A Biblical System for Growth in Traditional Churches

Through Evangelism and Discipleship

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By

Marcus D. Floyd

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Mentor: Dr. Garry D. Graves
Assistant Professor

Reader: Dr. David A. Wheeler
Professor of Evangelism
THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Marcus D. Floyd

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Mentor: Dr. Garry D. Graves

The Title: A Biblical System for Growth in Traditional Churches Through Evangelism and Discipleship

The prominence of self-centered philosophies in today’s culture has infiltrated the minds of contemporary believers and has produced a difficult context for urban traditional churches to function in because many parishioners are gravitating away from churches that faithfully proclaim the selfless nature of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The thesis project will contend that the erosion of truth can be opposed through a systematic process that underscores biblical concepts, which have been proven to be effective. Additionally, the thesis will demonstrate the importance of churches being spiritually healthy to gain and retain members by interacting with the scriptural mandate concerning evangelism and discipleship. Furthermore, the thesis will utilize survey data from selected pastors who have been successful in an attempt to grow churches. The findings from the thesis project will be presented in a style that will allow for application in small urban churches within the United States.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary church has experienced a shift from the paradigm of the original church. Gary McIntosh wrote, “Simply stated, while churches are becoming more missional in their thinking, they are becoming less evangelistic in their practice; that is, they are less involved in helping new people dine with Jesus.”¹ This condition did not happen overnight, but it has been consistent, and it threatens the survival of countless ministries. If this trend is to be reversed, churches are going to have to return to the new testament model of evangelism and disciple making. The members of these churches must be willing to embrace the shift back to the roots established by the apostles because a lack of flexibility will ensure the continuation of a trend that has crippled many prominent urban ministries in the United States.

The glaring problem with being obstinate versus flexible concerning change is the reality that change is necessary, and if it is not embraced the consequences are often a lingering and painful demise. Thom Rainer wrote, “The slow erosion is the worst type of decline for churches, because the members have no sense of urgency to change.”² In order for a sense of urgency to be produced the parishioners must be confronted by the prospect of a bleak future, and if they are

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Change cannot be implemented just for the sake of change. It must be done with great prayer, research, and diligence. Mark Dever wrote, “Members need to know that spiritual maturity is not simply about their quiet times, but about their love for other believers, and their concrete expressions of that love.”3 The best way for believers to express love is to aid the church in the process of creating an environment that is conducive to attracting and retaining members so that they can be developed into true disciples of Jesus Christ. This thesis project will explore ways to produce a strategic plan that can be implemented in many ministry contexts by examining multiple biblical texts and the thoughts of experts.

**Statement of the Problem**

Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church’s ministry methods are very traditional. The church was established in 1894, and the parishioners have worshiped the same way for much of that time. Rainer wrote, “The most pervasive and common ribbon of our autopsies was that deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero.”4 The church is guilty of that mentality, because the previous pastor served in that capacity for forty-five years. During those years, the church rose to prominence within the local community to the point of having to build a new sanctuary in 1952 to sustain the explosive growth during that period. Members who served under his leadership can often be heard reminiscing about that period within the history of the church, referred to as golden years.

The situation is not unique because this plays out across the landscape of Christianity in churches all over the world. The problem with proclaiming the past as the standard of how the

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church should function is the certainty that such a paradigm ignores all the signs, which leads to changing methods while attempting to remain relevant. God’s principles will never change, but Christians must be willing to change the context for preaching and teaching to facilitate the finest opportunity for the church to remain viable. This project will examine the foremost practices to meet that objective.

**Statement of Limitations**

Although the aim of this project is to produce a model for traditional churches to utilize as they attempt to adhere to the biblical mandate for evangelism and discipleship, it will have some limitations. This thesis project will contain the mission, vision, and history of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church, but the project will not disclose all the policies that create the obscured mechanics of the ministry. The thesis project will examine the thoughts of those who are appraised as experts on church growth, but the project will not endorse one philosophy over another because there will likely not be one solution that will repair everyone’s problems.

This project will also be limited in region by the responses of pastors who fill out the surveys. There will be some responses, but complete participation is not expected. Due to the level of transparency required to answer the questions, the process of mining the responses for valuable information will be vital concerning the fortification of the hypothesis this project will produce. Although that potential obstacle is seen as a hindrance, it will not be substantial enough to prevent this project from gleaning the necessary research from the studies.

Many of the findings produced by this project have not been proven so they will not be presented to be irrefutable. The results from this thesis project will add to the already inflated field of church growth strategies but will not be asserted as the final authority. The project will also use a small city setting as its backdrop so churches stationed in larger cities may not find the
project as useful as those who are attempting to grow their ministry in a setting that is like Bartow, Florida. It will be focused on constructing solutions for problems that are unique to a setting with restricted resources as well as a limited number of prospects from which to draw.

Finally, due to the ecclesiastical structure of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church, the results will be more applicable for churches that adhere to a similar paradigm for ministry. The focus on traditional churches does not exclude churches that do not fall within the purview of the style of the ministry. Some principles will be gleaned from the Bible and experts within the field of church growth, which can be applied to any ministry setting.

**Theoretical Basis**

Many resources are at the disposal of churches and ministries today such as the internet which can assist in the process of making disciples. Elmer Townes wrote, “Now I’m writing about online church because I think it will be the next big thing in the church world. Just as the computer is changing the way America lives and does business, so the computer will change the way churches connect ministries to members and connect members to one another.” ⁵ The prerequisite of church growth is spiritual health. Before health can be established, priorities based upon the word of God must be implemented. Those priorities must be clearly and consistently communicated to the parishioners who all have a vested interest in the ministry remaining viable. If churches rein in the power of technology, they will give themselves a greater opportunity to be effective within the process of making disciples. This thesis project will couple contemporary practices with timeless biblical principles and attempt to produce a strategic plan that will position Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church to grow.

If the vision of a church is clearly defined and consistently shared, a better chance of growth is likely to occur. Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “The major reason so many churches are plateaued or in decline is that they’ve either lost their vision or adopted the wrong vision.” The vision for churches must be based upon the word of God. Thom Rainer wrote, “Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.” A church must allow the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:16-20) to its guide so that making disciples will be a continual practice.

Many verses in the Bible indicate the importance of church growth, but churches often allow traditional practices to obscure the clear precedence established by the Bible. Alan Hirsch wrote, “I have taken this approach because we need to constantly remind ourselves at this point in history that if we fall in love with our system, whatever that is, we lose the capacity to change it.” God’s principles will never be altered, but the systems that are utilized to administer them must constantly be assessed and changed if necessary so that churches can remain relevant.

Pastors must be careful when they attempt to implement change because if it is done prematurely the results can lead to many problems. Mark Dever wrote, “The best way to lose your place of influence as a pastor is to be in a hurry, forcing radical (even if biblical) change before people are ready to follow you and own it.” The greatest example from the concept of church growth can be found in the second chapter of Acts.

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God empowered the apostles with the Holy Spirit and allowed them to speak the languages of the people who were gathered from all over the world without needing translation. This provides a clear picture of the importance of a relevant ministry because, if the apostles were not empowered to speak multiple languages at the same time, the addition of three thousand souls to the church would not have been possible.

In Acts 4:32-37, the believers sacrificed greatly to ensure that needs were met. In that context, there was no room for selfishness because all had to be willing to depart with precious items and trust God and the apostles to administer the items given after selling goods. God does not normally command church members to sell all their items and bring the proceeds to the church, but He does place a premium on sacrificing for the benefit of others. Parishioners are to give financially to the church, so the church has the funds that doing ministry requires. Parishioners must also give a great amount of time to help others grow to spiritual maturity. Members should in addition provide for some of the physical needs that their fellow parishioners have.

When a church operates within an environment where love is evident, the people will be more likely to experience explosive growth in God’s timing. God will bless members of the Body of Christ who are committed to caring for each other and the unchurched the way Christ loves them. God wants to send new believers to a church where they are more likely to be developed into disciples of Jesus Christ.

**Statement of Methodology**

The thesis project will follow a detailed pattern that will ensure that the research is presented in a systematic manner. The first chapter of the thesis project will serve as the introduction and will highlight what the thesis project will achieve. Since the objective of the
project is to produce a plan for church growth, chapter two will establish the meaning of healthy biblical and strategic church growth by utilizing the Bible and scholarly resources. The reasons that many churches are not incorporating the proven principles of church growth will also be examined in chapter two. In this chapter, the thesis project will scrutinize the present-day condition of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church (BCPBC) in Bartow, Florida. The evaluation will be done by examining the present state of the church and employing the works of experts in the field of church growth. The assessment will cover the vision, mission, and history of this historic church, which was established in 1894.

In chapter two, this project will also introduce readers to the process of evangelizing and discipleship. A direct correlation will be demonstrated between healthy church growth, effective evangelism, and discipleship programs. Thom Rainer wrote, “Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.”10 This chapter will make the necessity of those factors clear by citing the scholarly sources.

In chapter three, the results of surveys will be shared and examined. The pastor of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church, Marcus D. Floyd, serves as the President of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Church School Convention. In that capacity, he oversees the Sunday School ministries for the thirty-nine churches that are members of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. The churches are mainly located on the east coast of Florida, but some of them are in central Florida and as far east as Tampa, Florida. An online survey will be created by using wufoo.com, and pastors will be asked to fill it out. The survey

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10 Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased, 339.
can be completed anywhere in the world if they have internet access. There will be a mass email sent out to all the pastors, and they will be advised that their answers will be anonymous.

The data will be secured on the website by utilizing a strong password. Once the password is created it will not be shared with anyone except the administrator of the survey. The surveys will take approximately twenty-five minutes to complete, and questions will be theme related. All the pastors serve in ministry frameworks that have the same doctrinal stances and ecclesiastical structures as Burkett Chapple Primitive Church so the results will add value to the process of providing a strategic plan for BCPBC. See Appendix A for the survey questions.

In the fourth chapter, the changes that are needed to remedy the findings from the evaluation of BCPBC will be unveiled. This chapter will serve as a strategic plan for healthy church growth for BCPBC. Although the ministry context for BCPBC is unique, there are some principles that will be within the plan which can be implemented in any ministry setting. This will serve as the conclusion of the thesis project. This chapter will summarize the findings from the thesis project while highlighting the major findings and provide a decisive declaration concerning the discipline of healthy church growth.

Review of Literature

A diverse group of resources will be deployed to complete the thesis project. Most of the resources will be scholarly books, which will add credibility to the results of the project. Journal articles will also serve as a source of confirmation and aid in the process of validating this project. The most important source will be the Bible because it is the foundation for all the principles that this project will cover. The project will also use Bible dictionaries and commentaries to provide additional insight into the verses that will be used.
The book *Re: Vision: The Key to Transforming your Church* highlights the importance of sustained leadership and a clear and well communicated vision. Authors Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold provide readers with many tools for ministries that have lost sight of their identity through the process of leadership turnover. The tools gleaned from the book will ensure that churches are able to diagnose where their church is and formulate a plan to help their church to become viable again.

In the book, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*, Alan Hirsch included a paradigm used by the early church to show the importance of being intentionally missional. He teaches that the principles utilized during biblical times are just as relevant today. If applied appropriately and consistently, the principles will produce the goal of church growth.

Mark Dever in *The Deliberate Church* provides a church model which underscores the importance of preaching and teaching the Gospel as a prerequisite for church growth. The authors Mark Dever and Paul Alexander offer a clear and concise plan that is confirmed by the biblical precedence for the good news that has been established for centuries.

Thom Rainer in *The Autopsy of a Deceased Church* uses his wealth of experience in the realm of studying dying churches to produce a guide for his readers which includes twelve factors those troubled ministries had in common. The book will aid this project in an attempt to discover ways to identify the factors that are responsible for the seasons of decline for BCPBC and help with the implementation of policies, which will produce healthy change.

In *Growing God’s Church: How People Are Actually Coming To Faith Today*, Gary McIntosh proves that the methods utilized by most churches for outreach twenty or thirty years ago are not as effective today. McIntosh garnered his findings through a tested methodical
process that adds validity to his findings. This resource will add credibility to the strategic plan for church growth, which will be presented within the thesis project.

John MacArthur’s book *Pastor’s Library on Pastoral Ministry* is a great resource for pastors to gain a clear understanding how the role of pastors is directly connected to the vitality of their churches. This resource will help the thesis project establish the vital role that a pastor has within the process of growing a healthy church.

Brian A. DeVries wrote “*Spiritual Gifts for Biblical Church Growth*” and highlighted the critical role that spiritual gifts play within the process of growing a church. The article proclaims that the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite if a church is to experience church growth that is lasting. The article will aid the project in an attempt to prove the church’s responsibility to help its parishioners find out how God has equipped and helped them to function within the confines of gifts.

Marion Stanton Webb wrote a journal article entitled “*Diversified Marketing Media and Service Offerings Prove Successful for Nondenominational Churches*” and distinguished the different philosophies that nondenominational churches have utilized concerning the usage of social media to market ministries. The article proves that traditional Protestant churches have fallen behind mega churches in this area. The article will help show the importance of calculated marketing strategies so that prospects can see the value of what is being presented within a given church setting.

The *Discipline of The National Primitive Church* is the operations manual for all African American primitive churches in the United States. It establishes the doctrinal stances and the ecclesiastical structure for the denomination. The principles in the book will allow the project to
establish a strategic plan that is contemporary yet remains in compliance with the policies of the denomination which BCPBC is aligned.

*Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities* is the first book in a series that challenges the notion that Sunday School is no longer an effective form of discipleship. With this book, Steve Parr helps his readers understand the importance of utilizing the Great Commission as the foundation of Sunday School. He also compels his readers to assess their Sunday School ministry and implement the necessary changes that will ensure the presence of the biblical mandate. The book will support the project’s assertion that traditional practices can be retained if deployed in a scriptural manner.

*The Purpose Driven Church* accentuates the importance of a church knowing what the purpose is and building programs around it. Rick Warren utilizes his church as an example of the intentional effort it takes to become a church that is driven by purpose. Rick Warren teaches that when a church is motivated by their purpose, it will become a healthy ministry. This book will aid this thesis project in establishing the importance of an unclouded vision and mission that is injected into the minds and hearts of the parishioners of BCPBC.

*The Irresistible Community* paints a clear picture of the importance of creating an environment where believers are free to share their flaws with others and are empowered to improve as disciples. The book will help as the amount of work required to make disciples of Jesus Christ is highlighted in the project.

**Scriptural Basis**

Many scriptural references were considered, which would be ideal examples to be included in the thesis project. Due to the parameters of the venture, only the most important ones will be included. The selected Scriptures are vital to the effectiveness of the thesis project.
Deuteronomy 7:12-15

The verses presented to the children of Israel in this text contain conditional promises that were assured to come to pass if Israel remained obedient to God. Some believers do not realize that the biblical principle is just as relevant today as when presented to them thousands of years ago. These verses will provide the thesis project with a source to reference while teaching about the blessings that are automatically realized because of obedience to God.

Proverbs 9:10-11

This text teaches the importance of having a healthy and reverential fear of God. The text further teaches that fearing God will position believers to receive wisdom from God, and when that wisdom is applied, their lives will be blessed.

Matthew 1:18-21

This text displays the proper response to the call of Jesus. Many people are aware of the call to follow Him but are not willing to leave the attachments of the world. This passage will help the thesis project prove that discipleship requires great sacrifice.

Matthew 22:35-40

In this text, Jesus shows the high standard concerning how much a believer should love God. Jesus is not referring to shallow love that is inconsistent. He is referring to love that is strong enough to compel believers to follow Christ even when times are difficult. This text will help the project in the process of proving that believers must love God and others intentionally even when circumstances are not ideal.

Matthew 28:18-20
Matthew 28:18-20 serves as the foundation Scripture for healthy church growth. In that text, Jesus commissions His disciples to make new disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe the things He taught them. The Great Commission is still relevant and active today, no matter the context in which churches function. This Scripture will be utilized by the project to show the importance of no longer allowing this command to be omitted from the daily operations of the church.

Mark 4:35-41

The disciples in this text found themselves within a storm, but Jesus was in the storm also as a struggle for survival ensued. The interesting aspect of this occurrence was that Jesus told His disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side of the lake. The disciples were obedient to Him, and yet the storm still came. Jesus knew that the storm was on the agenda for the trip, but He still went to sleep and did not wake up until His disciples called upon Him. He then calmed the storm and preserved the lives of His disciples. This text will be used by the thesis project to teach that, even when believers are obedient to God, some storms are a part of His plan. The relationship with Jesus will always ensure that believers can call on Him to handle situations that only He can fix.

Mark 8:34-35

This text underscores the importance of consistent self-denial. The aim is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. This Scripture will help the thesis project impart to readers the importance of being selfless in pursuing spiritual health and growth for churches.

Jesus used this parable to communicate the importance of self-examination and accountability within the context of the church. He also informs of fellowshipping with people who are following Him, because if disciples follow the lead of those who are not, failure will follow shortly thereafter. This text will help communicate the severity of allowing the right people to lead the discipleship venture.

John 3:16

John 3:16 serves as a perpetual reminder of how much God loves the world. The verse also stresses the eschatological value of believing that Jesus died as the Savior of the world and rose three days later in absolute victory. John 3:16 will help the project proclaim the importance of having a healthy church that is spreading the good news and developing those who are converted into disciples of Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 teaches about the importance of being empowered by the Holy Spirit as a requirement for effectiveness. The Spirit of God is a prerequisite for being effective within the confines of God’s will. Luke also encourages readers to be decisive during the enterprise of witnessing. Jesus instructs His disciples to be witnesses in very crucial geographical areas. That same paradigm will be implanted within the strategic plan for BCPBC.

Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2 teaches the importance of refraining from functioning according to the mandates of worldly people. Paul highlighted that fact by encouraging believers to do the necessary work of mind transformation so that God’s will can be known. This Scripture will further add credibility to the strategic plan of the project by confirming the portion of the plan that will encourage parishioners of BCPBC to be vigilant concerning the things that can hinder
the process of the mind being transformed. The plan will compel people to be intentional concerning the procedure of being exposed to Christian-based resources.

Ephesians 6:10-20

In this text, Paul emphasizes the importance of waging successful spiritual warfare. This passage makes believers aware of the spiritual forces of darkness that hinder the process of disciple making. This principle will supplement the process of adding the necessity of training the parishioners of BCPBC in the art of spiritual warfare to the project.

Philippians 3:12

In this text, Paul emphatically declares the commitment to grow closer to Jesus Christ. Paul understood that because Jesus’ death made atonement for sins and provided access to God. Paul’s post conversion life was dedicated to utilizing that opportunity as often as possible, and believers should practice that option today. This text will aid the project as it teaches the importance of spending consistent time with God.

Colossians 1:28

Paul highlighted the importance of reaching those who are within the sphere of one’s influence in this text. Developing disciples was the aim of Paul’s ministry, and it serves as the primary reason he labored so tirelessly. This text will allow the project to emphasize the importance of putting forth the necessary effort to develop followers of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 implores believers to give thanks no matter what happens. The text also encourages Christians to pray consistently. This text will be used to reference the importance of prayer.
Hebrews 10:25

Hebrews 10:25 teaches about the importance of attending church without wavering. The Scripture also underscores the importance of building relationships with other believers. The combination of attending church and building lasting relationships will create an environment that is conducive for making disciples. This text will assist the project in the process of certifying the important role of faithfulness concerning spiritual growth.
Chapter 2

HEALTHY BIBLICAL AND STRATEGIC GROWTH

Introduction

This thesis project was conceived due to the realization of struggles some traditional churches have endured as a result of adhering to methods that are viewed by some as obsolete. After experiencing this firsthand for sixteen years as a minister the writer knows that a comprehensive discipleship program is a prerequisite for church growth. This chapter will establish the meaning of healthy biblical and strategic church growth by utilizing the Bible and scholarly resources. The model which a church is faithful to does not matter because inactivity by parishioners will render their efforts to grow ineffective. Alan Hirsch wrote, “In traditional and contemporary church-growth models, the vast majority of church members are passive in the equation.”\textsuperscript{11} Churches that have a desire to grow, must commit to a concerted effort to calibrate their parishioners regarding the true mission of the church. Jon Van Dine wrote, “Growth without a shared vision is rare.”\textsuperscript{12} This chapter will also define different types of church growth.

\textsuperscript{11} Alan Hirsch, \textit{The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements} (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 1087.

The Meaning of Church Growth

Many terms may help to define church growth, but the best way to explain it is by defining revitalization. Michael Ross wrote, “Though difficult to define in a comprehensive manner, the idea of revitalization of the church (or local congregation) carries with it the hope of renewed vigor; redirected purpose; restoration of healthy growth, qualitatively and quantitatively; reformed beliefs and practices; and the refreshment of the Holy Spirit over the entire life of the church.”\(^\text{13}\) The aim of any church should be to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:18-20 serves as the foundational Scripture for spiritual growth. In that text, Jesus commissions His disciples to make new disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe the things He taught them. The Great Commission is still relevant and active today, no matter the context in which churches function. Thom Rainer wrote, “Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the centerpiece of their vision, while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.”\(^\text{14}\) Focusing on the Great Commission will increase the probability of parishioners growing spiritually, which will then make them more effective as they attempt to share the Christ with others.

Church growth then is produced through a sound discipleship program which equips those who participate to make a spiritual impact in the lives of those within their spheres of influence. Rod Dempsey wrote, “A disciple is a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines


in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission." If parishioners are not committed during the process of growing spiritually, their church community will not experience numerical growth that is healthy. Spiritual growth is often intangible, but its impact is normally seen through an increase of membership within local churches.

**The Necessity of Spiritual Growth**

In Mark, 8:34-35 Jesus proclaimed the importance of self-denial as a requirement for being one of His followers. Spiritual formation serves as a catalyst for producing growth, which will empower believers to follow Jesus more consistently. Gary Newton wrote, “God plays the role of a seasoned farmer, carefully preparing the soil and maintaining the garden with the vision to see each seed grow into maturity.” The church has the responsibility to produce an environment with sound preaching and teaching laced with love so parishioners will be in a position to receive the spiritual food that God will use to develop them. This writer has identified eight characteristics of spiritual growth as conveyed in the table below:

**Figure 2.1. Characteristics of Spiritual Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Spiritual Growth</th>
<th>Scriptural References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God is ultimately responsible for all spiritual growth.</td>
<td>Isaiah 61:11; 1 Corinthians 3:7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Effort, diligence, and discipline are necessary for growth.</td>
<td>2 Peter 1:1-11; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spiritual growth potential may not be easy to see at first.</td>
<td>1 Samuel 16:7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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17 Ibid., 12.
4. Spiritual growth depends on an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.  
   John 15:1-17

5. Growth is primarily an inside-out process.  
   Deuteronomy 6:4-6

6. Spiritual growth relates to every aspect of our lives.  
   Luke 2:52; Zechariah 7:9-10

7. Growth happens most naturally within a close social context.  
   Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Acts 2:42-47

8. Significant growth occurs within the context of frustration, suffering, or challenge.  
   2 Thessalonians 1:3; Romans 8:18-27

Accountability should accompany the attempt of the church to implement an effective discipleship ministry. Christians are ultimately accountable to God and the local church. The *Oxford English Dictionary* characterizes the word “accountable” as being answerable for “responsibilities and conduct.” Accountability fosters connections that will encourage believers to strive harder in their endeavor to become mature Christians. Hebrews 10:25 teaches about the importance of attending church without wavering. The Bible also underscores the importance of building relationships with other believers. The combination of attending church and building lasting relationships will create an environment that is conducive for making disciples.

**The Challenges of Spiritual Growth**

Many churches are not acquainted with the characteristics of spiritual growth, and as a result they are not able to produce a disciple making system that is comprehensive enough to make their efforts effective. Gary McIntosh wrote, “Without a doubt, the first thing that must

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happen before a church can begin the process of revitalization is an admission that there is a problem.”

Methods that have been practiced for many years are often utilized even when they have been proven to be obsolete because leaders are afraid to embrace change. Rainer wrote, “The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero.”

Pastors and church leaders must be willing to shift their disciple making paradigm skillfully to avoid the trap of adhering to the methods of the past without leaving room for innovation.

The importance of assimilation is often overlooked, and this oversight will eventually lower the probability that new members will be retained. Gary McIntosh wrote, “Our focus must be on making disciples, which includes a balanced emphasis on evangelism, assimilation, and spiritual formation.”

If the areas covered by McIntosh are not afforded the same level of stress the efforts of churches to cultivate followers of Jesus Christ will be unproductive. The unchurched are seeking to be part of a community, but often the desire can lead them to communities that do not have their best interest at heart.

Pastors and leaders should attempt to create a community that is equipped to love them through their struggle to become more like Christ, but in many cases, unbelievers encounter the manifestation of the same attitudes they were attempting to flee when they gave their lives to Christ. Bill Donahue made the importance of community clear throughout his book The

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21 McIntosh, *Growing God's Church*, 74.
Irresistible Community: “There is no life change without community.” The reason most churches are not creating such communities can be contributed to a lack of emphasis.

**Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church**

Burkett Chapple Primitive Church was founded over one hundred and twenty-one years ago by Sam Burkett and Isaac Chapple. According to the Burkett Chapple’s official website, Sam Burkett was given a vision from God to build a church where family members and others who visited could worship God. Burkett knew that in order for a church to be erected there had to first be land to build it on. Therefore, he donated the land on the corner of Third Avenue and Parker Street in Bartow, Florida for the church to be built. Since he needed help to construct the building, he communicated with Chapple and found that he agreed with the vision that God had given him. The men then came together with plans to build the church. Although they were not contractors, they had a reverence and love for God. They used their God-given skills and talents, bought and hauled lumber, and secured any other needed materials to build the church. The original BCPBC was a wooden church building built by Burkett and Chapple in 1894. The church was organized by B.J. Jones and Trustees of the church: Sam Burkett, Nelson Johnson, and, K. Swindell. Deacons of the church included I.C. Chapple, L. Hill, K. Swindell. J.G. Washington served as the initial pastor. The pastors and parishioners who served in the setting of this church from the inception in 1894 were responsible to listen to God and serve within the confines of His will. The endurance of BCPBC indicates they have remained true to the task.


BCPBC is affiliated with the National Primitive Baptist Convention, Inc. The average attendance or BCPBC is one hundred and fifty on Sunday and forty on Wednesday nights for Bible study and prayer meeting. Burkett Chapple is steeped in tradition due to the length of time it has been a viable ministry. The nature of the current context of ministry the church requires an intentional change if the ministry is to remain sustainable. The church has experienced an increase in membership since Pastor Marcus Floyd became the senior pastor in 2014 due to the implementation of ministries and methods that created a growth focused environment as the figure below shows.

**Figure 2.2. Church Growth for Burkett Chapple**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pastoral Staff**

The pastoral staff of a church is an important part of the success. K. Wayne Dar wrote, “Though senior ministers bear the ultimate responsibility and authority for staffing, they must recognize that successful churches are no longer one-person shows. Even the most devoted,
talented, and able leaders must depend on the ‘supporting cast’s’ ability to work together.”

If this area is not addressed properly, a church will be limited. Currently, the writer if the thesis project serves as the Senior Pastor of BCPBC and has served in that capacity since 2014. Prior to the current role, he served as interim pastor, assistant pastor, and youth pastor.

BCPBC dealt with the ripple effects of some of the decisions the preceding pastor made. For instance, the church had to pay over five thousand dollars per month on a mortgage that the members of the church were not aware of until a few months prior to the dismissal of the previous pastor. The church contended with an intense litigation battle with the prior pastor due to a claim of wrongful dismissal and a wage dispute. Michael R. Milco wrote, “George Barna reported in 1992 that over the previous ten years, clergy had developed a tarnished image.”

Due to those revelations, BCPBC became very fragile when the writer of the thesis project was promoted to the pastorate.

While BCPBC was encumbered with the residue of the previous administration, doing ministry was difficult. Marcus Floyd had to work to restore credibility to the pastorate. Church members expect pastors to visit the flock. The discipline of the Primitive Baptist Church declares, “Let his visit include both poor and well-to-do. At the bedside of the sick, he should be found.”

Once the writer of the thesis project became the senior pastor, he worked tirelessly to restore the confidence of the parishioners concerning the senior pastor’s role being fulfilled correctly. The writer of the thesis project also works full-time as a sales agent for GEICO, so

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fulfilling this role requires great sacrifice at times. God always supplies the necessary grace to fulfill those duties.

The writer of the thesis project and his wife of almost eighteen years have a seven-year-old daughter, which makes balance a necessity. The Bible declares, “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3:5 NKJV). John MacArthur in addition wrote, “No thinking person can deny that the ministry is potentially hazardous to a pastor’s marriage and family. But should it be that way? Better yet, must it be that way? Most importantly, does God intend for it to be this way? The toil of the ministry can put a pastor’s family through strain, but a pastor’s family must be the first ministry. Family must be a priority if a pastor is going to be biblically fit to serve as the Senior Pastor. Pastors cannot afford to help others grow spiritually, fulfill their purpose, and allow their family to be neglected. Pastors are tasked with the responsibility to be good stewards over their families and the church they serve. The members of BCPBC understand the importance of balance, and they support the efforts of the writer of this thesis project.

BCPBC does not have any additional pastors on the staff, but as the church continues to grow others will be sought to fulfill specific pastoral roles. Gary McIntosh wrote, “While vision usually explodes from the minds of single individuals, there always seems to be a team involved to bring the vision to reality. Moses needed a team to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land, Jesus trained a team of disciples to take the Gospel to the nations, and Paul traveled with a team to plant churches.”

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members. The pastor also serves as the chief administrator tasked with the duty of making major administrative decisions. Lay leaders have been trained to fulfill the roles that are usually filled by pastors in the interim.

Currently, the youth are being led by lay leaders, and they do a great job planning and producing events that are attractive to the youth of BCPBC as well as the community. The youth director is tasked with the responsibility of formulating a plan for the youth department and working with the youth supervisors to implement it and labor toward bring the plan to fruition.

**Elders and Deacons**

In the Primitive Baptist Church, Elders are ordained clergy, and currently Pastor Floyd is the only member of the ministerial staff with those credentials. BCPBC has a strong deacon board which is led by chairman Cephas Floyd. He has been instrumental in leading the church during transition in 2013 and 2014. Several deacons have to be ordained again because the church has been re-affiliated with the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. They were initially ordained during a ceremony at the church because Burkett Chapple was an independent Primitive Baptist Church at times. The ecclesiastical structure of the National Primitive Convention requires that all ministers and deacons be examined for ordination by the presbytery of the regional association where the church is affiliated.

Deacons are the second officers of the church, and they are responsible for maintaining the unity among the church members, seeing to the physical needs of the pastor, reporting the welfare of the members to the pastor, and to serve tables. The deacons have done a superb job of maintaining the unity among the church members, but room exists for improvement in the

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areas of seeing to the physical needs of the pastor, reporting the welfare of the members to the pastor, and serving tables. If they become more effective in those areas, the pastor will be freed up to devote more time to studying, praying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God. Dave Browning wrote, “Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things. The key word when dealing with things is efficiency.” If the deacons adhere to those requirements, BCPBC will be empowered to operate with efficiency and effectiveness. Assistance by the deacons will reduce the burden on all parties involved, and the church will be following the Word of God, which will ensure success. The members will also be better served, and the act of servant leadership is the responsibility of servant leaders. BCPBC will then be viewed in the community as a caring and ministering church that is not only inwardly focused on finances and survival. The church will also be viewed as an outwardly focused ministry that has the best interests of members and the community as a priority.

Volunteer Staff

The volunteer staff consists of auxiliaries and leaders. BCPBC has a variety of auxiliaries that consist of the deacon’s board, deaconess board, Sunday school, ushers board, special events, and hospitality committee. The church also has a marriage ministry as well as men’s and women’s ministries. The pastor also implemented an outreach ministry which serves as the conduit to the community. The groups are led by presidents or chairpersons; those titles are interchangeable. Those ministries are like an engine that produces the programs of the church. The leaders as well as members of those groups are not compensated and participate on a

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30 Dave Browning, Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 211.
volunteer basis. The church is one hundred and twenty-six years old, and it has always functioned with the current model.

The leaders of those groups have been entrusted with the responsibility of helping and encouraging the members of the groups to give maximum effort. Work tends to be challenging when the leaders are not valid examples for those they are leading. The authors of *Church Transfusion* wrote, “The truth is, your church is only as good as its disciples. We have found that if you are not able to reproduce healthy disciples, you will not be able to reproduce healthy leaders or churches, and there will not be any apostolic movement.”\(^{31}\) The leaders of those groups should take the opportunity to lead seriously.

If godly character is displayed, a greater chance occurs so those who are being led will follow suit. Poor leadership can be an impediment in the disciple making process. People will often emulate the behavior that is deemed to be normal in specific environments. If apathy is produced by the leaders, the attitude will be reproduced by the followers. Perry Noble wrote, “When excuses are made about the way things are instead of embracing a willingness to roll up the sleeves and fix the problem.”\(^{32}\) Excuses and complaints are normal in some of the auxiliaries that cannot be accepted if the aim is to become a healthy church.

**The Mission**

For any church to be successful, members must first have focus. The mission provides a target for parishioners to work toward. Having a mission also helps the process of appraising the


progress made by members. John MacArthur wrote, “A church must have functional goals and objectives, or it will have no direction.” When Pastor Floyd was elected as the fifth pastor of the church, he had a good understanding of what needed to change very quickly because he sat under the previous pastor’s leadership for more than ten years. Through seminary training, he was blessed with the tools to determine what needed to be implemented first.

One of the first actions as Senior Pastor was to write and communicate the new mission statement. The mission statement declares, “The mission of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church is to boldly proclaim the Gospel to those in our sphere of influence so that each person we encounter will know the gift of God through Jesus Christ. We will be a light in our community, our county, our state, our country and to the ends of the world. Our aim is to influence multiple generations for Christ.” The mission statement was written by utilizing the great commission as a pattern.

Gospel Proclamation

The first portion of the mission statement covers bold proclamation of the Gospel. Pastor Floyd made it a priority to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a clear and concise manner, and as a result many conversions resulted. Members were encouraged and trained to share the Gospel with those within their intermediate families first and systematically work to reach out as far as their friends. Training was done extensively with slide shows, and in addition they were provided with tracts to share with the people within spheres of influence. The training helped the people to see the importance of the command that Jesus left His church. The training

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sessions created a sense of urgency among church members, and they are still excited about reaching others for Christ as found in Matthew 28:18-20. John MacArthur wrote, “Paul applied the principle of voluntary servitude to evangelism. He made himself a slave to all—including the roughest, most contemptible, loathsome pagan. Being free, he nevertheless joyfully entered into slavery for the Gospel’s sake.” The point that has been emphasized with the membership concerning evangelism is that everyone is not going to embrace their message, but it still has to be shared.

