

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Victory Temple House of Refuge: A Missional Focused Revitalization Strategy

Submitted to Dr. Jeffrey L. Dowdy

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis is to develop a revitalization strategy for Victory Temple House of Refuge located in Fayette, Alabama, that will connect the hearts and minds of its leaders to biblical principles for restoring church vibrancy and growth. The purpose rises to confront a problem of church membership decline and community contraction, frequently associated with a lusterless existence. The purpose statement also introduces a study on church revitalization's incipient principles of returning to missional activities and discipleship fundamentals as a means of restoring congregational vitality. Researching the problem is inextricable to a Christian community's mandate to bring glory to God by bearing fruit that lasts (John 15:16). The principles for promoting and nurturing a growing, thriving church are seen in the gatherings of first-century Christians through a display of diversity (e.g., males and females; young and old; husbands and wives; and multiple ethnicities). Christ calls people from every generation, gender, and race to collaborate in bringing the Father glory (Titus 2:1-10). A qualitative research approach is used in a methodology that includes five scheduled meetings whereby participants provide data through surveys and follow-up interviews as the researcher collects more data through field observations. The field project's objective is to empower the ministry's auxiliary leaders to use their influence in leading Victory Temple in a church revitalization, restoring church health and growth. Other ministry leaders might also be encouraged by the results and adopt similar practices in following the Holy Spirit during a church revitalization.

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Key Words: Church Decline, Church Health, Church Growth, Missional, Revitalization, Vibrancy, Vitality.

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Abbreviations

COGIC *Church of God in Christ*

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

VTHOR *Victory Temple House of Refuge*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The entire creation exists to glorify the Creator of the heavens and the earth through His spoken life words (Ps 19:1). Christ's declaration regarding His incarnation's purpose is to restore the abundant life that sin's stain attempts to tarnish (John 10:10). Since God does not take pleasure in death, anything that is dead or dying does not bring Him glory. This is not only true for humanity but also for the church Christ established.

The problem and purpose statements are determining forces for making methodological decisions.¹ The project facilitator provides a problem statement for VTHOR that identifies church membership decline and community contraction frequently associated with a lusterless existence. The project facilitator's purpose statement for the project introduces a study on church revitalization's incipit principles of returning to missional activities and discipleship fundamentals as a means of restoring congregational vitality. The project facilitator believes that contextual implementation of the first-century paradigm for maintaining vibrancy in the early church by a local congregation will sufficiently address the problem in this project. This presupposition influences and guides the project facilitator in investigating biblical principles regarding life in local churches from the first century until the present in order to implement a revitalization strategy at Victory Temple House of Refuge (VTHOR).

¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects* (Downers Grove: IVP Academics, 2011), 50.

Ministry Context

VTHOR is a predominantly black Pentecostal church affiliated with the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) denomination. VTHOR is located on the Northwest side of the City of Fayette, Alabama on a street where there are two other churches within one hundred and fifty yards. The mostly retirement aged community is composed of approximately seventy families.

According to the World Population Review, the population in Fayette, Alabama in 2020 was 4,175.² White and black Americans make-up 94.23% of the population, 68.29% and 25.94%, respectively.³ Fayette is presently declining at a rate of -1.18% annually which equates to a population decrease by -9.61% from a total 4,619 since the 2010 census.⁴ The largest industry in Fayette County is manufacturing, the average salary is \$31,687, the median household income is \$54,606, the employment rate is 41.7% and the unemployment rate is 8.2%.⁵ The median age in Fayette is 43 years (37.3 years for males and 48.4 years for females) and the overall marriage rate is 49.6%. Those with at least a ninth-grade education combined with high school graduates or those with a higher education represent 85.6% of the population.⁶ Victory Temple's challenge, then, is connecting with this unique community as it seeks to support advancing God's kingdom.

² World Population Review, "Fayette Alabama Population," Accessed February 21, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/fayette-al-population>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Church Demographics

A mixture of older, middle-aged, college-aged, and high school members from nine families make up the demographics of Victory Temple. During the week, a small women's group (3-5 members) meet on Thursday evenings at 5 pm, which is one hour before the church's regularly scheduled Bible study. The adult and youth Sunday school classes are lively. The senior pastor preaches on the second and fourth Sundays, accompanied by the senior choir, and the project facilitator preaches on the first and third Sundays accompanied by the youth choir. Both choirs sing together on special occasions. The project facilitator also serves as a chaplain for the COGIC Alabama First Jurisdiction. The following explicates the COGIC hierarchy, which shapes and influences VTHOR's culture.

Church of God in Christ Hierarchy

In 1907, COGIC became the first legally chartered Pentecostal body incorporated in the United States. According to its 1973 constitution, the church has two governing structures: civil and ecclesiastical. The civil structure includes a president, first vice-President, second vice-President, general secretary, general treasurer, and financial secretary. The general assembly elects all officers. The general secretary, general treasurer, and financial secretary terms run concurrently with the current presidential administration elected every four years.

The ecclesiastical structure mirrors the Episcopal-Presbyterian form of government. Churches fall under dioceses called jurisdictions and each jurisdiction falls under the authority of a bishop.⁷ There is a presiding bishop, known as the Chief Apostle of the church. The presiding bishop is part of a general board consisting of eleven other bishops elected by a general assembly

⁷ Robert W. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiencies for Effective Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academics, 2005), 66.

consisting of pastors, elders, chaplains, bishops, missionaries, supervisors, and designated lay delegates. The general assembly is the supreme authority over the church to decide matters of faith and practice. Jurisdictions range in size between thirty and one hundred churches. Each state in the United States consists of at least one jurisdiction. These jurisdictions separate into districts, consisting of five to seven churches governed by superintendents (ordained elders or pastors). There are more than two-hundred ecclesiastical jurisdictions around the world. Jurisdictions mirror the national church in terms of composition, polity, and procedure. The current presiding bishop and Chief Apostle is Bishop J. Drew Sheard (March 20, 2021). The church's national officers are chosen at the general assembly every four years unless special elections are warranted. The judicial board serves as the judicial branch and is the supreme body that interprets polity and practice.

Regarding polity and practice, Bishop Sheard's predecessor, Bishop Charles E. Blake, Sr., announced a new culture model for COGIC prior to his departure. In the new model, he addresses the need for the denomination's thoughts and behavior to evolve while remaining faithful to biblical principles. The paradigm shift rests upon the tenants: Integrity, Measurable Results, Passionate, Adaptable, Collaborative, Timely, and Service- Oriented (IMPACTS).⁸ The new culture framework captures the idea that, although denominations sometimes differ in their beliefs and practices, unity is possible where the goal is the same.

⁸ Church of God in Christ, "New Culture Model Launched in COGIC to Support Change," Church of God in Christ, accessed October 28, 2020, <http://www.cogic.org/blog/new-culture-model-launched-in-cogic-to-support-change/>.

Victory Temple Historical and Geographical Information

The following historical missional activities play an important role in this project study. Victory Temple House of Refuge was originally named Victory Temple. Church historical records indicate that two women, Lousana Burger and Lue Petty, formed the church at a house on McGuire Street in Fayette County, Alabama, in 1939. Both women lived in neighboring Lamar County but told others in their small town that they were led by God to start a church in Fayette. Their commitment to engage in missions beyond the comforts of familiar surroundings testify to their faithfulness to discipleship.⁹ After notifying the Jurisdictional Bishop two years later of their success in Fayette County, in 1941, a male overseer (Elder Floyd Smith) reported as the congregation's new shepherd. The idea of women church overseers did not correspond with COGIC biblical interpretation of church leadership in those days.¹⁰

Elder Floyd Smith began holding services under a large oak tree on property owned by Fayette Mercantile Company. Elder B.T. Henry, Deacon Paul Fleming, and Brother Hartford Smith assisted him. Under his leadership, the women's department emerged as Mother Pearlle Henry was responsible for leading the congregation's women. She subsequently assigned Sister Luverda Smith as overseer of the women's missionary department, and both continued the missional work started by Lousana Burger and Lue Peddy.¹¹

Church records further indicate that Victory Temple experienced a significant positive response to the gospel and grew exponentially in membership. Elder Floyd Smith relocated the

⁹ Jay Richard Akkerman and Mark Maddix, *Missional Discipleship: Partners in God's Redemptive Mission*. Kansas City (The Foundry Publishing, 2013), 18.

¹⁰ Jericho Nalls, "Victory Temple Church History," E-mail dated October 24, 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

church to a boarding house in Fayette owned by the Brown Lumber Company to better accommodate church growth. However, in 1945 he reported to the church that he received a vision from God to purchase the property at and around the large oak tree where church services were previously held and to plant a church there. Elder Smith demonstrate the ideal of a missional church by embracing its demands and priorities proclaimed by Christ.¹² The church members believed in his report and responded positively to his leadership. The land was purchased for the church by brother Paul Fleming and his wife in the year 1945.¹³

During the decades of the sixties and seventies, the church's membership slowly declined. Victory Temple's church records indicate that community engagement during this period pales compared to its former years. Church revivals held during these decades did not result in a significant response by the community to the gospel, and simultaneously the church's health and facility declined steadily. Over these years, three new pastors led the church with five years being the longest tenure for any of them.¹⁴ What resonates from these decades is that the vitality of VTHOR is inextricable with its missional and disciple-making activities.¹⁵

A spiritual resurgence marks the first five years of the eighties at Victory Temple under Elder J. Henderson's leadership. He is credited with reestablishing the church's collaboration and cooperation within the community and other denominations. Once again, a strong emphasis on outreach created a stir in the church members, which resulted in significant community

¹² Graham Hill, *Global Church: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 51.

¹³ Nalls, "Victory Temple," October 24, 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Eddie Gibbs, *The Rebirth of the Church: Applying Paul's Vision for Ministry in Our Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 24.

visibility through service to the people. Contrastingly, the last five years of the eighties marks a doctrinal and moral failure by the following two overseers. The first leader following Elder Henderson's tenure resigned after serving only eight months, and the second leader resigned after serving two years.¹⁶ The spiritual erosion and damage to the church's reputation due to their immoral behaviors yet lingers in the memories of some older church members, and the church's reputation still bears a dishonoring stain in the community's eyes.

During the following ten years (1989-1999), the church experienced another spiritual resurgence under Elder Major Upson's leadership. The people received compassionate pastoral care and began to heal and flourish spiritually. Significant renovations to the church building, and a refocus on missional activities through community outreach also marks his tenure. From the year 2000 to the present, the church experienced a complete renovation and expansion under Elder Arthur Barnes' leadership and is seeking God for spiritual renewal plans.¹⁷ He agrees with the problem statement and fully supports the project. His collaboration and participation in the study confirm his desire to lead the church by the Holy Spirit's direction. Additionally, Bishop Blake's announcement regarding a cultural shift that employs missional principles encapsulates the denomination's new direction and buttress the writer's efforts in achieving the project study's purpose. Furthermore, the church's history testifies that true revitalization happens when members rise-up and embrace their responsibility to witness to lost neighbors, co-workers, family members, and even strangers.¹⁸

¹⁶ Nalls, "Victory Temple," October 24, 2020.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 112.

Church Doctrine, Teaching, Practices, and Customs

Victory Temple teaches three separate and distinct works of grace that God performs in believers' lives: salvation, sanctification, and Spirit baptism or infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Victory Temple also teaches that God's salvation is the only way of redemption for sinners and restoration to divine favor and communion with God. Many church leaders in the denomination believe and teach that the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit's baptism is an experience that follows conversion and sanctification. Victory Temple believes in divine healing; however, it does not advocate the exclusion of medical supervision. The church teaches that the Holy Spirit's gifts are given to believers and are active in the church today.

Victory Temple also adheres to the following ordinances: water baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper. These rituals carry great significance as well as participating in acts of healing and speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Glossolalia is a Pentecostal and charismatic teaching based on Acts 2:4, 11; 10:45, 46; 19:6, and 1 Corinthians 14. The church does not practice infant baptisms or christenings but does conduct infant dedications in formal ceremonies.

As a classical Pentecostal holiness church, VTHOR embraces its holiness heritage by teaching modesty in dress and appearance, moderate participation in secular entertainment, and prohibitions against profanity, alcohol, substance abuse, and immoral behavior. The church also has a rich tradition of prayer, fasting, praise, and consecration. Also, esteeming dignitaries and demonstrating obedience to those serving in higher authoritative positions is taught.

Problem Presented

The project facilitator will address church health and growth at VTHOR. VTHOR is a small black Pentecostal church (40 members) located in a small city in Fayette County, Alabama.

The church has existed for over seventy-five years. The median age in the church is forty-five years old. Local attendance reports, a recent church roll purge of twenty members, and no baptisms in the previous two years reveal contraction signs.

When studying VTHOR's history, church growth and decline patterns are analogous with periods of vigorous missional activity or the ministry's contraction from the community. In Matthew 28:8-20, Jesus explained to His disciples that He wanted them to make more disciples. Making disciples requires engaging people outside the church's walls. Becoming more visible in the community can take many forms. Ideas that come to mind include hosting an annual holiday festival for the community, establishing a feeding program for the underprivileged, or financially sponsoring a child in a local school. Walls of indifference and apathy gradually dissipate through heartfelt conversations and sincere commitments. Engaging the church Christ is building moves believers from their comfortable surroundings to God's harvest fields where the Holy Spirit's work is ongoing.

Again, maintaining cultural relevance is essential to a church's missional activities as it is among the top discussions at the denomination's leading governing body. The Chief Apostle recently disseminated new guiding principles to the collective church body that supports maintaining societal relevancy. So, extrapolating congregational models and preferences dating back over seventy years to the present is not the solution some might espouse to mitigate VTHOR's diminished vibrancy.

Contextualizing the gospel for a new generation requires scrutinizing traditions and practices that no longer catch the Holy Spirit's wind.¹⁹ It requires relying on the Holy Spirit's power to guide every gospel presentation in a manner that does not diminish the Word's

¹⁹ The free dictionary defines contextualizing as placing a word or idea in a particular context.

meaning. Pressing forward includes honoring worthy efforts in the past while climbing upward to higher ground. Christ's missional mandate is perennial and therefore relevant in every generation for building and sustaining His church. The problem is that Victory Temple House of Refuge is not growing.

Purpose Statement

The project facilitator's purpose for this DMIN action research thesis is to develop a revitalization strategy for Victory Temple House of Refuge located in Fayette, Alabama, that will connect the hearts and minds of its leaders to biblical principles for restoring church health and growth. Christ's mandate to the Eleven applies to each of His followers. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said to His disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you, and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."²⁰ Jesus authorized His first disciples to use all that He had taught them for three years to turn the world upside down.²¹ The perpetual mandate to go, teach, and baptize are actionable hallmarks for every Christian and a commission for articulation in every ministry context. Christ's command is in the DNA of His followers and therefore believers must remain in-tune with His mission.²²

Additionally, the rationale for researching the problem is inextricable to a Christian community's mandate to bring glory to God by bearing fruit through these words, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit that will last

²⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version.

²¹ Michael Card, *Matthew: The Gospel of Identity* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 251.

²² Paul Borthwick, and Christopher J.H. Wright, *Great Commission, Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 77.

and that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you” (John 15:16). Jesus makes it clear that His disciples belong to Him, not by what they have done, but through His love for them in that He chose them. His words align with God’s choice of Abraham, David, and Israel as earthly representatives of His missionary presence. The covenantal love relationship He established with them also inspires today’s Christians to respond to His missional command.²³

Church decay creeps into the fabric of a believers’ body when congregations deviate from the Master’s blueprint. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul states, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” First, Christ gave the message to Paul, and he passed on the good deposits to Timothy. Now, Timothy is to entrust the message to other disciples. Making disciples is the process of teaching others to learn, follow, and love Christ.²⁴ Paul makes it straightforward that perpetuating the verifiable words and actions of Christ ensures the continuation of His lifeblood in the church.²⁵

Likewise, rationale and principles for promoting and nurturing a growing, thriving community are seen in the gatherings of first-century Christians through a display of diversity (e.g., males and females, young and old, husbands and wives, multiple ethnicities; [Titus 2:1-10]).²⁶ Christ calls people from every generation, gender, race, and background in the Spirit’s

²³ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, Vol. First edition, The New Testament Library (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 329, 330.

²⁴ Charles A. Davis, *Making Disciples Across Cultures: Missional Principles for a Diverse World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 112.

²⁵ David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (B&H Publishing Group, 2013) 161.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 255-273.

inclusion, cooperation, and collaboration to show His glory worldwide. So then, deviations from the script exacerbates church decline, which is also rationale for researching the problem.

Moreover, maintaining church health, vitality, and community outreach are essential to advancing God's kingdom. Revitalization interventions in the New Testament by early church leaders are shown in the following references: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 (Divisions); 5:1-13 (Sexual Immorality); 10:1-33 (Christian Freedom); 1 Timothy 1:2-4 (False Doctrines). Christ also addressed the declining spiritual condition of the churches in Asia and their need for revitalization in stating a departure from their first love, compromise, idolatry and immorality, dead orthodoxy, and unrepentance as reasons for their spiritual decay (Rev 2-3).

Basic Assumptions

Any number of variables prevent this project from being a perfect approach to addressing a specific problem. Participants and methodologies present actionable challenges as writing studies, doing the work, and collecting data flow through the project.²⁷ The following presuppositions acknowledge some of these realities. A commitment to mitigate interferences with the result's accuracy follows where they exist.

Christians desire to continue Christ's work in building His church and glorifying God. The assumptions here are that church growth is possible, and Victory Temple's members want to see the believers' body grow. The project facilitator also believes that biblical principles outlined in this study are prescriptive for restoring Victory Temple's vitality. That said, every believer is not willing to set aside personal preferences for the gospel's sake. Some church

²⁷ Liberty University, "Doctor of Ministry Program and Candidacy Handbook," Revised July 2020 (Lynchburg: Liberty University, 2020), 43.

members will not accept that changes in a ministry are necessary even when church vitality and membership stagnation persist. Additionally, some project participants will be less than authentic in their responses to survey questions and interviews. Therefore, a commitment to anonymity through pseudonymity or coding is an appropriate measure for coaxing more authentic participants' responses.

Also, familial relationships in church settings sometimes result in ingenious responses to support a favorable inquiry outcome based upon a desire to receive a project facilitator's approval. As such, a commitment to setting relationship boundaries, although difficult, is necessary for achieving and maintaining project objectivity. Additionally, the sample group's responses are an accurate representation of the beliefs and opinions in a local church body. Moreover, the difference in project measurements in participants' responses to church missional activities between the project's beginning and conclusion will positively change. Finally, Victory Temple's adoption of missional biblical principles for reaping Christ's ripened harvest fields will enliven the church.

Definitions

Project studies often present complicated peculiarities that, if not mitigated, can frustrate one's efforts in reviewing a study. The following list of terms and phrases with their definitions clarifies their context's usage in this project.²⁸ These terms appear in the literature review and support the project's foundation.

Christ's Body: The body metaphor describes Christ's body as the Church. It is one body with many members, not having the same function, but interlinked and interdependent. The Holy

²⁸ Liberty University, "Doctor of Ministry Program," 44.

Spirit not only baptizes every believer into Christ's body but also gives gifts to every member in the church to serve, teach, encourage, lead, and help others (Rom 12:3-8).²⁹ Christ body is a gift of God created by God's Word and the Holy Spirit.³⁰

Church Growth: The result of God's Spirit working mightily in people by laying the foundation of His Word, producing genuine responses to the gospel.³¹

Church Revitalization: An inside-out spiritual cleansing by God's power through the Holy Spirit who purifies a church.³² Enlivening a church is revitalization's goal, which can result in authentic numerical church growth when it is God's plan.

Forming Current: The spiritual current that matures followers of Christ into Christlikeness over a lifetime. It effectively teaches people to follow Jesus closely through discipleship.³³

Healthy Church: The God-ordained organic, living believer's body and beacon of hope to a struggling and dying world, willing to give itself for humanity.³⁴

Metanoia: The need to renew one's way of seeing through the Holy Spirit's leading. It is the need to renew the old while simultaneously allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the Church towards

²⁹ Schoeman Lourens, "The Unified Body of Christ as Biblical Metaphor for being Church," *Acta Theologica* 32 (01, 2012): 166.

³⁰ Michael Kinnamon, *Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed?: Questions for the Future of Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 36.

³¹ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 12.

³² Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publication, 2016), 24.

³³ Carolyn Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit: How the 5 Ministry Gifts Can Transform Your Church* (Springfield: Vital Resources, 2016), 45.

³⁴ Rodney Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Fall 2016): 69.

new things. The church continually readjusts its understanding of the world's life because the world is ever-changing.³⁵

Missio Dei: An aspect of God's work in which the church and the faithful participate. It is partnering in Christ's work and witnessing to God's Kingdom for the fulfillment of His purpose for the world. It also includes God's activity in the secular world's political and social affairs joined by the Church.³⁶

Missional: Activities where various missionary encounters occur between the gospel and cultures and where there is a clear proclamation of the gospel in a community of people caught up in God's activity.³⁷ It is developing people who are increasingly identifiable as followers of Christ and where communal practice and personal formation are intertwined as each person expresses His incarnated community life.³⁸

Limitations

Outside restrictions to investigative inquiries often impose boundaries on projects, which limits a project facilitator's query. When external controls besiege efforts in information gathering, restrictions diminish a study's scope.³⁹ The following identifies known limitations to this project study.

³⁵ Thierry-Marie Courau, "Listening: The Path to Salvation and to the Transformation of the Church," *Concilium* 2018, no. 4 (2018): 118.

³⁶ Thomas Kemper, "The Missio Dei in Contemporary Context," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 4 (10, 2014): 188, 189.

³⁷ Gil Pyo Lee, "Missional Vision for Renewal," *한국기독교신학논총* 75 (May 2011): 257, 258.

³⁸ Reggie McNeal and Magaly Koch, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011), xxi.

³⁹ Liberty University, "Doctor of Ministry Program," 44.

The church is in a community where an average yearly salary (\$31,687) encourages population migration to other cities. Church membership further reflects this reality as smaller church gatherings throughout the city attest to the community's dwindling population. The coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic mitigation is obviously beyond the project facilitator's control, which limits local church activities. The project facilitator also realizes that life still happens during a project; therefore, accessibility limitations for consultation with participants is anticipated. However, the advantage of capitalizing on other church leaders' influence in promoting acceptance of the project's aim is a principal reason for the sample group's limitation.

Other limitations include time restrictions on interview lengths, completing questionnaires, and responding to surveys. The project facilitator understands that some participants modify their character during information gathering points, limiting information's accuracy and skewing data. Fear of reprisal from clergy might limit participants' willingness to be truthful during interviews as well. Additionally, time-sensitive teaching, training, and sermon series during the methodology implementation are limitations that require creativity to achieve efficiency. Topic presentations from themes in the project are prioritized in the project facilitator's time allotment to work within limitations. Also, church services remain virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so practical group dialogue during teaching and training is limited. Finally, an inability to mitigate situations that might require a participant to drop out of the study is a limitation.

