

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

Toby D. Wagoner

Lynchburg, Virginia

February 2024

Copyright © 2024 by Toby D. Wagoner
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Report Approval Sheet

Dr. Jeffrey S. Mayfield
Professor

Dr. Lance T. Beauchamp
Assistant Professor

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT REPORT ABSTRACT

Toby D. Wagoner

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2023

Mentor: Dr. Jeffrey Mayfield

Small rural churches tend to have an inward-focus mindset fueled by the need for self-preservation and survival. This transactional ministry mindset negatively impacts sharing the love of Christ with others, culminating in apathetic attitudes toward church functionality. The problem this DMin action research project sought to address is the inward focus of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members. The church needs to improve its evangelism and discipleship efforts, embrace sharing their love of Christ with others, begin engaging guests on a meaningful level, and consider facility upgrades. Members were reminded of the importance of demonstrating their love of Christ to others and taking advantage of evangelism and discipleship opportunities through role-playing exercises. This DMin action research project involved hosting a training program called “*Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation.*” This program generated support for a strategic plan that addresses four areas of church operations. Thirty-two participants were involved in the training, representing half of all member families. Pre-and post-training assessments and group discussions were focal points. The goal was to shift participants’ inward-focused mindset toward a transformational mindset emphasizing soul care. A positive correlation between training and discussion resulted in a renewed sense of purpose and vision for the church. The church adopted a declaration supporting the revitalization effort and appointed a vision committee to oversee implementation. This DMin action research project will assist other rural congregations that have found themselves with similar inward-focus problems.

Keywords: transactional ministry, missional, inward focus, rural church, spiritual growth, discipleship, sharing the love of Jesus, guests, revitalization, transformation

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction	1
Ministry Context	9
Demographics.....	9
Church Structure.....	10
Church Atmosphere.....	10
Lack of Speaking About Jesus.....	14
Assessing Formal and Traditional Structures.....	15
Parking Concerns.....	17
Seating Issues.....	17
Lack of Information.....	18
Lack of Visitor Engagement.....	19
Lack of Signage.....	19
Church History.....	20
Problem Presented	21
Purpose Statement	23
Basic Assumptions	26
Definitions	28
Limitations	35
Delimitations	36
Thesis Statement	38

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Framework	42
Literature Review	50
Exploring Healthy Church Models.....	53
Needing Discipleship and Spiritual Growth.....	62
The Need for a Committed, Christ Honoring Church.....	69
Sharing Jesus with Others.....	73
The Importance of Love in the Church.....	79
Embracing New Ideas Positions the Church for Growth.....	81
First Impressions Are Impactful.....	84
Asking Jesus to Change Hearts.....	87
Growth Mindset Over Fixed Mindset.....	90
The Need for the Church to Make Disciples.....	91
Theological Foundations	94
Theoretical Foundations	110
Conclusion	116

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodology	120
Intervention Design	125

Training Curriculum.....	126
Basis for the Intervention.....	130
Challenges to Church Traditions.....	138
<i>Others First</i> Training Overview.....	139
Training Progression.....	142
Implementation of Intervention Design.....	148
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	
Results.....	153
<i>Others First</i> Progression Model.....	153
Collective Results.....	156
Participants.....	156
Data Analysis.....	160
Summary of Results.....	168
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	
Conclusion.....	173
Research Implications.....	175
Research Applications.....	187
Research Limitations.....	191
Further Research.....	193
Summary.....	195
Appendix A: STRATEGIC ROADMAP.....	198
Appendix B: MALE SECRET SHOPPER RESPONSES.....	199
Appendix C: FEMALE SECRET SHOPPER RESPONSES.....	200
Appendix D: PARTICIPANT REGISTRATION FORM.....	201
Appendix E: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	202
Appendix F: MEMBER INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPATE.....	205
Appendix G: VISION/IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.....	206
Appendix H: CHURCH DECLARATION SUPPORTING THE PROJECT.....	207
Appendix I: BECOMING MORE MISSIONAL.....	208
Bibliography.....	209
IRB Approval Letter/Waiver Page.....	218

Tables

3.0	Intervention Design.....	126
3.1	Training Agenda Week One	130
3.2	Training Agenda Week Two.....	131
3.3	Training Agenda Week Three.....	132
3.4	Training Agenda Week Four	133
3.5	<i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation Implementation</i>	150
4.0	Post-Training Survey	169

Illustrations

Figures

3.0	<i>Others First</i> Logo.....	121
3.1	Training Facility Needs.....	137
3.2	<i>Roadmap 4 Transformation</i>	147
4.0	Progression for Improvement Project	153
4.1	Visual Roadmap Strategic Plan	154
4.2	Age of Participants in <i>Others First</i> Training	157
4.3	Gender of <i>Others First</i> Training Participants	157
4.4	Education Level of Participants	158
4.5	Attendance and Number of Member Families Represented at Church	159
4.6	Member Households Represented in the <i>Others First</i> Training	159
4.7	I'm Excited to See What This Project Will Mean for the Church	160
4.8	Willingness to Trust the Pastor's Leading of the Transformation	162
4.9	How is FBC Leaving a Legacy	163
4.10	If We Had to Build a New Church to Grow	164
4.11	I Talk About Jesus Before the Service.....	166
4.12	How Often Do You Talk About Jesus?	166
4.13	Our Church Helps People Grow in Their Faith	167

Abbreviations

DMin	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FBC	<i>First Baptist Church</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Across the nation, many rural churches are experiencing an attendance decline as people fail to recognize the importance of sharing their joy and love in serving the Lord. The concern is that the Church's lack of a transformational focus contributes significantly to this issue. This problem intensifies when a church maintains an inward focus, creating a feeling of isolation for Christian and non-Christian guests. Members are not taking advantage of the opportunity to tell guests about their experiences serving the Lord and how the church can help them grow in their faith. There is little discussion among other church members about their love for the Lord. Perhaps the member's heart has become complacent with the week-to-week service, with no desire for spiritual maturity. When a church member fails to share his or her testimony and professes his or her love for the Lord, will the guest be left to ponder if the church does not want to help guests grow in a dynamic relationship with Jesus? The Holy Spirit must be active in this process.

Church visitors thrive when they establish relationships with leaders and congregation members early and can find the programs and facilities that meet their needs. These relationships help foster a desire within the Christian visitor to attend more services and grow in their love for the Lord because they see the church receiving them as guests, not outsiders. Non-Christians can view this hospitality as a safe environment where they can seek out a relationship with Christ and people are joyful in their salvation and excited to tell the news about Jesus. In both cases, relationships will thrive as guests learn the value of the Church, helping them grow to love Jesus

more. The attendant misses an opportunity to evangelize the lost and disciple other believers when their focus is on more worldly issues in the church than the gospel.

Christian and non-Christian guests can sense an inviting nature when the church member, through personal engagement, instills a sense that the church is welcoming, sincere, loving, and generally glad to see them. The church can support this genuine love by having programs and a renewed desire to share their faith in Christ with others, demonstrating that the church is concerned about the visitors' experience and cultivating an environment promoting communal spiritual growth with programs with discipleship and evangelistic components. Members sharing their love of Christ with Christian guests demonstrates how becoming a part of the Church will improve their faith journey and open doors for discipleship opportunities. For the seeker, members who demonstrate the love of Christ in their presence demonstrate what a changed life looks like and the joy that can come about through a personal relationship with Jesus.

Unfortunately, because of a church's inward focus, church leaders and members may be unaware of the harmful impacts of neglecting visitor engagement as part of critical church functionality. Failing to embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life and sharing one's love of Christ with others can create a mindset that leads to feelings of isolation, unimportance, and overall unwelcomeness by Christian and non-Christian guests. Visitor neglect may go unnoticed by church members because these members already have established relationships with other members and non-members inside the church and are content in these circles.

However, this oversight by church leaders and members to not help others see the joy in serving the Lord will impede church growth spiritually and numerically and could cause someone to question the church's love of Christ. Therefore, by providing inward-focus

transformational training to church leaders and members, the church can prayerfully identify and correct their actions that may impede a guest's experience or hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in the church by failing to share the love of Christ with others. This quality improvement project will help church leaders and members embrace a four-step strategic action plan that focuses on the need for spiritual revitalization through prayer, practicing spiritual disciplines, and learning how to better share one's faith with others as part of a customized curriculum that emphasizes overall church functionality centered around learning to share one's faith and love of Christ with people they have just met.

Ignoring the church's transactional attitudes will jeopardize church members missing organic relationship-building opportunities that can lead to evangelism and discipleship. Training will help church members understand that by maintaining an inward focus, the church can seem uncaring and selfish to visitors because of their lesser focus on Jesus.

Additionally, the training will help instill a personal revival where members will learn how to talk more about their love for Jesus and how the Church has impacted their lives. Having a renewed excitement in serving the Lord opens the door for the church to become more welcoming while encouraging others to consider employing spiritual disciplines to enhance their walk with Christ. The training will further allow the church to examine the existing facility to determine if making improvements will enhance the comfortability and accessibility of the church. Together, these areas of church functionality can embolden revitalization efforts through the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, help members rekindle their love for Jesus, and build enthusiasm in the church, all while underscoring the importance of positioning the church to meet the needs of an ever-changing culture where first impressions are critical.

The crux of the problem with a transactional attitude is that the church can ignore its behaviors because it sees itself as caring, loving, and genuinely wanting visitors to attend. Visitors often believe the church is healthy and loving because they know the care that exists for each other when needs arise. Further exacerbating the problem is when a church member focuses on other members in the congregation before the service rather than guests. Members should use this time to share their love for Christ and their church with visitors and demonstrate how mutual fellowship helps faith grow. Seeing the excitement a member has about serving Jesus can become contagious and perhaps lead to discipleship opportunities. This critical component of connectedness is missing in First Baptist Church.

Complicating the matter is that a church's inward focus can indicate genuine love for those within the congregation because members perceive the attention of others as being loved. Such feelings are fair assumptions if one is willing to equally apply the same logic to how a visitor or other person feels when they consider themselves ignored by church members. When visitors hear other members talk about activities in their personal lives but never hear anything about their love for Jesus or their involvement in the church, their excitement about serving the Lord is called into question.

Outsiders may view their lack of attention from church members as selfish, rude, or indifferent. This vantage point occurs when a congregation is unaware of their lack of an outward focus. A repeat visit would be unlikely if a guest perceives a church in this manner. Even worse could be the visitor's comments to others about their experience at the church, which could impact the church's reputation in the community.

While these judgments are unfair and likely untrue, they will indeed occur if no action occurs to transform the inward focus of the church. Hence, by creating and implementing a

custom training program geared toward reversing a church's inward focus, there can be a genuine revitalization of the heart where the love and care of guests become far superior than extending simple pleasantries. This refocusing of the church occurs as leadership and members view visitors as purposely chosen by God to be at their church at that very moment. Additionally, by considering the church facility as part of the overall review process, there is an opportunity for the church to determine if improvements are needed to better meet the needs of guests. This premise is critical to consider guest satisfaction, but learning to share the love of Christ with others is life-changing. When both components unite, the church is ready to engage guests meaningfully, providing spiritual growth. Through training dates and four months of strategic planning implementation, this quality improvement project for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood does both.

The church will come to see taking care of visitors as their responsibility to impact that particular soul, which may lead to repeat visits and eventually membership. This mindset will be accomplished by having church leaders and members complete the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* custom training program. This program addresses members' inward-focus mindset and helps convert it into a transformational mindset that understands the importance of wanting to embrace visitors to see them grow in Christ as they become disciples of Christ. As part of the curriculum, the church will follow the action steps identified in the program to reform four areas of church functionality, including guest engagement practices, facility needs, member actions, and program enhancements.

The *Roadmap* outlines how the church can begin making personal spiritual improvements through prayer and practicing spiritual disciplines coupled with the pastor preaching personal revival and spiritual renewal involving the importance of sharing one's love

of Christ with believers and non-believers. This awakening should encourage and provoke a desire to initiate improvements to immediately impact guest satisfaction, paving the way for evangelism and spiritual growth. Together, church leaders and guests will complete the training curriculum over five weeks in four sessions, underscoring the importance of a renewed desire to love and serve and implementing the changes identified in the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, demonstrating their renewed focus on overcoming transactional attitudes and becoming more transformational. If deemed necessary, the church facility may need to undergo some improvements to become more guest-friendly and inviting to foster spiritual growth and connectivity. Much of the training program involves group discussions to examine existing attitudes and actions. This discussion will demonstrate the immediate need to improve these interactions.

Rural churches need a strategic transformation model to help bolster their willingness to share the love of Christ, which will impact guests. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, is explicitly geared to First Baptist Church of Ravenswood and will address the transactional mindset in smaller churches that prefer to do things they have always done as part of some conservation ideal. However, the training module provides a broader understanding of what an inward focus entails and how it looks inside the church to members and leaders versus how it looks to those outside the church.

Implementing the action steps on the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, the church can convert its inward focus by engaging church leaders and members through self-awareness training. This training addresses personal preferences and attitudes, programs and objectives, and church practices that, if reformed, could lead to meaningful visitor engagement. This training will also challenge leaders and members to consider whether the facility needs improvement to

meet guests' needs. Those enrolled in the training will see that the discussion makes a case for the need for the transformation process to begin, which supports the notion of a quality improvement project. This training is essential in creating a desire for sustainability beyond the initial project. As indicated in Appendix A, the strategic roadmap will be instituted across four months or 120 days following the four training dates, which will help improve each area of concern.

Success will be two-fold as the curriculum addresses the pervasive inward focus that exists within most churches and provides the action steps to be taken to make immediate improvements in the church to address spiritual needs, programming, and any needed facility improvements. Members will learn the importance of sharing their love of Jesus with others, which signifies what the church can do for them spiritually. By the time the training is completed, members will be more aware of the importance of having an outward focus and becoming missional toward guest engagement by helping others learn how to live out their faith joyfully. Members will also role-play in knowing how to lead someone to faith in Christ when needed.

One unique aspect of the curriculum is a pause that allows feedback from pre-training surveys to be shared with the group. By utilizing these extensive surveys and thorough focus-group-oriented discussions, the church will establish their views of the church's functionality as part of the training. This realization will challenge many preexisting views about how the church is to operate. As such, those with an inward focus will have an improved desire to transition toward a more missional focus using intentionality. Following the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training, members will view people of faith differently because of their renewed passion and excitement for Jesus. This concept involves members to willingly and

excitedly tell others about how the church can help them come to know Jesus as their savior. The *Roadmap* itself is a much less complicated strategic plan that is immediately actionable by this small rural church, demonstrating their shift away from an inward focus and transactional mindset to one of an outward focus with a transformational mindset. The desire to see lives changed by loving Jesus more and sharing the love of the Lord with others seems easy on the surface. This concept and the other improvements outlined in the project will empower the church to serve the Lord with a glad heart.

First Baptist Church of Ravenswood appears uncomfortable engaging unfamiliar Christian and non-Christian guests because they are unsure how to do so. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will help the church move toward improved visitor engagement by seeing church functionality from the guest's point of view, not just the member's perspective. This transformation will position the church for growth as it becomes more visitor-friendly.

Members need to learn how to share their faith with guests and speak of their love for Jesus to help others see that the church can provide an environment to connect spiritually with others of the faith. Members must also learn to share their faith, enabling them to bear one another's burdens. This understanding of the importance of an outward focus will encourage the realization that Romans 12:13 and 12:15, as they call on Christians to practice hospitality and to connect with visitors emotionally. Putting this Scripture into practice means the member is willing to tell someone about how First Baptist Church of Ravenswood can help them grow in their faith or walk with them in discipleship. A member or guest hearing encouragement from a church member can be influential and, when received in the right spirit, may be the beginning of a life-changing journey.

Ministry Context

This section of ministry context explores the current ministry model of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, located in Jackson County, West Virginia. The church is affiliated with the West Virginia Baptist Convention and is of the American Baptist Churches, USA denomination. The church works with over a dozen other churches in the Good Hope Association across the region.

Demographics

The state of West Virginia is rural, older, poorer, and decreasing in population. In 2022, there were 1.77 million residents living in West Virginia, down from 1.85 million in 2010.¹ In Jackson County, where First Baptist is located, there was an even more significant decrease in population during that same period, from 29,211 to 27,738.² The state has limited diversity, as 97 percent of the population is White/Caucasian. Approximately 21 percent of residents are age 65 or older.³ An estimated 16.8 percent of residents across the state are living in poverty.⁴ The city of Ravenswood, where the church resides, is 50 miles north of Charleston and had a population of 3,847 residents in 2021.⁵ A Google map search indicates 15 churches are operating within the city limits.

The average weekly attendance at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood in 2023 is 90-100. Prior to COVID-19 in 2020, attendance varied between 125-140. Of those who regularly attend

¹ “Quick Facts West Virginia,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WV>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “City and Town Population Totals: 2020-2021,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed March 24, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/pepopest/2020s-total-cities-and-towns.html>.

service, approximately 60 are adults. Considering the size of the community, First Baptist is one of the larger churches in Ravenswood that has multiple paid staff, including a full-time pastor, and part-time positions, including a secretary, youth director, and custodian. The church has already begun exploring options for hiring a bi-vocational youth pastor in the next 12-24 months. There is a desire amongst the members of First Baptist Church to see growth and continue the longstanding tradition of serving the community.

Church Structure

The church operates autonomously regarding polity. The ministry leadership team consists of a full-time pastor and a deacon board. The church has multiple boards that meet monthly to take care of other needs, including trustees, deaconesses, and Christian education. Three committees, including care and concern, social, and financial, meet as needed. First Baptist has men's and women's fellowship groups, two youth groups (Jr./Sr. High / K-5th grade), and an 18-35-year-old group for younger adults. The church also has a volunteer worship leader, pianist, and organist. First Baptist is known to actively support missions in the U.S. and abroad. The church heavily supports local mission work and benevolence outreach to those economically stressed in their small rural West Virginia community.

First Baptist Church has one worship service on Sunday mornings. Bible study is on Wednesday evening. Both youth groups and the small adult group meet on Sunday evenings. The older youth group and the choir meet on Wednesday evenings.

Church Atmosphere

First Baptist Church of Ravenswood is considered a traditional Baptist church with a white exterior, bell tower, and steeple. Inside the sanctuary, one will only find a few semblances of modernity. First, the projector screen hangs from the ceiling, facing the pews in the sanctuary

for lyrics, announcements, and Scripture. Second, the sanctuary has an electric piano, but it sounds traditional. Third, a large television hangs on the rear wall facing the pulpit for the minister to see lyrics, Scripture, and announcements. Fourth, a shoebox-size video camera mounted to the back rear wall of the sanctuary is for live streaming the church service on social media. The camera is barely noticeable, as it is remote-controlled.

The sanctuary has cathedral-like high ceilings lined with elongated vertical windows covered with blinds. The church décor is heavily white, trimmed in darker wood, and accentuated with darker burgundy/reds. In the center of the church, on the front wall, hangs a giant curtain that matches the décor. While some may suppose this curtain is a centerpiece in the sanctuary, it opens to reveal a baptistry in what appears to be a mini-balcony, which makes viewing baptisms easy.

The décor, particularly around the pulpit area, seems to be from the 1950s-1960s, which includes a panel-style railing that boxes in most of the pulpit area. The lectern and pew seating are also indicative of the age of the church and its efforts to maintain the church's history. The pews are older and display their wear with removable seat pads that cover the length of the pew, and no padding exists for the back of the pew.

Communion cup holders are attached to the backs of the pews. These were handmade by former congregants who passed away years ago but visually serve as a reminder to those family members who still attend. An electric piano sits on the left-front side of the sanctuary, while an organ sits to the right. A communion table adorned with a large pulpit Bible and multiple offering plates is displayed directly in front of the pulpit.

The look of the church building and property from the outside of the church is aesthetically pleasing, as the property is well-maintained. Across the front of the church is a

large portico with four large pillars that provide stability. These giant columns give the appearance of Greek-accented supporting the porch roof. The columns and shape of the front of the church mirror what some might call a miniature U.S. Supreme Court building. Connecting to the back end of the church building and running perpendicular to the church is a large fellowship hall approximately 23 years old. It is the newest addition to the church. While the sanctuary maintains its traditional cathedral-like feel, the fellowship hall is more modern. The fellowship hall has large vaulted ceilings with two large chandeliers extending from the ceiling, providing a formal yet elegant look encompassed by recessed lighting.

The fellowship hall includes a full commercial kitchen for fellowship dinners and a weekend community feeding program. It is also available for persons who want to use the church facility for private or community events. The restrooms in this facility are also modern.

Sunday school is at 9:30 and lasts an hour. There are classes for all ages. For the most part, the classrooms are on the church's second floor, and a chair lift is available for those with physical disabilities. Sunday school ends at 10:30 so attendees have time to filter into the sanctuary for worship service. There is also a nursery service provided.

The pastor delivers his sermons from behind the lectern and is stationary in the pulpit. Those who attend First Baptist Church of Ravenswood either park their automobile on the street surrounding the front three sides of the church or across the street in a smaller gravel parking lot that the church owns. There are two accessible parking spaces directly in front of the church. No one directs people where to park, and parking is considered first come, first served. Once a person arrives at the church, they enter either through the main church entry doors where an usher greets them, or walk along a long sidewalk and enter at the door leading to the offices

where the church building and fellowship hall intersect. However, there is no usher present at this entrance.

As one enters the sanctuary for worship service, they are greeted at the door by the head usher, who extends each attendee a service bulletin. This service bulletin includes the order of service, announcements about events at the church that week, and additional information on scheduled activities and meetings. However, these bulletins do not include regular program information regarding ministry overviews or how to get involved in these programs. Restroom and classroom locations are not in the bulletin. There is also no information about nursery usage or the availability of the children's church program during the service.

After receiving their bulletin, all first-time attendees will also receive a non-church branded Fiestaware® coffee mug as a gift of appreciation for their attendance. Each person proceeds to enter the sanctuary and chooses their seat. Some pews sit closer to one another than others, and depending on a person's physical size may depend on where they sit.

Members tend to look around the sanctuary from their seats before the service starts to see who they know sitting near them. During the 15 minutes before church begins, much conversation occurs in the sanctuary as people visit with one another. The pastor will also walk around the sanctuary and visit with individuals and families as they arrive. Visitors are rarely engaged in conversations by the membership for any length of time. Some exceptions may include the pastor and deacons, but those interactions, when they occur, are brief mainly due to time constraints.

The Sunday worship service begins with the pastor announcing it is time for the service to start with an opening song. The song lyrics are displayed on the screen. Typically, three songs are a part of each service and are a blended mix of traditional and contemporary music played by

only the piano. During the service, there is time designated for prayer and an offering to be received. Children K-5 grade are dismissed from the sanctuary before the sermon to attend what is called children's church, a program that involves an age-appropriate lesson, craft, and snack provided by a volunteer. A nursery is also available for infants and children of preschool age. The worship service typically lasts an hour. The church also has a Bible study on Wednesday evening. There is no music or hymns on Wednesday evening.

Lack of Speaking About Jesus

Much of the conversation by church members before and after the worship service involves discussions surrounding generic life or secular activities. This behavior is due to the familial relationships in the church and the many ongoing friendships that have existed over the years. There appears to be little conversation about Jesus with guests or other members before or after the service. If small talk occurs between congregants, it is usually about family, local activities, health-related issues, or work, typically with people they have known for years. If members are discussing Jesus, it is usually in the context of something happening in the church, such as a specific program, lesson, or sermon.

This lack of sharing one's faith with others and the blessings they have received from the Lord indicates a complacent attitude of assuming that everyone already knows about Jesus or has a personal relationship with him. The problem is that not everyone is comfortable speaking about Jesus, their faith in Jesus, or how he has impacted their life. The excitement of talking about Jesus seems to have dwindled. This lack of enthusiasm is not due to a lack of love and adoration for Jesus, but to apathy and lack of awareness. These missed opportunities to share the love of Jesus with others are significant oversights that can prevent spiritual revival and maturity and, even more concerning, are a lost opportunity for evangelism and discipleship.

Assessing Formal and Traditional Structures

While pleasing to most members, the church atmosphere has multiple areas that may negatively impact visitor engagement and guest comfort, which could impede relationship building. The facility has many areas that members could explore updating to enhance guest satisfaction. A lack of updates to the facility may indicate an inward focus or perhaps just an oversight. An inward focus would exist if there is a desire to leave much of the décor alone because of an emotional connection to the facility that has developed over many decades. While there is nothing wrong with older décor, it can give off an aura of stagnation. The challenge for the church is to decide how much modernity would be too much, understanding that some level of improvement to the facility may make the church more inviting.

Understandably, many members may feel that a traditional church look is aesthetically pleasing, particularly in a rural setting. The concern is that a church with both a formal and traditional structure could portray the church as being stiff-necked or overly formal, and likely one that must have some strict dress code. This belief could potentially give a false sense of the people in the church being standoffish or judgmental. Coupled with this concern is the longstanding reputation of the church in the community as overly formal. While this operating structure may give the appearance of affluence, which some might consider an attribute, it can also be viewed as a negative for those with less financial means. While the church welcomes all people, the formal and traditional structure arguably exudes an upper-class look and feel, which could make some people feel uncomfortable.

Additionally, guests who do not want to attend a more formal church out of fear of lacking a higher social status in the community may visit other churches first. Similarly, people

who are not highly educated and are impoverished may feel the church is just too fancy for them. The congregation of First Baptist Church is generally well-educated.

Church members often take seats in the first third of the church, meaning the middle to front sections of the church sanctuary are more open for seating. This situation may unknowingly pressure guests to move to the front of the church instead of sitting toward the back. The pews are older and are situated closer together, making it difficult for larger or heavier individuals to fit in certain pews. Again, these concerns may hinder the church's relationship with guests and members if there is a perceived uncomfortableness about the church's setup.

Most members do not actively seek to engage guests they do not know, whether the guest is a Christian or non-Christian. Part of this hesitation may be because the member feels uncomfortable introducing themselves to someone they do not know or is unaware of how to do so. Regardless, when guests are not approached by members in a welcoming manner they may feel the church is uninterested in their attendance and may feel judged unfairly.

The situations described in this section could be avoided if members would take advantage of the time before and after the service to share their love of Christ with others. Actively seeking out guests before the service gives members an opportunity to inform them of church operations and facility features, and can lead to broader discussions about faith and how the church can help them grow in their relationship with Christ. This issue is delicate, as members must avoid pressuring guests and making them feel uncomfortable with overbearing personalities. Letting someone know how the church can help them grow spiritually is essential for them to grow in their faith. Members taking advantage of the time before and after service for meaningful spiritual conversation can open the door for discipleship opportunities, including discussions about spiritual disciplines for the Christian guest. Having this kind of engagement is

critical in becoming more missional. A comprehensive review of potential facility improvements, such as more parking, newer seating, and improved signage, can help improve first impressions and comfortability.

Parking Concerns

Parking is potentially an issue and another barrier to guest satisfaction. Street parking in front of the church and on the side street of the church fills quickly. There are only two spaces for handicapped parking in front of the church, and no spaces are designated explicitly for first-time guests. A gravel parking lot is available, but it is some distance from the church, with grass growing up through much of the gravel, making it difficult for people to walk through the lot for those with limited mobility. The lot has one primary street entrance, and a sign indicates First Baptist parking. This lot may be hard to find if a guest enters the area from a different street that is not near the primary entrance. No signs elsewhere around the church property point to additional parking for guests.

No church greeter is near the facility to direct people to the main entrance; the church operates assuming that everyone will know where to enter the building. Therefore, if someone parks along the sidewalk surrounding the church, the guest may use an entryway closer to where they parked instead of the main entrance. However, no signs inside the church direct visitors to the sanctuary or anywhere else.

