead an on-going conversation that will happen in a multitude of spaces and location over a long-term period time.



Phase 2 Create Smaller Environments for Discipleship

Phase two, will consist of two major axioms: First an Intentional shift to a missional small group model and secondly, establishing smaller environments for discipleship to occur.



Phase 3 Utilize Targeting Techniques

Phase three will build off the foundation of phases one and two by targeting specifics communities, homes, and neighborhoods to reach with the Gospel by establishing small groups. The paradigm shift is to build the church out of the community, rather than build community out of the church.



Phase 4 More Intentional Discipleship Training

Phase four is implementing a process of discipleship training that can be replicated and utilized for kingdom growth. This process will center on teaching the mission and core beliefs of the church in a small group setting.

Figure 1.5 Strategic Phasing

Each phase in figure 1.5 represents an example of a change that will need to take place within the culture of ABC. The feasibility of this strategy working at ABC will be dependent upon multiple factors, the two most crucial being the existing church leadership and the willingness of the church body to embrace this change. The shift is principled on the idea that the church should emerge from the community rather than community arise from the church. When this mentality is embraced, it essentially moves the walls of the church beyond the congregation to include the greater community. Therefore embracing the idea that “God is not more interested in developing people inside the church than those outside it.”¹¹¹ For ABC, the focus must include not just an internal dialogue but also an external one that moves the church into the greater community.

Building a Greater Gospel Dialogue

“The Gospel advances when people sow regularly and generously, not erratically and not sparingly.”¹¹² Jesus never ceased in His ministry to have meaningful conversations with His disciples and followers about growing in faith. Everyday tasks became opportunities in which Jesus could share a greater spiritual truth and meaning with His followers. Regardless of whether Jesus was eating a meal, fishing on a boat, or even drawing water from a well, there always seemed to be an opportunity to plant the seeds of the Gospel. Jesus established a greater Gospel conversation beyond those who were part of His small group of disciples and leaders. This Gospel dialogue thrived and moved to meet the culture where it was, rather than demand the culture move to Jesus.

¹¹¹ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*, 168.

¹¹² Scroggins, Wright and Leslee. *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations*, 11.

Although Jesus focused heavily on discipling a few, ultimately he sent out others to establish Gospel conversations. Jesus modeled to His disciples the importance of going into cities and villages with the purpose of serving others and proclaiming the Gospel:

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”¹¹³

In the last part of this passage, Jesus told His disciples that “the harvesters are to be sent out.” In no way did Jesus say to wait until the harvest is brought forth to be reaped; He told His disciples go out and reach it. The process of engaging the lost should involve actively sending those in the church out into the community to teach, preach, serve, and minister. ABC has in the past considered the first step toward discipleship to be for a new person to be incorporated into the life of the church, and then join a lifegroup. The challenge within this mentality is that the church is limited to only those who will attend the church, which in turn alienates most of the larger population from being ministered to directly. Future kingdom growth at ABC will require the ministry leaders to rethink this strategy, thinking in terms of how to engage people who may never walk into the church regardless of what program, ministry, worship experience, or message is being offered within the church. With this new strategy in mind, the first step within the discipleship process may be to engage people in the missional group, and subsequently moving these people into the church community by bringing them into the greater church body.

¹¹³ Matthew 9:35-38.

Establishing this cultural change within the context of ABC means creating more external conversations centered on the Gospel. This outward dialogue, however, is not a one-time conversation; it is an ongoing deliberate conversation that will take place in all types of spaces and locations. This type of approach is clearly seen in the Gospels in that, “Jesus moved into the neighborhood of those He wanted to win (John 1:14). He invited those who eventually became His disciples to follow Him home for the day (John 1:35-39), and He was notorious for eating with sinners (Luke 15:1-2).”¹¹⁴

As discussed before, ABC’s previous discipleship strategy centered on an attractional style of discipleship. This model was examined in greater detail in chapter two and highlighted in figure 1.2. In this model of discipleship, many of the Gospel conversations occurred within the walls of the church, with most of these conversations flowing out of worship services, ministries, and events. Outside the walls of the church, few Gospel conversations occurred unless the utmost intentionality was given toward building the external community. This is not to say, however, ABC does not have an external ministry context; the church has many community partnerships, international missions’ efforts, and other outreach initiatives. Rather, it means that ABC’s external ministry context needs to establish a more profound and engaging presence in the surrounding community of St. Johns County.

The move to counter this broken social context and form a missional congregation begins with cultivating an environment that invites people to address their experience and to reconnect with the memory of the biblical narrative in a way that grounds their lives in a story bigger than their private needs. Missional leaders cultivate ways of engaging people in dialogue and discussion that brings to voice their experiences and locates them within God’s narrative.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 139.

¹¹⁵ Roxburgh, Romanuk and Gibbs, *The Missional Leader*, 17..