Delimitations

Researcher constraints in a study support focus' essentiality by guiding a project facilitator's inquiry into specific interest areas. Arbitrarily confining the scope of the project to

targeted interest areas also alert readers to self-imposed piloting parameters.⁴⁰ The following identifies restrictions implemented to increase this project's quality and synthesize its findings.

The study's selected ministry is the church population at Victory Temple House of Refuge located in Fayette, Alabama. The senior pastor limited project participants to volunteer church auxiliary leadership members and himself. A sample group taken from volunteer male and female church auxiliary leaders further narrows the church population. Eight people comprise the sample group, chosen for their visibility in church leadership and positive influence.

Additionally, a missional approach to restoring church health and growth (church revitalization) narrows the project topic's angle. Also, unique definitions arising from the literature establish parameters, which aids in understanding certain words and phrases within the study's context. Finally, surveys, questionnaires, field observations, and phone calls are the preferred method for information gathering due to COVID-19 pandemic implications.

Thesis Statement

Luke captures life in the early church in Acts 2:42-47. The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles' witness, which resulted in exponential growth in the new followers of the "way" movement. A new Christian community grew through mission-minded disciples' obedience to proliferating Jesus' principle teachings and actions.⁴¹ Mission-minded disciples understand that

⁴⁰ Liberty University, "Doctor of Ministry Program," 44.

⁴¹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. Revised edition, (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2018), 33.

there is only one God who loves, heals, and forgives so they dedicate themselves to reaching out to others with His message.⁴²

Temple worship, house meetings, discipleship, and community engagement describe prevalent first-century Christian activities. These hallmarks precipitated establishing healthy local church bodies. Apostolic teaching, eating, and fellowship are common life expressions of the earliest Christians as well.⁴³ Joy is also a repeated theme noted in Acts 2:46, and when combined with the other activities, their Christian influence penetrated the communities. Healthy church life mirrored the fellowship enjoyed by Jesus and His disciples and attracted many others. Acts 2:41 indicates that the church grew by three thousand converts through evangelistic outreach on just one occasion.⁴⁴

However, a church's vitality gradually diminishes when it deviates from biblical principles that ensure its relevance and posterity. A shrinkage in community visibility and discipleship evidences a precipitous course leading to spiritual erosion. Though there is hope for declining churches. Christ exhorted the godly believing remnant in the church at Sardis to strengthen those who had wavered in their Christian calling when saying, "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God" (Rev 3:2). Here, Christ challenges people who appear to be alert but are entirely unaware of their desperate situation. They do not comprehend their present total ineffectiveness in their community. He challenged them to remember the apostles' sound teaching, treasure it, and

⁴² N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), 61.

⁴³ Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 33, 34.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

repent of their faithlessness.⁴⁵ If Victory Temple House of Refuge adopts a missional ministry focus guided by the Holy Spirit, then the church will experience spiritual renewal, vibrance and growth.

⁴⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Havertown: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 47.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

A project's scope lies within predetermined boundaries designed to lay a path for investigating precedent literature, theological precepts, and existing theoretical constructs. Consulting others' works in these areas ensures amassing an extensive repository of information necessary before entering an ongoing conversation. This chapter is mindful of these requirements and contributes to the project topic from a unique ministry's perspective.

Literature Review

Ministers often try to do what they think will draw people to God rather than seeking Him first for a ministry's purpose.⁴⁶ Prayerfully committing local ministry plans to God before implementing them is prudent since He already knows its kingdom purpose. However, ill-advised actions from lack of spiritual counsel are mostly disappointing. Although congregations worldwide are eager to take steps to curtail an exodus of people from the church, many are still experiencing either stagnation or decline in membership.⁴⁷ In the United States alone, churches are closing at the alarming rate of thirty-five hundred to four thousand annually.⁴⁸ Thom Rainer, former president of Lifeway Christian Resources, estimates an even higher annual number of church closings in the United States (between five and ten thousand).⁴⁹ So, fruitless churches

⁴⁶ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 21.

⁴⁷ Kevin Harney and Bob Bouwer, *The U-Turn Church: New Direction for Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 7.

⁴⁸ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 14.

⁴⁹ Baptist Courier, "How Many Churches Will Close (October 2020)," Accessed September 13, 2021. <https://baptistcourier.com/2020/10/how-many-churches-will-close/>.

abound across North America for various reasons, and every excuse robs God of the glory that only He deserves.⁵⁰ VTHOR's declining spiritual vitality contributes to an increasing number of churches that seems to have lost their way. The problem is that a predominantly African American church in a small town is not growing. A gradual shrinkage in community visibility and discipleship evidences a precipitous course leading to its spiritual erosion. The literature review covers the topic of church health and growth.

Purpose and Goal of the Church

The church represents God's habitation on earth in the lives of faithful Christians.⁵¹ The church witnesses to the lordship of Christ and participates with God in building His kingdom as a sent people empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into all nations.⁵² Baptized believers should make every effort to live according to the example and mandates of our Lord and Savior (Matt 22:37-39; 28:19, 20).

God purposed His Kingdom to advance steadily in unity by examining the Godhead's community of oneness.⁵³ Bob L. Johnson states, "Foreshadowed in the Hebrew Bible, it [church] was established to create a people [community] to bless the nations like Abraham did because it is uniquely anchored in the ministry of Christ and His disciples, redeemed by His

⁵⁰ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Creating a Gospel Legacy Throughout North America*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 6.

⁵¹ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 10.

⁵² Jay Richard Akkerman and Mark Maddix, *Missional Discipleship: Partners in God's Redemptive Mission* (Kansas City: The Foundry Publishing, 2013), 19.

⁵³ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 19.

death, and saved for eternity by His resurrection.”⁵⁴ So then, the ministry of reconciliation handed down by Christ to His disciples is now the church’s responsibility. Regarding Johnson’s statement concerning the church’s purpose, Robert Mills, in his article “Healthy Churches Grow,” agree when stating that the church’s task is to remain a beacon of hope to a dying world by exhibiting the same love, grace, and acceptance that led Christ to give everything for humanity.⁵⁵ Christ’s body must remain healthy to project truth upon humanity’s depravity. Jay Richard Akkerman and Mark Maddix also agree with Johnson and Mills by stating that God works through the church to shine His wisdom to the world so that all may experience His everlasting love.⁵⁶ Since Christians are ambassadors of Christ, the church must also be broken and spilled out in love before the world.⁵⁷

Moreover, God’s call for the church to be global and missional demands a distinct social existence where a commitment to plurality, diversity, and unity shapes a believer’s community and mission.⁵⁸ The church’s prophetic role in the world thrives when believers fulfill the missional commands of Christ. Fulfillment of God’s kingdom purpose for the church, then, begins with a missional focus which is the next discussion topic.

⁵⁴ Bob L Johnson, “De-Constructing and Re-Constructing the Institutional Church: Toward a Theology of Spirit-Sensitive Change,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 1 (2014): 11.

⁵⁵ Rodney Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Fall 2016): 69.

⁵⁶ Gerard Kelly, *Church Actually: Rediscovering the Brilliance of God's Plan* (Chicago: Lion Hudson LTD, 2012), 15.

⁵⁷ Akkerman and Maddix, *Missional Discipleship*, 21.

⁵⁸ Graham Hill and Scot Mcknight, *Global Church: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 16.

Missional: Definition and Characteristics

Author Bob L. Johnson submits that the church exists to convey the power of the Spirit and the mystery and salvation of the Son. God chose it to be his missionary: *Missio Dei*. Its mission and message are absolute across generations. The integrity of the institutional church is compromised if understood otherwise.⁵⁹ Here, a missional theme takes shape through words that identify its origin. Thierry-Marie Courar builds upon Johnson's assessment by saying the church's mission requires constant reexamination to fulfill its goal of opening its doors of being just and fair to all. Church renewal ensues as pastoral life, preaching, and a commitment to justice is revitalized.⁶⁰ The idea that constant reexamination is necessary to maintain closeness to missional precepts connects to the church's refreshing times. Church health and growth are rooted in God's purpose to save, redeem, and reconcile with His creation through the Holy Spirit's guidance.⁶¹ Author Darrel L. Guder state further that the nature and mission of the church are grounded in the nature and missionary activity of the triune God.⁶²

Indeed, missional churches recognize the need for the Holy Spirit's guidance in building the church. Missional evangelism, then, is empowered first by waiting on the Lord because people do not come to God without the Holy Spirit's power.⁶³ Gil Pyo Lee, in his article, "Missional Vision for Renewal," also says that being missional is a continual active response to

⁵⁹ Johnson, "De-Constructing and Re-Constructing the Institutional Church," 115.

⁶⁰ Thierry-Marie Courau, "Listening: The Path to Salvation and to the Transformation of the Church," *Concilium* 2018, no. 4 (2018): 114.

⁶¹ Gil Pyo Lee, "Missional Vision for Renewal," *한국기독교신학논총* 75 (May 2011): 259.

⁶² Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 30.

⁶³ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 28.

the changing and emerging culture of society and engagement with the world's chaos.⁶⁴ Johnson agrees and points to the action verbs in the Great Commission to specify the missional nature of the church: (1) *go* into all the world (Mark 16:15; Matt 28:19; John 20:21); (2) *preach* the Good News to all creation (Mark 16:15); *bear witness* of Me (Acts 1:7, 8); (3) *make* disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19); (4) *baptize* (Matt 28:19), and (5) *teach* them to obey, (Matt 28:20).⁶⁵ Lee and Johnson find agreement on the vital role of community engagement in missions, but Lee goes a step further by including the need for maintaining societal relevance.

That said, others are not so quick to follow some of the prevailing voices on missions.

Author Gerard Kelly states,

The most eager advocates of a missional recalibration seem at times to be calling for the complete abandonment of the inward thrust, as if the outward call of mission can only be recovered through a wholesale turnaround. More conservative leaders – raised on the call to shepherd God's people; concerned with the in-gathering and formation of disciples – will tend to reject such a call out of hand, knowing that this inward-call is a necessary and significant part of what we are as people of faith. It seems that we are being asked to choose between inward focus and outward flow, between gathering and dispersal. This feels dangerously close to asking a dying patient if he would prefer to breathe in or breathe out. We can and must do both.⁶⁶

Kelly seemingly prefers in-house discipleship for church renewal over Lee and Johnson's appeal for mission's outward focus. Author Mark Clifton offers what may be considered a rebuttal as well to an "all-out" call to missions when saying, "Missions is not the church's goal, but worship is. Missions exist because worship does not. Worship is ultimate, not missions because God is ultimate, not man."⁶⁷ Initially, Kelly's and Clifton's statements appear to reject the priority of

⁶⁴ Lee, "Missional Vision for Renewal," 261.

⁶⁵ Johnson, "De-Constructing and Re-Constructing the Institutional Church," 114.

⁶⁶ Kelly, *Church Actually*, 19.

⁶⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 17.

missions in church renewal, but reconciliation is possible if one sees both leading to church health and growth. Taking a closer look at discipleship is warranted at this juncture.

Discipleship: Definition and Nature

For Tennant, the term “discipleship” means different things, but in simple terms, it is effectively teaching people to follow Jesus closely. Further, discipleship is the Holy Spirit’s activity that forms believers into Christlikeness. The Holy Spirit forms and matures followers into Christ’s image through spiritual currents that lead to obedience.⁶⁸ Tennant relates the term “currents” to the term “discipleship” in her definition. She introduces the idea of a “forming current” for “discipleship” since it happens through a spiritual overflow when the five spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:11-13 are fully operational.⁶⁹ Akkerman and Maddix submit a more traditional activities list for discipleship: catechesis, spiritual formation, Christian nurturing, mentoring, compassionate service, and missional engagement.⁷⁰ Gregg Oden explicates Akkerman and Maddix’s list when submitting that the intentional relationship in discipling unites teacher and student through a journey that challenges, encourages, and equips the union through love as they grow towards maturity in Christ. The result is making disciples who make other disciples.⁷¹

The foundational work of discipleship helps people stay attached to Jesus and maintain an intimate relationship with Him.⁷² Making disciples who make disciples leads to transformed

⁶⁸ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 45.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷⁰ Akkerman and Maddix, *Missional Discipleship*, 17.

⁷¹ Greg Oden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 3.

⁷² Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 58.

churches and communities.⁷³ Believers become disoriented and uninterested when they are not involved in Christ's command to make disciples.⁷⁴ Making disciples is part of God's plan for His people to flourish in the world.⁷⁵ Defining biblical success in the church is essential as well and is the next discussion topic.

Biblical Success in the Life of the Church Defined

Author Rodney Mills states, "the preeminent underlying issue for every church is their health and not growth."⁷⁶ One may deduce that to embark upon the latter without first understanding the former's threats will eventually result in self-destruction. Author Andrew M. Davis agrees when he says, "Numerical growth alone cannot be a measure of spiritual health. Some of the unhealthiest churches in the nation espouse prosperity in life through erroneous methods, but they are huge and growing numerically."⁷⁷ Davis' statement calls into question those who forgo building on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ and the apostles' doctrine in favor of attracting large crowds. A systematic approach to addressing spiritual, doctrinal, relational, and denominational health issues must preclude making growth a goal for any

⁷³ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 112.

⁷⁴ Mario Phillips, "Stopping the Leaking Bucket Syndrome," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 42, no. 1 (January 2018): 75.

⁷⁵ Mark Labberton, *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 13.

⁷⁶ Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 69.

⁷⁷ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 16.

congregation.⁷⁸ The constant threat of disease-causing germs in the physical body is analogous to spiritual attacks against Christ's Bride, so a battle to maintain good health is warranted.⁷⁹

Also, the number of people involved in church ministry indicates how effectively leaders and congregants follow God's will.⁸⁰ Tennant uses terms related to a living organism in describing church health when saying that a healthy church is organic, alive, growing, and changing.⁸¹ These activities prevail in every place members join in the ministry's work by using their spiritual gifts. Again, she credits good church health to an overflow of fully operational ministry gifts. A growing church ensues, then, where members strive to live out their faith daily in a community beyond the community inside a church's walls.⁸² Sherwood H. Patterson adds that a healthy church is not defined just by how it does evangelism. A healthy church does evangelism and sees the results of that work.⁸³ The review turns now to the Holy Spirit's role.

Purpose of the Holy Spirit

The Trinity's third person is sent from heaven to reside in every believer and flow outwardly, even to earth's end. Wherever this outward-flowing movement interfaces with repentant hearts, God's territory increases.⁸⁴ The Holy Spirit's influence sets the gospel's destination to the ends of the earth.

⁷⁸ Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 69.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 71, 72.

⁸¹ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 67.

⁸² Phillips, "Stopping the Leaking Bucket Syndrome," 78.

⁸³ Sherwood H. Patterson, III. "Identifying Common Procedures for Revitalization Leaders when Initiating Turnaround Strategies in Declining Churches," (DMin, thesis, Biola University, 2019), 27.

⁸⁴ Kelly, *Church Actually*, 20.

According to Alton Garrison, the Spirit of God takes believers from aimlessly wandering into a life overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit.⁸⁵ Kelly says the Holy Spirit equips the church with the gifts and resources needed to do God's spiritual work in building up a body of believers. He strengthens God's witness in the mission field and directs obedient witnesses' inner drives and attitudes.⁸⁶ Moreover, God's Spirit enriches believers' lives through security, comfort, and supernaturally sustained holiness.⁸⁷

Regarding humanity's deprivation, Brian A. DeVries says the Holy Spirit causes people to recognize their sinfulness, repent of their sin, and run to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and healing.⁸⁸ Tennant adds that He fills contrite hearts and restores relationships with God through Jesus Christ's blood to the faithful who prays and waits. He then changes, teaches, and prepares the redeemed with insight into what He wants to speak into the hearts of others.⁸⁹ His transforming power draws weary souls to the Savior as Christ's name rises in the world.⁹⁰ The Holy Spirit's power is necessary for believers to become more, to say more, and to do more in Christ's name and for God's glory.⁹¹ Finally, the Spirit dwells within believers to purify,

⁸⁵ Alton Garrison, *A Spirit-Empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model*, (Nashville: Influence Resources, 2015), 14.

⁸⁶ Kelly, *Church Actually*, 72.

⁸⁷ Garrison, *A Spirit-Empowered Church*, 14.

⁸⁸ Brian A. DeVries, "Divine Empowerment: The Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization/Goddelijke Bemagtiging: Die Heilige Gees En Kerkherstel," *In Die Skriflig* 49, no. 1 (2015): 5.

⁸⁹ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Garrison, *A Spirit-Empowered Church*, 28.

cleanse, and free obedient hearts from every behavior that contradicts God's holiness. His indwelling presence is the revealer of truths about oneself, about the world, and about God.⁹²

Regarding the church, Hill says the Holy Spirit creates and animates the church and empowers it to witness to Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and the gospel. He fuels a church's mission and transforms communities and world initiatives. He also shapes the church into an alternative society that embodies God's reign.⁹³ So then, the Holy Spirit is sent from heaven; convicts and restores relationships; resides in, guides, and purifies believers; and oversees spiritual gifts. However, insolence to the Holy Spirit's power corrodes good church health and growth, which is the next topic in the review.

Reasons for Church Decline

Fruitless churches abound across North America in cities, towns, and rural areas. Church health is suffering because discipleship is nonexistent. A church that is not producing fruit does not accurately reflect God's glory, which brings a reproach against a community of believers.⁹⁴ Even with this evidence, some Christians still refuse to change because the past traps them. Taking a fresh look at the Scripture evades their thinking because of preconceived and engrained thoughts about church.⁹⁵ The reality is that most Christians refuse to "go" into their communities.⁹⁶

⁹² Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 115.

⁹³ Hill and McKnight, *Global Church*, 30.

⁹⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 6.

⁹⁵ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 20.

⁹⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *I Will: Nine Traits of the Outwardly Focused Christian* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 61.

Eddie Gibbs says the separation of ecclesiology from missiology is a severe issue in Christendom because it inhibits churches' vitality throughout the Western world and beyond. The Trinity is engaged in mission because God is the sending God, as seen from Genesis to Revelation.⁹⁷ Phillips unites with Gibbs in his assessment that the decline in mainstream denominations' membership is a failure to understand God's pleasure in seeking lost souls. He submits that insufficient social capital reservoirs within communities result in nonexistent relationships, a failure to make Christian disciples, and church decline. Withdrawal from the community is directly related to misinterpretations of the church's mission.⁹⁸

Continuing, marginalized churches cannot count on community support and vice versa. Some now realize that long-established approaches to ministry are failing while others are still in denial. Gibbs also notes that well-publicized, attractive services, and a range of activities once thought to meet individuals' and families' needs no longer have the broad appeal they once held.⁹⁹ Davis offers more specific reasons for declining churches in saying Christian views on salvation, the exclusivity of Christ, sexual morality, the sanctity of human life, the nature and permanence of marriage, and the like, are less and less accepted.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, dying churches most often assume the community is there to support them when the church is an extension of God's grace and mercy to the world.¹⁰¹ So, changes necessary for renewal and growth are never considered. Patterson issues a direct indictment

⁹⁷ Eddie Gibbs, *The Rebirth of the Church: Applying Paul's Vision for Ministry in Our Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), x.

⁹⁸ Phillips, "Stopping the Leaking Bucket Syndrome," 71.

⁹⁹ Gibbs, *The Rebirth of the Church*, ix.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *Revitalize*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 27.

when saying that many churches in North America have little concern for the lost, so they fail to redirect their plans and resources outwardly toward the harvest field.¹⁰² It can be deduced from Patterson's statement that maintaining a particular structure and governance style, traditions, and personal preferences against fulfilling the Great Commission are injurious to church vitality and proliferation. When the church becomes the private possession of a few who want to adhere to unfruitful methods from the past rather than follow timeless biblical principles, the church will die.¹⁰³ A decline in an outward focus is analogous with a slow erosion of vibrancy.¹⁰⁴ These authors agree that churches must move from the comfort of their walls to stem members' mass exodus.

Change is hard. Declining churches often avoid change's challenges by reminiscing about past days when the church was vital to their community. However, church leaders and members must accept that change is imminent, necessary, and woven into missional activities that promote good church health and growth.¹⁰⁵ When they do, they see the need for church revitalization, which is the next discussion topic.

Church Revitalization: Reasons and Purposes

God's love and concern for His creation are visible through a local, healthy, and thriving church.¹⁰⁶ A local church is a unique place where God's glory is always on display. So, God

¹⁰² Patterson, "Identifying Common Procedures for Revitalization," 1.

¹⁰³ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 28, 29.

¹⁰⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 2.

¹⁰⁵ Leah J. Hileman, "Sometimes We Plant, Sometimes We Fertilize: Making Church Revitalization a Priority," *Brethren Life and Thought* 59, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 53.

¹⁰⁶ Davis, *Revitalize*, 15.

desires that the entire body of Christ remains a healthy representation of His presence in the world. He designed the church to be a light to a dying world and an oasis in the desert of despair for weary souls.¹⁰⁷

Clifton says that unhealthy dying churches jeopardize God's reputation in every community when speaking about the stain of decay.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, Davis encourages overseers when saying revitalization elevates Christ's name, restores God's glory, wins the lost, enlarges God's kingdom, stirs-up hope in other dying churches, displays Christ's love and perseverance for His bride, employs missional principles, and fosters a loving, multigenerational congregation.¹⁰⁹ Harney and Bouwer add, "healthy, vibrant, local churches transform communities worldwide and herald Christ's promise to return for His Bride."¹¹⁰ Finally, Hileman motivates the revitalizer in saying when done correctly, church revitalization honors past leaders' and members' legacy, invites and champions God's present work in the church and community, and celebrates with the faithful because future generations inherit a grand legacy resting upon the Chief Cornerstone.¹¹¹ The Holy Spirit is the One who leads a church into renewal, which is the next discussion topic.

Following the Holy Spirit Leads to Church Health and Growth

Mills says church restoration happens in God's presence through sincere individual and corporate prayers. He adds that sermons, programs, lectures, socials, and rituals alone lack the

¹⁰⁷ Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 75.

¹⁰⁸ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *Revitalize*, 23-25.

¹¹⁰ Harney and Bouwer, *The U-Turn Church*, 11.

¹¹¹ Hileman, "Sometimes We Plant, Sometimes We Fertilize," 56.

power to remove the dross that keeps the church from emanating the Light shone from heaven.¹¹² His views clarify that God, through the Holy Spirit's power, breaks stony hearts, softens stubborn wills, and restores the brightness of His glory on the earth.

Additionally, DeVries addresses the Holy Spirit's wooing when saying that He summons faithful Christians to join with Him as He renews and restores believers individually and the church bodily. He empowers repentant church leaders to champion His revitalization work through a clarion call that beckons believers and sinners to yield to the gospel.¹¹³ Tennant adds that restoration and revitalization happen in a local body of believers when they decide that they will do everything God's way.¹¹⁴ These authors' views synthesize the Holy Spirit's activities in restoring church health through repentant and empowered believers.

Also, Harney and Bouwer address the gospel's efficacy and need to contextualize its message when stating that God's Word is eternal and does not change; however, the way we do ministry, our approach to worship, and how we reach our communities must continually endure His reproof.¹¹⁵ The Holy Spirit is the power of God that leads churches to experience His vitality and community influence. His presence is evident in people's lives as spiritual transformation guides them into fellowship and unity with the Godhead and Christ's body.¹¹⁶ God, through the Holy Spirit's activity, revives dying churches.¹¹⁷ Courau introduces the gospel term *metanoia* to

¹¹² Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 73.