Christians do not have the power to change hearts, but God will work through the efforts to convert those who others thought were unreachable. Burkett Chapple P.B Church has already experienced many of those victories within families who are associated with the church, but those victories would have never been possible if they did not first have a desire and the training to be a vessel for the advancement of God’s kingdom upon the earth.

Light in the Community

The next section of the mission declares the importance of being a light within the community. BCPBC has made a priority of taking ownership of the surrounding community. For many years, parishioners have turned their heads when they saw needs that went unmet within the community. Doug Murren wrote, “There are a number of things that can stall outreach ministry fatigue, boredom, a change of priorities, church squabbles, to name a few. But perhaps the most significant is discouragement that accompanies the loss of purpose.” When a church does not have the right focus and priorities, members cannot be spiritually healthy. BCPBC has


been asked to turn their heads back and try to cause a change even when no one else appears to be concerned. The actions so far have created trends in Bartow, Florida that has impacted other ministries and churches to follow suit. A number of local churches have contacted BCPBC requesting insight about methods that the church has deployed.

The writer of the thesis project created an event called “Neighborhood Blitz” which allows BCPBC to go into targeted neighborhoods and provide basic items such as water, toiletries, and other items. The church also positions the evangelism team to share the Gospel with prospects in those neighborhoods. People from those neighborhoods have become productive members of the church. The church also sends the bus to those communities on Sunday to pick up those who do not have transportation. The desire of BCPBC includes adopting those neighborhoods and not just to do one outreach event and disappear. Members of BCPBC from those chosen neighborhoods are asked to assist in efforts to reach out to the community.

The church also ministers in convalescence homes as well as a community café which allows homeless people to work for food. Both of those platforms have been quite fruitful in the ministry. The convalescence home ministry allows the church to take the ministry to members who are confined in that facility due to rehabilitation or heading toward the transition to be with the Lord. The “Go Ministry” of BCPBC has been a light in the community, but the ministry has only come about because of God’s blessings. MacArthur wrote, “A dozen men under the power of the Holy Spirit are a more potent force than the teeming masses whose initial enthusiasm for
Jesus was apparently provoked by little more than sheer curiosity.”37 Evangelism is not for everyone, but if God blesses the efforts of a few, many can benefit.

A Light in the County and State

BCPBC has been a light in Polk County, Florida by being active within the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. The East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association consists of thirty-nine churches and is located in Fort Pierce, Florida, and the churches meet three times a year for fellowship. The Discipline of the Primitive Baptist Church describes an association as follows, “An Association is an advisory and Monitorial Council formed by a group of churches, uniting upon Gospel principles and practice, for the purpose of cultivating better acquaintances and disseminating useful knowledge, and thus advancing the Kingdom of Heaven upon the earth.”38 The first fellowship is called the mid-term session which is held in February.

BCPBC has a long history of being active within the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. The third Pastor of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church, S.P. Kilpatrick, served as the Moderator of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association for many years. The moderator serves as the overseer or leader of the association. The position is the highest elected position within the association. The older members of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church can still remember those days. The church is continuing the tradition today by being active during the sessions that are held. The Church School convention falls

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under the authority of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. The discipline of
the National Primitive Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. defines the Church School as follows,
“Each Association shall have a Church School Convention that shall meet annually throughout
the states, for the purpose of doing educational work for the said districts in which they are
located.” The writer of the thesis project serves as the current president of the East Florida
District Primitive Baptist Association Church School Convention. Due to the position held by the
writer of the thesis project, BCPBC is required to render services annually during this session.

The attendance at the Church School Convention normally exceeds fifteen hundred.
Rendering service in front of such a large group is indeed a great opportunity to let the light of
BCPBC shine in Fort Pierce, Florida during these yearly sessions. The writer of the thesis project
has also served as the Bible Expositor for the Church School Convention in the past. In that
capacity, he preached sermons on three consecutive days that adhered to the theme of the
sessions.

BCPBC has also rendered service during the association meeting in October, which is
held at the Temple. This is like the Church School Convention, but the theme and focus of the
session is determined by the Moderator. During the Church School Convention, the moderator
allows the president of the Church School Convention lead, but during the October session of the
East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association, the president of the Church School
Convention does not have any responsibilities.

BCPBC is also active in union 5 of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist
Association. The discipline of the National Primitive Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. describes
unions as follows, “Each Association will say when and where its Union meeting will be held.

39 Ibid., 139.
The chief objective of the Union meeting shall be to further the cause of the district association in Christian fellowship.\textsuperscript{40} Union number five always meets on the Saturday before the 5th Sunday in months that have 5th Sunday. Six churches maintain membership in union 5, and the churches rotate meeting between those locations. The last meeting was at St. Hawthorne Primitive Baptist Church in Mims, Florida. Mims is a three-hour drive from Bartow. Prior to the latest meeting, the writer of the thesis project was asked by the president of the union to serve as the facilitator. The facilitator has the responsibility to lead a seminar for the adults that is based upon the theme of the union. One of the members of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church was also appointed as the president of the union’s mass choir. Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church also had another member appointed to serve on the finance committee. The union fellowships provide Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church with another opportunity to impact the county and the state.

A Light in the Country and World

BCPBC has been blessed to be a light in the country and the world through technology. Worship service and midweek Bible studies are streamed live on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the church’s website weekly. The church’s website has an online church page that has been verified through the video hosting company reaching people throughout the United States as well as some other countries. BCPBC is just beginning to tap into a small portion of the online potential. Burkett Chapple also has a Facebook group titled Burkett Chapple Worldwide and currently has two hundred and five members. The group is an online community which allows

\textsuperscript{40} Samuels, \textit{Discipline of the Primitive}, 140.
the church to accept prayer requests and encourage members through inspirational posts as well as the weekly streaming of services.

Priorities

The priorities of BCPBC have been established according to the Bible and the established mission statement. Those priorities have helped the church to direct most of the available resources toward the areas of the ministry that have been determined to be most important. Stanley wrote, “People will not follow you if you are unclear in your instruction, and you cannot hold them accountable to muddled directives.” For this reason, the mission was established first. The mission is emphasized and communicated clearly so that BCPBC’s priorities cannot be ignored. Once the priorities were established, the leaders of Burkett Chapple began to be held accountable for the way the mission was handled. Accountability produces results when those who are held accountable have a desire to do well in the areas that have been emphasized.

Goals

The goal of BCPBC includes effectiveness within the areas that God has called parishioners to serve. The new members are required to complete Burkett Chapple 101, which is the official new member’s orientation class of BCPBC. During the class, pupils are introduced to goals of the church. MacArthur wrote, “When people join an organization, they subscribe to its goals and agree to live by its rules and standards.” When new members have a clear understanding of the recognized goals, incorporation which will improve the odds of retaining new people attending worship. Stephen Macchia wrote, “First, goals concentrate attention,

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energy, and resources to accomplish effective results. Second, goals make it possible to design strategy to move toward significant accomplishments. Third, goals tend to inspire even greater effort than they articulate.”

The church made great strides in an attempt to remain focused on common goals that will empower BCPBC to remain unified.

The vision statement of BCPBC has been instrumental in the process of setting goals. The parishioners of BCPBC have taken ownership of both the vision and mission statements, and they often repeat them both in concert. They have become a part of the church’s DNA. The vision statement also provides a paradigm for the membership to remain calibrated according to the values it proclaims. The vision statement which declares:

Our Church is founded on biblical principles. We serve in the spirit of quality as well as integrity. Our focus is on our community, our nation and our world. We are reaching the lost and broken for Christ and developing disciples with the highest level of admiration. Our atmosphere demands maximum involvement, and we also support and develop effective leaders who will continue to use their spiritual gifts to effectively function within their God-given callings. God is using Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church as a vessel to influence the world for Christ.

The membership realizes that God sends people to local churches to be developed into disciples of Jesus Christ. The vision statement helps the flock to remain focused on the truth.

The intention of the church is to help parishioners see the value in fulfilling their purpose. Elmer Towns wrote, “People have different goals, attitudes, and reasons for living. The church can’t use yesterday’s methods in today’s changing world and expect to be in ministry tomorrow.”

The statement shows the importance of flexibility in ministry. Biblical principles

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cannot be compromised, but the methods must be revised regularly in order to remain relevant. When disciples of Jesus Christ are being made, spiritual issues must be cured. People who are spirituality broken today are generally damaged because of negative factors in the past. Church members have to follow a proven strategy when they minister to wounded people because the gloomy experiences from the past have to be removed methodically before spiritual productivity can be obtained.

Objectives

Once the ministries of BCPBC have diagnosed the spiritual place of members and ministered to areas of deficiency, parishioners are deployed into the chosen area of the ministry. Once members are in their chosen area of the ministry, maximum involvement is demanded because participation is necessary to complete the work that God has given BCPBC to do. Rick Warren wrote,

> People who are uninterested or unwilling to learn your church’s purposes, strategy, and the meaning of membership are failing to demonstrate the kind of commitment that membership implies. If they don’t even care enough to understand the responsibilities of membership, they cannot be expected to fulfill those responsibilities after joining and should not be allowed to join. There are plenty of other congregations they could join that offer a meaningless membership.\(^{46}\)

Once the members have shown the required level of commitment, each person is ready to accept more responsibility. The objective of a healthy church is to have a congregation of committed workers rather than a group of inconsistent spectators.

Members who excel will be placed in leadership positions to help participants remain in compliance with God’s will for the church collectively and individually. MacArthur wrote,

“Both church and world seem to have traded away the notion of leadership for celebrity. Today’s heroes are people who are famous for being famous. They are not necessarily (and not even usually) men and women of character. Real leadership is in seriously short supply.”

People who are looking to exalt themselves and not Jesus is the reason the church must be careful about who is placed in leadership positions. People will often mimic the behavior displayed to them. New members are especially vulnerable because brand new participants are more impressionable than seasoned parishioners. If people, who are unfit for a leadership role due to a lack of character, are placed in leadership, a procedure for failure will be produced. If bad behavior is produced through mediocre leadership, the responsibility falls on the Senior Pastor to make necessary changes.

A church must exercise wisdom with patience during the process of assigning leadership positions. Wayne Schmidt wrote, “Throughout Scripture, a change in leadership was often the indicator of a new beginning. Sometimes that meant raising up new leaders—Abraham to become the father of a great nation, Joseph to rescue God’s people from famine, a prophet to proclaim God’s warning to his people, and Paul to spread the Gospel throughout the world. At other times, God replaced leadership—David stepped into King Saul’s position, Solomon assumed the throne of his father, and Samuel replaced Eli.”

The writer of the thesis project must always be able to see the big picture as the Senior Pastor, because if the vision is blurred, decisions concerning change will become difficult. If the objective is threatened by someone, a change is necessary in order for the church to remain successful.

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If the objective is met, BCPBC will have strong leaders placed strategically who will share the church’s mission with members. The leadership’s actions will be calibrated with words, which will make the examples of the leaders credible. If credibility is established, BCPBC will be poised to produce results that will please God. The thesis project will examine the health of churches that are members of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association in Chapter 3 to produce a comparison between BCPBC and other churches that serve in similar conditions. The comparison will be derived from the results of surveys taken by the pastors. The results of the evaluations will provide a parameter for the development of the Bible-based plan produced by the thesis project.
Chapter 3

SURVEY RESULTS

Introduction

The thesis project will examine the results of surveys that were completed in this chapter. The surveys were completed by pastors who serve churches affiliated with the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association, which is also the association allied with Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church. The results will serve as the basis for a comparison analysis between churches where the pastors who completed the survey serve and BCPBC. John Swinton wrote, “An observation which is in agreement with that which is predicted is taken as corroborating evidence to support the hypothesis. Competing hypotheses can then be compared and their explanatory value assessed according to their ability to sustain certain predictions.”\(^\text{49}\) It is the hypothesis of the thesis project that behaviors which are guided by an understanding of church health will affect the viability and effectiveness of any church that serves in a context similar to BCPBC.

Ministry Focus

The focus of a church determines where the efforts of parishioners will be channeled. Michael Ross wrote, “In addition to focusing on the priority of preaching, pastors who want to see true revitalization in their churches will also give attention to the actual content of their preaching.” Preaching must steer parishioners into alignment with the Bible. The Great Commission which can be found in Matthew 28:18-20 teaches that churches should be both inwardly and outwardly focused.

Finding 1: Inwardly Focused

The writer of the thesis project sent out the survey through email to thirty-five pastors who serve churches in the EFDPBA, and sixteen of them responded. The reason for the 46% participation rate is likely the pandemic COVID-19, which has the pastor’s minds on maintaining their congregations both spiritually and financially. Nevertheless, the writer of the thesis project is grateful to have a sample size large enough to certify the hypothesis, which was defined in the project abstract. The first question of the inquiry surveyed pastors to find out if their churches were inwardly or outwardly focused. Two of the sixteen pastors that responded or 13% answered that their churches are inwardly focused only. One of the pastors has served his current congregation for between one and ten years, and the other has served in the same capacity for thirty-one years or more.

The writer of the thesis project assumed that all the pastors who have served more than thirty-one years would have disclosed that their churches are both inwardly and outwardly

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focused due to the teaching of Jesus as He shared the Great Commission with His disciples, but this answer serves as the outlier. Many factors, such as being comfortable or not having that same energy and passion for evangelism, can cause a servant of God to arrive at this reality after such a long time. No room appears for theories as the findings of the survey are discharged. Sylvia Collinson wrote, “Jesus prepared and commissioned disciples for leadership and to make disciples through going, baptizing, teaching.”\[^{51}\] The pastor who has served his current church between one and ten years is a better candidate for a church to be inwardly focused because the first decade of a pastorate is often a period of building and calibration. Time is necessary to lead parishioners into compliance with the commands of God, and this is especially true if a pastor follows someone who did not attempt to be a servant leader like Jesus. The graph below indicates the results of the pastor’s responses to the ministry focus question.

\[\text{Figure 3.1. Interviewed Pastors and Focus Responses}\]

Finding 2: Outwardly Focused

Being effective in ministry requires balance. Churches must focus on both the parishioners who have committed to join the local church as well as the community that surrounds it. Doug Murren wrote, “We invest the bulk of our time and money not in advertising but in helping our people bring and include their friends (rather than evangelism we use the phrase bringing and including).”\textsuperscript{52} One pastor of the sixteen surveyed disclosed that his church is only outwardly focused. He just represents 6% of those who responded, but his admission underscores the possibility that his discipleship ministry is not receiving the attention required during the process of developing disciples who are mature. Gary Newton wrote, “A FOUNDATIONAL COMPONENT of Jesus’ strategy to make disciples is the role of the church, the body of Christ, in that process.”\textsuperscript{53} The Holy Spirit works through the preaching and teaching of the Bible to change the lives of those who commit to the path of growth. The role of leaders is vital, and they must ensure that discipleship receives the focus and effort it necessitates.

The pastor’s tenure that maintains an outward focus only is between one and ten years, which might explain his emphasis on external ministry. Outward ministry is necessary for growth, but retention will suffer if those who join do not find enough attention for them to grow holistically. Ed Stetzer wrote, “Again, we must recognize that people are at different stages in their spiritual development.”\textsuperscript{54} A ministry must be equipped to accommodate all stages of

\textsuperscript{52} Doug Murren and Mike Meeks, \textit{Growing Your Church through Evangelism and Outreach} (Nashville, TN: Moorings, 1996), 7.


\textsuperscript{54} Ed Stetzer, \textit{Planting Missional Churches} (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 185.
development in the lives of believers. If a church can accomplish this task effectively, their chances of being a healthy ministry will increase exponentially.

Finding 3: Outwardly and Inwardly Focused

Balance is an essential component of an effective ministry. A pastor must be able to focus on leading those who have committed to being members of the church as well as reaching out to prospective members in the community surrounding the church. Thom Rainer wrote, “Again, as churches become ill, they are more likely to use funds for their own members rather than reaching their community. Balance is the key, and most of these churches are out of balance.”

Thirteen of the sixteen pastors who responded to the survey understood the critical role that balance plays in the process of structuring a healthy ministry. The balanced pastors represent 81% of the surveyed group. Every tenure category is represented in this group, which proves that many variables appeared aside from years serving at the same ministry which can determine a pastor’s focus. Thirty-eight percent of the pastors served at the same church for between one and ten years. Also, 31% of pastors in this unit who have served at the same church between eleven and thirty years. The final faction which represents thirty-one years or more at the same location had one pastor or 6% of the group.

Mission and Vision Statements

Finding 1: Mission and Vision Statements

Mission and vision statements are important as far as the direction of a church is concerned. Some fundamental practices can be found in churches, but additional areas can vary

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depending on the context where the church serves. Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “The major reason so many churches are plateaued or in decline is that they’ve either lost their vision or adopted the wrong vision.” It is essential that every pastor seeks God for the vision He has for the local church. The work of a ministry must be deployed with precision. The paradigm applied to the application of ministry resources should be gleaned from God not man. Garnering the blueprint from God will ensure His blessings upon the guided efforts of parishioners as they attempt to remain in compliance with the vision. Pastors must cast the God-given vision with passion, clarity, and consistency. The chart below represents the responses of the surveyed pastors concerning mission and vision statements.