For ABC to become missional in its discipleship process and way of thinking, it must consider looking at ways to create within its immediate ministry missional communities that invite people into the dialogue of the Gospel. The conversation must include people of all walks of life, age, socioeconomic status, and religious background. This type of missional thinking affords ABC an opportunity to have Gospel discussions with communities and individuals who would otherwise never set foot in or be drawn to the church. Attractional thinking often keeps ministry and outreach confined to the property of the church; missional thinking extends the walls of the church to include the community. For ABC, every housing development, home, school, and community center should represent an opportunity for the missional community. For this reason, “A church that learns to church the area and influences the community cannot merely be a huddle or a gathering place to say kind things to one another. It will be an entity that is alive and powerfully spreading out in all directions.”¹¹⁶ Once a vision for reaching these areas is achieved, the goal for the next phase is to create environments in which discipleship can occur most organically.

Create Smaller Environments for Discipleship

A postulate of healthy churches is to always look for ways to create more intimate environments for discipleship. Currently, at ABC, multiple environments exist for ministry and discipleship to occur at different levels. The two main environments for discipleship at ABC are large worship gatherings and small groups settings located both on and off campus. However, the primary vehicle for discipleship is considered to be small groups.

¹¹⁶ Bob Roberts, *Transformation: Discipleship That Turns Lives, Churches, and the World Upside down* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 130.

The small group ministry at ABC has maintained a relatively high level of health throughout the years, with the weekly average percent of those attending a small group at ABC hovering around sixty percent of those who attend worship. In addition, there has been significant progress within the last few years to move more small groups off campus. Some of this shift was forced due to the lack of meeting space on the weekends on church campuses, but the majority of the reason for moving off campus was to extend the reach of ABC. Currently, about fifty percent of all ABC lifegroups meet off campus, which accounts for about five-hundred people. For the leadership of ABC, these numbers represent a reasonable context for small group ministry. Within this context, there is a greater vision for growing the kingdom exponentially through the ministry of small groups.

In order to attain this type of vision, two important axioms must be understood for ABC to reach new heights through its small group ministry. First is the idea that small groups should drive the church rather than the church drive small groups. Intentional missional small groups will promote meaningful kingdom growth at a far higher rate than intentional large group worship services because missional small group communities can create environments much more conducive to making and training disciples for Christ. This reality leads to the next axiom of change that must be embraced by ABC, which is simply a purposeful shift to create more smaller environments for discipleship. Many of the small groups at ABC have more than twenty members, which has in turn created barriers for organic discipleship to occur within these groups. Although many of the small groups at ABC function at this size, this not the ideal number with which to maximize growth potential. Like many churches, ABC has operated under the impression that small groups should consist of between ten and twenty people to remain a healthy environment for discipleship.

This is not to say that the ten to twenty number range should change for missional groups, but rather that there needs to be a second target number within missional small groups; this number should be between two and four. Some have considered such groups as cell groups that can become places for mentorship and one-on-one discipleship. This type of cell group offers a path for accelerated spiritual growth and life-on-life ministry. In some church contexts, these cell groups operate as offshoots of the small groups, providing a way for mature believers to be paired one-on-one with new believers. For ABC, creating cell groups and missional small groups that range from three to fifteen people is essential to maximize the potential for disciple-making.

Jesus's ministry was defined by his relationships with His disciples and followers; it was these life-on-life relationships that so profoundly impacted the lives of the disciples. The book *Discipleship Fits* expresses the idea that such relationships were Jesus's ideal context for ministry, stating that "He prioritized his time with the small group. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom to large crowds and met with groups of twenty to seventy people in homes, but he spent considerable time with his special group of twelve. Each of these forms of ministry was crucial to his mission."¹¹⁷

Jesus ministered in all types of group settings and environments but the one He spent the most time with was His small group of disciples. Jesus's time spent mentoring, encouraging, and ministering to the twelve disciples inspired in them a radical life transformation and spiritual depth that could not be accessed unless they had a substantial basis of community. It was Jesus's mentality and understanding that the time given to Him was short, so He needed to dedicate Himself to where he could achieve the most significant effect.

¹¹⁷ Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits*, Kindle.

It was because of the transformation that occurred within the disciples that Jesus's ministry would exponentially multiply through His disciples. Life transformation for the disciples was a direct result of time spent in close relationship and community with Jesus. The book of Acts recognizes that the disciples were astonishingly different as a direct result of their time spent with Jesus: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."¹¹⁸

One of ABC's greatest strengths has been in attracting people to attend services, events, and ministries. However, where the church has struggled is in engaging individuals in the discipleship process to grow and mature. For ABC to be more successful in making and training disciples and shift to a missional discipleship model, a greater emphasis must be centered around the personal ministry context. For ABC's staff and leadership, this context cannot merely focus on the medium-to-large-group settings for discipleship. The framework must include a willful change that places importance on more small groups and environments in which one-on-one discipleship can occur. Jesus's ministry within the twelve included another group that was the inner circle, which included Peter, James, and John. As stated earlier, if Jesus had only focused his ministry on the large crowd, one-on-one discipleship would not have occurred. The same can be said about ABC, if focus and effort are predominately targeted toward large weekend gatherings while attention is also devoted to small groups and intimate gatherings for discipleship growth.

The first step in bringing greater attention to creating more spaces and gatherings for discipleship to occur is to consider ABC's current ministry context.

¹¹⁸ Acts 4:13.

