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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Impacts of Network Training on Church Revitalization

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the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity

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by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Does the impact of executive team training in church networks enhance problem-solving at the local church level and develop theologically informed theoretical practices? The action research project addressed the question that if the staff at Harvest Network received instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization, the expected result might be that the network team may become better equipped to serve the churches of the network. Four primary themes emerged from the literature research: barriers to church revitalization; detrimental pastoral leadership; church revitalization culture; and organizational team training. The designed intervention included interviews, focus groups, participant observations, reports, surveys, instruction, and exit interviews for the staff at Harvest Network and network churches identified as needing revitalization. The action research found that organizational team training did better equip the Harvest Network team to serve the network's churches better. As the American church landscape indicates a widespread need for revitalization, the thesis project will impact others in ministry network leadership.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The problem being addressed in this thesis project is the inability of the Harvest Network office to properly equip and encourage pastors in this network that leads churches that are plateaued or in decline. Out of 107 North American Harvest Network churches, 88 are currently identified as declined or stagnant in their growth.

This reality among the churches in the Harvest Network reflects other national trends. The statistics concerning the realities of the Christian church in North America are dismal. The North American church is in a current state of overall decline. If one took the number of churches in existence at the beginning of the year, added the number of planted churches and subtracted the number of closed churches, a net loss is realized. In fact, research done by Brian Croft reveals two alarming realities: “Specifically, there has been an average net loss of 3,500 churches each year over the last twenty-plus years and of the remaining churches 88 to 91 percent of them are dying.”¹

Harvest Network churches are not exempt from the reality of the dismal landscape of the North American church. There are unique obstacles within the Harvest Network office that can be addressed and possibly enable the distressed churches to make a turnaround toward health and renewed vitality. This thesis project will address the problem and possible alternatives that may assist the leadership team at Harvest Network to lead plateaued and declining churches toward renewed health and vitality within its ministry context.

¹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 8.

Ministry Context

Harvest Network is a network of 126 churches. Of the 126 churches, 107 of the congregations exist in North America. The remaining 15 percent of the network are international congregations in nations such as Pakistan, San Salvador, South Africa, Canada, Colombia, and Mexico. Collectively, more than 70 percent of the network churches are plateaued or in decline.

The network informally began in 2003 when a small group of pastors seeking greater connection and mutual encouragement intentionally began to organize training events and central worship services for edification and leadership development. Over time, the genesis of these mutual happenings became more attractive to other like-minded leaders. In 2006, the key influencers of the adolescent movement formally organized as Harvest Network. Harvest Network exists to plant new churches, revitalize existing churches, and multiply healthy campus ministries.

The appeal for leaders to connect with the network is training, resourcing, interconnectivity, accountability, ministerial credentialing, polity, and mutual encouragement. The leaders and their teams gather annually for training, resourcing, mutual encouragement, and spiritual renewal. In addition, the network hosts an annual leadership development gathering for ministry leaders.

The entry point for consideration in the network is a personal recommendation from someone already in the network, accompanied by an exhaustive application and appropriate background check. Upon receipt of the personal recommendation, application, and clean background check, the candidate is interviewed by the new applicant board. The applicant board makes the recommendation for approval and credentialing. Upon approval, the new member and congregation covenants to support the network prayerfully and financially in its mission to plant

new churches, revitalize existing churches, and multiply healthy campuses.

Network members have access to the central office where twelve staff people exist to help them plant new life-giving churches, revitalize an existing church, or multiply an existing healthy campus. The central office resources, trains, and encourages existing or new congregations in their contextual mission.

The offices of Harvest Network reside in Columbus, Ohio. The Harvest Network team consists of twelve people that serve the network. The team has a team leader, an office manager, four regional leaders, two field assessors, and four administrative office assistants. This researcher is the team leader. The team leader is a 57-year-old Caucasian male. He has twenty-eight years of extensive experience in church planting, church multiplication, and renewal. The leader's experience as a church planter brings valuable experience and insight to the journey of a planter that conceives a dream about a particular type of church in a specific city for unique people. His insights on the struggles and joys of a planter are valuable to the team.

Further, the team leader has personal experience in multiplying video campuses from healthy existing churches. Video campuses present unique challenges for the vibrancy and mission of the mother church and require balanced healthy tension that allows both to evolve as healthy entities. The leader also has a history of leading declining churches toward vitality and renewal. Before joining the Harvest Network team four years ago, he served on the leadership team of another larger network of churches. On that team, his portfolio was primarily revitalization and church health. This experience also informs the daily operations of the Harvest Network.

The office manager is a 41-year-old Caucasian, single female. She is a corporate lawyer by trade. She joined the team three years ago to lead the managerial efforts of the office. She is a

people person and an excellent multi-tasker and administrator who can track multiple projects simultaneously. She directly reports to the director. Her primary responsibilities include managing the team, legal matters, corporation documents, and assessments. Though she has no formal church experience, she is an excellent problem solver and thinker and an essential asset to the energy and daily progress of the team.

The network is divided into four divisions: Northeast USA, Southeast USA, Western USA, and International. Each division has a regional leader assigned to enhance a consistent relationship, training, and guidance for network churches. The Northeast USA region currently has 44 churches in the network. The Northeast USA regional leader is a 38-year-old Hispanic, married male and a former successful church planter that joined the team two years ago. He pastored for twelve years and led the church he and his wife planted to multiply to two vibrant video campuses. He is a gifted leader and communicator that enjoys leading church planting, revitalization, and multiplication efforts in the Northeast USA.

The Southeast USA region currently has 37 churches in the network. The Southeast USA regional leader is a 58-year-old, Caucasian, married male. He is a former pastor of thirty years and is a doctoral candidate for his DMin in Practical Theology at the University of Chester, Matterson Hall Bible College. He joined the team three years ago. His extensive pastoral background brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the team. His ministry experience, zeal for equipping leaders, and heart for pastors inform the practices of the network.

The Western USA region currently has 22 churches in the network. The Western USA regional leader is a 52-year-old, Caucasian, married male. He joined the team one year ago and has an extensive background in corporate sales. He has been a Christian since an early age, is the son of a pastor, and is a well-disciplined student of God's Word, while having a deep conviction

concerning biblical principles and practices. Growing up, his family pastored in California, Nevada, and Oregon. This upbringing makes him a valuable asset in his leadership of the Western churches in the network. His charismatic personality, people skills, and energy experience made him a very successful corporate salesperson. His experience and personality deliver great synergy to the efforts of the network.

The International arm of the network has 23 churches. The churches represent Canada with three churches, Mexico with two churches, San Salvador with three churches, Pakistan with eight churches, Africa with four churches, and Colombia with three churches. International efforts are led by a 61-year-old, Canadian, married male who has been on the team from its inception. He was the original team director of the network at its establishment. He was a long-term pastor of 28 years of a church he and his wife planted in Ontario, Canada. His passion for church planting, church health, and multiplication serve the network well. Also, his love for missions and global gospel efforts makes him an excellent fit for his role.

The network has two field assessors that are responsible for site visits, on-site training, coaching, and mentoring of pastors and their teams. Their primary role is to be present in the network churches and are scheduled on the road four days per week. The network divides into two field assessment categories. The Northeast USA and Southeast USA regions are combined to make one division, and the Western USA and International efforts are the second assessment division. The Northeast USA and Southeast USA regions have a primary leader as does the Western and International territories.

The Northeast USA and Southeast USA on-site assessment, training, coaching, and mentoring of pastors and their teams is led by a 63-year-old, Caucasian, married male. He works intimately with the Northeast USA regional leader and the Southeast USA regional leader. The

regional leaders work cooperatively to prioritize on-site visits, schedules, and goals. They also may regularly assist the assessor to their regional churches. The assessor is known as the “Energizer Bunny” because he always wants to be on the go helping churches. He is a former church-planting pastor of 18 years and a denominational leader of 12 years from Maryland. He joined the team three years ago as the original on-site assessor for the network. His wealth of ecclesiastical knowledge and pastoral experience is invaluable in the field. He is very good at problem-solving in light of the Scriptures and a great motivator of leaders.

The Western and International field assessor joined the team two years ago and is a 46-year-old Caucasian, married male. He planted and pastored a church for 22 years. He leads the Western USA and International on-site assessment, training, coaching, and mentoring of pastors and their teams. He works intimately with the Western USA regional leader and the International leader. They work cooperatively to prioritize his schedule and goals. They also may regularly accompany him and assist at their respective churches. The mother church the Western and International field assessor and his wife planted multiplied into seven satellite campuses in California and Nevada. Each of the seven satellite campuses were independent congregations led by couples from the mother church. This reality speaks of his ability to develop leaders for ministry. His passion for church health and multiplication is essential to the efforts of the network.

An administrative person supports the regional leaders and their corresponding field assessors. The Northeast USA and Southeast USA regional leaders and assessor are administratively supported by a gifted administrator with a degree in communications from the University of Florida. She is a 29-year-old, married, Caucasian female. She and her husband served as youth pastors in West Palm Beach, Florida, for five years in one of the network

churches. She joined the team one year ago and is very skilled at informational technology. Her primary role is to support and organize the efforts of the Northeast USA and Southeast USA regional leaders and their assessors from an administrative perspective. She offers a keen perspective on all things administrative in the Harvest Network efforts.

A 31-year-old, Caucasian, married woman supports the Western Regional USA and International leaders. She has a Bible and theology degree from Southeastern University and was a missionary in Pakistan for eight years. She joined the team three years ago. Her background in biblical studies and missionary service offers a wealth of perspective to the work of the network in the West and internationally. Data collection and analysis are her gifts to the team. This gift serves the overall efforts of the team well.

Two additional administrators serve in the network offices with more general roles. The first additional administrator that serves in the office serves as the office manager's assistant and manages all digital communications. She is a 48-year-old, Swedish, married female who is exceptionally gifted in administration and digital infrastructures. She joined the team three years ago. She has a degree in internet technology from Ohio State University. She has learned the skill of grant writing since joining the team. This new skill helps equip our assessors with the essential training for their efforts in the field. Her ministry leadership experience is limited, but she remains a tremendous asset to the team.

The second additional administrator is a 48-year-old African American female widow. Her background is in education but walked away from teaching after her husband passed away five years ago. She joined the team two years ago and is a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ with a great love for the church. Her primary role is to assist the team leader administratively. Her portfolio includes leading all other administrative efforts in the Harvest Network office, and she

also leads as the conference coordinator. Further, she schedules all travel for the team domestically and internationally. She is an excellent communicator and also serves as the official editor. Her calm personality and peaceful presence serve well to the occasionally chaotic team efforts.

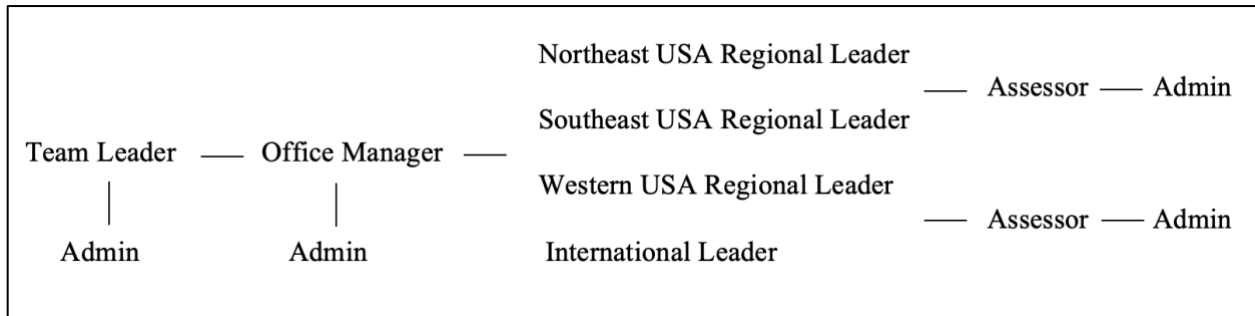


Figure 1. Harvest Network Organizational Chart

The team does well with leading leaders in their ambition to plant new life-giving churches and resourcing pastors to multiply existing healthy campuses. However, it appears unsatisfactorily equipped to provide theological and theoretical guidance to churches plateaued or in decline. The apparent problem is that the ministry staff at Harvest Network appears to lack a clear understanding of biblical principles for church revitalization. This research project will address the apparent insufficiency within the Harvest Network lead team.

Problem Presented

This project will address the problem that the ministry staff at Harvest Network appears to lack a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. This problem necessitates further inquiry because over half of the network’s 126 churches are plateaued or declining.

Historically, the network has had good results in developing church planters and planting new churches while helping established healthy campuses multiply their presence. Church

planting and campus multiplication have been a known strength of the network. However, as churches have hit roadblocks in sustained growth and have plateaued or tended toward decline, the network has been ineffective in leading pastors as they endeavor to revitalize their ministries. The network lead team appears inadequately equipped to serve the churches in need. Therefore, a proper biblical worldview for the network lead team concerning church revitalization is paramount. Without training in a proper theological framework from the Scriptures concerning renewal that shapes life and ministry, the theoretical practices that emerge whereby theology and ministry come to life may not produce authentic revitalization that glorifies God in the local church context. Ultimately, the primary emphasis on equipping the lead team of the network is paramount. Upon the completion of training, the leadership team can lead pastors whose churches are in decline to test once again their basis for ministry, the existing structure of said ministry, and soberly test the current results the church is producing.

If the research shows that a lack of training of the leadership team is the hindrance to practical network revitalization efforts, a properly trained and equipped lead team can serve the network in revitalization efforts. As a result, the local churches can glorify God once again in their contexts as they pursue the challenge of biblical renewal.

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis is to address the problem that the ministry staff at Harvest Network appears to lack a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. The researcher desires to pursue this project because it is possible that training in biblically informed theology and practices of church revitalization for the ministry staff of the Harvest Network may equip pastors to successfully turn plateaued or declined churches toward renewed health and vitality.

With 76 percent of the North American Harvest Network churches plateaued or in decline, a better equipped network lead team can better serve the churches of the network. Training that provides a biblical worldview concerning church revitalization can inform proper ideologies and practices at the local church level. Properly trained staff can better serve the network as plateaued churches and churches in decline pursue renewal.

Basic Assumptions

This researcher approaches the problem with the following presuppositions. The strength of the organization lies in efforts of church planting and the multiplication of healthy campuses. The weakness of the network is church revitalization. As a result of the assumed structural weakness in church renewal efforts, it is assumed that the network team members lack the understanding of biblical renewal established in theological truths that inform theoretical practices. Without an understanding of a biblical worldview for churches in decline or plateau, the network team is ineffective in assisting them to turn toward a preferred future of vitality and health. Further, a biblical worldview of church revitalization that informs practice results in a turnaround for churches in decline or that are plateaued is assumed. These preconceived ideas shape the analysis and outline of the problem and purpose of the project.

Definitions

Declined church – a church that begins a downward spiral in ministry and mission. Attendance, finances, membership are on the decline. As a result, the church becomes compromised in quality and expense.²

² Bill Henard, *ReClaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 91.

Healthy church – a church positioned to experience growth; its vision drives the church toward ministry, mission, and multiplication. As it develops strategy that allows the church to fulfill its vision, the quality of its ministry increases, and the extent of its mission grows. It is a church that has developed a biblical church vision and believes that God calls it to fulfill that vision.³

Plateaued church – a church where the methods of ministry have become more important than the vision and the church becomes program-driven rather than vision-driven. The church experiences a leveling off in biblical discipleship, growth, and church leadership.⁴

Revitalization – the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God.⁵

Theological foundation – timeless truths from the Bible about God, our relationship to Him, and His purposes in the world that shape life and ministry.⁶

Theoretical foundation – the principles that guide how the gospel is expressed in a particular church in one community at a point in time.⁷

Limitations

A first limitation of the study is the value of the data received from churches in the network used to define the congregation as healthy, plateaued, or declining. Also, the researcher

³ Henard., 85.

⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁵ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 20.

⁶ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2012), 20.

⁷ Ibid.

cannot control the accountability measures to training and coaching afforded to identified churches in decline. Further, the consistent application of theoretical practices in the network churches seeking and receiving guidance from the network is unpredictable. Another limitation is the impact that poor leadership ability introduces to the path toward vitality. The researcher cannot predict how the local church responds to the introduced conflict that proposed renewal brings. Also, the researcher cannot control the conflict management skills of the pastor and leaders, while the researcher cannot also control the necessary budget adjustments necessary for effective revitalization. The researcher cannot control the capability of the existing pastor to become a revitalizer. These external limitations are beyond the influence of the central network offices.

Delimitations

The study is limited to the churches in the network that are classified as declining or plateaued. Not considered are new church plants and multiplied campuses of the network. Also, not studied in the study are International churches. Not measured are congregations of less than fifty people. All of the network office personnel are involved in the project.

Further, the research will occur within a specified window of time. Also, the study will only focus on self-identifiable churches plateaued or in decline. The network has identified churches plateaued or in decline, but the research will limit the study to those congregations that have acknowledged a need for revitalization. These internal limitations are beyond the influence of the central network offices

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement for this research project is as follows: If the staff at Harvest Network

receives instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization, the expected result will be that they may be better equipped to serve the churches of the network. Therefore, effective training in church revitalization is necessary for the lead team of the Harvest Network. By implementing team training, problem solving at the local church level can expand with theologically informed theoretical practices.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The Review of Literature for this thesis project considers the problem presented, purpose statement, and thesis statement through the lens of the discoveries of the literature research.

Four primary themes emerged from the research. The four primary themes that materialized from the research were as follows: barriers to church revitalization, detrimental pastoral leadership, church revitalization culture, and organizational team training. The following is a review of the primary themes discovered in the literature.

Literature Review

The literature review considers the current research that informs the studied problem. The review interacts with the literature critically, practically, and systematically. It addresses how the literature embraces or does not support the researcher's thesis project. The review introduces themes in the literature. It also identifies gaps in the research and affirms the current supporting scholarship. The first theme that emerged from the research was the presence of barriers to church revitalization.

Barriers to Church Revitalization

Concerning barriers to church renewal, Brian Croft stated that "Experts estimate that approximately 1,000 local churches close their doors every year in the Southern Baptist Convention."⁸ When the Southern Baptist Convention forever closes, on average, 20 churches per week, something is amiss. Although God continues in part to build His church through church planting, churches are not being planted and lasting near the rate of those that

⁸ Croft, 15.

permanently shut their doors each year. These realities create cause for concern and require further insight into the state of plateaued and declining churches. The research presents roadblocks to church vitality in churches on the path to closure.

The review of literature presented common hindrances to health present among plateaued and declining churches. The presence of these barriers to overall local church health and vitality contributed directly to decline. Henard noted in his book that a primary denominator present in churches in decline was an unhealthy church culture.⁹

Plateaued or declined churches show certain contextual qualities that place the ministry in an ineffective posture. The sources consistently presented realities in unhealthy church cultures that contributed to the decline of church health. Indicators present were the worship of the past, a refusal to look like the community, an inward budget, a lack of Great Commission practices, and a present spiritual deficiency among congregants.

A consistent present barrier toward a preferred future in unhealthy church cultures is seeing the past as the hero. According to Rainer, the consistent reverence of the path the ministry has taken steals from the energies to propel the church toward its preferred future. This barrier of the worship of the past was an identified concern in the literature.¹⁰ The focus on the past and the consistent bias toward a preferred future undermines the possibility of effective change that results in renewal.

A refusal to look like the community was also a present barrier to revitalization present in the literature review. Rainer's research further suggests that the faces of the church that are present in the declining church are far different than the current community in which the church

⁹ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 138.

¹⁰ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2014), 18.

is positioned. The aging church failed to consistently reach the community in which it has been placed by God.¹¹ As a result, the church no longer looks like the immediate surrounding community. In contrast, the population of healthy churches reflects the demographic of their surrounding communities.

Another significant barrier to vitality in plateaued or declining churches is that the resources of a church in regression are reserved for its own existence and no longer reflect a willingness to set aside funds for community outreach and evangelization. Kricher stated this inward focus evolves because of the decline in giving income in correlation with declining attendance numbers. The declining numbers require the church to turn inwardly and begin to focus solely on survival in hope of a brighter day.¹² The inward budget focus contributes significantly to the lack of health in the church culture, resulting in a lack of commitment to the Great Commission.

The inward focus of the ministry budget undermines organizational Great Commission efforts. As the church focuses inwardly to survive, it loses its focus on why God first placed it in the community. Keller noted in his book that God placed the church in the community to make Himself known to the people in that place. Unfortunately, an inward focus aborts an outward presence.¹³ The result of an absence of community focus diminishes gospel witness, new converts, water baptisms, new members, and growing disciples. These realities contribute to the demise of church vitality.

In direct correlation to an inward budget, a refusal to look like the community, the

¹¹ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 44.

¹² Lee Kricher, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2016), 121.

¹³ Keller, 311.

worship of the past, and the lack of Great Commission practices, a present spiritual deficiency emerges in unhealthy church cultures. Croft contends that an avoidance of Great Commission practices and a lack of growing disciples permits the inwardly-turned church to become self-centered in practice and famished in spirit. Particularly clear is a lack of diversity, an absence of a multi-generational presence among congregants, and isolationism.¹⁴ These realities exist because of a lack of spiritual health among congregants that have permitted themselves to surrender to the pressures of decline and accept an anemic existence. The lack of spiritual vitality further contributes to an overall detrimental church culture that motivates decline.

The presented indicators of an unhealthy church culture among plateaued or declined churches show certain contextual qualities that place the ministry in an ineffective posture. These indicators are barriers to church revitalization.

Detrimental Leadership

In the literature review, a second theme emerged. The review revealed that pastoral leaders and their embraced leadership structures were detrimental to preventing further decline and a pursuit of renewal. A lack of personal leadership skills and personal spiritual health contributed to the unfavorable culture of the ministry. According to Iorg, the conflict style of the leader within the boundaries of the church discipline culture can undermine efforts toward a preferred future. These three detrimental values of present pastoral leadership create environments averse to church revitalization.¹⁵

The Review of Literature revealed the need for a qualified leader to facilitate the charge of church revitalization. The need for a qualified revitalizer was essential and primary to a

¹⁴ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* 57.

¹⁵ Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2018), 108.

turnaround church in their writings. In contrast, other writers did not champion the leader as the key component for revitalization but only acknowledged the pastor as an overall contributing factor to renewal. The literature on pastoral leadership spoke to the contributions of the leader in the renewal with some making it a primary factor and others a general contributing factor. Leadership contributions to renewal were either bolstered or hampered based on the quality of leadership provided.

The quality of leadership was apparently fundamental in churches that moved from decline toward revitalization. Henard stated that a pastor that acknowledged the need for revitalization was essential to an actual turnaround. In effect, a pastor that did not acknowledge the obvious signs of decline was detrimental to any hope for renewal.¹⁶ The component of self-awareness for pastoral leaders to acknowledge a plateaued or declining state is fundamental in turnaround churches. A lack of self-awareness may be an indicator of a lack of leadership health. This absence of personal leadership health directly impacts the leadership effectiveness of the leader in a ministry renaissance.

Healthy leaders possess the personal qualities to create a healthy church culture. It is possible that the leader may possess the leadership skills to lead a church toward revitalization but lack the personal spiritual health to lead the congregation toward vitality. The leader's lack of personal spiritual health diminishes his ability to lead the church toward biblical well-being. The pastor is the lead change agent. Rainer's research indicates that a pastor that has ceased to experience personal spiritual formation cannot lead the church toward the changes for a new path toward health. One role as an agent of change in church revitalization is for the pastor to lead the congregation to face the ugly truths of the reality of a lack of church health and present decline.

¹⁶ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?* 28.

A pastor not positioned to face his own poor spiritual condition cannot lead the church toward an effective similar understanding.¹⁷ Therefore, an effective leader of church health initiatives must possess the necessary personal spiritual health to lead revitalization effectively because all church revitalization efforts create conflict.

The conflict management style of the leader in revitalization impacts the local church discipline culture. The personal conflict management style of the leader can undermine progress toward church health. Poirier noted in his book that if the conflict management style of the leader is punitive, it cannot create win-win scenarios with parties engaged in conflict. Such circumstances are necessary to maintain relationships and unity in revitalization. In response, the church discipline culture will be a detriment to progress toward renewal.¹⁸ However, if the pastor uses a style of leadership practiced in biblical church discipline realities, the pastoral management style can contribute to effective revitalization and create a church discipline culture that embraces effective conflict management. The sources did not all address the conflict style of the pastor but Poirier, Iorg, and Morgan addressed the important role that church discipline and conflict management styles play in revitalization.

Poor pastoral conflict management style, personal spiritual health, and leadership qualifications all contribute to a culture of detrimental leadership as primary barriers to church revitalization. Effective healthy leaders are essential to creating a healthy church culture that produces a fertile environment for revitalization. Next, the review of literature considers church revitalization culture, the third prominent theme of the literature.

¹⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit? Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2016), 45.

¹⁸ Alfred Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2006), 298.

Church Revitalization Culture

The literature exposes that contextual cultural adjustments in the plateaued or declining church can foster fundamental practices that promote effective church revitalization. The primary practices that create a genesis for church renewal are a culture of prayer, a culture of change, clear vision, and proper spiritual formation practices. Central to church revitalization culture is a prevailing culture of prayer.

Clear in the sources was the fundamental practice in turnaround churches of a prevailing culture of prayer. Prayer is often the crucial foundational issue neglected in leading change. Prayer is not an option in leading change in the church; it is foundational. The leaders of churches in decline are not capable enough to lead change in their own abilities. They must pray for wisdom. They are not brave enough to lead change. They must pray for courage. They must humbly acknowledge their limitation to lead effective change and pray for strength. In fact, Clifton stated that it is foolish and arrogant to attempt the work of church renewal without an effective prayer strategy.¹⁹

Davis noted that it was in a prayer meeting that the church of Jesus Christ emerged as a world-changing force.²⁰ According to Rainer, prayer was the lifeblood of the early church. The infant church grew by a fundamental commitment of the apostles to prayer.²¹ This essential means of grace for revitalization compels the consciences of churches to surrender their clever efforts unto God's all-wise and powerful plan. Croft stated that church revitalization efforts must begin in prayer for it to have its maximum impact of God's people and bring true, lasting

¹⁹ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2016), 55.

²⁰ Davis, 94.

²¹ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 67.

spiritual conviction and life to the fledgling church.²² Without an effective prayer strategy in place, pursuing a renaissance for the local church is powerless. The church's heart must change. The people in the church must change. Prayer for heart change and spiritual reawakening is essential. Effective prayer is the power of an effective church revitalization culture. This culture of prayer is the seedbed for a culture of change.

The literature emphasized a culture of change as an elemental necessity for effective revitalization aspirations in the local congregation. Croft noted in his manuscript that for authentic sustaining change to emerge in the framework of renewal, a culture of change must permeate the congregational worldview. Only God can produce heart change toward revitalization. The church's heart must change. The people in the church must change. As the church's heart changes and the heart of the people changes, a culture of change begins to emerge.²³ Change then becomes a normal part of the ongoing culture instead of an abnormal intruder. Church renewal is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their views about change will not embrace change and become negative toward change. McIntosh stated that a prevailing culture of change will envelop those who initially resist change, and they eventually see the positive results that change has brought to pass and begin to continually embrace the culture of change.²⁴ Therefore, the local congregation, in pursuit of creating a church revitalization culture, finds the means to appropriately embrace a culture of change. This ongoing embrace of change in the revitalization culture allows a clear vision of a preferred future to emerge among the congregants.

²² Croft, 54.

²³ Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2017), 149.

²⁴ Gary L. McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012).

A clear vision of a preferred future is fundamental to a healthy church revitalization culture. Revitalizers must establish a clear vision, know the past and appreciate the past, but find God's future for the church and pursue it with deep discipline and absolute prayerful commitment. Churches can easily drift from the biblical purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission to the institutional purpose of survival. A clear vision will prevent such a drift. Revitalized churches have a clear vision that looks to the future. For them, vision provided the means to own God's strategic direction for the church. The church embraces who they are and who they aspire to become. In this sense of destination, Henard said that they focus more on the future than they do the present. Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and established upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances.²⁵ A vision is a description of hope for the future. It is a description of what local congregants desire to accomplish. To be even more direct, a vision is not what the people want but what God wants for the church. In testing churches that are growing and healthy and those who are stagnant or in decline, McIntosh suggested that one of the key distinctions that emerges between those categories is the existence of a clear vision of a preferred future.²⁶ A clear vision is fundamental to a healthy church revitalization culture. Elementary to such a clear vision of a preferred future is a commitment to a noticeable spiritual formation plan.

An effective church revitalization culture champions a prominent congregational spiritual formation strategy as discovered in the sources. In Matthew 28, Jesus explains what He expects of His followers. As He was about to depart from this earth, He did not ask His disciples to gather larger crowds or to raise large sums of money or to construct great buildings. He

²⁵ Henard, *ReClaimed Church*, 172.

²⁶ Morgan, 126.

commanded His followers to make disciples. Clifton argues that the spiritual formation process of making disciples should be clear in the ministry.²⁷ Rainer contends that churches with a clear discipleship process are the healthiest by almost any metric. A healthy church always has making disciples at the forefront of their efforts.²⁸ A church in decline did not prioritize the spiritual formation process and did not continue to embrace Christ's command in the Great Commission to make disciples.

A disciple is a whole life learner, someone shaped by both the doctrine and lifestyle of the master. The Great Commission involves not only bringing people to that initial moment of saving faith but also teaching them wholehearted obedience to everything Christ has commanded us. This is the act of spiritual formation. Clifton stated that every revitalization effort must culminate in the church being transformed to embrace the vision of growing as disciples and making other developing disciples.²⁹ The sources revealed practices that create a genesis for church renewal. These fundamental requirements for a healthy church culture that motivates revitalization are a culture of prayer, a culture of change, a clear vision of a preferred future, and prominent spiritual formation practices.

Organizational Team Training

The review of literature presented a fourth theme for training the Harvest Network lead team to be better equipped to serve the churches of the network. The prominent theme from this section of the sources reinforced organizational team training. The resources for effective organizational team training that equips essential team members to better serve the plateaued or

²⁷ Clifton, 7.

²⁸ Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?* 72.

²⁹ Davis, 199.

declining Harvest Network churches were evident. The sources reinforced the core of the topic with the necessity to identify and deliver team training needs and the necessary presence of a mentoring culture among lead team members.

The identification and delivery of team training needs is essential to building an effective leadership team to lead network churches through revitalization efforts. Anderson offered various practices that would enhance the effort of the organization to better equip the lead team. The ability for the team to gain new skills and knowledge quickly and continually is crucial to ongoing success while serving the network. This ability informs the dynamic complexities of each local congregation's unique need for successful revitalization strategies as the team leader interacts with key congregational leaders.³⁰

The sources defined training as a planned and organized procedure designed to improve the effectiveness of people on the lead team. First, the organization should identify the training needs. An understanding of the following essentials is fundamental while considering the team's needs. (1) Make plans and preparations to address the needs of the lead team through effective instruction and hands-on training. (2) Create and implement the team training plan in an accurate and timely fashion with the team. (3) Inquire of the team strategies to help facilitate the training into the culture of the organization upon conclusion of the training. Allenby and Jenkins stated that to capture the lessons learned on an organizational level, churches must create an avenue for continual improvement and feedback on lessons learned.³¹ The identification and delivery of team training needs better positions the leadership team of Harvest Network to serve the churches of the network experiencing decline.