Figure 3.2. Mission and Vision Statements Responses

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The majority of the sixteen pastors which completed the survey understood the importance of having a God-given pattern to follow. The survey asked the pastors if they had both vision and mission statements. Their responses helped the writer of the thesis project to discover that 88% of the pastors surveyed have both. Malphurs wrote, “The mission is to make disciples (Matt. 28: 19), and the vision is what that will look like in the next few years.”57 The mission serves as a tool for calibration, and the vision will allow the participants to predict the results of future efforts, with God’s help. The mission cannot live without the vision, and the vision will not be obtained without the mission. Both depend upon each other, and they cannot be effective if either is omitted.

Finding 2: Communicating the Vision and Mission Statements

Communicating both the mission and vision statements is a fundamental part of producing a ministry that is effective. Gary McIntosh wrote, “It is primarily through preaching that mission and vision are communicated to the congregation at large and Christian beliefs are clarified.”58 Pastors should utilize their preaching and teaching opportunities to lace their messages with the vision and mission statements of the church which they serve. The mission as well as the vision of the church should become familiar to everyone who unites with the church starting with the initial assimilation process. It is easy for parishioners to lose sight of the reason God sent them to the local church that they united with, so vision and mission reminders can serve as spiritual sticky notes.

57 Malphurs and Penfold, Re Vision, 63.

Most of the pastors who completed the survey understood the importance of communicating the mission and vision statements regularly. This was reflected in their answers, as 69% of them responded that they communicate both their church’s vision and mission statements constantly. It was also revealed that 45% of the pastors who share their vision and mission statements regularly have a tenure of between one and ten years. The pastors who have tenures of between eleven and thirty years represent 36% of this group. A few factors possibly contributed to the group of pastors with less tenure representing a larger portion of this group. Thom Rainer wrote, “During this relatively rare tenure beyond ten years, the pastor will go down one of two paths. One path is to be reinvigorated as a leader and ready to tackle new challenges and cast new visions.”59 A vision can become stale if it is not altered to help it remain relevant. Relevance can be lost through thoughtless repetition. Casting a new vision can be thought-provoking and serve as the catalyst which reignites the fires that can be extinguished with familiarity and comfort.

Five pastors disclosed that they do not communicate their church’s vision and mission statements often. This represents 31% of the pastors who responded to the survey. The importance of communicating both the church’s vision and mission statements frequently and rewarding them has already been established, so this finding is troubling. Mark Dever wrote, “It may be best to present a vision of pastoral ministry as a corporate unity, an integrated, indivisible whole.”60 If there is no communication of the vision, there will likely not be enough cooperate


60 Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel (Wheaton, IL: B&H Publishing Group, 2005), Location 2601.
participation from the congregation. The parishioners must be able to see how they fit into the mission of the church which will ultimately bring the God-given vision to fruition.

Three of the pastors who divulged the existence of their lack of communication concerning their church’s mission and vision statements are both outwardly and inwardly focused. It is difficult to explain that emphasis to parishioners if it is not shared vocally, but the visions and missions can be modeled if the pastors lead by example while omitting pointed communication about the written declarations. Two of the pastors who do not share their vision and mission statements often are only inwardly focused. Churches that do not have regular communication applied toward their mission and vision statement or an outward focus will likely produce a fortress-like environment which is filled with people who do not have enough clarity of vision to be effective within the confines of their God-given purposes.

**Church Growth Studies**

**Finding 1: Church Growth Studies**

The church growth movement has produced many resources that have approached the subject in a plethora of ways. If healthy church growth is the aim of a pastor, he should make it his aim to learn about the methods that have been utilized in the past. Some practices are not applicable to every ministry context, but pastors can learn from others who have a successful record that certifies their credibility. Gary McIntosh wrote, “No work of human agents in evangelism and church growth was ever effective without the silent, behind-the-scenes, in-the-heart work of God’s Spirit.”\(^{61}\) It is important that church leaders know that, no matter what is

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gleaned from others and applied in ministry, God is the source of church growth. Sixty-nine percent of pastors confirmed that they have studied church growth.

The writer of the thesis project has stressed the importance of studying church growth during multiple sessions of the Church School Convention, which is held every June. The revelation that not all the pastors who completed the survey have complied comes as a surprise. While quantifying the data about the eleven pastors who have studied church growth, it was discovered that five of them have served in the same pastorate for between one and ten years. The pastors who have served at their current location for between one and ten years represent 42% of the pastors who have studied church growth. This finding bodes well for the prospect of them being effective in their attempt to implement the methods of church growth, which can be applied to their ministry setting. The chart below shows the responses.

![Church Growth Studies](chart)

**Figure 3.3. Church Growth Studies Responses**

Five pastors have studied church growth with a tenure of between eleven and thirty years. They embody a sector of seasoned pastors who still have a sense of urgency and have avoided
the trap of complacency. Dave Browning wrote, “Because we are surrounded by tens of thousands of lost people, there is an urgency about our mission. The harvest is great. We do not have time to wait.” Pastors should always seek improvement and never feel as if they have arrived at a level of proficiency that no longer requires growth. These pastors represent 42% of those who have studied church growth, and they prove that resiliency and endurances are necessary ingredients for pastoral and parishioner-related growth.

The remaining pastor in this group has a tenure of thirty-one years or more. His longevity is a testament of God’s grace as well as the implementation of his gleanings about church growth. Alan Hirsch wrote, “Structure and organization are extremely important, and they are necessary to maintain growth over time and distance.” A pastorate that lasts for thirty years or more has to be sustained by a structure that is built upon biblical principles and proven methods. Five pastors have not studied church growth, and they represent 31% of the pastors who completed the survey. This group is likely pastoring churches that have plateaued or are declining. Thom Rainer wrote, “Decline is everywhere in the church, but many don’t see it.” The study of church growth helps pastors to diagnose the areas that lead to a spiritual and numerical decline. If as pastor has not studied the mechanics of church growth, it can be difficult to determine where the church is and where they need to go.

Specific components serve as prerequisites to successful church growth. Rainer wrote,


64 Thom S. Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways To Keep Yours Alive (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), Location 125.
Often the decline is in the physical facilities, but it is much more than that. The decline is in the vibrant ministries that once existed. The decline is in the prayer lives of the members who remain. The decline is in the outward focus of the church. The decline is in the connection with the community. The decline is in the hopes and dreams of those who remain. 65

The principles of church growth should serve as a paradigm that pastors can deploy to monitor the congregation for compliance. It is easy to lose sight of the importance of all the parts not just those that have always been employed. When a pastor is not aware of the principles, he may depend on traditions that are likely antiquated and serve as hindrances to growth. Rainer wrote, “The most pervasive and common thread of our autopsies was that the deceased churches lived for a long time with the past as hero.” 66 The past must be utilized as a launching pad, not a place of rest. When a pastor is exposed to church growth tools, the necessity of guided flexibility will become easier to embrace.

**Church Growth Principles Implementation**

The implementation of church growth principles is a crucial part of the equation. Many ways exist so the principles can be distributed, but pastors must choose the option which fits their context. To be an effective long-range leader, a pastor should teach with authority. Bob Briner wrote, “As we survey the miracles of Jesus, we see that his miracles had two primary purposes. One was to perform an act of love and mercy for the recipient. The other was to advance his mission by teaching lessons important to the plan.” 67 The latter part of that quote can be applied to the teaching of church growth principles. Pastors must advance the teaching of

65 Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased*, Location 125.
Jesus, which contain many tenets of expansion by gearing their teaching toward a plan to increase the church both spiritually and numerically.

Finding 1: Church Growth Principles Implementation

The church is the lab where the message must be disseminated to the parishioners. If the message of church growth is not prominent, the congregation can easily lose their sense of urgency regarding the community that surrounds them. Steve Parr wrote, “The growth in numbers is present, but it should be noted that they are also seeking to grow spiritually as well as numerically.” The best way for a church to grow statistically is by the means of evangelism. Evangelism often results from a burden to see the unchurched not only saved but assimilated into the life of the local church. The sixth survey question examined the methods the pastors used to apply the principles they garnered as they studied church growth. The chart below reveals the answers.

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Figure 3.4. Church Growth Principles Implementation

Two of the pastors surveyed disclosed that they primarily use Bible study sessions to teach the values of church growth. They represent 12.5% of the pastors assessed. Bible study serves as a great time to teach church growth because the presentation is normally in the form of dialogue and not just a monologue by the pastor. That setting encourages questions from attendees who are seeking a higher level of understanding as it pertains to growth. Gary C. Newton wrote,

Good teachers come in all shapes and sizes: single parents who faithfully bring up their children to obey the Word, boys’ club leaders who maintain a relationship with their guys long into their adult years, Sunday school teachers who take the time to do fun activities with their students, Bible study group leaders who skillfully build a sense of community with their members, or a men’s or women’s group leader who faithfully helps group members get victory over addictive behaviors.69

The tools of teaching can be deployed into any category. When the teachers are skilled, the pupils are more likely to be enthusiastic about their learning moments. Pastors who primarily use Bible study as their system of sharing the importance of church growth must maximize every opportunity because they are limited due to their choice not to emphasize this subject through other conduits. If pastors chose a broader deployment plan, the information will have a greater chance of impacting the parishioner they teach. The Bible includes the correct model rather than stunts or promotion schemes.

One pastor which represents 6.25% of the pastors who answered the survey only employs sermon series to share his convictions about church growth. Sermons serve as a great opportunity to teach the importance of aiming for church growth, but it is limited because parishioners do not have the opportunity to ask questions during the presentation of a sermon.

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69 Gary C. Newton, Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Training Association, 2003), 84.
John MacArthur wrote,

Thus, speaking to a congregation from the pulpit should be no different than speaking with them individually in the pastor’s office. The larger audience merely requires enlarged speaking intensity, facial expressions, and gestures so that all get the same message.\(^{70}\)

John MacArthur, however, declares that a pastor can convey the desired message successfully if it is presented utilizing the skills of homiletics. Worship services normally have more people in attendance than Bible study sessions, but larger crowds also increase the chances that a higher number of casual Christians, who are not interested in church growth will be there. The possibility can make it more difficult to present messages to edify all parties involved.

The pastors were also asked if they utilized Sunday school or training programs to teach the principles of church growth, and none of them have used those means. The pastors are missing opportunities to communicate the significance of church growth by not teaching this important topic during those times. John MacArthur wrote, “The twelve apostles led the early church until it spread out, and elders and deacons were trained to lead and serve in other congregations.”\(^ {71}\) The majority of measures can be implemented during Sunday school, which can allow pastors to instruct leaders to share the principles of church growth with others. Steve Parr wrote, “I recently asked a group of master of divinity graduates what they had learned about Sunday school growth in their seminary experience. Only one of about sixty students could point to any academic training in this area.”\(^ {72}\) Sunday school growth and church growth should not be


separated. The church that has a mission and vision to grow spiritually and numerically should include Sunday school as one of the vessels of training.

Thirteen of the pastors surveyed disclosed that they use a balanced approach to teach the principles of church growth. This group represents 81.25% of those who answered to the assessment. They utilize Bible studies, sermon series, training, and Sunday school to publicize the message about church expansion to the congregations they serve. Neil Cole wrote, “In the same way, the teacher is not called to teach the saints but to equip the saints to teach others.” Pastors are called to pour into the parishioners with the aim of church members being empowered to teach others. When the members are only dependent upon the pastor, church growth will be limited to the reach of that pastor. Carl George wrote, “The rancher seeks out opportunities to empower others and applauds the expansion of caregiving. The desired objective is not less care but assured care.” That statement underscores the importance of pastors using every opportunity to teach the fundamentals of church growth. Those principles should be shared often so Christians can confidently disseminate the information to others, which will ultimately lead to expansion.

Finding 2: Results of Church Growth Principles Implementation

The application of the principles should yield specific results depending upon a ministry’s context. A healthy church does not always produce numerical growth, but spiritual growth serves as a marker of a healthy church. Neil Cole wrote, “For us, church growth is not a solution, nor is

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74 Carl F. George, How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993).
it success. We want to see healthy disciples reproducing other healthy disciples, leaders emerging, and new churches being born that will reproduce spontaneously.”

Most pastors are discouraged when churches do not experience explosive statistical growth, but growth should not be the aim. Difficulty arises in quantifying the development of mature disciples, but results can easily be seen if the pastor examines the faithfulness and retention of the members God sends to the local church. Another indicator of a healthy church is the deployment of members either to the mission field or the new church plants.

Question seven examined the benefits the pastors have seen as a result of teaching the principles of church growth. The chart below reveals the answers.

![Figure 3.5. Church Growth Principles Implementation Results](chart)

Only one pastor experienced an increased membership which was a surprising revelation. He represents 6.25% of the pastors that completed the survey. This pastor is an outlier because

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his church is also only inwardly focused, which normally hinders attempts to grow a church numerically. He has served the same church for thirty-one years or more, which means his system is well-established. Longevity also creates credibility, so there is probably also generational growth, which is produced organically through births and marriages. This pastor also utilizes, sermon series, training, Sunday school, and Bible study to teach the tenets of church growth. The thesis project cannot conclude that certain factors must be applied before growth can be realized because the Holy Spirit can produce growth in unusual settings.

Two pastors saw an increase in visitors as a result of teaching the precepts of church growth. These pastors represent 12.5% of the group, and both churches are inwardly and outwardly focused. The increase in visitors can also be attributed to an outward focus pertaining to the community surrounding the church. Steven Macchia wrote, “Specifically, the church with an outward focus has a growing sense of the importance of outreach ministries of evangelism, social concern, and international missions.” When a church has a reputation for loving the community, people have a tendency to go and visit while being motivated by a desire to show reciprocity. The reality should produce an increase in membership, but some factors hinder visitors from committing to the ministry such as the absence of a welcoming environment. Thom Rainer wrote, “If you talk to members in a dying church, most will deny that their church is a fortress. But in our autopsy, we found that is exactly what was taking place. People in the community did not feel welcome in the church.” A pastor can devote much time in an effort to teach and model the principles of church growth, but the parishioners must take ownership of the

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biblical principles and embrace the harvest provided by God. If the congregations do not adopt the principles they are taught, time and resources may be wasted.

Three of the pastors revealed that their churches have done more outreach because of the consistent teaching of church growth principles. Those pastors represent 18.75% of the pastors that completed the survey. A church doing more outreach is normally an outgrowth of a shift in focus, but the efforts should be saturated with the aim of sharing the gospel. Gary McIntosh wrote,

> In place of evangelism, churches have adopted a concept of missional outreach, which usually means they do acts of love, mercy, and justice in their communities. Any sort of outreach that affects our communities and families for Christ is good, but it is equally important in today’s postmodern society for Christians and churches to proclaim the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.\(^78\)

Recent patterns have led some churches to combine acts of love with evangelism efforts. The act of love is produced by providing food, clothing, or toiletries. This is not a pattern that should serve as an evangelism paradigm, because conversion should occur when a prospect realizes the need to repent after the Bible is shared with them.

These three pastors have all served at the same church for between one and ten years, so it is sensible for them to establish their commitments to the local community during the first years of their pastorates. Myron Augsburger wrote, “There are a number of things that can stall outreach ministry—fatigue, boredom, a change of priorities, church squabbles, to name a few. But perhaps the most significant is discouragement that accompanies the loss of purpose.”\(^79\) It is the pastor’s responsibility to ensure that the congregation does not become discouraged or lose

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sight of their purpose. A pastor can accomplish that act by having Bible-based mission and
vision statements and sharing them often. Two of the pastors in this group have both mission and
vision statements, but one does not have either. The two pastors that have both will not likely not
have to grapple with the reality of outreach ministries that flicker over time.

The next group of pastors saw their leadership team become more committed. That
accomplishment is a remarkable outcome because, when the leadership team is calibrated, the
prospects of the congregation following suite increases significantly. John MacArthur wrote,

It is simply not wise leadership to try to manage everything with hands-on oversight.

Leaders who take that approach invariably frustrate their people by micromanaging, and
they sabotage their own effectiveness by getting bogged down in details.80

When other leaders take ownership of the mission of the church, which serves as the blueprint
that will facilitate them, accomplishing the vision of the pastor, he will be free to pray, study, and
teach the Word of God. These pastors in addition represent 18.75% of those who completed the
survey. One of the pastors in this subcategory has served at the current church for between one
and ten years, and the other two have served their congregations between eleven and thirty years.
The pastor who has served between one and ten years revealed that his church is only inwardly
focused. The inner emphasis of the church produced the benefit of having a more committed
leadership team. If the focus shifts to the community as well, they have a better chance of
becoming beneficiaries of numerical growth in the future. The other two pastors who have seen
the leadership teams become more committed are both outwardly and inwardly focused. The
churches they serve have variables in place that should produce church growth that is healthy.

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Seven pastors experienced balanced results. They saw all the above happen in the ministries. Those pastors represent 43.75% of the pastors who finished the survey. The efforts produced ideal outcome which proves that the proper application of church growth principles can produce the desired results even when they are applied to a traditional church framework. Ed Stetzer wrote, “Innovation or death? Too many churches choose death over innovation. The choice we make today will impact the church of our children.” When a church has balanced results, innovation can be produced even from a traditional church context. The innovation that is produced must also be deployed with patience while delicately phasing out conventional methods that are no longer effective and keep those practices that remain productive.

**Features of Church Health**

Finding 1: Their Views Concerning Features of a Healthy Church

The eighth survey question asked the pastors to share their views concerning the features of a healthy church. The pastor’s answers are shown in the chart below.