¹¹³ DeVries, "Divine Empowerment," 2.

¹¹⁴ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 20.

¹¹⁵ Harney and Bouwer, *The U-Turn Church*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 26.

¹¹⁷ Davis, *Revitalize*, 43.

express the continual need for renewing one's way of seeing through the Holy Spirit's guidance uniquely.¹¹⁸ Her emphasis in this manner speaks to the focus and dedication required throughout church revitalization efforts. Biblical principles guide revitalizers in restoring church health, which is the next discussion topic.

Principles Related to the Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization

Henard states that God's Spirit initiates and orchestrates church revitalization. Biblical principles guide leaders and church members to living water fountains of everlasting life. Personal desires alone are insufficient to produce real growth and sustain life in Christ's body.¹¹⁹ God's Word is the foundation upon which local churches must rely before a revitalization movement through His Spirit saturates a congregation and community.¹²⁰

Additionally, Garrison speaks to overseers' and congregants' responsibility in saying that revitalization happens when church leaders and members fully embrace the Holy Spirit as the only source of power for spiritual renewal.¹²¹ DeVries agrees with Henard and Garrison when stating that leaders must accept praying in faith for revival is necessary and acknowledge that their competencies, abilities, and previous ministry successes are gifts from God. The Holy Spirit always begins by communicating the Word about Christ and confronting sin.¹²² Furthermore, without the Spirit's work of conviction and repentance in the heart of rebellious

¹¹⁸ Courau, "Listening," 118.

¹¹⁹ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 12.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Garrison, *A Spirit-Empowered Church*, 28.

¹²² DeVries, "Divine Empowerment," 3, 4.

people, Christ's message of love and salvation falls upon deaf ears.¹²³ A leaders' role in the church's life is the next discussion topic.

Spiritual Leadership and Church Health and Growth

Leaders play a critical role in maintaining church health. Autor J. Oswald Sanders submits the following regarding spiritual leadership,

To be a leader in the church has always required strength and faith beyond the merely average. If the world is to hear the church's voice today, leaders are needed who are authoritative, spiritual, and sacrificial. Authoritative, because people desire reliable leaders who know where they are going and are confident of getting there. Spiritual, because without a strong relationship to God, even the most attractive and competent person cannot lead people to God. Sacrificial, because this trait follows the model of Jesus, who gave Himself for the whole world and who calls us to follow in His steps. Churches grow in every way when they are guided by strong, spiritual leaders with the touch of the supernatural radiating in their service. Spiritual leaders are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies. God alone makes them.¹²⁴

His words are sobering and challenges anyone seeking to lead God's people to first seek God's purpose and plans for themselves and then for the church. Spiritual power, which is unequaled, authors spiritual leadership. A true leader influences others to do God's work because the Spirit works in and through him or her to a greater degree than in those he leads.¹²⁵ Education is essential; however, effective spiritual leadership is not a result of theological training or seminary degrees. Jesus made this clear when He told His disciples that their call to follow Him was preordained (John 15:16).¹²⁶ Only God's sovereign selection ensures the right leader is in

¹²³ DeVries, "Divine Empowerment," 5.

¹²⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 16.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20

the right place at the appointed time.¹²⁷ Patterson agrees with Sanders when saying that ungodly leaders negatively impact churches' health when they neglect their purity and spiritual duty.¹²⁸ Whereas other qualities are meaningful, being Spirit-filled is indispensable.¹²⁹ God requires leaders in languishing churches to strengthen the things that are dying (Rev 3:2). Common biblical principles avail local congregations who desire to see their churches' life restored, which is next in the discussion.

Solutions for Dying Churches

Mills prepares revitalizers for the long journey in restoring church health when saying that revitalization takes years before vitality returns to a congregation. Leaders must take care not to promise too much or to expect quick results regarding regaining church health. Improved church health will come in God's timing and not according to a leader's schedule.¹³⁰ Clifton adds that the pathway to a new life begins by repentance, prayer, and remembering God's legacy of missions and ministry that birthed both a nation and the church.¹³¹ Tennant agrees with Clifton when stating, "If we want to have a strong and healthy church, we are not dealing with an amorphous mass or a team of pastors and a board of deacons. Rather, each member of the body must exhibit godly characteristics to have a shift in the church."¹³² Accepting the responsibility

¹²⁷ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 20.

¹²⁸ Patterson, "Identifying Common Procedures for Revitalization," 5, 6.

¹²⁹ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 67.

¹³⁰ Mills, "Healthy Churches Grow," 74.

¹³¹ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 14.

¹³² Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 23.

of personal sanctification then supports the collective responsibility for achieving and maintaining church health.¹³³

Hileman speaks to corporate responsibility stating that congregations must first accept a church's decline and that change is necessary. Turning to Christ sets the stage for cultivating the unplowed grounds of their hearts. A sincere appeal for revitalization includes a plea to the Lord for His favor and grace.¹³⁴ A biblical comprehensive and strategic plan requires the Spirit's empowerment to produce spiritual fruit in people's lives. Connecting through fellowship and evangelism, growing through discipleship, serving through ministry gifts, building up the body, caring for the community, outreach, evangelism, missions, worship, teaching, and singing, are essential principles in restoring church health.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Although congregations worldwide are eager to take steps to curtail an exodus of people from the church, many are still experiencing either stagnation or decline in membership. Still, the church's task is to remain a beacon of hope to a dying world by exhibiting the same love, grace, and acceptance that led Christ to give everything for humanity. Then, its mission requires constant reexamination to fulfill its goal of opening its doors of being just and fair to all.

A healthy growing church exists wherever members strive to live out their faith daily in a community beyond the community inside of the church's walls. The Holy Spirit equips the church with the gifts and resources needed to do God's spiritual work of building up a body of

¹³³ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 23.

¹³⁴ Hileman, "Sometimes We Plant, Sometimes We Fertilize," 55.

¹³⁵ Garrison, *A Spirit-Empowered Church*, 25.

believers. He strengthens God's witness in the mission field as faithful disciples lift-up Jesus' name. Contrariwise, the loss of members in mainstream denominations is symptomatic of a failure to understand that God takes pleasure in seeking lost souls. Also, an insufficient social capital reservoir within a community results in a breakdown in relationships, a failure to make Christian disciples, and eventually, church decline.

However, church revitalization happens as repentant church leaders and members champion a clarion call that beckons believers and sinners to yield to the gospel. Restoration and revitalization happen in a local body of believers when they decide that they will do everything God's way. Biblical principles guide leaders and church members to living water fountains of everlasting life. A return to church health and growth takes years, so leaders must take care not to promise too much or to expect quick results regarding regaining church vitality.

Theological Foundations

The New Testament is replete with revitalization intervention measures to ensure continued vitality in the church. Early church leaders recognized the need to adhere to the mandates for the church passed down by Christ to His first disciples. So, they mitigated false doctrine and church discord with a closer perspective of the apostles' counsel, realizing that the consequences of neglecting seemingly innocuous disagreements in the beginning are far worse for church life later. Their actions in mitigating many unhealthy practices honors God's design for a Holy Spirit led vibrant church that is in constant dialogue with its community.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Kelly, *Church Actually*, 18.

Restoring Vitality by Confronting Inequality

When the Twelve received news that Hellenistic widows were not receiving the same care as Hebraic widows, they took decisive action. Inequality threatened church unity, so the leaders assigned seven qualified men to ensure all widows were treated fairly (Acts 6: 1-3). Author Carl Holladay points out that the more restrictive Hebraic ideas and practices possibly hindered relationships and caused a division with non-Hebraic people.¹³⁷ Author Yon Gyong Kwon adds that the linguistic and cultural barriers among the Jews was an unavoidable fact of life for the early church and was also divisive.¹³⁸ Further, since the Hellenist were disciples drawn from the Greek-speaking Synagogues in Jerusalem, it is almost certain they formed their own house groups within the church.¹³⁹ Despite these challenges, the push for unity continued.

Author David E. Garland captures the mindset of early church leaders in maintaining the unity of believers when stating, “Luke emphasized togetherness as a crucial aspect of the community’s life from the beginning, and one can assume that he presents it as a model for his readers to emulate.”¹⁴⁰ In the Christian community, this incipient principle speaks to harmony’s essentiality in supporting health and growth in God’s kingdom. Christ is particularly concerned about the inclusion of those living in society’s margins. His compassionate love reaches the utmost places and gives life, as seen in His encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-15).

¹³⁷ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*. Vol. First edition. The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 152.

¹³⁸ Yon Gyong Kwon, *A Commentary on Acts* (Lanham: Fortress Press, 2015), 68.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 80.

Restoring Vitality by Confronting Superseded Traditions

Peter confronted proponents of Judaism's circumcision mandate which eroded church vibrance by contradicting God's path to salvation (Acts 15:5-9). Here, Jewish Christians questioned salvation's appearance to non-Jewish Christians. Though non-Jewish Christians were exempt from God's circumcision covenant that linked Israel with Him in their former generations, Judaism's proponents taught otherwise. Garland notes that Jewish Christians resisted the gospel's promise of salvation through God's grace for everyone who believes in Christ.¹⁴¹ Garland also states that Peter's words affirm Gentile acceptance into the Christian community through the Holy Spirit's power and without adherence to ethnic rituals or practices.¹⁴² Garland's conclusion is not reached in isolation.

Kwon agrees with Garland when stating that God does not show respect of person, evidenced through Peter's preaching to the Gentiles and their subsequent receipt of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³ The evidence here makes it clear that God made/makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles regarding cleansing of hearts by faith. The additional stipulation of circumcision for Gentile believers through Judaism's teaching amounted to placing a yoke around their necks that neither they nor their ancestors could bear (Acts 15:10).¹⁴⁴

Author Douglas Moo agrees with Garland and Kwon when addressing the erroneous requirement for adherence to old religious traditions stating, "When truly appreciated, Christ's cross, God's manifested wisdom, power, and grace, rules out human-oriented laws that agitators

¹⁴¹ Garland, *Acts*, 161.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴³ Kwon, *A Commentary on Acts*, 130.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

perpetuate.”¹⁴⁵ Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman also typifies spiritual degradation through adherence to superseded traditions. In this instance, many in the community chose to ignore Jesus’ message that everyone who believes in Him receives everlasting life (John 4:14). So, their rejection of His grace not only marked their spiritual decline but hindered other people from receiving the wellspring of living waters (John 4:15). Returning to Christ’s examples restores and enlivens Christian fellowship.

Restoring Vitality by Addressing the Need for Church Diversity Within Unity

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul states, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and everyone, it is the same God at work.” Author Mark Taylor states the following regarding this passage, “Although the work of the Spirit in the church is clearly the main topic and gifts play a significant role in the discussion, Paul’s language is more encompassing than gifts and includes the other divine persons of the Godhead.”¹⁴⁶ Regarding the Spirit’s work and spiritual gifts, author Gordon Fee also notes that Paul’s concern is to set the Corinthian’s former experience as idolaters in contrast with their present Christian experience.¹⁴⁷ One may surmise that the Corinthian Christians’ need to be superior to others manifested in the local church. This was evidenced by their elevation of the tongues gift above the other spiritual gifts. Fee points out that this stratification in the church carried over from ecstatic utterance experiences during their former pagan worship which now

¹⁴⁵ Douglas Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2013), 182.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 156.

¹⁴⁷ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Revised edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 640.

jeopardized the church's vibrance.¹⁴⁸ Prescriptive measures for correcting false doctrine soon followed.

Paul sorted this out by insisting that inspired utterances alone do not authenticate God's Spirit. He further explained that the intelligible content of utterances tested by a Christian's confession of Christ's lordship validates the mark of the Spirit.¹⁴⁹ He continued by emphasizing the need for a variety of manifestations of the one Spirit. Moo notes as well that a diversity of gifts and ministries characterizes the Godhead and operates for the common good.¹⁵⁰ Author Thomas R. Schreiner agrees with Fee in saying, "Paul emphasizes the body's unity through repetition of the word 'same.'"¹⁵¹ These authors make the point that disunity leads to broken fellowship, consequently resulting in church decline.

Restoring Vitality by Confronting Division's Origin

James confronted church division by first asking a series of rhetorical questions. He quickly identified the problem as strife that had become common in the church (4:1-3). Pursuing worldly desires persisted over prayerfully entreating God and thrust the church into personal conflict. Author Vernon D. Doerksen states that James addressed worldliness and selfish characteristics exhibited by many saints as these threatened to destroy church unity and the believers' fellowship.¹⁵² He further characterized the source of the discord as the relentless

¹⁴⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 640.

¹⁴⁹ Moo, *Galatians*, 637.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 646.

¹⁵¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 255.

¹⁵² Vernon D. Doerksen, *James: Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 62.

bombardment of unquenchable human cravings.¹⁵³ Doerksen finds support in his conclusion from others.

Author Scot McKnight agrees with Doerksen when stating, “James pushed the warring factions in the church to consider the origin of their behaviors, which was their craving desires for control and power.”¹⁵⁴ Their selfish and destructive behaviors restricted Christ’s lifeblood from flowing in the church. Instead of wrestling with God in prayer, these believers fought against one another on various issues for superiority.¹⁵⁵ The church he addressed spiraled into an abyss precipitated by egregious acts. Their craving desires led to disputes and conflicts as well as murder in the Messianic community.¹⁵⁶ Paul admonished Corinth’s Christians because of similar divisive superior behaviors that also threatened church vitality. He reminded them that Christians are co-laborers within the gospel, and God is the author of the church’s vitality (1 Cor 3:6).

Christ Confronting Decadence in the Churches in Asia

Christ’s revelation regarding the spiritual condition of Asia’s seven churches provides the theological basis for church renewal for the ages. He identified the spiritual decay that led them astray, along with the prescription for reclaiming vibrancy since He saw and knew their situations.¹⁵⁷ Although impressive with many other qualities, Christ admonished Ephesus

¹⁵³ Doerksen, *James: Everyday Bible Commentary*, 63.

¹⁵⁴ Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 222.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 79.

because love was no longer the primary motive for their actions. So, He encouraged them to remember their former devotion to Him, repent for their lapse in love for Him and others, and exhibit again the characteristics of passion and dedication so prevalent in the church's former years. Removal of the church's lampstand (light) is what they could expect for sustained disobedience (Rev 2:4, 5). Author Ian Paul notes the seriousness of the Ephesian's declining vibrancy along with the severity of their potential punishment by reminding readers that the heart of the Christian faith rests in authentic relationships.¹⁵⁸ Author Ian Fair explains further that the threat to remove the lampstand refers to removing their rights to be a church.¹⁵⁹ Ephesus became so heavily involved with Christianity's superficial aspects that they lost their original love for and commitment to Christ.¹⁶⁰ External pressures were challenging to some of the churches as well.

Christ encouraged Smyrna to overcome their fears and endure persecutions (10 days) for the promise of a reward (Rev 2:9, 10). Fair notes that Smyrna suffered afflictions and poverty mostly because of their faith in Christ. Hardships sometimes accompany allegiance to Christ; however, Smyrna's saints' social and economic challenges (and today's Christians) cannot be compared to the spiritual richness in Christ.¹⁶¹ Fair adds that Christ referenced Daniel 1:8-16, where Daniel endured ten days of testing as a sign of his faithfulness to God, regarding the brief period of acute testing.¹⁶² Christ's judgment is also comprehensive.

¹⁵⁸ Paul, *Revelation*, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Ian A. Fair, *Conquering with Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2011), 115.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁶¹ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 121.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Pergamos saints exhibited several Christian virtues; however, their good works did not cloud Christ's call for total commitment to the gospel. Christ admonished them to avoid communion with those who promoted false doctrine and espoused sexual immorality (Rev 2:13-16). Author Ian Paul shares that Christ first focused on Pergamos' situation, as He did with Smyrna, rather than their deeds, as He did with the other five churches.¹⁶³ He then states that Christ referenced Balaam's deception of Israel (Num 31:16) as an example of Pergamos' sin, which led to shrinking vitality. He also emphasizes the promised suddenness of Pergamos' judgment by Christ if they failed to repent from their waywardness.¹⁶⁴ Christ encouraged Pergamos not to weaken their commitment by conciliation with the secular culture.¹⁶⁵ Other churches also faced Christ's sweeping judgment.

Christians in Thyatira shared similar challenges as those in Pergamos. Christ also commended them for their faithfulness in some areas; however, His rebuke quickly followed because of their tolerance of sexual immorality and participation in cultic meals (Rev 2:19-22). Author Ian Paul submits that Thyatira understood that Christian discipleship's path leads to spiritual maturity, evidenced by Christ's acknowledgment of their spiritual growth (v 19). However, their spiritual decline began when they failed to confront immoral behaviors.¹⁶⁶ Author Ian Fair agrees with Paul and notes that Thyatira received one of the harshest condemnations (Christ promise to cast them into great tribulation unless they repented) of the

¹⁶³ Paul, *Revelation*, 89.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 130.

¹⁶⁶ Paul, *Revelation*, 93.

seven churches. Christ does not tolerate sexual immorality among His people, nor will He accept any compromise with the world in these and other matters.¹⁶⁷

Christ's exhaustive judgment continued as He issued both a rebuke and an affirmation to Christians in Sardis for those living an illusionary life of vibrancy and those living a life worthy of His calling (Rev 3:1-4).¹⁶⁸ Many Christians in Sardis adopted a lifestyle commensurate with the city's illusionary reputation of being illustrious.¹⁶⁹ Author Ian Fair warns contemporary churches of the danger of self-deception. He cautions saints to beware of secular popularity, spiritual compromise, lethargy, and immaturity, which leads to a lusterless existence.¹⁷⁰ Fair adds that Sardis presented a depressing picture of a church that had lost its vibrancy because of its adaptation to the pagan culture.¹⁷¹

Like the letter to Smyrna, Philadelphia did not receive Christ's condemnation or rebuke. Christ reassured Christians in Philadelphia that He knew their deeds and that the only way to God was through His death, burial, and resurrection which was available to them (Rev 3:8-13).¹⁷² Author Ian Paul informs his readers that Philadelphia's Christians received reassurance because they acknowledged that they needed God to withstand the world's challenges.¹⁷³ Author Ian Fair agrees and adds that the church in Philadelphia did not compromise their faith by

¹⁶⁷ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 154.

¹⁶⁸ Paul, *Revelation*, 102.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁷⁰ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 155.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Paul, *Revelation*, 106.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 107.

confessing Caesar as Lord. Since they held firmly to the Christian doctrine, Christ promised them access to the Father.¹⁷⁴ Though they were considered weak by the world's standards, their strength and vitality lay in their dependence upon God (2 Cor 12:10).

Finally, Christ rebuked Laodicea for their lack of bearing spiritual fruit. He spoke stern words to them because the saints' professed faith and actions were not aligned (Rev 3:15-21).¹⁷⁵ Author Ian Paul states that the difference in how the Christians in Laodicea perceived themselves and Christ's assessment of their virtues is striking.¹⁷⁶ However, Christ's motivation for His condemnation of their spiritual decline (v 16) was not a final judgment but a call for reform (vv 17, 18 [revitalization]). Christ immediately revealed His spiritual renewal plan for them after His assessment.¹⁷⁷ Author Ian Fair adds that the church in Laodicea copied their community's affluent lifestyle yet believing their spiritual connection with the Godhead was unaffected. Further, their assumption of wealth and security was a precursor to spiritual degradation.¹⁷⁸

Christ's words to the assemblies in Asia extend beyond geographical boundaries and form the theological basis and relevant approach for achieving and sustaining church health and growth. Author Ian Fair states that Christ knows His church's strengths and weaknesses and is deeply concerned for its spiritual well-being. So, churches need also to examine their faith's focus and depth and remain aware of the dangers of compromise with secular neighbors.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Paul, *Revelation*, 114.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Fair, *Conquering with Christ*, 155.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

Conclusion

The New Testament forms a composite of church revitalization interventions to ensure its vitality. Early church leaders recognized the need to adhere to Christ's mandates for the first-century church, so they mitigated false doctrine and discord with a closer perspective of the apostles' counsel. Leaders in Jerusalem appointed seven qualified men to ensure fair treatment of all widows when inequality threatened church unity (Acts 6: 1-3). Peter confronted proponents of Judaism's circumcision mandate that contradicted God's path to salvation and threatened to alienate non-Jewish Christians from the believers' fellowship (Acts 15:5-9). Paul confronted proponents of the superiority of the "tongues" spiritual gift over the other gifts Christ gave to the church. James confronted warring church factions fueled by worldly desires and selfish aspirations. Finally, Christ's letters to the churches in Asia form the theological basis for church renewal for the ages.

Theoretical Foundations

Churches adopt ministry practices to guide them in accomplishing their mission. Some ministries conform to denominational polity in their Christian practices, while others freely search the Scripture for doctrinal guidance that also ensures a connection with God and their communities. The principles and concepts that guides a church consequentially impacts its health and growth. Therefore, adopting biblical principles that infuse life into a church is paramount. The following discussion examines various ministry concepts and their efficacy in achieving and maintaining church vibrancy.

Church Merger/Acquisition Revitalization

Proponents of church mergers as a revitalization strategy point mostly to Paul's discussion on the church body's unity (Eph 4:4, 5) and Jesus' statement regarding other sheep that will also enter God's kingdom (John 10:16).¹⁸⁰ Authors Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird state that God champions gathering diverse people to represent His love for all nations. Church mergers, then, confirm that the gospel's power not only transform lives but destroys barriers that separate people from God and each other.¹⁸¹ Moreover, mergers multiply church impact, guide outreach, produce synergistic ministries, revitalize churches, restore facilities, serve communities better, and revive hope for the future.¹⁸² However, churches must agree in key areas for mergers to be effective.

Tomberlin and Bird state that successful church mergers revitalize and unify where churches agree on a clear biblically-based mission and share an ordinary theology and faith practice. Unity's power flourishes in a community with a single purpose.¹⁸³ Clifton adds that church mergers provide opportunities for dying churches to extend their legacy for generations through partnerships with flourishing congregations.¹⁸⁴ Redemption Church, presently located in five cities across Arizona, is an example of a successful church merger. The new vision, ideas,

¹⁸⁰ Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 8.

¹⁸¹ Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together*, 9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 41.

leadership, resources, and prayers enabled the one church to grow exponentially.¹⁸⁵ However, Redemption Church's success is not always the outcome.

Unsuccessful mergers are a common occurrence among churches after an agreement to unite is reached. Their lack of success is normally traceable to a desire to preserve the past, avoid systemic issues, or secure a leadership position on another church's staff by former lead pastors and/or members.¹⁸⁶ Church mergers succeed when they emerge from God ordained purposes. When the pain of not changing becomes unbearable, a decision to merge with another congregation normally emerges.¹⁸⁷ Mergers are an advantage when declining and dying churches embrace their reality. However, mergers are a disadvantage where declining churches refuse to accept their future under new leadership.¹⁸⁸ Church mergers are accomplished in several ways.