Just as individuals have ministry contexts, so do churches; often the ministry context of the church can be dictated by that of the staff and leaders. For example, if a church's sole focus is on the ministry context of weekend worship services, all the staff resources and time will be spent making that service the highest quality. However, by putting the focus solely on the weekend services, a church could forfeit an opportunity to emphasize small groups. Creating a balanced ministry context as a church is essential to prioritize the discipleship environment that has the potential to yield the most kingdom growth. Figure 1.6 below details the ministry context of ABC as of 2019.



Ministry Context

13



Worship Services

Total number of Worship Services offered for various age groups at ABC across 3 locations.

59



Small Groups

Total number of Lifegroups offered at Anastasia both off and on campus

50



Ministry Opportunities

Total number of ministries offered through ABC.

6



International mission partnerships including France, Haiti, Nicaragua, India, Canada, and Cuba.

3



National partnerships including New Orleans, Montana, and Miami.

16



Local mission partnerships in St. Johns and surrounding counties.

Figure 1.6 ABC Ministry Context ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Data for infograph gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, "Anastasia Baptist Church," Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

ABC has maintained an overall healthy ministry context throughout the years; ministry and discipleship occur at both the large-group and small-group level. The ministry dialogue through ABC is happening locally, nationally and internationally. It seems necessary, “A congregation needs to proactively engage its context. Congregations need to systematically study their contexts to evaluate trends that are taking place. But more importantly, they need to look at their contexts through theological lenses to discern the work of God that is taking place.”¹²⁰

Figure 1.6 illustrates the depth of the ministry context at ABC and highlights the church’s current platform to proclaim the Gospel. The weekend and weekday worship services represent a large gathering space and conversation for the Gospel to be presented, while the individual ministries of the church represent a medium-sized environment for people to be discipled. Lastly, the small groups represent a more intimate setting and personal environment for discipleship to occur. Most data on ABC suggests that there is an equal focus on all ministry contexts; however, a closer look at the resources of the church has uncovered is an unbalanced effort and commitment to utilizing the small group setting as a means of discipleship. Figure 1.7 offers the evidence of this imbalance.

The overarching point that can be gathered from ABC’s ministry context is that a great deal of energy and resources are being utilized to maintain a large group ministry context as a means for discipling. However, the findings of this thesis project suggest that the most conducive environments for making disciples is not the large group gathering but rather within the small group setting. Second, if ABC aims to become more missional, its local and international partnerships must represent places for deep Gospel centered dialogue.

¹²⁰ *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit*, 162

Aside from the financial and servant partnership, there must be a sincere desire to build the church within context of these community partnerships. To become more missional, it may require ABC to consider downsizing the number of partnerships in order to focus more strategically on a few as a place for Gospel community.