³⁰ Erika Anderson, "Learning to Learn," *Harvard Business Review*, March 2016, 98-101. EBSCOhost.

³¹ Alison Allenby and Dela Jenkins, *Institute of Leadership and Management Super Series: Training, and Development*, 4th ed. (Burlington, MA: MPG Books, 2003), 5.

An established ongoing culture of mentoring relationships that compliment and propel team training efforts within the lead team office culture may enhance the team's effectiveness in serving the churches of the network. Team mentoring is often associated with a transfer of wisdom as a more experienced colleague passes on their experiences to prevent lesser experienced people from making the same mistakes. The mentor acts as a source of advice for mentees, as his or her experience may provide greater guidance for a unique scenario in the network church. Buckley suggests that this association of a like knowledge base between the mentor and mentee is shared as the mentee grows in experiential knowledge. The concepts of the lead team objectives may enhance the overall team's ability to better serve the network.³² Instead of working in isolation, the team serves the network in open collaboration in the lead team office. According to Edmonson, the ongoing training that occurs in a mentoring culture allows the mentee to rehearse proper church revitalization metrics with ongoing support from his or her mentor. The rehearsal of proper actions facilitates growth and produces confidence in the mentee.³³ As the mentee gains confidence, an independence from the mentor blossoms, and the team member may become more effective in serving the churches of the network. The establishment of the mentoring culture compliments the efforts of the greater organizational team training strategy and fosters an overall team context that is collaborative instead of isolated in ambition.

Conclusion

The four primary themes that emerged from the sources direct the research toward the

³² Roger Buckley and Jim Caple, *The Theory and Practice of Training*, 6th ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Kogan Page Publishers, 2009), 224.

³³ Amy Edmonson, Richard Bohmer, and Gary Pisano. "Speeding Up Team Learning." *Harvard Business Review Special Issue*, Winter 2019, 46-53. EBSCOhost.

current conclusion that barriers to church revitalization exist but equipped and competent leaders that create a culture for revitalization can lead the ministry to overcome obstacles, thus allowing the organization to transition from plateaued or declining toward health and renewal. Vital to the plateaued or in decline Harvest Network churches is the proper equipping of the Harvest Network lead team. The concepts discovered in the literature review for team mentoring and organizational equipping in the Harvest Network lead team further suggest that if the staff at Harvest Network receive instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization, the expected result will be they may be better equipped to serve the churches of the network.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundations of Scripture for barriers to church revitalization, effective leadership, healthy renewal cultures, and equipping strategies inform the presuppositions and operating principles of this research project.

The Church

Walter E. Elwell said, “The church is the spiritual family of God, the Christian fellowship created by the Holy Spirit through the testimony to the mighty acts of God in Christ Jesus.”³⁴ The Greek word for “church” used in the New Testament is *ekklēsia*. Hammett said, “The *ekklēsia* are ‘the called-out ones.’ In ancient Greece, the *ekklēsia* was the assembly of the called-out citizens, who came together to conduct the business of the city.”³⁵ The term was used in the New Testament 109 times and referred to the local and universal church.

³⁴ Walter E. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 246.

³⁵ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations of Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 26.

The identity of the church is grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Peter's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah in Matthew 16:16 in response to the Lord's inquiry of His disciples concerning His identity was the initial revelation to His followers. Jesus' response to Peter in verses 17 and 18 establishes the source of Peter's revelation and its implications. Jesus informed Peter that his assessment of Him was correct, and the source of his revelation was from God the Father (Matt. 16:17). The implications of this revelation of Jesus as the Messiah would be the foundation on which Jesus would build His church (Matt. 16:18). Osborne stated, "This is the first of three times 'church' (ἐκκλησία) appears in Matthew (twice in 18:17)."³⁶ Through the revelation of Jesus as Messiah, the called-out ones identify as His church.

Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. The fact that Jesus is personally involved in the building of His church is essential to the theological implications concerning church revitalization. The statement of promise that Jesus would build His church requires consideration by all that identify as His assembly. The Greek word used for "build" (oikodomeō) expresses that Jesus would establish and sustain His church. Notably, the apostle Paul also used oikodomeō in Ephesians 4:12 when he referred to the building up of the body of Christ, demonstrating the continuing presence for Christ in His church beyond Jesus' encounter with Jesus. Therefore, with plateaued or declining churches, it becomes paramount to inquire as to what is happening that does not permit Jesus to build His church. Such discoveries emerge in theological truths.

The established growing church in the New Testament continues in the Scriptures beyond passages containing the term *ekklēsia* through images and metaphors that reveal the nature of the

³⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2010), 627.

church. New Testament pictures of the nature of Christ's church develop in the use of the terms the *people of God*, the *body of Christ*, and the *temple of the Holy Spirit*.

In 1 Peter 2:9-10, the writer addressed the called-out ones with Old Testament terminology. He identified the church as a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Pet. 2:9). Hammett noted in his book that the writer's statement of the people of God as a chosen people belonging to God recalls descriptions of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 4:20, 7:6, Hosea 1:10, 2:23, and many other Old Testament references where God calls Israel "my people."³⁷ This connection of the New Testament church to the Old Testament people of God is the ongoing fulfillment of God calling to Himself of a called-out people. Therefore, the church is shaped in every way by its mutual relationship with God. The nature of this identity as the people of God is essential to the church that Jesus promised He would build, known as the body of Christ.

The description of Christ's church appears in the use of the expression body of Christ. Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ in his letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians). Hammett further contends that the use of the "body" metaphor demonstrates numerous aspects of the nature of the church. For example, the body of Christ is an image of the local church in 1 Corinthians 12:27: "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." Hence, the local church was the body of Christ in that place and not considered as merely part of a larger body of Christ.³⁸

The implication is that all believers are the expression of the body of Christ in that place, and within the greater global context, it speaks of the interconnectedness of all under the

³⁷ Hammett, 32.

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

headship of Jesus. He is the head of the body, as observed in Paul's letter to the Colossians, "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1:18). Pao suggests that Paul affirms Jesus' supremacy over the community of believers, His church. "The head (κεφαλή) stands in the predicative position and is marked by an article, which indicates absolute identification with the subject: Christ and Christ alone is identified as the head."³⁹ The focus is on the authority of the head over the body. The designation of Christ as the head of His church established the body of Christ as essential to His redemptive work.

The interconnectedness to one another with Christ as the head is vital to the community of faith. Christian faith cannot be defined solely by individual relationships with the Lord but must also account for the unified relationship with Christ as His body. Paul focused on the unity of the body of believers in two sacraments of the church. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul suggests that partaking in the Lord's Supper expresses oneness for the *ekklēsia*. "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 1:17). Their unity with one another signifies their prior unity with Christ. So, Paul used the image of the body of Christ to express their collective unity.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the unity of the body of Christ is associated with their shared experience of baptism by one Spirit. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit, into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). Gardner said that the baptism in the Spirit refers to regeneration and the incorporation of believers into the church. Believers are spiritual people by being found in the realm of the Spirit and living under his influence within the community of the *ekklēsia*.⁴⁰ Hence,

³⁹ David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, vol. 7, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2012), 99.

the interconnectedness of the body derives from the unity of the Spirit as experienced in the mutual sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism of the Spirit.

The body of Christ characterized genuine fellowship. The New Testament term for fellowship is *koinōnia*. In Acts 2, the writer Luke used fellowship to characterize the practice of the early church. The underlying meaning of the term is that of participation in or sharing something in common with another. Schnabel said, "The followers of Jesus who lived and fellowshiped in community that was brought into existence by the shared experience of the Spirit."⁴¹ In Acts 2:44, fellowship is the habit of being together. Further, 1 John 1:3-4 suggests that it also can be used to describe a believer's relationship with God (verse 4) and one another (verse 3). *Koinōnia* is the harmonious relationship among the *ekklēsia* demonstrated by genuine care for one another, even to the point of sharing resources. Acts 2:45 reveals that in the early church, the attitude and actions of fellowship provoked disciples of Jesus to sell their possessions to meet the needs of someone in their midst. The fellowship of the church is a distinguishing characteristic of the body of Christ, the people of God, and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The temple of the Holy Spirit is a third significant image of the church in the New Testament. As the body of Christ, both individually and collectively, the church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul described believers as the temple of the Lord and a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit in Ephesians 2:21-22. Interestingly, according to Arnold, Paul used the Greek term *naō's* (ναός) denoting specifically the sanctuary of the temple in

⁴⁰ Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, in *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2018), 541.

⁴¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, vol. 5, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2012), 179.

Jerusalem.⁴² This clarification for the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary of the temple signifies exclusivity by Paul. God chooses to dwell among His children in a specific fashion as the Holy Spirit imparts life into the church through union with one another and Christ.

Further, the term *built together* in verse 22 is parallel with *fitted together* in verse 21. Fitted together in verse 21 is the Greek word *synarmologeō* (συναρμολογουμένη) meaning to join carefully together, while the Greek word *synoikodomeō* (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) in verse 22 conveys to build together. The parallel words used by the writer stresses corporate identity and unity in the temple of the Holy Spirit. The writings of the apostle Peter reinforce this concept of the people of God as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Peter writes of the believers as “a spiritual house” in 1 Peter 2:5. As the church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, both individually and collectively, Peter articulates that the followers of Jesus are “being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). Erickson noted that Peter offered the Greek word *Oikos* (οἶκος) for house denoting a dwelling place. As the Holy Spirit dwells in the *ekklēsia*, they display the character of Christ in their attitudes and actions as the priesthood of all believers.⁴³

The indwelt *ekklēsia* are the holy priesthood formed into a spiritual house in 1 Peter 2:5. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is formed in 1 Peter 2. Hammett noted that the reformer “Martin Luther is justly identified with the recovery of the priesthood of all believers.”⁴⁴ The priesthood of all believers denotes a body of priests as understood from the

⁴² Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, in *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2010), 172.

⁴³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 962.

⁴⁴ Hammett, 45.

terminology used by Peter. The “holy priesthood” of verse 5 signifies the Greek term *hierateuma* (ἱερατεύω). Swindoll contends that the priesthood of all believers has the privilege and responsibility of serving as priests on behalf of each other in the fellowship of the body of Christ. He states, “not every believer is gifted and called to be a career pastor, preacher, teacher, missionary, or evangelist. Nevertheless, we are all called to be full-time priests.”⁴⁵ Peter states that the royal priesthood is to offer up spiritual sacrifices. Hebrews 13:15-16 offers a clear indication of the kinds of sacrifices of New Testament believers. “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of the lips that confess his name. Moreover, do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices, God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16). The church serves as the temple of the Lord as the priesthood of all believers, indwelt by His Spirit.

The images of the *ekklēsia* mentioned reveal the nature of the church through the use of terms such as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. In light of these characteristics and especially the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, who leads the church?

The Leadership of the Church

One of Paul’s first steps in the churches he founded was to provide leaders. Scripture presents specific examples, guidelines, and qualifications for those who are to lead churches. The theological view of church leadership is paramount to organizational leadership and church revitalization.

Necessarily, there are two categories of leaders in the local church, elders and deacons.

⁴⁵ Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary*, vol. 13, *James, 1 and 2 Peter* (Nashville, TN: Tyndale Publishing, 2014), 183.

For the sake of this project, this section will deal primarily with the office of elder. There are three interchangeable terms for the office of the primary church leader that serves as the under-shepherd of God's localized flock. Scripture uses the terms *elder*, *overseer*, and *pastor* interchangeably. Seventeen times the term *elder* is used as a term for a church leader. In the book of Acts, it is mentioned ten times and eight of those times, the term referred to the church in Jerusalem. *Overseer* or *bishop* is found four times as a noun in reference to a church office. Only once, in Ephesians 4:11, is the term *pastor* used for a church office, but twice it is used to designate the responsibility of an elder in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2, according to Hammett.⁴⁶ Acts 20 and 1 Peter 1:5 demonstrate the interchangeability of the terms used in the New Testament. In Acts 20, Paul sends for the elders of the church at Ephesus (verse 17). When they arrive, he states that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers of the flock (verse 28), and he charges them to pastor, or shepherd, the church. The same emphasis in 1 Peter 5 emerges. Peter addressed the elders (verse 1), telling them they are to pastor or shepherd the flock and that they are to serve as overseers (verse 2). This synonymous use endorses the interchangeability of the terms. The three terms are three different terms in Greek. The Greek word for elder, *presbyteros* (πρεσβυτέρους) denotes those who presided over the churches. The Greek term for bishop and overseer is *episkopē* (ἐπισκοπή) and conveys those who presided over the churches as did presbyteros. Further, the Greek word for pastor is *poimēn* (ποιμένας) and represents those who presided over a church like presbyteros and episkopē. The interchangeable terms of elder, overseer, and pastor indicate the role of a leader in the New Testament church. These interchangeable terms commonly appear among the New Testament writers and are vital to the mission of the New Testament church.

⁴⁶ Hammett, 162.

The Mission of the Church

The theology identifying the mission of the church is to make disciples and equip them to do the work of the ministry. In Matthew 28, Jesus told His disciples to go and take His message to the nations and make disciples. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Osborne noted in his book, “The activity demanded is found in ‘make disciples’ (mathēteuō, μαθητεύσατε), also found in Matthew 13:52; 27:57 and summarizing the discipleship emphasis in Matthew.”⁴⁷ Within the scope of disciple-making is evangelism, believer’s baptism, teaching, and the omnipresence of Jesus. The second emphasis of the New Testament church is to equip believers to mature in the faith.

Ephesians 4 introduces the second emphasis of the New Testament church. “It was He who gave some apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). To prepare people for works of service and mature people in the faith so that the body of Christ may prosper is the role of the church that accompanies the Great Commission.

“To become mature” (4:13) is the Greek phrase *eis andra teleion* which literally means “to a/the perfect/complete/mature man.” The singular word “man” points to the church as the body of Christ becoming mature, according to Roberts.⁴⁸ He further stated in his book, “Therefore, the body of Christ is to grow not just into maturity but into the perfect man, that is,

⁴⁷ Osborne, 1080.

⁴⁸ Mark D. Roberts, *Ephesians*, vol. 10, *The Story of God Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2016), 136.

into Christ who exemplifies maturity.”⁴⁹ Therefore, the role of the church is to make disciples who grow into the maturity and completion of Christ himself.

Revitalization in the Church

The need for church revitalization is grounded in biblical theology. The New Testament writer Paul championed the need for the right doctrine and the right form for ministry in 1 Timothy. The church at Ephesus was experiencing a setback because of deceptive teachers and needed a renewal of doctrinal teaching to combat the disease of biblical decay. Paul told Timothy to address the false teachers and to command them not to teach false doctrines (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul emphasized to Timothy that he must teach correct doctrine (verse 3) and to carry out the instruction of Paul in love (verse 5). Without confrontation, the false teachers would undermine the work of the Lord in Ephesus and the witness of the gospel would be defeated in that city. Paul recognized the problem in the Ephesian church and responded accordingly to return vitality to the gospel message in that city. Revitalization is an ongoing agenda to see God’s people ever recalibrating to be an accurate reflection of his heart for people. This renewal effort inspired by Paul through Timothy in Ephesus is New Testament revitalization expressed.

The theological foundations of Scripture for barriers to church revitalization, effective leadership, healthy renewal cultures, and equipping strategies that transform inform the presuppositions and operating principles of this research project.