Seating Issues

Once inside the church sanctuary, seating may be a concern. Several pews can be challenging to access because they are too close together and not evenly spaced. The older pews tend to shift, making one closer to another. Some pews have more room than others, making it

difficult for larger people to sit in some areas. This seating issue is not defined or mentioned in any way other than by the guest who tries to find the right seat by trial and error.

The church facility has limited space for repositioning the pews, which does not help make the pews more accessible. Members often arrive early at church to secure the best seats in the pew (typically aisle seats). The drawback is that for people to get inside the row to access the pew after the aisle seats are gone, the person seated must step out of their row for others to enter. The closeness of the pews may further lead to people feeling they are being trapped by sitting in the middle of the row because now they are unable to exit the row for restroom use or even at the end of the service without asking those seated around them to step into the aisle to allow them to pass. The pews are restrictive as space is limited.

It is nearly impossible for two people to pass on the outside of the pews near the wall without someone first stepping into another row to let someone else pass. The pews have removable cushion seats on the bottoms. There is no back cushion. These seats could be uncomfortable for some people, particularly those with back problems. Seating can be expensive and take some time to acquire. There have been no plans to deal with the over 50-year-old pews with removable cushions that have been a part of the church for nearly six decades. Many pews have undergone repairs over the years, but due to existing transactional attitudes, there has never been support to replace them.

Lack of Information

While attendees receive a bulletin explaining the order of service, the meeting schedule for the week for boards and committees and the programs available does not provide location information about where classes, programs, or meetings occur specifically in the church. The bulletin contains more helpful information for a member than a guest. The bulletin excludes

background information on programs and the locations where specific activities inside the church occur. Those who attend regularly would know that information. The guest would not. There is no specific information in the bulletin regarding how to get children involved in youth programs, the nursery, or other activities. Further, restroom locations are not in the bulletin. Since guests do not pass a restroom as they enter the sanctuary from the church's main entrance, the only option for finding a restroom is to ask someone or explore the building.

Lack of Visitor Engagement

The time before service can be problematic for guests as they can be left to fend for themselves. Guests decide where they want to sit following their arrival. Once guests find a seat, they are often left alone. There is limited engagement besides the church greeter at the main entrance and the pastor's brief visit walking down the aisle by the pews before the service begins. Members in the church take significant time to talk to one another before the service, walking around the sanctuary and visiting with other members. However, guests are left with very little engagement. No one takes time to share the love of Christ with visitors or the positive impact the church can have on them coming to know more about Jesus and how he can change their lives. No one takes the time to share the programs available to help visitors grow in their faith. Even on simple matters, if guests need the restroom or want to place their child in one of the children's programs or nursery, the burden would be on them to ask someone seated around them where programs or facilities are located and how they work.

Lack of Signage

Due to the transactional nature of the church, the church operates on the notion that everyone knows where everything is inside of the church. This false belief pertains to classrooms, restrooms, and children's program areas. The lack of signage creates barriers to both

people of faith who have been attending the church for some time and guests walking through the facility. The only sign at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood is in the main entrance. The sign is an older wooden sign with mailbox-style letters inside a lighted box, including the church name, pastor's name, and service times. The only other outdoor sign is the one previously mentioned at the entrance to the gravel parking lot.

There is no directional signage in the church courtyard or facility. The church is a two-story structure with multiple classrooms upstairs and children's programs downstairs. This lack of signage indicates the church's inward focus, presuming that everyone attending the church knows where they need to go and where activities are. Without appropriate signage, the Christian and non-Christian guests and newer congregation members will have difficulty navigating the facility independently, which can create awkwardness and hinder one's engagement.

Church History

First Baptist Church has been serving the community dating back to 1866. The church website at www.fbcravenswood.org documents the history of the church.⁶ Historical highlights in this section are detailed below from the church webpage for educational purposes.

The desire for a Baptist church in Ravenswood followed the Civil War after soldiers returned home needing a place to worship. More Baptists were reportedly moving into the area, and these men and their families wanted their own Baptist church, which led to the forming of what was known as the Ravenswood Baptist Church on November 10, 1866. Church records indicate that there was no permanent meeting location for the church assembly during this time. The church was reportedly willing to have services anywhere, including member's homes, at the Ravenswood Academy, the Harpold Tannery, and even at the Opera House. It was reported that

⁶ "Brief History of Our Church," First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, accessed March 24, 2023, <http://fbcravenswood.org/brief-history-of-our-church/>.

in 1875, the small congregation purchased a parcel of property on Ann Street in Ravenswood for \$200 from what the church reports belonged to Henrietta Fitzhugh, daughter of Sarah Washington Fitzhugh, the sister of George Washington. This property acquisition paved the way for church construction in 1875, with the actual dedication held three years later on June 9, 1878, after a total cost of \$3,000. God was blessing the efforts of this church.

The missionary calling of Miss Francis Crooks, who was called from the church to serve as a foreign missionary, was of significance to the early formation of the church. She reportedly sailed to Burma on October 29, 1906, where she served for 21 years and, after her death, was buried there. The church continued to expand.

The congregation built a bell tower for the church and installed a bell in 1928. The classrooms or academic wing of the church came about in 1952. Perhaps the most significant change for the church was a name change. The Ravenswood Baptist Church changed its name in 1954 to First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. Twenty-seven pastors have served the church over the past 150-plus years. The fellowship hall was the latest addition to the church, built in 1999. While the congregation hovers around 100 persons weekly, First Baptist Church of Ravenswood continues to have over 500 members listed on the church membership roll.

Problem Presented

First Baptist Church of Ravenswood has a longstanding reputation for being one of the most active churches in their small rural community in West Virginia regarding church programming, outreach, and benevolence support. The membership and regular church attendees will admit that the church works hard to meet emerging needs from within the church. However, there may be a significant reason for this level of engagement. Many members and regular attendees are either family or have already established close friendship bonds that existed before

attending church together.

Unfortunately, guests are not receiving the same level of attention as church members, which is concerning. Whether guests are Christians or not, neither receive much attention or interaction from the congregation unless previously known to others. Members are missing an opportunity to tell Christian guests about their personal experiences with the Lord and how the church can help them grow in their faith and love Jesus more. Members do not view first-time and potentially non-Christian guests as an opportunity for evangelism. Therefore, guests are not engaged in a manner that may eventually lead to church membership.

The chances are that these persons do not see the church members' love for Jesus through these simple interactions. More often than not, guests and others new to First Baptist are left to sit alone, with minimal conversation from those seated near them. Should a guest have a connection within the church, their experience may be different. But when there is no existing relationship or connection, an apparent disconnect occurs. Thus, unaffiliated attendees inside the church are left to themselves.

Members of the church are not actively taking advantage of the time before and after the worship service to share their love of Jesus with others. Many members appear to be complacent in their salvation to the point of being content with attending the worship service and then leaving. Others feel uncomfortable sharing their faith and do not know how to do so. This problem may have contributed to the inwardly-focused mindset of merely operating as they did in the past and not seeing the need for evangelism and discipleship. The problem at First Baptist Church is its inward focus resulting from a lack of training and planning concerning the need to actively share the love for Jesus with others, which can lead to salvation and discipleship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin action research project is to develop and deploy *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, a training curriculum for converting the church's inward focus into a missional focus, helping members learn to share their love of Christ with others. Due to this rural church's inward focus, little to no attention is given to Christians and non-Christian guests who may be attending First Baptist Church for the first time. Members are not actively sharing their love of Jesus with other church members before or after the service. This oversight is causing members to miss opportunities to share their faith with others and fulfill evangelistic and discipleship needs in the church. Moreover, other members and guests are not actively sharing their joy in serving the Lord and how the church has helped them mature in their faith.

Additionally, the pastor has limited time before or at the end of the service to actively engage people in this manner, as many in the congregation vie for his time. Other than the greeter, the church leadership also does not actively pursue first-time visitors beyond an initial handshake that can appear cold. The lack of time and confusion as to whose responsibility it is to make the guest feel welcome or what to say during those encounters are the reasons for this oversight.

Most church members will attest that this problem results from their inward focus, in which they feel more comfortable conversing with fellow members before the service rather than viewing the visitor as an opportunity for evangelism and discipleship. There needs to be more of a focus on members telling others about their love of Jesus and sharing their personal experiences with the Lord. If the guest is already a Christian, then the member must explain how the church can help them grow in their faith, attesting to how the church has impacted their life.

Some people have reported wanting to engage guests after the service but forgetting to do so. Others rely on asking someone seated around them whom a particular guest was instead of engaging them personally.

The problem is that church leaders and members need training on adequately engaging visitors to help them initiate relationship-building and sharing their love of Christ within the first 15 minutes of arrival. Adding to the problem is that the church facility appears somewhat outdated in certain areas, which may give the perception that the church does not consider the needs of its people and that growing the church is not a concern. Therefore, some could see an outdated facility and members not sharing their faith as a stagnant, uncaring church that is uninterested in welcoming guests. Furthermore, poor parking does not provide an environment conducive to being guest-friendly.

Church members have to understand that first impressions matter. Learning about first impressions can be accomplished during training. When opportunities to engage new people in the church setting and initiate relationships with Christian and non-Christian guests are limited, First Baptist Church of Ravenswood misses the experience to overcome their inward focus and share their faith with others. Church members should be excited about their love of Jesus and how he has impacted their lives. Failing to show others this newfound life might make one question what the church has done for this person who has not mentioned the name of Jesus.

Presently, the only significant engagement occurs at the point of entry when the visitor meets the head usher, who opens the door to the sanctuary, extends a handshake, and provides a service bulletin along with a non-branded coffee mug as a gift. This act would seem to be a good start toward engaging the guest; however, it only lasts a few seconds. For the most part, this moment is where engagements begin and end. In most cases, the church misses the opportunity

to hear why someone decided to attend First Baptist in the first place. This information can be beneficial to the pastor and church leaders to better understand what exactly helped someone decide to visit the church. It can also assist the church with marketing campaigns to encourage growth.

Once the visitor decides where to sit, neither the pastor, his leadership team, nor anyone else purposefully introduces themselves to the guest and shares their experience with the Lord. The church does not routinely try to explain how things operate in the church and how it can help one's faith grow. Additionally, those guests who are forced to rely on the worship service bulletin for answers will see what the church offers regarding schedule but not much content on what each program is or means to their spiritual growth. Guests will not know where the restrooms or classrooms are unless they ask.

The pastor claims he has limited time to engage guests due to other visitation needs before the service, with current members vying for his time. Others, including the leadership team, claim a simple oversight for not meeting a guest or admit they did not get a chance to ask who the visitor was because other church members captured their attention first. Several have used the excuse of not being an extrovert or not understanding what they should be saying or doing to forge relationships. Several people might have the belief that it is just uncomfortable to meet someone new.

In all cases, the problem is consistent. Non-Christian and Christian visitors may be left to feel unimportant or nonessential, which creates an awkwardness that allows the church to look reclusive, cold, and not desiring a relationship or connection. Visitors likely see engagement happening around them soon after their arrival, but they are left to watch from afar. Rarely does anyone share the benefits of serving Christ or what the church can do for the visitor regarding

spiritual growth. The church's hope of creating a community of faith that is intentional in relationship building and encouraging in discipleship is admirable but perhaps impossible if there is no focus on visitor engagement. As it stands, First Baptist Church of Ravenswood prioritizes existing relationships over new ones. The church may choose to make facility improvements that can help improve visitor and member satisfaction. This may include more easily accessible parking, better seating, and directional signage inside and outside the church. A top down review of the church's programs should be reviewed to see if their current structure is more out of a longstanding tradition or a missional approach.

Having a training program for both the church leaders and members will bring to the forefront issues regarding the church's attitudes, actions, and behaviors toward guests concerning the facility, programs, guest interaction, seating, and parking. This training will help the church uncover its need to become missional and more outward-focused, which can transform how guests and others are viewed. This training begins with implementing the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* quality improvement project. This *Roadmap* will implement changes over 120 days and should immediately start to impact member engagement at the church. The 120-day window is essential because small rural churches need to be able to see immediate impacts to foster a desire for sustainability. Converting an inward focus and implementing the changes identified in the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will demonstrate a change in mindset by the church.

Basic Assumptions

There are several assumptions that the researcher made in consideration for *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. The researcher assumed that church members of First

Baptist Church of Ravenswood would acknowledge that they are effective at caring for each other whenever there is an emerging need within the church.

This response is particularly true if a church member or close acquaintance of a church member is experiencing a difficult time financially. Whenever a church member learns of or discovers that another church member has a specific need or hardship, the pastor or deacon is informed and action occurs. One of the reasons the church membership reports this information to the leadership is because they are encouraged to do so by church leadership.

The second assumption is that First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members have no idea they have an inward focus regarding personal interactions, facilities, programs, and information sharing. There is an expectation that the church leadership and members may challenge this premise based upon their local, domestic, and foreign mission support and their generous benevolence giving at the local level.

The third assumption is that the members of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood will agree that they should do more when it comes to telling others about the Lord. The expectation is that the biggest obstacle to sharing their faith is the lack of knowledge on how to share the love of Jesus with others. Members can engage guests better if given a pathway forward using the tools explained in the curriculum. Nevertheless, there is also an assumption that the membership of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood will welcome an opportunity to learn how to become more outwardly-focused if it means helping others see the love of Christ in the church. If non-Christian and Christian visitors feel welcome and engaged by the church membership, there is an assumption that they will want to attend services regularly, grow spiritually as other members have said they have, and perhaps join in membership, leading to church growth.

The final assumption is that the church will want to participate in the curriculum and follow the action plan in the program because the pastor and his leadership team see the importance of positive visitor engagement when churches see declines in attendance worldwide. This assumption by the researcher brings to the fore that as many as one-third to one-half of the regular attending adult members on any given Sunday will be willing to participate in the training and awareness dates developed to address the inwardly-focused mindset. This involvement will stimulate a unified desire for the church to improve non-Christian and Christian guest engagement, leading to spiritual growth. Additionally, the aim will be for those who attend the training to share with other members what they have learned and the importance of recognizing guests for spiritual growth and evangelism.

Definitions

This active research project involves training ministry leaders and First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members to help them identify their inward focus and overcome barriers that may impact growth. Key terms used in this project are significant to understand due to the nature of the research, as the church will be positioned through the training to become more outward-focused regarding impacting church growth. The researcher will use the following definitions as described unless otherwise noted:

American Baptist Churches, USA – This denomination resulted from the Baptist split into Northern and Southern Conventions in 1845 over the issue of slave ownership.⁷ The Northern Baptist Convention prohibited slave ownership and eventually renamed the American Baptist Convention of 1950 to the American Baptist Churches USA in 1972.⁸

⁷ “Our History,” American Baptist Churches USA, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.abc-usa.org/what-we-believe/our-history/>

⁸ Ibid.

The denomination follows the Baptist faith that has been in existence since the 17th century in the U.S., emphasizing the core beliefs of the Baptist faith, which are: 1) the Lordship and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, 2) the believer's baptism, 3) the competency of all believers to be in direct relationship with God and to interpret Scripture, 4) the recognition of the influence of the Holy Spirit, and 5) the need for autonomous congregations free from government interference or hierarchical polity.⁹

Autonomous – This form of church administration has the right or power of self-government.¹⁰ This church governance at First Baptist Church is autonomous as part of the American Baptist Churches USA denomination. This autonomy is vital as it allows the church to formulate its own doctrine, mission, and worship style and does not have policy dictates. Therefore, church decisions are made by the membership.

Congregation – This term identifies the collective assembling of people at First Baptist Church for worship.¹¹ One does not have to be a church member to be considered part of the congregation. However, one who is a member is also part of the congregation that gathers.

COVID-19 – Defined as a mild to severe respiratory illness, COVID-19 is the coronavirus responsible for a worldwide pandemic.¹² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported their first laboratory-confirmed case of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus

⁹ "Our History," American Baptist Churches USA.

¹⁰ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "Autonomous," accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomous>.

¹¹ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "Congregation," accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/congregation>.

¹² *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. "COVID-19," accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/COVID-19>.

in the U.S. and activated its Emergency Operations Center as a response.¹³ COVID-19 forced many churches in the United States to close due to the risk of disease transmission.¹⁴

Greeter – This person is assigned to open the door for guests arriving at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. Upon entry, a greeter typically hands the guest a service bulletin. Church greeters have the role of inviting people into more than just a facility, but a relationship.¹⁵ The greeter aims to assume nothing and explain everything.¹⁶

Guest – In the Bible, a guest is someone who was invited, usually to a feast.¹⁷ A guest is someone welcome at a specific place. Peter welcomed Gentile messengers in his home in Acts 10:23.¹⁸ Regarding this project, a guest is a person who enters the church either as a first-time visitor or an ongoing regular attendee of the church.

Head Usher – This person is the primary initial point of contact for guests at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood on Sunday mornings. This primary role is one of a servant, where the head usher is responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of reverence and order.¹⁹ First Baptist Church has assigned this person to open the church doors for guests and provide a service bulletin to each attendee. The head usher will assist guests with finding seats or information as

¹³ “CDC Museum COVID-19,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#:~:text=January%2010%2C%202020,2%20virus%20on%20its%20website.>

¹⁴ Jerry Pillay. “COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible.” *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020): 266. Accessed November 15, 2023. [https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820963156.](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820963156)

¹⁵ Ryan Nelson. *I’m Never Coming Back to This Church: A Church Staff’s Guide to Visitors*. Bellingham, WA: Proclaim, 2016.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, Trent C. Butler, and Bill Letta, eds., “Guests” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 692.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ David R. Enlow, *Church Usher: Servant of God* (Chicago, IL: Wingspread, 2006), Chapter 1.

needed. This person will also ensure enough volunteers are present to collect tithes and offerings during the offertory.

Hospitality – This biblical concept relates to guests, strangers, and sojourners.²⁰ The practice of hospitality is benevolence extended to those persons beyond one’s usual circle of friends, fulfilling the literal meaning of the Greek word for the love of strangers.²¹ There is an expectation that the host and guests have a role concerning hospitality. The host is to honor the guest while the guest is to partake in what is offered by the host.²²

Inward-focused – This project will examine a church’s inward-focused mindset in which the church body may emphasize or prioritize the wants and needs of the membership regarding self-satisfaction and fulfillment. This occurs when one is more concerned about personal happiness or lack of success than one’s lack of righteousness.²³ An inward-focused church can promote a form of legalism when there is an expectation that other churches are to look like their own.²⁴ This may impact guests negatively.

Live-stream / Live-streaming – This is the process or activity of broadcasting an event live over the Internet.²⁵ During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in smaller churches live-streaming their worship services because their buildings were closed due to

²⁰ David K. Huttar, “Hospitality” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1006.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² David B. Howell, “Hospitality” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, eds. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 611.

²³ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “Live Stream,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/live%20stream>.

government policy that resulted in the temporary closure of public buildings and large gatherings.

Member – A church member is a person who has been saved, baptized, and enrolled in the church by a vote of support from the existing membership.²⁶

Membership – The state or status of being a member is called membership.²⁷ To become a member of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, a person can transfer their membership from another Baptist church or similar church in faith with baptism by immersion. Persons may also request to join the church as members by profession of their faith by sharing their conversion experience and attesting that they have received baptism by immersion.

Persons who have only been sprinkled or had water poured over them for baptism would have to be baptized by immersion first before being accepted as members. Persons qualified for membership are traditionally voted upon by the members who are present following the next available church service.

Missionary – Men or women serving in missional strategies as the agents of God are called missionaries. These persons sense a call to service from God.²⁸ They operate with a consciousness of God as their source of inspiration and empowerment.²⁹ Missionaries can serve locally, nationally, or internationally.

²⁶ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Member,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/member>.

²⁷ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Membership,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/membership>.

²⁸ Daniel J. Kim, “Comparative Study of Prophetic Call and Shamanic Call and Its Implications for Christian Missionary Call,” *복음과 선교* 44, (2018): 267. doi:10.20326/kems.44.4.265.

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

Outward-focused – The church’s mindset prioritizes guests’ wants and needs regarding self-satisfaction and fulfillment. Having an outward-focused mindset means the church understands the desires of people who may visit, including security, safety, status, love, a sense of belonging, freedom, and self-fulfillment.³⁰ The church’s mission should be to welcome people unlike themselves.³¹ This change in mindset would be a missional approach or outward-focused thinking that will change how guests are received.

Revitalization – This process involves change for the better. Revitalization is giving new life or vigor to something.³² Church revitalization pushes back against the harmful mindset of not changing something that needs to be changed solely out of a self-serving attitude of continuing to do things the way they have always been done.³³

Rural church – A rural church is a church that is located in a rural place or setting. A rural place is considered a significant distance from large towns or cities.³⁴ Interestingly, some people who live near a rural church consider it their church even though they have never attended because it is in their small, close-knit community.³⁵ The attitudes are critical to helping understand the rural church setting. Moreover, a guest may notice two or three generations of the same family present on any given Sunday, which is how faith and values extend from one

³⁰ Danny Franks, *People Are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2018. Logos.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Merriam-Webster.com*, s.v. “Revitalization,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revitalization>.

³³ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 21.

³⁴ *CollinsDictionary.com*, s.v. “Rural Church,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/rural-church>.

³⁵ “Why the Rural Church Matters,” Lifeway Research, last modified May 18, 2018, <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/05/18why-the-rural-church-matters/>.

generation to the next.³⁶

Secret shopper – A secret shopper tests the service in stores and businesses by pretending to be a regular customer.³⁷ Churches can use secret shoppers to identify positive and negative experiences in the church that may otherwise go unnoticed by members. They can report their treatment and what they see or do not see. An impartial analysis from a secret shopper in the church can be beneficial. Their findings can bring attention to matters in the church that need consideration for improvement or expansion.

Visitor – The term visitor is defined as a person who visits for friendship, business, duty, or travel.³⁸ A church visitor may randomly attend a worship service out of curiosity while traveling or visiting family living near the church. A visitor may be someone looking for a place to become a member. A church visitor is referred to as a guest. A visitor may be a Christian or non-Christian.

West Virginia Baptist Convention – The West Virginia Baptist Convention is defined by its mission statement as a family of churches committed to reaching all generations for Jesus Christ both here and abroad by equipping one another to be healthy, growing, and unified in Christ and for Christ.³⁹ There are 354 Baptist churches affiliated with the convention as of March 30, 2023.

³⁶ “Why the Rural Church Matters,” Lifeway Research.

³⁷ *Cambridge Dictionary.org*, s.v. “Secret Shopper,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/secret-shopper>.

³⁸ *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “Visitor,” accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/visitor>.

³⁹ “Mission Statement,” West Virginia Baptist Convention, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://www.wvbc.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.

Limitations

This research aims to develop and implement *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* to help First Baptist Church of Ravenswood overcome its inward focus and become more missional by taking immediate actions to enhance the visitor's experience at the church. This training will be open to all church leaders and members. Some of these leaders and members may be unable to participate in the training due to personal time constraints or other commitments. There may be situations where a church family has privately decided only to have one person in their immediate family attend the training and share what they learn when they return each week.

Some members may be hesitant to participate, believing the training program is geared more toward younger people or finding it too time-consuming or irrelevant as older persons. These concerns will not significantly impact the program's success because those in attendance can still move forward in understanding the need to employ the strategies identified in *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. In order to mitigate these factors, the pastor will provide a significant overview of the program, with training dates announced well in advance. Those who complete the training will be able to identify the differences between an inwardly-focused church and an outwardly-focused church, but knowledge alone does not indicate that change will occur. There is no way to compel participation in the study.

Visitors who have attended the church sporadically for less than three months will have the opportunity to complete a survey that captures their perceptions of the church. Some visitors may be reluctant to voice concerns since they have just started attending the church. There is no way to gauge how many visitors may attend over the course of a four-week recruitment timeframe. Assuring confidentiality in the process may help encourage participation. The *Others*

First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation training program will uniquely incorporate data collected from participants before the training that will be part of the facilitated discussions regarding perceptions of church functionality to underscore areas of inward focus.

These data are limited to the participants' honesty in completing the survey instruments. There is a presumption that some survey instruments could capture members' personal bias in the feedback. This bias could result from a church leader or member not wanting to see changes in the church. Additionally, there could be bias from a church leader or member who wants the survey to make the church look good, so they only report what is considered positive. Post-training data will also be part of the analysis for comparison in part of the training. Therefore, data ascertained from the project will be limited to information provided by those who agree to participate in the study and complete the necessary survey instruments.

The course ends with the church beginning to implement the action steps identified in the *Others First: Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* across four months, becoming more missional and less inward in focus. The church may choose to alter a recommendation of any component on the *Roadmap*.

Additionally, secret shoppers who have visited the church from outside the region have completed an evaluation of their experience at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood that reflects their opinions of the facility and member interaction in Appendix B and Appendix C. These data may not indicate how other guests feel; however, their opinions center on first impressions without any perceived bias towards the church.

Delimitations

This intervention involves developing the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training program for the leadership and members of First Baptist Church of

Ravenswood to address the church's inward focus. The aim is to complete the training and begin implementing the changes identified on the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* within four months to help change their inward focus and enhance a guest's overall experience at this small rural church. There is no guarantee that church members will not try to make adjustments to the strategic action plan moving forward as implementation is underway.

The training program will address the inward-focused personal perceptions, behaviors, and actions of church leaders and members identified from surveys. Members who have been attending the church for a significant amount of time may not be able to report their experiences as guests accurately. Therefore, guests attending First Baptist for less than three months will participate in surveys to capture their feedback regarding their first few visits. Setting a three-month restriction for guests asked to participate in the surveys will help reduce the risk of having first impressions skewed because of several visits that could have exceeded expectations.

There is no way to anticipate the number of guests meeting the requirements to be able to participate in the intervention leading up to the training. The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* program will primarily focus on church members' and leaders' perceptions and practices and will not investigate any underlying beliefs that led to the perceptions held by those providing feedback. The inward-focus awareness training will be limited to subject matter experts addressing the impacts of guest engagement. This training will be curtailed to transactional and transformational ministry settings to demonstrate the impacts on visitor engagement with a shift in attitudes regarding inward focus.

A pre-and-post-training survey will gauge overall attitude shifts individually and collectively at the end of the training to determine if there is an awareness of the church's existing inward focus. This feedback may not indicate the church's willingness to implement the

complete step-by-step plan for improved guest enhancement identified in the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. However, it will indicate if church leaders and members have identified their pre-training perceptions, actions, and behaviors as inward-focused and creating barriers to guests engagement.

Thesis Statement

Non-Christian and Christian visitor engagement by church leaders and members is essential for repeat visits and church growth. The actions and behaviors of members, as well as programs and facilities play a dynamic role in creating the atmosphere in which guests expect to operate. Having a church that maintains an inward-focus mindset regarding behaviors, programs, and facility needs will hinder the guest experience and impede future visits or even deter membership. Evidence suggests that the first seven to ten minutes after a person arrives at church are critical to forming and embedding a first impression about the church.⁴⁰ In those first moments, a person determines whether the church visit was positive or negative.⁴¹ Does the church meet the guest's needs and expectations? Do people hear others talk about loving Jesus and how the church has helped them? Are church members willing to speak about their experiences in praise or adoration?

Therefore, the church will implement *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, a training program for all church leaders and members to address the inward-focus mindset. This approach will identify barriers to visitor engagement and how guests perceive the facility, programs, and information the church shares. By participating in *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, church leaders and members will discuss the impacts of an inward

⁴⁰ Franks, *People Are the Mission*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

focus from a guest's perspective based on their personal experiences.

The aim is to create positive interactions with non-Christian and Christian guests that allow for evangelism and sharing the love of Jesus, which will develop into friendships and result in return visits. The program will create a desire in attendees to share their love of the Lord without feeling awkward. This part of the training is the most crucial. Members must be empowered and emboldened to explain how the church can help each guest grow in their faith by participating in church programming and activities. Moreover, members must be able to share their satisfaction in serving Jesus at the church. By sharing their love of Christ, guests will feel more connected to the members and the church and see worshipping Jesus and equipping the saints as the church's focal points.