2019 Budget

Breakdown of 2019 Budget is Based off a \$3,200,403.96 Annual Budget

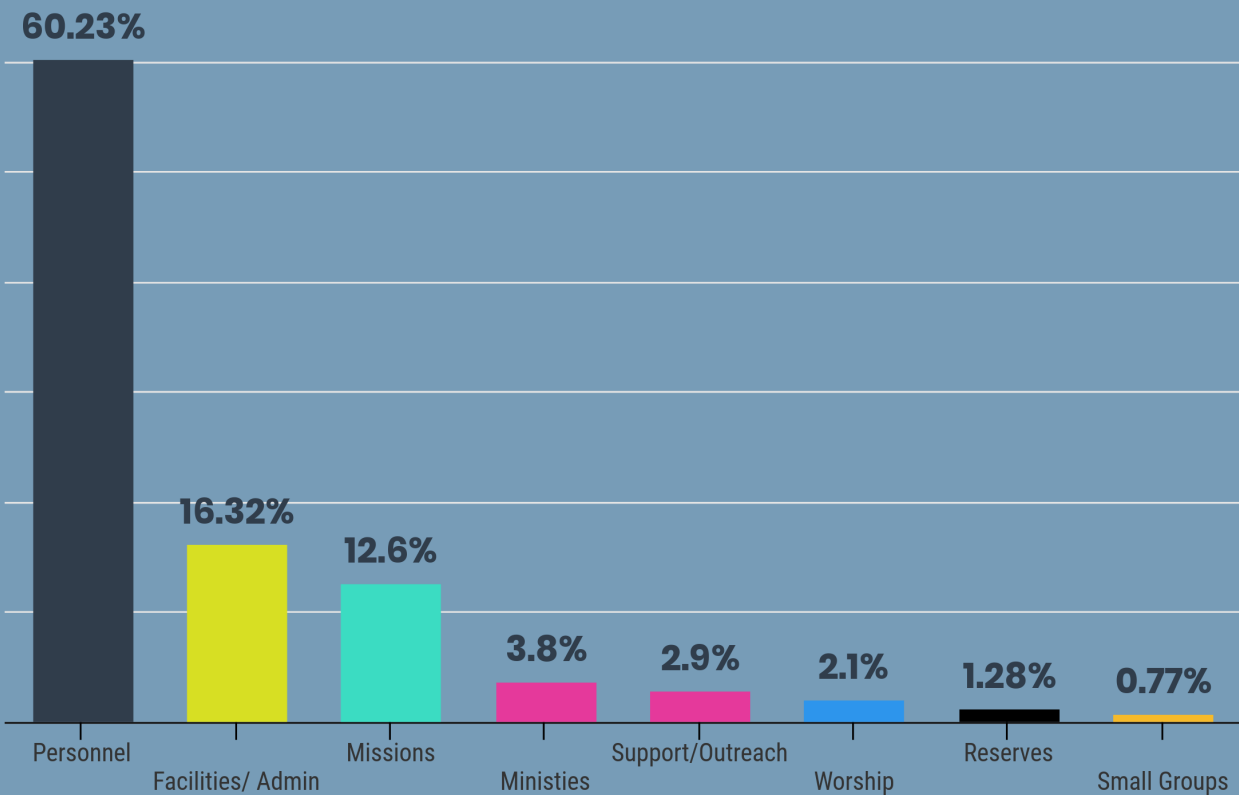


Figure 1.7 ABC 2019 Budget¹²¹

¹²¹ Data for infograph gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, "Anastasia Baptist Church," Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that small groups are the church's least-resourced and -funded ministry. Ultimately, such underfunding means that the ministry context with the highest potential for making and creating disciples is not receiving the most significant amount of resourcing. ABC's small group ministry has functioned at a high level over the last ten to twelve years, but for a more significant ministry impact, ABC must put more resources and attention toward the building the small group environment. Jesus taught His disciples that the environment in which the Holy Spirit could work and move was not always associated with large; instead, He stated, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."¹²² In this verse Jesus explains that the out pouring of His presence differs not from the large gathering to the small; rather, the same power and presence resides in both.

Within the church at ABC, the thought process has centered around the momentum established by large-scale ministry. The more time, effort, staffing, and resources that can be devoted to a church ministry, the higher the success. For a missional remodeling to happen within ABC, value must be placed on building and establishing personal discipleship that occurs within groups of two to three.

Utilizing Targeting Techniques

Phase three will build off the foundations of phases one and two by targeting specific communities, homes, and neighborhoods with the intention of reaching them with the Gospel, and more specifically by establishing leadership and small group teams to be sent to reach designated demographics and areas.

¹²² Matthew 18:20.

This model of targeting will, in turn, require a cultural shift for ABC designed to build the church out of the community, rather than to build the community out of the church. For this shift to occur, attention and vision must be provided by ABC to consider regions both near and far that God has called ABC to reach.

Jesus taught his disciples to have this mentality of selecting areas and regions to which to go forth and to share the Gospel. Jesus Himself displayed this mentality by going “through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him.”¹²³ It was evident that each of the disciples would be sent out with missions of reaching various people group and communities.

Though the message of hope and forgiveness was made available to all people, there were times in Jesus’s ministry that He directly sent out the disciples with a clear mission to reach certain populations. One can gather that no group of people in Jesus’s eyes was less valuable; however, He targeted a few in particular that so that in turn He might reach the multitude. During Jesus’s ministry, reaching the multitude meant that He had to disciple a few. This was the pathway for the disciples as well: disciple a few so that these same could be sent out with a similar task. The Gospel of Matthew provides an account of Jesus’s command for the disciples to specifically target a small group of people: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.”¹²⁴ The following infographic highlights some areas of reach for ABC.

¹²³ Luke 8:1.

¹²⁴ Matthew 10:5-8.

As discussed previously, ABC set out a few years back to begin ramping up efforts to launch off-campus lifegroups from every campus. In figure 1.8, these lifegroups are represented by small flags. Also marked in figure 1.8 are three circles which each cover an area of roughly five miles of perimeter around the church; each of these circles represent a community of potential reach.