Theoretical Foundations

The practice of church revitalization is evident in the Scriptures and has experienced efforts throughout the generations of renewal that have successfully helped plateaued or

⁴⁹ Roberts, 136.

declining churches. Some efforts have broken down for various reasons and did not achieve the desired results. As a result, the research done related to the considered topic is plentiful.

The concepts that undergird this research project are not necessarily striking new ground but emphasize proven strategies that birth ongoing renewal in the context of the local healthy life-giving church. The review of literature revealed that common tendencies exist among plateaued or declining churches. Realities exist in unhealthy church cultures that contribute directly to the undermining of vitality for the local congregation. Present indicators in the review of literature were the worship of the past, a refusal to look like the community, an inward budget, a lack of Great Commission practices, and a present spiritual deficiency among congregants.

For example, the local congregation on the path toward renewal would have to shift its focus toward the expression of the local life-giving church for the present and future generations, while still honoring the past. This balance is a critical function of revitalization. Further, if the church no longer looks like the community, then an honest effort is necessary to revision within the existing community and seek again to be salt and light to the surrounding demographic with a renewed commitment to the Great Commission and the priesthood of all believers. These practices are critical for new life to emerge in the struggling community of faith. The Acts 2 church is an excellent example of this desired theological expression in the local church context. They leveraged the realities of the purposes of God for the people of their day while embracing the implications of the prophets of old. Acts 2:47 indicates that the Lord added daily those who were being saved to the Acts 2 church.

Other identified indicators among plateaued or declining churches were discovered in the literature review, such as the presence of detrimental leadership, poor existing church culture, and lack of biblical equipping necessitates a practical Scriptural application within a sound

theological framework. These obstacles discovered in the review of literature directly contribute to the poor health of the North American church and necessitates the research.

The research is justified because of the current status of the North American church, which finds itself in decline. Rainer's research suggests that "more churches are marching toward the precipitous path of death every year. Ten years ago, about 10 percent of all churches were declining so rapidly we deemed them terminal or near terminal. Today, 19 percent of all churches in America are in that category."⁵⁰ The current reality is that the number of churches classified as "terminal" and required to close their doors has almost doubled in the past ten years. An additional underlying factor of the struggling North American church was revealed by George Barna and David Kinnaman in the book *Churchless*.⁵¹ The authors indicated that the cumulative effect of cultural shifts over recent decades is widening both the real and perceived gaps between the church and the unchurched. The corresponding impact on the church is that it responds inwardly because of a lack of understanding and a basic fear to evangelize those moving further and further away from them ideologically. These trends can diminish through solid theological foundations that form theoretical practices and substantiate the research.

The existing models that justify the research conducted are theologically grounded and promising. The theological basis for revitalization established in the writings of the New Testament is fundamental to the project. The approach of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy strives for the right doctrine and practice as essential to the endeavor of revitalization. The Scriptures further inform the biblical concept of church, church leadership roles, principles, and corresponding strategies for renewal. The worldview of Scripture defines the framework for the

⁵⁰ Thom S. Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020), 14.

⁵¹ George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless* (Austin, TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 31.

project.

The insight of the theological definitions and corresponding practices is essential to the study. For example, the church in Acts 2 that emerged after the Day of Pentecost was a church that gathered in the temple and house to house for teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. This community resulted in gospel demonstration that created unity in the new church and personal sacrifice to meet the needs of one another. The new church grew as outsiders found salvation.

The Acts 2 model is an expression of the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 and Paul's guidance in Ephesians 4:11-13. The new church was making disciples and equipping them to full maturity in Christ Jesus. The Acts 2 church propagates the Great Commission and matures the body of Christ by the making of disciples, the fellowship of believers, the sacrifice for unity and provision, and the commitment to reaching outsiders with the message of the gospel. This model produced productive vitality for the church that resulted in growth and community impact.

The apostle Paul presented the theological boundaries for New Testament church leaders. He offered guidelines for the qualifications of leaders, along with roles and responsibilities. Paul presented a robust theology in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus for leadership roles in the church and their functions. These ideas are fundamental to church revitalization and inform this project.

The priesthood of all believers is an essential doctrine for renewal. The necessary changes require a congregational embrace. Insight for the congregation through teaching and training of the priesthood of all believer's theology informs practices that produce a new direction in plateaued or declining churches. The catalyst for the theological foundation is 1 Peter 5, as it provides an essential understanding of the identity and responsibility of the

Christian in the body of Christ.

The practices that inform the research have a track record of exhaustive application in the available research. The available research validates the application of the applied principles in churches moving toward a renaissance.

The strength of the theological models is that they proceed from the Scripture. As a result, the application of the principles can anticipate the desired results because when the Word of God is obeyed and embraced as God's will desired outcomes can develop. The weakness of the prescribed scriptural models is that the application flows through many different variables, such as leadership skills, conflict resolution capabilities, persistence, budget realities, and tradition. These variables can thwart the intentions of the revitalizer in multiple ways. The strengths and weaknesses of the theological models and theoretical practices contribute directly to the research because the application of biblical realities flows through human vulnerabilities.

The concepts mentioned above inform this research project. The research for the project embraces a firm theological worldview that informs practices in church revitalization. The research considers the research of those in the field of church health and renewal research and writing in North America.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology operating in the applied research in the presented problem. Presented in Chapter 3 is an explanation of the approach the researcher used to identify research project participants at Harvest Network and how the researcher achieved cooperation from the stakeholders. The operating methodology transpires in two steps. First, the intervention design addresses the ministry context problem and research question posed in Chapter 1 and the research choices made in Chapter 2. Next, the implementation of the intervention design offers a narrative of the implementation and collection of data essential to the research. Hence, presented in Chapter 3 are the intervention design and the implementation of the intervention with the staff at Harvest Network. In the intervention, the network leadership team will receive instruction in biblical principles and practices of church revitalization so that they may better serve the churches of the network.

The research project can begin once the necessary approvals are secured. The initial step is that the researcher must secure Liberty University Institutional Review Board approval of the project before implementing the research project design in the ministry setting. Further, the researcher must complete training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative in order to submit the Institutional Review Board application. According to the Liberty University DMIN Program and Thesis Project Manual, “The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University exists to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research studies being conducted by or with Liberty faculty, staff, and researchers” (pg. 46). One of the ways the IRB protects participants’ rights and welfare is to require researchers conducting research involving people or information about people to apply to the IRB before enrolling participants in or

collecting data for their research project. Upon approval, the researcher can take appropriate next steps.

Included in the process of approvals, the researcher must secure formal written approval from the Harvest Network office manager. Verbal consent was already afforded to the researcher with great enthusiasm in anticipation of possible solutions for the network as it seeks to revitalize affiliated churches. A formal memorandum seeking approval from the office manager is part of the consent process.

Finally, approval of the participants of the study in the Harvest Network offices is required before the project commences. This formal approval from the participants is in memorandum form and requires the signature of each study participant.

A proposed fair trial period to evaluate the intervention of the research is approximately six weeks. Since the problem studied does not involve multiple stakeholder groups and is isolated to a local office context, the centralized setting will allow the researcher to utilize processes that move efficiently from the description, through interpretation, towards problem-solving.

The researcher understands that as the team embarks on the study of the problem in the context of the Harvest Network office, that investment will evolve through participation by the entire team. The aspiration for total team involvement and investment in the honest approach to the problem studied may need more time for buy-in than initially expected. However, with proper patience with the team as they embrace the process of embracing the problem could result in a renewed sense of vitality and community among participants. Therefore, it may be necessary to trade time for team cohesion as the problem is studied.

Intervention Design

The intervention design for this research project addresses the problem that the ministry staff at Harvest Network appears to lack a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. This lack of clear understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization degrades the effectiveness of the team's ability to serve the churches of the network.

The intervention plan proposed to address this problem includes action research. The action research approach will allow for the Harvest Network team to participate in their growth of understanding biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. The problem cannot be solved theoretically but through a partnership between the participants and the goals of the research. This process brings stakeholders together around a common obstacle to pursue jointly and discover practical solutions to their difficulties. The obstacles do not exist in isolation but are a part of a complex network of influences, worldviews, values, practices, and protocols that currently exist in the cultural context of the Harvest Network team. The action research plan includes interviews, focus groups, participant observation, documents, records, reports, surveys, instruction, and the available research literature to address the problem. These tools allow the researcher to gather data and measure the effects of the intervention.

Intervention Plan Components

The intervention plan includes interviews. The interview permits opportunities for stakeholders to describe the situation from their perspective. These casual conversations with participants provide a record of stakeholders' views and perspectives while validating their investment in the solutions to the problem. The participant's viewpoint is vital to the research and the ongoing stakeholder participation in the conventional approach to problem-solving. An

audio recording and detailed notes by a designated assistant capture the details of the interviews.

Focus groups in the intervention plan are also included. The focus groups provide an additional means for gathering information from the stakeholder's perspective. This process provides participants an occasion to describe their understanding of the research problem and offer their worldview on the questions examined. An audio recording and detailed notes by a designated assistant capture the details of the interactions of the focus groups.

The intervention plan further includes participant observation by the researcher. This plan allows the researcher to observe how participants approach their interactions with one another, clients, and the problems presented daily in the organization. These observations enable the researcher to gain a proper representation of the research framework in the everyday settings in which participants undertake behaviors germane to the inquiry. The people, places, purposes, and activities of the stakeholders are the focus of the observations. Detailed notes by the researcher capture the particulars of the observations.

Also included in the plan are the reports of the network. Harvest Network utilizes reporting mechanisms that reflect the interactions, conversations, guidance, goals, and outcomes of affiliated churches. These documents can provide summaries and feedback to stakeholders that inform the focus of the research. These documents can also inform measurement tools to evaluate the impact of the research on the organization's goals in church revitalization.

Pre-research and post-research surveys provide valuable insight into research projects and will contribute insight from organizational insiders and outsiders that informs the research. Surveys are central to the intervention plan. The network churches of Harvest Network and the participants of the intervention are the benefactors of the efforts of Harvest Network. The feedback from network churches impacted by the guidance and interactions of the team and

survey insights from the participants informs the outcomes of the research problem. Surveys can assist in the gathering of vital implications of the efforts of the network leadership team, its experiences, and its strategies.

The available research of the problem studied is included in the plan of intervention. The available research informs the presented problem and can provide possible solutions that instruct the network team in biblical principles and practices of church revitalization in order to become better equipped to serve the churches of the network. The available research provides insight into other perspectives of biblical principles and practices of church health renewal.

Finally, the intervention plan includes three team instruction sessions that gather real time information from the data and the available research. The teaching times allow for biblical principles and practices for renewal from the available research to inform the understanding of stakeholders of the theological and theoretical strategies for revitalization. The combination of a response to real time data and instruction from available research may allow the opportunity for the team to better serve the churches of the network.

Interviews, focus groups, participant observations, reports, surveys, available research, and team instruction make up the intervention plan to address the problem studied.

Intervention Plan Implementation Strategy

The intervention design for this research project addresses the problem that the ministry staff at Harvest Network appears to lack a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. This lack of clear understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization degrades the effectiveness of the team's ability to serve the churches of the network.

Approval

First, the research acquired approval of the office manager. The approval was afforded to the researcher with great enthusiasm in anticipation of possible solutions for the network as it seeks to revitalize affiliated churches. The approval occurred in a formal email that explained the intent of the research and the outline of the components of the intervention plan. The consent form consisted of the acknowledgment of the intentions of the research and the signatures necessary to approve.

The researcher received the consent of participants in a formal personal consent form which stated the objectives of the research and was signed by the stakeholder and the researcher. Also, the consent form included the processes of the intervention plan that the participant may experience throughout the research process. The presented approach to consent allowed for transparency among all participants in the research.

No other resources or personal preparation was necessary for the research project to commence. The research transpired in the workplace of the researcher. It occurred in the workflow and the rhythms of the ministry environment as the researcher was afforded all latitude in the daily schedules and activities of involved stakeholders. This researcher introduced bias to the research because the researcher is invested in the success of the organization, However, this researcher likely did not know what he did not yet know. However, though aggressive timelines were challenging, additional resources and personal preparation were not needed as the research project progressed.

Project Launch Meeting

The next task in the intervention plan transpired in the project launch meeting with all essential personnel for the research in the Harvest Network conference room. The team meeting

for the Harvest Network leadership team participants served as the initial catalyst for informing the team of the aspired research project. The entire network leadership team in the office in Columbus, Ohio, was anticipated to participate in the study as participants. The meeting provided the parameters and plans of the research and provided a time for questions for clarity.

Two weeks before the meeting, the researcher distributed launch meeting schedule invitations through the email calendar program. Follow-up phone calls seven days before the meeting were completed by the researcher. Presented at the launch meeting was an anticipated detailed schedule of the pre- and post-research surveys, interviews, focus groups, organizational reports, contextual observations, and instruction times for the research. Time was afforded for questions and answers in the initial meeting. Finally, the researcher scheduled individual interviews after the meeting. The personal interviews commenced the day following the launch meeting.

Interviews

Interviews with stakeholders transpired the first three days of the study in the office conference room. There was a total of eleven interviews. The scheduled meetings were one hour per participant. Four interviews transpired on day one. Four conversations happened on day two and two on day three. One participant interview was rescheduled to day thirty-eight because of the individual participant's vacation.

To prepare for the individual interviews, the researcher gathered his notes for the meeting, the project notebook for note-taking items, and iPhone for recording the conversation. The researcher arrived in the conference room ten minutes early for the interviews to be present when the interviewees arrived for the meeting. The researcher greeted the stakeholders and affirmed the purpose of the meeting as a casual conversation about the research project. The

researcher stated that the meeting was an open interview to gain insight from the participants to gather data that will inform the studied problem. The interviewer consistently noted that the conversation was an opportunity for the participants to express views of their experiences as team members. The researcher then received each stakeholder's permission to take notes and record the conversations. Once completing the introduction and the approval was granted to record the conversations, the interviews commenced.

The interviews consisted of eight primary questions. The questions were presented as follows: (1.) How do you explain your role at Harvest Network to a stranger? (2.) How long have you worked at the network? (3.) Why do you continue to work at Harvest Network? (4.) What is a typical day like for you at the office? (5.) What is the favorite part of your job at the network? (6.) In your opinion, what is the biggest problem you face at completing your primary responsibilities? (7.) On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very equipped and 1 not being equipped at all equipped, how confident do you feel to fulfill your assigned team tasks? Question seven was a designed data point question that was measured. (8.) In what specific areas do you desire more resources or training?

After the interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording of the interviews by using the dictation feature in Microsoft Word. Upon completion of audio transcription, the interviewer checked the transcription for accuracy and made appropriate edits. Upon final checks for accuracy, the researcher provided the transcribed account of the interviews to the participants and asked the stakeholders to verify the documents for accuracy. Upon accuracy approval by the stakeholders, the researcher saved the interviews in an encoded external hard drive utilized explicitly for the project for privacy and security.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were an essential part of gathering information and gaining stakeholder investment in the project. Upon completion of the individual interviews, three focus group sessions transpired that sought opportunities for participants to describe their experiences and present their perspectives on the problem studied. Focus group questions followed the same rules and formats as those used for interviews.

Two weeks before the focus groups, invitations were disbursed for the sessions through the email calendar program. The researcher made a follow-up phone call three days before the meeting to confirm participant attendance. Focus group sessions with stakeholders transpired days five, six, and seven of the study in the office conference room. There were three group sessions. The group meetings were planned four hours per session. However, each session went beyond the allotted time because of the enthusiastic interaction of the participants with the problem studied. The session with the group on day five was five hours and ten minutes. The focus group on day six was four hours and forty-five minutes and the final group on day seven met for seven hours and twenty minutes.