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation is a custom curriculum targeting clergy, the church leadership team, and the general membership regarding personal perceptions regarding church engagement, the facility, behaviors, and programs. Before the training, secret shoppers and surveys from visitors who have attended sporadically over three months will be used to gain valuable insight into what expectations exist when attending a new church. By sharing this data during the training, members and leaders can hear what others experienced during their visits. The training will help the church identify an inward focus not easily seen from their vantage and establish an action plan via the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* to help the church through a revitalization process to makes guests feel more welcome in the service, where there is an expectation they will see and experience the love of Christ in others who are serving the Lord.

A recent study of evangelism found that 51percent of Americans are curious as to why some people are so devoted to their faith.⁴² Even 60 percent of those surveyed reporting religiously unaffiliated say they are curious about others' faith.⁴³ These data indicate there are opportunities among seekers that believers miss when demonstrating their love and excitement about Jesus to others. Understanding this mindset is part of the curriculum that will be used to demonstrate a shift from an inward-focus to an outward-focused mindset where meaningful evangelism can occur.

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will renew the church's thinking about its perceptions, actions, and programs across a three-day training program. This program should yield immediate results identifying areas where an inward focus exists and areas of the church that need transformation to become more outward-focused. The training ends with the church wanting to change its inward focus by agreeing to move forward with the areas identified on the Roadmap for revitalization within 120 days for their small rural church. While the church could put the action steps in the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* on hold until a later date as to when it will implement the broader changes, the training will have already helped change the church's mindset to see the value in actively engaging newcomers and the pitfalls of an inward focus.

This renewed mindset will demonstrate to the visitor that the church values their presence and wants to learn more about the circumstances that brought them to the church, all the while sharing the love and excitement of serving Jesus in the process. Aiming to know the visitor's family makeup, where they are from, and what brought them to church will help establish an initial point of contact to demonstrate their presence in the church is valued.

⁴² Marissa Postell, "People Aren't Scared of Your Faith," Lifeway Research, March 18, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/03/18/people-arent-scared-of-your-faith/>.

⁴³ "People Aren't Scared of Your Faith."

This approach, coupled with members' personal testimony of faith, will be impressive, explaining how the church has helped them in their spiritual walk with the Lord and offering to walk alongside them in their journey. Most significantly, the church will immediately understand the impact of acting swiftly and decisively to make both the non-Christian and Christian guests feel welcome to experience the love of Jesus on Sunday because church members not only welcomed them to initiate relationships but were willing to share the love of the Lord.

Backing this newfound awareness with various improvements across church functionality will ensure visitors have a positive experience as church guests, not outsiders. This training should be integral to new member orientation and staff development to ensure an understanding of the risks associated with maintaining an inward focus. All of these efforts will assist the church in fulfilling the Great Commission, in which Jesus commanded the church to make disciples. Having guests in attendance should produce general excitement from within the church, creating a feverish desire to engage the new person from all membership levels without hesitation, leading to more extraordinary hospitality. The Christian guests should be encouraged to get involved in the church and grow in their faith, while the non-Christian guests are opportunities for evangelism.

This training program will instill confidence that conversations and relationship building can occur at all ages and levels of Christian experience when the member understands that their love of Christ is a critical motivating driver for engagement with guests and member alike. This excitement and improved church functionality will begin the church's effort to revitalize the heart and facility, culminating a renewed desire to serve the Lord and share the love of God with others. If First Baptist Church receives training addressing its inward focus, it will become more missional, demonstrating its love of Christ to others.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Attempting to understand why some Christians have an inwardly-focus mindset is complicated. Multiple questions surface when the subject is discussed, including, when do a person's individual needs supersede the needs and attention of others? Millard Erickson links the inability to empathize with others due to sin, which limits one's perspective.⁴⁴ This limitation is due to selfish desires, reputation, and opinions.⁴⁵ This mindset becomes obvious whenever someone is less concerned about meeting another person's wants or needs in the church over their own.

Even more complex is trying to understand why any church member would believe their personal preferences or opinions regarding the worship setting should have more bearing than others'. In order to gain insight into the issue, the researcher will explore the mindset of church leaders and members at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to better understand their individual and collective feelings and beliefs regarding the impacts of an inward focus. Understanding how an inward focus can impact guests negatively is critical to behavior change.

Further, the church needs to understand that living out its faith authentically in front of first-time guests by sharing the love of Jesus and explaining what the Lord can do for them will have a meaningful impact that leads to spiritual growth. This behavior and mindset are essential because the guest could be the kind of believer Erickson describes as one who desires a more

⁴⁴ Millard J. Erikson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 220.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

sophisticated version of the Christian faith, where one seeks to understand the meaning of the Christian faith and life more fully.⁴⁶ He claims that sin results in the inability to love others fully, and if the church's aim is self-satisfaction, then people who disagree with that premise will be considered a threat.⁴⁷

Therefore, since limited information exists on reforming the inward-focused church to demonstrate to others a love of God, a custom modality is being used based on information available to the researcher and is the premise for the training. The model will be used as a custom curriculum that will help shape the church's desire to be more evangelistic and missional. This goal underscores the importance of building relationships that foster discipleship and spiritual growth. Will Mancini and Cory Hartman believe that churches agree with Jesus' mandate to make disciples; however, many fundamentally fail to do so, even though they articulate that disciple-making outcomes are at their core purpose.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, when a church finds its uniqueness and does not just use someone else's template, there are certain fundamentals they can highlight to bring about joy in serving the Lord and reaching the lost for Christ.

This basis will help drive the training program, which considers the church's functionality regarding visitor engagement and attitudes, facility needs, member actions, behavior regarding guest engagement, sharing the love of Christ with others, and program benefits. These areas apply across the spectrum, but the potentially negative impacts on Christian and non-Christian guests who are isolated or considered nonessential cannot be ignored.

⁴⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 43.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁴⁸ Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 22-26.

The motive and synergy for the project come from the love the congregation has for the Lord. Jesus would want guests to see love demonstrated in the church. Jesus would want the church to grow and prosper while making disciples and encouraging those of the faith. Therefore, at the core of the training program, there must be a rekindling of the soul or a newfound desire by members to see souls saved and grow spiritually and in their love for the Lord. This common desire will be the motivation toward transformation that impacts the church and its members. This revitalization for members comes as they understand the importance of guest engagement, which involves sharing one's love of God and how the church has supported them on their spiritual journey. This imparting of wisdom will help the new attendee to grow in their faith and see the church as a place where this can occur. Having this more significant understanding will equip believers to put their faith in and see church guests as souls the Lord loves and opportunities for engagement that the Lord divinely inspired to be in attendance.

Hindrances for the body of believers are deeply held personal attitudes and beliefs that have culminated in a pervasive inward focus for the church, which can lead to resistance to change. This practice centers around why church members often attach themselves to the church facility, including other people, places, personalities, programs, and people.⁴⁹ Will Mancini and Cory Hartman asserted that people do not resist change; they resist loss.⁵⁰ For the member, there needs to be a sense of urgency regarding engaging people of all ages, as 50 percent of young people in the congregation will fall away from their faith as young adults.⁵¹ Understanding that

⁴⁹ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 22-26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵¹ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), np. <https://books.google.com/books?id=vurxDAAAQBAJ&lpg=PT9&dq=6%20markers%20of%20especially%20elcoming%20churches&lr&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

congregations are not growing younger, congregations must prioritize including and representing people of all ages.⁵²

Providing leaders and members with training sessions on hospitality allows for a broader conversation about inward-focus and how such a mindset impacts guests. This training will emphasize soul care and illustrate how it is more effective than ministry that seeks to maintain the status quo to please oneself.

This process builds support for the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* program that helps the church institute changes over four months to become more evangelistic and mission-focused, making non-Christian and Christian guests feel welcome because of an overwhelming sense of the love of Jesus in members. Part of this process is helping people in the church learn to share with others not only why they attend this specific church but also how others in the church have helped them love Jesus even more. Having members engaged in the process is vital because a shared sense of mission and vision influences ministry management.⁵³

Since Baptist churches are autonomous, church members elect leaders. Therefore, this sense of mission must be employed at all levels of the church. This personal and honest assessment allows each church member to become a necessary conduit of God's love and share in building personal relationships organically.⁵⁴

The church collectively will learn that the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* can be implemented across a 120-day window. The *Roadmap* prioritizes areas based on how quickly each issue can be addressed and where more work is needed. For example, interactions with

⁵² Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*.

⁵³ Christopher L. Kingdom, "Church Leadership: Effectual Strategic Planning Towards the Congregational Growth and Maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries" (DMin. thes., Liberty University, 2021), 21, <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3196/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

guests can occur relatively quickly, whereas facility improvements such as signage or furnishings can take time to order and install, unlike bulletin enhancements about programming that can also be made right away. However, teaching leaders and members to share their love of Jesus and how the church has impacted their lives over the years will be the most challenging. Having training that includes role-playing opportunities will help. Some people find spiritual engagement complicated, particularly with a guest or another church member they do not know. For a non-Christian or Christian guest to feel welcome, they must feel loved and engaged and see the excitement the member has about Jesus. This responsibility falls on the church member.

One component of this training will help attendees learn how to have a simple evangelistic conversation using the acronym TALK or 1) introducing oneself to the guest, 2) asking the guest who they are and asking about their family and what brought them to church, 3) listening to what they share and interacting accordingly, and 4) kindly sharing the love for the Lord and how the church can help the guest grow in their faith. This simple approach will open the door for initial and non-threatening conversation and can easily be replicated whenever needed.

The problem now is that this kind of conversation is not happening as it should. Using this model as presented, when used sincerely should appear non-rehearsed and allow for natural conversation to flow, while still helping one remember simple action steps for engagement. Admittedly, TALK is not a catch-all approach, but a conversation starter that should allow the church leader or member to share their love of Jesus and the church with the guest. This approach will open the door for further engagement, including a personal witness or sharing what the church offers in spiritual development or maturity.

It is essential to understand that teaching others about the importance of sharing one's faith might sound simple, but getting people to do so in an actual service with people they do not know will challenge each person in ways they may not have experienced. While the training not only gives participants confidence and encouragement, there further comes an understanding that the Holy Spirit can lead them in the conversation that may be divinely inspired from the beginning. One example the church must look to is how Jesus does not instruct his disciples to adopt spiritual practices but instead to model them.⁵⁵ This effort invited his disciples to emulate him, which helps one correlate Jesus' words and deeds.⁵⁶

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* is a simple pathway forward for a small rural church such as First Baptist because it aims to examine church functionality and guest engagement and revitalize those efforts, putting the love of others and Jesus at the center of everything. This common desire becomes the mindset of the church, not just the members. The curriculum will underscore that loving Jesus and loving others needs to be the expectation of the church. To the non-Christian, this engagement could open the door for evangelism. Creating an environment of love and trust will help soften the non-believer's heart.

Regarding strategic planning, larger churches would likely rely on consultants over church-wide training, which can be costly. A quick Google search shows countless commercial plans available for visitor engagement, and most highlight canned talking points and visitor points of contact. However, none of these programs appear to underscore the importance of sharing the love of Christ and one's testimony as part of reshaping the existing mindset that helps others see the importance of making Christ the center of their lives. Additionally, the commercial

⁵⁵ Catherine Wright, "The Power of Example: Following Jesus on the Path of Spirituality in Luke-Acts," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (2023):1, accessed November 15, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ref14020161>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

revitalization plans may require actions and material things that are unreasonable for many small rural churches due to limited volunteers, space, parking, and resources.

However, *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* focuses on changing the inwardly-focused mindset of the church member first, then making some facility changes that will enhance a guest's experience, all while learning to share and demonstrate the love of Jesus with others. This effort creates a common desire among church leaders and members to see a revitalization opportunity by making much-needed changes to the facility and the members' hearts about loving others more. The church can use the already-established *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* to launch a culture of loving others like Jesus.

While the approach may sound simple, changing a deeply held mindset is a large obstacle. One problem that Nate Holcomb underscores is that church leaders can live their entire lives and never understand the purpose of their church's existence.⁵⁷ The church can get so excited about what is happening inside the church with members and the already established friendships that it can miss the opportunity God has given to engage new guests or new families whenever they arrive, regardless of whether or not they are Christian.

Therefore, to adequately address the inwardly-focused mindset, a literature review was used to develop the curriculum for the intervention. This effort, followed by an understanding of the theological and theoretical foundation, supports the need for a curriculum to help an inwardly-focused church change while emphasizing sharing the love of Christ with guests in the church. The literature review will provide a review of resources that have provided insight into

⁵⁷ Nate Holcomb, *Close the Gap: There's Danger in the Distance* (Copperas Cove: Him Publishing, 2016), 83.

the issue from various scholars and professionals in the ministry regarding transactional and transformation ministries.

This analysis will provide valuable information about visitor and member expectations, church revitalization, the importance of leadership involvement on the issue, and overall church hospitality. Guests can see the church members' excitement about their church by hearing them share their love for Jesus and how their life has been transformed and enhanced by faith in him and involvement in the church. This information collectively sets the groundwork for developing and implementing a training program such as *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* for the membership and leadership team regarding the risks associated with missing the opportunity of having repeat guests, leading to church decline if an inward focus is maintained. This inward focus can make an outsider feel non-existent and unwelcome.⁵⁸ Where there is no welcome, there is alienation.⁵⁹

In contrast, the book of Acts supports a one-on-one relationship-building premise as it demonstrates that one can emulate Jesus by following the example of those patterning their lives after Jesus (Acts 11:27-30, New International Version).⁶⁰ Luke shows readers how Gentile believers financially showed the same generosity to Jewish Christians.⁶¹ In all aspects, they followed the example set by their teacher Barnabas, who practiced what some say was "radical generosity."⁶²

⁵⁸ Adrian Kitson, "Welcoming the Stranger: Being a Welcoming Church," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2008): 80, accessed November 15, 2023, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/welcoming-stranger-being-church/docview/213728891/se-2>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Wright, "The Power of Example," 8.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

This curriculum addresses the church's concerns by bringing issues and concerns to the table for discussion to shift the mindset of the church. This transitional approach will benefit the church by revitalizing the church's actions, behaviors, facility, and program needs, creating a better guest experience and opportunity to grow in faith together. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will prove that an inwardly-focused church will want to change once it recognizes its issues and understands why certain attitudes and actions may need to change. Failure to take recommended actions in the curriculum will result in the continued lack of meaningful guest engagement regarding facility improvements and member attitude, behaviors, and actions regarding church functionality, which will hinder the guest's experience at church and potential church growth over the next decade as guest expectations from an ever-changing culture evolve.

Literature Review

Protestant church membership rates across the United States have decreased steadily for decades, resulting in a tremendous burden on the local church today.⁶³ Research firms have sought insight into why these attitudes and behaviors have changed in America. This investigation raised the natural question of whether the local church can do anything to reverse the trend. If there is to be an intervention by the church to slow attendance declines, corrective action must occur immediately upon church entry using the available data and peer-reviewed interventions as expounded.

An intervention, to be deemed adequate, must take into consideration the currently available findings concerning church decline and growth and then work to transform the minds

⁶³ Jeffrey, M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, 2021, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

of the church leadership and congregation to better engage visitors as the most influential people in attendance on Sunday morning, which opens the door for relationship building.⁶⁴ *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will meet this need.

The problem of membership decline is not going away and is getting worse, and the local church should be looking for ways to intervene. During the first 60 years of Gallup's polling efforts monitoring church attendance, nearly 70 percent of respondents reported membership in the local church.⁶⁵ This number plummeted in 2020 to 47 percent, down from 50 percent in 2018 and 70 percent in 1999.⁶⁶ One report cited that the most significant declines in Mainline Protestantism were the United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, and also American Baptist Churches USA, of which First Baptist of Ravenswood is a part.⁶⁷

Consequently, the number of Americans now reporting that they only attend church a few times a year, seldom, or never has been increasing alarmingly.⁶⁸ The Pew Foundation found the number one reason for non-involvement in the church was that respondents said they either practiced their faith in other ways, disliked the services or sermons, or did not feel welcome.⁶⁹ All of these factors must be considered by church leadership if any change is to occur.

First impressions are essential, and guests will start making assumptions and forming

⁶⁴ Adam Mark Walker, "Church Guests Matter: A Strategic Program to Welcome Guests." (DMin. thesis., Liberty University, 2021), <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2936/>.

⁶⁵ Jones, Gallup, "U.S. Church Membership."

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*.

⁶⁸ "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services," Pew Research, last modified August 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/#:~:text=Among%20self%2Didentified%20Christians%2C%20the,going%20to%20church%20more%20often.>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

opinions about the church within the first seven to ten minutes of their arrival.⁷⁰ This understanding avows that even before guests hear the sermon, they have already determined if the church is a place they want to worship.⁷¹ This premise supports the notion of the tremendous need for the church to take action and make intentional relationships a focal area of the church mission by both leadership and members of the congregation. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will address first impressions.

This heightened awareness can come as part of church revitalization. The transformation process that will occur through *Others First* training can help church member's mindsets evolve to rethink how they perceive church visitors. This kind of revitalization will spark growth and is possible for any church, regardless of its size, history, or stage in life.⁷² However, the opposite occurs for habitually internalized churches that focus only on their needs and problems.⁷³ Christians should be involved in their communities, influencing culture during relationship building.⁷⁴ Failing to establish this sense of connection and community early may cause the church to miss critical points of contact for connection, which could lead to a missed return visit and possibility of future membership.

Tolliver says that failing to emphasize fellowship has a cascading effect that hinders efforts leading to Christian discipleship, and instead leads to broken relationships with God and

⁷⁰ Franks, *People Are the Mission*.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Bill Henard, *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 96, Proquest Ebrary.

⁷³ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁴ Olanda Tolliver, "Creating a Transformational Model that Bridges the Gap Between Church and Community" (DMin. thesis., South University, 2020), 3, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

other Christians, negatively impacting the entire church community.⁷⁵ This argument bolsters the proposition that the church needs to be engaged in a ministry that builds unity and encourages relationships. Planning and practicing the welcoming of strangers is born out of conviction.⁷⁶ Members who gather to worship in Jesus' name should welcome one another and any strangers in their midst the same way the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit welcome the church member with total acceptance.⁷⁷ Marissa Postell says, "Two in three Americans (66 percent) say they're at least open to having spiritual conversations with a friend, and 41 percent of those are very open to these conversations."⁷⁸ She asserts that "six in ten Americans (60 percent) say many of their Christian friends rarely discuss their faith."⁷⁹

Exploring Healthy Church Models

First Baptist Church must consider the question of what makes a church healthy and how one ascertains what areas of church functionality need improvement. By examining some strategic plans and models, First Baptist Church may be able to gain some helpful insight for problem assessment to ensure the church is in a positive position for growth both spiritually and numerically. Does a common view exist on a healthy church model? Sam Horn notes, "Church historians, theologians, evangelical authors, and leaders agree that two distinct church models

⁷⁵ Tolliver, "Creating a Transformational Model," 5.

⁷⁶ Kitson, "Welcoming the Stranger," 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁷⁸ Postell, "People Aren't Scared," <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/03/18/people-arent-scared-of-your-faith/>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

exist in the current evangelical context in the United States defined as doxological model churches and attractional model churches.”⁸⁰

The doxological model church is best described by Horn as believing the primary purpose of the worship service is for believers to worship God accurately, authentically, and acceptably in accordance with the mandates and expectations of Scripture.⁸¹ In this setting, Horn says, there is an emphasis on worshipping God through praise, adoration, prayer, and giving and receiving edification, exhortation, and encouragement from God’s Word. The attractional model church believes the primary purpose of the worship service is to attract lost people, disengaged Christians, or the unchurched to accept the gospel and reconnect with the church by placing an emphasis on the experience by making it attractive to skeptical audiences.⁸² Horn says that in some cases, the attractional model church has light theology and low commitment. Horn expressed this model downplays what are considered the “offensive parts of the Gospel,” and fails to emphasize growth and progressive sanctification to confront sin.⁸³ Furthermore, the attractional model ministry is known to place an emphasis on life lessons, which focuses on improving attendees’ lives and resolving problems.⁸⁴

Size or look of the church alone is not enough to accurately gauge whether a church is attractional or doxological. Horn says the normal descriptive words, traditional and

⁸⁰ Sam Horn, “Choosing a Church: Two Models: Recognizing the Theological Orientation of a Local Church,” Bob Jones Today, November 19, 2019, [https://today.bju.edu/vice-president/choosing-a-church-doxological-vs-attractional-models/#:~:text=Attractional%20model%20\(AM\)%20churches%20believe,and%20reconnect%20with%20the%20church.](https://today.bju.edu/vice-president/choosing-a-church-doxological-vs-attractional-models/#:~:text=Attractional%20model%20(AM)%20churches%20believe,and%20reconnect%20with%20the%20church.)

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

contemporary, that are often used to describe churches are not necessarily synonymous with doxological and attractional ministry functions.⁸⁵ He asserts that some traditional churches can follow an attractional model, while some contemporary churches can follow a doxological model. In order to create a strategic plan, the ministry model of First Baptist Church must be considered. When examining these two models of church operations, First Baptist Church is best considered a doxological church.

First Baptist Church meets the eight identifiers of a doxological church including: 1) the church's focus on the authority of Scripture, 2) a commitment to the accurate and authoritative exposition of God's Word, 3) an emphasis on salvation by faith alone, 4) a strong and clear commitment to spiritual growth progressive sanctification, 5) a clear and uncompromising insistence on moral and ethical mandates in Scripture, 6) an expectation of church membership as being a baptized believer, 7) biblically qualified people serving in leadership roles, and 8) the belief that corporate worship is designed to glorify God.⁸⁶ There is one commonality that First Baptist Church shares with the attractional model church and that is their desire to reach out to non-believers and invite them to worship. The church has a heart for lost people and recognizes their need for salvation, which underscores the importance of evangelism and outreach within all churches to share the gospel. However, while the worship service at First Baptist is welcoming to nonbelievers, it should be primarily aimed at believers as they attempt to live out their lives as saved people, following the leading of the Holy Spirit and joining with other believers in praising God for his salvation, praying for one another, and being encouragers in the faith.

⁸⁵ Horn, "Choosing a Church: Two Models."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

This critical understanding of ministry models is important when determining what kinds of changes a church may embrace. Church functionality can be improved upon if it is aligned with the ministry model of the church. If the proposed changes are in direct conflict with the ministerial ethos of the church, then change will be very difficult, if not impossible or divisive. Therefore, in order for First Baptist Church to initiate change, there must be an understanding of how the proposed church functionality improvements fit into the overall ethos of the church. Once this operating structure is understood, then other models can be explored to gain insight on improvement particularly in regards to church health.

One such model was proposed by Mark Dever. He says there are four basic models of church ministry that operate in the United States: liberal, prosperity gospel, seekersensitive, and traditional.⁸⁷ There is some variance in each of these categories that can be further extrapolated as attractional or doxological as explained in the preceding paragraph.

Dever's assertion is not specifically about how a church operates programmatically, but rather what is happening at the core of the church.⁸⁸ This helps determine if the current ministry model is viewed as healthy and if so, if it is self-consciously distinct from the culture, which will serve as a key indicator of success evidenced not by results but by persevering biblical faithfulness.⁸⁹ This position underscores the importance of churches not becoming so desperate to reach people that they compromise the truth of the gospel by weakening theology to the point it is not considered offensive due to culture shifts.

⁸⁷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4th ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 30, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6735039>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

First Baptist Church is a traditional doxological church that is aligned with Dever's premise that distinction from the culture is necessary.⁹⁰ As such, there must be consideration given to Dever's *Nine Marks* involving examining the church's preaching, doctrine, understanding of conversion and evangelism, biblical church discipline, biblical concern for discipleship and growth, biblical church leadership, and biblical understanding of prayer and missions. This examination is important for a church to honestly and openly assess how they are currently operating in regards to church health. When trying to improve the church culture, there is concern that the church may start making changes for the sake of making changes, without considering why certain aspects of church functionality need changed and how those changes will impact the overall health of the church. By using Dever's markers, a church can target areas for improvement by looking at the need through the lens of creating a healthier church.

Some areas of Dever's assessment would be helpful in initially identifying areas of functionality that may be unhealthy. There is consensus within the church that the preaching and the church's use of Baptist doctrine are sound. No changes are needed there. However, there is room for improvement in areas of spiritual disciplines and growth, leadership development, outreach, and having a biblical concern for conversion and evangelism. Comparing *Others First* areas for targeted improvement through the lens of Dever's model, the church will need a curriculum that not only identifies areas of concern in functionality, but also collectively engages the membership with a proactive approach to bring about healthy improvements in the areas of church functionality that are needed to be made whole.

The *Others First* curriculum sought input from church members before and after training to gauge areas needing the most improvement. By underscoring the importance of First Baptist

⁹⁰ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 30.

becoming a healthy and more missional church, the motive for change began with church members seeing the need for a change of heart. This effort is described as the church embracing a sincere desire to be a place where people can worship Jesus, share in their love for Him with others, and grow together in their faith. Dever stresses that the health of the church should be the concern of all Christians because it impacts the spiritual life of the believer, members of the church, and those called to be leaders in the church.⁹¹

This premise was embraced as evident by the church's willingness to participate in the project and support the proposed improvement efforts moving forward. Therefore, by creating a training curriculum that both identifies areas of concern at First Baptist as well as the corrective action steps necessary to improve upon each area of church functionality, the church moves toward being healthier. Having the church embrace the importance of instilling the love of Christ in all aspects of church ministry is a universal starting point.

Another strategic planning model that was considered comes from an idea found in Christian Schwarz's *Natural Church Development Model* that is part of his *Color Your World with Natural Church Development*. This model capitalizes on eight characteristics touted by the North American Division Evangelism Institute and includes a focus on: effective structures, empowering leadership, gift oriented ministry, holistic small groups, inspiring worship, loving relationships, need-originated evangelism, and passionate spirituality.⁹²

Similar to Dever's model, Schwarz calls upon churches to examine how they worship and serve with an open mind and heart. In Schwarz' model, over a dozen actively involved lay persons and the church pastor are surveyed to determine the church's strengths and

⁹¹ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 230.

⁹² "Natural Church Development," North American Division Evangelism Institute, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.nadei.org/nadequipping/natural-church-development>.

weaknesses.⁹³ Whatever areas scored the lowest are targeted for improvement. Comparing Schwarz's model to *Others First*, both models identified areas in the church needing improvement that involve improving and implementing effective structures, empowering leadership in programs, creating discipleship and evangelism opportunities in small groups, and fostering loving relationships through passionate spirituality and witnessing.⁹⁴

Others First used pre-testing analysis of surveys to determine these areas of church functionality, which further identified areas for improvement. In Schwarz's model, churches would continue their survey annually over a period of years to gauge improvement. The *Others First* project goes further by not only annually reviewing the work that is being done, but also forming an oversight committee or vision committee to ensure adherence to the improvement steps identified in the project. The church also would vote on an official declaration of the *Others First* project to provide additional credibility, making it the official strategic plan for the church. The aim of the *National Church Development* model was to identify obstacles to growth that could be removed so that growth could occur.⁹⁵ With their custom curriculum, First Baptist modeled a similar approach by having members help identify areas of weakness in the church in regards to church functionality to determine barriers in each section of ministry. Church member feedback is essential in not only identifying existing attitudes, but gauging what possibilities exist for change within the First Baptist Church culture.

When further comparing against the *National Church Development* model, First Baptist chose to focus on relationships, evangelism, small group spiritual disciplines, and guest

⁹³ "Natural Church Development," North American Division Evangelism Institute.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

interaction and to consider if facility improvements were necessary. Ultimately, by members learning to share the love of Jesus with others and following the leading of the Holy Spirit in their daily walk with the Lord, the *Others First* model would change hearts as well as church functionality.