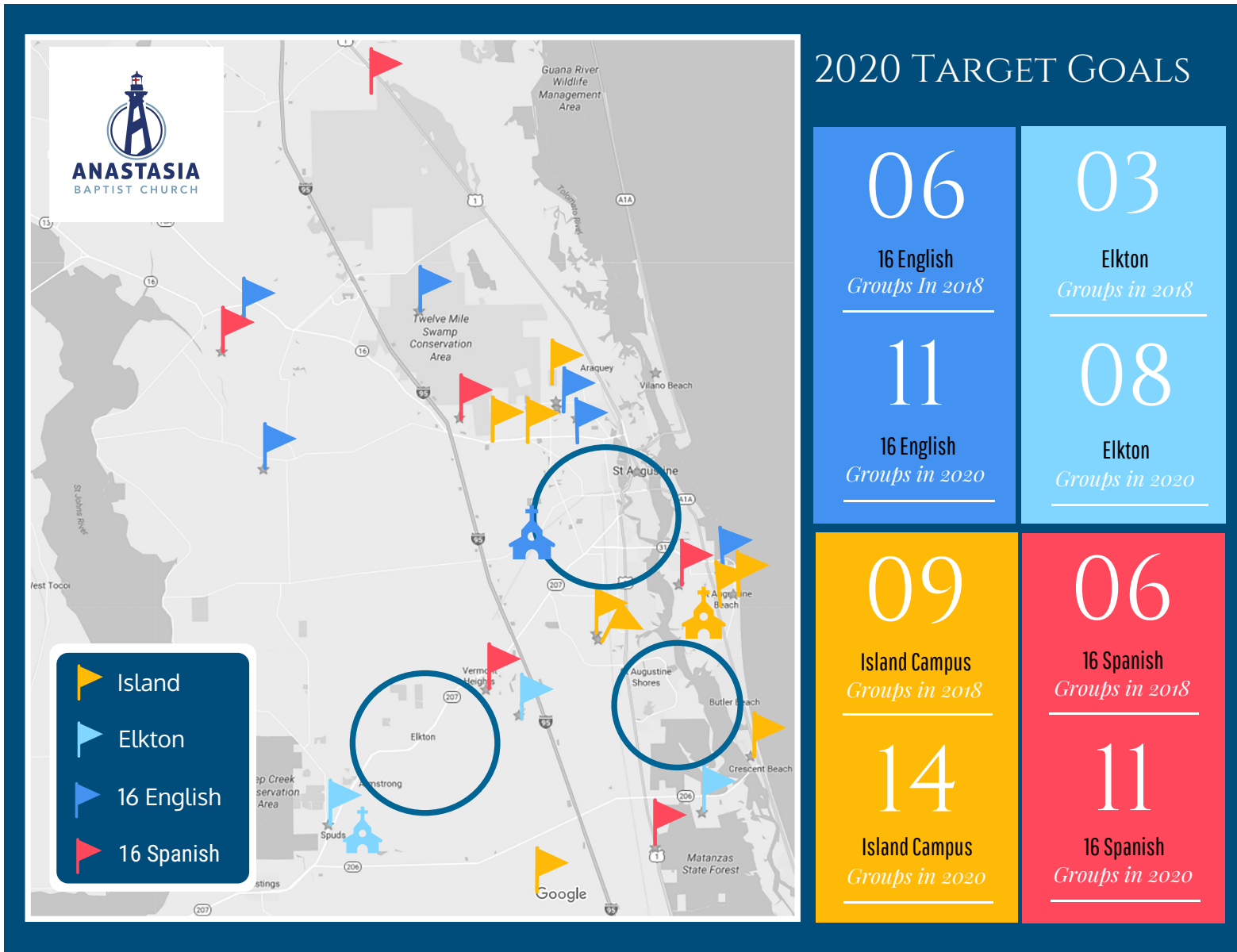


Figure 1.8 2020 Target Goals¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Data for infographic gathered from Anastasia Baptist Church Database, “Anastasia Baptist Church,” Anastasia Online Community, Accessed June 17, 2018, <https://anastasia.ccbchurch.com>

The areas in the circles highlighted above have great strategic importance for ABC for two major reasons. First, all three of the highlighted areas are within close proximity of an ABC church campus. Secondly, each circled area represents an area of current or upcoming growth and development. For ABC, these are the areas that offer significant potential for kingdom growth; for this reason, it will be imperative that ABC seek opportunities to reach these areas. Schools, communities, and homes in these target areas represent key places to launch upcoming missional small groups with the intent of establishing a greater Gospel dialogue.

More Intentional Discipleship Training

Phase four implements a process of discipleship training that can be replicated and utilized for maximum kingdom growth. This process will center on forming disciples out of the community rather than church programs. The reason for this is “It is not possible to promote a people development culture without an intentional focus on relationships.”¹²⁶ Relationships are key when it comes to disciple-making; therefore, if a missional resurgence is to take place at ABC, a focus must be placed on relational discipleship.

As discussed earlier, a small part of the missional approach to discipleship is driven by creating authenticity within small group discipleship atmospheres. This approach is, however, about bringing people into the presence of Jesus and sharing the truth of His Gospel. According to Hirsh in *Forgotten Ways* regarding the declaration of the Gospel, “A genuine incarnational approach will require that we be always willing to share the gospel story with those within our world. We simply cannot take this aspect out of equation of mission in the world.

¹²⁶ McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, 110.

We are essentially a ‘message tribe,’ and that means we must ensure the faithful transmission of the message we carry through the proclamation.”¹²⁷

Coinciding with the writing of this thesis, ABC leadership took time to discuss some of its core values as a church. These six core values are an embodiment of the major characteristics and teachings of Christ: Jesus is the way, the Bible is the map, disciple-making is our mission, love is our greatest command, serving is our privilege, and every person is important. More than just core values, these mantras represent the essential conversations for every disciple-maker to have with each disciple. Rooted in each one of these statements is a biblical narrative that is key for Christ-followers to learn and embrace. As a part of the transformative discipleship approach that is to occur at ABC, a greater effort is to be made to have more Gospel dialogue within small group environments based on these core values. The strategy for teaching these core values is to offer them in multiple small group settings, including cell groups, lifegroups, and in a new members’ class. In each setting a teacher, coach, or staff member will walk alongside the individuals being taught the core values to ensure maximum spiritual growth. The following figure highlights each of these values and the key theological points they hope to cover.

¹²⁷ Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways*, 144 .