To prepare for the focus groups, the researcher gathered his notes for the sessions, the project notebook for note-taking items, and iPhone for recording the conversations. The researcher arrived at the conference room ten minutes early for the meetings to be present when the participants arrived for the meeting. The researcher greeted the stakeholders and affirmed the purpose of the meetings as a casual conversation about the research project. The researcher stated that the meeting was a collaborative, open interview to gain insight from the participants to gather data that would inform the studied problem. The interviewer noted that the conversations were an opportunity for the participants to express views of their experiences. The

researcher acquired the stakeholders' permission to take notes and record the conversations. Once completing the introductions and the approvals were granted to record the conversations, the meetings commenced.

The ground rules for the focus group were the first topic of conversation for the researcher. The ground rules for the group sessions were as follows: (1.) The group meeting was the time when each person had an opportunity to express opinions and perspectives of the problem studied. (2.) The role of the researcher was to maintain the focus of the conversations. (3.) Participants were asked to act courteously and with indulgence to each other. (4.) Each person should have had an equal opportunity to speak. (5.) The facilitator asked questions that clarified or deepened the information presented by asking furthering questions throughout the conversation. (6.) Before shifting to a new question, the facilitator summarized common themes spoken and asked the group if that is what they believed likewise. (7.) If action items transpired from the conversations, the researcher made an action plan that designated tasks, persons, timelines, and resources. The researcher designated a time and place to meet to review progress on the action plans that arose.

The collaborations consisted of eight primary questions. The questions were as follows: (1.) How do you define our role as a network? (2.) Concerning church revitalization candidates, how can we as a network best help the pastor in a revitalization context? (3.) Why do you believe churches need revitalization? (4.) Define biblical church revitalization, and what is its goal? (5.) What are the primary questions churches ask you about revitalization? (6.) How well equipped do you feel to provide biblical guidance to a declined or plateaued church? (7.) How can we best equip you to better serve churches in need of revitalization? (8.) What question has the research overlooked?

After the group sessions, the researcher transcribed the audio recording of the focus groups by using the dictation feature in Microsoft Word. Upon completion of audio transcriptions, the interviewer checked the transcription for accuracy and made appropriate edits. Upon final checks for accuracy, the researcher provided the transcribed account of the sessions to the participants and asked the stakeholders to verify the documents for accuracy. Upon accuracy approval by the stakeholders, the researcher saved the documents, notes, and recordings of the focus group sessions in an encoded external hard drive for privacy and security utilized explicitly for the project. Upon completion of the focus groups, the researcher scheduled appropriate times to observe stakeholders in their everyday activities.

Stakeholder Observation

Participant observations by the researcher were designed to observe the stakeholders in their everyday activities as they related to the problem studied. Upon completion of the three focus groups, stakeholder observations commenced. The participant observations were originally scheduled to begin on day nine of the project timeline. However, because the focus group sessions convened longer than originally anticipated, the participant observations were rescheduled to occur on day eleven. Therefore, on day eleven of the research calendar, participant observations began. The contextual observations were conducted a minimum of four hours per session. Eleven sessions were necessary to observe each research participant. Two sessions per day for five days and one session on the sixth day covered all eleven participants. Ten of the scheduled observations ensued on days eleven through day sixteen and one on day twenty-eight of the intervention plan calendar. One contextual observation was delayed because of the unexpected sickness of the participant. On day ten of the intervention plan calendar, the

stakeholder observations with participants were scheduled at a convenient time for them. The scheduled time for the ill stakeholder was scheduled upon her return to the office.

The researcher arrived to meet the stakeholders at the scheduled time. The researcher informed the participants of what could be expected of their time participating in the observation together. The stakeholders were informed that the researcher would ask clarifying questions throughout the allotted time in order to gain greater insight into processes practiced by the participants. Otherwise, the researcher would not disrupt the rhythm of the regular working practices of the participants.

A record of the observations by the researcher transpired through note keeping of insights gained from the participant's daily activities. The elements of observation included the place, time, and date the observations occurred, as well as activities observed. The role and purposes of the stakeholders in the organization were listed as well.

After each observation, the researcher recorded all observations into the record of the intervention plan. The observations were recorded in an encoded external hard drive utilized explicitly for the project for privacy and security.

Reports

The researcher inquired of the Harvest Network office on intervention plan day 1 for reports of the past three years of statistics from Harvest Network churches. The statistics sought were church name, name of the pastor, location, attendance, water baptisms, small groups, income, outreach, membership, website, social media accounts, structure, and any recent interactions with the office over the past twelve months.

The researcher studied the reports and looked for churches that demonstrated a decline or no growth in attendance, baptisms, small groups, income, outreach or membership in the past

three years and identified such churches as candidates for revitalization. The evaluation of the data received for the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019 revealed that of the 126 Harvest Network churches, 85 percent of the congregations exist in North America. The remaining 15 percent of the network were international congregations. This research excluded the international component of the organization and solely evaluated the data from the 107 North American assemblies. The records provided demonstrated that 88 of the 107 North American churches were either plateaued or in decline based on the data from the three-year period, 2017-2019. A summary was created by the researcher on day three and provided to essential stakeholders for the accuracy or further insight into the specific details of the context of the identified churches.

Upon completion of a data summary and identification of churches in need of revitalization, the researcher recorded all observations into the record of the intervention plan. The observations were entered into an external hard drive utilized explicitly for the project for privacy and security.

Surveys

The 88 churches identified in need of revitalization received a pre-research survey through Survey Monkey that solicited feedback from the targeted ministry concerning the level of satisfaction of the value of guidance received from Harvest Network in their specific revitalization efforts.

Survey 1 was distributed through Survey Monkey on day four of the intervention plan with a request to complete the survey within ten days. The survey promised to be a blind survey. It utilized a scaled response for the participant. It included the purpose and nature of the survey and was completed via email through the Survey Monkey platform. Within the ten-day expectation, 53 of the 88 identified churches completed the survey.

The intervention plan required a second identical post-research survey be distributed to identified churches on day thirty-nine of the intervention plan. The post-research survey was distributed via Survey Monkey to the same 53 participants that responded to the day four survey with the same ten-day request for completion. Within the requested ten days, 48 surveys were returned. The survey sought to again measure the level of satisfaction of the value of guidance received from Harvest Network for their revitalization efforts after the leadership team at Harvest Network had received training on the biblical revitalization principles and practices.

The researcher made observations of the comparisons and contrasts of the two surveys and recorded them. The researcher shared the metrics with the Harvest Network team in a team meeting to discuss the feedback openly from served churches. The meeting occurred on day fifty of the intervention plan.

Available Research Team Instruction Sessions

The available research on church revitalization introduced the leadership team of Harvest Network to current insights on theological and theoretical principles and possibly equipped them to better serve the churches of the network. The team instruction sessions were based on available real time data from the active research and occurred in the Harvest Network conference room.

There were three sessions, three hours in length. The sessions included the entire Harvest Network team and were conducted by the researcher from the available research on topics that strengthened the church revitalization mission of the team. The sessions included two 45-minute instruction periods with two 45-minute breakout sessions to discern how the presented information translated to the context. The four sessions transpired over five consecutive days on days twenty through twenty-five on the intervention plan calendar. The sessions began at 9:00

a.m. and concluded at 12:00 p.m. daily.

The topics were decided based on the data that the individual interviews, focus groups, contextual observations, pre-research surveys, and reports revealed about the opportunities for improvement to better serve the churches of the network.

The intervention plan provided the staff at Harvest Network instruction in biblical principles and practices of church revitalization that better equipped them to serve the churches of the network. The understanding of a biblical worldview of the writers of the Old and New Testament and their discoveries of solutions to the problems they faced in their populations allowed for an understanding of biblical principles and practices that brought desirable outcomes may make a change in the problem for the Harvest Network team.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The implementation of the intervention design offers a narrative of the implementation, collection, and analysis of data that explains how the observation was done. Also, a crosscheck of the data by triangulation is presented.

A successful outcome of the proposed intervention is that the Harvest Network leadership team arrived at a better understanding of biblical principles and corresponding practices of church revitalization. The newly embraced instruction in biblical principles and practices of church revitalization made the team better equipped to serve the churches of the network.

The Harvest Network leadership team are the stakeholders of the research project. Any evaluation should consider a review of the information gathered from group constructions, interviews, documents, surveys, and observations by the impact of the instruction on their evolving worldview and corresponding actions.

Since the action research process was one of collaboration around a common organizational problem studied, the criteria for the evaluation should consider a comparison of the stakeholder's original view of the stated problem, ideas for resolution, and concerns compared to the same view after instruction and collaboration with the team because of the research. Based on the research, the views of the participants should then be compared and contrasted for evaluation.

The commonalities and differences among the stakeholders should provide opportunities for the next phase of the ongoing practice of evaluation and improvement in the lifecycle of the organization. The prioritization of unresolved items and the practice of the organization collaborating around an obstacle to their mutual success should be a positive outcome to the intervention. An additional positive outcome to the intervention could be that the churches of the network that are in decline or plateaued feel better equipped and supported by the network to arrive at biblical solutions and strategies that bring renewed vitality to their ministries.

The intervention plan proposed to address this problem includes action research. The action research approach should allow for the Harvest Network team to participate in their growth of understanding biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. The problem cannot be solved theoretically but through a partnership between the participants and the goals of the research. This process brings stakeholders together around a common obstacle to pursue jointly and discover practical solutions to their difficulties. The obstacles do not exist in isolation but are a part of a complex network of influences, worldviews, values, practices, and protocols that currently exist in the cultural context of the Harvest Network team. The action research plan included interviews, focus groups, participant observation, questionnaires, documents, records, reports, surveys, instruction, and the available research literature to address the problem. These

tools allowed the researcher to gather data and measure the effects of the intervention.

The research project utilized triangulation to increase the credibility of the research process. The inclusion of perspectives from diverse sources through triangulation enhanced the value of the study. The planned sources of triangulation in the intervention were focus groups, personal interviews, and surveys.

Focus groups were an essential part of gathering information and gaining stakeholder investment in the project. Upon completion of the individual interviews, three focus group sessions transpired that sought opportunities for participants to describe their experiences and present their perspectives on the issues discussed. Focus groups allowed for the gathering of data and provided unique perspectives from diverse sources for triangulation.

Personal interviews provided opportunities for stakeholders to describe the situation in their terms. This reflective process informed the research from a participant's worldview through an informal process and provided a unique perspective for intervention triangulation.

Surveys allowed for a measuring snapshot from both the stakeholder and network church pursuing revitalization and the impact the intervention has made from their unique perspectives. For the participant, initial and concluding surveys at the beginning and conclusion of the intervention should measure the impact of the intervention, with the same being true for the church receiving the services of the network for revitalization guidance. Their perspective of the value of guidance from the network at the beginning of the intervention compared to the end of the study was measured by a survey.

Surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups allowed for triangulation in the research process that invited perspectives from diverse sources that enhanced the value of the study and introduced balance and integrity to the process.

The researcher used a reflective journal throughout the entire project to bracket out biases. The journal introduced reflection of the evolving intervention implications and allowed the facilitator to interpret and render understandable the study without bias. Also, the reflective journal provided the researcher with a personal record of initial thoughts and insights of the intervention as it unfolded in real-time.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter will outline the results of addressing the problem gleaned from the data in response to the intervention plan and lead the reader to understand the meaning of the study undertaken. This chapter will provide the outcomes of the proposed intervention plan in Chapter 3. The researcher will discuss if the intervention plan yielded the expected results and evaluate whether the underperforming outcomes resulted because of either poor design or faulty implementation. In light of the thesis expectations, the researcher will consider the analysis tools presented in Chapter 3, and with the use of tables and graphs, illustrate any changes that occurred between the baseline and the collected data. Further, the researcher will highlight any change that is directly traceable to the intervention plan. First, a baseline was established for the research.

Research Baseline

The baseline for the research study was established from two surveys and stakeholder interviews. First, an organizational blind survey based through Survey Monkey was conducted of churches in the network in need of revitalization. The churches were identified from an organizational report that evaluated the data from the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019 to determine churches that were plateaued or in decline. Identified were churches that experienced a decline or no growth in attendance, baptisms, membership, outreach, small groups, or income in the evaluated three years. The target of the pursuit of the baseline of the network churches was to establish the level of satisfaction of the quality of guidance received from Harvest Network offices concerning revitalization strategies.

Next, a baseline blind survey distributed through Survey Monkey was conducted of consented Harvest Network office personnel research participants. The survey was designed to determine the baseline of their biblical understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization. Further, the survey evaluated the participants' personal level of confidence in serving churches in the network in need of revitalization. The stakeholder baseline informed the project action research.

The final baseline indicator was established through individual stakeholder interviews. The private interviews consisted of eight primary questions and identified the role, level of experience, obstacles, confidence to execute responsibilities, and the specific needs of the individual to better serve the network churches.

The surveys of the identified churches and stakeholders accompanied by the private individual interviews established a triangulation of baseline data for the research project. The baseline data is next presented.

Baseline Research Data

Plateaued or Declined Network Churches

The first set of data represented are the results from the organizational pre-research reports of churches in the organization identified as plateaued or in decline in the specific timeframe of January 2017 through the end of December 2019. The evaluation of the data received for the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019 of the 126 Harvest Network churches stated that of the 126 churches, 85 percent of the congregations exist in North America. The remaining 15 percent of the network are international congregations in nations such as Pakistan, San Salvador, South Africa, Canada, Colombia, and Mexico. This research has excluded the international component of the organization and solely evaluated the data from the 107 North American

assemblies.

The records provided demonstrated that of the 107 North American congregations, 88 of the 107 North American churches are either plateaued or in decline based on the data from the three-year period, 2017-2019. The chart below indicates that in the evaluated time frame, 76 percent of the Harvest Network churches were either plateaued or declined in attendance. Ninety-five percent of network churches were either plateaued or in water baptism decline. Ninety-two percent of the churches were either plateaued or in membership decline, while 81 percent experienced no growth or a decline in their outreach efforts. Finally, 78 percent of the churches experienced a decline or were plateaued in overall income. Overall, 82 percent of the North American Harvest Network churches are in need of some form of revitalization. The gathered statistics provided a standard for evaluation of the effectiveness of the Harvest Network to the local churches served by the network.

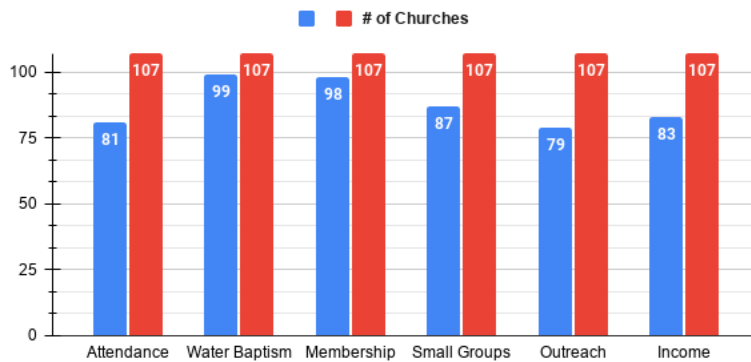


Table 1. Churches Plateaued/Declined 2017-2019

Network Churches Pre-Research Blind Survey

The next set of data represents the results from the pre-research blind survey through Survey Monkey administered to the 88 North American Harvest Network congregations identified as plateaued or in decline. The survey of churches identified was designed to establish the level of satisfaction of the quality of guidance received from Harvest Network offices

concerning revitalization strategies. Fifty-three of the 88 identified congregations responded to the blind survey. The results are represented below in a chart that indicates the average collective responses on a scale of 1 – 10 to the indicated questions of the 53 responses of the blind survey.