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None of the pastors thought that having a large membership only is a characteristic of a fit church. Casual observers may think that every church that has a large membership is healthy, but that is not always the case. Some large churches have a club-like environment which does not actually produce disciples of Jesus Christ. The size of a church is also relevant to the size of the community in which it is stationed. Dave Browning wrote, “There is not always a correlation between size and significance. The most important light in your house may be not the chandelier in the dining room but the little night-light that keeps you from stubbing your toe when you get up at night.”\textsuperscript{82} When a church produces an environment that is conducive to growth and development, disciples will be constructed even if they are few in numbers. If disciples are developed, the church will be following the Great Commission.

The pastors surveyed also did not think a great prayer ministry was a standalone feature of a healthy church. Prayer is vital, but it must be accompanied by methods to produce the God-given vision for the local church. John MacArthur wrote, “Our staff has grown from the soil of much time that we have spent with each one in personal fellowship, teaching, and prayer.”\textsuperscript{83} It takes a combination of ministry components to produce a healthy church structure. It all starts and ends with prayer, but there are many things that must be in place in between the twin book ends of prayer.

Three of the pastors disclosed that they viewed having an effective evangelism ministry as a feature of a healthy church. The pastors with that opinion represent 18.75% of the group. A

\textsuperscript{82} Dave Browning, Deliberate Simplicity: Go the Church Does More by Doing Less (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 19.

strong evangelism ministry is a vital component of a healthy church, but it cannot make the church well if it is not coupled with other parts that are just as crucial. A healthy church includes a valid system to help the new prospects to assimilate in a lifestyle that in most cases is complete counter to their prior experiences. Doug Murren wrote, “Love is the fuel of our evangelism. Pastors cannot, without loving Christ, find a desire to witness. Without loving people, none of us would stay long at the job.”84 The love for Christ and people motivates pastors and churches to evangelize their communities, baptize new converts, and guide them to spiritual wholeness. The disciple making procedure cannot be done by just sharing a tract with someone, because the practice requires a lifetime commitment to the process of their sanctification.

Three additional pastors disclosed that they felt a strong Christian education ministry was an important feature of a healthy church. Those pastors represent 18.75% of the pastors who completed the survey. The Christian education ministry in most churches is utilized to develop disciples. In the context of primitive Baptist churches, the Christian education ministry normally includes a new member's class, Sunday school, and training for specific ministry assignments. Kenneth Gangel wrote,

Discipleship is not achieved just by memorizing Scripture verses. Nor is discipleship merely going to church. A transformation must take place within the person in order to become a disciple and to continue becoming a follower of Christ. This transformation comes through regeneration and grows as one learns about the character of the Lord we follow.85

The Christian education ministry of a healthy church must include resources that are geared toward every age and stage in the lives of the parishioners. Having a deficient Christian ministry

84 Doug Murren and Mike Meeks, Growing Your Church through Evangelism and Outreach (Nashville, TN: Moorings, 1996), 94.

is an insurmountable obstacle in the pursuit of spiritual wellness in the local church. Christian education should be emphasized by any church that is committed to growing disciples of Jesus Christ.

None of the surveyed pastors deemed that good preaching and teaching alone are facets of a healthy church. Preaching and teaching the Bible serves as the foundation of making disciples. The Word of God must be handled with precision if it is going to produce growth in the lives of members of the church. David Eby Wrote, “The only hope is for pastors and church leaders to enthusiastically embrace proclamation and prayer as the God-given priority for biblical church growth.” Preaching and teaching the Word of God accurately and saturating the assertion with prayer is a formula that cannot be excluded from a church that aims to be strong. Growth is possible without the other features presented in this section, but it cannot be accomplished devoid of sound preaching and teaching.

Ten of the pastors which represented 62.5% of the group feel that all the above features are prerequisites of a healthy church. The ingredients and results vary according to the context of the church. Numerical growth may occur more naturally in a more populated urban area as compared to a less populated rural area. A church located in a rural area can have all the features except a sizeable membership and still be fit. One may feel that if a church does not have a substantial membership, it cannot be healthy, but the size does not always determine health. Mark Dever wrote,

It’s tempting to think that we should just pray that God would make our churches bigger. But what we’re really after is health, not just size. Churches can be incredibly unhealthy even when they’re big. A small, healthy church is better than a big, unhealthy church.87

Bigger can often be misconstrued as better, but the aim of any church should be spiritual wellness. God may choose to bless a church with numeric growth as one of the features of health, but pastors should resist frustration if the size remains small. God is the source of numerical growth, rather than gimmick, pragmatic methods, or a lack of statistical growth should be used as a measure to quantify the health of a church. The aim of church should be biblical accuracy instead of numerical growth.

Finding 2: Features that Lead to an Unhealthy Church

The objective of any church should be spiritual health. Just as doctors check for symptoms in the process of diagnosing diseases, pastors can examine the health of churches by examining the origins of symptoms that show up in the ministry context. Thom Rainer wrote,

Churches with symptoms of sickness are likely to have declined some in worship attendance over the past five years. If they have grown, the rate of growth was slower than the growth rate of the community in which they are located. Many leaders stop looking at numbers when they began to decline. And when numbers are ignored, they tend to get even worse.88

Pastors cannot afford to ignore the symptoms because understanding them will empower the congregation to remain on the path to church growth. The final survey question examined the pastor’s views of the symptoms that lead to an unhealthy church. The pastor’s responses are shown in the chart below.

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One of the pastors which represented 6.25% of the group divulged that a lack of vision can be the sole symptom that leads to an unwell church. A church needs to have a clear vision because it helps all parties involved to understand what they hope to accomplish in the future collectively. Ray Stedman wrote, “Do we have any concept of the power Jesus intended for His church to wield in this dark and dangerous world? Or has our vision of the church become so dimmed that the word church suggests to us only a building on the corner where we go once a week to sing hymns and hear sermons?”\textsuperscript{89} The church is more than just a building. A sound vision will equip parishioners to be who Christ has commissioned them to be throughout the week, in addition to the days when the church assembles. A lack of vision is very detrimental, but it is merely one symptom produced by an unhealthy church among many others.

None of the pastors felt that a lack of good leadership could serve as the only symptom of an unhealthy church. Leadership in the local church is an important aspect of the ministry, but other components also lead to a church becoming ill. John MacArthur wrote,

> It is simply not wise leadership to try to manage everything with hands-on oversight. Leaders who take that approach invariably frustrate their people by micromanaging, and they sabotage their own effectiveness by getting bogged down in details. A few things demand your hands-on attention, but good leadership demands that you delegate the rest.\(^{90}\)

When leadership becomes a problem in most churches, the situation often springs from a lack of proficient leaders who the pastor can delegate responsibilities to with the assurance that the task will be done. The reality frequently causes pastors to hoard the responsibilities, and when that happens, the growth of the church will be affected negatively.

The pastors also did not feel that a lack of resources is the sole symptom that leads to a church being sick. Resources are the tools that pastors must deploy if the goal includes leading the church to grow in a manner that is healthy. A lack of resources serves as a stumbling block that stymies all efforts to develop a ministry that has the infrastructure to last. Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “People will also respond poorly because of lack of resources. Declining ministries are like sinking ships. Some people are quick to abandon them and take their money with them.”\(^{91}\)

When a church has resources, parishioners will have incentives because they will use them to seek spiritual growth. If the resources needed are not available, church members will seek them elsewhere, which will ultimately lead to more erosion. The pastors similarly did not feel that a lack of good preaching and teaching solely are features that lead to a church being in an ailing

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condition. They also refrained from concluding that a lack of community involvement alone could not be a symptom of an unhealthy church.

Most of the pastors felt that churches produce multiple symptoms that are not healthy. Fifteen of the pastors surveyed, which represents 93.75% of the group indicated that all the symptoms would show up within the confines of an unhealthy church. The indicators do not show up overnight, but if they are not addressed the result will likely be death. Thom Rainer wrote, “So what did the deceased churches cling to? What did they refuse to let go of facing certain death?”92 A church that has been given a death sentence due to the culmination of warning signs can either accept that fate or adjust their methods in an attempt to survive. The church must operate prayerfully while possessing a sense of urgency because the church is worth defending. Rainer wrote, “They were warned. They were facing certain death. They saw every sign. But like Harry Randall Truman, they preferred death to change. And death is what they got.”93 Churches that find themselves clinging to life must be willing to implement the necessary changes that will help them not only survive but become a healthy church that can grow both spiritually and numerically.


93 Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased*, Location 192.
Chapter 4

Bible Based Implementation

Introduction

The writer of the thesis project discovered a wealth of information that will empower Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church to experience healthy growth despite the customary practices that have been established over a period of more than one hundred years. Some contemporary practices will serve as a conduit for young adults to remain connected after graduating from high school. The plan presented in this chapter will serve as a template which can be utilized by BCPBC well as well as other churches with similar settings and traditions.

One Year from Now

Planning can be challenging, but goal setting allows a church to establish and measure accomplishments. BCPBC was established in 1894, which indicates that many served under its tutelage throughout the life of the church. During that time, members endured wars as well as many cultural shifts, but throughout the one hundred and twenty-six years and multiple generations the church continues. The history of BCPBC proves that God has blessed the church with longevity and influence, so the challenge includes implementing methods that will enrich rather than devastate the future of the church. Ed Stetzer wrote,

Learn how to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of innovations and then how to implement your innovations-and be sure that you have a good idea of the ups and downs and the strengths and weaknesses of your innovation before you begin. If you think that an innovation will only bring in the good times, you're wrong. Be honest about your innovations and happy that you're living in this "yeasty" age. We live in a time filled with opportunities to do more for God than we've ever done before.1

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The intention of BCPBC includes persisting in conformity with the Bible without allowing the contemporary trends that depend upon pragmatic practices to dominate future methods adopted within the church.

The optimal way to realize the goal of adjusting deficient areas includes employing the means while understanding that pleasing all members may prove difficult. The writer of the thesis project introduced BCPBC to online giving and online streaming five years ago. During the implementation process, some seasoned members openly questioned the necessity. Some of the members failed to understand why online giving and streaming were needed until COVID-19 forced the church to rely on virtual meetings due to the health risks associated with gathering in person. Many of the most vocal opponents later proclaimed appreciation for the ability of BCPBC to worship and give online safely. Visionary leadership is necessary to equip churches for the vicissitudes of the future.

First Goal

The aim of BCPBC during the inaugural year of the proposed plan includes improving the effectiveness of Sunday School. Sunday School serves as an important ministry because the teaching ministry provides a great platform to develop members spiritually while also assisting with the assimilation process for people new to the congregation. Steve Parr wrote,

I will state a simple fact here without any apology or hesitation: leading the Sunday school to be healthy and growing is hard work. It is a high-maintenance strategy involving a large number of the congregation. The results can also have a high return. Sunday school is a tool that can involve every generation in the church in evangelism, Bible study, fellowship, ministry, and assimilation of new members.²

Building an effective Sunday School requires committed leaders because constant effort serves as a prerequisite for success. BCPBC will require all Sunday School teachers to go through training on an annual basis. The training will be facilitated by Ministry Grid, which is an “online tool to develop and disciple your church.” Ministry Grid allows teachers to go through the training process at their own pace while utilizing curriculums and instructors geared toward the appropriate age group.

Training will help teachers to remain attuned to the fundamentals of Sunday School. Steve Parr wrote, “People attend because they are invited, they return because they have an enjoyable experience, and they attend regularly because they develop relationships.” The sequence of retention presented by Steve Parr should be on the minds of Sunday School teachers when they interact with the class, and the standard takes great effort to preserve. Regular attendance opens the door to spiritual development because students experience more opportunities to be taught the Word of God. The Sunday School teachers of BCPBC will receive training to cherish and prayerfully maximize the opportunities to impress biblical principles upon the hearts and minds of Christian students.

Sunday school will serve as a vessel for developing lasting relationships among parishioners. The relationships developed will improve retention among the membership of BCPBC. Steve Parr wrote,

The second prong of the magnet is relationships. Relationships do not develop simply because Bible teaching is taking place. The group members must interact while they are together. You should not gather without spending time teaching the Word of God, nor should you feel reluctance to allow time for fellowship when you meet together. Enhance the fellowship by planning time together in addition to the gathering for Bible study.

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Relationships will be further enhanced as you discover and respond to ministry needs of the class members. Combining excellent teaching with refreshing relationships will keep members connected and the number of those enrolled attending at a much stronger level.\(^5\)

In the past, time restraints prevented fellowship, but for church members to develop lasting relationships, church services and meetings will include extra time for conversations. Moments for fellowship will include providing breakfast on Sunday mornings in the fellowship hall before Sunday School. The members of BCPBC will receive encouragement to communicate with new parishioners or those considering connecting with the church. The aim includes creating an environment that allows for guidance regarding life within the confines of the church as well as in the community. This opportunity will provide opportunities for transparency that will lead to lifestyle changes in alignment with the Bible.

BCPBC’s Sunday school classes prior to COVID-19 occurred on campus, but post COVID-19 the church will employ some small groups that meet off site. The aim of small groups will include further enhance occasions for relationship development. Members of these groups may meet at coffee shops, diners, or even on Zoom. Steve Parr wrote,

> Relationships occur when there is interaction between people. A person can attend a worship service and have little or no conversation with other members. A person can easily be overlooked in larger settings because it is difficult to know who are members and who are guests. A small gathering allows for introductions, interaction, and discussion. People do not build relationships merely by being in the same room but by conversing and getting to know one another.\(^6\)

Meeting off campus will step outside of the normal boundaries previously adhered to at BCPBC, but that option will allow younger members to develop creatively in the process of building


beneficial relationships and growing in Christ concurrently. The hybrid approach to classes will give the church the best opportunity to reach multiple generations simultaneously.

The Sunday School ministry at BCPBC can improve, but all parishioners need to understand the modern-day relevance of the teaching ministry and embrace the importance. Steve Parr wrote,

> From the very beginning of the Sunday school movement, a key element that made Sunday schools work so effectively has been keeping the focus of reaching and winning people to faith in Jesus Christ. In the last four years at Houston’s First Baptist, we have recharged the Sunday school organization with a strong emphasis on both outreach and inreach. We are installing outreach and inreach leaders who serve with their care group leaders, and are charged with the task to minister and connect with guests and members in a more effective way.\(^7\)

In the next year, BCPBC’s Sunday school ministry will lead the church in the attempt to engage prospects, help them integrate into the new environment, and build relationships during fellowship and teaching occasions. The fresh approach will require a change of perspective because all ministries will connect to the Sunday School without functioning on islands.

Second Goal

The second goal for BCPBC includes improving ministry balance. Most of the surveyed pastors serve at churches both inwardly and outwardly focused. Being focused both on the making of disciples and serving the community surrounding the church can prove challenging, but the approach adheres to biblical principles, which produce a balanced ministry context. The balanced pastors embody 81% of the surveyed group. The responses prove that BCPBC should develop a balanced approach as a clear goal. Dave Browning wrote, “In any case, God is not

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\(^7\) Parr, *Sunday School That Really*, 66.
into extremism. He wants his kingdom to expand, but in a healthy, balanced way.”

BCPBC will evaluate the methods for a cohesive fit with the talents and gifts of the parishioners.

A balanced ministry approach will help BCPBC develop leaders committed to the biblical principles of church growth. An emphasis in the training will include embracing the Great Commission not just by grasping the concepts contained in the commission but also the importance of applying the principles within the framework of the ministry. Rainer wrote,

> It was like the slow erosion described in chapter 2. The efforts at obedience to the Great Commission faded gradually, so that no one noticed. Or if someone did notice, he or she was largely ignored. The more vocal members usually left the church. The comfortable members remained behind for the deathwatch.  

Maintaining ministry balance proved challenging for BCPBC in the past, but a refreshed and maintained pledge to obeying Christ’s commission will remedy that reality. Once the church obtains and maintains balance, the focus of the church will be clear and easier with which to comply. Parishioners may avoid committing to such a directive because of self-ambition, but the process will identify who God ordained to remain connected to BCPBC.

Decisions about BCPBC’s areas of ministry development avoid allowing fear of losing members to serve as a hindrance because God remains responsible for membership retention if the church employs methods that follow the Bible. Bob Briner wrote, “A quality leader acts decisively when the occasion calls for it—decisively, not impulsively.” Some leaders make impulsive decisions due to a desire to see numerical growth, which God does not have to

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produce if the decision falls short of His will for a specific ministry. A desire for numerical growth may be the reason some pastors utilize the same marketing strategies as corporate America at the expense of authentic gospel proclamation. Dave Browning wrote,

The minute the church starts to feel like a marketing campaign — more like a slogan than a reality — it begins to stray from reality. Deliberate Simplicity calls for an understated approach. No hard sell. A relative lack of hype. No over-the-top prognosticating. A conversational tenor. Better to understate our own importance or success so people can remember Who is truly important.11

BCPBC serves as a traditional church with humble beginnings, so the future must include humility and simplicity. The church will strive to exalt Jesus while being transparent with regard to the need for absolute submission to Him. Man should not be lauded because the deficiencies prevalent in human beings often act as deterrents for those of the world looking for the salvation that only Jesus can provide.