Advocates of church mergers submit four models for healthy consolidations. First, a rebirth merger happens when a declining church restarts under a larger, vibrant church. Some of the old congregation's members become a part of the new consolidation.¹⁸⁹ A rebirth drains a lead church of its time, energy, and resources without knowing if the merger will work, which is a disadvantage.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Secondly, churches that are typically stable or stuck are candidates for adoption mergers. Here, churches integrate with a more robust, vibrant, larger church.¹⁹¹ Adoption mergers happen when stable or stuck churches recognize that submitting their name, ministries, and assets to a more vibrant church will multiply its impact. The adopted church's ministries, staff, and facilities integrate into the lead church's overall strategy.¹⁹²

Next, marriage mergers happen when two healthy or growing churches realign under a united vision and new leadership. Marriage mergers present the most significant potential for gains because of mutually beneficial strengths and assets.¹⁹³ An advantage is a seamless succession strategy establishment; however, a disadvantage is conflicts that arise from co-sharing the senior pastor's role.¹⁹⁴

Finally, Intensive Care Unit mergers are the least successful because other measures to enliven them have already failed.¹⁹⁵ An advantage is that their merger may extend their existence long enough to improve church health and growth. A disadvantage is that churches in this category are unwilling or unable to change.¹⁹⁶

Organic Church Revitalization

Authors Neil Cole and Phil Helfer state that organic revitalization precepts are grounded in believers' promised life through resurrection's power (Rom 6:4). These precepts align with

¹⁹¹ Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together*, 27.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29, 31.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

the new Christian covenant heritage in that God's Word is deposited in believers' hearts at conversion and provides the strength for Christ-followers to walk daily in His truth.¹⁹⁷ God's Word infused into believers is organic revitalization's seedbed. Church revitalization happens, then, as local body members embrace their new identity as Christ-followers, indwelt (infused), and empowered by God to bring light and life to a dying world.¹⁹⁸ Faith Reformed Church, in Dyer, Indiana, is an example of a successful organic revitalization. The church practices growing the connected by reaching the disconnected.¹⁹⁹ Proponents of organic revitalization espouse several key principles for reaching the disconnected.

According to Cole and Helfer, God's kingdom is an unstoppable apostolic movement carried forward by every Christ-follower.²⁰⁰ Organic revitalization's primary principle for enlarging God's kingdom is emulating Jesus' upside-down approach to the world's way of thinking. Jesus started His earthly kingdom small and infused Himself into His disciples at the cellular level.²⁰¹ He then commanded them to go and infuse others, using the same principle. Slowly growing is another organic revitalization principle which acknowledges that going narrow and deep with a few provides the needed support for a later spontaneous and multiplying movement.²⁰² Organic revitalization adheres to the biblical principle that people or churches that

¹⁹⁷ Neil Cole and Phil Helfer, *Church Transfusion: Changing Your Church Organically From the Inside Out* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 5.

¹⁹⁸ Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People: Sharing Good News Naturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 101.

²⁰⁰ Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 9.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 9, 10.

acknowledge their insufficiencies are more likely to turn to God first for help (2 Cor 12:10).²⁰³

Finally, since resurrection is meant to be the way of life for Christians, Christ-followers must die daily to old ways so that hope can guide believers into new resurrected ways.²⁰⁴ Organic revitalization's guiding principles aid believers in maintaining their new way of living.

Additionally, Cole and Helfer state that Divine Truth, Nurturing Relationships, and Apostolic Mission (DNA) fuel organic revitalization.²⁰⁵ Organic revitalization proponents point to missing Christian core DNA as the reason for the eventual demise of declining churches. A transfusion of healthy and holistic disciples infused with Christian DNA is prescriptive for churches on life support. Fruitful, multiplying church members improve a local church body's vitality according to adopters of the organic revitalization model.²⁰⁶

Also, organic revitalization proponents embrace the acrostic "DEATH" to express the theory of restoring church life. Dying daily to personal desires is necessary to follow the Holy Spirit's leadership. Empowering others to make disciples is essential for Christ's DNA's exponential transfusion. Accepting risk is normative for Christ-followers who already have eternal life. Theology moves from knowledge to practice when the Holy Spirit's power rekindles disciples' hearts. Hold tightly to Christ and loosely to everything else is the final acrostic expression for the organic revitalization model.²⁰⁷ The strength of this model is its return to Christ's principles for turning the world upside-down. A weakness in this model is

²⁰³ Cole and Helfer, *Church Transfusion*, 9, 10.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 11, 12.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

noticeable in the unwillingness of some church leaders to release congregants to follow the church's head (Christ). In a successful church revitalization, every church member submits to Christ's plans. Problems persist where church members are unwilling to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Missional Revitalization

According to authors McNeal and Koch, missional communities' resurgence heralds a post-congregational movement that is different from the static institutional church formed in past centuries.²⁰⁸ Missional revitalization models its practices on first-century Christian activities in many ways. It offers a fresh perspective on the way Christ-followers gather to worship God and serve others.²⁰⁹ Author Alan J. Roxburgh state that the Holy Spirit is breaking boundaries once set around God's movement and leading Christ-followers onto a different path.²¹⁰ This refreshing new look at Christianity opens hearts and minds to new avenues for seeking and fellowshiping with those living on the fringes of society's normalized interpretation of communing with God and others. Christians, individually and collectively, are called to live pressing toward missional activity.²¹¹ So then, Christians live out God's love for neighbors through missions.²¹²

²⁰⁸ McNeal and Koch, *Missional Communities*, 2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh, *Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 75.

²¹¹ Lance Ford, and Brad Brisco. *The Missional Quest: Becoming a Church of the Long Run* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 10.

²¹² Charles Van Engen, *Transforming Mission Theology* (Pasadena: William Carey Publishing, 2017), ii.

McNeal and Koch state that missional revitalization targets “non-affiliated” religious people, which is the fastest-growing believers’ group in the nation.²¹³ Christianity does not stand alone in its normalized religious practices rejection by the masses. Many former faithful members from other religious gatherings also make-up the exodus of people from hallowed walls.²¹⁴ The declining numbers in traditional congregational attendance partly reflects an inability of many to satisfy a rigid denominational membership profile.

The missional approach to revitalization does not restrict people (traditional or nontraditional church members) to institutionalized interpretations of following Jesus. Many missional community practitioners retain their congregational affiliation while taking the gospel outside the church’s walls.²¹⁵ St. Thomas Sheffield, in Philadelphia, PA is an example of a missional community. St. Thomas is an urban and network model with one hundred missional communities serving as its core expression.²¹⁶ Their example champions a strategy of community engagement. At its core are people partnering with God in writing redemption’s story from past eternity upon all the hearts of the world’s redeemed.

Missional communities engage cultures rather than retreating within institutional church walls.²¹⁷ Missional revitalization’s post-congregational culture engage people (where welcomed) in their homes, at work, at school, and where they pursue their hobbies. Missional revitalization’s incarnational thrust welcomes intentional living, passionately loving God and

²¹³ McNeal and Koch, *Missional Communities*, 7.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 17.

neighbor while making positive contributions in a community.²¹⁸ Much difference is observed between missional revitalization and other models.

Missional revitalization is different from church mergers in that proponents actively seek the disenchanting masses who have withdrawn from traditional forms of worship. Missional communities place full attention on the “sent” aspect that links Christ’s followers to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19, 20). Missional revitalization differs from the organic revitalization model in its willingness to immerse, interculturally, into a community’s scattered church, participating in mutual life-giving activities.

Missional revitalization’s strength is its methodology, which demands engaging believers’ communities beyond traditional church walls. Its weakness is loosely knit gatherings create leadership voids, which questions biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy within a community. However, missional revitalization fills a gap in application through its principle activity of engaging the church’s scattered dimension.

So, church revitalizations flow through various ministry practices. Proponents of each theory find scriptural support for implementing prescriptive biblical principles for restoring church vibrancy. Church merger supporters point to the church body’s unity (Eph 4:4,5; John 10:16) to validate their approach. Merger advocates believe that these references demonstrate the gospel’s power not only transforms lives but destroys barriers that separate people from God and each other. Romans 6:4 anchors organic church revitalization supporters in precepts that guarantee believers’ promised life through Christ’s resurrection. Organic revitalization’s primary principle is to emulate Jesus’ upside-down approach to the world’s way of thinking. Missional revitalization supporters place full attention on the church’s “sending” responsibility

²¹⁸ McNeal and Koch, *Missional Communities*, 13.

which links Christ's followers to the Great Commission (Matt 28:19, 20). Missional model advocates engage cultures rather than remaining inside institutional church walls and partner with God in writing redemption's story upon redeemed hearts.

Conclusion

Critical interaction with precedent literature, theological precepts, and existing theoretical constructs for church revitalization established the scope and set a path for engaging the topic. The selected literature provides an extensive repository of information necessary to enter the ongoing church revitalization conversation. Consulting church revitalization biblical principles and existing models for church revitalization established the project's underpinning and precedent ministry practices, respectively.

Although congregations worldwide are eager to take steps to curtail an exodus of people from the church, many are still experiencing either stagnation or a decline in membership. Leading authorities on church revitalization continually engage in a Scripture-guided dialogue on restoring life in the church. Topics of interest include discussions on declining church vitality, church revitalization principles, the Holy Spirit's purpose in church revitalization, and solutions for restoring church life.

Moreover, a robust theological base embedded in Scripture forms the foundation for establishing why revitalizing churches is biblically warranted. The point is that anything that is dead or dying robs God of His glory. Luke's letter confronting inequality in the early church (Acts 6: 1-3), Paul's letters confronting superseded traditions (Acts 15: 5-9) and church diversity within unity (1 Cor 12: 4-6), James' letter confronting church division's origin (4: 1-3), and Christ's letters to the churches in Asia (Rev 2-3) each contribute to grounding the project through biblical examples showing that churches are to remain alive.

Finally, various ministry practices undergird the project by showing different approaches to achieving and maintaining church vitality. Church mergers restore church life by multiplying church impact when dying churches unite with thriving churches. Organic revitalization principles afford new life to churches by guiding adherents to Christian Divine Truth, Nurturing Relationships, and Apostolic Mission (DNA). Missional revitalization principles restore church life by welcoming incarnational living, passionately loving God and neighbor, and making positive contributions in a community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A unique intervention design and implementation form the particular methodology used in addressing Victory Temple's decreasing vitality and declining membership. Biblical examples advise efforts when crafting principles to reform practices that rob a believers' body of its spiritual efficacy. A step-by-step explanation of the writer's plan and its ministry implementation follows.

Intervention Design

The intervention design aligns with the project's purpose of developing revitalization practices that connect the local believers' hearts and minds to biblical principles for improving church health and growth. The plan shows how a healthy church can extend Christ's earthly mission by implementing perennial missional precepts first mandated to His disciples (Matt 28: 18-20). The intervention employs local ministry resources in facilitating the project.

Setting the Stage

The project will begin on May 17, 2021, after the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval. Approval is necessary to ensure the project's compliance with federal and institutional guidelines requiring participants' consent along with proposed ministry activities. The project facilitator will submit a letter to Victory Temple's senior pastor and church board requesting permission to solicit volunteer church auxiliary leaders' participation in a project study on church revitalization (Appendix A). The project facilitator will also request permission to facilitate a forty-five minute meeting at 5 pm the following Thursday at Victory Temple's fellowship hall with potential project study participants. The rationale for the meetings'

duration, time, and place is to minimize interruptions to volunteers' occupational and family obligations. Since Victory Temple conducts weekly Bible studies on Thursday evenings at 6 pm, meeting an hour prior provides the least interruption to their weekly obligations. The project facilitator will also reassure the senior pastor in a phone call that the project study is not an affront to leadership but rises from a desire to advance the ministry's community presence.

Within one week after receiving approval from the senior pastor and church board, the project facilitator will confirm the auxiliary leaders' names and mail invitation letters to each potential volunteer (Appendix B) to participate in a six-month project study on church health and growth. Church auxiliary leaders (Leaders for the Deacons, Women's Ministry, Sunday School, Choir, Ushers, Youth, and Kitchen Committee) and the senior pastor are the letter recipients. The rationale for identifying church leaders is to facilitate the change by using their position and influence to saturate the congregation with missional principles. The writer is the project facilitator as well as the assistant pastor at Victory Temple.

Participant Selection and Orientation

During the first meeting, the project facilitator will inform potential study participants by saying, "The pastor, church board, and LU approved a six-month project study at Victory Temple on improving the church's health and growth. This meeting's purpose is to solicit volunteers for the project, which will require initially weekly and subsequent bi-monthly meetings to disseminate vital project information and collect data. The data collected will come from interviews, questionnaires, and surveys. Some of the questions address cultural, historical, and traditional norms designed only to explore different areas that might influence current ministry practices. The time required for these events will be approximately forty-five minutes. The project facilitator will vary the contact method to update volunteer participants between

scheduled meetings through group emails, group texts, and phone calls. All personal information is considered private and will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the project facilitator's home.

Pseudonyms and coding will ensure participants' confidentiality.

The project facilitator will request permission from the senior pastor to access Victory Temple's membership statistical data for the previous five years to substantiate an already visible church attendance decline. An illustration representing membership totals from 2015-2019 is depicted in the chart below (see sample figure 1). The project facilitator will then encourage questions regarding the process, duration, inability to complete the project, and other details. The project facilitator will inform potential volunteers that data collected from individuals unable to complete the project study will be destroyed. The project facilitator will acknowledge the leaders who volunteer and announce that the next group meeting is Thursday at the same location, time, and duration. Volunteer participants will be given an informed consent (Appendix C) to read, sign, date, and return to the project facilitator by the next meeting. Participants will also receive a copy of their signed consent.

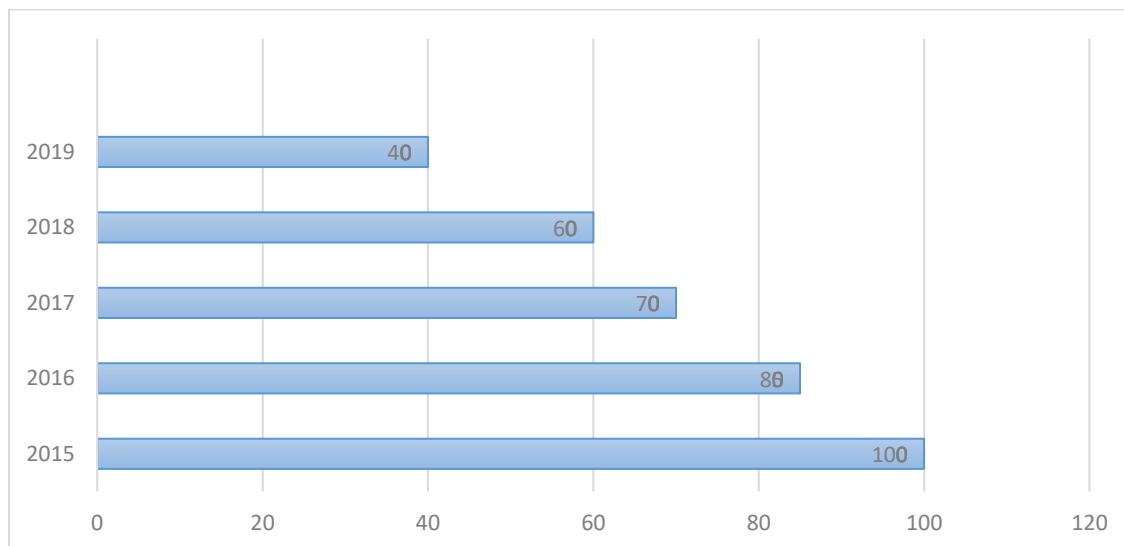


Figure 1. Sample Church Membership Totals, 2015-2019

Problem Discussion

In the second meeting, the project facilitator will welcome the participants at the scheduled time and place and thank them again for their participation. The project facilitator will inform participants that a collaborative inquiry interview approach is the method for information gathering. The project facilitator will then request permission to record all meetings using a miniature recorder and advise participants that the recordings will start when the meetings begin and stop when the meetings end. The project facilitator will further advise participants that all meeting transcripts is forthcoming in the next scheduled group meeting. The project facilitator will also seek a commitment from the participants to attend all meetings. The project facilitator will email meeting transcripts to absent members.

The project facilitator will implore participants to cultivate a collaborative, cordial, warm, and cohesive environment while seeking consensus on a shared problem: Victory Temple is not growing numerically. The project facilitator will ask the participants, “Do you believe God’s plan for Victory Temple is to improve its spiritual health and growth?” After assessing individual responses, the project facilitator will give the meeting’s purpose: Explore and examine how key stakeholders describe and interpret the problem as framed. Further, frame the purpose statement into a question that might lead to the problem’s source(s). The project facilitator will devote the meeting’s remaining time to discussing the problem’s potential origin(s). The rationale here is that a guided reflection will enable the facilitator to grasp the participants’ points of view in their terminology.

The project facilitator will facilitate the discussion until approximately ten minutes remains in the allotted time. At the meeting’s end, the project facilitator will set the next meeting for the following Thursday at the same place, time, and duration. The project facilitator

will provide participants with a list of printed questions to answer and return by the next meeting. The questions will assess some of their Christian beliefs, views on the church's missional activities, and vitality. Preview questions are listed below. The project facilitator will inform the participants that the information is necessary to assess their beliefs and actions at the beginning of the study compared to the study's end and its impact on Victory Temple's missional activities. The survey includes the following assessment:

1. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

2. I often look for God's redemptive activity in people's lives and join in the Holy Spirit's work.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

3. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

4. Victory Temple's members understand the meaning of the term "missional."
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
5. Victory Temple's church activities reflect a missional focus.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
6. Victory Temple's church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join with Christ in building His church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
7. Victory Temple's presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

8. Witnessing God's salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian's duty.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
9. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
10. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders are willing to sacrifice sacred traditional programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
11. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple's health and growth.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

12. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit's authority, God's purpose for a ministry rises above other motives.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

The project facilitator will conduct follow-up interviews with each participant within two weeks of receiving their completed responses to the initial survey questions. Follow-up interviews are necessary to gather more substantial data regarding participants' feelings about Victory Temple's missional focus. The project facilitator will ask open-ended questions that require participants to talk and tell their stories. Follow-up interviews will be conducted by phone rather than in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technological barriers with older participants, and the concern for maintaining participants' confidentiality. Since the interviews will be recorded, the project facilitator will announce the recordings' start and stop times. The project facilitator will collect and analyze the data using longitudinal surveys and coding, which will consolidate consistent themes in participants' responses. The analyzed data will be depicted in a chart to illustrate the results.

Missional Orientation

At the beginning of the third meeting, the project facilitator will collect the completed surveys and thank the participants for their cooperation. The project facilitator will also provide each participant with a copy of the notes transcribed from the previous meeting. The project facilitator will then allow the participants ten minutes to discuss any lingering issues before moving forward in the project study.

After addressing any concerns, the project facilitator will facilitate a discussion on the Great Commission (Matt 28: 18-20) and how each participant can participate in its enduring mandate. The project facilitator will start the discussion by asking, “How can Victory Temple’s auxiliary leaders use their positions and influence to compel others to join in purposeful missional activities?” After a ten-minute discussion, the project facilitator will ask ministry leaders, “Are you willing to lead your small groups in Christian missional activities?” After assessing participants’ responses, the project facilitator will explain that intervention at their level deepens mitigation efforts to the problem; however, prayer and fasting must precede all church revitalization endeavors. The project facilitator will also state that Christ’s mandate to the Eleven extends to today’s Christians and lead the participants in a discussion using the following outline:

I. Introduction: Read Matthew 28:18-20.

II. Discussion.

- A. Verse 18: Explain Christ’s authority. The authority given to Christ by God is complete (in heaven and earth; over everything, everywhere (Ref. Eph 1:22; Dan 7: 13, 14).²¹⁹
- B. Verse 19a: How does a Christian’s knowledge of Christ’s authority comfort them when carrying out the Great Commission? Since Jesus has authority over everything, He strengthens believers to fulfill His purposes. Disciples are reminded that with God, all things are possible.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Study and Obey, “The Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20,” Accessed October 24, 2020, <https://studyandobey.com/inductive-bible-study/great-commission>.

²²⁰ Ibid.

- C. Verse 19b: What does this tell disciples about how to carry out the tasks “go,” “teach,” and “baptize?” A disciple must remember that Christ has all authority and not them, so they must go in His power (Acts 1:8) and teach under Christ’s authority and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²²¹ The word “*poreuō*” is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “go,” which means to pursue the journey one has started. The word *mathēteuō* is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “teach,” which means to follow precepts and instructions. The word “*baptizo*” is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “baptize,” which means to dip repeatedly.
- D. Verses 19c, 20: Since He spoke to the disciples, how does Jesus’ command apply to today’s Christians? Christ’s command is relevant to every generation. Today’s Christians must pursue missional activities of making disciples who make more disciples, following Christ’s example.²²²

The project facilitator’s expectation from the group discussion is that the participants will convince the pastor, church board, and congregation to observe Thursdays as a day of prayer and fasting before engaging in missional activities during the next four to six weeks. Weekly scheduled Bible studies will serve as a time for corporate prayer and repentance. The clergy will deliver sermons that focus on Christ’s missional purpose for the church. Auxiliary leaders will focus on missional activities during their group meetings.

The project facilitator will extend the plan by showing how project participants can lead the church in missions over the next four to six weeks through the following examples:

²²¹ Study and Obey, “The Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20.”

²²² Ibid.

1. Deacon Board leader – Lead the small group into homes and hospitals by serving communion to those unable to attend church; Seek opportunities to visit those in jail.
2. Women’s Group Leader – Lead the small group into homes and hospitals to visit the sick.
3. Youth Group Leader – Join a local school to sponsor a child who needs emotional and financial support.
4. Clergy – Continue to develop sermons that focus on the church’s missional purpose; Join with the City Council to identify areas where the church can support the municipality (police department, fire department, etc.).
5. Kitchen Committee Leader – Feed the community’s elderly and underprivileged.
6. Sunday School – Select and teach curriculums that express God’s missional activity in the church.
7. Choir Leader – Select songs with Christian missional themes.
8. Usher Board Leader – Organize clothing distributions to the underprivileged.

Post Research Survey Discussion and Distribution

During the fourth meeting, the project facilitator will issue participants a post-project study questionnaire (Appendix D). The project facilitator will also ask the participants to complete the questionnaires and return them no later than the study’s scheduled fifth meeting. The project facilitator will also inform the participants that the data analyzed will be illustrated in a chart for comparison to the beginning survey. The purpose of the comparison is to determine the intervention’s effectiveness in moving Victory Temple beyond the church’s walls and connecting with the community. The project facilitator will encourage continued collaboration and reflection on the field project by participants while observing further missional ministry

changes. The project facilitator will also continue to gather information about the action research that may be useful in writing the final chapters for the project.

Post Research Survey Collection and Coding

During the fifth meeting, the project facilitator will collect the participants' post-project study questionnaires. The project facilitator will assign a numerical code to each survey for future identification purposes as they are collected. The project facilitator will ask the participation if they have further questions regarding the field project. After responding to any questions, the project facilitator will thank the participants and encourage them to continue working together as God leads the church through revitalization.