Question 1 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very satisfied and 1 being not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of assistance you receive from Harvest Network?” The overall average participant response was 7.

Question 2 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very satisfied and 1 being not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of assistance concerning renewal efforts you receive from Harvest Network?” The average participant response was 5.

Question 3 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to resource you and your church for revitalization?” The complete average participant answer was 5.

Question 4 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify the barriers to church renewal in your context?” The overall average participant response was 4.

Question 5 solicited from the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify harmful leadership practices in the local church?” The total average participant reply was 5.

Question 6 solicited from the partaker, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify fundamental practices for revitalization in your context?” The

collective average participant response was 6.

Question 7 solicited from the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you lead your church in revitalization?” The overall average response was 5.

Question 8 solicited from the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in your ability to identify the theological imperatives of Scripture for renewal?” The total average response was 7.

Question 9 inquired of the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in your ability to identify the theoretical practices of Scripture for renewal?” The total average answer was 7.

Finally, Question 10 asked the participant: “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very equipped and 1 being not at all equipped, how equipped do you feel to lead your local church in a turnaround?” The overall average response was 6. The gathered statistics provided a standard for evaluation of the level of satisfaction and effectiveness of guidance received from Harvest Network offices concerning revitalization strategies.

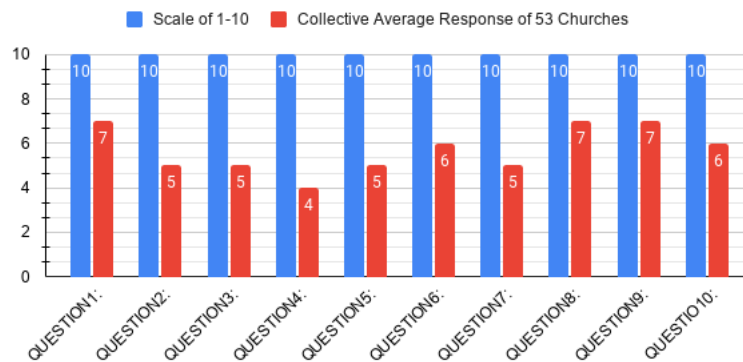


Table 2. Collective Average Response of 53 Churches

Harvest Network Team Pre-Research Blind Survey

The next data set represents the pre-research results from the blind survey through Survey

Monkey administered to the consented stakeholders of Harvest Network offices. The survey was designed to determine the baseline of the participant’s biblical understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization. Further, the survey evaluated the participant’s personal level of confidence in serving churches in the network in need of revitalization. All 11 stakeholders responded to the blind survey. The results are represented below in a chart of findings that indicates the average collective responses on a scale of 1 – 10 to the indicated questions of the 11 responses to the blind survey.

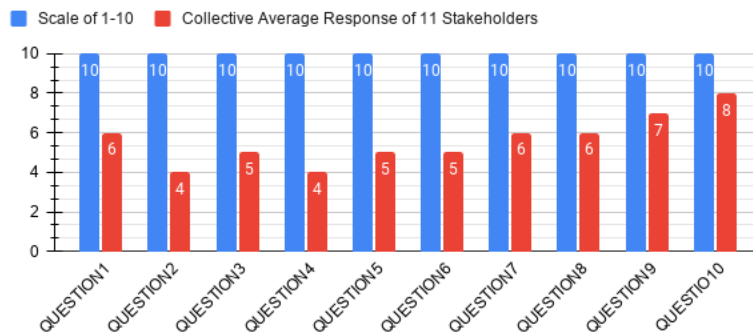


Table 3. Pre-Research Collective Average Response of 11 Stakeholders

Question 1 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to assist the declined or plateaued churches in the network to overcome their obstacles to renewal?” The overall average participant response was 6.

Question 2 asked the participant “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to determine if a church leader is a candidate to lead in the revitalization efforts of a plateaued or declining church?” The overall average participant response was 4.

Question 3 inquired of the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify the theological

imperatives of Scripture for church renewal?” The overall average participant response was 5.

Question 4 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify the theoretical practices of Scripture for church renewal?” The overall average participant response was 4.

Question 5 questioned of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to identify the barriers to church renewal?” The overall average participant response was 5.

Question 6 inquired of the contributor, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to identify harmful leadership practices in the local church?” The overall average participant response was 5.

Question 7 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify turnaround churches’ fundamental practices?” The overall average participant response was 6.

Question 8 asked the respondent, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that your efforts can lead to the renewal of a church that is declined or plateaued?” The overall average response was 6.

Question 9 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that the local church pastor is the essential catalyst in a church renewal?” The overall average response was 7.

Lastly, question 10 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that the Harvest Network team is a candidate for focused training in church revitalization?” The overall average participant response was 8. The gathered statistics provided a baseline for the stakeholders’ biblical understanding of the

theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization. Further, the survey evaluated the participants' personal level of confidence in serving churches in the network in need of revitalization.

Harvest Network Individual Interviews Quantifiable Question

The Harvest Network initial team interviews were designed in the intervention to gain insight from the participant and gather data that will inform the studied problem. Eight pre-designed questions guided the interview. Seven of the eight questions were informative and contributed to the general knowledge of the research. A specific question was framed in a measurable technique. The measurable question was introduced to the personal interview strategy for data triangulation purposes. The quantifiable question was presented as follows: “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident do you feel to fulfill your assigned team tasks?” From 11 respondents in personal interviews, 6 was the overall average response.

The presented results of the pre-research surveys of the churches identified for revitalization and participating stakeholders accompanied by the private individual interviews established a triangulation of baseline data for the research project.

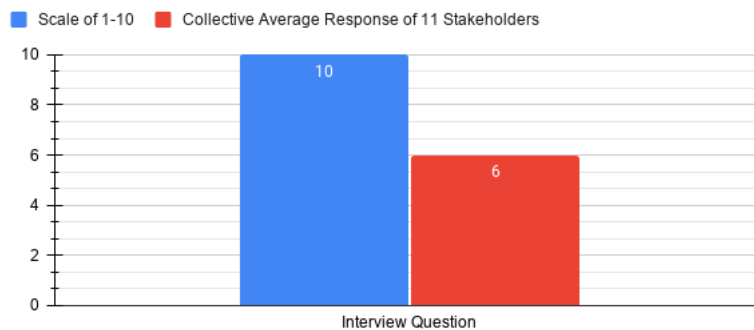


Table 4. Personal Interviews Collective Average Response of 11 Stakeholders

The intervention pre-research data collection established the baseline for the future evaluation of the intervention design and revealed that stakeholders are not well equipped to serve the churches of the network. Further, the results from participating churches demonstrated that the confidence in the ability of the network to best serve churches in need of revitalization was average at best. These initial measurements affirm the assumed idea before the research project began. It was assumed that the Harvest Network team was in need of effective training in church revitalization to become best equipped to serve the churches of the network. The next phase of the intervention design was the stakeholder focus groups.

Focus Groups

The focus groups were designed in the intervention to serve as a deepening of the conversation around the studied problem and to invite participant collaboration that informed the research. The three focus groups allowed the participants to describe their experiences and offer their real-world perspectives on the research. The results of the focus group intervention helped further identify the strengths and the needs of the Harvest Network team as they aspire to lead identified churches in the network toward vitality. The collaboration consisted of eight primary questions that guided each focus group. The collective responses and insights that informed the research are as follows.

Question 1: How do you define your role in the network?

The collaboration around question 1 throughout the focus groups yielded both expected and unexpected results collectively. The expected result was that team members could consistently and confidently rehearse the organizational flow chart and communicate his or her role within the established context. However, it became obvious that though roles were easily

defined, the functions within the stated roles became diluted when dealing with the aspirations of the organization. For example, certain personnel regardless of their role were consistently called upon to overcome similar obstacles churches had encountered. If a person was assigned to the Northeast sector of the United States, and a church planter in the Western sector of the United States had a challenge, it was common practice to call upon a team member from another sector who could provide a solution to participate in the desired outcomes. The same was true when the team encountered obstacles in assisting churches in need of revitalization that regardless of regional roles and responsibilities the same individuals were called upon to offer solutions to the challenges because of their experience in that given discipline. Therefore, the unexpected result became that Harvest Network has an organization established by regions in the United States and abroad that supports church leaders, church planters, church multipliers, and revitalizers which calls upon leaders from different regions to overcome challenges in ministries outside of their territories based on their primary area of expertise. Based on the focus groups, the regional blending of problem solving on behalf of the network was an organizational Achilles heel that hindered the effectiveness of the mission of the team.

Question 2: Concerning church revitalization candidates, How can we as a network best help the pastor in a revitalization context?

The responses of the stakeholders concerning the role as a network to serve a congregation in need of renewal was consistent throughout the groups and expected. The focus groups repeatedly offered the same strategies to best help the pastor in a revitalization setting.

The first point of emphasis that the groups regularly offered was that it was paramount for the pastor to understand the hard work of revitalization. The need for deep personal and organizational introspection is required and must be fostered by the leader among congregants.

The church must be honest about the authentic hard work of moving toward a preferred future and be openly willing to make the necessary sacrifices of traditions, ideologies, and worldviews that brought a downturn. All groups were emphatic concerning this need.

The next prominent point of emphasis the participants offered was the responsibility of the team to lead the revitalizer to truly identify systematic obstacles that produced decline in his context and offer appropriate solutions that produce vitality. The groups were consistently diligent in stating that if there is hope for renewal, the ugly systematic shortcomings that produced organizational sickness must be addressed for there to be any hope of a preferred future.

Next, the groups regularly were committed to leading the revitalizer to the realization that turning a church toward vitality is a long-term commitment that takes a leader with resilience and a proper support group.

The groups also emphasized the need for resourcing the leader in the revitalization context with practical, proven, solutions that foster renewal. However, the groups consistently revealed a lack of biblical and practical strategies when asked what type of resources they would afford a leader in a revitalization context. This dearth of resourcing possibilities was an unexpected result of the intervention question. Question 2 produced expected and unexpected outcomes.

Question 3: Why do you believe churches need revitalization?

The considered question produced coherent feedback from focus group participants. The stakeholders consistently suggested that churches need revitalization when it was observable that they had declined or plateaued in attendance, baptisms, membership, outreach, small groups, or income in the past three years. The focus groups revealed an organizational ideology of “keeping

score” with known measurables in their churches and consistently evaluating the metrics. The question did not offer any unexpected results.

Question 4: Define biblical church revitalization, and what is its goal?

For reference, the definition the designed intervention used for biblical church revitalization was “the effort to restore by biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God.”⁵² The focus groups cohesively struggled to offer a consistent definition of biblical church revitalization. However, the groups proved effective to define characteristics of the preferred future of biblical church revitalization for congregations in need of renewal. The divergence between the definition and desired goal of biblical church revitalization was unexpected.

Question 5: What are the primary questions churches ask you about revitalization?

The participants of the focus groups consistently replied to question 5 that they did not normally receive questions directly about revitalization as a topic. However, the questions they did entertain were indicators of a need for revitalization. For example, all groups responded that instead of questions about revitalization, they most often received questions about leadership development, small group training, offering strategies, church growth, and outreach. This unexpected result suggested that there is a disconnect between a plateaued or declining church in need of revitalization and the inquiry for leadership development, outreach strategies, and church growth desires. These queries are potential indicators of an aspiration for renewal or revitalization and might require further inspection by the Harvest Network team when asked.

⁵² Davis, 20.

Question 6: How well equipped do you feel to provide biblical guidance to a declined or plateaued church?

The overwhelming response to question 6 was that participants felt inadequately prepared to provide biblical guidance to a declined or plateaued church. However, one individual in two separate groups felt surprised they were adequately equipped to guide churches toward renewal. Hence, the vast majority of the Harvest Network team felt inadequate to assist a leader to move his congregation toward a more preferred biblical future and desired training in this area.

Question 7: How can we best equip you to better serve the churches in need of revitalization?

The collective focus group responses to question 7 were scattered but represented a common theme of desired instruction that would inform the stakeholders of biblical strategies and applications. Another common theme was the desire for training in common factors or obstacles to revitalization. The focus group responses to the question informed the problem studied. The feedback to this question also informed the planned team instruction based on the available research.

Question 8: What question has the research overlooked?

The unexpected feedback from one particular focus group suggested that the research overlooked the structure of the organization and its impact on performance. The stakeholders revisited question 1 and suggested that if participants were consistently transitioning across the organization based on the needs of the organization, then possibly the organization should consider aligning itself around function instead of territories. The possibility of realignment should be reconsidered when the results of the intervention plan are considered.

The aforementioned eight questions as presented to the focus groups served as a

deepening of the conversation around the studied problem and invited participant collaboration to inform the research. The three focus groups allowed the participants to describe their experiences and offer their real-world perspectives on the research. The results of the focus group intervention helped further identify the heart felt needs of the Harvest Network team as they aspire to lead identified churches in the network toward vitality.

Contextual Observations

The intervention design introduced contextual stakeholder observations to allow the researcher to observe participants in their daily activities as they relate to the problem studied. The contextual observations of individual stakeholders further highlighted the unique role each team member fulfills in the organization and how each role impacts the problem studied.

The outcomes of the individual stakeholder contextual observations were generally expected. The observations revealed a link between the outcomes of the focus groups and the day-to-day snapshots of the participants at work in the Harvest Network offices.

Particularly noticeable was the function of the office around need, not recognized regional territories. The observations revealed a constant disregard for the clearly established territorial teams and a high tendency to consult with the person that had expertise in the area of inquisition. For example, on one occasion a pastor from California called asking for assistance in reviving ministry small groups. Instead of the administrator connecting him with the Western Regional Leader, she immediately connected the pastor with the Southeast Regional Leader because of his past successes in the small group ministry.

Further apparent throughout the contextual observations was the inability of the stakeholders to adequately assess renewal opportunities from a phone call or email. In seven of the contextual observations, participants misunderstood an ask for revitalization guidance by

failing to unmask the true purpose of the inquiry through inquisitive questioning of the leader. For instance, an email inquiry requested information from the network on resources to increase stewardship in the church. The administrator who received the email immediately began to inquire where the resources should be mailed instead of inquiring as to why stewardship was a concern for the church leader. This approach to the inquisitions of pastors was common in seven contextual observations.

The contextual observations informed the problem studied as the researcher observed each team member in his or her setting. The observations revealed commonalities between focus group data, survey data, personal interview data, and contextual observation data.

Team Instruction

The intervention implementation design introduced three sessions of team instruction in response to the real time data within the context of the available research to better equip the Harvest Network team to serve the plateaued or declining churches of the network.

As the problem was studied, real time results portrayed data points to be addressed in team instruction in response to the results. Through stakeholder personal interviews, focus groups, contextual observations, reports, surveys and pre-research surveys of participating churches, three periods of team instruction were created from the data and existing research.

Team Instruction Session 1

The first period of instruction designed to better equip the Harvest Network team was in response to the two baseline data points from questions in pre-research surveys to stakeholders and participating churches.

The first baseline data point was from question 4 in the pre-research blind survey of

network churches. In the survey, the leader was asked his response to the question, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify the barriers to church renewal in your context?” The overall average participant response from the 53 churches was 4.

The second baseline data point was from question 5 in the pre-research stakeholder blind survey. The survey asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being least likely, how well equipped do you feel to identify the barriers to church renewal?” The average response to the question was 5.

These two data points presented an opportunity to use the existing research gained from the project literature review to better equip the Harvest Network team to serve the churches of the network. The available research addressed the barriers and provided the framework for the first team instruction session. The first session was three hours in length. It consisted of two, 45-minute teachings on the barriers to revitalization and two breakout sessions to translate the information into the stakeholder’s context.