God established many church models as success stories, so for that reason BCPBC will continue to incorporate components from several styles. Dave Browning wrote, “The lack of clarity has given rise to many different church organization models, all of which can in some way find validation from the Bible.12” Including practices from various prototypes will empower the church to achieve balance during the worship services also. The majority of BCPBC’s membership enjoys starting the worship services with deacons leading the congregation by deploying a practice known as lining hymns. Many of the hymns can be traced back hundreds of years, so the people in the sixty-year-old or older demographic can sing along with the deacons without looking at the hymnals. The millennial members of BCPBC favor starting the service

11 Dave Browning, Deliberate Simplicity: Go the Church Does More by Doing Less (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 83.
12 Browning, Deliberate Simplicity, 115.
with a praise team which normally sings songs written by modern gospel artists. Under the leadership of the writer of the thesis project, services on the first and third Sundays begin with deacons leading a devotion and starting the second and fourth Sundays off with a praise team. This hybrid approach allows the church to keep in place both traditional and contemporary models of worship.

Ministry leasers will utilize surveys to determine other best suited methods for BCPBC. The feedback of leaders will help formulate a plan for deployment within the membership of BCPBC and the surrounding city of Bartow, Florida community. Upon completion of the surveys, ministry leaders will meet with the writer of the thesis project who serves as the Senior Pastor of BCPBC to discuss the answers. The goal of the interviews will include formulating a plan of implementation and challenging the leaders to train other ministry participants, so leaders will also become calibrated according to the new methods. In addition, the meetings will provide the writer of the thesis project with the occasion to communicate both the mission and vision statements with the ministry leaders to ensure that the plans align.

Third Goal

The third goal for the next years includes recasting the vision and mission statements of the church. Eighty-eight percent of the pastors surveyed have both mission and vision statements. Sixty-nine percent of the pastors make known that they communicate both the church’s vision and mission statements frequently. The existence of the pastor's commitment to communicating both statements with the churches they serve shows that conveying the significance of both the mission and vision statements of BCPBC during the future meetings with leaders remains important. Once the leaders of BCPBC commit to the vision and mission
statements and model the goals before the individuals in ministry, balance will prove easier to obtain within a year.

The vision statement serves as the architectural rendering of what the ministry will become, and the mission statement serves as the blueprint of how to get there. The writer of the thesis project has not communicated the statements consistently in the past, but the declarations will be shared more in the next year. The writer of the thesis project will seek God to make certain that the current statements are following His will for the church. Richard Blackaby wrote,

Too often people assume that along with their role of leader comes the responsibility of determining what should be done. They develop aggressive goals. They imagine grandiose dreams. They cast grand visions. Then they pray and ask God to join them in their agenda and bless their efforts. That's not the spiritual leader's role. Spiritual leaders seek God's will, whether it is for their church, family, or corporation, and then they mobilize their people to pursue God's plan.\(^{13}\)

The aim of BCPBC includes aligning with God's agenda, which will guarantee that His blessings will validate the efforts of the church moving forward. BCPBC has been ordained by God to do specific things during every era of its existence, and this reality creates a sense of urgency for current members to make necessary adjustments to discover and line up with His will for this age. The church remains viable after one hundred and twenty-six years because much work remains unfinished.

Recasting the recalibrated statements will generate a sense of purpose and more unity within the church. Proper vision and mission statements incessantly communicated will limit the prevalence of multiple visions birthed from the minds of man. Blackaby wrote, “God does not ask leaders to dream big dreams for him or to solve the problems confronting them with their

\(^{13}\) Henry & Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 41.
own best thinking."\textsuperscript{14} God rarely shows all the details of what He plans to do in the future so guessing would be frivolous to think that the entire plan can be captured in vision and mission statements. The church will commit to seeking God for constant guidance concerning the details He wants to reveal at certain times. Church leadership will make adjustments by acknowledging the need of guidance during every phase of the process. Just as contractors glean particulars from blueprints, if the structure should become reality concerning what the architect envisioned, so must the church seek God as the master designer to build according to the specifications He intended.

Fourth Goal

The fourth goal for BCPBC will include removing numerical growth as a measure for spiritual health. MacArthur wrote, “If we concern ourselves with the\textit{ depth} of our ministry, God will see to the\textit{ breadth} of it. If we minister for spiritual growth, numerical growth will be what God chooses it to be.”\textsuperscript{15} Frustration may be the end product of longing for an escalation of members, because God provides increase, and the responsibility for working in the church includes the entire membership. God ultimately determines whether a church will experience growth and produces parishioners committed to growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. Many churches have taken the proclamation of the Bible from a place of prominence and replaced biblical principles with entertainment. Churches that follow those patterns appear willing to go to the great extremes to make visitors and members feel comfortable.

When one examines a mega church only on the surface, the methods may not be clear, but a more in-depth analysis could uncover troubling paradigms. MacArthur wrote,

\textsuperscript{14} Henry & Richard Blackaby, \textit{Spiritual Leadership}, 47.

\textsuperscript{15} John F. MacArthur Jr., \textit{Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes like the World} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 74.
What good, after all, is numerical expansion that is not rooted in commitment to the Lordship of Christ? If people come to church primarily because they find it entertaining, they will surely leave as soon as they stop being amused or something comes along to interest them more. And so the church is forced into a hopeless cycle where it must constantly try to eclipse each spectacle with something bigger and better.\textsuperscript{16}

When the purpose statement of a church includes a commitment to preaching and teaching about the importance of Christ’s Lordship in every aspect of the lives of parishioners, many drawn by entertainment will leave. Christ has not commanded His churches to be clubs that merely make members feel good about themselves. Spiritual growth in the lives of His followers comes to reality when pastors present the truth about the frailties of man as the reason for submission to Christ.

Sixty-nine percent of the surveyed pastors confirmed having studied church growth, which shows that the topic of expansion remains a priority for most of the group. The writer of the thesis project has been concerned at times because BCPBC has attempted to utilize outreach events such as neighborhood blitzes to provide community members with toiletries, clothing, and food while deploying the premise that a tangible show of love would make prospects more open to hear the prerequisite of Jesus Christ for entrance into heaven proclaimed. The process kindled frustration because the focus was on pragmatic practices, which were temporal and not on biblical truth, which is eternal. The evangelism team focused on making people feel good about themselves, but the aim should have been to inform people of the eternal reality of hell for those who refuse to repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

Some who were the recipients of the team’s attempt to display the love of Christ became members, but many of the individuals never accepted the invitation to join the BCPBC family.

\textsuperscript{16} MacArthur Jr., \textit{Ashamed of the Gospel}, 74.
The hypothesis might have been flawed, but if God wanted those events to produce colossal numerical growth, He could have. The group expressed pure motives and love for Christ and the people served, but the group’s aim never materialized. MacArthur wrote,

That is exactly the conventional wisdom of the user-friendly, market-driven philosophy. It starts with felt needs and addresses them with topical messages. If Scripture is used at all, it is only for illustrative purposes—precisely as Fosdick advocated. It is sheer accommodation to a society addicted to self-esteem and entertainment. Only now that advice comes from within evangelicalism. It follows what is fashionable but reveals little concern for what is true. It was well-suited for the liberalism from whence it came. But it is totally out of place among Christians who profess to believe that Scripture is the inspired Word of God.17

The methods deployed by BCPBC in the future will highlight the preeminence of Scripture and trust God to produce the results He desires. BCPBC’s responsibility to accept the will of God becomes frustrated when numeric growth fails to occur.

When quantitative growth serves as the primary motive of a ministry, compromise may habitually be employed. MacArthur wrote,

The church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), and church meetings are for corporate worship and instruction. The church’s only legitimate goal is “the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12)—vital growth, not mere numerical expansion.18

Pastors driven by growth may ignore topics such as same-sex marriage, adultery, and fornication because of the fear of offending the masses, but when pastors preach the Bible is taught faithfully those sins must be addressed regardless of the fallout. BCPBC will remain faithful, to the teaching of the Bible, rather than marketing strategies. The writer of the thesis project will meet with the leaders of BCPBC who have teaching responsibilities quarterly for inspiration to

17 MacArthur Jr., Ashamed of the Gospel, 82.
remain calibrated concerning the importance of faithfully applying the Bible without compromise.

Fifth Goal

The fifth goal for BCPBC in the next year includes implementing a more balanced approach when teaching the principles of church growth. Thirteen of the pastors surveyed disclosed that they employ a level-headed methodology to teach the tenets of church growth. This group embodies 81.25% of those who answered the assessment. The church leaders utilize Bible studies, sermon series, training, and Sunday school to announce the message about church expansion to the parishioners. In the past, the writer of the thesis project mainly used sermon series and Bible studies to teach the church about growth, but because of the survey answers, a more effective plan includes an increase in the channels of communication. A pastor should regularly establish the true meaning of church growth and re-training will remain a priority for the leaders of BCPBC. Many leaders have associated numerical growth with success, but the true essence of expansion must be established so that, when those indicators become visible, acknowledgement of accomplishments will receive emphasis.

Once the process of training leaders reaches completion, leaders will receive the necessary knowledge to help the parishioners of BCPBC as the focus of the church shifts from having the pews filled to having hearts filled with the love of Jesus. When the hearts of parishioners fill with the love for Jesus Christ, the people will likely obey His commandments with the help of the Holy Spirit. John MacArthur wrote, “Christ Himself—not marketing know-how, human cleverness, or church-growth techniques—adds to the church, causes its genuine growth, and blesses the church with health and vitality.”19 The church must depend upon Christ for a numerical increase. The objective for the church includes equipping the saints to fulfill the

roles that God has for them individually and for the congregation collectively. If God allows, numerical growth will follow, but if statistical growth is not His will to add to the church, equipping must take place regardless. A change of perspective should occur because the contemporary church growth movement impacted many, even to the point that some have declared churches to be unhealthy because of the lack of statistical growth.

Spiritual growth will be preached during Sunday school, Bible studies, and sermon series. The members of BCPBC should prevent the pragmatic practices of mega churches to make the church appear to be inconsequential. The Lord loves the members of small churches to the same degree as He loves members of a large church deemed as prominent by the standards of man. The writer of the thesis project will teach the parishioners of BCPBC to realize that healthy and vitality may be produced, but if the perspective of parishioners is unsound, it will not be noticed. Gary McIntosh wrote,

> The process of salvation is ultimately in God’s control. We must appreciate the profound nature of spiritual transformation and growth. Recognizing that “our adequacy is from God” (2 Cor. 3: 5), we must continue in prayer, trusting God to bring about spiritual fruit in his time. Planning for evangelism must be rooted in faith, perseverance, prayer, and patience. Faith and prayer enable us to trust God with the results, while perseverance and patience allow us to keep doing our part of proclaiming the message of salvation.  

BCPBC will continue to pursue both spiritual and numerical growth. The next year will feature a period of prayer and development. Once the year ends, BCPBC will seek God in a bid to find methods that will depend upon His power and not the ingenuity of the members of the congregation.

The critical component of growth includes spiritual formation. The teaching occasions during the next year will focus on applying the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting,

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assembling, and reading the Bible. Gary McIntosh wrote, “No work of human agents in evangelism and church growth was ever effective without the silent, behind-the-scenes, in-the-heart work of God’s Spirit. However, within his sovereignty, God calls us to responsibility for preaching the Good News.”21 For numerical growth to occur during the one-year period of recalibrating, the church must increase the spiritual connection with God by using the tools He provided. The writer of the thesis project has already started the process of discovering the spiritual gifts of the members of BCPBC. During the next year, the goal includes asking at least 90% of members to complete a spiritual gifts assessment. Once members better understand spiritual gifts, the writer of the thesis project will effectively delegate leadership positions to parishioners who have the spiritual gifts to function in designated areas.

A diversity of spiritual gifts appears within every local church, and if Christians avoid properly deploying gifts, the effectiveness of the congregation will be limited. John Koessler wrote, “Every believer is given the Holy Spirit and is gifted in some way, but not everyone has the same gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29–30).”22 When pastors neglect to discover the gift makeup of the church, a disservice occurs to individual members and the body of Christ as a whole. When a person's gift or gifts remain unutilized within the confines of the church, Christians remain powerless to fulfill their purpose completely. In the past, when members of BCPBC completed spiritual gifts assessments, some members who were in their eighties and were just discovering their spiritual gifts. Some elderly people may experience a reduction in ability to serve in the

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21 McIntosh, Growing God's Church, 54.

capacity that fits their gifting, but if those Christians had discovered gifts while young, a greater impact would have been made through the proper application of the gifts.

Sixth Goal

The sixth goal for BCPBC includes seeing the results of the changes produce results by the end of a one-year period. Ultimately, results will vary according to God’s plan, but a few specific areas may benefit quickly. Seven of the surveyed pastors saw balanced outcomes. The churches witnessed an increased membership, more visitors, more baptisms, more outreaches, and more committed leaders. Those pastors embody 43.75% of the pastors who finished the assessment. The churches that the pastors serve experienced the ideal outcome which proves that the appropriate usage of church growth principles can produce the desired results with God’s help even when applied to a traditional church framework.

One of the goals of BCPBC in the next year goes beyond numerical, but the church will embrace numerical growth if God delivers it. Growth may happen organically due to a renewed focus on balance in the categories of focus and deployment of training, teaching, and preaching. During the new member’s class, teachers will emphasize the value and importance of church membership. When church membership remains a low priority, the likelihood of faithful adherence to the Bible and the polity of BCPBC remains low. Thom Rainer wrote,

That is how we are to enter into relationship with others in the church. Membership in the church is not country club membership. It’s not about paying your dues and getting perks. It’s like Paul described in 1 Corinthians 12: 12–31. We are members of the body of Christ. We do not exist to serve ourselves; instead, we exist for the greater good of the body. Members of dying churches did not get that. For most of the members, their affiliation with the church focused around their desires and needs.23

The meaning and purpose of membership will be more clearly defined and taught. The current members of BCPBC will also need to serve as examples of how to serve as members who are faithful to the vision and mission of the church.

BCPBC may be defined as a family church due to a central group of family units who affiliated with the church for many generations. The wife of the writer of the thesis project is a descendant of both Sam Burkett and Isaac Chapple, who are the founders of the church. She serves as one example of the generational commitment of many families to the church. As a result of that demographic, the pastor of BCPBC and the leadership team will facilitate a meeting with key members of those families and share the importance of consistently providing a good example of church membership behaviors. The pastor of BCPBC will also underscore the importance of having a unified approach toward reaching the members of the families no longer connected to BCPBC.

One desired result of the meeting will include additional visitors at BCPBC. Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “Attendance is a real-time indicator, a weekly appraisal of commitment. Membership reflects a commitment to a church made in the past but may not be reflective of current actions. The value of membership also differs by generation.” Some individuals who refuse to commit to becoming a member of BCPBC will attend services, give in offerings, and even participate during outreach events. When such individuals who fit the category of devaluing membership feel pressured, they will likely move on to another church. That message must be communicated to all members of BCPBC because membership in a local church falls short of granting access to heaven. Church members will receive reminders of the importance of allowing

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visitors to experience the love of Christ through the members of the church. The process will move human efforts from the forefront and allow God to move on the hearts of prospects as they hear the Bible preached and taught. God will do what He has willed, and the membership must accept the results He produces.

An increase in baptisms may occur in the next year due to the rise of visitors and the new behaviors of calibrated families and members of BCPBC if God allows it. Individuals routinely ask to unite with the church after a second baptism, and the procedural error could result from a misunderstanding of the biblical basis for baptism. Ed Stetzer wrote,

> A little more than a decade ago, our research team did a study of baptisms (in our faith tradition, baptism is to follow conversion). Yet, 40 percent of those being baptized indicated they were actually making a rededication from an earlier decision. It seems that in baptistic traditions, there are so many calls to commitment that many are being baptized over and over. When decisions are the focus, decisions come and baptisms follow—often over and over. But what about life transformation? When does that finally take root?²⁵

The church desires to see more baptisms, but the goal includes more detailed training so candidates for baptism understand the purpose. Transformation is the most pressing command for individuals, which will produce a lasting effect on the converts to Christianity as well as the people impacted by witnessing the change in behavior. A biblical understanding of baptism should compel parishioners to work on spiritual growth rather than depend upon a magical formula to receive a good standing with God. Conversion should precede baptism. Once believers accept Christ as Savior and Lord and partake in the ordinance of baptism by immersion, moments may occur in the future when the need for repentance and recommitting to Christ occurs, but in such a case, rebaptism does not have to ensue.

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If candidates for baptism still have a desire to be baptized after being taught the meaning of baptism, the church will not accommodate that desire because baptism occurred after the candidate was converted, which meets the membership requirement of the church. In such cases, baptism will not happen again. First-time baptisms serve as a marker of church health because the ordinance of baptism follows conversion. Gary McIntosh wrote, “The rhythm of baptism bonds new disciples to the person of Christ and his fellowship on earth— the church. It asks new believers to submit to Christ’s leadership and ties them to a community of faith where they may be taught, held accountable, and grow.”26 First-time baptisms happen due to conversions, and the new converts are normally led by God to commit to a local church where baptism and development will be facilitated. When God sends believers to a church, that church carries the responsibility given by God to handle the developmental process with great care. Disciple making is a task that BCPBC will seek God for the ability to be used effectively by Him as a conduit for growth in the lives of those He sends.

The individuals will experience baptism upon the completion of Burkett Chapple 101, which is a new members class. The class will expose the candidates for baptism to the polity and doctrine of the church as well as responsibilities as members. New parishioners will also be taught the church’s responsibility to new members. In addition, prospects must complete a spiritual gifts assessment prior to receiving the ordinance of baptism. The facilitators of Burkett Chapple 101 often know which pupils have the best chance of becoming faithful members of the church due to the commitment that is shown during the timeframe of the class. At the conclusion of those steps, the prospects will have the option of either continuing with the journey as a

26 Gary L. McIntosh, Growing God’s Church: How People Are Actually Coming to Faith Today (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 70.
member of BCPBC after being baptized, or the candidates for membership can seek admission in a church which is not as committed to membership value.