Conclusion

The intervention design will function as a guide in directing the project facilitator's involvement in the implementation phase. The project facilitator will facilitate discussions with ministry stakeholders that will lead them to seek God for the way He wants to restore Victory Temple's vitality. The path to revitalization will include setting the stage where the project facilitator will receive Liberty University's Institutional Review Board's and local ministry approval before starting the field project, selecting and orientating project volunteers by using predetermined criteria, discussing the problem with the project volunteers, and orientating the project volunteers to Christ's perennial missional principles.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

An accurate narrative of the intervention's implementation was made possible by capturing immediate impressions after each planned event. Documenting what was seen and heard during planned meetings proved invaluable when reporting the actual progression of the

field project. Additionally, Holy Spirit guided assessments of the stakeholders' interpretations fostered coalescing different points of view. Also, prayerful reflections on the stakeholders' discussions and collaboration assisted with guiding actions at every stage of the intervention's implementation.

Moreover, triangulation aided in comparing and analyzing data. Ernest Stringer states, "The credibility of a study is enhanced when multiple sources of information are incorporated. When diverse sources such as observations, surveys, and reports exist, meaning to phenomena receives closer scrutinization."²²³ Tim Sensing adds that triangulation cross-checks certain phenomena and the veracity of separate accounts by gathering data from any number of informants and sources and comparing and contrasting them. Triangulation means gathering data from three analysis tools (e.g., surveys, field observations, and interviews).²²⁴

Thus, an analysis of surveys, project facilitator's field observer notes, and interviews served as divergent means to verify the veracity of the stakeholders' responses. The project facilitator also remained aware that myriad data analyses might provide a clearer picture of the problem, and at other times, the data sources might diverge. An additional challenge then was to study and report where likenesses and differences occurred.²²⁵ The project's impact then was measured by the stakeholders' collaboration in framing the problem(s) that plagues Victory Temple's vitality and adopting proven ministry practices that leads to perpetual revitalization. The intervention's narrative follows.

²²³ Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*. 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 93.

²²⁴ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

Setting the Stage Implementation

The project began after receiving approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval was necessary to ensure compliance with federal and institutional guidelines requiring participants' consent and proposed ministry activities. The project facilitator also submitted a letter to Victory Temple's senior pastor requesting permission to solicit volunteer church auxiliary leaders' participation in a project study on church revitalization (Appendix A).

The project facilitator then requested permission from Victory Temple's senior pastor to facilitate a forty-five-minute meeting at 5 pm on May 20, 2021, at Victory Temple's fellowship hall with potential project study participants. The rationale for the meetings' duration, time, and the place was to minimize interruptions to volunteers' occupational and family obligations. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Victory Temple conducted weekly Bible studies on Thursday evenings at 6 pm. So, meeting an hour before Bible study would provide only a minor interruption to participants' weekly obligations, considering COVID-19 protocols. The project facilitator reassured the senior pastor through a phone conversation that the project study was not an affront to leadership but originated from a desire to investigate the reason(s) for the ministry's membership decline.

Two weeks after receiving approval from the senior pastor to conduct the field study, the project facilitator confirmed the auxiliary leaders' names, phone numbers, home addresses, and email addresses. The project facilitator then emailed the auxiliary leaders invitation letters (Appendix B), which solicited their voluntary participation in a six-month project study on church health and growth. Leaders over the Deacons' Board, Women's Ministry, Sunday School, Choir, Ushers, Youth, and Kitchen Committee, and the senior pastor received an

invitation. The rationale for identifying church leaders was to use their ministry influence to facilitate revitalization by saturating the congregation with missional principles. Additionally, the researcher served as the project facilitator and the assistant pastor at Victory Temple during the observation period. The implementation then turned to selecting and orientating the participants.

Participant Selection and Orientation Implementation

The project facilitator started the first meeting with an opening prayer at 5 pm on May 20, 2021, in Victory Temple's sanctuary. The deacon's auxiliary leader could not physically attend the first meeting because of a medical condition that required nontravel for a few weeks. So, the project facilitator arranged to connect the deacon's leader to the group via Google Duo during the recovery period. Google Duo is a video calling application that allows people to see each other during phone calls.²²⁶

During the meeting, the project facilitator welcomed the auxiliary leaders and announced that Liberty University and the pastor approved a six-month project study at Victory Temple on improving the church's health and growth. The project facilitator then stated that the purpose of the meeting was to solicit volunteers for the project, which would initially require weekly and later bi-monthly meetings to disseminate vital project information and collect data. The project facilitator further informed the auxiliary leaders that the data collected would come from interviews, field observation notes, and surveys. The project facilitator also advised the auxiliary leaders that some of the questions addressed cultural, historical, and traditional norms, further stating that the questions explored different areas that might influence current ministry practices.

²²⁶ Yahoo, "Google Duo," Accessed July 10, 2021. <https://duo.google.com/about/>.

Additionally, the project facilitator informed the auxiliary leaders that the time required for each meeting would be approximately forty-five minutes. The project facilitator stated that the contact methods for updating volunteers between scheduled meetings would be group emails, group texts, and phone calls. All personal information was considered private and kept in a locked file cabinet in the project facilitator's home. The project facilitator informed the participants that codes ranging from P0001 to P0008 would increase the group members' confidentiality.

The project facilitator then asked P0001 for permission to access Victory Temple's membership statistical data for the previous five years. The information was necessary to substantiate an already visible church decline. Church records reported 43 members in 2016; 38 members in 2017; 30 members in 2018; 27 members in 2019; and 22 members in 2020 (see figure 2).

The project facilitator then encouraged questions regarding the process, duration, inability to complete the project, and other details. The project facilitator informed the auxiliary leaders that any data collected from individuals who decided to discontinue the study would be destroyed. After a brief discussion with the group, the project facilitator scheduled the second meeting for 5 pm May 29, 2021. The project facilitator gave an Informed Consent to each volunteer to read, sign, date, and return to the project facilitator by the next meeting (Appendix C). The project facilitator also informed the volunteers that they would receive a copy of their signed consent at the next meeting.

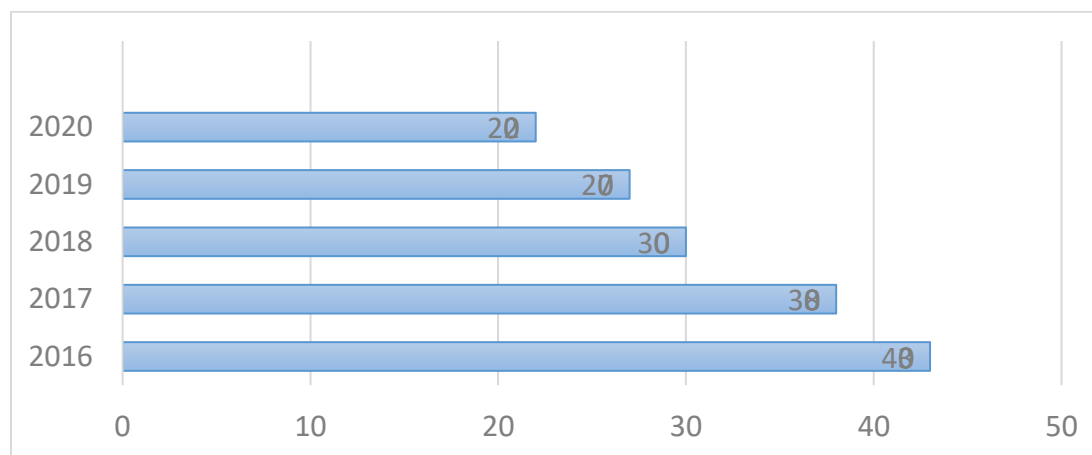


Figure 2. Church Membership Totals, 2016-2020

Understanding the problem was a crucial component in the implementation phase, which followed.

Problem Discussion Implementation

In the second meeting, the project facilitator met with P0008 at 4:30 pm on May 29, 2021, to access the finance office to make copies of the “Beginning Research Survey” for distribution to the stakeholders. The project facilitator collected the “Consent Documents” from all stakeholders as they arrived and made copies for them. The project facilitator also provided P0006 with a copy of the notes from the first meeting. The project facilitator emailed the other stakeholders the first meeting’s notes on May 24, 2021. Seven out of the eight members attended the meeting as P0007 joined the meeting via a Google Duo connection with the project facilitator. P0003 notified the project facilitator the day before of a work schedule change that conflicted with the meeting.

The project facilitator started the meeting at 5:10 pm by facilitating an assessment and feedback discussion on a shared stakeholder concern from the first meeting: disunity at Victory Temple. The project facilitator anticipated that addressing this detail would assist the

stakeholders in seeing more clearly the way disunity negatively impacts church vitality and growth. After a short discussion, the project facilitator asked the stakeholders for their opinion about partnering in prayer with another member to pray for: (1) each other; (2) forgiveness; (3) church unity; and (4) the field project's success. The project facilitator referenced a plea for unity and a request for forgiveness for any trespasses committed against other stakeholders by P0001 in the first meeting. The project facilitator affirmed the stakeholders' resolve that the group must first become unified and set an example for the congregation of working together.

After a brief discussion, the stakeholders partnered with each other for prayer. The following groups formed: P0001 and P0007 (P0001 used the project facilitator's Google Duo connection with P0007); P0006 and P0008; P0002 and P0005, and then they prayed together for approximately five minutes. The project facilitator asked the stakeholders if they wanted to start the remaining meetings by praying in small groups. The group unanimously agreed to the idea. The project facilitator anticipated that the Holy Spirit would reveal how disunity and unforgiveness negatively affect church vitality and growth. The project facilitator then stated that as the Holy Spirit leads them into authentic fellowship and restoration, He would also guide them in leading the church into vibrancy.

The project facilitator then requested permission to record all meetings using a miniature recorder and advised participants that all recordings would start when the meetings began and stop when the meetings ended. The project facilitator further advised the stakeholders that all meeting notes would be disseminated to them before or no later than the next scheduled group meeting. The project facilitator asked for and received a commitment from the stakeholders to attend all scheduled meetings. The project facilitator also advised the group that members unable to attend a meeting would receive meeting notes via an email or a personal copy.

The project facilitator then informed the stakeholders that information gathering would occur through a collaborative inquiry interview approach. Stringer states, “Active participation is the key to feelings of ownership that motivate people to invest their time and energy to help shape the nature and quality of the acts, activities, and behaviors in which they engage.”²²⁷ The project facilitator implored stakeholders to cultivate a cordial, warm, and cohesive environment while seeking consensus on a shared problem: Victory Temple is not growing spiritually and numerically. The project facilitator asked the stakeholders, “Do you believe God’s plan for Victory Temple is to improve its spiritual health and growth?” After assessing individual responses, the project facilitator gave the meeting’s purpose: Explore and examine how key stakeholders describe and interpret the problem as framed. Further, frame the purpose statement into a question that might lead to the problem’s source(s). The project facilitator devoted the meeting’s remaining time to facilitating a discussion on the problem’s potential origin(s) and guiding the stakeholders in exploring Victory Temple’s decline in spiritual health and growth. The rationale was that a guided reflection would enable the project facilitator to grasp the participants’ points of view from their terminology.

The project facilitator facilitated the discussion until approximately ten minutes remaining in the allotted time. At the meeting’s end, the project facilitator scheduled the third meeting for June 7, 2021, at 5 pm, provided stakeholders with the “Beginning Research Survey” questions to answer and return by the next meeting and gave the stakeholders a copy of their signed “Consent Document” document. The project facilitator further advised the stakeholders that the survey would assess some of their Christian beliefs, views on the church’s missional activities, and church vitality. The project facilitator also informed the stakeholders that the

²²⁷ Stringer, *Action Research*, 31.

information was necessary to assess their beliefs and actions at the beginning of the study compared to the study's end to evaluate any changes in their perspectives or views. The surveys included the following twelve questions with corresponding Likert Scale responses: Strongly Agree=SA; Agree=A; Disagree=D; Strongly Disagree=SD.²²⁸

1. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church.
2. I often look for God's redemptive activity in people's lives and join in the Holy Spirit's work.
3. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy.
4. Victory Temple's members understand the meaning of the term "missional."
5. Victory Temple's church activities reflect a missional focus.
6. Victory Temple's church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join Christ in building His church.
7. Victory Temple's presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities.
8. Witnessing God's salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian's duty.
9. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community.
10. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders are willing to sacrifice traditional sacred programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence.
11. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple's health and growth.
12. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit's authority, God's purpose for a ministry rises above other motives.

²²⁸ The free dictionary defines Likert Scale as a scale used to represent people's attitudes to a topic.

The project facilitator added the following open-ended questions to the “Post Research Survey” to collect subjective feedback on Victory Temple’s spiritual vitality:

1. What does it mean to be saved?
2. What spiritual fellowship (prayer, Scripture study, etc.) do you engage in with people who do not attend church?
3. What are some of the signs of a spiritually healthy church?
4. What could Victory Temple’s members do to engage in more missional activities?
5. What missional activities could you engage in to help improve Victory Temple’s spiritual health?

Other tools used for data triangulation were the project facilitator’s field observation notes, and follow-up interviews discussed later in this section. Also, themes identified by the project facilitator during field observations from this point that warranted a deeper reflection served as conversation starters during assessment and feedback discussions before advancing the field project. Missional biblical principles for achieving and maintaining congregational vitality could go unnoticed, which was next in the implementation.

Missional Orientation Implementation

The third meeting started at 5:10 pm on June 7, 2021. The project facilitator collected the first surveys, assigned codes to the surveys to connect each document with the stakeholder, and thanked the stakeholders for their cooperation. Five out of eight stakeholders attended the meeting. P0001, P0002, and P0008 notified the project facilitator beforehand of other pressing obligations that precluded their attendance. The project facilitator also connected P0007 to the meeting via Google Duo, provided P0006 with a copy of the notes from the second meeting, and allowed ten minutes for the stakeholders to discuss lingering issues. The project facilitator

emailed the other stakeholders a copy of the second meeting's notes on June 1, 2021. The stakeholders briefly discussed: (1) how to overcome church disunity, disobedience, and an unwelcoming spirit by some members; and (2) church member unforgiveness. P0008 presented positive feedback to meeting together to seek God for answers to Victory Temple's spiritual decline and asked that the stakeholders continue to meet beyond the field project's duration. The group agreed to P0008's suggestion.

After addressing stakeholders' concerns, the project facilitator asked them to partner with another member for prayer. P0003, P0004, and P0005 formed one group, and P0006 and P0007 formed a second group via a Google Duo connection. In addition to praying for each other and church unity, the project facilitator asked the stakeholders to consider praying for: (1) spiritual maturity; (2) forgiveness; (3) accepting and welcoming to others; (4) repentance for disobeying the Holy Spirit, and healing from others' hurtful words and deeds; and (5) the field project's success.

The project facilitator noted that the Holy Spirit was uniting the stakeholders through their shared concerns. Since the group was experiencing positive outcomes from partnering with each other in prayer, after they finished praying, the project facilitator asked their opinion about including the church in their experiences by scheduling a corporate prayer. The project facilitator also asked the stakeholders if they were willing to share how God was renewing their spirit and their ideas for connecting Victory Temple with the community. After a brief discussion, the group scheduled corporate prayer for June 14, 2021, at 5 pm pending the pastor's approval. The project facilitator made a note to update P0001, P0002, and P0008 of the group's decision. The project facilitator then thanked the stakeholders for their cooperation and facilitated a discussion on P0008's suggestion that auxiliary leaders meet beyond the project's

scope to continue missional church revitalization efforts. The project facilitator noted the stakeholders' enthusiasm for improving Victory Temple's vitality. The project facilitator added that the church becomes healthy and grows when the members "go" and make disciples.

The project facilitator then facilitated a discussion on the Great Commission's (Matt 28: 18-20) enduring mandate. The project facilitator started the discussion by asking, "How can Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders use their positions and influence to compel others to join in purposeful missional activities?" After a ten-minute discussion, the project facilitator asked ministry leaders, "Are you willing to lead your small groups in Christian missional activities?" After assessing stakeholders' responses (each stakeholder agreed), the project facilitator explained that intervention at their level deepens mitigation efforts to the problem; however, prayer and fasting must precede all church revitalization endeavors. The project facilitator stated that Christ's mandate to the Eleven extends to today's Christians and led the participants in a discussion using the following outline:

I. The project facilitator read Matt 28: 18-20.

II. Discussion.

- A. Verse 18: The project facilitator explained Christ's authority by stating that the authority given to Christ by God is complete (in heaven and earth; over everything, everywhere (Ref. Eph 1:22; Dan 7: 13, 14)).²²⁹
- B. Verse 19a: The project facilitator then stated that since Christ has authority over everything, He strengthens believers to fulfill His purposes. Also, disciples must believe that with God, all things are possible.²³⁰

²²⁹ Study and Obey, "The Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20," Accessed October 24, 2020, <https://studyandobey.com/inductive-bible-study/great-commission>.

²³⁰ Ibid.

- C. Verse 19b: The project facilitator then explained the imperatives “go,” “teach,” and “baptize” by saying that a disciple must remember that Christ has all authority and not them, so they must go in His power (Acts 1:8) and teach under Christ’s authority and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²³¹ The word “*poreuō*” is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “go,” which means to pursue the journey one has started. The word *mathēteuō* is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “teach,” which means to follow precepts and instructions. The word “*baptizo*” is the English transliteration of a Greek word for “baptize,” which means to dip repeatedly.
- D. Verses 19, 20: The project facilitator then stated that Christ’s command is relevant to every generation, so today’s Christians must pursue missional activities of making disciples who make more disciples.²³²

The group convinced the pastor to observe each month’s first and third Tuesday as a day of prayer and fasting beginning July 6, 2021. Weekly scheduled Bible studies would serve as a time for corporate prayer and repentance. The Auxiliary leaders also began to focus more on missional activities during the group meetings.

The project facilitator extended the plan by giving examples of how stakeholders could lead the church into missional activities over the next four to six weeks through the following:

1. Deacon Board leader – Lead the small group into homes and hospitals by serving communion to those unable to attend church; Seek opportunities to visit those in jail.
2. Women’s Group Leader – Lead the small group into homes and hospitals to visit the sick.

²³¹ Study and Obey, “The Great Commission Matthew 28:18-20.”

²³² Ibid.

3. Youth Group Leader – Join a local school to sponsor a child who needs emotional and financial support.
4. Clergy – Continue to develop sermons that focus on the church’s missional purpose; Join with the City Council to identify areas where the church can support the municipality (police department, fire department, etc.).
5. Kitchen Committee Leader – Feed the community’s elderly and underprivileged.
6. Sunday School – Select and teach curriculums that express God’s missional activity in the church.
7. Choir Leader – Select and sing songs with Christian missional themes.
8. Usher Board Leader – Organize clothing distributions to the underprivileged.

The project facilitator then asked the stakeholders to pray about ways their auxiliaries might connect with the community and consider sharing their ideas with the rest of the congregation after the corporate prayer meeting on June 14, 2021. The project facilitator ended the meeting with prayer. The implementation then shifted to the second research survey.

Post Research Survey Discussion and Distribution Implementation

The project facilitator scheduled the fourth meeting for June 20, 2021, via a text message on June 15, 2021, to the stakeholders. On June 20, 2021, the project facilitator met with P0008 at 9:50 am to access to the finance office to make copies of the “Post Research Survey.” The project facilitator started the meeting at 12:30 pm by welcoming the stakeholders. P0007 informed the project facilitator two days before of a prior commitment on that date. The project facilitator emailed the notes from the third meeting to the stakeholders on June 8, 2021, except for P0006, who received a hard copy.

The project facilitator allowed the stakeholders ten minutes for assessment and feedback from the third meeting. The stakeholders returned to their previous discussion on meeting beyond the project's duration to continue following the Holy Spirit in Victory Temple's revitalization. The stakeholders spoke on the corporate prayer's success and their appreciation for the opportunity to share ideas with the congregation on how God was leading them to connect with the community. Moreover, the stakeholders shared their enthusiasm about how God was blessing the group through prayers and working together. The project facilitator then asked the stakeholders to continue praying for: (1) each other; (2) church unity; (3) the field project's success; (4) repentance; (5) forgiveness; (6) healing from the hurtful acts of others; and (7) a welcoming spirit to visitors. The stakeholders also expressed their desire to meet monthly or quarterly beyond the project's scope.

The project facilitator then gave the stakeholders a copy of the "Post Research Survey" (Appendix E). The project facilitator asked the stakeholders to complete the survey and return it no later than the study's scheduled fifth meeting. The project facilitator also informed the stakeholders that they would be contacted later in the week to schedule a follow-up interview (4 or 5 questions) to some of the field observation notes taken throughout the project.

The project facilitator then informed the participants that the data analyzed from the "Post Research Survey" would show in a chart for comparison to the "Beginning Research Survey" (Appendix D). The purpose of the comparison was to determine the intervention's effectiveness in moving Victory Temple beyond the church's walls and connecting with the community. The stakeholders then agreed to meet for corporate prayer on the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 5 pm starting July 6, 2021. The project facilitator encouraged the stakeholders to continue collaborating on the field project. After the group agreed to meet again

immediately after church services on Jun 27, 2021, the project facilitator asked P0001 to close the meeting with a prayer. Collecting and coding the final research survey was the next step in the implementation.

Post Research Survey Collection and Coding Implementation

The project facilitator started the fifth meeting at 12:30 pm on Jun 27, 2021, by welcoming the stakeholders. All group members were present except P0005, who was unable to attend because of a prior commitment. The project facilitator emailed notes from the fourth meeting to the stakeholders on June 21, 2021 except for P0006, who received a hard copy. The project facilitator thanked the stakeholders for their cooperation and commitment to the field project and reminded them of corporate prayer scheduled for the first and third Tuesdays of the month starting in July 2021.

The project facilitator then collected and coded the “Post Research Surveys” to identify each submission with the corresponding stakeholder and facilitated a discussion on continuing the auxiliary leaders’ meeting beyond the field project’s scope. After a brief discussion, the stakeholders agreed to start in August 2021 to meet every other month on the third Tuesday between thirty and forty minutes after corporate prayer. The project facilitator also encouraged the group to continue working together as God leads Victory Temple through revitalization. The project facilitator then acknowledged P0007 for expounding on Matt 28:18-20 during the scheduled auxiliary ten-minute space to speak before the midday sermon. The project facilitator then asked P0001 to end the meeting with a prayer. The project facilitator emailed the notes of the fifth meetings to P0001-P0005, P0007, P0008 on June 28, 2021, and anticipated providing P0006 a copy on July 4, 2021.

Data Analysis Outline

In addition to using a longitudinal survey data analysis, the project facilitator used field observation notes and follow-up interviews to refine and broaden the data. The field observations corroborated the findings documented in the implementation phases, which served to identify consistent themes. Emerging themes captured in both were: (1) disunity; (2) unforgiveness; (3) disobedience; and (4) unwelcoming. These themes contributed to crafting standardized follow-up interview questions, which was the third tool used in the data triangulation.