Foundations

Pathway Towards Discipleship



Figure 1.9 Foundations, Pathway Toward Discipleship

Figure 1.9 presents an overview of the basis of the curriculum and intentional conversations that a disciple-maker is to have. Although the process does involve the use of a curriculum, the seven conversations are meant to be discussed in more of an organic setting. Connected to this curriculum is team of disciple coaches who are trained and equipped to mentor, teach, and encourage those going through the study. The hope is to provide a conversational piece that can be had within the context of the small group, cell group, or a one-on-one conversation over coffee. The curriculum is broken down into two separate parts: *be one* and *make one*. The *be one* section focuses on the foundational understandings of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. In this section, emphasis is placed on key teachings of Jesus that flesh out what it means to be a Christ-follower; topics such as identity in Christ, essentials to spiritual growth, lifestyle of a believer, and Christian community are discussed in greater length. It is the goal of this section to help disciples understand what it means to have a personal relationship with Christ. Section two, or the *make one* section of the curriculum, is centered on what it takes to be a disciple-maker. This section reviews the mission of disciple-making, serving others as privilege, and servant leadership. Similar to the *be one* section, each topic is framed by a narrative of the Gospel. These narratives were important aspects to include within the curriculum because they serve as both a biblical foundation and a conversational piece. The premise of this curriculum was intended to be simple and easy to teach or lead so that that anyone could walk with someone through these basic aspects of the faith; each one of the topics can also be built upon in greater depth.

It is essential to the success of this discipleship pathway that it be coupled with disciple coaches who will patiently walk with individuals through the curriculum in order to ensure that everyone is spiritually met where they are; whether a new believer or seasoned Christ-follower, each can be engaged to take the next steps of faith within the church. Paul instructed his mentees in the same manor, stating, “You have heard me teach these things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.”¹²⁸

Coaches should walk with disciples in the same manner that Paul instructed, taking care and attention to walk with people in understanding the fullness of the Gospel. Providing a pathway for discipleship requires that ABC raise a group of discipleship coaches to be sent out to make disciples. These coaches can be trained as missional group leaders sent out into the community or simply as individuals willing to walk with people in the community or workplace. The key is that ABC commits to making and sending disciple-makers who are equipped to replicate this process repeatedly. Paul wrote of the importance of sending out disciple-makers in his letter to the Roman church, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ 2 Tim. 2.2.

¹²⁹ Romans 10:14-15.

Chapter Five

Potential for Growth and Impact

St. Johns County is currently listed as the 14th fastest-growing county in the nation and one of the fastest-growing in the state of Florida. St. Augustine sits in the heart of St. Johns County and thus is surrounded by new growth. The opportunity to reach new communities, demographics, and people is unmatched when compared to other churches sphere of reach. The St. Johns County school district reported that “the student body represents 114 different countries speaking 79 different languages.”¹³⁰ The possibility of reaching the nations of every language exists here within the school district lines.

ABC has for many years existed as the largest evangelical church in St. Augustine and held the place as the largest church in St. Augustine behind the Catholic Church. Financially, the church sits in a healthy position by meeting or exceeding its budget most every fiscal year. The staff of the church has maintained longevity and tenure, something uncommon among other churches. Seven of its ten pastors have served at ABC for greater than 10 years, with two of them serving for more than 20. All three of ABC’s church campuses sit in areas of direct potential growth, providing a prime opportunity to reach new people with the Gospel of Christ. The favorable circumstances that surround ABC for potential growth and kingdom impact are remarkably high. The momentum that has already been established is carrying over into a new time and era for ABC. The launching pad for a fresh church vision and discipleship strategy has been built upon the church’s previous success and ministry context. The future for ABC is bright and filled with immense potential; achieving this success hinges on overcoming just a few obstacles within the church.

For ABC, there will always be a temptation to remain attractional in its approach to discipleship simply for the fact that it was fruitful for the church in the past. However, there is a chance that if the same strategies and methods are used, they could equate to substantially different results than previously experienced at ABC.

The unmet challenge is to separate ourselves from any unnecessary and traditional cultural wrappings. Many among conservative evangelical churches retreat to a preferred past in order to maintain a sense of spiritual nostalgia. Yet the church must never become too comfortable with any culture, whether it existed five, fifty, or five hundred year ago. What the church must be comfortable with is becoming missional, always looking for the best way to reach the culture it lives in at that point in time. If anything, the church should err on the side of becoming futurists (rather than historians) in regard to culture. Staying biblically relevant means we'll have to look beyond the present to perceive what's best for the church in the future, moving forward in God's kingdom.¹³⁰

Looking beyond the present is what the book *Transformational Discipleship* refers to as defensive discipleship efforts rather than offensive discipleship. Defensive discipleship remains concerned with defending the ground the kingdom growth has already achieved, while offensive discipleship seeks to actively achieve new growth. Offensive discipleship looks at the unchurched community at large and seeks to make strategic moves to reach this community. Ultimately, the goal is to “Play aggressive offense, not passive defense. Disciple for transformed hearts, knowing that transformation always results in obedience.”¹³¹ For ABC, the time has come to make an offensive play in which the Gospel moves outward toward the community. “A congregation needs to proactively engage its context. Congregations need to systematically study their contexts to evaluate trends that are taking places. But more importantly, they need to look at their context through the theological lenses to discern the work of God that taking place.”¹³²

¹³⁰ Stetzer and Im, *Planting Missional Churches*, Kindle.