The key difference is that pre-and post-survey results in *Others First* would measure both initial thoughts on church functionality as well as the desire for change after training. These efforts provide a mechanism to ensure the improvement project is both implemented and continued. The aim will be for this vision committee at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to meet regularly and provide updates to church members on the progress being made across the four areas identified.

What is important for modeling and implementing change is that the one leading the charge must be empowered by leadership. Jan Inge Jenssen and Arne Mella looked at the issue and found churches, like other organizations, require formal and responsible leadership involvement if change is to occur.⁹⁶ They assert that in most churches the pastor has overall responsibility for the church and can lead the effort but should also empower others. They stress it is important that the pastor does not do everything, but must mobilize others to accomplish sustainability.⁹⁷

Therefore, for an improvement project to be embraced by the church, the pastor must be able to lead efforts of change with the support of leadership in the church in regards to bolstering the spiritual–theological side of the church.⁹⁸ The reason for providing this level of support for a

⁹⁶ Jan Inge Jenssen and Arne Mella, “The Significance of the Senior Pastor for Change and Growth: A Literature-Based Discussion,” *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology* 10 (December 6, 2023): 157–181. <https://www.sjlt-journal.com/index.php/sjlt/article/view/90>.

⁹⁷ Jenssen and Mella, “The Significance of the Senior Pastor,” 170.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

project by the pastor and other leaders in the church is their ability to gain greater access to resources needed for the improvement project, such as money, buildings, materials, etc., to be able to appropriately design goals, recruit employees, and disseminate information.⁹⁹ Jennsen and Mella affirm, “Studies have shown that a good leader is crucial for good performance, facilitating change, and ensuring that the organization is moving in the desired direction.”¹⁰⁰ Transformational leadership is vital for change, but its impact processes are slower.

First Baptist Church has a long history of transactional ministry that is sometimes hindered by an inward focus. Therefore, it can be difficult to institute change. However, Jennsen and Mella agree that in regards to church growth thinking, pastors in growing churches that have come through a period of stagnation are often more visionary and goal-driven than pastors in churches that are neither growing nor stagnating.¹⁰¹ Therefore, First Baptist Church is in a position to capitalize on its long history in the community, knowing that it has overcome many challenges over the years. In all instances, the church has continued to serve the community and has an ongoing desire to remain healthy and viable. This belief will motivate change.

Further, the church leadership team has accepted and supported the pastor in leading the transformational efforts facilitating functional change by the leading of the Holy Spirit. This support has been continual in a willingness to participate in the project, take part in the surveys, participate in roleplaying activities, and then embracing the action steps for improvement. Success begins with a vision and a plan. As Jennsen and Mella note, “A strong vision for the future can seize the church and motivate growth.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Jennsen and Mella, “The Significance of the Senior Pastor,” 162.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 172.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 168.

¹⁰² Ibid.

This is the premise that *Others First* will capitalize on, knowing that improving the health of the church is a common desire for members. Getting church members involved in the decision making process for an improvement project will create commitment; however, it can also slow the overall progress.¹⁰³ This is why a limited number of people should be involved in the initial stages of the strategic plan for the church. Once a roadmap is created for moving forward, more people can be brought into the discussion. *Others First* will not only equip and empower the church member for service, but will also enable them to share the love of Jesus with others and help the church continue to serve the community.

Needing Discipleship and Spiritual Growth

Another model that was considered for this project involved looking at discipleship and the impact of spiritual gifts. Clyde David Headley points out that the church today attempts to lead people to make a commitment to Jesus and then tells them to minister to others without having the benefit of being ministered to or watching other believers minister to anyone.¹⁰⁴ There is somewhat of an expectation that a new believer will somehow automatically know how to start living their life like Jesus. This is an area that can be improved upon at First Baptist.

New believers need to be discipled. The expectation that believers just know how to live like Jesus without being mentored or taught is what Headley says is completely reversed from the model Jesus presents.¹⁰⁵ He suggests the churches abandon the thought process of just “leading people to Christ” and replace it with teaching people the precepts of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶ He

¹⁰³ Jenssen and Mella, “The Significance of the Senior Pastor,” 171.

¹⁰⁴ Clyde David Headley, “Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus in the Local Church,” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2022), 61, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 123.

instructs believers to, “teach the truth and invest in the few people who seek further understanding.”¹⁰⁷

George Barna explored five models of discipleship that are considered effective and unique, but also have positives and negatives. He says when a person is devoted to the process of spiritual growth and to allowing the Holy Spirit to shape them on that journey, how they end up will bear scant resemblance to what they were when they began the journey.¹⁰⁸ One of those models explored for this project is what Barna calls The Missional Model.¹⁰⁹

The Missional Model is a descriptive name which helps differentiate the discipleship efforts of five churches. The Missional Model is the kind of discipleship effort used by Fellowship Bible Church of Little Rock that is captured in Barna’s book. He says this approach aims to help people become more spiritually mature by 1) being passionately committed to Jesus Christ, 2) evaluating everything in their lives according to biblical standards, 3) being deeply committed to having a healthy family, 4) being morally pure, 5) being evangelistically bold, and 6) being socially responsible and impactful.¹¹⁰ In this model, believers are taught fundamentals of the faith in a class that meets over eight Sunday evenings in a small group setting. As part of this process, they are introduced to what is called a Personal Development Plan that highlights six outcomes for the participant to focus on in the coming year. This model promotes the importance of the small group setting for personal growth. New members are required to participate in a small group.

¹⁰⁷ Headley, “Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus,” 128.

¹⁰⁸ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, Barna Reports (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2013), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=739841&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*.

Barna says the simplicity of the model is what makes it appealing.¹¹¹ However, some people consider the project too easy to be effective. He asserts that the hard work that goes on behind the scenes involving planning, anticipation, resources, and defining a clear mission takes time, but the process itself is easy for everyone to get involved. First Baptist Church of Ravenswood is using a similar approach in the *Others First* training. The project itself is rather simple, but the work behind the scenes collecting data, taking part in discussions, and converting those discussions into learning materials for feedback purposes and role-playing activities are time intensive. The small group setting allows for interaction and an inviting setting. A significant part of *Others First* is role playing exercises in learning to share one's faith and to explain how the church can help people grow in their faith. One of the outcomes of the *Others First* strategic plan is to give members the opportunity to participate in ongoing monthly meetings with the pastor to help them develop and build upon personal spiritual disciplines to continually grow in their spiritual maturity.

Comparing the Missional Model to the *Others First* project, one will find that they are both simple but involve significant planning behind the scenes to ensure that hands-on experience of discipleship can be fostered in a small group setting easily. Barna admits that one perceived negative to the Mission Model is that it does not place much weight on exposing everyone to core theological foundations.¹¹² He suggests a deeper understanding will come later through church teaching and discussion. *Others First's* aim is also not to emphasize theological foundations, but rather to mature spiritually and share the love of Christ and the benefits of following Christ with other people. Spiritual maturity is a common theme in both the Missional

¹¹¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Model from Barna and the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* model.

Barna states that by having a sound discipleship program, people's lives can change and then society can be changed by the disciples. However, he notes that society may also experience turmoil as a result of the church being true to God's truth and commands, and disciples should expect to be persecuted for that work.¹¹³ The obstacle for making disciples for Christ according to Barna is not money, time, methods, or knowledge, but rather the human heart. Headley builds on this notion in his own model, which reiterates that discipleship begins the first time a person hears about Jesus Christ and during every encounter with another person that involves Jesus.

¹¹⁴Having a heart that loves Jesus is not so much about having knowledge of who Jesus is, but rather instilling a desire to model and imitate the character of Christ and his love for others.

Headley asserts that a church having a sound discipleship program does not necessarily equate to starting a new program.¹¹⁵ He said new programs are not the answer for initiating discipleship efforts in the church. Discipleship begins by acting on the desire to disciple that serves as a means for the discipler to demonstrate the disciplines and truths they desire to teach.¹¹⁶ By initiating these efforts, Headley says the model of discipleship helps the discipler as well as the one being disciplined to incorporate Christian values in their daily lives and brings about spiritual maturity.¹¹⁷

Another model assessing church health in small churches and the impact or limitations of

¹¹³ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*.

¹¹⁴ Headley, "Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus," 118.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 124.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*.

facility was proposed by Eric Tate Martin, who found that growth stagnation in small churches occurs because the church is not healthy, not because of the size of the church.¹¹⁸ While the culture today may presume bigger churches have to be better churches because of greater attendance, this may not be the case. The same argument can be made in regards to modern versus traditional facilities.

Martin's investigation explored the possibility of a link between poor church health and facility limitations. His aim was to encourage small churches about how to better use physical space in their church more efficiently.¹¹⁹ While facility limitations was just one aspect in his research project pertaining to church health, the findings apply to *Others First* because facility improvements are included as part of the strategic improvement plan for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood.

Martin's data analysis for church health was used to determine church growth strategies, strengths, and weaknesses.¹²⁰ The notion that a church cannot do something for the Lord because the church facility has limitations is an excuse to do nothing. Part of Martin's conclusion was for small churches to simply make the best use of what they have available and to capitalize on their smaller size in regards to relationship building and small group discipleship.¹²¹ He proposed working closely with other small churches or church plants, saying, "Jesus was not concerned about a building, nor was he concerned about a large crowd like as many people are today."¹²²

¹¹⁸ Eric Tate Martin, "Characteristics of a Healthy Church Used as a Model to Aid in the Survival and Growth of Small Churches in the Dallas, Texas Metroplex," (DMin diss., Regent University, 2021), 1, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 65.

¹²² Ibid., 16

As part of spiritual growth assessment for the *Others First* project, First Baptist Church of Ravenswood began to analyze the church facility to determine how to better position the church for guest and member engagement. Multiple facility needs are being considered for improvement as part of the project that may have been neglected over the years for a variety of reasons. While improved facilities at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood will not guarantee church growth physically or spiritually, they will be beneficial for better meeting the ever-changing needs of church members and guests who may attend the church in the future. Churches have to be careful about ignoring facility needs. Martin quotes Thom Rainer in *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, saying, “It is rare for a long-term church member to see erosion in his or her church.”¹²³ Missing much needed repairs or improvements can lead to bigger problems down the road.

This is why it is critical for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to include facility improvements in the *Others First* project. While facility improvements may be welcomed by the church, these improvements will not impact overall church health based on Martin’s research. His analysis found that poor church health is more connected to a leadership problem where there is not a present and clear purpose, vision, and goal to equip the congregation in work for the Lord, as opposed to facility issues. According to Martin, pastors and leaders need to be better equipped to help foster growth in other ways beyond facility limitations. This conclusion bolsters support for *Others First* because it encourages the church to be active in the practicing of spiritual disciplines, sharing the love of Christ with others, engaging guests, and ensuring discipleship and evangelism components exist in church programs.

Churches can consider facility limitations as opposed to dismissing them as barriers.

¹²³ Martin, “Characteristics of a Healthy Church,” 4.

Martin says that prayer should be the first step in facilitating church expansion, whether it is in the form of spiritual or physical growth, and notes that small churches have a great opportunity for relationship building because most everyone knows every other person or is familiar with families in which they are connected. Martin warns that this comfortability while an asset is also a risk. He says small churches must be careful not to allow the strength of small church relationships to pull the focus of the church inward.¹²⁴ This is a concern at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood that led to the *Others First* project. Therefore, First Baptist will follow the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* plan to not only help identify existing attitudes steeped in an inward focus pertaining to four areas of church functionality, but also aims to convert these views to a broader mission-minded focus that reaches out to more newcomers as Martin suggests.¹²⁵

Spiritual growth on the other hand will occur, according to Adam McClendon and Jared Lockhart, when there is an implementation of various principles in one's life including: confessing, gathering, praying, giving, and engaging the church.¹²⁶ This further supports the need for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to implement discipleship and evangelism components into existing programs. McClendon and Lockhart contend that if a local church is deficient in one of these areas, a change agent such as a church leader or member can urge other members to become more faithful.¹²⁷ This new attitude will demonstrate a change of heart by placing a greater emphasis on loving Jesus and others. Therefore, the pastor must lead the efforts to

¹²⁴ Martin, "Characteristics of a Healthy Church," 28.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹²⁶ McClendon and Lockhart, *Timeless Church*, 91.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

transform the church into a healthier church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The pastor has opportunities to initiate change processes due to his or her formal position and visibility.

The Need for a Committed, Christ-Honoring Church

There is a need to overcome or at least combat the reasons for the statistical problems of one's non-involvement in the local church. The first step must be to examine the local church itself and determine its priorities. Where is the church committed? It may be possible that the church has forgotten the Great Commission by being overly inward-focused.¹²⁸ Being heavily inward-focused risks creating cliques or clans. If this occurs, the church may not be actively pursuing, evangelizing, or edifying others but may instead have decided to focus on meeting the needs of the existing church members.¹²⁹ Adam Walker states this mindset is all in-reach with no outreach.¹³⁰ Churches that have not had recent growth or are in decline become so internalized that they are crippled.¹³¹ *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* cautions against this mindset.

Evidence suggests that people seeking a church are looking for one that is “fully committed” to following Jesus at its core; however, they often find themselves in a social commitment church instead.¹³² The problem with a social commitment church is that it focuses on members' needs and desires rather than on how guests feel.¹³³ This belief system impedes

¹²⁸ Walker, “Church Guests Matter,” 10.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Henard, *Reclaimed Church*, 94.

¹³² David Harris, “Try Different Things,” *The Presbyterian Record* 5, no. 2 (2016): 2, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/try-different-things/docview/1790172743/se-2>.

¹³³ Ibid.

building a community where people experience God's love through others' actions and deeds.¹³⁴ Therefore, introspection by church leadership must occur regarding church operations and procedures. If visitors desire to feel included in the faith community, efforts must be made to create relationships. Whenever the church is unified, it becomes a witness to the authenticity of Jesus.¹³⁵

The problem is that some Christians who do not emphasize the need for fellowship will see a negative response to the call to Christian discipleship.¹³⁶ This negative response can lead to broken relationships with God and other Christians, negatively impacting an entire community. The worship setting provides a relationship connection that can foster spiritual growth and discipleship. This is one of the reasons why assembling as a body of believers is vital for the church. Research demonstrates that church congregations have found that participation in church worship services increases feelings of connection and inclusion.¹³⁷

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will add to this experience because of its emphasis on guest encounters and engagement. Further, this research suggests a significant impact since the more strongly one identifies with a group, the more likely he or she will be to incorporate into the group, or in this case, the church congregation.¹³⁸ Much of this incorporation into the church is the result of shared values.

¹³⁴ Harris, "Try Different Things," 2.

¹³⁵ Tolliver, "Creating a Transformational Model," 4.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³⁷ J. E. Brown, V. van Mulukom, Watts F. Jong, and M. Farias, "Exploring the Relationship Between Church Worship, Social Bonding and Moral Values," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 44, no. 1 (2022): 3–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00846724211070858>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Evidence suggests that when moral values and priorities are aligned, the church visitor and church member are positioned to build a relationship because of their shared desire.¹³⁹ One study found that participants' moral values and priorities matched those of the church they attended. This insight demonstrates that persons with like-minded core beliefs, such as faith tenets, are highly likely to have other common beliefs.¹⁴⁰ It would be reasonable to assume this commonality sets the stage for much more significant and deeper relationships to develop. Postell proposes, "Many in the church aren't sharing their faith with others, and it may not be because their friends don't want to talk about faith. It may be because they don't want to talk about faith."¹⁴¹ She says, "Our church members need to know viewing their friends as a mission field doesn't mean every conversation they have needs to be a gospel presentation, but the entirety of their lives should be a gospel presentation."¹⁴² However, the desire for commonality may manifest as a church seeker's personal bias when deciding on a church to attend. This bias is based on presumptions about a particular church having similarly held moral values. If a person attends a new church for this reason, their experience would likely be enhanced if singing and other synchronized activities within the church worship service occur, further demonstrating a desire for a sense of shared purpose.¹⁴³

This refocusing on self-to-community opens the door for relationships to flourish because the approach rests upon the intended mission of Jesus, which is foundational.¹⁴⁴ Church health

¹³⁹ Brown, van Mulukom, Jong, and Farias, "Exploring the Relationship," 15.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Postell, "People Aren't Scared," <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/03/18/people-arent-scared-of-your-faith/>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Brown, van Mulukom, Jong, and Farias, "Exploring the Relationship," 15.

can be analyzed by examining its commitments. Refocusing the church away from the needs of self to the needs of others will bring it back into alignment with the primary purpose for which it exists.¹⁴⁵ *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will challenge First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to make enhancements in each program that the church provides to ensure a component of welcoming and encouraging guest involvement. The goal is to live lives that allow church members to point people toward Christ faithfully.¹⁴⁶

Special recruiting efforts are needed in each program the church offers. However, ultimately, the first step in becoming a guest-friendly church is understanding and believing in the importance of a welcoming church.¹⁴⁷ This process is the first step in the training program that will lead to the church rekindling its love of Jesus and having the desire to share that love with others through the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the training offered in this program must over-emphasize how important becoming a welcoming church is to guests and to create an environment where relationships can flourish and people can grow to love Jesus more.

Evidence suggests that regular attendees who view the committed church as a faith community open the door for hospitality and friendship to thrive. Keith Wasserman and Christine Pohl say, “A community of friends is beautiful and challenging, filled with possibilities, risks, joys, and disappointments. We can grow and flourish within it as we move more deeply into faithful discipleship.”¹⁴⁸ They assert that the committed church fosters

¹⁴⁴ Bill Wilson, “What Does a Healthy Church Look Like?” *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 3 (2016): 334, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637316658582>.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁴⁶ Postell, “People Aren’t Scared,” <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/03/18/people-arent-scared-of-your-faith/>.

¹⁴⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *Becoming a Welcoming Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 47, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5973492>

¹⁴⁸ Keith Wasserman, and Christine D. Pohl, *Good Works : Hospitality and Faithful Discipleship* (Chicago: Eerdmans, 2021), 68, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=6647786>.

authenticity because believers are willing to see beyond their preferences and engage with others who are different to experience how God reveals himself in us, to us, and to the world.¹⁴⁹

To aid in that experience, the committed Christ-honoring church found in the New Testament was a church that was growing because it was a praying church.¹⁵⁰ After prayer, the Spirit empowered these disciples, and people were saved (Acts 4:23-32, Eph. 6:18-19).¹⁵¹

Sharing the Love of Jesus with Others

Not every church guest is a Christian. Not every church guest is a non-believer. Church members are Christians. All people in the church should experience the same love and respect. Every person who walks through the church's front door, Christian or not, should have the opportunity to hear the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16a (NIV), "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view." When a church member sees a guest as someone who could potentially become a child of God, there should be a desire to see that person saved if they are not already. Bill Faye says, "Nonbelievers must hear the gospel an average of 7.6 times before they receive it."¹⁵² He cites a survey from the National Institute of American Church Growth that indicated 75-90 percent of new believers come to Christ through a friend or acquaintance who explains the gospel message on a one-to-one basis.¹⁵³ In contrast, only 17

¹⁴⁹ Wasserman, and Pohl, *Good Works*, 68.

¹⁵⁰ Pierre Alain Giffard, "Leadership and Church Growth: The Case of Chuck Smith," *Great Commission Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (2019): 84.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² William Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999), 19, ProQuest Ebook.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

percent of all conversions come through an event such as a worship service message, crusade, or other gathering.¹⁵⁴

This reality underscores the importance of members of First Baptist Church knowing how to build relationships in the church that present personal opportunities to share the gospel message with others. If the non-Christian guest is understood as an opportunity for evangelism, then sharing the gospel message in an easy-to-understand manner is essential. If one believes that God has supernaturally directed that unsaved person to the church, they should be treated as though the Lord invited them. Faye believes that God has used him as a conduit to share the good news with many of the people who have come into his life, which he believes is not by coincidence.¹⁵⁵

If church members can create a culture of seeing others as opportunities that God has given them to share the gospel message and the power of the Christian life, then the church is adopting what Fay calls “lifestyle evangelism.”¹⁵⁶ This concept is when a member shares their life openly, in a vulnerable and caring manner, while steeped in integrity and character. He believes this “undergirding lifestyle brings a deep love for people and deep devotional life with God because it is out of the outflow of our hearts that people will come to know him.”¹⁵⁷

In this active lifestyle for Christ, the church member has an opportunity to demonstrate the truth of the Scriptures. David Garland says that for Paul, truth is not relative or simply a matter of personal taste, but rather is rested in the objective reality of what God has done in Christ, which

¹⁵⁴ Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear* 19.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

was to die for the world's sins.¹⁵⁸ Further, Amberly Neese notes that people need to find a voice of love and kindness pointing them to the grace and forgiveness found in Jesus.¹⁵⁹

For the believer, reflecting on God's goodness is essential during a worship service. During these times of personal reflection, the believer can draw strength from the Scriptures. As such, when guests attend a church for the first time, they arrive expecting their spiritual needs to be met. Many of those guests are unsure of how that need will be met or what meeting that need will look like in the service.

The church member needs this understanding to share their love of Christ with others openly, as well as how the Lord has helped them grow. In the secular world, when shoppers are about to make a purchase or hotel reservation for travel, they often read the product's reviews first. This is done so that they can gauge others' experiences against their desires. If the review matches their needs, they complete the purchase. For believers and church members, a review of a particular church and the Lord is best described in one's testimony. Sharing that testimony is a part of evangelism.

Elton Trueblood says, "Evangelism is not a professional job for a few trained men, but is instead the unrelenting responsibility of every person who belongs to the company of Jesus."¹⁶⁰ Robby Gallaty said the good news that Christ died for one's sins, was buried, and rose again is the

¹⁵⁸ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 282.

¹⁵⁹ Amberly Neese, *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and Connecting Like Jesus* (Abingdon Press, 2021), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6550182>.

¹⁶⁰ Robby Gallaty, *Growing up, Revised and Updated: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2022), 69, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=29249893>.

sole basis for who a believer is, who they are becoming, and who they will be.¹⁶¹ The problem is that many Christians feel that to be “good Christians,” they must be able to lead someone to Christ. According to Gallaty, the truth is that success in evangelism is in the sharing of the gospel, not the saving of the gospel.¹⁶² Everything in the Bible, whether theological, practical, historical, poetical, applicational, or prophetic, is meant to draw people closer to Christ.¹⁶³ The Holy Spirit is the one who saves.

Christie Love suggests that a believer’s thoughts of God create a framework to speak, and that framework shapes one’s view of God and the world.¹⁶⁴ This framework allows members to have a starting point for sharing their stories with others. The process is relatively easy to embrace as it involves remembering and sharing. Something special happens when a church member connects with a guest through spiritual connection and remembering. The Bible reminds us in Exodus 3:15 to remember God and his deeds and how the people of God were delivered from Egypt.¹⁶⁵ The feasts and celebrations in the Bible were set aside to bring about remembrances of God’s love, provision, and care of his people.¹⁶⁶ Psalm 78 discusses the importance of sharing one’s faith with others, including the youth.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Gallaty, *Growing up*, 70.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶³ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 78-79.

¹⁶⁴ Christie Love, *God of the Gaps: Finding Faith in the In-Between Spaces of Our Journey* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2021), 20, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6884878>.

¹⁶⁵ Fred Stewart, “Remember and Be Renewed,” *The Presbyterian Record*, no. 2 (2014): 17-18, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1498387465>.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

There is a constant reminder for church members to remember what God has done for them and to tell others. The problem is that believers are often private about personal matters, and this impacts one's ability to evangelize.¹⁶⁸ A balance must be struck. Some argue that they are more introverted and not extroverted. True, extroverts are more likely to be forthcoming about their faith, but sometimes aggression and excitement can be coercive.¹⁶⁹ Introverts may be hesitant, but this does not make them resistant. One author likened the need to "untying the tongue" to become evangelical.¹⁷⁰

Terrence says, "If we decide together that we're going to love like Jesus and give all we have to the one, I can promise that you and the people around you will be better for it."¹⁷¹ He asserts that this kind of love starts by seeing people. Seeing people is "not dependent on where they are, who they are, or what they are doing."¹⁷²

Once we see people, we can engage. This effort is accomplished when someone knows their faith story and is confident in sharing it when the opportunity arises.¹⁷³ Conversation creates a bridge between friendship and community.¹⁷⁴ Confusion enters when people think sharing their story has to be done from the pulpit or when trying to convert people to

¹⁶⁸ David Harris, "We Are Called to Be Angels," *The Presbyterian Record*, no.10 (2011): 4, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/904403136>.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Terence Lester, *I See You: How Love Opens Our Eyes to Invisible People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 158. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5811351>.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Harris, "We Are Called to Be Angels," 4.

¹⁷⁴ Lester, *I See You*, 116.

Christianity. While sharing one's story could lead to salvation, the aim is to share one's faith about what led them to Christ and how they are growing today in that faith.

The other concern is that some people are what one author called "jaded" toward the church, Christians, and even toward God based on prior bad experiences.¹⁷⁵ Regardless of their disposition, the church member must remember the Scripture in Colossians 4:5 (NIV), which says, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity."

The problem is that church members can become so over-confident or self-absorbed in their salvation that they forget the power when a guest sits among committed believers singing heartfelt songs of worship and praying to a Savior who died for the world's sins.¹⁷⁶ The church member can learn to remain genuine, establish boundaries, and prioritize truth, all of which help engage guests meaningfully, building relationships and sharing Jesus's love.¹⁷⁷

Something special happens when a church member can tell a guest about the details of an experience where God demonstrated grace in hard times and following him during those moments was worth it.¹⁷⁸ The experiences are important for a seeker to hear. Additionally, church members should not discount the power and effectiveness of sharing their faith journey and love of the Lord, even if they consider their conversion story boring or not as exciting as Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Mark Mittelberg and Lee Strobel, *Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 40.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-59.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁷⁹ Harris, "We are Called," 4.

Training can be critical in helping equip church members to first remember their faith journey and then to learn how to share that experience with others. This approach will open the door for future conversations about how these guests can become more involved in the church, leading to membership. Additionally, becoming open about one's faith in this manner has benefits spiritually for that church member who embraces this "share with others" approach toward hospitality.

This spiritual renewal builds confidence and a desire to see more people fall in love with Jesus. All these benefits come about because a church member remembers what God has done for them, knowing he can do the same for someone else. These personal interactions were missing during COVID-19 when live-streaming of services was encouraged. Personal interactions matter in the church.

The Importance of Love in the Church

The church is filled with people who attend worship services for various reasons, including worshipping the Lord out of their love and adoration for him. However, some attend for a sense of community, to learn about what the Bible says, to seek a better life, and to understand their sense of purpose in this life. Regardless of the reasons for the person or family attending church, there should always be a sense of love and unity amid the congregation. Gerald Sittser says, "The church is called to function as a body, as if it were a kind of incarnation of Christ in the world."¹⁸⁰ This approach echoes the sentiment found in the Scriptures that says how the church should be viewed by others when it said, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ," (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV). Sittser asserts that the church's success is not found in wealth, political power, technology, organization, great

¹⁸⁰ Gerald L. Sittser, *Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16, ProQuest Ebook Centra

preaching, rallies, big buildings, or creative programs, but rather in the mutual love shared within the community of faith.¹⁸¹ The members of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood should speak more about the Lord before and after the services with others in the congregation, demonstrating the impact of having Jesus as the Lord of their lives.