Additionally, the project facilitator conducted follow-up interviews on the 24th and 25th of June 2021. Follow-up interviews were necessary to gather more factual data regarding participants' feelings about Victory Temple's missional focus. The project facilitator asked open-ended questions that required participants to talk and tell their stories. The interviews were conducted by phone rather than in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technological barriers with older participants, and concern for maintaining participants' confidentiality. The project facilitator asked the stakeholders the following five questions:

1. Why do you believe Victory Temple's membership has declined?
2. What do you believe causes disunity at Victory Temple?
3. Why might some visitors feel unwelcomed when they attend church at Victory Temple?
4. What are the reasons why some of Victory Temple's members are unwilling to forgive other members?
5. Why do you believe some members at Victory Temple disobey the Holy Spirit?

The project facilitator announced the interview recordings' start and stop times for each interviewee. The data analyzed is depicted in a chart to illustrate the results (see chapter 4 Results).

Conclusion

The project facilitator sought God's plan for church revitalization based upon Victory Temple's uniqueness so that the congregation might join in the Holy Spirit's work. The plan's intervention design included setting the stage, orientating volunteers after applying pre-selection criteria, discussing the problem, and orientating the volunteers to Christ's perennial discipleship principles. The intervention design also aligned with the project's purpose to implement biblical revitalization precepts that improve church vitality and growth. The intervention implementation deviated slightly from the design wherever the Holy Spirit led the planned discussions into more profound revelations. Adding assessment and feedback discussions to the plan before proceeding to the subsequent planned discussion served to capture the essential stakeholders' point of view. The project facilitator saw success in each implementation phase as the Holy Spirit led the stakeholders to remorse for offenses committed against each other and repentance to God for disobeying Him. Including a section on data analysis also shaped the theme development for the proceeding chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Many factors contribute to action research's qualitative approach, which assists organizations in improving operational efficiencies. Evaluating an intervention's implementation and reporting the findings are critical in assessing a field project's overall planning. After the project facilitator implemented the plan for Victory Temple, an evaluation of the results flowed from data triangulation (surveys, field observations, and interviews). The project facilitator used each tool to confirm the trustworthiness of the participants' adoption of biblical discipleship principles (i.e., ministry auxiliary leaders' movement into the community). A successful outcome for the intervention's implementation was to mitigate declining church vitality and better understand counterproductive ministry practices that rob God of His glory.

The intervention's effectiveness became noticeable as the auxiliary leaders began to ask each other for forgiveness, repent for disobedience, and plan small group community activities with missional significance. Leaders also began to speak openly to other church members about a Christian's responsibility to connect with its community. The congregation's collective mindset began to shift from an inward focus to trusting God to succor the fainthearted through paralyzing apprehensions. The project facilitator noted that a once static organization was slowly embracing the Christian metanoia of seeing through the Holy Spirit's leading. The Holy Spirit enlivened the congregation's thoughts to accept the Great Commission's call to "go," "teach," and "baptize." The following results from surveys, field observations, and follow-up interviews report collaborative efforts in developing a missional approach to church revitalization for Victory Temple.

Survey Results

Longitudinal survey analysis was the first triangulation tool used in determining the results of the intervention. The project facilitator gathered data from stakeholders' responses to survey questions at the beginning and end of the field project. Responses to twelve statements are depicted below in three illustrations where colored-coded legends show a side-by-side comparison of the stakeholders' beginning and post-survey selections on a Likert Scale. The Likert Scale choices are Strongly Agree-SA; Agree=A; Disagree=D, and Strongly Disagree=SD. The statements are listed first, followed by analyses and interpretations, illustrations, and then a summary to the conclusions. The project facilitator considered the wording of each statement when reporting changes in the raw data, analyzing, and offering interpretations. That is, an increase or decrease in the number of responses to choices on the Likert Scale might both bode favorably for the intervention's implementation.

Statements

1. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church.
2. I often look for God's redemptive activity in people's lives and join in the Holy Spirit's work.
3. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy.
4. Victory Temple's members understand the meaning of the term "missional."

Analyses and Interpretations

1. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church. In the "Beginning Research Survey," six participants chose "strongly agree," and two participants chose "agree." In the "Post Research Survey," five participants chose "strongly agree," and three participants chose "agree." The number of responses to "strongly agree" decreased by one in the post-survey

compared to the beginning survey. Additionally, the number of responses to “agree” increased by one in the post-survey (see figure 3). The intervention was effective in that the total responses remained in the positive range. The project facilitator interprets that the participants understand that church walls do not confine God’s salvation.

2. I often look for God’s redemptive activity in people’s lives and join in the Holy Spirit’s work. In the “Beginning Research Survey,” four participants selected “strongly agree,” three participants selected “agree,” and one participant selected “disagree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” five participants selected “strongly agree,” and three participants selected “agree” (see figure 3). The intervention was effective in that the overall selection for “strongly agree” increased by one in the second survey, leaving zero selections for “disagree.” The results suggest that more auxiliary leaders are following the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

3. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy. In the “Beginning Research Survey,” two participants selected “strongly agree,” three participants selected “agree,” and three participants selected “disagree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” four participants selected “agree,” and four participants selected “disagree” (see figure 3). Victory Temple’s spiritual health was measured by statement number three. The participants’ selections for “strongly agree” decreased by two in the “Post Research Survey,” corresponding to an increase by one for both “agree” and “disagree.” The results suggest that the intervention was unsuccessful; however, it was successful if some participants understood spiritual vitality better.

4. Victory Temple’s members understand the meaning of the term “missional.” In the “Beginning Research Survey,” one participant selected “strongly agree,” four participants selected “agree,” and three participants selected “disagree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” three participants selected “agree,” and five participants selected “disagree” (see figure 3). The

selections in the “Post Research Survey” decreased by one for both “strongly agree” and “agree,” corresponding to an increase by two for “disagree.” The intervention was successful because the participants understood the term “missional” and are now able to convey its true meaning to the congregation.

Illustration

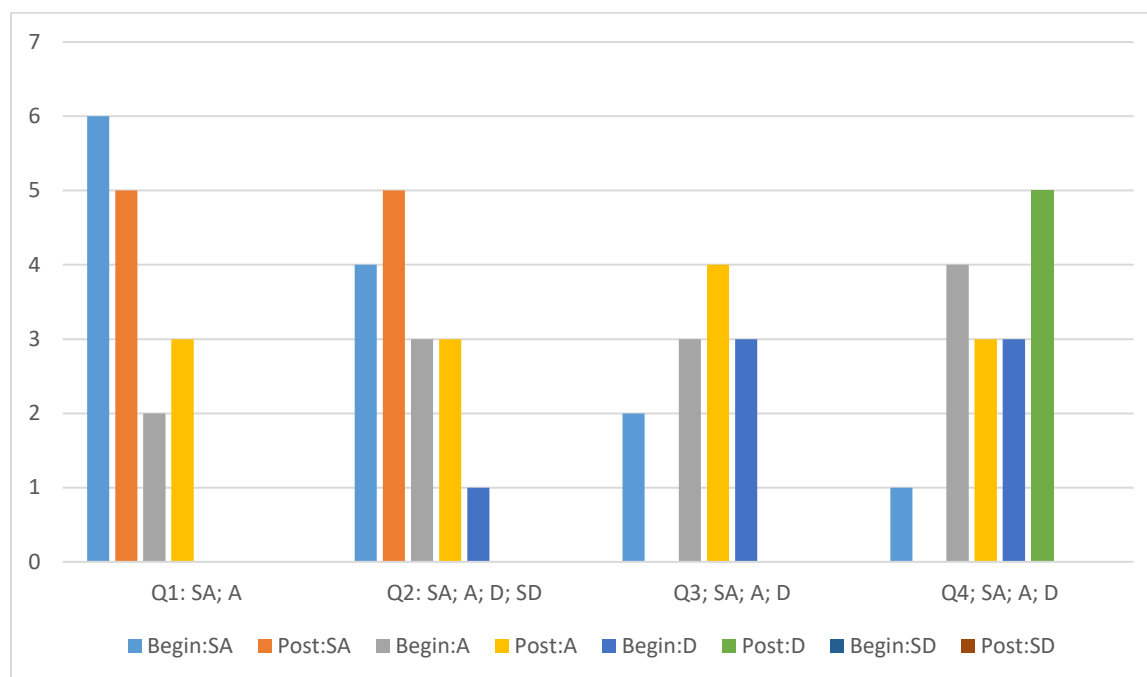


Figure 3. Beginning and Post Research Survey Statistics: Statements 1-4

Results for statements five through eight follows.

Statements

5. Victory Temple’s church activities reflect a missional focus.
6. Victory Temple’s church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join Christ in building His church.
7. Victory Temple’s presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities.
8. Witnessing God’s salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian’s duty.

Analyses and Interpretations

5. Victory Temple's church activities reflect a missional focus. In the "Beginning Research Survey," one participant selected "strongly agree," six participants selected "agree," and one participant selected "disagree." In the "Post Research Survey," one participant selected "strongly agree," five participants selected "agree," and two participants selected "disagree" (see figure 4). In the "Post Research Survey," the participants' selections decreased by one for "agree," corresponding to an increase by one for "disagree." The statement canvassed responses to Victory Temple's outward focus. The raw data suggests that the intervention was unsuccessful because selections concurrently decreased by one and increased by one for "agree" and "disagree," respectively.

6. Victory Temple's church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join Christ in building His church. In the "Beginning Research Survey," three participants selected "strongly agree," two participants selected "agree," and three participants selected "disagree." In the "Post Research Survey," two participants selected "strongly agree," four participants selected "agree," and two participants selected "disagree" (see figure 4). In the "Post Research Survey," responses to "agree" increased by two, reflecting a decrease by one for both "strongly agree" and "disagree." The changes suggest that the auxiliary leaders' thoughts and planning remain positive while shifting towards activities that connect the church to its community.

7. Victory Temple's presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities. The statement assessed participants' opinions regarding Victory Temple's community visibility and connection. In the "Beginning Research Survey," two participants selected "strongly agree," three participants selected "agree," and three participants selected "disagree." In the "Post Research Survey," two participants selected "strongly agree," one participant

selected “agree,” and five participants selected “disagree” (see figure 4). In the “Post Research Survey,” responses to “agree” decreased by two, corresponding to an increase by two for “disagree.” The results suggest that the participants understood what it means to become connected to the community.

8. Witnessing God’s salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian’s duty. In the “Beginning Research Survey,” five participants selected “strongly agree,” and three participants selected “agree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” seven participants selected “strongly agree,” and one participant selected “agree” (see figure 4). In the “Post Research Survey,” responses to “strongly agree” increased by two, reflecting a corresponding decrease by two for “agree.” The project facilitator’s interpretation is that the implementation strengthened the participants’ purpose of making disciples.

Illustration

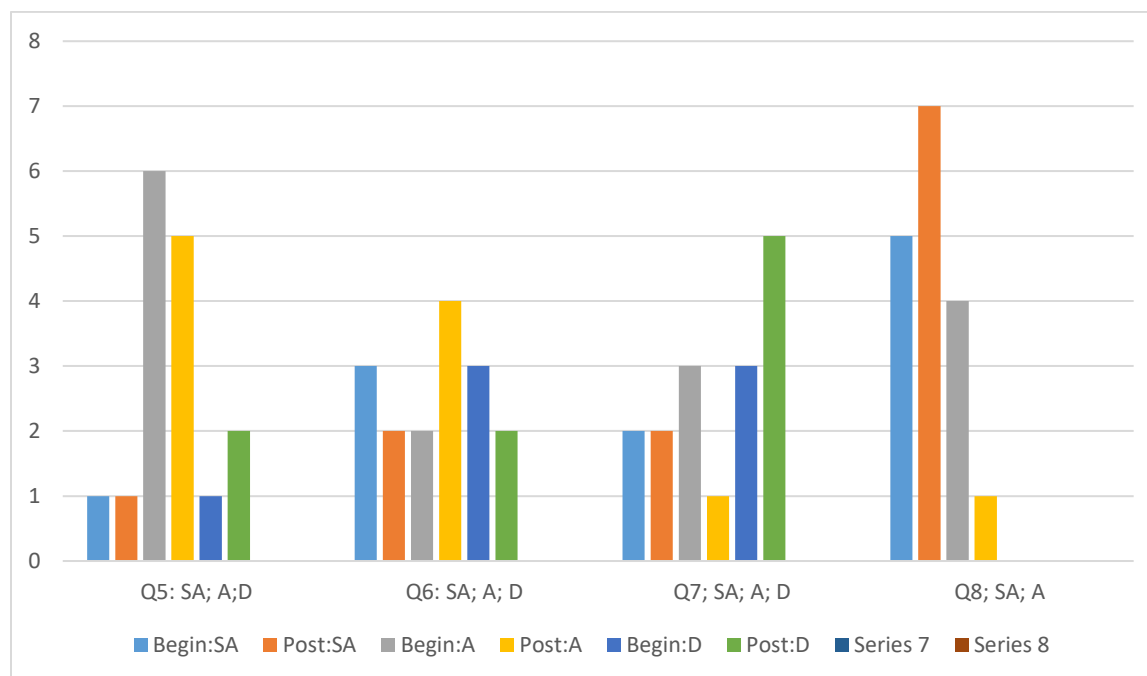


Figure 4. Beginning and Post Research Survey Statistics: Statements 5-8

Results for statements nine through twelve follows.

Statements

9. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community.
10. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders are willing to sacrifice traditional sacred programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence.
11. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple's health and growth.
12. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit's authority, God's purpose for a ministry rises above other motives.

Analyses and Interpretations

9. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community. In the "Beginning Research Survey," one participant selected "strongly agree," one participant selected "agree," and six participants selected "disagree." In the "Post Research Survey," one participant selected "agree," six participants selected "disagree," and one participant selected "strongly disagree" (see figure 5). Statement number nine assesses whether Victory Temple is intentional in connecting with its community. Responses in the "Post Research Survey" indicate selections for "strongly agree" decreased by one, corresponding to an increase by one for "strongly disagree." The results suggest that Victory Temple must prayerfully plan activities that will connect the church with its community.

10. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders are willing to sacrifice traditional sacred programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence. In the "Beginning Research Survey," three participants selected "strongly agree," two participants selected "agree," two participants selected "disagree," and one participant selected "strongly disagree." In the "Post Research Survey," two participants selected "agree," five participants selected "disagree,"

and one participant selected “strongly disagree.” The results indicate that Victory Temple’s leaders must also seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance during yearly planning and budgeting meeting and relinquish alliances to antiquated traditions.

11. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple’s health and growth. In the “Beginning Research Survey,” four participants selected “strongly agree,” and four participants selected “agree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” three participants selected “strongly agree,” and five participants selected “agree” (see figure 5). The “Post Research Survey” showed a marginal change (a reduction by one and a corresponding increase by one for “strongly agree” and “agree, respectively). The changes occurred within the positive range on the Likert Scale for the statement, so the implementation was measurably successful. However, positive results for this statement reveals that the group might harbor unmerited suspicion based upon responses to the previous statement.

12. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit’s authority, God’s purpose for a ministry rises above other motives. In the “Beginning Research Survey,” eight participants selected “strongly agree.” In the “Post Research Survey,” six participants selected “strongly agree,” and two participants selected “agree” (see figure 5). The project facilitator notes a decrease by two for “strongly agree” and a corresponding increase by two for “agree” in the “Post Research Survey.” Again, the changes occurred within the positive range on the Likert Scale for the statement, so the implementation was measurably successful.

Illustration

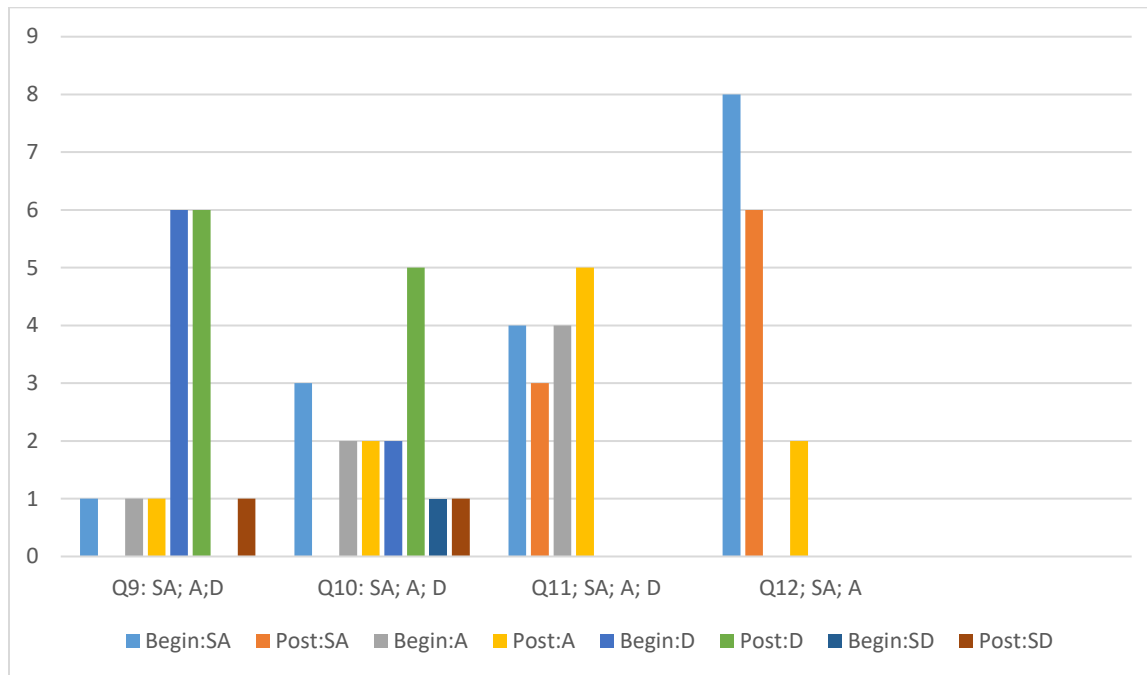


Figure 5. Beginning and Post Research Survey Statistics: Statements 9-12

Summary

The project facilitator captured the participants' opinions to survey statements on a Likert Scale by totaling their responses for each selection. The project facilitator used the longitudinal survey method for data gathering and analysis as two surveys contained the same statements. The participants responded favorably to eight out of twelve statements, yielding overall positive results for the intervention. Results for the data Field observations tool follows.

Field Observation Results

Stringer acknowledges that participants play a critical role in research and are often the most valuable sources of evaluation for a project.²³³ This section reports the stakeholders' voices

²³³ Stringer, *Action Research*, 74.

from qualitative narratives that show the group's gradual adoption of revitalization principles. Field observations yielded results from what was seen and heard along with impressions. Participants' conflicting personal characteristics, interaction style, conversation manner, body language, tone of voice, and even silence contributed in a unique way to coalescing different points of view and group cohesion.²³⁴ Additionally, the stakeholders' assessment and feedback on lingering issues before proceeding with the next meeting resulted in them seeking God for additional guidance.

Moreover, the project facilitator used field observation notes to present a chronology of collaboration, showing how the stakeholders gradually embraced church revitalization principles. The assessment and feedback sessions, implemented during the second meeting, elevated the stakeholders' voices and sharpened the intervention, which was critical in achieving a successful outcome. The chronology flowed through five planned meetings as presented in the observation notes (Appendix F). The analyses and interpretations are listed first followed by a table, and then a summary of conclusions.

Analysis and Interpretations

In the first meeting, none of the stakeholders denied that Victory Temple's spiritual vitality and membership had declined. On the contrary, some participants shared their concerns about accurately reporting membership statistics, finance appropriations, new member indoctrination classes, and church disunity. The project facilitator interpreted their concerns as positive responses to the project's introduction. Removing inactive members from the church rolls, realigning budgets, preparing for growth, and deciding to work together were critical decisions for following the Holy Spirit in leading the church into revitalization.

²³⁴ Stringer, *Action Research*, 76.

In the second meeting, the project gained momentum as the group agreed to form small prayer teams, acknowledged their need to “get it together,” asked if the stakeholders’ meetings could continue beyond the project’s scope, repented for disobeying God, and acknowledged their actions that contributed to Victory Temple’s spiritual decline. The project facilitator interpreted the stakeholders’ words and actions as demonstrations of obedience, commitment, and humility. The project facilitator sensed the group’s genuine desire to follow the Holy Spirit in moving the church into its purpose.

In the third meeting, the stakeholders discussed meeting monthly or quarterly beyond the project’s scope, scheduled a date for a corporate church prayer meeting, began seeking God to lead their auxiliaries in connecting with the community and discussed Jesus’ commandment to His followers to make disciples. The project facilitator interpreted the stakeholders’ actions as moving into good stewardship in their responsibilities as church leaders.

In the fourth meeting, the stakeholders shared their plans for connecting with the community, discussed the corporate prayer’s success, shared lingering pains from trespasses committed by other church members, and asked each other for forgiveness. The project facilitator interpreted the stakeholders’ actions as the results of Holy Spirit leading them to become more vulnerable, transparent, and authentic. The project facilitator also understood that God was healing the church leaders so they might assist with leading the congregation into vitality.

In the fifth meeting, the stakeholders continued following the Holy Spirit in moving the church forward by presenting the church membership statistics and scheduling stakeholders’ meetings beyond the project’s implementation. The project facilitator interpreted the stakeholders’ actions as steps for keeping the revitalization implementation moving forward.

Table 1.1 includes words and phrases used to describe how the Holy Spirit guided the stakeholders in successfully adopting revitalization principles during the project’s implementation.

Table

Table 1.1. Field Observation Interpretation Key Word(s) and Phrases

1st Field Observation Interpretation	2nd Field Observation Interpretation	3rd Field Observation Interpretation	4th Field Observation Interpretation	5th Field Observation Interpretation
Reconciling church rolls	Humility	Leading the Congregation in Prayer	Vulnerable	Moving Forward
Realigning Budgets	Repentance	Good Stewardship	Transparent	Keeping the Change Going
Preparing for Church Growth	Obedience		Authentic	
Working Together	Commitment		Healing	

Summary

The Bible is replete with Scriptures that encourage God’s people to live peaceably and work together. Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity” (NIV). The project’s implementation showed how God formed a cohesive group committed to bending their desires to His will. The Holy Spirit led the participants on a path for restoring Victory Temple’s vitality. Prayer was the key from the very beginning. Additionally, the project facilitator shared the stakeholders’ voices through some of their words and actions/reactions recorded during the field project’s implementation. A chronicling of

events from five meetings shows how they worked together to lead Victory Temple into God's purpose for the ministry. The results from the follow-up interviews are the final tool used to measure the intervention's effectiveness.

Follow-Up Interview Questions Results

The follow-up interview questions deepened an investigation into the reasons for Victory Temple's spiritual decadence. The project facilitator crafted five standardized follow-up interview questions from consistent themes identified in the field observation notes. In many instances, the stakeholders identified counter-Christian behaviors that rob God of Glory. Consistent words and phrases were often repeated in their responses to different questions. The project facilitator collated the stakeholders' responses to each question to assist with a comparative analysis. The following summarizes the follow-up interview results from the stakeholders' descriptive words and phrases. The project facilitator also lists, summarizes, and analyzes repetitive responses within the five questions to highlight ancillary issues. The questions are listed first, followed by analyses and interpretations, an illustration, and then a summary to the conclusions.