¹³¹ Geiger, Kelley and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*, 46.

¹³² Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 59.

Potential Setbacks

When an arrow is loosed from a bow, it is released with the intent to hit a target.

Similarly, when Jesus essentially loosed His disciples out into the world, they were given a target to hit: to make disciples of all nations. To make disciples has been and remains the goal of the church. Throughout the years, some churches have been successful in hitting this target with pinpoint accuracy, while others have failed to hit the target at all. Much of this challenge can be better understood in the following statement:

It is true that throughout North America today, though numbers are declining, there are still many people coming to church, and some are busy with ministry-related activities. There are ministries to the poor. Buildings are being built. Programs are running at full tilt. Money is being given. But attendance, busyness, construction, finances, and programs are not real indications of success. The core question of effectiveness - the question that ultimately matters – is whether the people who are getting saved are being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Are we making mature disciples of Jesus who are not only able to withstand culture but also are making disciples of Jesus themselves?¹³³

Significant factors could potentially hinder ABC from becoming more missional in its discipleship strategy. The first potential setback for ABC would be to continue in a discipleship process that is dictated by events, programs, and ministries that ultimately forfeits opportunities for relational discipleship. There is a legitimate temptation in attractional-based churches to be overcome by the process rather than the people they are sent to reach.

Churches tend to become insider-focused over time. This isn't just a problem for so-called traditional churches; this is an issue for every church that has existed for any length of time. Unless you work to prevent it, eventually people inside the church become higher priority than those on the outside the church. For fear of making insiders unhappy, churches tend to hold on to ministry programs, even if these programs are not producing health and reaching more people. The complexity creep grows.¹³⁴

¹³³ Putman, Harrington and Coleman, *DiscipleShift Five Steps*, 20.

¹³⁴ Morgan, *The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches*, 133-134.

Jesus often confronted the Pharisees and the religious leaders of the time of His ministry because they had become consumed more by the complexity of their laws and rituals than by living in relationship with God. For the attractional church, there is similar peril in placing more focus on program-building rather than relational discipleship. ABC must rise above maintaining the complexity of an over-programmed church and simplify its pathway toward discipleship. This over-complexity issue is potentially the greatest challenge facing ABC in regard to making any future changes to the DNA of the church.

Strategy and vision are driven by the desire to fulfill the mission of an organization, and within churches these principles ring especially true. ABC's success in embracing a new missional vision and strategy is directly correlated to the church's leadership commitment and understanding to fulfill the mission of the church. Currently, ABC's mission statement is "Helping people embrace the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ." For future growth and impact to occur at ABC, a strong commitment to this mission is imperative. It is essential both for the leadership of the church and the congregation to fully embrace the mission of the church.

The second greatest barrier to ABC's emergence as a missional church is understanding the scope of its mission. For example, if the scope of ABC's mission is only to reach people within the walls of the church in order to "embrace the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ," ABC is unlikely to experience exponential growth.

ABC must seek to break the norm of "Traditional evangelical churches tend to have a dim or, at best, ambivalent view of the world outside the church. They engage the world hesitantly. The church is a place for evangelistic missions. The faithful sally forth only as long as necessary before hustling back to the relative safety of the proverbial holy huddle of the church."

However, if the scope of the mission is expanded to help all people “embrace the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ,” then kingdom growth moves at an increased rate. This type of scope could redefine ABC as a missional church and further change the context for ministry in the community. “Oikos the extended household on a common mission is the bedrock of most societies and was the structural center of the New Testament church. Don’t forget it was a church that was heavily persecuted, yet it was able not only survive but to grow by 40 percent for over thirty decades.”¹³⁵

The greatest challenge facing all churches is existing only in a state of mediocrity rather than excellence. Jesus even warned churches not to arrive at this place, stating, “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.’”¹³⁶ To combat that this type of complacency, churches must act with a sense of urgency to reach communities. Although ABC is predominantly a healthy church, it is not exempt from falling victim to this type of mentality; each church must act in a manner of Gospel urgency.

¹³⁵ Harrington, *Discipleship That Fits*, 125.

¹³⁶ Rev. 14-16.

Future Study

The missional movement is emerging in all regions of the globe and is slowly being identified as a movement that can reshape the future of the church. Although it could be stated that the missional church has existed since its establishment in the first century, its contemporary presence has been reshaped and modeled to fit the current cultural context. What makes the study and analysis of the missional movement fascinating is that the movement still exists very much in a raw form. In all, there is much to observe from the missional church especially as it continues to increase its presence in the West. For the writer, two main areas of future study have emerged in the research phase of this project.

The first area is directly related to the thesis topic, concerning how existing churches who previously operated under an attractional model can move to a missional one. How many churches will be successful in implanting this type of DNA change? What steps must be taken to successfully migrate to this model? As stated earlier, most academics and experts in the field of the missional church are concerned with implementing the model within a new church startup. It is also interesting to note that few denominational efforts have been made to work with individual churches to achieve these types of crucial changes. One exception to that statement would be the Pillar Network, which as stated on its website is “is a community of like-minded SBC churches that are doctrinally aligned, missionally driven, & committed to church planting & revitalization, together.”¹³⁷ The writing of this thesis relied heavily on the Pillar Network as a source to connect with current church leaders and missional thinkers

¹³⁷ "Our Identity," Pillar Network, Accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.thepillarnetwork.com/>.

particularly related to the SBC. The work of the Pillar Network and other groups like it will be crucial to the development and further assessment of the future of the missional church.