Sittser posits that when a church becomes what he calls a “community of mutual love,” people will see and experience both the love of people for one another and the love that God has within himself.¹⁸² This claim aligns with Mark Scandrette’s position that says this kind of love is demonstrated to others when they see a church member exhibit peace and less stress, watch them handle crises gracefully, and experience less fear and anxiety.¹⁸³ Additionally, there is evidence of God’s presence and love in the believer when they can manifest more joy, overcome anger and compulsions, and enjoy more fulfilling relationships while having compassion and loving more boldly.¹⁸⁴

Scandrette says, “The most compelling argument for the validity of Christian faith is a community that practices the way of Jesus by seeking a life together in the kingdom of love.”¹⁸⁵ His position is that the Christian life, when lived out in love in community, “has the potential to renew our experience of Christ-empowered transformation, community life, and social change.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Sittser, *Love One Another*, 17.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Mark Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 22, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

Embracing New Ideas Positions the Church for Growth

Congregational size is a topic that has spanned generations, and many were left wondering what a church must do in order to see growth. One of the apparent positions is to have leadership that connects with people. There is an argument to be made that churchgoers do not quit churches but instead quit ministers, priests, and rabbis.¹⁸⁷ Regular church attendees often consider their pastor, priest, or rabbi outstanding. This sentiment accounts for frequent attendees having a higher engagement level with their church leaders than those who do not attend as frequently. At one time, the congregation's size depended on address, the number of churches in an area, and where the better messages were delivered.¹⁸⁸ However, over time, things have changed. Today, there seems to be more of a desire for personal relationships and connectedness.

The number of smaller congregations is increasing. Many community characteristics that organically positioned the church for growth have reversed trends, leaving some churches closing.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, for smaller churches that could push back against the road toward extinction, some characteristics that are laudable within the church could be expanded and potentially repositioned for growth, such as capitalizing on building relationships outside the church.

Evidence of smaller congregations and their dedication to the church is noteworthy. Research shows that smaller churches have a more significant percentage of member participation in weekly worship services, give more money to the church per person, and have

¹⁸⁷ Frank Newport, "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance," Gallup, 2018, February 10, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx>.

¹⁸⁸ Scott L. Thumma, "Exploring the Dynamics and Challenges of Congregational Size" *Theology Today* 78, no. 3 (2021): 286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405736211030245>.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 290-291.

more members who volunteer than larger churches.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, there is a great need for smaller churches to emphasize prioritizing relationships, culture, and history because people are willing to connect and work together.¹⁹¹

Another critical aspect of spiritual growth is ensuring the Bible is at the root of learning. God gave the church the Bible to know him. If the Word of God is not deemed necessary in the believer's life, the believer cannot be spiritually healthy. Christopher Aiken asserts that losing biblical fidelity will hinder revitalization, affirming that healthy churches are biblically faithful.¹⁹² The problem with many churches is that they stray from focusing on their mission.¹⁹³ There is a need to help churches identify and turn from these characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors so that revitalization can occur.¹⁹⁴ This evolution depends on a unified desire to share the love of Jesus with others and to let them know how the church can help them grow spiritually. When loving Jesus more becomes the center of church operations, guests experience meaningful friendships that can lead them to salvation and discipleship opportunities. Success comes as the church member builds godly, loving, and lasting relationships with guests, and they become members over time.

Unfortunately, the small church's greatest threat to themselves is a desire to maintain the status quo and not do anything new.¹⁹⁵ They aim to maintain what the generation has given them

¹⁹⁰ Thumma, "Exploring the Dynamics", 290-291.

¹⁹¹ Karl Vaters, *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 63.

¹⁹² Christopher Michael Aiken, "Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Study," (EdD. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 21, https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/6486/Aiken_sbts_0207D_10509.pdf.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Thumma, "Exploring the Dynamics," 290-291.

before.¹⁹⁶ The crux of the matter is that a small church can act as a church family because it consists of family members who connect through kinship. While this may often appear close-knit, they may be unaware that they are embracing a sense of self-satisfaction in knowing they are taking care of their own. This limited cohesiveness could arguably create a struggle within the church whenever program change or church growth strategies are for consideration.

Kate Shellnut quotes Hannah Anderson regarding the environment in the small church, saying there is less pressure for a small church to be cutting edge.¹⁹⁷ Jared Wilson asserts that the real struggle in a church that is cutting edge is that Christianity is not often front and center. He says that over the last generation, “not only has America become less Christian, but professing Christians have become less Christian.”¹⁹⁸ David Harris views the problem as an attention issue. He says what people seek in churches today is an outward focus.¹⁹⁹ This lack of mission focus is one of the reasons why people are taking longer to decide whether or not to join a church. Adam Cunningham notes that before a person joins a church, they often want to confirm it effectively ministers to their community and strives for excellence.²⁰⁰ Cunningham says it may take some time for the seeker to embrace this model or mission of the church. However, a church that fails to offer a missional approach to reaching people and forging relationships is inexcusable. Jovan Davis confirms, “Our inability to embrace the task of changing lives is ultimately damaging

¹⁹⁶ Kate Shellnutt, “Small Wonders: Rural Ministers Celebrate God’s Work Even in Places Plagued by Decline.” *Christianity Today* 63, no.2 (2019): 16, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A577397065/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=f02ba68d.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 174.

¹⁹⁹ David Harris, “Try Different Things,” 2.

²⁰⁰ Adam Cunningham, “An Assimilation Strategy for First Baptist Church Plant City” (DMin thesis., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 60, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

lives.”²⁰¹ This effort of refocusing will often mean the church will have to do things differently than they have in the past. Having training to address the inward focus mentality is a start, but demonstrating to others the love of Christ in one’s life and helping disciple those coming into the church is a great way to see their faith increase.

First Impressions Are Impactful

Church leadership must not overlook the importance and impact of first impressions on the visitor. There is an expectation that a first-time visitor to the church will likely analyze the church from the moment they arrive. Therefore, some basic assumptions must come to the fore. First-impression research in organizational psychology relies on an unstated assumption that people want to be seen favorably and develop positive interpersonal relationships with others.²⁰² First impression effects comprise four common elements: cues, motives, processes, and outcomes.²⁰³ These capacities involve differing perspectives, such as displayers and perceivers, that hone in on different time horizons and organizational levels and are considered valid or biased.²⁰⁴ This understanding reiterates the effect that these long-term impacts can have as they are considered finite drivers that prove that one never gets a second chance to make a first impression.²⁰⁵

Author Danny Franks asserts that there is a responsibility for the church to remember that

²⁰¹ Jovan Troy Davis, “A Complete Overhaul of the Guests to New Discipleship Assimilation System at St. John Missionary Baptist Church” (DMin. thes., Drew University, 2018), 10, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²⁰² Brian W. Swider, T. B. Harris, and Qing Gong, “First Impression Effects in Organizational Psychology,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 107, no. 3 (2021): 354, <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000921>.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 358.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 354

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

every weekend at church is someone's first weekend to attend.²⁰⁶ He says this is why it is essential to treat everyone in the church as if it is their first time in attendance because for some persons, it is.²⁰⁷ Frank implies that there is a misconception that first impressions are the responsibility of church leadership. He says the focus of his book elevates intentionality toward visitors and demonstrates that this intentionality must come from the congregation, not church leadership.²⁰⁸ This tactic is where church hospitality becomes an effective tool.

Frank writes that whenever a church exudes hospitality, it removes hurdles for some people and encourages faith.²⁰⁹ He says a cold and unfriendly church is contrary to the gospel. An accurate analysis of the church's response to the visitor's attendance is essential. Failure to do so is problematic. There is a risk of the church membership failing to embrace the work ahead to initiate changing lives, which consequently damages lives.²¹⁰ Adrian Kitson says welcoming the stranger takes faith and intention.²¹¹ She underscores the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in this work but adds that the Holy Spirit chooses to work through the believers' mouths, hands, and feet to reach others.²¹²

Jovan Davis asserts that the church simply going through the motions every week leads the guest nowhere. Failure to embrace church hospitality and newcomers across the lifespan impacts fellowship and discipleship and encourages separatism, elitism, narcissism, and

²⁰⁶ Franks, *People Are the Mission*.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Davis, "A Complete Overhaul," 10.

²¹¹ Kitson, "Welcoming the Stranger," 80.

²¹² Ibid.

antagonism.²¹³ To avoid these first impression pitfalls, one must remember that the purpose of the church is to cultivate relationships in which the church should implement intentional systems that allow for embracing, engaging, equipping, and evangelizing individuals.²¹⁴ The time before service begins is when guests are most likely to be overlooked by members.²¹⁵

Consequently, there must be an understanding that a positive first impression may hinge on the church's efforts to initiate an organic relationship cultivated in communal formation.²¹⁶ These relationships exist because of appealing church interaction and may result from the positive first impressions and visitor engagement that the church provides. While some may dismiss these areas of the church as unimportant, they leave an impression that should not be ignored. In addition to the lack of relationship-building efforts, a guest's decision not to return to a church may result from issues such as cleanliness, parking, and signage.²¹⁷

However, the ultimate determination in the first impression that the church must seek to impact is how they make people feel when they attend a service. Love is the key to persuading people to return because humans are susceptible to love and its absence.²¹⁸ Mark Mittelberg and Lee Strobel assert that spreading the gospel is God's business—and Christians have the privilege of joining him in what he is doing to reach the world.²¹⁹ Hence, the best practice of congregations is to initiate an effort to emphasize clarity of goal and vision while including a

²¹³ Kitson, "Welcoming the Stranger," 80.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Walker, "Church Guests Matter," 27.

²¹⁶ Wilson, "What Does a Healthy Church," 337.

²¹⁷ Walker, "Church Guests Matter," 11.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Mittelberg and Strobel, *Contagious Faith*, 181.

sequence of positive, natural, and widely prevalent talks regarding identity, purpose, and mission.²²⁰

More than a positive attitude mentality, the church must be friendly. Instead of being internally focused, friendliness symbolizes an outside-focused mindset where relationships matter. This premise makes any visitor's first impression of the church positive. When handled with the guest in mind, these areas of influence create an atmosphere where friendship-building can occur.²²¹

This atmosphere is where hospitality leads to spiritual conversations that can have a contagious effect on others to want what the other believers have, which is a church family. Smaller, rural churches have an opportunity to be great churches where relationships can flourish; however, new people can seem threatening when the status quo is challenged. Preparing now for guests will help the church to embrace guests and grow spiritually.

Asking Jesus to Change Hearts

There is a plethora of emotions that any one person can exude throughout life. In Jesus' ministry on Earth, compassion was the emotion he most expressed.²²² Church members are not always concerned with the burdens that first-time visitors, whether Christian or non-Christian, may be carrying. This lack of concern, when it exists, could be part of the church member's human fallen nature. In cases where there is a lack of concern, the believer should seek the help

²²⁰ Wilson, "What Does a Healthy Church," 335.

²²¹ Mittelberg and Strobel, *Contagious Faith*, 42.

²²² Thaddeus Williams, "The Emotions of Jesus, Part 3: Compassion," *The Good Book Blog*, Biola University, June 15, 2015, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2015/the-emotions-of-jesus-part-3-compassion>.

of the Holy Spirit, asking for a change of mindset to become more compassionate and emphatic toward others.

Jonathan Stockstill describes humans as naturally selfish and self-centered, focusing on their needs first, but notes Jesus continually giving.²²³ He says that growing in love is a critical element in becoming Jesus' disciple, and that one is not a disciple if not growing in that love.²²⁴ The premise, he says, is to love God first. Dana Candler says, "A compassionate and empathetic heart like Jesus will make the church member vulnerable to criticism. He wants our love for Him to be the preeminent aim of our lives and reward of our hearts, that we would love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength," as recorded in Matthew 22:37.²²⁵ When the church member has a heart for Jesus, they have the desire to share that love with others. This mindset opens the door for evangelism and discipleship.

Another example of an inward focus is one's attitude regarding service and servant leadership. Is the church member or leader eager to serve and get involved in projects in the church, or is it someone else's responsibility? Ken Blanchard argues that "if people don't have a compelling vision to serve, the only thing they have to serve is their self-interest."²²⁶ An even stronger argument should be made in regards to the Christian view that one should have a compelling vision to serve Christ over self. One solution to self-interest might be to treat all

²²³ Jonathan Stockstill, *The Real Jesus: Challenging What You Know About the Greatest Person Who Ever Lived* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2021), 39, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6534529>.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Dana Candler, *First Love: Keeping Passion for Jesus*, 22.

²²⁶ Ken Blanchard, and Rene Broadwell, *Servant Leadership in Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Incorporated, 2018), 183, ProQuest Ebook Central.

people like family to demonstrate worth.²²⁷ Another solution falls directly on leadership to do more than serve and care about people, but to also empower them to use sense common sense and good judgment.²²⁸ This ideal applies to the church and interacting with others who may not look or act like the church member, whether Christian or non-Christian.

Neese says Jesus risked this scrutiny because he chose to love all people, not just those who looked good and acted appropriately, which led him to die on the cross.²²⁹ A relationship can develop if the church member takes time to share a part of their life with guests and others. Furthermore, Neese notes that some of the most meaningful blessings a believer can share are intangible and involve only a willingness to share one's life, schedule, stories, vulnerabilities, heart, and listening ear.²³⁰

If a church member wants to learn to extend grace, they can follow Neese's advice to walk alongside someone as a friend and encourage them to live a life of freedom and holiness in Christ. Another option is to build them up and offer praise, which makes people feel valued.²³¹ However, some people may believe that love in the church has to be earned, like many views on trust. This is unfair. Jared Byas insists that love matters more. He reports that those who follow God will love indiscriminately, and those who withhold love to demonstrate that they love are "nonsense."²³² He asserts that from God's perspective, someone should not be able to tell if the

²²⁷ Blanchard, and Broadwell, *Servant Leadership*, 183.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

²²⁹ Neese, *The Friendship Initiative*, 48.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

²³¹ Blanchard and Broadwell, *Servant Leadership*, 190.

²³² Jared Byas, *Love Matters More: How Fighting to Be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 196, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6649854>.

believer is loving on their neighbor or their enemy at the time they respond.²³³ First Baptist Church of Ravenswood already does a good job inwardly loving those they know who participate in the worship service. That same love needs to be extended to the guests, whether they are Christian or not. The church leader's job is to teach people to love one another and to share their love of Jesus with others, just as Jesus was a model to his disciples.

Leaders must be an example to the flock. Perhaps the principle to “teach people the power of love rather than the love of power” applies. This kind of selflessness is having a willingness and desire to love others because Jesus said to do so. John 13:34 (NIV) says, “A new command I give you: Love one another...”.

Growth Mindset Over a Fixed Mindset

An ongoing assessment of how the church member receives and processes training information should be assessed to impact a transactional ministry mindset positively. By providing in-person training, members of either the growth or fixed mindset can benefit by participating in discussions, completing surveys, and role-playing exercises, although their expectations may differ. Stanford psychologist Carolyn Dweck and her colleagues describe a growth mindset as the belief that a person's capacities and talents can be improved over time.²³⁴ A fixed mindset is the belief that one can only have a certain amount of intelligence and cannot do much to change it.²³⁵

²³³ Byas, *Love Matters More*, 195.

²³⁴ “Growth Mindset,” Psychology Today, accessed September 14, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/growth-mindset>.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Psychology Today looked at the issue and found that a fixed mindset is a limiting belief that the capacity to learn and improve cannot be meaningfully developed.²³⁶ However, the growth mindset is open to effort, even if it takes significant time to improve. Battling the common concerns of the lack of self-confidence by members of the church to implement change is something of which to be mindful. However, it must be understood that repetitive and confidence-building training can still positively impact this fixed mentality.

Consequently, the *Others First* training will meet the needs of members on both sides of the aisle of growth mentality. Those who participate in the training and feel they are apt to change will immediately do so, and those who feel the change would be difficult for them can still learn from the information about the importance of sharing their love of Jesus with others and what discipleship opportunities exist to expand their faith.

Nevertheless, persons with a growth mindset will sense a desire to begin using what they have learned. Those with a fixed mindset will, at minimum, understand the concerns about the lack of sharing Christ with others and using opportunities in the church with guests as gateways for evangelism and discipleship.

The Need for the Church to Make Disciples

Churches must love and welcome unbelieving guests to allow evangelism so they may be saved. However, the church must also be prepared for the Christian guest who attends the church looking for discipleship opportunities and spiritual growth. However, many churches are not ready to provide such opportunities. Mancini and Hartman describe three kinds of church societies entering a twenty-year window that they assert will witness the transformation of the

²³⁶ “Growth Mindset,” *Psychology Today*.

church in North America.²³⁷ The first kind of church they describe is a program church that operates as an “organization without disciple-making.” This kind of church, they claim, is big on organization but small on genuine biblical disciple-making because the focus is programming.²³⁸

The second kind of church is a house church that is “disciple-making without organization.” This kind of church sees the “church” as distorted by generations of disciple-faking.²³⁹ Therefore, the emphasis is away from the church building and focused on small groups and gatherings, sometimes called “simple church,” where authentic and organic relationships can operate and thrive. In this circumstance, leadership is shared widely, not professionalized, and seeks to encourage more “simple churches.”²⁴⁰

The last kind of church is the future church, which offers organized disciple-making. In this instance, the church maintains place, personalities, and programs, and strives to make them accessible and excellent to all, underscoring the need for the church to use relational disciple-making as Jesus modeled, taught, and commanded.²⁴¹ This church does not choose between organization and disciple-making; it practices “organized disciple-making.”²⁴²

Discipleship matters within the local church. This discipleship can help lead to growth both spiritually and numerically in the hopes of creating relationships. For biblical unity and love to grow, people must know each other deeply.²⁴³ This is obtainable for the small rural church as

²³⁷ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 43-44.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138.

it becomes more missional in its desire to reach others for Jesus. However, for relationships to develop, there must be engagement of the Christian and non-Christian guest by the member. Program churches measure and focus on what is on the inside of the church, whereas the future church focuses on the outside of the church. The *Others First* curriculum encourages organic relationship building, provides the foundation for evangelism and discipleship, and considers programming within the church to be equipped for reaching people inside and outside the church.

These components are essential aspects of Christian living and can serve as motivators for evangelism and discipleship. Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research, said, “Many people can be a member of a church but not participate in the work of the church,” adding, “Pastors see the potential of mobilizing everyone in the church to minister to others in the church and their community.”²⁴⁴ A phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors conducted March 30-April 22, 2021 identified apathy in the church as a problem for Protestant churches.

The survey indicated apathy as the most challenging issue faced by Baptists (79%), non-denominational (78%) and Pentecostal pastors (77%).²⁴⁵ Awareness of apathy in the church stems from an inwardly-focused mindset that sees evangelism and discipleship as someone else’s responsibility. This kind of apathy can be a problem in a predominantly older congregation. First Baptist Church of Ravenswood is predominately an older congregation that falls into this category. This view can be corrected and overcome through transformational ministry, where

²⁴⁴ Aaron Earls, “Apathy in Churches Looms Large for Pastors,” Lifeway Research, May 10, 2022, accessed September 20, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/05/10/apathy-in-churches-looms-large-for-pastors/>.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

church members can see the importance of soul care as the church’s mission—to reach the non-believer and, at the same time, encourage the believer as two of the greatest works of the church.

One reason a church could be apathetic toward its mission and not reach others is the growing concern that people outside the church are looking less to institutional churches and leaders to help them grow spiritually and more to other options.²⁴⁶ People self-directing their spirituality is partly due to declining trust in and reliance on institutions.²⁴⁷ This further exacerbates the need to demonstrate the value of attending church and becoming established in the community of faith through relationships and opportunities to serve.

People always make time for the things they value most, and failure to see a direct benefit in a task always results in declining engagement.²⁴⁸ Therefore, establishing a rapport with non-Christian and Christian guests can lead to relationships that find value in engaging with the faith community. These relationships open the door for non-Christian guests to be evangelized, leading to salvation. Moreover, for the Christian guest, these relationships lead to discipleship opportunities.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundation of the thesis centers on changing a church’s inward-focus and helping members share their love of Jesus with others as they transition to a missional focus. For this to occur, meaningful guest engagement must center on the love of Jesus, compassion, and hospitality. However, this poses the question of whether or not the guest who is an unbeliever should be treated differently than a Christian guest. Based upon a reading of the Scripture, the

²⁴⁶ Carey Nieuwhof, “10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often,” accessed September 20, 2023, <https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

answer is no. The church should view both classes of people as the same, as God's creation and one that he loves.

God's love for humanity is unconditional. John 3:16-17 (NIV) says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." The world is filled with believers and nonbelievers, and God is accessible to both. D.A. Carson affirms, "God sent Jesus to a world that was already condemned; therefore, the mission of Jesus was to bring salvation to it."²⁴⁹

Church members could prejudge first-time guests as saved, unchurched, or even as outsiders or strangers. While this stereotype may or may not be the case for first-time guests, they should still be made to feel welcome and loved. Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV) says, "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." According to René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, to treat someone as native-born means "as one of your own brothers or kinsmen."²⁵⁰ The Scripture reminds the Israelites that they were once strangers in a foreign land.²⁵¹ Therefore, church guests should be treated the same as family. This concept is easily understood as the Golden Rule: to treat others how one would expect to be treated.

²⁴⁹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 183, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6526207>.

²⁵⁰ René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Leviticus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 299.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

People come into the local church from various backgrounds or upbringings. It may take a while for anyone to notice whether they are already a believer or simply a seeker. Nevertheless, there is no need to pre-judge people and purposefully look for differences and reasons not to associate. Rather, an attempt should be made to see all guests as God's creation, whom the Lord loves. In every visit, there is an opportunity for evangelism or discipleship. Jared Bayes says, "We are not called to love only those within our tribe, people who think like us and act like us, but we are neighbors with even those we hate and those who hate us. When we use standing up for truth to excuse our rudeness, our judgment, our feeling of discomfort toward people who aren't like us, we condemn ourselves as Bible scholars who 'want to justify ourselves.'"²⁵²

Instead of seeing people as outsiders, the aim should be to see the guest as one's neighbor whom God sent to the church and treat him or her accordingly with hospitality. Jesus used the Good Samaritan parable to define one's neighbor. He claimed that one does not have to know someone to be his or her neighbor. In Jesus's parable, it was not the two religious people who acted like neighbors. They passed by the injured outsider and ignored the man. It was the Samaritan, despised by the Jewish religious leadership, who rendered aid to this stranger, treating him as a neighbor with a need. According to the Scriptures, the religious leader questioning Jesus about the issue was doing so to justify himself (Luke 10:29).

The problem then was a deeply held Jewish belief centering around one's identity. For example, "Jewish legal interpretation sought to govern every situation and every relationship: Jew and Gentile; Jew and Roman; man and woman; free man and slave, priest and laity, clean and unclean, righteous and sinner."²⁵³ In that culture, these relationships determined how and

²⁵² Byas, *Love Matters More*, 188.

²⁵³ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 172.

when a person could participate in Jewish worship.²⁵⁴ While this is not necessarily the case now or considered a cultural norm, the problem still exists. Today, church members may treat people as strangers if they act, look, dress, or hold themselves differently than others in specific social structures. The rich and poor were treated differently in Jesus's day and it still applies today.

Jesus warned believers not to show favoritism, giving preference to the rich over the poor (James 2). James wrote that the poor, in the world's eyes, were rich in faith (James 2:5). God sees value in all people. When a nonbeliever seeks the Lord, the believer can act to help lead the person to Christ through the Holy Spirit. The church member must see the unbeliever or seeker the way Jesus did in Mark 6:34 (NIV), which says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." Jesus had compassion for the people, and he began to teach them. This example demonstrates how nonbelieving guests and seekers should be viewed in the church. If these people feel welcome, meaningful, and valued, their relationship-building will come naturally.

For the guest who is a believer, the church must see them as a brother or sister in Christ seeking a church home. In this manner, the church member can be an encourager in the faith. These Christian guests are to be treated the way Jesus commanded the church to treat his children in John 13:34: to love one another just as he loved them. Jesus gave his disciples the expectation that they must love one another. In order to accomplish this, believers must look within themselves. As a body of believers, church members may need to search their hearts regarding visitor engagement. Just because a member does not know someone who has entered the church does not excuse their ignoring or treating them as strangers or outsiders. Carson

²⁵⁴ Butler, *Luke*, 172.

asserts that believers can appreciate the love of the Savior particularly more as they recognize their own selfishness, innate self-centeredness, and the depth of their own sin.²⁵⁵

In addition to Christian guests, church members must love one another, those already a part of the congregation, beyond just pleasantries. Jesus explains that endless self-sacrificing love should be the pattern for believers' attitudes and relationship toward one another.²⁵⁶ If the church desires to adopt this mindset, it must regularly examine its heart to ensure it is willing to put others before itself. This approach requires humility. John 13:35 (NIV) speaks of this kind of loving humility, noting that Jesus said, "By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." This action involves what Carson calls a reflection of their new status and experience as the children of God, reflecting the mutual love of the Father and the Son and imitating the love shown to them.²⁵⁷

Such a response requires the church to have love rooted in compassion, forbearance, evangelism, and empathy.²⁵⁸ These traits reiterate the importance of the church loving each other, including the first-time guest, because it communicates that the church is a follower of Christ.²⁵⁹ Often in a church, one's personal needs can come to the fore before others. This reality means that for guests, there may be an assumption that they will need to conform if they continue to assimilate.

²⁵⁵ Carson, *The Gospel*, 435.

²⁵⁶ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 253.

²⁵⁷ Carson, *The Gospel*, 436.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

An outward-focused church would expect what the guest is thinking upon arrival at the church and be willing to meet those needs without compromising the integrity or traditions of the church. Members who practice humility open the door for meaningful conversations with guests who may already feel uncomfortable in the church service. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* instills this sense of humility by asking what the church can do better.

The Apostle Paul addressed the issue of humility when he wrote to the church in Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV):

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

When people feel connected to the church, they desire to get involved.

Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Henson agree that first-time Christian or non-Christian guests should be seen as extraordinary gifts full of unparalleled potential.²⁶⁰ Their position is that God brings these first-time guests through the church's front doors, and if there is "prayerfully planned reciprocation" by the church, then the chance to see a changed life exists.²⁶¹ Paul wanted to see the Galatians have changed lives. He wrote in Galatians 4:19 (NIV), "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...". Everything Paul did for the Galatians was motivated by this purpose. Craig Keener points out that the Galatians needed to embrace Christ's truth, a process of formation into Christ's image, which may be

²⁶⁰ Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Henson, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 28.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

progressive or take time.²⁶² For this purpose, Paul shares his desire for the Galatians to follow Christ fully, and First Baptist Church must want the same for their guests at the church, even if they find the desire difficult to put into practice.

Believers new to the church can be welcomed, accepted, and then disciplined by a church member to grow in their faith and imitation of Christ. Greg Ogden says, “Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to make disciples who make disciples.”²⁶³ This importance of discipleship is evident throughout the Bible, but the process is not easy.

Ogden asserts that the Apostle Paul was so “passionate about making disciples that he compares his agony over the maturity of the flock to the labor pains of a woman giving birth.”²⁶⁴ Paul said in Galatians 4:19 (NIV), “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...”. Helping others live and love Christ will take time and must be done in love.

This effort is the challenge before the church because members must have a love for Jesus that motivates fundamental transformation from their inward focus to become more missional and intentional toward guests who visit the church. Chad Hunt adds that the secret to getting guests to return is love because people can easily sense love—or the lack thereof.²⁶⁵ Job

²⁶² Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 330, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5756040>.

²⁶³ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 3.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁶⁵ Chad Hunt, *The Real Reason Guests Come Back to Your Church*, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2015/02/the-secret-to-getting-guests-to-come-back/>.

6:14 (NIV) says, “Anyone who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty.”

There is an expectation that church leaders are to be modeling this kind of mentality. Jesus’s life expressed the concept that “good leaders are also good followers,” and God is the leader that church leaders are to follow.²⁶⁶ Church leaders should desire to impress upon members the seriousness of guest engagement and, in doing so, can implement a strategic plan to pursue and fulfill the mission and vision God has given the church.²⁶⁷ Ogden says, “We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling.”²⁶⁸ This kind of behavior is what the Apostle Paul suggested in the Scripture when he wrote, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:16, NIV) and “You became imitators of us and of the Lord” (1 Thes.1:6, NIV).