Questions

1. Why do you believe Victory Temple's membership has declined?
2. What do you believe causes disunity at Victory Temple?
3. Why might some visitors feel unwelcomed when they attend church at Victory Temple?
4. What are the reasons why some of Victory Temple's members are unwilling to forgive other members?
5. Why do you believe some members at Victory Temple disobey the Holy Spirit?

Analysis and Interpretations

1. Why do you believe Victory Temple's membership has declined? The participants submitted the following responses: (1) One participant acknowledged a loss of fervency; (2) Some members are unwilling to go out into the community; (3) Some members are unfriendly and insensitive; (4) Some members do not treat others with love; (5) There is too many discussion about district obligations; (6); Some people just do not want to come to church; (7) There is too much bickering and disunity in the church; (8) Some people do not want to hear the gospel.

2. What do you believe causes disunity at Victory Temple? The participants submitted the following responses: (1) Selfishness; (2) Complacency, do not want to grow or change x 2; (3) Some members are not filled with the Holy Spirit and are insensitive to others' needs; (4) Backbiting and talking about each other x 2; (5) Jealousy and self-importance; (6) Some members try to overrun the pastor and rule the church.

3. Why might some visitors feel unwelcomed when they attend church at Victory Temple? The participants submitted the following responses: (1) There is too much church animosity, and some members are just unwelcoming x 2; (2) Some people are too judgmental x 3; (3) Some members are unfriendly and criticize others too much; (4) Some members just do not want to do right; (5) Some members try to instruct visitors in righteousness.

4. What are the reasons why some of Victory Temple's members are unwilling to forgive other members? The participants submitted the following responses: (1) Some members do not love God and practice nepotism; (2) One participant could not think of an answer; (3) Some members do not understand that God forgives our sins through Christ's sacrifice; (4) Some members are just ungodly; (5) Jealousy and competition are the main reasons; (6) Some members are not saved; (7) Some members do not have God in them; (8) Some members are just set in their ways.

5. Why do you believe some members at Victory Temple disobey the Holy Spirit? The participants submitted the following responses: (1) Some members do not have God’s Spirit in them; (2) Some members fear being led deeper into holiness x 2); (3) Some members do not understand the consequences of disobeying the Holy Spirit; (4) Some members subordinate the Holy Spirit to a tool to be used and not obeyed; (5) Some members do not like the truth; (6) Some members refuse to allow God to work in their lives; (8) Some members fear what making sacrifices may cost them.

Paul stated, “If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Gal 5:15). The project facilitator interprets the follow-up interview analysis results in this way: Victory Temple suffers from the pitfalls of an inward rather than an outward ministry focus. The participants’ responses to the survey questions support the findings. The project facilitator grouped the same or similar responses for all five questions and listed them under a standard heading to present a ministry snapshot, although sourced only from the follow-up questions. The results were positive in that they identified actionable congregational behaviors that rob God of His Glory (see results figure 6).

Illustration

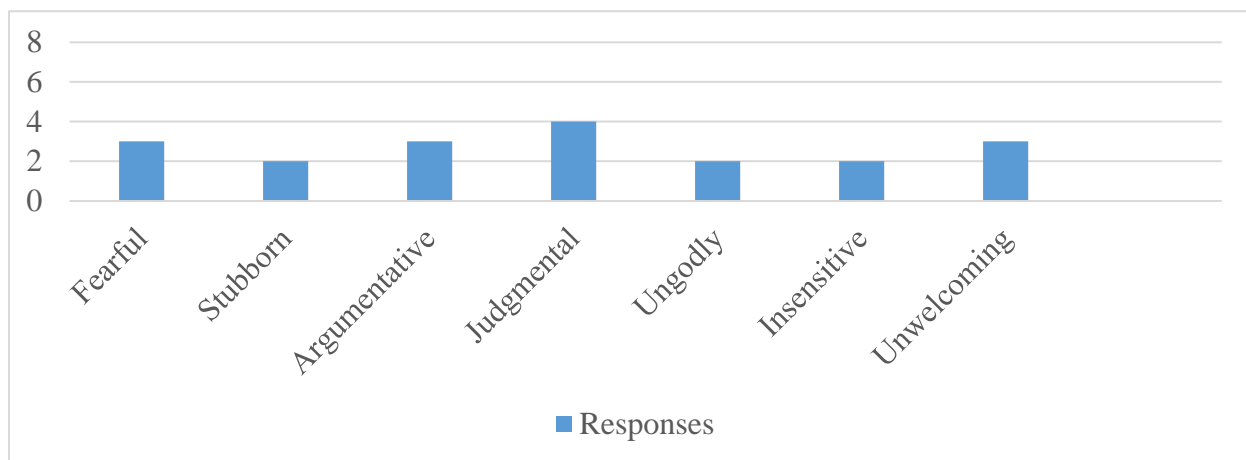


Figure 6. Follow-Up Interview Questions Repeat Responses

Summary

The project facilitator crafted five standardized follow-up interview questions from consistent themes identified in the field observation notes. The stakeholders' responses to the questions pinpointed seven counter-Christian behaviors that rob God of Glory. The project facilitator collated the stakeholders' responses to each question to assist with a later comparative analysis. A conclusion for the three tools used to measure the project's results follows.

Conclusion

The results of the field project were critical in evaluating whether its design and implementation yielded expected results. Surveys, field observations, and follow-up interviews were analysis tools designed to triangulate the trustworthiness of the data and highlight any changes. The project facilitator gathered data from longitudinal surveys that required participants to respond to statements by choosing a Likert Scale option.²³⁵ The project facilitator also gathered data by taking meticulous notes from what was seen and heard to document both problems and collaboration. Additionally, the project facilitator conducted follow-up interviews to aid data gathering through canvassing questions that availed deeper information for mitigating spiritual decadence. The results presented through illustrations and narrative summaries confirmed that the intervention's design and implementation effectively addressed Victory Temple's declining vitality and church growth. The following shows how the overall changes were discovered in the process.

The three triangulation tools used to measure the intervention's construct were critical in determining the plan's effectiveness, evidenced by overall ministry changes. The participants'

²³⁵ The free dictionary defines Likert Scale as a scale used to represent people's attitudes to a topic.

positive response to eight out of twelve statements was the first indicator of a successful implementation. The project facilitator also captured positive ministry changes during field observations where prayer, humility, repentance, obedience, unity, stewardship, vulnerability, transparency, authenticity, and healing fueled momentum in restoring Victory Temple's vitality. Finally, the project facilitator used follow-up interviews to identify an inward ministry focus rife with fearful, stubborn, argumentative, judgmental, ungodly, insensitive, and unwelcoming dross that covered Victory Temple's silver soul (Proverbs 25:4). Chapter 5 concludes the entire thesis project.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Purpose of the Study Summary

The purpose of this project study was to develop a revitalization plan for Victory Temple House of Refuge that would connect the hearts and minds of its congregation to biblical principles for restoring church health and growth. The objective was critical because Christ's mandate to the Eleven still applies to His followers. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said to His disciples, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus authorized His disciples to use all that He had taught them for three years to turn the world upside down. The commands to "go," "teach," and "baptize" are still applicable for every Christian and mandated by Christ to articulate in every place. Christians find the strength to make disciples through Christ's power because they are His offspring (Matt 28:18; Acts 17:29). The conclusion of the field project flows through the information presented in precedent literature, theological and theoretical foundations, intervention design and implementation, results, precedent literature comparison to the results, knowledge acquired, application, future research, and recommendations.

Precedent Literature Overview and Reflection

Consulting precedent literature at the project's beginning provided crucial information about church revitalization before entering the conversation. Nearly every source acknowledged that fruitless churches abound across North America for various reasons and that every excuse robs God of glory. The church represents God's habitation by witnessing the lordship of Christ, and His faithful followers participate with Him in building His kingdom. Baptized believers

then should make every effort to live according to the example and mandates of the Lord and Savior of the world (Matt 22:37-39; 28:19, 20).

The church also exists to convey the power of the Spirit and the mystery and salvation of the Son. God chose the church to be His missionary: *Missio Dei*. Its mission and message are absolute in every generation. The integrity of the institutional church is compromised if understood otherwise. Making disciples is God's plan for His people to flourish in the world; therefore, believers engaged in missional activities work towards His purpose. Moreover, believers become disoriented and uninterested when they are not involved in Christ's command to make disciples.

Churches involved in missional activities share several animations: organic, alive, growing, and changing, empowered by the Holy Spirit. So, the number of people involved in missional activities in a church indicates how effectively leaders and congregants follow God's will. These activities prevail any place members join in ministry work through spiritual gifts given at the moment of salvation (Eph 4:11-16). The Trinity's third person resides in every believer and flows outwardly, even to earth's end. Wherever this outward-flowing movement interfaces with repentant hearts, God's territory increases. The Holy Spirit's influence then sets the gospel's destination beyond geographical boundaries.

To the contrary, church health deteriorates wherever missional activities and discipleship are nonexistent. A church that is not producing fruit does not accurately reflect God's glory and brings a reproach against a community of believers (John 15:16). Even with this knowledge, some Christians refuse to change as old traditions trap them. Taking a fresh look at the Scripture evades their thinking because of engrained erroneous thoughts about church.

The reality is that most Christians refuse to “go” into their communities. Dying churches most often assume the community is there to support them, when in fact the church is an extension of God’s grace and mercy to the world. So, changes necessary for renewal and growth never happen.

Still, God’s love and concern for His creation are visible through local, healthy, and thriving churches. A healthy local church is a unique place where God’s glory is always on display. God’s plan then is for the church to remain a healthy representation of His presence in the world.

Sermons, programs, lectures, socials, and rituals alone lack the power to remove the dross that keeps the church from emanating the Light shone from heaven. So, church restoration happens in God’s presence as sincere individuals and groups entreat Him through personal and corporate prayers. The pathway to a new life begins by repentance, prayer, and remembering God’s legacy of missions and ministry that birthed both a nation and the church.

Theological and Theoretical Foundations Review

Paul wrote, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). Victory Temple’s field project is anchored in biblical theology. The project facilitator first consulted Scripture for a foundation and biblical principles before crafting an intervention design for the ministry. The New Testament forms a composite of church revitalization interventions to guide contemporary Christians. Early church leaders recognized the need to adhere to Christ’s mandates for the first-century church, so they mitigated false doctrine and discord with a comparative perspective of the apostles’ counsel.

Contemporary revitalizers then recognize the need to adhere to life-giving practices passed down by Christ to His first disciples. The first disciples quickly mitigated false doctrine

and church discord, realizing that the consequences of neglecting seemingly minor drifts from doctrinal principles are far worse in later church life. Their attention to correcting many unhealthy practices honors God's design for a Holy Spirit-led vibrant church in constant dialogue with its community.

Examples of restoring church vitality exist in the New Testament where several conflicting situations occurred even as the early church experienced growth. For example, when inequality threatened to divide a congregation, church leaders assigned seven qualified men to correct the irritation of unfair treatment of Hellenistic widows (Acts 6: 1-3). Peter also confronted proponents of Judaism's circumcision mandate, which eroded church vibrance by contradicting God's path to salvation (Acts 15:5-9). Additionally, Paul addressed confrontational parties in the church at Corinth regarding spiritual gifts by teaching believers that diversity within unity characterizes the Godhead (1 Cor 12:4-6). Also, James addressed a church splinter by showing warring factions that most often unquenchable human cravings cause divisions (James 4:1-3).

Finally, Christ's revelation regarding spiritual decadence in Asia's seven churches provides the theological basis for church renewal for the ages. He identified spiritual decay that led them astray, along with the prescription for reclaiming vibrancy, since He saw and knew their situations. Christ reminded Ephesus that love must remain the primary motive for their actions (Rev 2:4, 5). Christ encouraged Smyrna to overcome fears and endure persecutions even when facing extreme persecution (Rev 2:9, 10). The saints at Pergamos learned from Christ that good works alone do not relinquish His call to total commitment to Him (Rev 2:13-16). Christ rebuked the saints at Thyatira for their tolerance of sexual immorality and participation in cultic meals even though He commended them for their faithfulness in other areas (Rev 2:19-22).

Christ's exhaustive judgment continued as He issued both a rebuke and an affirmation to Christians in Sardis for those living a vibrant illusionary life and those living a life worthy of His calling (Rev 3:1-4). Christ reassured Christians in Philadelphia that He knew their deeds and that the only way to God was through His death, burial, and resurrection, which was available to them (Rev 3:8-13). Christ rebuked Laodicea for their lack of spiritual fruit because the saints' professed faith and actions did not match (Rev 3:15-21). One only needs to consult with Scripture to see good church leadership examples that foster vitality and growth.

Church orthopraxy should also rise from theoretical models following first-century practices for maintaining congregational vibrancy. Some ministries, however, prefer adherence to old church customs and traditions rather than searching the Scripture for biblical examples for maintaining healthy internal dialogue and community engagement. The principles and concepts that guide a church consequentially impact its health and growth. Therefore, adopting biblical principles that infuse life into a church is paramount. Several models exist to assist congregations with church renewal's necessity.

Church merger and acquisition revitalization proponents reference Paul's discussion on Christian unity (Eph 4:4, 5) and Jesus' statement regarding other sheep that will enter God's kingdom (John 10:16).²³⁶ Since God champions gathering diverse people to represent His love for all nations, church mergers confirm that the gospel's power transforms lives and destroys barriers that separate people from God and each other. Mergers multiply church impact, guide outreach, produce synergistic ministries, revitalize churches, restore facilities, serve communities better, and revive hope for the future; however, collaboration is critical to success.

²³⁶ Tomberlin and Bird, *Better Together*, 8.

Organic church revitalization proponents adhere to precepts aligned with the new Christian covenant heritage when God's Word resides in believers' hearts. Faith in God through Jesus Christ provides the strength for Christians to walk in His truth daily. Church revitalization happens as members embrace their new identity as Christ-followers, indwelt (infused), and empowered by God to bring light and life to a dying world. Organic revitalization's primary principle for enlarging God's kingdom is emulating Jesus' upside-down approach to the world's way of thinking. Jesus started His earthly kingdom small and infused Himself into His disciples at the cellular level. He then commanded them to go and infuse others, using the same principle. Christ provided the example of how going narrow and deep with a few faithful followers provides the needed support for a spontaneous and multiplying movement later. Organic revitalization proponents adhere to the biblical principle that people or churches that acknowledge their insufficiencies are more likely to turn to God first for help (2 Cor 12:10).

Finally, the missional approach to church revitalization models its practices on first-century Christian activities and offers a fresh perspective on the way Christ-followers gather to worship God and serve others. The missional model opens adherents' hearts and minds to new avenues for seeking and fellowshiping with those living on the fringes of society. Christians adopt missional activities, which epitomizes God's call for believers to love their neighbors. The missional approach to revitalization heralds Christ's call to every sheep by not restricting people to institutionalized interpretations of following Him (John 10:16).

Moreover, missional community practitioners retain their congregational affiliation while taking the gospel outside a church's walls. The theological and theoretical construct confirm that missional revitalization's post-congregational culture enlivens congregations and communities by engaging the scattered church in homes, at work, at school, and where they pursue their

hobbies. Missional revitalization's incarnational thrust welcomes intentional living, passionately loving God and neighbor while making positive contributions in a community. Missional revitalization fills a gap in an application through principles that encourage adherents to engage the church's scattered dimension.

Intervention Design and Implementation Summary

The intervention design aligns with the project's purpose of developing revitalization practices that connect the local believers' hearts and minds to biblical principles for improving church health and growth. The plan showed how a healthy church extends Christ's earthly mission by implementing perennial missional precepts first mandated to His disciples (Matt 28: 18-20). The intervention design employed local ministry resources for setting the stage, selecting and orientating participants, discussing the problem, and discussing missional activities.

The project facilitator obtained approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on February 17, 2021, to conduct a field project, establishing a solid foundation for the research (Appendix G). Approval was secured to ensure the project's compliance with federal and institutional guidelines requiring participants' consent along with proposed ministry activities. A letter requesting permission to solicit volunteer church auxiliary leaders' participation in a project study on church revitalization was also submitted to and approved by Victory Temple's senior pastor.

Predetermined volunteer selection and participation qualifications also ensured that only qualified church members attended a project selection and orientation meeting. The project facilitator thoroughly informed the auxiliary leaders about the project's purpose, meeting frequency, and participant obligations during that stage. The project facilitator further informed

the auxiliary leaders that data collection flowed through interviews, field observation notes, and surveys. The project facilitator also advised the auxiliary leaders that some of the questions addressed cultural, historical, and traditional norms. Selected questions also explored different areas that might influence current ministry practices.

Additionally, the project facilitator informed the auxiliary leaders that the time required for each meeting was approximately forty-five minutes, disclosing another commitment required for the project. The method used to update auxiliary leaders and ensure constant communication between scheduled meetings was group emails, group texts, and phone calls. The project facilitator also ensured auxiliary leaders that all personal information was kept private by securing that information in a locked file cabinet in the project facilitator's home. Finally, the project facilitator confirmed with the auxiliary leaders that another level of protection was in place to ensure participants' confidentiality by using codes ranging from P0001 to P0008 to mask their identities.

The Intervention's implementation mostly mirrored the intervention design. Documenting what was seen and heard during planned meetings proved invaluable when reporting the actual progression of the field project. Prayerfully reflecting on discussions and collaboration, which began during the second meeting, caused a deviation from planned interventions; however, this action assisted the stakeholders in fine-tuning the project's direction in the remaining implementation stages.

Moreover, triangulation aided in comparing and analyzing data. Analyzing surveys, project facilitator's field observer notes, and interviews served as divergent means to verify the veracity of the auxiliary leaders' responses. The project facilitator also remained aware that myriad data analyses might provide a clearer picture of the problem, and at other times, the data

sources might diverge. An additional challenge then was to study and report where likenesses and differences occurred. The project's impact flowed through the stakeholders' collaboration in framing the problem(s) that plagues Victory Temple's vitality and adopting proven ministry practices that leads to perpetual revitalization.

Theological and Theoretical Framework Results Summary

The project's results flowed through a theological and theoretical framework that provided the basis and practice for church renewal. The biblical foundation and example guided the project facilitator in collecting and analyzing data from three angles. Collecting and evaluating information from different angles also aided the project facilitator in assessing data validity and reliability. The tools required for verifying data trustworthiness assisted the project facilitator in making accurate judgments based upon precedent literature and the theological and theoretical foundations. So, data gathered from surveys, field observations, and follow-up interviews provided the information necessary to present the following result summaries.

Information collected through survey analyses showed an overall sixty-seven percent improvement in the participants' missional mindset after the project's implementation. The project facilitator captured the participants' opinions to survey statements on a Likert Scale by totaling their combined responses for each statement. The project facilitator used the longitudinal survey method in analyzing data collected from participants' responses to consistent survey statements at the beginning and end of the field project. The participants responded favorably to eight out of twelve statements, yielding overall positive results for the intervention, the first indicator of a successful implementation.

Data gathered from field observations revealed how the participants committed to collaboration to improve the church's spiritual health. The Holy Spirit led the participants into

positive ministry changes and the pathway for restoring Victory Temple's vitality, evidenced by prayer, humility, repentance, obedience, unity, stewardship, vulnerability, transparency, authenticity, and healing. The project facilitator captured participants' words and actions during five meetings that demonstrated how they worked together in following the Holy Spirit in charting a new course for God's purpose for the ministry.

The project facilitator also crafted canvassing questions for follow-up interviews that allowed more in-depth information to mitigate spiritual decadence. The participants discovered that an inward ministry focus rife with fearful, stubborn, argumentative, judgmental, ungodly, insensitive, and unwelcoming characteristics robbed God of His glory. The results presented through illustrations and narrative summaries confirmed that the intervention's follow-up interview design and implementation positively impacted Victory Temple's declining vitality and church growth.

The data triangulation tools used to measure the intervention's construct and implementation confirmed the church revitalization's plan effectiveness. A beginning and post-survey comparison in responses to missional statements indicated that the participants acknowledged a decline in Victory Temple's spiritual health and that they needed God to intervene. Positive ministry changes continued as the participants engaged in small group and corporate prayer and consorted to acts of humility, repentance, obedience, unity, stewardship, vulnerability, transparency, authenticity, and healing. Finally, the participants engaged in an outward ministry focus rather than an inward focus by planning church activities that connect the ministry with the community.

Comparison of the Project's Precedent Literature to the Results

The literature review is replete with authoritative research pointing to restored church vitality wherever a believers' body returns to first-century discipleship principles (e.g., missional engagement). The Holy Spirit enlivens congregations through missional activities that keep local churches connected to communities by readjusting their understanding of the ever-changing world's life. God called the church to be global while remaining distinctly attractive through Christian principles fostering plurality, diversity, and unity. So, a church thrives as it fulfills its prophetic role of spreading the gospel throughout the world.

Furthermore, times of refreshing follow when a church begins to embrace its Christian metanoia (renewing the old while simultaneously allowing the Holy Spirit to lead the church towards new things). Victory Temple's revitalization plan encapsulated missional precepts through an intervention design and implementation that guided Christ-followers' thinking and planning beyond the church's walls. The project's results mirrored the literature review evidenced by changes in both a mindset and subsequent church planning that redirected more church resources towards community engagement. Results from surveys, field observations, and follow-up interviews confirmed an improvement in Victory Temple's vitality, thereby agreeing with the precedent literature.

Knowledge Acquired While Implementing the Project

Zechariah 4:6 says, "So He said to me, this is the Word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty." Since the Holy Spirit is God's agent for building His kingdom, complete dependence upon Him was critical in leading Victory Temple into church revitalization. The project facilitator learned the following while following the Holy Spirit in implementing Victory Temple's spiritual renewal plan.

First, God is always working by His Spirit to revitalize dead or dying churches; however, the key is for leaders to recognize what He is doing. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders' complete cooperation throughout the project's implementation shows that God had already prepared their hearts to accept His life-producing changes for the ministry. The participants quickly grasped church renewal principles and accepted the challenge to glorify God.

Second, the project facilitator learned that allaying fears and suspicions was necessary from the project's beginning. The participants revealed their accurate assessment of Victory Temple's spiritual condition only after they fully understood the true motivation for the investigation. The project facilitator also realized that collaboration was made easier through a constant awareness of maintaining group parity. Group trust increased exponentially by assuaging the paralyzing grip of fear and suspicion.²³⁷

Third, the project facilitator learned that including Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders in the field project assisted in accurately identifying problems beneath the surface. Once reassured about the project's purpose, participants gladly shared information relevant to a decline in Victory Temple's vibrancy and membership. Since implementing the project, two people joined the ministry, and two former members renewed their membership, possibly attributed to participants sharing their knowledge about underlying ministry issues.

Fourth, the project facilitator learned that authenticity, transparency, and true repentance must precipitate moving forward into God's purpose(s) for a ministry. However, church business is messy at times and unresolved member confrontations can impede spiritual maturity. The project facilitator led the participants with their problems into God's presence which was prescriptive for removing barriers to restoring Victory Temple's vitality. The Holy Spirit

²³⁷ Stringer, *Action Research*, 67.

cultivated a healthy group environment in which the participants began to confess some of their deepest feelings, concerns, and regrets about the ministry. The Holy Spirit then slowly moved the participants beyond stagnation, often associated with death, into well-springs of living waters.