The first 45-minute teaching session addressed roadblocks to overall church health that contributed to plateau or decline in the local church context. The presence of the barriers was an indicator of an unhealthy church culture. The indicators of unhealthy culture were worship of the past, a refusal to look like the community, and an inward budget. The three barriers were the topics of the first 45-minute teaching session of the first period of instruction.

The instruction was followed by a 45-minute breakout session that addressed the question, “How do these obstacles disguise or present themselves in our interactions with the churches we serve?” The interactions in the breakout sessions were particularly vibrant around the unhealthy cultures that were longing to overcome a worship of the past. Specifically, the

overwhelming results of the breakout sessions assessed feedback from churches that revealed that very few had no clear vision of a preferred future for the congregation but was uniquely frustrated with the worship of the past in some fashion. As the groups in the breakout sessions began to make the connection between the tension between a worship of the past and no clear vision of the leader for a preferred future, excitement grew among the participants as they arrived at possible solutions for those they served daily.

The second 45-minute teaching session also addressed roadblocks to overall church health that contributed to plateau or decline in the local church context. As in the first session, it was understood that the presence of the barriers was an indicator of an unhealthy church culture. The indicators of unhealthy culture addressed in the second 45-minute session of the first period of instruction were a lack of Great Commission practices and a present spiritual deficiency among congregants.

The instruction was followed by a 45-minute breakout session that addressed the question, “How do these obstacles disguise or present themselves in our interactions with the churches we serve?” The interactions in the breakout sessions were particularly energetic when the connection between a circumvention of Great Commission practices and a dearth of growing disciples allowed the inwardly turned church to become self-absorbed in practice and famished in spirit. The breakout sessions around these ideas from the period of instruction ignited in the team an apparent previously unknown reality that the barriers do not exist in isolation but interrelate across a spectrum that is revealed in the decline of a congregation. The scheduled 45-minute breakout session lasted two hours and fifteen minutes.

The initial team instruction yielded unexpected results as the teaching and breakout sessions inspired the team toward meaningful connections with the real time data and contextual

goals.

Team Instruction Session 2

The second period of instruction designed to better equip the Harvest Network team was in response to the three baseline data points from questions in pre-research reports, pre-research surveys to stakeholders and participating churches.

The teaching for session 2 was framed by three baseline data points. The first baseline data point emerged when 82 percent of the North American Harvest Network churches were in need of some form of revitalization. The second baseline data point for the session arose when question 10 of the network churches pre-research blind survey revealed that leaders feel poorly equipped to lead the local church toward renewal. Finally, the third data point that informed the second team instruction session was question 4 from the focus groups. Question 4 asked the candidate to define biblical church revitalization and its goal. Participants struggled to offer a concise answer to the question, which indicated the need for definition. The data points had in common the need to define church revitalization and its goal. This was the topic of the second team instruction.

The second team instruction consisted of a 90-minute teaching on the definition of biblical church revitalization and its goal. The teaching was followed by a 90-minute breakout session that answered the question, “How does the definition of biblical church revitalization and its goal inform the team as it serves plateaued or declining churches?”

An unexpected result came from the breakout session. As the groups wrestled with the question at hand, there was overwhelming resolve to pursue church revitalization in obedience to the standard of the Scriptures and God’s goal for His church. The feedback from the groups demonstrated a growing conviction that the work of revitalization was the work of God. This

revealed among the team that there was a disconnect from the daily grind of the work around the Harvest Network offices and the desire for God’s standard for His church to return to health as revealed through the mandates of Scripture. Some stated that this new understanding heightened their awareness of their participation in the current work of the Lord in the earth. This shift toward a more biblical aspiration to church renewal among the team increased the burden for the 82 percent of churches in the movement in need of renewal. Therefore, the second team instruction yielded unexpected results because during the breakout sessions, the team made meaningful connections with the real time data and contextual goals.

Team Instruction Session 3

The final period of instruction designed to better equip the Harvest Network team was calculated in response to three baseline data points from contextual observations and data in pre-research reports from stakeholders and participating churches.

The teaching for session 3 was framed by three baseline data points. The first data point emerged from the contextual observations. The researcher observed that the stakeholders inadequately assessed opportunities for renewal in phone calls or emails. Throughout the observations seven of the eleven team members misidentified a request for revitalization guidance by not adequately assessing the leader’s real need cloaked in a shallower question to the office.

The subsequent data point was from question 7 of the pre-research blind survey. The question asked, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify the fundamental practices of turnaround churches?” The overall team response of 6 indicated that the stakeholders were not fully capable to identify the primary practices of churches on a healthy path toward renewal.

The third marker that informed session three was question nine of the pre-research blind survey of plateaued or declining churches. The question asked, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in your ability to identify theoretical practices of Scripture for renewal?”

The final session was three hours in length. It consisted of two, 45-minute teachings on fundamental practices that promote effective church revitalization and two 45-minute breakout sessions to translate the information into the stakeholder’s context. The breakout sessions addressed the question, “How should these primary practices inform our interactions with the churches we serve?”

The first teaching of session three addressed the primary practices from the current research and identified a culture of prayer and a culture of change among churches that experienced revitalization. The breakout sessions following the time of instruction demonstrated a fresh understanding of calling churches back to the essential elements of the life-giving practices of the New Testament church as observed in the book of Acts and elsewhere. One specific breakout group stated that the time of instruction formed a new perspective of the fundamentals of the healthy church practice of prayer and that they were enlightened as to the need for a church in need of renewal to pave the path with prayer. A second group mentioned that the priority of prayer and an effective prayer strategy would embolden courage among the leaders and congregants as the path toward a preferred future was embarked upon. It was concluded that the emphasis of the primary practice of prayer should inform future interactions with the churches of the network in order to create the genesis for a culture of effective change.

The second teaching of session three also focused on the primary practices from the current research and identified a clear vision and proper spiritual formation practices among

churches that experienced revitalization. The breakout sessions following the time of instruction first made a direct correlation between prayer and the realization of a clear vision and a solid commitment to effective disciple making processes. One group stated that they realized not simply one solution leads to renewal. In fact, they concluded that many factors lead a church to decline or plateau, and equally various biblical dynamics move a church toward revitalization. Another group affirmed that if a culture of change is to emerge, it must be birthed by people transforming by prayer. Hence, the group stated, that a culture of change is directly linked to people transformed through prayer. The final team instruction yielded unexpected results as the breakout sessions revealed the team made meaningful connections with the real time data and contextual goals that may better equip them to serve the churches of the network.

Overall, the three team instruction sessions produced expected results and insightful unexpected results. The expected result was that through the sessions, the team would be more informed of theological realities and theoretical implications for revitalization as the intervention design evaluated available research to address the needs that the real time data was affording. The unexpected results illuminated the effectiveness of the intervention design as the research informed the necessary teaching to meet the real felt needs of the team so that they could be better positioned to serve the network churches.

Results of Addressing the Problem

The results of addressing the problem were identified through measurable changes between the baseline data and the post-research data collected from stakeholders and participating church blind surveys, breakout sessions, and exit interviews.

Baseline Data and Post-Research Data Comparisons

The comparisons between the baseline data and the post-research data presented recognizable results of addressing the problem studied. Compared were the pre- and post-research blind surveys of the network churches, research participants, and quantifiable questions from personal interviews. The first data point compared was the changes in the baseline data and the post-research data of the participating network churches.

Network Churches Post-Research Blind Survey

The post-research data of the network churches represents the results from the blind survey conducted through Survey Monkey administered to the 88 North American Harvest Network congregations identified as plateaued or in decline. The survey presented to the participating churches was identical to the pre-research survey.

The survey of declined or plateaued churches was designed to establish the level of satisfaction of the quality of guidance received from Harvest Network offices concerning revitalization strategies. Of the 88 identified congregations, 48 responded to the post-research blind survey. The results are represented below in a chart that indicates the average collective responses on a scale of 1 – 10 to the indicated questions of the 48 responses of the blind survey.

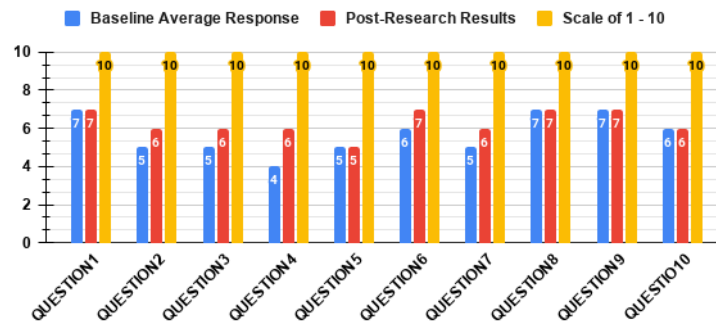


Table 5. Collective Post-Research Average Response of 48 Churches

Question 1 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very satisfied

and 1 being not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of assistance you receive from Harvest Network?” The overall average participant response was 7. The post-research average compared to the baseline represented no change in results.

Question 2 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very satisfied and 1 being not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of assistance concerning renewal efforts you receive from Harvest Network?” The total average participant response was 6. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed a slight increase in quality of assistance of 1 data point.

Question 3 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to resource you and your church for revitalization?” The total average participant response was 6. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed a slight increase in confidence of 1 data point.

Question 4 asked the participant: “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify the barriers to church renewal in your context?” The overall average participant response was 6. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed a slight increase in confidence of 2 data points.

Question 5 solicited from the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify harmful leadership practices in the local church?” The total average participant reply was 5. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed no increase in confidence.

Question 6 solicited from the partaker, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you identify fundamental practices for revitalization in your context?” The collective average participant response was 6. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed a slight increase in confidence of 1 data point.

Question 7 solicited from the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in the ability of Harvest Network to help you lead your church in revitalization?” The overall average response was 7. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed a slight increase in confidence of 1 data point.

Question 8 solicited from the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in your ability to identify the theological imperatives of Scripture for renewal?” The total average response was 7. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed no increase in confidence.

Question 9 inquired of the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident are you in your ability to identify the theoretical practices of Scripture for renewal?” The total average answer was 7. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed no increase in confidence.

Finally, Question 10 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very equipped and 1 being not at all equipped, how equipped do you feel to lead your local church in a turnaround?” The overall average response was 6. The post-research average compared to the baseline data revealed no increase in confidence.

The post-research statistics provided a comparison for evaluation of the level of impact the problem studied had on the satisfaction and effectiveness of guidance received from Harvest

Network offices concerning revitalization strategies.

Harvest Network Team Post-Research Blind Survey

The next data set represents the post-research results from the blind survey through Survey Monkey administered to the consented stakeholders of Harvest Network offices. The survey was designed to determine the baseline of the participant’s biblical understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization. Further, the survey evaluated the participant’s personal level of confidence in serving churches in the network in need of revitalization. All 11 stakeholders responded to the blind survey. The results are represented below in a chart of findings that indicates the average collective post-research responses as compared to the average pre-research data points. The data points are scaled 1 – 10 to the indicated questions.

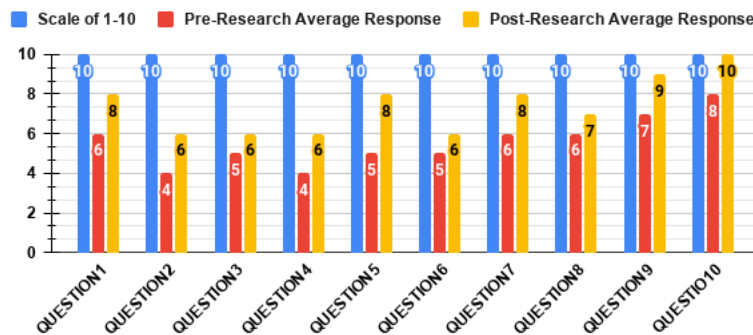


Table 6. Pre- and Post-Research Average Responses of 11 Stakeholders

Question 1 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to assist the declined or plateaued churches in the network to overcome their obstacles to renewal?” The overall average post-research participant response was 8. The post-research average response compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to assist declined or plateaued churches in the network.

Question 2 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to determine if a church leader is a candidate to lead in the revitalization efforts of a plateaued or declining church?” The overall average post-research participant response was 6. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to determine if a church leader was a candidate to lead in the revitalization efforts of a plateaued or declining church.

Question 3 inquired of the leader, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify the theological imperatives of Scripture for church renewal?” The overall average post-research participant response was 6. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 1 data point in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to identify the theological imperatives of Scripture for church renewal.

Question 4 inquired of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify the theoretical practices of Scripture for church renewal?” The overall average participant response was 6. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to identify the theoretical practices of Scripture for church renewal.

Question 5 questioned of the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to identify the barriers to church renewal?” The overall average post-research participant response was 8. The result compared to

the baseline data revealed an increase of 3 data points in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to identify the barriers to church renewal.

Question 6 inquired of the contributor, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel to identify harmful leadership practices in the local church?” The overall average participant response was 6. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 1 data point in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to identify harmful leadership practices in the local church.

Question 7 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how well equipped do you feel you are to identify turnaround churches’ fundamental practices?” The overall average participant response was 8. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how well the stakeholder felt he or she was equipped to identify the fundamental practices of turnaround churches.

Question 8 asked the respondent, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that your efforts can lead to the renewal of a church that is declined or plateaued?” The overall average response was 7. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 1 data point in how probable it was that the team member’s efforts could lead to the renewal of a declined or plateaued church.

Question 9 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that the local church pastor is the essential catalyst in a church renewal?” The overall average response was 9. The outcome compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how probable it was that the local church pastor was the essential catalyst in church renewal.

Lastly, question 10 asked the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being most likely

and 1 being the least likely, how probable is it that the Harvest Network team is a candidate for focused training in church revitalization?” The overall average participant response was 10. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how probable it was that the Harvest Network team was a candidate for focused training in church revitalization.

The comparison of the pre-research and post-research statistics provided an evaluation of the effect of addressing the problem for the stakeholder’s biblical understanding of the theological and theoretical strategies for church revitalization. Further, the outcomes of the compared data evaluated the participant’s personal level of confidence in serving churches in the network in need of revitalization.

Harvest Network Individual Exit Interviews Quantifiable Question

The Harvest Network post research individual exit interviews were designed in the intervention to gather from the participant the answer to an identical quantifiable question that was posed to the participant in the process of the personal interview in the beginning of the research project.

The individual exit interview was designed as an informal conversation that thanked the participant for his or her participation in the study. Intentionally designed in the interview was the quantifiable question framed in a measurable technique. The quantifiable question was presented as follows: “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very confident and 1 being not at all confident, how confident do you feel to fulfill your assigned team tasks?” From 11 respondents in the exit interviews, 8 was the overall average response. The result compared to the baseline data revealed an increase of 2 data points in how confident the stakeholder was in fulfilling assigned team tasks.

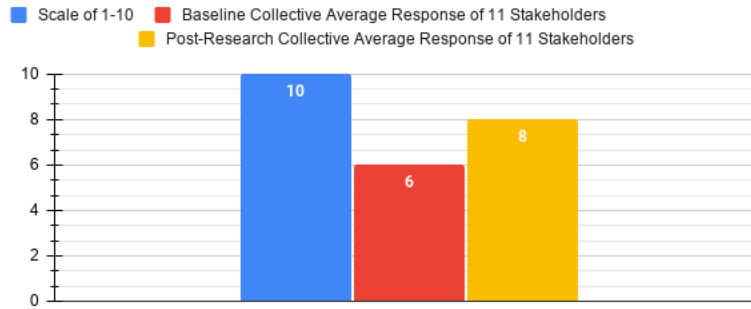


Table 7. Personal Exit Interviews Collective Average Response of 11 Stakeholders

The compared data informed the results of addressing the problem and if the intervention plan yielded the expected outcomes. The triangulation that evaluated pre- and post-research data of the designed intervention plan was produced by the evaluation of a unique quantifiable personal interview question, stakeholder blind surveys, and surveys of participating Harvest Network churches.