BCPBC will also aim to produce more outreach events during the last month of the one-year period from the implementation of the strategic plan. The eleven-month timeframe will allow for the employment of the principles presented in the thesis project. During the eleven-month period, all outreach events will pause in order to ensure that the Go ministry of BCPBC implements the principles thought in the thesis project. The membership of the church will do a better job of embracing new visitors who assemble with the church because of conversions if the focus becomes biblical and not personal. The church cannot venture out into the community until parishioners depend upon God to produce growth if He chooses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has provided BCPBC with a great opportunity to exhaust the necessary effort to generate a shift of focus. Gary McIntosh wrote,

If you train 10 percent of your people each year for five years, you will have trained half of your people. At that point, the atmosphere of the church will change considerably, as members and attendees are sensitized to caring for nonbelievers.27

The focus of BCPBC included personal evangelism prior the pandemic and has continued. Eighty percent of the church leaders of BCPBC will achieve some sort of ministry training by the end of 2020. Once the church can assemble in person again there should be an evident difference in the atmosphere of BCPBC. The goal includes training 100% of the leaders of BCPBC in the next two years either face to face or virtually. The change should also improve the interaction with the citizens of the Bartow community once outreach events resume.

The COVID-19 pandemic also shifted the focus of members of BCPBC from traditional outreach to virtual outreach. The church assembled online only for the past four months due to

27 McIntosh, Growing God's Church, 152.
social distancing restrictions, which made safe face to face interaction almost impossible. The current reality allowed members of the church to send invitations to Facebook friends to join the church on the BCPBC Facebook page. BCPBC has an on-line church page on the church website that allows comments and gives on-line attenders the ability to raise virtual hands to declare a decision for Christ. Parishioners can also submit prayer requests on the website and Facebook. The church also uses a toll-free conference call number that allows people who do not have internet access to remain connected by participating in Sunday School, Bible study, and worship services.

Those points of connection have allowed the members to remain connected to the church as well as provide friends and family members with the opportunity to grow from the safety of homes. Todd Mullins wrote,

Church online currently takes various shapes and expressions. As churches better leverage current technology and prepare for the advancing technology; the potential for ministry online is endless. Church online removes the barriers of distance and time, allowing individuals to be reached and ministered to 24 hours a day. The new digital generation that is emerging needs resources and training to be evangelists to a growing online world.28

The opportunities provided to the church by the means of technology serve as a source of appreciation. BCPBC’s on-line footprint can be traced back to 2014, and every year since then the church has worked to increase virtual ministries. Currently, the writer of the thesis project does much of the online ministry, but if God produces growth in the future, the position of virtual pastor will become a reality. The virtual pastor will cover pastoral care for the on-line members of BCPBC. The group of members classified as on-line members live in different communities and are as far away as Kenya. Virtual pastoral care consists of answering prayer

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requests, keeping on-line members updated with the news of BCPBC, and encourage on-line members to contribute on BCPBC’s website or mobile app.

The leadership of BCPBC will commit to the process of realizing wellness within the congregation. Just as most of the surveyed pastors experienced a more committed leadership team due to the implementation of the tenants of church growth, the writer of the thesis project expects the same result at BCPBC. The desired results depend upon God first, but He also will produce health through willing vessels. Andy Stanley wrote,

> When a leader attempts to become well-rounded, he brings down the average of the organization’s leadership quotient— which brings down the level of the leaders around him. Don’t strive to be a well-rounded leader. Instead, discover your zone and stay there. 

Leaders must find the area of leadership that fits because God equips all leaders in the local church to serve in specific capacities. The danger lies in the desire to seek only glamorous positions. The frontline individuals normally garner many accolades but serve no more importance than those who help behind the scenes. The writer of the thesis project will form a committee of seasoned Christians who will assist in the process of helping leaders, and potential leaders find positions in the zones that fit the gifts. The results of spiritual gifts assessments will provide a base line to work from for the placement committee. The committee which the writer of the thesis project will chair will assess the effectiveness of current leaders per annum. The practice of observing leaders for compliance yearly aligns with the government of the church because all positions except the Senior Pastor go through the process of election or appointment annually.

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Seventh Goal

The seventh goal of BCPBC includes all the features of a healthy church as defined by the results disclosed by the surveyed pastors. Ten of the pastors which represented 62.5% of the group feel that all the above features serve as prerequisites of a healthy church. The features of a fit church as defined by the pastors included a large membership, a great prayer ministry, an effective evangelism ministry, a strong Christian education ministry, and good preaching and teaching. The first ingredient may not be a true indicator of a healthy because God may avoid producing large memberships in all healthy churches. In addition, some mega churches employ pragmatic practices with the aim of increasing numbers. Some large churches may exceed biblical boundaries to assemble a large crowd and even exclude the proclamation of the Word of God. John MacArthur wrote, In the past half-decade, some of America’s largest evangelical churches have employed worldly gimmicks like slapstick, vaudeville, wrestling exhibitions, and even mock striptease to spice up their Sunday meetings.” If BCPBC realizes a larger membership in the future, the increase will occur as a result of God’s provision rather than manufactured dubious methods.

The current membership of BCPBC stands at two hundred and twenty-one, which does not categorize the church as being small. God blessed the church to include many faithful members who represent multiple generations. The leaders of the young adult ministry of BCPBC grew up in the church and seem committed to remaining connected to help ensure that BCPBC remains relevant for many years to come. These members represent the millennial generation and a difficult demographic to reach for many churches. Some operate as agents of change because the writer of the thesis project understood the need of a voice from the group of millennials and

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as a result of the decision the group has worked tirelessly to help BCPBC reach the peers of the group. The church created a young adult ministry, and the members of the ministry have been good stewards over it. The young adults of the church have facilitated panel discussion with relevant topics that drew millennials from churches within the community. Some do not attend church regularly but because the service produced by peer’s attendance was a priority. The young adults of BCPBC also stuffed blessing bags which were handed out to homeless people in the community. The presence of a functioning young adult’s ministry symbolizes wellness for BCPBC and equally important a good marker for the future.

BCPBC’s prayer ministry is great, and prayer will continue to be an emphasis in the future. The church endured many trials during the one hundred and twenty-six-year history, and prayer has been at the forefront of the efforts the parishioners expended to endure. Stephen Macchia wrote,

What would you say constitutes the foundation of a healthy church ministry? Many slogans suggest ideas, but wouldn’t you agree that the Word of God and prayer are fundamental? They are two of God’s greatest gifts to us. In them we find comfort, direction, and hope. In them we discover God through his Spirit. In them we grow in our relationship with our Savior. In them we learn about where we have come from and who we are to become today.31

The church must accentuate prayer just as much as the Word of God. God provided both prayer and the Bible so that His followers can develop a relationship with Him. Prayer and the Bible both serve as indispensable features of a healthy church. BCPBC currently facilitates a prayer band ministry that convenes on Wednesdays at noon and a prayer group that meets at 6:30 p.m. on the same day. During both of those occasions scheduled prayer parishioners focus on prayer requests as well as prayers that underscore the health and protection of the membership of the

church. The writer of the thesis project constantly prays for prayer requests submitted online, texted, or shared verbally.

In the future, the writer of the thesis project will also add a 7:00 a.m. Sunday morning prayer meeting to the church’s schedule. A prayer line will in addition be implemented so members or people not affiliated with BCPBC can call in and in the discipline of prayer. Prayer will be practiced more corporately at BCPBC than moments in its recent history. Steven Macchia wrote,

Strangely, though Scripture and prayer are highly valued, they are more often promoted than practiced. We not only need to reinvigorate our congregations toward greater biblical literacy, but we must reevaluate our traditional view of prayer meetings and introduce prayer into every context of the ministry.32

The prayer meetings will operate as pillars for the BCPBC prayer ministry. In addition, leaders will be asked to pray regularly with and for the members of assigned groups. Leadership prayer will create an environment that accentuates prayer, and the church will continue to experience great prayer ministry.

BCPBC will strive to improve the evangelism ministry during the next year. The evangelism ministry of BCPBC has already made an impact in the Bartow community by employing the method of neighbor blitzes. In the future, the goal will include revisiting the neighborhoods that the church has held outreach events in before and seek out leaders from the communities who will be able to share the most pressing needs with the church. Once those needs become known, the Go ministry will formulate plans to help meet some of the requests. Thom Rainer wrote,

Make specific plans to minister and to evangelize your community. You have prayed about it. You have honestly evaluated your time in programs and ministry, and how the church spends its funds. Now is the time to develop specific and concrete plans to impact

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32 Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, 18.
One church leader I know went to the principal of a nearby public elementary school. He asked the principal what the school needed most. That next summer, over 100 members of the church were painting walls in the school. The community ministries grew from that one commitment.33

The problem that plagued BCPBC’s evangelism ministry in the past was a lack of commitment. Upon leaving the communities where the neighborhood blitz events occurred, the church never followed up with the residents. The absence of follow-up may have hindered the growth of the church because relationships take time to develop. If the members of those communities had seen the members of the evangelism ministry on a consistent basis, the likelihood of attendance at the church would potentially have increased.

Inconsistent leadership normally damage efforts to develop a sound evangelism ministry. The leadership of the evangelism ministry of BCPBC will hopefully do a better job of building bridges in the communities that surround the church upon request so that the gospel spreads and needs become met. The writer of the thesis project will meet quarterly with the leaders of the evangelism ministry to cast the new expectation for the positions. The leaders and participants of the evangelism ministry will endure training on the principles of evangelism once yearly. The training will allow the participants to remain in compliance with the rudiments of evangelism, which will place them in a better position to win souls.

The impending instructions will also remind the members of the evangelism ministry of the significance of occupying the frontlines of the church. The efforts of the evangelism ministry with God’s help can become the catalyst for statistical growth. Intentional actions should take place if a growth in the membership of BCPBC is to happen in the future. Stephen Macchia wrote,

Jesus’ words to go out and make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28: 18–20) are not to be taken lightly. We have God-ordained responsibilities in the areas of evangelism, social concern, and worldwide missions. Imagine what your church would be like if the pastor and leadership team lived out this mandate and empowered others in the congregation to do so as well. For this to occur, we need to equip the saints for the work of outwardly focused ministry.\textsuperscript{34}

The writer of the thesis project remains committed to the great commission and the equipping of the saints to command from Jesus out. BCPBC can no longer vacillate between being committed to evangelism or acting as if evangelism does not matter. When the church shows flashes of apathy regarding outreach, the unchurched of the community cannot receive the good news of a Savior who died for sins and is committed to caring for His followers not only on earth but also throughout eternity. The world needs the Savior, and the responsibility has been given to the church to present Him to the world. BCPBC will remain resolute in the area of evangelism.

In the next year, BCPBC will also continue improving the Christian education ministry. The process of improvement has already started due to the training of leaders both on-site and online through the ministry grid website. The process will continue as only 40% of the trainees have completed all allocated courses. The goal has been established for the completion of 100% of assigned courses within the next year. Once leaders complete the classes, progress will be measured according to the coursework. The leaders will be observed by the director of BCPBC’s Christian education ministry. Surveys will be given to the students taught by the Sunday school teachers. The surveys will provide a tangible measurement of the progress the teachers will make after training. The survey question will parallel the principles taught in the classes, so if the trained methods are not being utilized by the teachers, students will unknowingly divulge whether the teachers are out of compliance.

\textsuperscript{34} Macchia, \textit{Becoming a Healthy Church}, 145.
The surveyed pastors also disclosed views of the importance of good preaching and teaching as a feature of a healthy church. The writer of the thesis project currently serves as the only preacher at BCPBC, and well-prepared sermons will continue as a priority. When a minister preaches the Bible, eternal ramifications should compel the preacher to take biblical proclamation seriously. Expository preaching may serve as the best style to deploy to disclose to parishioners the interpretation of a text. Richard Ramesh wrote,

> Expository preaching is about the Bible and your people. There are many fine definitions of expository preaching. This is my working definition: Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness. The components of the definition help us understand the expository task from many dimensions and at many levels.\(^{35}\)

The process of employing the tools of hermeneutics takes time, which requires a commitment to facilitate the necessary moments of preparation often at the expense of many other things. A charismatic preacher may excite a crowd, but the Bible coupled with the influence of the Holy Spirit will change the hearts and minds of parishioners who are fortunate to hear a preacher who can divulge the true meaning of a text through utilizing the method of expository preaching.

The writer of the thesis project invested thousands of dollars in Logos Bible Software over the years. The library includes over eleven thousand books and resources that allow for the systematic study of any biblical text or subject. The software also includes an original languages tool that allows for a verse by verse examination of any text both in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The writer of the thesis project will continue utilizing the expansive Logos Bible

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software library to approach the teaching and preaching ministry of BCPBC by employing expository methods, which provide the best opportunity with God’s help to present the Bible accurately.

Most of the surveyed pastors indicated that churches become unhealthy as a result of specific characteristics. Fifteen of the pastors surveyed, which embodies 93.75% of the group, indicated that certain symptoms would appear within the boundaries of an unwell church. The characteristics included lack of vision, poor leadership, limited resources, unsound preaching, and teaching, as well as little community involvement. BCPBC will commit to eradicating any of those characteristics within the next year by following the paradigm the thesis project created. BCPBC can now self-diagnose wellness by confirming rather the symptoms of unhealthy churches manifest in the context of the church.

**In Five Years**

The principles of the Bible serve as the foundation for the pattern gleaned from the thesis project. BCPBC will utilize the paradigm from the thesis project as a blueprint from this day forward with the hopes that God will bless the church to remain healthy and produce the fruit He ordained. The church will approach the implementation of the template while leaving room for God to amend the plan at any moment. The pattern has not obtained perfection, but the plan has been comprehensively developed by utilizing the Bible, experts in the field of church health, and experienced pastors. Certain characteristics of progress will show up in the next five years if God allows within the context of BCPBC.

**New Facility**

BCPBC has begun the process of securing funds to build a new facility on the seven acres of land, which is owned by the church free and clear. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the
campaign to break ground for now but has facilitated an opportunity for the church to continue the process of fundraising. Once the process to build the modern facility begins the building phase should take one year to complete. As a result, the new building will not open until 2022 at the earliest. The current facility was built in 1952 and has undergone many renovations since that time. The facility is in excellent shape due to good care ever since the first services were held, but the building does not have some essential amenities that are beneficial for growth.

The absence of classrooms produces an obstacle for the effort to host an efficient Sunday school ministry because all adult classes are in the sanctuary. The pupils can hear lessons being taught by multiple instructors concurrently, which makes the task of focusing arduous. The lack of classrooms also makes the creation of new classes impossible, which hinders the church from promoting teachers and maintaining sound student to teacher ratios. Steve Parr wrote,

I do not object to some adult classes being large, but if all of your adult classes are large, you will find that many ministry needs are being neglected and the back door grows wider and wider. Please note that larger congregations tend to have slightly larger classes. But the further you stray from healthy ratios of leaders to learners, the more difficult it will become to minister to your members and to assimilate new members and guests.36

The writer of the thesis project taught the importance of ratios at BCPBC during sessions of the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Church School Convention in the past, but due to antiquated facilities built at a time when the fellowship halls were deemed to be more important than classrooms, ratios have been allowed that are often too large for churches to have effective Christian education ministries. The major driving force for the new facility has been the desire to implement the principles of the ministry that will provide BCPBC the best opportunity to connect with the community, assimilate new members, and develop the congregation toward

spiritual maturity. The new facility has proven to be necessity for the church to accomplish that objective in the future.

Christian School

The freedom to mold young minds by utilizing the Bible as the foundation serves as a necessity. The new facility will provide BCPBC with the opportunity to facilitate a Christian school. Ronald Hoch wrote,

Why the constant search for and implementation of new programs, models, and methods? Because the non-Christian school is rooted in ideas that do not cultivate life; rather, they are rooted in the temporal and the fleeting: man and his abilities and accomplishments. Hess is right: Non-Christian schools and their operational systems stand on quicksand; they lack a solid foundation, or, to return to the metaphor of rootedness, they lack the nourishing soil of truth that feeds the human soul.37

The hosting of a Christian school at the facility will assist BCPBC with the aim of remaining in alignment with the Bible and the mission and vision statements. The wife of the writer of the thesis project holds a Doctor of Education degree and is a certified school psychologist. Her expertise as well as future partnerships with others will help produce the school. The school should be fully functional within the next five years.

The church will utilize a master blueprint for the constructing of the new facility that provides phases, which will allow for a future educational edifice behind the worship facility, if God blesses the school to outgrow the classroom space in the worship facility. The school will start with elementary grades and work up to high school grades in the future. The school will also add sports subsequently as God graciously grows the institute. Once the school starts, BCPBC will have a great opportunity to help young people develop biblical world views that will bless the lives of many.