Theologically, the church must understand that a genuine change of heart depends on the Holy Spirit’s help. Ogden says, “Relational vulnerability means honest, self-disclosing and confessional relationships that give the Holy Spirit permission to remake us.”²⁶⁹ He further asserts, “The centrality of truth is emphasized when people open their lives to one another around the truth of God’s Word, and the Lord begins to rebuild their lives from the inside out.”²⁷⁰

This revival of the heart is what First Baptist needs theologically so there can be an understanding that confronting an inward focus will involve praying and yielding to the Holy

²⁶⁶ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on God’s Agenda* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 32.

²⁶⁷ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, The Holman New Testament Commentary, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 252.

²⁶⁸ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 7.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Spirit. This yielding to the Holy Spirit will bring out their love for Jesus and each other, motivating them to engage Christian and non-Christian guests and others in the congregation in a way that honors and glorifies Jesus. In this mutual accountability, the church member understands that as disciples, believers are giving one another of the faith the authority to hold them accountable to mutually agreeable standards.²⁷¹ This accountability is what the Scripture in Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) speaks of when it says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” The believer who loves Jesus and other disciples understands that Christian ministry requires biblical theology that is faithful to the story of the scripture and sound in its application.²⁷²

Donald Whitney says, “Christians are individuals, but we are also part of the body of Christ. We experience God, and we grow in His grace through both personal and interpersonal Spiritual Disciplines.”²⁷³ Whitney claims spiritual disciplines are activities, not attitudes, practices, character qualities, graces, or fruits of the Spirit.²⁷⁴ They are “those behaviors that augment our spiritual growth and enable us to grow to spiritual maturity.”²⁷⁵ Whitney says, “These activities are means, not ends.”²⁷⁶

It is spiritual disciplines that make the believer more godly in living. Whitney believes that godly people have always been spiritually disciplined, which aligns with 1 Timothy 4:7

²⁷¹ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 7-8.

²⁷² Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 115.

²⁷³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for Christian Life (Revised and Updated)* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 6.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ “What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?” Got Questions, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-disciplines.html>.

²⁷⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 6.

(NIV), which says, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.” This is why having members of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood attend multiple training sessions to understand not only how to share their love of Jesus with others, but also to learn how to be more spiritually disciplined to mature in their faith where they cannot help but tell others about the impact Christ has had on their own life. This training will help members of First Baptist Church to become more godly.

Spiritual disciples that need to be taught include setting aside time for reading the Bible, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving and caring for others, stewardship, fasting, meditation and reflection, journaling, visiting others who need encouragement, and serving in the church. As the believer becomes more dependent on the Holy Spirit in their life, there is evidence that God “works in you to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV). Living spiritually disciplined lives helps believers do what Hebrews 3:13 (NIV) says, which is to “encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that sin’s deceitfulness may harden none of you.” Therefore, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we can share our faith with others as witnesses (Acts 1:8). Learning to make the practices of spiritual disciplines a part of the church members’ lives at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood will create a sense of urgency about sharing their love of Jesus with others.

This approach will open the door for conversation that can lead to accepting Jesus as Lord. This effort of becoming more spiritually disciplined will further help position the church to assist newer believers in maturing in their faith and becoming more of the witness they have been created to be and do.²⁷⁷ This maturity from church members and newer believers allows for

²⁷⁷ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 962.

the common desire to lift the name of Jesus, which is the church's job, so others can see him.²⁷⁸

According to Rodney Mills, leaders are called to remain focused on their responsibility, which is to be used by God to create an environment conducive to growth.²⁷⁹

This focus supports the notion of a training curriculum that brings together church leaders and members to examine their current mindset and how that impacts church functionality, guest engagement, and sharing of the love of Jesus with others. Jeffrey Arnold states that biblical evangelism is “a person-to-person process of sharing the good news.”²⁸⁰ Mills says the church creates an environment conducive to growth, and God is responsible for the rest.²⁸¹

By welcoming both Christians and non-Christian guests and sharing the love of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, the church will radiate the love of Christ through hospitality to others. This hospitality should center on Christ and salvation, the primary message to the non-believer. The Billy Graham Evangelist Association says:

Being passionate about Christ will help others see that there's something different about you, and they will want to know what it is. You can also reflect Christ through kind words, patience, a gentle temperament, choosing to love even difficult people, carefully monitoring what you watch or listen to, and treating others with respect.²⁸²

Gary Cobb from the Billy Graham Evangelist Association further notes, “People not only listen

²⁷⁸ Mark Waltz, *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church* (Group Publishing, 2013), 29.

²⁷⁹ Rodney Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 69

²⁸⁰ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 38.

²⁸¹ Mills, “Healthy Churches Grow,” 69.

²⁸² “Sharing Your Faith 101,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, last modified July 29, 2019, <https://billygraham.org/story/sharing-your-faith-101/>

to your words, they look at your life. Keep it simple. The Gospel is already simple. Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again.”²⁸³

Believers are called upon to have the same mindset of humility as Christ and not a mindset of personal preference or desire. This kind of humility, according to scholars, is only obtainable if it is grounded in encouragement, love, and fellowship.²⁸⁴ The Apostle Paul was calling the congregation at Philippi to move away from selfishness and toward unity.²⁸⁵

Rethinking one’s selfishness is never easy. Gerald Peterson concurred when he wrote that following Christ meant adopting a confident attitude or mindset from the Greek word *phroneo*, meaning to employ one’s faculty for thoughtful planning.²⁸⁶ Jesse Giddens asserts that everyone who truly desires to go through the transformation process in their ministry must acknowledge that real change begins with the correct thinking.²⁸⁷ Part of that thinking is examining one’s own heart.

Humility is rarely on display in Christian character traits. The Apostle Paul delineated these traits when he called for church humility in Colossians 3:12-14 (NIV), saying:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

²⁸³ “Sharing Your Faith 101,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

²⁸⁴ Gerald W. Peterman, “Philippians,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, eds. Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 1860.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Jesse Giddens, *Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life: The Master Key to Unlocking Total Victory* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2018), 63.

This Scripture shows how the Apostle Paul implored believers to deal mercifully with others in the group using compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.²⁸⁸

All of these attributes are considered the basics of the Christian life. The church member should embody these attributes because they reflect the love of Christ and open the door for authentic Christian relationships. Connections matter. The Apostle Paul talked about becoming like those to whom he ministered and found common ground with everyone so that he could bring them to Christ.²⁸⁹ In First Corinthians 9:20–22 (NIV), Paul wrote:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) to win those under the law. To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

For the first time in the Bible, Paul tells the world that his ethnic identity as a Jew was no longer the primary reality in his life, as he was identifying as a Christian.²⁹⁰ He could find common ground with others, whereas before, he saw their backgrounds as divisive in culture. The church is responsible for seeing people as God's creation, with whom God longs to have a relationship. A person's background and previous experiences should not get in the way of the church member forging personal relationships and telling guests about how Jesus can change their lives.

Relationships formed through a humble, outwardly-focused mindset can lead to

²⁸⁸ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 299.

²⁸⁹ Jason Young and Jonathan Malm, *The Come Back Effect: How Hospitality Can Compel Your Church's Guests to Return* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 32, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 191, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5521091>.

membership increases. Visitors to any church should be afforded hospitality by church members without unfair judgment or being ignored. First Peter 4:8-10 (NIV) says, “Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”

There is no hospitality in grumbling. Grumbling is off-putting. Creating relationships with people at church who are different from what one might consider of the same social class is difficult for some to accept. This humility requires a purposeful change in thinking. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:2 (NIV), “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

The world already sidelines those who are different. In the church, one can create a picture of what a church member is to look like based on social norms in the community and completely miss what Jesus meant when he said to renew one’s mind. This vantage is consistent with an inwardly-focused mindset. The believer must resist the pressure to conform morally, intellectually, emotionally, and behaviorally to Satan’s schemes.²⁹¹ When one maintains a mindset that includes ongoing unfair judgments, selfish attitudes, and the need to please self over others, God is not being honored. Jesus said all people would know his disciples because of their love for one another (John 13:35).

The church provides an opportunity for a demonstration of love for others, which is evidenced by the church’s outward focus on others. The author of Hebrews says believers are

²⁹¹ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, “Romans,” vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 365.

spurred to the attitude of love expressed in outward good deeds. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) says, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” This Scripture and *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* exemplify how the desire to be outward-focused will increase love in the church for members and those who are guests. This decision aligns with Jared Wilson’s statement, “Someone will always have better coffee, music, facilities, and speaking. Showcase Christ and his gospel. No one can improve on that.”²⁹²

Many people may think church revitalization is all about bringing flashing lights and contemporary music into the worship setting. While these things may be attractive to some people, true church revitalization begins with the heart as believers search for truth. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will emphasize both gathering and a confession of specific truths that can be shared.²⁹³ According to Adam McClendon and Jarod Lockhart, confession in this instance is more than one’s silent belief. It is an expression or proclamation of beliefs by either the person or the church.²⁹⁴ Having a desire to worship God with one’s entire being and heart is what matters most.

Psalms 105:1-2 (NIV) gives us an example of such an expression when it says, “Oh give thanks to the Lord; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him,

²⁹² Brandon Smith, “Expressing God’s Love in the Local Church,” Lifeway, July 7, 2023, <https://leadership.lifeway.com/2014/10/20/expressing-gods-love-in-the-local-church/#:~:text=Leaders%20should%20strive%20for%20excellence%20and%20use%20their,his%20gospel.%20No%20one%20can%20improve%20on%20that.%E2%80%9D>.

²⁹³ P. Adam McClendon and Jared E. Lockhart, *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 4.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!” In this Psalm, David draws attention to what God has done rather than take credit for his work and accomplishments.²⁹⁵ Churches that focus on God and then loving and serving others will be able to maintain an outward focus. William VanGemeran asserts that this praise is continual, God-centered, and indicative of a grateful heart.²⁹⁶

When a church is outward-focused and redirects its attention to others for the glory of God, it argues against those who claim churches are self-centered and self-serving. VanGemeran notes that this kind of praise is not to make the church feel good but to acknowledge that God is great.²⁹⁷ Jesus is coming again, and with that statement comes hope. First Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV) says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

Michael Martin says Paul demonstrated this to the Corinthians as he “instructed them to ‘build up’ others in the church by providing both examples (1 Cor 8:1; 10:23) and words (14:4), which would especially benefit the less mature Christian.”²⁹⁸ Similarly, Martin says Paul had the Ephesian churches exercise their gifts for mutual benefit to “grow and build itself up in love” (Eph 4:16, NIV).²⁹⁹ Gene Greene affirms, “Each individual in the community is responsible for the development of others and the whole through this mutual building process.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Willem A. VanGemeran, “Psalms,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 324.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 169.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Gene L. Green, “The Letters to the Thessalonians,” in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002), 245.

This “building up” is fundamental to Paul’s understanding of the life of the church.³⁰¹ Paul was trying to underscore the good that existed in those established churches and encouraged the work of mutually strengthening one another. This approach complements Romans 15:2 (NIV), which says, “Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.” Robert Mounce states, “It was not enough that the strong simply put up with the foibles of weaker Christians; they were to bear the weaknesses of the immature.”³⁰² His point is that strong believers are to please their neighbors to help them develop into more mature Christians.³⁰³

Wayne Grudem says that God can accomplish His purposes independently but adds that God, in his providence, chooses to work through and in cooperation with his creation.³⁰⁴ This view echoes the mindset of an outward-focused church, which builds up Christians to help one another grow in maturity so they can reach the world for Jesus.

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations for this research will center on the need for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to create and deploy a training program designed to change its attitude from inward-focused to more outward-focused, which demonstrates to others their love and excitement for Jesus. This analysis will assert that First Baptist Church can move toward a transformational style of leadership that creates a culture where the congregation is motivated to experience their potential fully. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* theoretically empowers the membership to understand the differences in transactional and transformational

³⁰¹ Green, “The Letters to the Thessalonians,” 245.

³⁰² Robert H. Mounce, “Romans,” vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 259.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 315.

attitudes and practices within the church that are causing a lack of sharing the love of Jesus Christ with others, which is hindering visitor engagement, and equip them to share their faith more readily. The theoretical foundation stems from the researcher's experience as a First Baptist Church of Ravenswood pastor.

The training will encourage the membership in awareness of their attitudes, actions, and behaviors, as well as the Scriptural basis for the needed change. Theoretically, if members of First Baptist Church begin to practice spiritual disciplines and learn the importance of sharing their faith and love for Jesus Christ with others, as well as how to share their faith, the likelihood of evangelism and discipleship in and outside the church will increase. This empowers church members to treat others as they would want to be treated.

This training will bring members and church leaders together to discuss the importance of others seeing the love of Jesus and the joy of serving Jesus in the church. Proponents of growth mindset theory believe those with this mindset will be more inclined to gravitate toward self-improvement and be able to persist in the face of challenges and failures.³⁰⁵ There is an assumption that some members in the congregation at First Baptist Church could identify as more of an autodidact, where their preferred learning is by unsystematic means and needing no instruction.³⁰⁶ Those with a fixed mindset believe they can already do what they need to do and cannot improve their mindset by learning.³⁰⁷ Regardless of the mindset, an argument can be made that people can evolve from one mindset to another, which is the belief behind the training model employed.

³⁰⁵ "Growth Mindset," Psychology Today.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

Gauging the ongoing behaviors will demonstrate that an inward-focused mindset is predominant in the church. First Baptist Church of Ravenswood has a history of over 150 years in the community. Several current members have had generations of their family connected to the church. This kind of connection can lead to a desire to protect the traditional nature of the church, even as far as the church furnishings.

By reviewing the benefits of transformational training, this researcher will be able to ascertain information to measure attitudes and insights from the congregation as to deeply held attitudes involving their inward-focus mindset. Surveys and discussions will help inform the working nature of the leadership team at the church to identify areas where improvement is needed in equipping the saints for ministry. This information and a custom training program that teaches members the importance of witnessing to others can positively impact behavior change. The goal is to see members in the church renew their love of the Lord and become excited about their faith to the point that they want others to experience the same joy.

Further examining First Baptist Church attitudes and expectations toward church functionality in a focus group format will further underscore the importance of having a robust training program regarding the church's transactional or transformational behaviors. The pervasive attitude of "it has always been that way" can hinder growth. If the church becomes concerned with vision, values, ethics, and relationships, then it meets the definition of being in a position for transformation.³⁰⁸

This process considers followers' motives, needs, and humanity.³⁰⁹ Another sign of transformational growth in the church is when it initiates and maintains relational processes that

³⁰⁸Richard Parrott, "Transformational Leadership: Theory and Reflections," *Ashland Theological Journal*, no. 32 (2000), accessed November 15, 2023, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ashland_theological_journal/32-1_063.pdf

impact the motivation and morality of both the leader and follower.³¹⁰ Richard Parrott says, "Transformational leadership moves people beyond expectations."³¹¹

Transactional leadership does not consider each individual's needs and does not focus on personal development.³¹² As such, a transactional ministry model exhibits a management style expectation of a reward for the follower for doing what is needed and will use corrective criticism if needed. In other words, the follower will do what the leadership wants under transactional leadership because it needs to be done.³¹³

The training program introduced in this project will empower the church leadership to continue to offer ongoing training opportunities that encourage the practice of spiritual disciplines beyond the confines of this project. However, some in the membership could resist changing from a transactional to a transformational leadership style because they are used to the past way of doing things in the church as part of their fixed mindset.

Both ministry styles can work in the church, although they each have their challenges. For example, one church may insist they are transformational because they have a vision statement, yet their actions do not align, meaning they are transactional.³¹⁴ A transactional church can have good leadership that makes tasks fair and has tangible rewards for those who do their jobs. However, in both cases, transactional churches can become transformational, but

³⁰⁹ Parrott, "Transformational Leadership."

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

overcoming the “we have always done it that way before” mindset can be difficult.³¹⁵ The desire to maintain the status quo to protect the church is at the crux of the problem. A church member can have a great heart for the church building and programs, but they must have a greater heart for soul care.

Some people believe that transactional leadership treats people like commodities and is fundamentally wrong.³¹⁶ Structural changes alone do nothing about leaders who remain in positions that embrace the mindset of the transactional ministry model.³¹⁷ Ignoring problems or pretending they do not exist in the facility, having more concern about leadership than the flock, and losing healthy leaders and members are all signs of transactional ministry leadership.³¹⁸ Mission and vision statements alone do not make a church transformational.

Theoretically, if First Baptist Church of Ravenswood will enact change in its overall focus, it must first understand what attitudes are prevalent. Does traditionalism exist because of the memories of family members who once attended the church but have died? Evidence shows that churches that want transformation often see stagnation that results in criticism due to inactivity.³¹⁹ Where is the Christian mindset of treating others how one expects to be treated and having a servant’s heart? The goal of a transformational church is to introduce people to Jesus, make disciples, and help people mature in their faith, all of which require a change in the church

³¹⁵ Parrott, “Transformational Leadership.”

³¹⁶ Gregg R. Allison and Bryce Butler, “Why Transactional leadership Hurts the Church,” April 4, 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/transactional-leadership-hurts-church/>.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church: New Scorecard for Congregations* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 2, <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Oz5bRaT4tWgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=transformational+church+assessment+tool&ots=nnwOpZdauM&sig=G4ozrFewtvdD0WREAONDtTo4g1Y#v=onepage&q=transformational%20church%20assessment%20tool&f=false>.

and community alike.³²⁰ Facility improvements and program enhancements will help the church move to a more missional approach in reaching others for Christ and becoming more welcoming. Having members fall in love with Jesus again will generate excitement; others will want to experience that same joy in their lives.

As the church aims to become more welcoming, members will see non-Christian guests as an opportunity for evangelism and church growth. Research is needed to determine what transformational impacts are possible for the people and communities as lives are changed. If transformational churches are the bearers of hope that Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer assert, then developing a training program for First Baptist Church that targets their inward focus will help reposition the church to become more transformational and less transactional.³²¹ Members will see that their primary focus beyond serving and worshipping Jesus personally is to be the soul care of Christian and non-Christian guests and other members already established in the church. Consequently, there is growing concern about whether the congregation will sense the same urgency as the pastor. Ronald Wise acknowledges that change is difficult because the church is institutionalized.³²² He says many small churches may see their demise before a change occurs due to ritualism and traditionalism.³²³ Having First Baptist Church engage in training will not only position the church to make necessary changes in guest engagement, facility needs, member actions and behaviors, and programs, but also will help them building upon the experiences of church members and their desire to serve the Lord faithfully.

³²⁰ Stetzer and Rainer, *Transformational Church*.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ronald Kent Wise, "Transformational Leadership: Equipping Small Churches to Make Disciples By Integrating Wesleyan Principals," (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2020), 35, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

³²³ Ibid.

Conclusion

A significant amount of research relating to church transformation is available. However, limited research exists on smaller churches in rural settings seeking transformation by addressing their inward-focus mindset and how to incorporate loving others like Jesus through discussion and introspection. There is, however, evidence that practicing spiritual disciplines, understanding the role of the Christian lifestyle, and the church's actions, behaviors, facilities, and programs will all impact Christian and non-Christian guests. By providing awareness training in these areas and offering real-life practicums, attitudes can change and a heart revival can begin.

First Baptist Church needs to be revitalized, and having a customized training program that addresses the church's transactional attitudes lays the groundwork for transitioning the church to becoming more guest-friendly, while helping church members share their love of Jesus with others and creating discipleship opportunities ending with spiritual growth. The challenge for First Baptist is to come to understand that even though the church has had a longstanding history of nearly 160 years in the community, there is a great need to reverse the transactional attitudes that exist in church functionality and make way for transformation and revitalization centered in one's love for Christ and seeing lives changed.

This church's legacy can be celebrated, but not addressing the inward focus now will later cause hindrances to preservation for the years to come. The church has some deeply-held convictions that have created barriers to much-needed change. These barriers may be rooted in self-satisfaction or simply preserving good memories of loved ones who have died. In either case, both are inward-focused mentalities that inhibit necessary change and cause some to resist. Due to this prevalent mindset, program changes and facility needs may be delayed or not even addressed. If the church knows of a problem or issue and refuses to address it, it may be due to

an inward-focus left unspoken. Nevertheless, church transformation requires Biblical truth and the power of the Holy Spirit to change the church ethos.

A church that is interested more in maintaining what they have than winning souls to Christ has become complacent in its evangelism and is therefore ineffective. This dynamic is the transactional approach grounded in the status quo or adding another program mentality. In this mentality, church members are more interested in visiting with people they already know and have relationships with rather than meeting new guests and their families. The problem for an inward-focused church is that the church can become more concerned with personal feelings and self-fulfillment than evangelism. If the church looks full and has limited seating, then why invite others to attend? If parking aggravates members, what does it do for guests?

Jesus continually demonstrated throughout his life that his disciples were to love one another. He taught that one's enemies were to be loved and that the believer should willingly go the extra mile to surpass what was expected. First Baptist Church has an opportunity to experience true revitalization. The church facility cannot become an idol. Programs need to be better explained. Programs without a Christian component do not evangelize. Members who do not speak with guests appear rude and obnoxious. The lack of guest engagement by members is problematic on multiple fronts. Sadly, no one appears to be openly sharing what Jesus has done for them before or after the service with others.

A custom training program has been designed to address the existing mindset in First Baptist Church. Church members need to be trained to identify areas of the church that have gotten ingrained in their minds as essential because "things" have always been a certain way. Programs need to be analyzed. Facility signage and parking needs exist. The church's day-to-day operations are predictable and function as if everyone knows what they need to know about the

facility, programs, and one another, so all is well. This mindset hinders change and, in some cases, could halt it. Members need to learn how to engage guests and share their stories about how the Lord and the church have helped them.

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will meet this need. *Others First* will help the church review and understand the differences between transactional and transformational church core values. This renewing of the mind is supported in Scripture when the Apostle Paul said in Romans 12:2 (NIV), “Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Enough research exists to help First Baptist Church reassess its mindset through training to challenge its deeply held attitudes and values entrenched in traditionalism. Without this training, the church may be unable to challenge these values. Therefore, completing *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* is essential and critical for renewing their mindset regarding building Godly relationships with guests. Once their attitudes come to the fore, the action steps identified in the curriculum’s *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will reinforce the church’s desire to become more outward-focused to leverage the guest’s experience.

As part of this revitalization, the church must demonstrate its love of God toward others. This action involves actively conversing openly and freely with guests attending the church for the first time. Members can explain what Jesus has done for them and how the church has helped them spiritually. Helping guests find a church home that loves Jesus and will help them grow in their faith and other attributes that please the Lord.

Through a renewed love for the Lord, the facility enhancements, program revisions, and improved guest relationship building will culminate in a worship setting where all can find their

God-given purpose and thrive. First Baptist Church is already a great church with great people who love Jesus. However, *Others First* will position First Baptist Church as an even greater church that has put loving Jesus at the center of everything they do, motivating them to love others as themselves regardless of who they are.

The church needs to go from being a transactional church to a transformational church. The congregation will learn to see guests as divinely-inspired opportunities for discipleship. Members will learn to build relationships quickly and effectively around Jesus. Transaction churches are about maintaining what exists now with no genuine concern for tomorrow, but transformational churches look to change the world tomorrow by fulfilling the Great Commission now.

The *Others First* curriculum will help the church understand its current mindset regarding church functionality and guests' perception. Becoming more outward-focused with intentionality allows the church to utilize the love that already exists in the believer for Jesus and to project it onto others in a way that honors the Lord. These steps will help preserve the church for generations and create the next generation of believers. Open doors where people can come and hear the Word of God and have their lives changed for the glory of God are essential. However, having a church with open doors where people can come and hear the Word of God, have their lives changed for the glory of God, and learn to love others like Jesus did makes for an even better church.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study's design and methodology are built upon qualitative action research involving First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members. The aim is to transform the church's inward focus through customized training and implementing the action plan curriculum called *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. This curriculum focuses on the number four, meaning it embodies a four-process plan addressing four areas of church functionality, including guest engagement, facility needs, member behaviors and evangelism, and program enhancements.

Churches across America struggle to determine what must happen in their particular setting for church growth. While many churches may have a similar desire to see an increase in membership, something entirely different from church to church is their particular way of engaging guests. What cost is each church willing to pay to become more missional? First Baptist Church of Ravenswood has church leaders and members who want to see growth spiritually and numerically.

Are they willing to implement some changes despite the church's long history in the community? The church may be hesitant to consider change when hearing the word transformation because a pocket of members may feel that if the church has existed for nearly 160 years, it must be doing something right. These members are unaware that transformation can begin incrementally and strategically. In this curriculum, the process focuses on the member's mindset regarding church functionality. This process will allow members to step back and truly

see their attitudes, as well as others' in the church.

This vantage, coupled with seizing opportunities to evangelize the non-Christian guest, may lead to discipleship. Therefore, by completing the customized training over several weeks, First Baptist Church will not only see their attitudes and behaviors as a potential hindrance, but they will also be able to accept and make changes in the church



Figure 3.0. *Others First* Logo

using the *Visual Roadmap*, becoming more guest-friendly by sharing the love of Jesus and their experiences in the church with them.

Therefore, this action research project will employ a combination of cognitive and social constructivism learning theories that address the church's inward focus. The differences in both approaches are significant because people learn differently. When using cognitive constructivism, ideas are learned through an individual and personal process, whereas in social constructivism learning is conducted through interaction with the teacher and other students.³²⁴ Katherine Powell and Cody Kalina say, "Both methods use the inquiry method to facilitate learning and can be used alternatively and interactively to produce an effective learning environment."³²⁵ Therefore, "the main goal is to produce an inquiring and accepting atmosphere that leads to each student reaching his or her full potential if the teacher is attentive and guides

³²⁴ Katherine C. Powell and Cody J. Kalina, "Cognitive and Social Constructivism: Developing Tools for an Effective Classroom," *Education* 130, no. 2 (2009): 241, Gale Academic OneFile.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

each student through the process.”³²⁶ The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* models this approach and will utilize this environment.

In this curriculum, church members will gauge their attitudes and actions through prayer and reflection and answer questions about how they perceive the church and its functionality. This is accomplished by reviewing participant data, expectations and concerns, discussing the Scriptures, and hearing others give their perspective on evangelism efforts in the church to help bolster the need for an improvement plan. This process is where members learn to choose what pathway is best for themselves with the tools before them to find the most helpful technique and strategy based on their personality. In this curriculum, social constructivism involves the lectures and demonstrations given by the teacher. Both of these approaches in the learning environment will work cohesively. However, it is essential to incorporate both because prevalent personal preferences and attitudes may be more based on tradition and experience, and role-playing and application are essential.

This process culminates in the church following the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* program that will lead the church to convert its inward focus to a missional focus that considers the guest’s perspective concerning their needs. The idea is that members participating in the training will see the need for immediate change. At the end of the training, the church will vote on accepting a declaration (Appendix H), accepting the pathway forward, committing to following the four phases of improvement, and assisting in the church becoming more missional.

The guest, whether Christian or not, is expected to want to feel welcome. If this is the case, what do they see when arriving at First Baptist Church inside and outside? First

³²⁶ Powell and Kalina, “Cognitive and Social Constructivism,” 249.

impressions occur before the preacher ever steps into the pulpit. How people interact with the guests will have an influence on the guest's overall satisfaction. As far as worship and love for Jesus are concerned, the member's involvement with others in this manner will also have an impact.

Understanding how the church as a whole can either positively or negatively impact the visitor can hinge on the church's love for Jesus and each other. If a church is not talking about Jesus, what is the conversation about? If a church member never says what the Lord or church has done for them, what might they do for the guest? These expectations are part of discussions that will come out in the curriculum and will delve into spiritual disciplines that spill over into the church, along with member actions and behaviors, particularly regarding witnessing and evangelizing.