The second area of potential future study is related to missional leadership models. During the interviews with the missional church leaders, almost all reported a major shift in the leadership structure as a step toward becoming more missional. Although multiple church leaders reported this change in structure, few books or resources were found discussing this move. Leadership plays an integral part in leading healthy churches toward disciple-making. Does moving to an elder-led church or shared pastoral leadership structure create an environment more conducive to missional engagement? This subject may be a crucial step for many churches wishing to change from an attractional model, especially in a time when churches are rising and falling on pastoral leadership. This study has the potential to drastically change many denominational norms associated with the leadership structure.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis project was to establish a greater depth of understanding concerning the missional church under the notion that the principles discovered could be utilized in the ministry context of the researcher. What was accomplished, however, was something far greater than simply a new strategy for implementation: a new paradigm and understanding of the church for the writer. Opportunities were afforded for the writer to engage with other missional church leaders and hear individual stories and journeys about the process of moving the church to reach new places and people. What the writer discovered was a migration of church leaders and thinkers away from previous inadequate ways of thinking, revealing a new paradigm with which to begin the process of renovating the church center more on its creator than the created.

In today's age, churches are being defined more by what they offer or who the pastor is than by an incarnational expression of Jesus. At the core of the Western church culture, there is an identity issue that has stemmed from a consumeristic mentality, creating a snowball effect in which churches feel obligated to continually generate bigger and better ministries, events, buildings, and services. This effect leaves the church and its leadership in a continual cycle of competition with itself and other churches to become the best at enticing people into the church. This approach asks the question of whether Jesus truly intended the church to behave in such a way?

From the start, Jesus's ministry was characterized by a missional approach to reaching people. The Gospel of John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."¹³⁸ It was Jesus who in fact stepped out of glory to enter the realm of humanity, that in doing so all the world could experience the fullness of life. If this is the exemplary model the church is to follow, then major transitions must take place for the future church to thrive.

One aspect that has stuck with the writer since the beginning of this project is the ideology of the church put forth by Alan Hirsch, who states that the "lack of growth, development, and adaptation is a call for repentance and change. We can be sure that more of the same will not deliver fundamentally different results. It is time to reappraise the way we think about ourselves as ecclesia and how we go about fulfilling our calling. This needed audit must include how we think about and practice ministry and leadership."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ John 1:14.

¹³⁹ Hirsch, Catchim and Breen, *The Permanent Revolution*, 207.

It is easy to look at the dysfunction of the church and blame on the system, approach, or even the culture that demands it, but ultimately the church is dependent upon leadership. To call for the church to change is to call the leadership to reimagine the roles of pastor and ministry leader. The identity of the leader can no longer be defined by the attractional mentality that brings with it an ego of building a church that is larger and greater. The movement of the church must be centralized on the idea that “He is also head of the body, the church.”¹⁴⁰ Jesus should define the movement, ministry, and mission of the church in every aspect of its outward expression. The essence of the church was created to be a vehicle with which to move people closer into God’s presence and further along in fulfilling the Great Commission.

In all the challenges that the future of ABC and the greater church face, there is an undeniable hope to which the writer clings, one that is defined by the narrative that Jesus has invited all humanity to take part in, i.e., that of the redemption of the church:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”¹⁴¹

Until the day in which Christ returns to claim His church, there is incredible prophetic promise spoken over God’s people, in that the Bride will be made bright and pure. The church, though seemingly misguided at times, still rests under the sovereignty and leadership of Christ and His power. Because of this enduring truth and promise, this writer believes that greater days lie ahead for the church, and hope is far from vanquished.

¹⁴⁰ Colossians 1:18a.

¹⁴¹ Revelation 19:6-9.

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 10, 2018

Samuel Forest Thigpen
IRB Approval 3178.041018: Attractional to Missional: A Strategic Transition Plan for Anastasia Baptist Church

Dear Samuel Forest Thigpen,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B

Interview Questions

Attractional to Missional: A Strategic Transition Plan for Anastasia Baptist Church.”

Samuel F. Thigpen
Liberty University

Rawlings School of Divinity

1. What church do you currently serve at and what is your position?
2. Can you briefly describe the history of the church?
3. What model of discipleship does your church currently adhere too?
4. Previously did your church follow any other model of discipleship? At what time did you transition to a different model?
5. Can do you describe the differences between a missional model of discipleship and attractional one?
6. What steps did the church leadership take to transition your church to the new model of discipleship? What is the period in which steps were taken to transition to the new model of discipleship?
7. What challenges did the church and leadership face with the with this transition?
8. What benefits and or growth did the church experience as a direct result of the transition?
9. What books, leaders, and resources were utilized to aid in the transition?
10. What if any recommendations would you give a church look to move from an attractional model of discipleship to a missional model of discipleship?