Reentry Program

Within the next five years BCPBC will partner with Marcus D. Floyd Ministries, Inc., which is a nonprofit organization founded by the writer of the thesis project to produce a reentry program designed to help members of the community who were incarcerated in the areas of employment, housing, healthcare, education, family reconciliation, and most importantly spiritual growth. The aim of the partnership includes helping stop the cycle of returning to crime due to a lack of opportunities and little skill development. The resources will be provided through grants as well as contributions from donors. The most important thing the reentry program will provide includes hope. Michael Jackson wrote,

Lack of employment is a major contributor in the failure and return to prison of most people. Finding a job is also one of the most difficult challenges most formerly incarcerated people will face. It is not just getting a job, but getting a job that pays a decent wage to live on and possibly even support a family. An attractive resume package is needed to present to employers to overcome the former incarceration factor. It can be tricky and frustrating, but it can be done.38

The ministry context of BCPBC demands such resources, because as a result of the prison cycles that have been created, many children have grown up in single-parent homes. That reality may increase the chances that the same pattern will be played out in the lives of the children if something does not interrupt the sequence.

The program will help the individuals who have paid their debts to society to gain the resources and understanding to heal relationships that have been damaged because of the incarcerated. Michael Jackson wrote, “Take time to consider the negative impact your presence

in the prison has had on your family and loved ones. In many cases, the women and children of
inmates suffer worse than does the man in jail.”\textsuperscript{39} The program should produce empathy in the
hearts and minds of the individuals who finish. The empathy that emits will hopefully empower
them to do the necessary work of reconciliation with Christ first and the families that shared the
imprisonment experience with them. The Christian school will help children avoid the traps of
incarceration so greater opportunities will be presented in the future. The reentry program will
help the individuals who have been incarcerated avoid the perils of attempting to live a
productive life. The school and the reentry program will both serve vital purposes in the future
for BCPBC.

Membership Increase

BCPBC does not aim to grow in the next year, but with God’s help through the
implementation of the features of the paradigm that the thesis project provides, the church should
increase membership by around 54% in the next five years. An increase of that percentage would
place the membership of BCPBC at 340 members in five years. The conservative estimate will
likely occur if God allows the numerical increase to happen. New members will allow the church
to enlist more people into the fabric of the mission and vision of the church. Thom Rainer wrote,

While numbers are not everything, they can be telling from a symptomatic perspective. Churches with symptoms of sickness are likely to have declined some in worship attendance over the past five years. If they have grown, the rate of growth was slower than the growth rate of the community in which they are located. Many leaders stop looking at numbers when they began to decline. And when numbers are ignored, they tend to get even worse.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Thom S. Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014), Location 698.
The metrics of attendance and growth will be scrutinized meticulously after the one-year period is over because both can serve as markers of church health. The church began the process of taking attendance during Sunday School and counting the people who attended during the weekly services, but that practice will be suspended for one year while the church focuses on health through the application process of the features contained in the thesis project.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Many factors can arise and hinder a church from being healthy. The thesis project has utilized Burkett Chapple Primitive Church as the subject of a case study to show a church can utilize the presence of symptoms as motivation to exhaust the necessary effort to produce spiritual health with God’s help.

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter one of the thesis projects serves as the introduction which defined the meaning of church health, the statement of the problem, the statement of limitations, theoretical basis, statement of methodology, review of literature and the scriptural basis. Each of those sections helped provide content, which steered the project in the right direction for researching the need for a biblical system for growth in traditional church through evangelism and discipleship. Once the chapter was complete the reason for the research and the plan to carry the investigation out was formed.

The statement of the problem established the starting point for the thesis project to commence researching and developing a Bible-based plan which would potentially provide a strategy for healthy growth at BCPBC. The glaring problem for BCPBC was presented as the traditional methods of the ministry which have not changed much throughout the one hundred twenty-six years of the church’s history. The success of the past has also served as a hindrance to progress because many parishioners who experienced those great years are committed to resisting change because of familiarity with the antiquated methods of the past.

The statement of limitations showed the plan produced by the thesis project would serve as a blueprint, but the proposal will be subject to the responses of the surveyed pastors and filter
information concerning the inner workings of BCPBC. The plan can be altered to fit many churches with similar contexts, but the congregations that attempt to implement the Bible-based plan will have to use other means to fill in any blanks left by the recognized constraints. The theoretical basis section referenced the importance of producing a strategic plan which incorporates contemporary practices combined with timeless biblical principles that will position BCPBC to grow with God’s help. The statement of methodology established how the thesis project would follow a comprehensive method that would ensure the research is given in a systematic manner.

The review of literature demonstrated the range of varied resources, which would be employed to complete the thesis project. Most of the resources were scholarly books, which added credibility to the results of the thesis project. Journal articles also served as sources of validation and abetted the process of certifying the thesis project. The most important source proposed was the Bible since it is the basis for all the principles covered throughout the thesis project.

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter two provided the thesis project with a systematic examination of Burkett Chapple Primitive Baptist Church. The church’s polity, history, leadership, mission statement, vision statement, and past methods were examined in order to utilize the current status of BCPBC as the point of implementation for the methods provided by the biblical system produced due to the comprehensive research of the thesis project. Chapter two also examined specific goals that were employed successfully by BCPBC in the past, and a few of the objectives and goals will continue as aims in the future due to efficacy in the past. The objectives and goals found within chapter 2 can be employed in almost any ministry setting, but some characteristics
are unique to BCPBC. Chapter 2 indicated that the thesis project was envisioned due to the understanding of battles some traditional churches have experienced because of observing to practices that are viewed by some as antiquated. Chapter 2 also divulged the meaning of healthy biblical and strategic church growth by employing the Bible and academic sources.

Chapter 2 examined the mission statement of BCPBC carefully and established the statement's significance. The section covering the statement made it clear why parishioners must have a target. The mission provides a goal for members to work toward and helps the process of appraising the progress made by congregants. It was also recognized in chapter 2 that once the ministries of BCPBC have diagnosed the spiritual place of members and ministered to areas of weakness, parishioners are implemented into the preferred area of the ministry. Once members are in the chosen area of the ministry, maximum participation is asked because involvement is essential to complete the work that God has assigned to BCPBC.

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 of the thesis project examined the survey results of pastors that serve churches affiliated with the East Florida District Primitive Baptist Association. The ministry contexts that the pastors operate in mostly mirror that of BCPBC, which made the responses relevant. The thesis project also utilized many references that provided pertinent information that added credibility to the methods proposed by the thesis project. The results of the surveys coupled with the Bible helped provide the thesis project with parameters for the creation of the plan that will be biblically implemented at BCPBC in the future.

The first question of the inquiry surveyed pastors to find out if the churches were inwardly or outwardly focused. Two of the sixteen pastors that responded or 13% answered that the churches they serve are inwardly focused only. One of the pastors has served the current
congregation for between one and ten years, and the other has served in the same capacity for thirty-one years or more. One pastor of the sixteen surveyed disclosed that the church he serves is only outwardly focused. Thirteen of the sixteen pastors who responded to the survey understood the critical role that balance plays in the process of structuring a healthy ministry. The pastors who serve churches that are inwardly and outwardly focused represents 81% of the surveyed group.

The majority of the sixteen pastors which completed the survey understood the importance of having a God-given pattern to follow. The survey asked the pastors if they had both vision and mission statements. The responses helped the writer of the thesis project to discover that 88% of the pastors surveyed have both. Most of the pastors who completed the survey understood the importance of communicating the mission and vision statements regularly. This was reflected in their answers, as 69% of the group responded that they communicate both the church’s vision and mission statements continually.

While calculating the information about the pastors who have studied church growth, it was discovered that five of them have served in the same pastorate for between one and ten years. The pastors who have served at their present location for between one and ten years represent 42% of the pastors who have studied church growth. Those discoveries will provide the churches a greater possibility of being effective as the congregation attempts to implement the methods of church growth in the future, with God’s help.

Upon implementing the findings of church growth studies one pastor experienced an expanded membership. He represents 6.25% of the pastors that completed the survey. The pastor that saw the membership of the church he serves increase is only inwardly focused, which normally obstructs efforts to grow a church numerically. He has served the same church for
thirty-one years or more, which means his system is well-established. Longevity can also create credibility, so there is probably generational growth, which is produced gradually through births and marriages. The pastor who saw the church he serves grow also utilizes sermon series, training, Sunday school, and Bible study to teach the principles of church growth. The thesis project cannot presume that certain factors must be applied before growth can be achieved because the Holy Spirit can generate growth in atypical situations.

Seven pastors experienced balanced results upon implementing church growth principles at the churches they serve. Those pastors represent 43.75% of the pastors who completed the survey. The efforts produced an exemplar outcome which may provide evidence that the proper application of church growth values can create the anticipated results despite being applied to a traditional church framework. When a church has balanced results, creativity can be produced even from a conventional church context. The innovation that is produced must also be implemented with fortitude while subtly phasing out typical approaches that are no longer useful.

Ten of the pastors which represented 62.5% of the group felt that various features are prerequisites of a healthy church. The components and results fluctuate according to the context of the church. Numerical growth may occur more naturally in a more populous city area as compared to a less populated rustic area. A church located in a rural region can have all the features except for a considerable membership and yet be fit. One may feel that if a church does not have a substantial membership, it cannot be healthy, but the size does not always verify health.

Most of the pastors revealed that churches produced numerous symptoms that are not fit. Fifteen of the pastors surveyed, which represents 93.75% of the group indicated that all multiple indicators would appear within the boundaries of an unfit church. The signs do not show up
quickly, but if they are not addressed, the result may be death for the church. A church that has been given a death verdict due to multiple alarms can either acknowledge that fate or modify procedures to survive. Churches must operate prayerfully while retaining a sense of urgency because the well-being of the church should be a priority. Churches that find themselves grasping for life must be willing to employ the crucial changes that will help them not only endure but become a healthy church that can grow both spiritually and numerically if God allows.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 produced the proposal for the Bible based implementation of the health and growth plan for BCPBC. The writer of the thesis project examined the steps of application for the first year as well as the desired results within five years. The success of the biblical based establishment of the proposal is contingent upon God’s will regardless of how conscientiously a church follows the plan. Any proposed percentage of improvement was produced with the caveat of “if God wills” or “with God’s help.” Healthy growth termed as organic falls short of the reality of growth. Healthy numeric growth is always produced by the supernatural influence of God. The foundation of a healthy church can be described as a pronounced and well-developed allegiance to Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church. If the efforts of the church do not calibrate upon that truth, the church risks the danger of becoming a club that only wants to make the congregation happy.

The intention of BCPBC during the initial year of the suggested plan includes improving the usefulness of Sunday School. Sunday School functions as an essential ministry because the teaching ministry provides a great platform to cultivate members spiritually while also aiding with the integration procedure for people new to the congregation. Constructing a successful
Sunday School necessitates dedicated leaders because continuous work is a requirement for success. BCPBC will expect all Sunday School teachers to go through training on an annual basis to ensure optimal effectiveness.

The second goal for BCPBC includes enhancing ministry balance. Most of the surveyed pastors serve at churches that were both inwardly and outwardly focused. Being focused equally on the making of disciples and serving the community encircling the church can be challenging, but the approach holds to biblical principles, which create a well-balanced ministry context. The balanced pastors represent 81% of the surveyed group. The answers of those pastors prove that BCPBC should develop a balanced approach as an objective.

The third goal for the next year includes redistributing the vision and mission statements of the church. Eighty-eight percent of the pastors evaluated have both mission and vision statements. Sixty-nine percent of the pastors made known that they communicate both the church’s vision and mission statements often. The reality of the pastors’ devotion to communicating both statements with the churches they serve shows that conveying the importance of both the mission and vision statements of BCPBC during the imminent meetings with leaders remains vital. Once the leaders of BCPBC commit to the vision and mission statements and model the goals before the individuals in ministry, balance will prove easier to obtain within a year.

The fourth goal for BCPBC will include eliminating numerical growth as a gauge for spiritual health. Dissatisfaction has been the result of yearning for an escalation of members in the past. God decides if He is going to deliver an increase of members, but the responsibility for working to ensure the ingredients for growth is the responsibility of the entire congregation. The
focus of the next year will include setting the groundwork for growth that will hopefully come at the conclusion of the first year of the proposed plan.

The fifth goal for BCPBC in the next year incorporates applying a more balanced methodology when teaching the principles of church growth. Thirteen of the pastors surveyed divulged that they employ a level-headed methodology to teach the tenets of church growth. This group embodies 81.25% of those who answered the assessment. The church leaders employ Bible studies, sermon series, training, and Sunday school to announce the message about church expansion to the congregants. In the future, the writer of the thesis project will utilize the same means as the balanced pastors to convey the principles of church growth.

The sixth goal for BCPBC consists of the new changes generating results by the end of a one-year period. Ultimately, outcomes will vary according to God’s plan, but a few areas may gain swiftly. The seventh goal of BCPBC comprises the creation all the elements of a healthy church as defined by the results divulged by the surveyed pastors. Ten of the pastors which exemplified 62.5% of the group felt that all of the aspects serve as prerequisites of a healthy church. The features of a fit church as defined by the pastors included a large membership, a great prayer ministry, an effective evangelism ministry, a strong Christian education ministry, and good preaching and teaching.

BCPBC has commenced the course of obtaining monies to build a new facility on the seven acres of land, which is owned by the church free and clear. The COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the campaign to break ground for now but has facilitated an opportunity for the church to continue the method of fundraising. Once the process to build the contemporary facility begins the building phase should take one year to complete. As a result, the new building will not open until 2022 at the earliest. The new facility will offer BCPBC with the opportunity
to accommodate a Christian school. The hosting of a Christian school at the facility will help BCPBC with the intention of persisting in alignment with the Bible and the mission and vision statements of the church. The church will employ a master blueprint for the building of the new facility that provides phases, which will permit a future educational structure behind the worship facility if God blesses the school to outgrow the classroom space in the worship facility. The school will start with elementary grades and work up to high school grades in the future. The school will also add sports subsequently as God graciously grows the institute. Once the school starts, BCPBC will have a great occasion to help young people cultivate biblical world views that will help many.

Within the next five years, BCPBC will join with Marcus D. Floyd Ministries, Inc. which is a nonprofit organization founded by the writer of the thesis project to produce a reentry program meant to help members of the community who were imprisoned in the areas of employment, housing, healthcare, education, family reconciliation, and most importantly spiritual growth. The aim of the partnership includes helping stop the sequence of individuals returning to crime because of a lack of chances and little skill enhancement.

BCPBC does not intend to grow numerically in the next year, but with God’s help through the implementation of the features of the model that the thesis project offers, the church should increase membership by about 54% in the next five years. An increase of that percentage would position the membership of BCPBC at 340 members in five years. The moderate estimation will likely occur if God allows the numerical increase to happen.

God’s blessing will rest upon any church that is Bible-based in principles and methods, but even if His blessings are not manifested through numerical growth, His blessing will produce spiritual health in any ministry setting, which adheres to the precepts of the Bible. The thesis
project reached the goal of producing a biblical system for growth in traditional churches through evangelism and discipleship. The only future need for further research will be at the one year and five-year marks of the implementation of the system. At those junctures, the proposed outcomes of the thesis project will be either proven to be accurate or inaccurate. The methods contained in the thesis project will ensure that BCPBC or any similar church remains healthy for many years to come.

The system is not perfect and does leave room for amendments as new and better methods become available in the future. The Bible serves as the foundation for all the methods that the thesis project employed so most of the procedures will remain applicable in ministry contexts for many future generations. This system serves as another installment in the already overly saturated field of church growth, but in conclusion, it was disclosed that all healthy numerical growth in the local church can only be produced as a result of God’s blessings and not pragmatic practices, which remove God and the proclamation of the Bible the place of prominence.

BCPBC will benefit greatly due to the system the thesis project provides. The writer of the thesis will communicate the results of the research among the members of BCPBC and encourage adherence to the pattern. Frequent communication of the contents of the proposed plan will foster familiarity and will increase the execution of the vital components of the system. Openness will also help parishioners to grasp the significance of having a plan which was produced by employing systematic and comprehensive methods that were guided by a desire to help BCPBC become the best possible church it could become with God’s help. The church has a great opportunity to serve as an example of church health and potential numerical growth to a
plethora of churches that have been plagued by traditional methods as well as rural settings. If God allows, BCPBC will obtain the objectives of the thesis project.
Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Which of these words best describe your current church context?
   a. Inwardly Focused
   b. Outwardly Focused
   c. Both

2. How long have you served as pastor at your current church?
   a. 1-10 Years
   b. 11-30 Years
   c. 31 or more Year

3. Does your church have both a vision and mission statement?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Do you communicate the church’s vision and mission statements often?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. Have you studied the importance of healthy church growth?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. How have you implemented your findings?
   a. Bible Studies
   b. Sermon Series
   c. Training
   d. Sunday School
   e. All the Above

7. How has the implementation of the principles you have gleaned benefited your church?
   a. Increased Membership
   b. More Visitors
   c. More Baptisms
   d. More Outreach
   e. More Committed Leaders
f. All the Above

8. In your opinion, what are some of the features of a healthy church?
   a. Large Membership
   b. Great Prayer Ministry
   c. Effective Evangelism Ministry
   d. Strong Christian Education Ministry
   e. Good Preaching and Teaching
   f. All the Above

9. What are the origins or the symptoms that lead to a church becoming unhealthy?
   a. A Lack of Vision
   b. A Lack of Good Leadership
   c. A Lack of Resources
   d. A Lack of Sound Preaching and Teaching
   e. A Lack of Community Involvement
   f. All the Above
Bibliography

Books


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South Florida Bible College & Seminary Website, Accessed July 15, 2019
http://sfbc.edu/jchester/.


March 27, 2020

Marcus Floyd
Garry Graves


Dear Marcus Floyd, Garry Graves:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office