The results of addressing the problem reflect the researcher’s assumptions before the intervention plan commenced. It was assumed that the network team was ill equipped to aid the churches of the network realize biblical vitality. It was assumed that the network team members lacked the understanding of biblical revitalization established in theological truths that inform theoretical practices. Without an understanding of a biblical worldview for churches in decline or plateau, the network team was ineffective in assisting them to turn toward a preferred future of vitality and health. The gathered post-research data demonstrated that as a result of addressing the problem the Harvest Network team is likely better equipped to serve the churches of the network.

Unexpected Results

The unexpected results of the intervention design were two-fold. First, the researcher did not expect that the focus groups would yield a previously undetected Harvest Network

organizational flaw. The office is organized by regions in the United States and internationally so that a consistent team from within the office could serve the churches of the designed structural regions. It was believed that this dedication of personnel to specific regions would foster relationships with the churches in the region. In the focus groups, the frustration of the team consistently arose that most regional teams were not properly equipped with personnel that could best serve a church in need of revitalization guidance. As a result, the structure dictated that the office was consistently introducing guidance to churches in need of revitalization from different regional leaders. This bleed over of roles does not meet the goal of the designed Harvest Network structure which is established relational guidance for ministry leaders of the network. The revelation of the frustration created by the organizational chart was an unexpected result of the intervention design.

A second unexpected result of the study was uncovered by the lack of improvement in the post-research data point of question 1. The question inquired, “On a scale of 1 – 10, with 10 being very satisfied and 1 being not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with the overall quality of assistance you receive from Harvest Network?” There was no recorded change in the results of the pre- and post-research data from the question. It was expected that the churches would be more satisfied with the quality of assistance they receive from Harvest Network as an outcome of addressing the studied problem. However, no change in satisfaction was documented between the pre-research results and the post-research measurements of the same data point.

It is feasible that the unexpected outcome of no change in results in satisfaction from the participating network churches was a result of poor research design. It is a possibility that satisfaction among participating churches may take longer to produce measurable change than the time restraints of the research project.

Expected Results

The intervention plan yielded expected results. The basic assumption of the project was the strength of the organization was centrally in efforts of church planting and the multiplication of healthy campuses. The weakness of the network was church revitalization. As a result of the assumed structural weakness in church renewal efforts, it was presumed that the network team members lacked the understanding of biblical renewal established in theological truths that informed theoretical practices. Without an understanding of a biblical worldview for churches in decline or plateau, it was assumed that the network team was ineffective in assisting declined or plateaued churches to turn toward a preferred future of biblical health. These preconceived ideas shaped the analysis of the project studied. Therefore, it was argued that the staff at Harvest Network required instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization so that they may be better equipped to serve the churches of the network.

The results of the intervention plan yielded expected results of the project argument that the network team would be better equipped to serve churches in need of revitalization if they received instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization. The triangulated data of the pre- and post-research findings revealed that an improvement was realized in a better equipped Harvest Network team to serve the network churches in need of revitalization.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This chapter presents a brief overview of the study and compares the research for the thesis project proposal with the results of the implemented research project. In this section, the reader will understand the relevance and usefulness of the study. Further, Chapter 5 compares the results with similar situations and considers how the research might be replicated in a like setting. In addition, it reviews the findings of the study in light of the theological and theoretical framework and reflects on the precedent literature discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes specific recommendations for stakeholders. Finally, this conclusion presents the questions that require additional investigation and considers next steps for the research concerning the topic discussed.

Overview

Because 76 percent of North American Harvest Network churches were in decline or plateaued in the timeframe studied, the researcher questioned if the ministry staff at Harvest Network lacked a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. The project was pursued because it was possible that training in biblically informed theology and practices of church revitalization for the network ministry staff may better equip the team to aid pastors to turn plateaued or declined churches toward renewal. It was assumed that this was a weakness in the network's ability to help ministry leaders succeed as revitalizers in their local contexts.

The literature review considered the problem studied in view of the current research and addressed how the literature supported the researcher's thesis project. Four primary themes

emerged from the sources that concluded that barriers to church revitalization exist but equipped and competent leaders that create a culture for renewal can form a context that leads the ministry to overcome obstacles and transition toward vitality. Fundamental theological foundations that produce Bible-centric theoretical applications allow such a life-giving context to emerge.

The methodology for the research study shaped an intervention design informed by the literature review and the problem studied. The implementation of the intervention design proposed that the intervention would lead the Harvest Network leadership team to a better understanding of biblical principles and practices for church revitalization. In response to the data produced by the action research, which included interviews, documents, surveys, and observations, it was concluded that instruction in biblical principles and practices of church revitalization may help the team become better equipped to serve the churches of the network.

The results of the research were demonstrated by the comparison of the baseline research data and the post-research information. The interpretation of the information showed that the intervention design yielded the expected results.

Research Proposal and Project Results Compared

The research for the thesis project proposal suggested that barriers to church revitalization existed. As the research proposal developed, four primary themes emerged from the sources. The research disclosed that common obstacles to church revitalization exist in congregations that are experiencing a lack of vitality. The studied barriers informed the approach to the problem studied. Further, the examination showed that equipped and competent leaders that created a culture for renewal could form an atmosphere that overcame obstructions to congregational health and turn the plateaued or declining church toward vitality. The research further revealed that if theological foundations were reestablished in turnaround churches, an

opportunity for theoretical applications would produce a culture of renewal that moved the struggling congregations toward revitalization.

In comparison, the results of the implemented research project demonstrated that the identified barriers to church revitalization that the proposal identified could be overcome by leaders equipped to lead a plateaued or declined church toward renewal. The assumption that the network team was ineffective in the assistance of dying churches move toward renewal was realized in the problem studied. As a result, the information gleaned from the review of literature that informed the studied problem and the evaluation of the gathered data suggested that the Harvest Network team were candidates for effective training in a biblical worldview of church revitalization that informed the strategies of churches that desired a renewed vitality. Therefore, it was concluded that the research for the assumptions of the thesis project proposal and the outcomes of the implemented research project were comparatively similar.

Relevance and Usefulness of the Study

The relevance and usefulness of the study has important implications beyond Harvest Network churches and could enlighten other ministry network organizations that encounter struggles leading declined and plateaued churches toward revitalization.

Networks are primarily organizations that provide biblical covering, a theological center, ministerial encouragement, and guidance. The Harvest Network research project may be beneficial to other networks that serve churches that are plateaued or declined. The statistics concerning the realities of the Christian church in North America are grim. The North American church is in a current state of overall decline. The research done by Brian Croft in *Biblical Church Revitalization* suggests, “There has been an average net loss of 3,500 churches each year over the past twenty-plus years and of the remaining churches 88 to 91 percent of them are

dying.”⁵³ Many of the churches in North America that face distinction are connected to networks. The results and methods of the Harvest Network study could be replicated in like organizations that seek to better serve the plateaued or declined churches in their networks. If the leaders of like networks lack a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for church renewal those leaders cannot properly serve their networks effectively. Therefore, the Harvest Network study has usefulness to networks that desire to effectively serve their congregations seeking a renewed vitality.

Results in Light of the Theological and Theoretical Framework

The findings of the study in light of the theological and theoretical framework are significant because the outcomes demonstrate a direct link to the biblical expressions of church and her renewal. The Scripture directly addresses the need for revitalization and presents methods to pursue congregational vitality. The practice of church revitalization is evident in the Scriptures and demonstrates efforts throughout the generations that have successfully helped congregations in need of renewal.

The Harvest Network study revealed that the team lacked a clear biblical understanding of theological foundations and theoretical applications that move congregations toward renewal. As a result, the team was not properly equipped to lead churches in the network in a plateaued or declined condition.

The theological framework of the study informed the active research and established a biblical framework for successful renewal. For example, it was discovered in the research focus groups that it was common for churches in the network that experienced decline had possibly lost sight of the Great Commission and the standard of the Acts 2 church that added to their

⁵³ Croft, 8.

numbers daily those who were being saved. Awareness of the scriptural standard of the New Testament church informed the research study and its findings. Further, the understanding that the Acts 2 model is an expression of the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 and Paul's guidance in Ephesians 4:11-13 to lead Jesus followers to full maturity informed the findings of the study. It was observed that the Harvest Network team made an intentional shift from assisting leaders in revitalization efforts with common methods toward a more biblically centered assistance that allowed the Scriptures to inform counsel.

A commitment to theological foundations and theoretical applications was evident in the findings of the study as the team increased its confidence in equipping churches in need of renewal from the intervention design.

Precedent Literature

The conceptual framework of the action research of the thesis project considered a review of literature that considered the problem presented, purpose statement, and thesis. The precedent literature unearthed four primary themes from the sources that concluded that barriers to church revitalization exist. However, equipped and competent leaders that create a culture for renewal can form a context that leads the ministry to overcome obstacles and transition toward vitality. Further, the literature revealed that fundamental theological foundations that produce Bible-centric theoretical applications allow such a life-giving context to emerge.

The precedent literature established the dismal state of the church and the barriers to revitalization. The literature established central theological foundations and theoretical practices that were common in turnaround churches. The precedent information was invaluable to the research project and served as the foundation to the intervention design that addressed the problem studied.

Stakeholder Specific Recommendations

In response to the outcomes of the research project, two specific recommendations are suggested for the Harvest Network stakeholders. First, based on the unexpected result of the focus groups that demonstrated that stakeholders were frustrated by the organizational alignment of the network, it is recommended that the network organizational chart be reviewed based on the findings.

An appropriate adjustment in the organizational chart of Harvest Network may be that the office be organized around the needs of churches rather than the physical locations of churches, establishing the office around function instead of location. It is recommended that the office reorganize personnel around the three primary Harvest Network functions of church planting, campus multiplication, and church revitalization. This may alleviate the frustrations created by the organizational chart currently focused on regions instead of ministry need. This adjustment may allow the network to better serve the churches of the network.

A second recommendation is that the network make an ongoing investment in Harvest Network team training. The results of the study demonstrated an improvement of confidence in the team and served churches around revitalization needs. The team training in the intervention design markedly impacted the results of the study. Further training may continue to serve the team well and continue to produce improvements in the ambitions of the network. Specifically, five days of training per calendar year, at minimum, would serve the network well. The training can create an ongoing conversation around the goals of the network and continue to foster healthy theological foundations and theoretical applications that strengthen the ambitions of the network. This would permit the training to expand beyond the focus of revitalization, though more training is necessary for the team in this area, and allow the training to inform all the

functions of the network. Church planting and church multiplication are equally established in theological realities throughout the Scriptures. It is recommended that the efforts of the network warrant the Bible to speak through an ongoing commitment to team training in those disciplines as well. The two specific recommendations offered should allow the network to continue to arrive at a clear understanding of biblical principles and practices for life-giving church planting, multiplication, and revitalization around the world.

Questions that Require Additional Investigation

Considering the completed research, three additional questions require further investigation. First, does the same shortcomings of theological foundations of the Scripture and resulting theoretical applications inform the other areas of mission in the network? How would the leaders in those segments of the network respond to the survey questions as they pertain to their own experiences with the network? Would they find the Harvest Network suitably equipped to lead them in church planting and multiplication efforts in their communities or do the same obstacles exist in these disciplines as existed in church revitalization efforts? Similarly, how equipped does the Harvest Network team themselves feel to serve the other needs of the network? This question needs further examination in order to properly assess the goals of the organization.

A second question that requires further investigation is as follows: Is the frustration among church leaders that the blind surveys revealed directly linked to the inadequacies of the team or is there other contributing factors to the lack of network confidence among pastors? This needs further inquiry because when the baseline data was compared to the post-research data the leaders acknowledged an increase in overall confidence in the network's ability to aid in revitalization. Interestingly, the leaders demonstrated no data point increase in confidence to lead

his or her church in a turnaround based on theological and theoretical principles. Was this lack of improvement due to a lack of personal confidence or a lack of a perceived added personal value from the network? Was this an indicator that the leaders are not viable revitalization candidates or an authentic personal assessment? This question requires additional scrutiny.

The final question that requires additional investigation is as follows: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the perceived implications of the research? The period analyzed assessed pre-pandemic realities. A portion of the research was conducted during the apex of the COVID-19 pandemic. Did the cultural landscape skew the data? Would the stakeholders and participating leaders have responded differently without cultural implications? Did other unknown factors influence the data because of the pandemic? Did the views of church leadership shift as a result of the pandemic? Did the views of church networks shift in pandemic realities? The three aforementioned questions stress further investigation.

Research Next Steps

The next steps for the research include a complete assessment of the entire Harvest Network mission based on central principles of the research study. One should investigate if the Harvest Network team is competent in all areas of the organizational mission. Based on the research outcomes of the problem studied, a similar intervention design may prove fruitful to the team and its ambitions to best serve the churches in the network. Research next steps should be seriously considered if organizational effectiveness is valued by the leadership of the network. A proper assessment through research would better align the organization with its stated goals.

In addition, the research would benefit from an investigation into the overall view of the value of the network to those in the field. The question should be asked of pastoral leaders if the organization adds value to leaders in context. Do congregational leaders continue to value what

Harvest Network offers or do leaders seek elsewhere the assistance they need to flourish? If solutions are sought elsewhere by leaders, why is it happening? What shortcomings of the network require leaders to seek help outside the network? These sincere questions require acute consideration by the network.

Finally, a further inquiry into the needs of the network team and network churches in the United States and abroad should solicit next steps in the research. It is unwise to assume that the problem studied adequately assessed the exhaustive realities of the team and network needs. Though prized data has been gathered in the studied problem, valuable next steps are required to further assess the needs of both the team and the churches of the network.

Conclusion

The impacts of network training on church revitalization were researched in this project. The problem was presented within the ministry context as the limitations and delimitations of the study were acknowledged. With basic assumptions for the study considered it was argued that if the staff at Harvest Network received instruction in biblical principles of church revitalization, the expected result would be that they may be better equipped to serve the churches of the network. It was assumed that a better equipped network team could inspire problem solving at the local church level with theologically informed theoretical practices.

Upon the completion of a literature review that provided a conceptual framework for the problem studied, four common themes emerged. Barriers to church revitalization, the realities of detrimental leadership, the presence of an aspired church revitalization culture with corresponding network team training blossomed from the literature review as theoretical practices informed by theological realities. As a result, a methodology for the research was realized through a designed intervention.

The intervention design received IRB approval and was implemented. The intervention plan produced results as the problem were addressed through the triangulation of focus groups, personal interviews, contextual observations, and blind surveys. The active research informed three periods of instruction that better equipped the network team to serve the churches of the network as demonstrated in the comparison of the baseline data with post-research data. Expected and unexpected results were realized as a result of the intervention design. Ultimately, the purpose of the research study was realized, and the data demonstrated that the intervention did better equip the stakeholders to serve the churches of the network.

The results of the project are useful, and the research may prove valuable to other networks seeking to provide leadership to plateaued or declined churches in their contexts. As the sun sets on this research project, there are additional questions that require investigation for Harvest Network and opportunities for logical next steps exist. In conclusion, the research study yielded the expected results.

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 29, 2020

Timothy Houston
Jeffrey Dowdy

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-166 Impacts of Network Training on Church Revitalization

Dear Timothy Houston, Jeffrey Dowdy:

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.(iii). 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) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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