This improvement project follows the expected route of an action research project, which brings together stakeholders (church members and leadership) who then discuss, analyze, and cogenerate relevant knowledge that implements the solution.³²⁷ The methodology behind *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* follows the preferred route of rationale, intervention, and evaluation.³²⁸ The systematic approach will help the church become outward-focused by implementing changes outlined in the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* as an effective solution to address its inward focus, positioning itself for better and more evangelistic guest engagement resulting in repeat visits.³²⁹

³²⁷ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 56.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 1.

The curriculum designed for this intervention will demonstrate that the cost of change is not so much monetarily as it is the church's willingness to revitalize functionality. Understanding that maintaining an inward focus is built around survival, whereas a missional focus is built on transformation, is vital. In order for that progression to occur, an action plan is needed. This is why the *Others First* curriculum is divided into four sections in which implementation can begin immediately to have a complete plan moving forward within four months.

This qualitative research improvement project supports the intervention proposed because it is cross-cutting, considering and integrating expert data with practical evidence about guest engagement, attitudes, expectations, church functionality, transactional and transformational ministries, personal relationships, and facility needs that lead to better guest satisfaction. These data come from literature reviews, interviews, surveys, and even secret shoppers. Three initial surveys of participants will be used to gauge individual perceptions of church functionality before training. Participants in the training will engage in open-ended questions as a group around each of those areas.

Part of the training will involve sharing with one another how the Lord has impacted their lives. By working on spiritual disciplines such as praying daily, reading the Bible daily, taking part in Sunday School, and weekly Bible Study, members will fall in love with the Lord and strengthen their desire to share their love of Christ with others. This approach, in addition to preaching sermons that encourage members to grow in their relationship with Jesus, will.

Asking God to help congregants acquire a heart like his for all people can make a difference. Therefore, ensuring the church has opportunities in programs that encourage spiritual disciplines and the sharing of one's faith with others is critical to inspiring people to share their joy of serving the Lord with others. This project results in First Baptist Church adopting the

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation as part of a formal vision, allowing the church to follow a simple pathway forward using incremental revitalization steps with the guest's needs and expectations in mind. This training means First Baptist Church will become more outward-focused and missional, putting the visitor's needs before theirs. This plan will help the church engage visitors and others meaningfully across all aspects of church functionality, where repeat visits are likely, guest satisfaction improves, and there is an unwavering sense of love for Jesus among the members of the church.

Intervention Design

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation is a custom curriculum designed by this researcher that addresses the inward focus of rural church leaders and members to revitalize four aspects of church functionality. The training aims for the church to understand the significance of shifting its inward-focus mindset to being transformational, with a greater emphasis on intentional and transformational ministry.

Understanding the church member's perspective regarding church operations is necessary. The church has four primary components to consider for this improvement project. The first is how the church member views guest engagement, as an understanding of the importance of the impact of first impressions matters.

Church members will attest that they are friendly and welcome any person to the church. However, not all guests who enter the church are encountered by members other than the greeter. Similarly, most attention by the church members is given to other members and non-members who are already known in the church. This may give the impression that the church is cold, uncaring, and unloving.

Table 3.0. Intervention design

<i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation Intervention Design</i>		
Step 1	<p style="text-align: center;">Announce the Project and Dates</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The pastor will announce the launch of the <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i> training curriculum during a Sunday morning worship service. This process will include announcing the dates for the four-day program across four weeks on Sunday afternoons. 2. The pastor will explain the purpose of the training using the prepared announcement as approved by the Institutional Board. An email reminder will follow. The aim will be to help First Baptist Church of Ravenswood revitalize the church's inward focus by becoming more guest-friendly and better sharing Christ's love with others. 	After approval from IRB
Step 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Registration and Survey Distribution</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Registration for the training program begins. 2. Church leaders and members will participate in the four trainings together. Four separate training dates will be held. Each training will focus on one of four specific church functionality areas identified on the Roadmap. 3. Pre-training surveys are distributed with an envelope to keep information and personal identity confidential. This tool will gauge the existing mindset of church members regarding four areas of church functionality. 3. Two secret shoppers will be asked to attend a service and complete a report on their findings. They will also receive an envelope to protect their privacy as they return the envelope. 4. Data will be compiled and shared during the training and will be used to aid in discussions. 	2 weeks
Step 3	<p style="text-align: center;">Plan for Training Location and Times</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training Session 1 – Guest Engagement 2. Training Session 2 – Facility Needs 3. Training Session 3 – Member Actions and Behaviors 4. Training Session 4 - Program Enhancements <p style="text-align: center;">Reveal Strategic Plan: <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The four curriculum outlines may be viewed on the next page.</p>	Each training occurs on three different dates. Allow a minimum of 2 hours for each class.
Step 4	<p style="text-align: center;">Full Intervention Implementation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Training completed 2. Strategic plan revealed 3. Post-test distributed to gauge change in mindset after training 4. The church agrees to begin implementing strategies identified in the plan within 30 days. 	Begin implementing changes across 30 days following Session 3.

Next, members of the church will identify facility needs that should be improved upon to enhance a guest's experience. If the church overlooks facility repairs and renovations, it can have a detrimental impact on first impressions. Guests may wonder if the church is willing to overlook necessary improvements such as foundation repairs, will they also overlook their spiritual needs? The church has made several improvements over the last five years, but there exist larger looming issues that can negatively impact operations such as the church building having foundation repair issues. These kinds of deficiencies need to be addressed.

This project will help members see that a more welcoming facility will create a better experience for guests and members alike. Having a facility that is well kept also demonstrates the love the members have for their church. Neglected repairs could have been related to financial issues in the past, but also result from many church members being overprotective of the church facility, not only seeing it as historical because of its over 150-year history, but because many of their family members from generations long ago attended the same church.

Memories attached to the facility and property can hinder change and indicate an inward focus, where memories outweigh the need for facility improvement. This hesitancy is also indicative of an inward focus. Members are learning that becoming more missional involves first addressing the member's heart to become more concerned about soul care and to determine through honest assessment if the existing church's facility is meeting the needs of the emerging generation without repairs and enhancements. By making these necessary improvements to the church facility, members can get excited about seeing their church restored to its original glory, which may bring them joy.

Lastly, member attitudes and behaviors must be considered. How often are people talking about Jesus with others prior to the service? Are members sharing with others what the Lord has

done for them? Most of the conversations that occur before and after service have nothing to do with the church or serving the Lord.

These are therefore missed opportunities for organic relationship building, evangelism, and discipleship. Many of these missed opportunities occur because the member is focused on worldly things before and after the service, resulting in an oversight of speaking to others about Jesus. Part of this is the need for more spiritual discipline on the part of the church member, but also for awareness of missed opportunities at the church to build relationships around Christ that can foster spiritual growth for the believer and non-believer alike.

Lastly, the training program will address program needs. First Baptist Church has many programs, but most do not include an active evangelism or discipleship component. Many of the programs have operated the same for many years. There are no brochures or online information about the programs offered, which likely has caused limited involvement of new people. Few of the programs have had leadership changes over several years. Therefore, much of the same structure in the programs offered in the church has existed for years, and changes are rare.

The people who attend these programs have attended for many years. By completing an assessment for programs within the church, programs will be analyzed to determine what success means and how the Lord is glorified in each area. If discipleship and evangelic opportunities are missing, they will be instituted. Recruitment of leaders and restructuring of these programs programmatically are important, as this can help people grow in their faith and desire a relationship with Jesus.

To that end, the aim for the project is for the church member to see the significance of finding joy in serving Jesus with others. By sharing the love of Christ with one another and by serving one another, a mutual desire to see faith grow is exhibited (Appendix I). The church will

be positioned to change from an inward-focus mindset to one that is more centered around soul care, which is a missional approach. When people enter the church, they should feel the love inside the church from members who are genuinely happy to be there because their lives have been changed.

This strategic plan centers on a revival of the hearts of church members, with them remembering their first love after becoming a Christian and then wanting others to experience the same. This mindset impacts all aspects of church functionality from guest engagement, facility enhancements, member actions and behaviors, and improved programs. There is a common desire to do better. When the church sees guests and members as souls that either need Christ or need to be encouraged in Christ, great things can happen.

The Holy Spirit can help create an environment where there is joy in worshipping Christ together because hearts are excited to be assembled. One of the great responsibilities of the church today involves both evangelism and discipleship. Following the leading of the Holy Spirit, members can build relationships that will demonstrate that there is encouragement in serving Christ together. This is in line with the third component of First Baptist Church's mission statement of "Growing Together in Christ."³³⁰

³³⁰ First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, "Mission Statement: Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ," accessed March 31, 2023, www.fbcravenswood.org.

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* Curriculum

Table 3.1. Training agenda week one

Training Agenda – Week 1	
Session 1	
1.	Prayer
2.	Introduction/Overview
3.	Sessions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Session 1 – Guest Engagement b. Session 2 – Facility Needs c. Session 3 – Member Actions and Behaviors d. Session 4 – Program Enhancements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reveal Strategic Plan <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i>
4.	First Baptist Church of Ravenswood’s Rich History
5.	Church Declines Nationally – Local Church Closures
6.	Review Pre-Training Survey Data
7.	Ministry Mindsets /Functionality <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Transactional versus Transformational b. First Baptist Church Functionality – Group Discussions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. What do we do well? ii. What do we need to improve? iii. Questions to consider for the future iv. Uncertainties
8.	Guest Feedback /Secret Shoppers <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is good? 2. What is missing? 3. Guest engagement (Christian / Non-Christian) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual arrival of a guest to Sunday School / Worship 4. Welcoming 5. What do they see/hear? 6. Evangelism 7. Witnessing 8. Discipleship / Programs 9. Transactional / Transformational approaches 10. Discussion 11. Role playing exercise
9.	Next Meeting Date and Adjourn with Prayer

Table 3.2. Training agenda week two

Training Agenda – Week 2	
Session 2	
1.	Prayer
2.	Introduction/Overview
3.	Sessions
a.	Session 1 – Guest Engagement
b.	Session 2 – Facility Needs
c.	Session 3 – Member Actions and Behaviors
d.	Session 4 – Program Enhancements
	Reveal Strategic Plan
	<i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i>
4.	Briefly Recap Session 1
5.	First Impressions Matter
6.	Review Facility Survey
7.	Ministry Mindsets /Functionality
a.	Transactional versus Transformational
b.	First Baptist Church Facility Discussion – Group Discussions
i.	How important is it to preserve the look of the church?
ii.	The fellowship hall is modernized. Was that a mistake?
iii.	What do you think guests think about the facility/functionality?
iv.	What do you like about the facility and its functionality?
v.	What do you not like about the facility and its functionality?
vi.	Why has so little been done to improve the facility of the church?
vii.	If you could wave a wand, what changes would you make?
viii.	Major Concerns / Minor Concerns
ix.	Questions to Ponder
x.	Transactional or Transformational
xi.	Discussion
8.	Survey Feedback Regarding Facility
1.	What is good?
2.	What is missing?
9.	Next Meeting and Adjourn with Prayer

Table 3.3. Training agenda week three

Training Agenda – Week 3	
Session 3	
1.	Prayer
2.	Introduction/Overview
3.	Sessions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Session 1 – Guest Engagement b. Session 2 – Facility Needs c. Session 3 – Member Actions and Behaviors d. Session 4 – Program Enhancements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reveal Strategic Plan <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i>
4.	Briefly Recap Sessions 1 & 2
5.	What Guests Are Looking for in a Church
6.	Member Actions, Behaviors, and Attitudes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Discussion – You are a guest in someone’s home. b. Discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. What makes a good visit to church? ii. What makes a bad visit to a church? iii. What examples can you give of a good and bad experience? c. Transactional versus Transformational d. Whose job is it to greet visitors? (Christian and non-Christian) e. When greeting visitors, what should that entail? f. Sharing your faith – (What has Jesus done for you?) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Inside the church ii. Outside the church iii. Exercise: Your Story g. Explain how the church can help them grow in their faith. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Exercise: How can the church help you grow in your faith? h. How often are conversations before and after church about the Lord? i. What keeps you from sharing your faith or love for Jesus? j. Could you lead someone to Christ? Role play. k. Spiritual disciplines help the member and guest grow. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> l. How well do we evangelize in our community? m. What could be done to improve that effort inside the church? n. What could be done to improve efforts outside of the church? o. What would make the perfect visit to a church?
7.	Feedback Regarding Member Actions and Behaviors
8.	Next Meeting and Adjourn with Prayer

Table 3.4. Training agenda week four

Teaching Agenda – Week 4	
Session 4	
1.	Prayer
2.	Introduction/Overview
3.	Sessions
	a. Session 1 – Guest Engagement
	b. Session 2 – Facility Needs
	c. Session 3 – Member Actions and Behaviors
	d. Session 4 – Program Enhancements
	Reveal Strategic Plan
	<i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation</i>
4.	Briefly Recap Session 1, 2, & 3
5.	What Programs Exist in Our Church?
	a. What is the program objective and recruitment plan?
	b. How do guests know/learn about what they are for or how to get involved?
	c. How does it evangelize?
	d. How does it make disciples? How are program leaders determined?
6.	When is a program no longer effective?
	a. Discussion
	i. How many new people participate in a year?
	ii. How many people started but left?
	iii. Why should a program continue?
	iv. Could it be improved?
	v. Sounds good, looks good, but no fruit = Pharisee
7.	Incorporating Discipleship Opportunities in Our Programs
	a. Programs should demonstrate the member's love of Christ.
	b. Programs should demonstrate the member's love for one another.
	c. Programs need an evangelism component.
8.	Repurposing Our Programs to Ensure Christ is Exalted and Demonstrated
	a. Problems in the community? Problems in the family? Problems with addiction?
	b. Grandparents struggling? Discipleship?
	c. Reasons for not implementing
	i. No leadership role, No funds, Do not know how, No time, No excuses
9.	Promoting Our Programs with Passion and Expectation of Spiritual Growth
	a. Participation
	b. Word of Mouth, Bulletin, What is missing?
10.	Transactional versus Transformational
11.	Reveal Visual Roadmap: Sharing the Love of God with Others
12.	Next Steps for Implementation; Church Declaration
13.	Adjourn with Prayer

The training dates will use the curriculum format explained above but begin with a brief review of the previous session to underscore the importance of what was covered and learned. This culminates at the end of the fourth week, where members will be given the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* strategic plan that indicates suggested areas of improvement and asks the church to vote officially to accept the declaration, moving the church toward becoming more missional by completing multiple action steps beginning within the first 120 days. This process includes appointing a committee that will oversee each of the four areas of functionality to ensure the improvements outlined are completed. The aim is to create a culture where the church actively loves Jesus and shares their faith with others.

Therefore, this action research project lays out a specific pathway where the church can make small changes that, when considered in sum, will enhance both the Christian and non-Christian visitors' experience at church as well as other members and non-members. This training program gives all parties the confidence and means to build relationships inside the church that can lead to salvation for the lost and spiritual maturity for the believer longing to grow in their faith. Members will learn the importance of interacting with each other, sharing the love of Christ with them before and after the service, helping them learn about the programs in the church that can help them, and solidifying the facility needs to position the church for the next 25 years of ministry. None of this would be possible if the church cannot recognize its inward focus and attempt to become more relational and welcoming in church functionality to reach Christian and non-Christian guests better.

The Basis for the Intervention

Others First is a training program that will address four phases of functionality centered around the church's identity. The aim is to take honest perceptions from church leadership and

membership and hold them against the reality or what is being done and what needs to be done at First Baptist. Do these perceptions match? The program's facilitator will pose questions that will generate discussions among attendees to expose expectations versus future needs. By examining the differences in transactional and transformational ministries and identify the ongoing impacts of becoming more mission-minded, the church can be positioned for change. This process involves creating a strategic plan with achievable goals. Stringer explains, "Unless research participants take systematic steps to incorporate changed procedures into the ongoing life of the organization, changes are likely to be short-lived."³³¹

This information will lead to the church recognizing its perceptions against the transactional and transformational ministry approaches model. The program identifies four aspects of church functionality where the church needs to address its inward focus. The training program ends with a roadmap or strategic plan presented to First Baptist Church to methodically and decisively address their inward focus. This visual roadmap demonstrates how the church can be positioned for transformation by helping guests feel welcome to embrace the faith community, creating an environment where they can actively seek or learn about Jesus.

Others First will target the leadership and adult members of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood to change their inward-focused mindset to an outward-focused one. Having a transactional or inward-focused attitude stymies connectivity with guests. The program will exist in four phases. The aim is to help the church visualize the need for change by examining existing attitudes regarding visitor engagement, facility needs, program needs, and overall church functionality to create a desire for revitalization.

³³¹ Sensing, Qualitative Research, 223

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will be presented as four Sunday sessions and four weeks of sermons reiterating the need to evangelize the lost, love others, and encourage those of the faith. This training will explain and reiterate the differences between inward-focus and missional-focus or transactional and transformational ministry and the significant impact regarding Christian and non-Christian guest engagement through evangelism and discipleship. Following the training, the church will be presented with a four-step plan called the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* that identifies action steps across four areas needing revitalization that will bring about more significant guest interaction and provide opportunities for evangelism and discipleship. The areas to be improved upon are guest engagement, member actions/behaviors, facility needs, and program enhancements.

The training conducted by the pastor will also involve a lecture format that will include focus group-style discussions regarding ministry needs, guest interaction and relationship building, evangelism, and discipleship. Further, the training explores existing actions and behaviors of church members to help the group assess whether current actions and behaviors support church growth or church maintenance. The expectation is that the church has an inward-focused mindset that is predominant and goes unnoticed by most members. This oversight is because the church has maintained what some would consider an average-sized crowd for the size of the community, the church is considered financially sound, and the perception that people in the church genuinely love each other.

On the surface, there are not many issues of concern. Therefore, the inward focus of church leadership and membership is often overlooked. However, there is an underlying belief that the current maintenance model appears to be celebrated as transformative because personal preferences regarding expectations inside the church are being met. No one sees the inward focus

as creating barriers that can lead to church attendance declines over the next decade. No one sees the traditional facility as becoming a barrier to growth. The lack of facility upgrades is a potential barrier to growth and can impact the visitor experience.

The aim of *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* is to bring to the fore the inward-focused attitude of a church hesitant to change. This mindset goes unnoticed as it has been common practice for decades. Therefore, the leadership is content working with the congregation that has come to accept that the status quo is sufficient as long as the membership is satisfied. The problem is that many church members are older and may not live beyond another ten years, leaving the church to fend for itself if the status quo is no longer acceptable to those still attending.

Nonetheless, the fear of causing resistance to change will keep the church operating at status quo, limiting the church's ability to embrace growth and enthusiasm. The concern is that this inward focus negatively affects visitor engagement and limits facility revitalization needs. It creates an unwillingness to rethink stagnant programs, preferring to keep traditions instead of positioning the church for growth because there are seemingly no problems brewing in the church.

Training Facility Needs

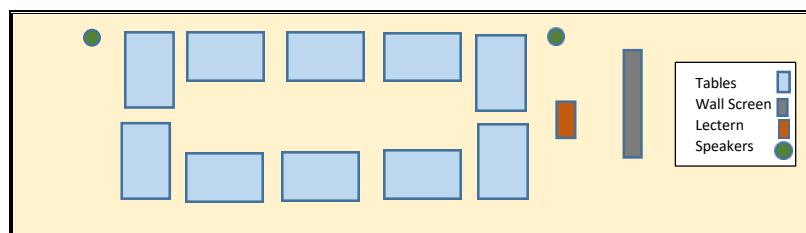


Figure 3.1. Training facility needs

Each training day will be held in the fellowship hall with seating at tables situated in a square formation so that each attendee is facing the other. This setup will allow everyone present

to hear someone speaking or ask questions better. The leader or moderator of the group will be the pastor, who will use a microphone standing at the lectern. Each attendee will be given two sheets of paper and two pens for any notes or questions they wish to remember later. The leader will record significant notes from each session. These notes will not include specifics as to who said what, and comments are only identified by participant number to provide confidentiality in the notes.

Challenges to Church Traditions

The challenge for the church is its long history in the community because longevity often indicates success. Since many generations of families have attended the church, some deeply held beliefs about the importance of preservation exist. The church has the same look and feel that it has had over the years (cathedral-like) and offers many of the same programs. The church sings many of the same songs and even embraces some of the same leadership styles of the past. Because the church has been operational for over 150 years, there is a mindset that something must have been done correctly for the church to exist today. Some people in the community insist that a particular group or a few individuals have too much influence over decisions made for the church. This perception may have been accurate at some point in the church's history but is not a reality today.

Nevertheless, those attitudes and beliefs could still exist in the community. Therefore, the church members' bold witnessing of how the church operates today is needed. Additionally, learning to share the love of Jesus with others in and outside of the church can supersede those misnomers. Although the church has an average attendance of around 125, it is considered one of the larger churches in the small rural community of Ravenswood. However, church attendance today is about 40-50 percent of what it was 30 years ago. If attendance declines were to continue

across that lifespan of the church similarly, it would be financially unable to maintain full-time ministry as it does now by 2053.

This training program will make the way for the immediate mission focus changes needed to help transform church functionality. Before a church can seek change as a body, there has to be evidence of a problem existing in the first place. This curriculum will expose those deeply held beliefs and practices that are heavily inward-focused and can be overcome by learning to incorporate the sharing of one's love for Jesus with others in the church.

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will accomplish that need. Those who complete the program will understand four areas of church practice that could be considered for revitalization if an outward focus is employed.

The four phases of training over the four days of training are:

- 1) Christian and Non-Christian Guest Engagement (What They Expect and Need)
- 2) Facility Needs (Comfort, Updating, Parking, Elderly Accessibility)
- 3) Member Actions and Behaviors (Serving, Evangelism, Relationship Building)
- 4) Program Enhancements (Evaluation, Improvement, Expansion)

Church leaders and members who attend the training will learn to address these focal areas while safeguarding the church's values and legacy. Great care will ensure the church understands that each area targeted for revitalization will begin immediately.

Others First Training Overview

The *Others First* training program is for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood church members. Members will be invited to attend the four training sessions at the pastor's request. While attendance is voluntary, there is a clear call to participate in hopes of positioning the church for improvement in church functionality, emphasizing how others are treated. An honest

evaluation of how often church members share the love of Christ with others in the church is the central focus throughout the training. The aim is to foster evangelistic efforts within the congregation that demonstrate to others their love of Jesus and to share how their life is better due to attending this particular church and taking part in activities that are available for discipleship. Members will receive a letter inviting them to participate as shown in Appendix F. Attendees will be asked to complete a registration form and consent form as indicated in Appendix D and E.

A pre-training survey called *Current Church Perceptions* will be distributed to everyone enrolled at the time they submit their registration. This survey determines existing attitudes about church members' mindsets based on 78 questions regarding guest engagement, facility needs, member actions and behaviors, and programs. Attendees will be asked to select the best answer for each question based on their viewpoint. This information will then be shared collectively in the opening sessions across the four training sessions and during group discussions. Not all question responses will be used in the training, but they will help provide additional insight for discussion.

Throughout the training, the curriculum explores the evidence regarding church attendance declines nationally and what visitors look for in a church. This information is coupled with pre-training survey responses. Each session underscores the differences in the two primary leadership styles most prevalent in churches today, including transactional and transformational ministries.

The critical difference is that transactional ministry focuses heavily on maintenance and sustainability. In contrast, transformational focuses more on individual care or soul care, seen through evangelism for the non-Christian and discipleship and spiritual disciplines for Christians.

As part of the discussions that will be ongoing in the training, it will become clear that the church needs to focus more on evangelism, sharing their love of Jesus, and helping others mature in their faith. Part of this process involves the members identifying their need to become more aware of their role in the church to make disciples, teaching them about the Lord and how to share their faith with others.

As part of the training, the facility, over 150 years old, needs to be revitalized for continued sustainability and to be more accommodating to guests. The facility has multiple needs that church members will identify through the survey process to become more welcoming to guests, such as improved parking, seating, and signage, and also to help provide a level of comfort and contentment for current members. This overhaul is needed when guests consider their first impressions of the church. While facility improvements may seem out of place in a program targeting an inward focus, the facility itself is evidence of that pervasive inward-focused attitude. These improvements will contribute positively to the guest experience at the church and help communicate that church members care about their facility. This testimony demonstrates that the church wants to be accommodating, comfortable, conservative, and God-honoring. The emphasis on revitalization will bring about a rekindling of excitement in the church because it is recommitting itself to the mission of reaching out, inviting in, and growing together in Christ.

The aim is to be excited again about loving Jesus and loving others, as well as making improvements within the facility to launch a renewed focus on others, proving the church's willingness to commit to becoming more transformational. The improvements that can lead to repeat visits will be discussed. Attending a facility that is aesthetically pleasing to the visitor is essential to both Christian and non-Christian guests, as well as other members.

Programs will also be thoroughly discussed and analyzed as part of the training. Defining program success is vital to ensure the programs in existence remain or to determine how they should change to align with the mission and vision statement of the church. The program analysis will ensure that each program operating in the church has an evangelical and missional focus, providing opportunities for salvation and fostering discipleship. The concern is that many programs operate as member-only organizations within the church, much like a social club would operate under the presumption that people who attend are already saved and spiritually in a good place. This belief may not be the case. Providing discipleship components and evangelism opportunities helps fulfill the Great Commission.

Training Progression

The first training phase will focus on guest engagement. In this phase, evidence from the literature review and Scriptures will be shared with members about how Christian and non-Christian guests should be treated. Guests who come into the church will have expectations. These first impressions will play an immediate part in their experience.

The church will virtually follow a guest through a discussion from the point of arrival to the end of the service. How is the guest interacted with, and what information are they lacking about the facility and service? How do people in the church approach them? These discussions will identify good and bad areas and consider suggestions for improvement. Evidence from the literature review will explain what first impressions are and what people are looking for in a church, regardless of whether they are Christian or non-Christian guests.

The second training phase of the curriculum will examine the facility and how it may or may not meet the guest's needs. As part of the curriculum, Church members will honestly assess the church as it exists for what is good, wrong, outdated, and needed to enhance a guest's

experience. The belief is that there will be a significant discussion around the lack of comfortable seating since the pews are over 50 years old. The church has no signage to help a guest traverse from one point of the church to another. There is no way to identify where specific classrooms are, including the nursery and children's church programs. Parking will also be shared as a concern because it is limited. On-street parking is the primary means of parking surrounding the church, which operates on a first-come, first-served basis. There are two accessible parking spaces. Elderly members and late arrivers will be forced to park in a gravel parking lot that looks unkept with weeds growing through the gravel. The aim will be to propose paving, parking lines, landscaping, and even valet parking for elderly members and guests who arrive late and are unable to walk the distance.

The third training phase of the curriculum will address member actions and behaviors. This training is where the church will learn the two predominant ministry styles, including transactional and transformational. The church currently employs the transactional model, often described by the phrase "we have always done things this way." This action generates an inward focus when the church is reluctant to change out of a desire to preserve the past without care or careful consideration for future needs.

This ideal also may be responsible for the lack of members sharing their love of Jesus with others before or after each service. Conversations before and after the service are often about friends, family, and life events rather than things of the Lord. As part of the training, the discussion will ask members to assess when they last honestly told someone they did not know about their experience with the Lord before or after the service. Further, the discussion will delve into how each person interacts with Christian and non-Christian guests in the church that they do not know personally outside of the church.

This training helps members explore ways to initiate conversations with guests that introduce themselves and leads to an opportunity to explain how they love the Lord and what the church can do to help guests in their spiritual journey. Role-playing will be a part of this effort. The aim will be to help those who say they cannot talk to strangers learn that they can with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Members will learn that conversations about the Lord with visitors and other fellow members can lead to discipleship opportunities to help both sides grow in their love of the Lord. The more people practice sharing their faith, conversion, and love for Jesus, the easier it becomes. The congregation will be challenged to try this approach the following Sunday, report back at the next training, and keep it going in future services.