Fifth, the project facilitator learned that carefully analyzing data gathered only from the participants' point of view is key to addressing genuine ministry problems. The project facilitator remembered Stringer's statement that personal interpretations and intuitions can contaminate and/or sabotage many investigative hours if the project facilitator does not trust the information gathered from the participants' perspectives and experiences.²³⁸ However, trusting, analyzing, and charting data obtained through specially designed investigative tools provided an accurate ministry assessment summary which supports continuing the intervention's implementation.

Application of the Results in Other Settings

A study of precedent literature on church revitalization/renewal confirms that church leaders must remain keenly aware of declining congregational vitality and adopt biblical precepts to restore church life where noticed. One of the first religious exercises of the New Testament church after Pentecost was to preserve the apostles' doctrine. Local churches placed themselves under God's authority by accepting counsel available through study and adherence to His Word (Acts 2:42). The early church leaders' biblical response to both internal and external pressures preserved church vitality, resulting in growth.

²³⁸ Stringer, *Action Research*, 139.

However, today, lusterless churches persist across North America. The answer to maintaining congregational life lies in following Jesus' example. The first-century church was missional: active, engaging, and multiplying through discipleship as it moved into public places and from house to house (Acts 2:14, 41, 42, 46, 47). The first apostles followed Christ's example with an outward-focused emphasis.

Victory Temple's leaders also turned to Scripture to abate a precipitous decline in spiritual vibrancy. Ministry leaders only need to respond to Christ's call to "...Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house may be full" (Luke 14:23). Other ministry leaders may replicate Victory Temple's results by also renewing a commitment to bear fruit that remains (John 15:16).

Future Research

Situations sometimes arise during a field project's implementation that warrant follow-up either due to an impactful late discovery, the need to assess a field project's outcome, or the need to evaluate an agreed-upon commitment. The following describes actions for future research for Victory Temple's field project.

The participants in the field project agreed to extend their small group prayer into a church corporate prayer opportunity, already begun on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. The stakeholders concluded that including the entire congregation in praying for the church and community might unify the members while cultivating an outward focus. The participants' commitment commands future research.

The participants also agreed to meetings beyond the field project's scope to maintain a cohesive leadership core. The meetings start the third Tuesday in August and every other month

after that, following the corporate prayer meetings. Future research for this commitment is also necessary to evaluate continued forward momentum in restoring Victory Temple's church health.

Finally, during the field project, the project facilitator accepted an invitation to minister to a small group in a rural community once a month. A missional approach to church revitalization challenges adherents to move into the community and forge a relationship with others. This action deserves future research to observe how obedient hearts will bring more glory to God.

Recommendations

A field project is incomplete without making recommendations that might help improve or completely mitigate a problem. The problem in this field project is that Victory Temple is not growing. The project facilitator makes the following recommendations based upon the field research's results.

The obvious recommendation is that the ministry fully adopts and implements the church revitalization plan. Specifically: (1) Victory Temple continues corporate prayer meetings twice a month and agrees with the senior pastor on God's vision for the ministry; (2) The senior pastor continues to set an example for the stakeholders and congregation in confession, repentance, and accountability; (3) The stakeholders continue to meet bi-monthly to assess the church's spiritual condition; (4) The senior pastor teaches and empowers church members to use their spiritual gifts for edifying the church body; (5) The senior pastor releases auxiliary leaders into the community through planning activities and budget appropriations that connect the church to the community.

Finally, a study in church revitalization resulted in a spiritual refreshing in the project facilitator. A focused scriptural study on the theological basis for spiritual rejuvenation revealed

God's call to church leaders to strengthen the things that are ready to die (Rev 3:2). A search of precedent literature on church health and growth also showed how struggling congregations can move into spiritual currents that enlivens.²³⁹ The project facilitator is encouraged knowing that God will continue the spiritual resurgence begun at Victory Temple for His Glory (Phil 1:6).

²³⁹ Tennant, *Catch the Wind of the Spirit*, 45.

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APPENDIX A
PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

[Date]

Elder [REDACTED]
Pastor
Victory Temple House of Refuge
[REDACTED]

Dear Elder [REDACTED]:

As a doctoral student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my project is “Victory Temple House of Refuge: A Missional Focused Revitalization Strategy” and the purpose of my project is to develop a revitalization strategy for Victory Temple that will connect the hearts and minds of its leaders to biblical principles for restoring church health and growth. I am writing to request your permission to invite some of Victory Temple’s leaders to participate in my project study.

Participants will be asked to contact me at [REDACTED] if they plan to attend a meeting on (Date). Participants will also be asked to complete the attached surveys. Additionally, participants will be asked to read and sign an informed consent document prior to participating in the study. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcomed to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Project Facilitator

Encl: beginning survey questions (1), post survey questions (2)

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a doctoral student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctorate degree. The purpose of my project is to develop a revitalization strategy for Victory Temple that will connect the hearts and minds of its leaders to biblical principles for restoring church health and growth. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be eighteen years of age or older, Victory Temple's pastor, or a ministry auxiliary leader. Participants, if willing, will be asked to attend five weekly and/or bi-monthly project group meetings and two surveys. It should take approximately seven hours total to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate please contact me at [REDACTED] for more details about a meeting on (Date). A consent document will be given to you at that meeting if you choose to participate. The consent document contains additional information about the project. Once received, please read, sign, and return it by the next scheduled meeting.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Project Facilitator
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX C

CONSENT LETTER

Title of the Project: Victory Temple House of Refuge: A Missional Focused Revitalization Strategy

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED], Project Facilitator, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Project Study

You are invited to participate in a project study. In order to participate, you must be at least eighteen years old, Victory Temple's pastor, or a church auxiliary leader. Taking part in this project study is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to develop a revitalization strategy for Victory Temple that will connect the hearts and minds of its leaders to biblical principles for restoring church health and growth.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you are asked to do the following things:

Attend five weekly and/or bi-monthly project group meetings and complete two surveys. It should take approximately seven hours total to complete the procedures listed. The researcher plans to record the meeting so that notes can be transcribed and provided to each participant.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Project records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future project studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any

information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared. Participant responses will be kept confidential by using a coding system. Data will be stored in the researcher's locked file cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, records will be shredded. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored in the researcher's locked file cabinet for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

To participate in the project, you will need to pay for your own meals and transportation costs.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher is a clergy member and serves as the assistant pastor at Victory Temple where preaching and teaching are the primary roles. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Victory Temple. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a project participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX D

BEGINNING PROJECT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Instructions: Please complete the below survey and return it to the research facilitator by the next meeting. Check the selection beneath the questions that best represents the participant's choice.

1. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

2. I often look for God's redemptive activity in people's lives and join in the Holy Spirit's work.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

3. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

4. Victory Temple's members understands the meaning of the term "missional."
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
5. Victory Temple's church activities reflect a missional focus.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
6. Victory Temple's church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join with Christ in building His church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
7. Victory Temple's presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

8. Witnessing God's salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian's duty.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
9. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
10. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders are willing to sacrifice sacred traditional programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
11. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple's health and growth.
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

12. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit's authority, God's purpose for a ministry rises above other motives.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX E
POST PROJECT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Instructions: Please complete the below questionnaire and return it to the project facilitator by (Date). Write responses to the questions in the space provided or check the selection beneath the questions that best represents the participant's choice.

1. What does it mean to be saved?

2. God extends His salvation to people even if they do not attend church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

3. I often look for God's redemptive activity in people's lives and join in the Holy Spirit's work.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

4. What spiritual fellowship (prayer, Scripture study, etc.) do you engage in with people who do not attend church?

5. What are some of the signs of a spiritually healthy church?

6. I believe that Victory Temple is spiritually healthy.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
7. Victory Temple's members understands the meaning of the term "missional."
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
8. Victory Temple's church activities reflect a missional focus.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
9. What could Victory Temple's members do to engage in more missional activities?
10. Victory Temple's church activities are designed to reach out to the community and join with Christ in building His church.
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

11. Victory Temple's presence would be missed if the church no longer engaged in community activities.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

12. Witnessing God's salvation through Christ to friends and neighbors is a Christian's duty.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

13. Victory Temple makes a special effort to connect with people in the community.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

14. I am willing to surrender personal church preferences if it would improve Victory Temple's health and growth.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

15. What missional activities could you engage in to help improve Victory Temple's spiritual health?

16. Victory Temple's auxiliary leaders willingly sacrifice sacred traditional programs to ensure church activities with greater community outreach take precedence.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. When a church submits to the Holy Spirit's authority, God's purpose for a ministry rises above other motives.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX F

FIELD OBSERVATION NOTES

First Meeting Observation: Field Project Selection and Orientation (May 20, 2021)

The stakeholders stated the following after the project facilitator introduced the field project and solicited their comments:

P0008 stated that developing a better system for tracking church growth and decline should be addressed before moving forward with the field project.

P0004 voiced financial concerns about preparing meals for the community's elderly and others who might need food assistance.

P0001 responded to P0004 by stating that the issue in the past was not financial but confusion and disunity that developed. P0001 further stated that others were already making plans for the kitchen auxiliary to reengage in providing community meals where needed.

P0008 also voiced a need to revitalize the new member's orientation process.

P0005 agreed with P0008 that implementing a church/denominational indoctrination process would help new members adapt quicker to the church's customs.

P0004 added that some church practices are even challenging for long-time church members.

P0003 then shared from prior church experiences that new members were required to complete at least six-week of denominational/church orientation. P0003 added that connecting new members with current members is part of their curriculum.

P0001 stated that new beginners' indoctrination materials were already available.

P0006 stated that encouraging visitors and new members was critical. The more the church reaches out to them, the easier it will be for them to catch on to our customs and feel like they are part of the church.

P0002 then stated that before the stakeholders can become missional, the volunteers must learn to work together inside the church. P0002 added that visitors notice disunity, so working together will help our missional efforts. P0002 then said that if a person does not agree with someone else, try to refrain from speaking negatively about their sponsored programs. Instead, seek other ways to support sister auxiliaries (e.g., finances, supplies) if unable to be physically present.

P0005 shared how witnessing Christ to someone on the job during the COVID-19 pandemic turned into an invitation for them to visit Victory Temple. P0005 disclosed that past denominational financial demands during a period of personal sickness by the person resulted in them leaving that church. Now the person is seeking a new place to attend church services. P0005 also shared that many people want to attend church but are discouraged by past lousy church experiences.

P0003 then shared that handing out tracks in the community would be a good idea for connecting with people.

P0007 shared that the group conversation flowed well through the Google Duo connection.

Second Meeting Observation: Problem Discussion (May 29, 2021)

The project facilitator started the meeting by addressing a shared stakeholders' concern from the first meeting: Stakeholders' and church disunity. The project facilitator anticipated that discussing the issue would assist the participants in seeing more clearly the way disunity negatively affects church vitality and growth.

Since problems rarely exist in isolation, the project facilitator asked the group to partner with another stakeholder and pray for each other, church unity, and the field project's success. The project facilitator added that the stakeholders must first become unified and set an example of unity for the rest of the congregation. The project facilitator then referenced a plea for unity in the first meeting by P0001, where the participant asked for forgiveness for any trespasses against other stakeholders. The project facilitator then asked P0001 and P0007; P0006 and P0008; P0002, P0004, and P0005 to form groups and pray for a few minutes before moving forward with the meeting.

After the stakeholders prayed together for approximately five minutes, the project facilitator asked them to continue praying for each other, church unity, and the project's success throughout the week. The project facilitator also asked the participants if they wanted to start the remaining meetings by praying in small groups. After the stakeholders agreed, the project facilitator stated that as the Holy Spirit leads them into genuine, authentic fellowship, He will also equip them to lead the entire church into vibrant activities and restoration.

The project facilitator then led the stakeholders into a discussion on the possible reason(s) why Victory Temple's health and growth was declining:

P0002 pointed to lingering hurts, disappointments, problems, and pains within the ministry as significant contributors to Victory Temple's overall decline. P0002 also stated that some of the declines in membership were traceable to people who disagree with God's requirement to live holy. P0002 further stated that the church must become mature in a relationship with God before offering help to others by stating, "We must get it together."

The project facilitator then asked the group: “What is generally the source of a congregation’s need to “get it together?” P0008 responded, “disunity,” and the rest of the stakeholders agreed.

The stakeholders framed the question that surfaced from the discussion: Why is Victory Temple not growing spiritually and numerically? The stakeholders then agreed that the answer to the question was disunity, resulting from spiritual immaturity.

P0005 added that a decline in membership occurred when the young people were experiencing an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. P0005 added that many members left the ministry because of unbelief.

P0005 also stated that God’s Word was being taught and preached at Victory Temple, and the young people were repeating biblical truths to their friends. P0005 also stated that the young people were emboldened to challenge erroneous statements regarding salvation and righteousness.

As the discussion closed, the project facilitator encouraged stakeholders to consider missional activities over the next week to lead their auxiliaries.

P0008 then asked for verification of how long the field project would last. The project facilitator responded, “four to six months.” P0008 then asked if the group could continue meeting after the field project’s duration. P0008 added that meeting together helps leaders in providing direction for the church. The project facilitator responded, “We can continue with the meetings if the group agrees.” The other stakeholders agreed with P0008.

P0001 then acknowledged that some of Victory Temple’s spiritual health and growth issues resulted from disobedience to God’s plans for the church. P0001 added that a detour from preaching the gospel led to sermons designed to appease people. The thought was that a robust membership would ensure a steady flow of finances to pay off recent church renovation expenses. P0001 added that the leader bears the ultimate responsibility for the church and that God reminded P0001 of God’s providence during the COVID-19 shut-down. P0001 also stated that although many members faltered in their previous spiritual and financial support, Victory Temple still survived.

P0001 then stated that some people in the community feel unwelcome by some of Victory Temple’s members when they visit. P0001 then said, “People must experience God’s love through our actions and see unity when they visit.”

Third Meeting Observation: Missional Orientation Discussion (June 7, 2021)

The project facilitator facilitated a discussion by returning to P0008’s statement that the group continues this type of forum beyond the field project’s scope.

The project facilitator asked the participants their opinion about meeting monthly or quarterly beyond the project's duration. The project facilitator also asked the group's opinion about including the congregation in a corporate prayer meeting. Afterward, they could share more about the project and how God was blessing the group. The project facilitator asked the stakeholders to also think about sharing ideas with their groups on connecting with the community better. The project facilitator said that when members equip themselves to "go" and make disciples by following the Holy Spirit, the church will grow.

P0003 asked for clarification on Jesus' command to His disciples to "go" by asking, "Do you mean being sent by God or the pastor?" The project facilitator responded that it is a combination since God planned that His people have a covering and that if the leader approves of what one is doing, they are "sent" by the ministry. The project facilitator added that one God's first actions for Adam and Eve after they knew they were naked was to cover them. Everyone needs to have a covering not to set themselves up to be hurt or possibly fail.

P0003 then sought further clarification on Jesus' command to "go," by asking, "Once you have the pastor's approval to 'go,' is it necessary to ask each time you engage in missional work?" The project facilitator responded, "I will not answer for the pastor, but my opinion is that as long as the pastor knows what you are doing, you have a ministry covering." The project facilitator added that the pastor might also require monthly reports on missional activity, referencing some Methodist denominational practices. Their pastors report monthly activities on communions administered to the homebound, home/hospital visitations, and baptisms.

P0005 voiced a hesitancy about engaging in missional activities because of past bad experiences at another church. P0005 then expressed a willingness to engage in missional activity. P0005 then stated that missional activity at another church became an opportunity for some to shine the light on themselves rather than point people to Christ. P0005 also expressed excitement to engage in missional work correctly.

The project facilitator then transitioned the conversation by asking the stakeholders to consider what God was speaking to them about connecting with the community. Examples were given by stating that the deacons might administer communion to the homebound or those in nursing homes or visit those in prison; the women's auxiliary might also visit those in nursing homes and hospitals; the choir leader might select songs that speak to God's missional activity; The Sunday School leader might focus on God's missional activity in sending His Son, Jesus' missional activity in sending The Eleven, and Paul's missionary journeys. The project facilitator then gave the example of how the early church was always on the move.

P0003 then revealed the reason for the participant's previous questions about missional work/making disciples by sharing a personal impression from God to "fill a need in someone's life."

P0005 added comments to a previous statement about a prior bad experience in doing missional work stating that visiting nursing homes was the assignment; however, when the person who accepted the assignment no longer wanted to make the visits, the assignment was passed to others. P0005 also added that weighing bad memories of condemnation for not accepting the responsibility resulted in much personal anxiety.

The project facilitator mentioned other means of discipleship by possibly hosting small groups that focus on grief, divorce, and single parenting. P0005 responded that people are looking for those types of connections. P0005 then spoke about a small group meeting in a home for over a year and how the people were comforted by God and that Victory Temple grew spiritually and numerically. P0005 stated that sometimes people just want someone else to listen to their story without opinions or judgment. P0003 added, coming together provides comfort to others who may learn that they are not alone and that there is hope.

The project facilitator then asked the group, “What would it look like if the group presented to the pastor the idea of meeting with the rest of the church for corporate prayer, share what God is doing in the stakeholders’ meetings, and share ideas about how each auxiliary plans to connect with the community?”

P0005 responded that it would be fantastic. P0003 responded that it would be awesome because other church members share some of the same ideas.

P0005 then stated that when the church was growing, the small group was active. P0005 also stated that by sharing hurts from a terrible church experience and the subsequent healing after joining Victory Temple, many in the group followed P0005’s family.

P0003 asked if other interested community members might come to Victory Temple’s corporate prayer meeting. The project facilitator responded, “that may be possible.” P0003 added that corporate prayer might encourage others to come out of their shell and express their love for God more openly.

The stakeholders asked to meet again on Jun 14, 2021, for corporate prayer, to share missional ideas, and the spiritual resurgence taking place in the group. The stakeholders agreed to announce on Sunday, June 13, 2021, about the corporate prayer. The project facilitator made a note to add the comments in the meeting’s notes to update the pastor.

Fourth Meeting Observation: Post Research Survey Distribution (June 20, 2021)

The stakeholders agreed again that the group should continue meeting beyond the field project dates. (This was a great decision since revitalization is always ongoing in the body of Christ).

The project facilitator asked the stakeholders to continue praying for each other, church unity, the field project’s success, repentance, forgiveness, healing from other church member’s hurtful

words and actions, spiritual maturity, and that the church might become more welcoming to visitors.

The stakeholders also stated that they wanted to meet monthly or quarterly beyond the project's duration to continue revitalization efforts. The stakeholders shared that the corporate church prayer held on June 14, 2021, was successful. The project facilitator then allowed the stakeholders to share their ideas about how they planned to better connect with the community.

P0008 shared that forming a community choir was where God was leading the choir auxiliary.

P0007 shared that the deacons would move into the community to connect with other men who did not attend church.

P0005 shared that forming a support group for single mothers and women in distress were areas God was reviving for connecting with females in the community. P0005 stated that she was already connecting with people on the job about why they no longer attend church. Some of their responses were: Too much hypocrisy, fakeness, too much emphasis on finances, unwelcoming spirit, condemning spirit. The people would rather experience love, compassion, concern, and spiritual food than hearing, "We have not seen you in a while."

P0003 shared that it is vital to remain ready to minister to others wherever a need arises. Seeing people in need and being led by God is the key.

P0004 stated that we should ask God how to deal with difficult people. Additionally, many people do not fellowship with Victory Temple because we do not fellowship with them. Also, many people do not visit Victory Temple because some members condemn them for their dress.

The project facilitator then asked the stakeholders for feedback on the group meetings:

P0003 stated that the group was becoming more confident in responding to what God was saying. The group talked more about Victory Temple's issues and was more concerned about others' feelings and connecting with the community.

P0008 stated that the group must continue learning about doing missional work. Making disciples is what Jesus commanded His disciples to do. "Why should we stop what we are doing now?"

P0005 stated that our coming together had created an environment where the people want to come to church. Also, "thank you (leaders) for not asking the visitor today to stand and greet the congregation. Also, that, "When leaders ask people to stand and greet the congregation, leaders sometimes push them away, especially those who have not been to church in a while."

P0006 stated that the way to become good leaders is to communicate with each other.

P0002 stated a desire to clear the air regarding some personal hurts suffered by other church members so that the meeting might move forward. P0002 then stated that unforgiveness and the hurt that follows were the issues. P0002 first asked for forgiveness from anyone in the group if they had suffered personal hurt through the participant's actions. P0002 expressed a desire to move beyond personal hurts suffered by others so that the participant might grow spiritually. P0002 then forgave some others and said afterward, "We must get things right...so, I forgive anyone who has hurt me. I must release the personal hurt I have suffered over the past four or five years...The people who have hurt me, my husband, or my family may not be in this room, but I love everyone at Victory Temple. If I have hurt anyone, know from the bottom of my heart that I am sorry because I want to grow and become a better person."

The project facilitator commended P0002 for the authentic words shared with the group and acknowledged the healing that was taking place. The project facilitator stated that God created a group environment where some now feel safe enough to share their innermost feelings.

P0004 then stated that we must be mindful that we do not lose ground, drop-off, and return to our old ways.

P0008 stated that the church, as a business, must come together and deal with issues. We must continue to make time to deal with church issues. The project facilitator challenged P0008 to see the church as a spiritually led organism instituted by God through Christ.

P0005 stated that P0002 deserved a response to an outpouring of the participant's heart to the group by saying that P0005 had not been offended by P0002. P0005 also asked P0002 for forgiveness for any unknown trespasses. P0002 accepted P0005's request for forgiveness.

P0003 stated that many times people are unaware that they are hurting and rejecting others. These meetings are helping the group to see that everyone must ask for forgiveness for known and unknown deeds. P0003 asked the group for forgiveness and then forgave others. P0003 further stated that the stakeholders' meetings were helping the group to see more clearly.

P0003 then asked if the group could invite other community members to the corporate prayer meeting. The group decided that the prayer meetings should be focused on internal issues first before inviting others.

P0002 stated that it is critical for the group not to give up on missional activities, even when people do not respond positively. If the group keeps pushing forward, people will catch on.

Fifth Meeting Observation: Post Research Survey Collection and Coding (June 27, 2021)

The project facilitator facilitated a discussion on continuing the auxiliary leaders' meetings beyond the field project's scope. After a brief discussion, the members agreed to meet every

other month on the third Tuesday after corporate prayer, starting in August 2021. The stakeholders scheduled auxiliary meetings for between thirty and forty minutes.

The project facilitator encouraged the group to continue working together as God leads the church through revitalization.

The project facilitator commended P0007 for speaking from Matthew 28:18-20 during the Deacon's auxiliary space before the midday sermon.

The project facilitator commended the auxiliary leaders for their faithfulness during the field project.

P0002 advised the project facilitator that the church membership statistics were forthcoming.

APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

February 17, 2021

██████████
██████████

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-599 Victory Temple House of Refuge: A Missional Focused Revitalization Strategy

Dear ██████████,

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 does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason: Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision 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 non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,

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