The fourth aspect of the training will look at program enhancements and the ministry mindset of the church. The training will have a discussion that will briefly discuss a top-down review of programs in the church to assess their successes and failures. Questions will be asked about the ministry components of each, including how faith is grown as part of the program and what efforts exist in that program to learn. What recruitment efforts are underway to bring more people into the program? What is the main benefit of attending one of these programs? Are current leaders of these programs empowering others in the group to take turns holding the reigns of leadership to promote Christian development, or are these programs still operating with few results? The more significant question is, what programs are ineffective and should be discontinued? Are there any? What must be done to make programs attractive to others if they are unsuccessful?

Lastly, as part of transitioning to an outward-focused ministry mindset, are there needs in the community that the church should consider more of a priority than what is currently

underway? If so, why have those needs not been addressed? This nonchalance in attitude may be another example of an inward focus on what is preferred rather than needed. These questions aim to help the congregation determine the larger picture of the community where they live and consider at ministry areas that may have been overlooked over the years because of a transactional mindset. This section of training helps attendees quickly see the inward focus that exists. This understanding will make the church aware that it must become more concerned about others if it wants to be more missional.

The conclusion of the training ends with the presentation of the action steps in *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, where the member can record updated perceptions. How have their views changed regarding sharing their faith with others and explaining to others what the Lord has done in their lives? This will measure if change is recorded in the program. A post-training survey will capture those newfound principles that will help promote and encourage a more evangelistic and missional church where soul care is emphasized. Members will have learned about the differences between transactional and transformational ministries in at least four significant areas of church functionality.

This change in mindset is necessary for the intervention to be successful because the *Others First: Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will impact decisions as to what needs to be happening in the church to enhance a visitor's experience through guest engagement, improved discipleship and evangelistic efforts by members through their behaviors and actions, and to ensure that the facility needs and program needs are constantly being evaluated and changed to meet the needs of the community. The program is designed to start the church on that journey, realizing their inward focus was inhibiting their efforts to share their faith with others because

they were more concerned about what was happening in the operations of the church than the needs of the others who are attending the church in regards to soul care.

The curriculum ends with the leader sharing the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. The purpose of the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* is to help the church see that rural churches can be transformed if there is a plan moving forward with small actionable steps identified that place a greater emphasis on missional outreach than inward-focused maintenance modeling. Each step allows for achievable goals along the way. The church can vote to accept a declaration of support for the project to help it align with its mission of reaching out, inviting in, and growing together in Christ.

To transition into this last part of training session four, the facilitator will ask the group if things in the church can be improved. Second, is there agreement that the church needs to focus more outwardly? Third, would First Baptist Church of Ravenswood be implementing the plan that will systematically move the church from a transactional ministry to a transformational ministry over the course of four months, putting the needs of others at the front and center of everything the church does? This would indicate the church's support and willingness to begin sharing their love of Jesus by witnessing God's goodness, helping them see what Jesus can do for them, and identifying ways the church can help them grow in their faith through programs, activities, and discipleship opportunities.

Ultimately, by exploring the differences between transactional and translational models of ministry, the church will have concluded that they must become more missional and engage with Christian and non-Christian guests as well as each other. Attending church where very little is said about Jesus before and after the service seems almost disrespectful to God. There is a possibility that the curriculum may cause some of the older congregation to be somewhat

hesitant to embrace some of the changes outlined because they are satisfied with living out the remainder of their lives under the existing maintenance model that requires no changes as long as their preferences are met. However, in harboring those kinds of feelings, a level of selfishness exudes, putting the church at risk the church of failing to be relevant and missing an opportunity to become transformational for the generation ahead.

Nevertheless, the curriculum will convince the church member that there are opportunities for personal spiritual improvement and physical and programmatic improvements needed to help address their inward focus, leading to full support of the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, where real change can occur.

The facilitator will walk the group through each area of the transformation map, indicating how the plan will help revitalize the church and honing in on areas discussed during the training for immediate attention. The question will be posed: How can this church move from an inward focus (identified on the map in the first space) to an outward focus, becoming more transformational (last space on the map)? The basic answer is that they have a desire to do so.

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4

Transformation provides the church with a clear path forward with changes that can be made to bring about transformation and revitalization regarding the church's inward focus mindset. The church has an actionable roadmap that identifies areas of functionality that a small, rural congregation can undertake over 120 days. The training ends with the church having *A Visual*

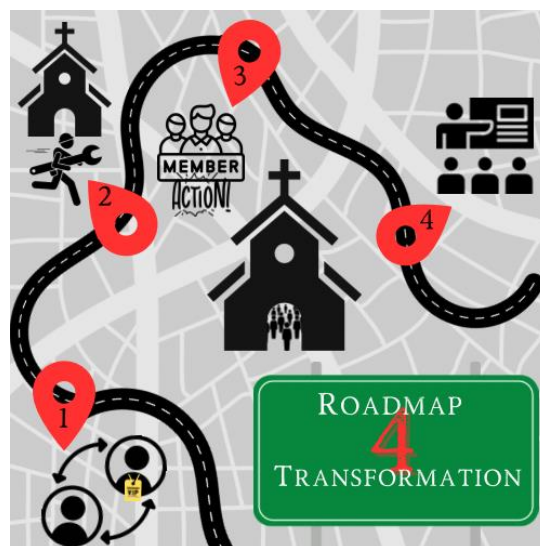


Figure 3.2. *Roadmap 4 Transformation* infographic

Roadmap 4 Transformation in hand to help them immediately begin addressing their inward focus in a methodical and well-thought way, leading to more engagement with church guests soon after they arrive. This refocusing of the church will help it see the benefits of focusing on others more than themselves and their personal preferences.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

While the training will demonstrate to the members of First Baptist Church that the church's inward focus is hindering church functionality and limiting guest engagement and evangelistic opportunities, it should also fuel a desire for change in practice, the need for facility improvements, and even more importantly a personal revival where members begin talking about their love of Jesus again. Therefore, the final training component of the project following the training session is the church adopting the intervention.

The aim will be for the church to use what they have learned in the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training program and follow the four-component action plan that makes the church more cognizant of guest interaction and views guests as an opportunity for evangelism and discipleship. By initiating this process, members should also improve their relationships with other members because they will talk more about the Lord before and after the service. This acceptance of the plan will demonstrate church members' willingness to share their love of Jesus more with guests and other members within 120 days of the training. Post-training surveys will further indicate the church's willingness to accept the need to shift their mindset toward a more intentional and purposeful missional focus instead of the transactional mindset that has hindered the church spiritually.

The pastor will announce a special meeting of the church to formally adopt a declaration stating that the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* will be accepted as the plan

moving forward to help church members begin to share the love of Jesus and prepare to evangelize non-Christian guests better. This will teach others who did not participate in the training how the church's new initiatives will improve their interaction with Christian and non-Christian guests alike.

The pastor will appoint a committee and assign the four areas of improvement identified on the *Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* to various persons or groups within the church to take responsibility for those critical areas of church functionality addressed in the curriculum. This oversight will ensure that the critical areas identified in the *Roadmap* are not overlooked or set aside. It will be during this time that efforts will begin to plan for facility enhancements. Further, program leaders will assess their programs for the first time to ensure there are components in them that involve opportunities for evangelism and discipleship that may have been missing.

This process involves looking for additional ways to improve recruiting for those programs to find Christian and non-Christian guests who will participate in these small groups. This committee will report annually on the progress and look to identify other areas in the church that can be refocused around evangelism and discipleship, which puts the concern for others over self to make the church more welcoming to all.

Additionally, opportunities will be announced to help members consider spiritual disciplines, working alongside the pastor to foster their personal spiritual growth. At the same time, the church will strive to improve relationships inside and outside the church by living lives that exemplify the love of Christ.

As more people become familiar with interacting with others with a missional mindset, the church will slowly begin moving as the body of Christ from a longstanding transactional attitude that has permeated this small rural church to a transformational ministry that impacts

lives for Jesus. When the church member begins seeing others as opportunities for evangelism and discipleship, there will be a renewed sense of excitement in helping others come to know Jesus as Lord and then helping them experience the love of Christ by serving alongside their brothers and sisters of the faith.

The following chart depicts five primary steps that will occur after the training, which provides details for how the intervention will be implemented:

Table 3.5. *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* implementation

<i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation Implementation</i>		
Step 1	<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusion of Training</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members who have submitted the pre-training survey will be asked to complete a post-training survey to gauge if there is a better understanding of the negative impacts of an inward focus on the church. The survey should indicate a better understanding of a transactional ministry and the benefits of becoming more intentional in outreach, mission, evangelism, and discipleship. 2. Members will be presented with a final copy of the <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap for Transformation</i> plan indicating the four church functionality areas that need improvement. 3. The church will formally vote to adopt this strategic plan for the church to support the existing mission statement of <i>Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ</i>. See step two. 4. The pastor will appoint a committee to oversee each area identified in the improvement plan. This group can provide regular updates as to the implementation of each improvement. They will provide a written report annually for the next five years. See step three. 5. For growth development, the pastor will host a monthly opportunity for members and guests who want to learn more about implementing spiritual disciplines in their own lives to mature their faith and demonstrate the love of Jesus to others. This will be encouraged for new member orientation. See step four. 6. The church will actively aim to ensure guests have a fulfilling visit where they seek salvation in Christ, experience the love of Christ through relationship building, and are encouraged in the worship service to share their love of Christ with everyone. 	Immediate
Step 2	<p style="text-align: center;">Vote on Declaration to Affirm the Others First Plan for the Church</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vote to approve a declaration that the church will seek to implement the suggestions outlined in the <i>Others First: A Visual Roadmap for Transformation</i>. 	Two weeks following training

Step 3	<p style="text-align: center;">Committee Appointed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The vision committee the pastor has appointed in response to this project will oversee improvements in the areas identified in the <i>Visual Roadmap</i> (Appendix G). 2. Each person will oversee the area defined in the section identified on the <i>Visual Roadmap</i>. They may seek additional input for improvements and will work closely with elected boards in the church, such as the deacon board, trustee board, and finance committee. 3. The four areas under the vision committee’s purview are Guest Engagement, Facility Needs, Member Actions and Behaviors, and Program Enhancements. 4. The committee will report to the church annually on the work being done concerning this vision committee. 	Two weeks following training
Step 4	<p style="text-align: center;">Pastor Provides Monthly Opportunity to Encourage Spiritual Disciplines</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each month, members and guests will be invited to attend a program hosted by the pastor to encourage spiritual disciplines to become more mature in the faith and gain confidence in sharing their faith with others. 2. This program will be encouraged and highly recommended for new church members. 3. The aim will be to underscore the importance of being active in the church, sharing one’s faith with others, and demonstrating their love of Jesus with the hope of leading people to Christ or encouraging the believer. 	Within 30 days
Step 5	<p style="text-align: center;">Revisit or Reassess Efforts Annually</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reassess the work done in the church to improve how guests are received, welcomed, evangelized, and discipled. 5. Ensure Christian and non-Christian guests are shown love and hospitality in the church by engaging visitors about their experience, walk with Christ, and how the church can help them grow in their faith. 6. Ensure members actively pursue guests to share their joy and love of Christ with them and form connections that can lead to a repeat visit. 7. Ensure members share their joy and love of Christ and encourage one another, creating an environment where members can serve together. 	Meet in December to share information for the January business meeting

As part of this process, groups will be left to decide the time needed to implement each strategic plan component. Some of the interventions will be immediate, such as sharing the love of Jesus more in the congregation before and after service and considering practicing spiritual disciplines to develop one’s love for Jesus further, while other improvements, such as paving the parking lot, creating valet parking for those with mobility issues, and landscaping may need some additional time to complete fully. However, the agreement and support of the church

pursuing these changes in church functionality and adopting the declaration as the immediate position of the church to work toward becoming more missional and less self-focused will demonstrate the shift in mindset resulting from this project.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The primary focus of this study was to develop and deploy a training program that would help the First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members convert their inward focus into a more outward-focused mindset regarding how Christian and non-Christian guests are engaged for Jesus in the church.

Others First Progression Model

Progression for Improvement Project



Figure 4.0. Progression for improvement project

This training effort, called *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*, would lead to immediate action steps the church would be recommended to take that focus on four critical areas of church functionality. Here is a look at the progression of the project: The training will bring church members together across five weeks to first consider their views regarding aspects of church functionality and church operations.

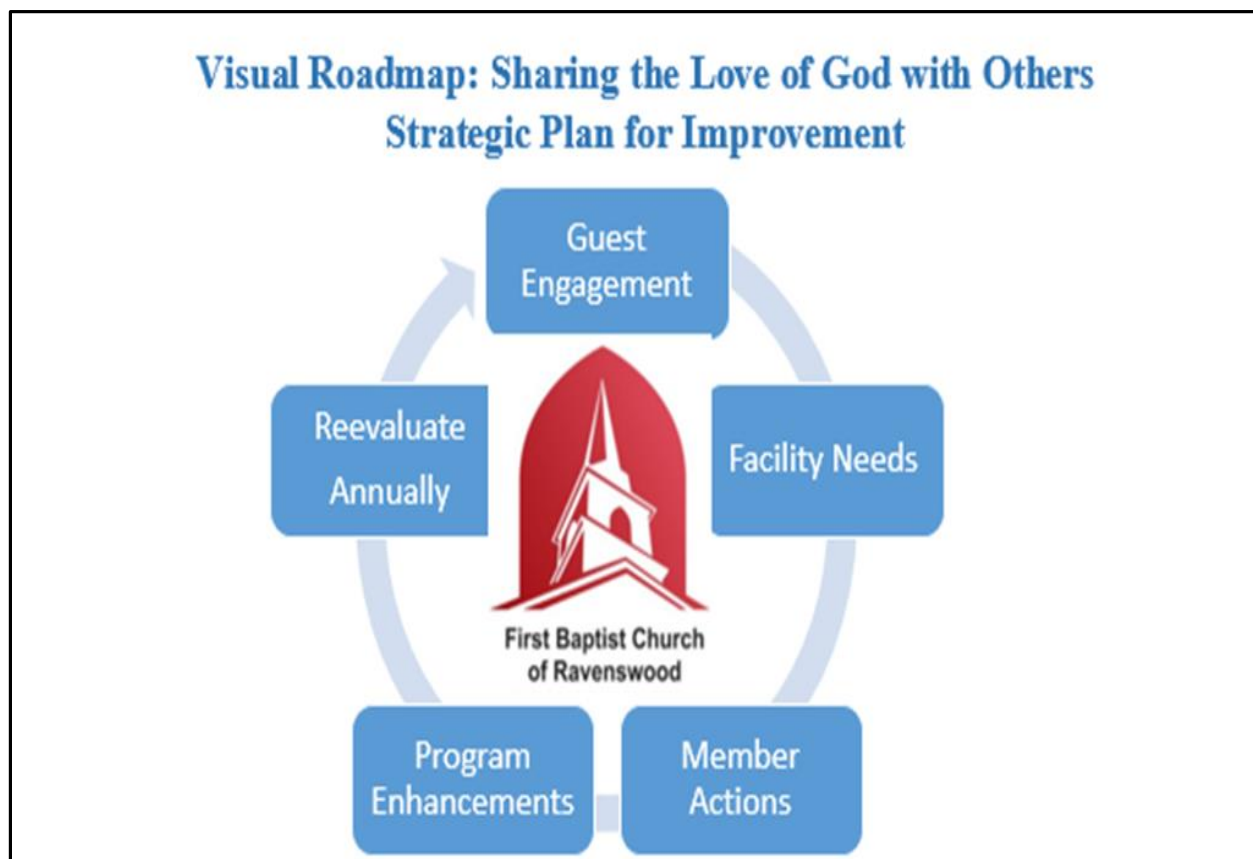


Figure 4.1. Visual roadmap strategic plan

The premise supporting the need for training considered how church members' beliefs aligned with inward thinking compared to other members in the same age range as well as across the lifespan. The member would need to closely examine how the church sees guest engagement, the facility itself, and other member actions, attitudes, and behaviors and consider why specific programs are operational. The common thread the program is built upon is the missional need for

the church members to create relationships that share Jesus's love with others and invoke opportunities for evangelism or discipleship. An inward focus mindset indicates years of transactional ministry where many things happen in the church because they always have occurred regarding maintaining what the church has in the form of facility and operations.

This mindset works against the transformational ministry mindset, which focuses on evangelism and discipleship, or what some would call soul care. By analyzing existing attitudes in a group setting and sharing evidence regarding the importance of transformational goals as opposed to transactional goals, there becomes a better understanding of why Christian and non-Christian guests should be considered in all aspects of how the church operates. The aim is not for the church to follow a standard attractional model of worship, often called consumerism, but rather to help the members become mindful of how their personal views can be inward-focused and hinder the guest's needs.

Relationship building has to start with a change of heart, which is to have a love for Jesus and all people. First Baptist Church of Ravenswood's mission statement is "*Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ.*" The mission statement alone is missional in tone, but the church is operating in a transactional manner in all four areas of functionality, and changes must occur if there is a sincere desire to make disciples.

Hence, by looking closely at members' attitudes versus the needs of others who are attending the church, the question becomes, will guests see church members sharing the love of Jesus and see them as willing to share more about how the church may help them in their faith journey? Would the member understand that the church facility is focused on the members' needs and is missing multiple components that would prove helpful for extending hospitality to the Christian or non-Christian guest? Does one's expectations of the church service create an

environment conducive to transactional ministry instead of transformational? *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* calls for changes in evangelistic efforts, discipleship efforts, facility enhancement, member attitudes, and program enhancements that can be implemented immediately with an annual review over the next five years to ensure sustainability. A committee will be appointed to oversee the improvement plan to ensure critical measures are met.

Collective Results

This improvement project was open to First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members at least 18 years of age. The registration process collected biographical information such as name, gender, age, education, and consent to participate in the project. The training occurred for two hours on Sundays over five weeks.

Each training session focused on a different aspect of church functionality, examining Christian and non-Christian engagement, the facility, member attitudes, actions and behaviors, and programs. This effort was meant to identify existing attitudes about church operations, the desire for evangelism and discipleship, and to explore further members' inward focus tendencies that may have been embedded over years of traditionalism.

Participants

There were 32 members of the First Baptist Church of Ravenswood enrolled in the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training. The vast majority, or 63 percent, were age 65 or older, while 28 percent were split equally, with 17 females and 15 males participating between the ages of 51-64. Six percent were 51-64 years old, and 3 percent were between 18-30, as shown in Figure 4.2. Figure 4.3 indicates the gender representation for the training.

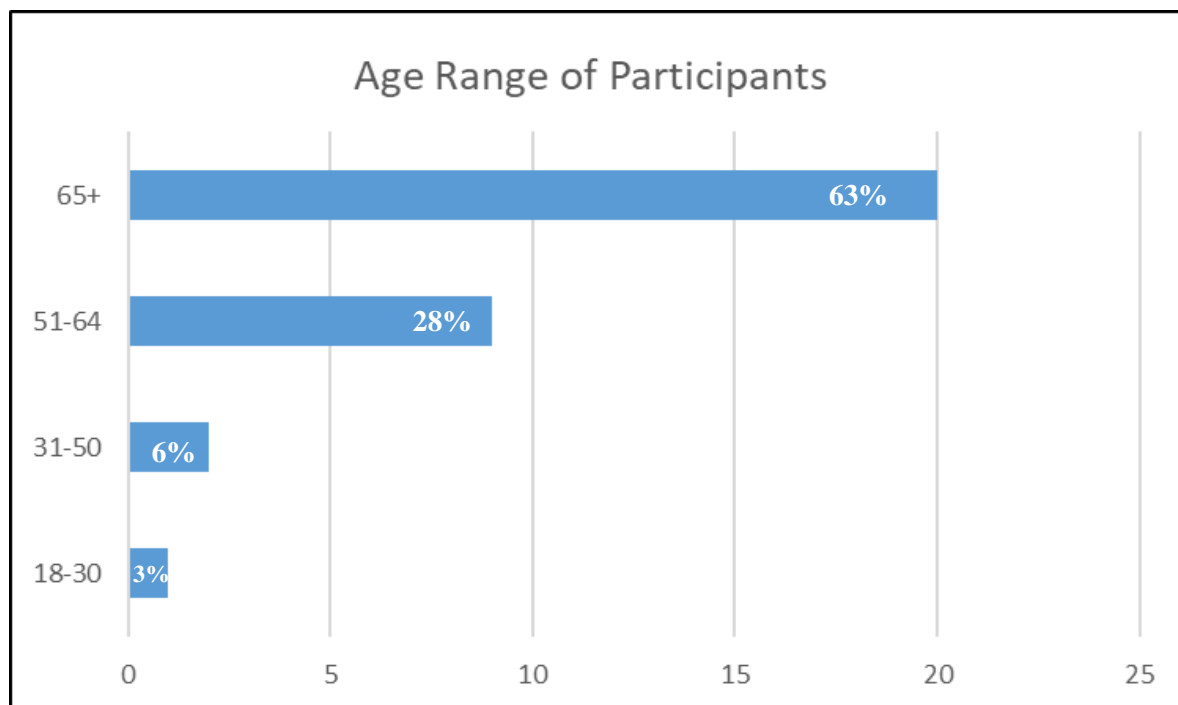


Figure 4.2. Age of participants in the *Others First* training

Having both genders equally represented, helps ensure that opinions derived from the pre-training surveys crossed all perceived gender barriers in the participants' mindsets. Having equal input from both genders regarding church functionality was important.

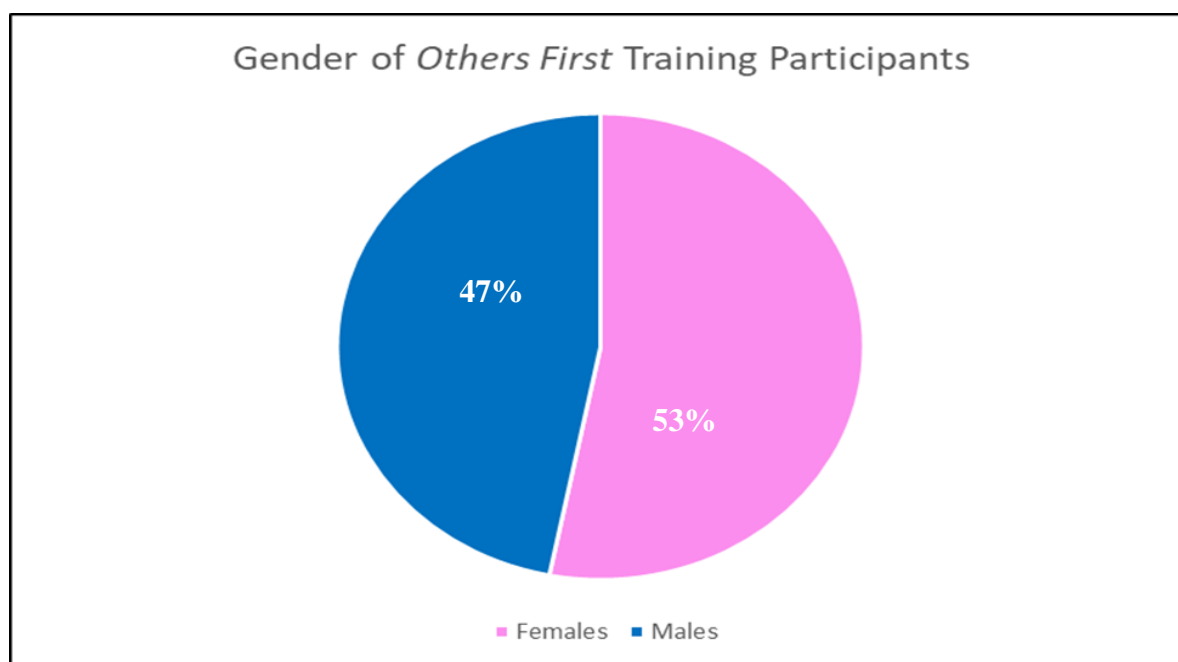


Figure 4.3. Gender of the *Others First* training participants

The educational levels of the participants in the project were: 50 percent high school graduates, 41 percent Bachelor's degree or higher, and 9 percent other, which likely indicated either a trade school or perhaps no high school education, as indicated in Figure 4.4.

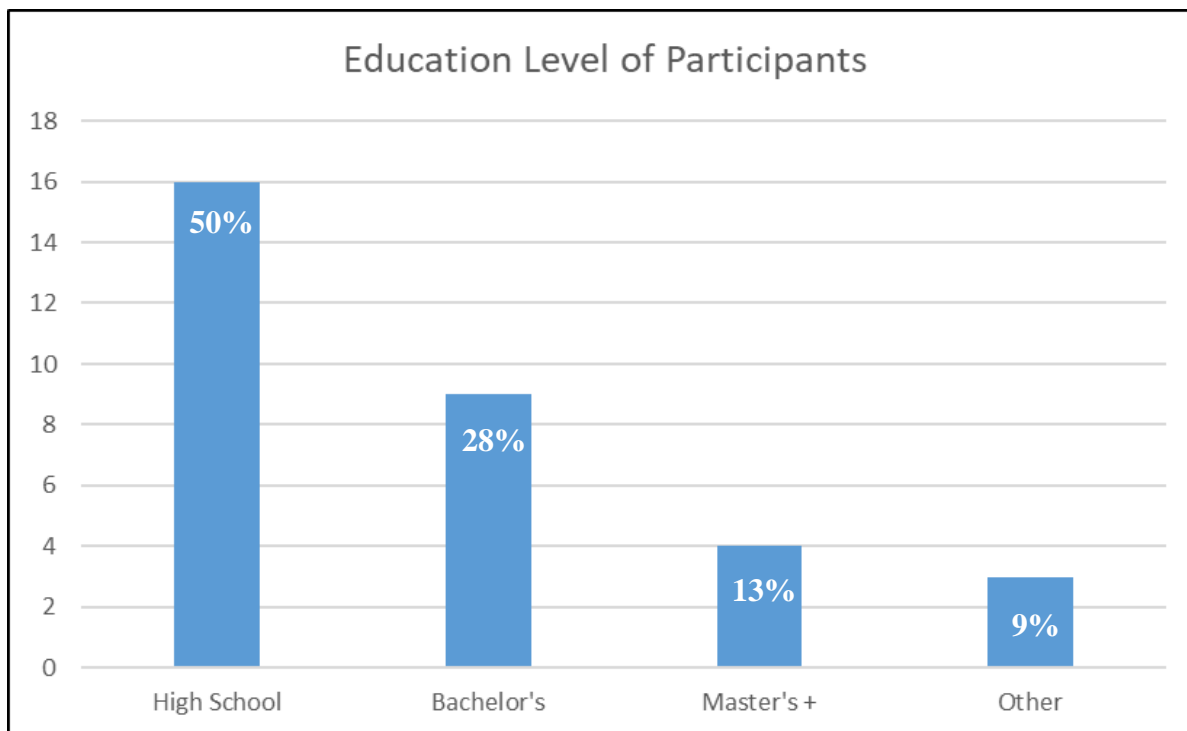


Figure 4.4. Education level of participants

Considering the age of the participants in the program and the rural nature of the community, the level of education in the church, predominately high school graduate level, was not surprising. The next area of emphasis was determining the average number of members attending First Baptist Church of Ravenswood before the training. As indicated by Figure 4.5, approximately 70 adult members regularly attended First Baptist Church. Nearly half as many people who were attending the service were non-members.

These non-members are not considered guests since they attend services regularly. Since this training improvement project is geared toward adult church members, those indicated in Figure 4.5 as non-members were not eligible to participate in this project. This omission is

because non-members cannot vote for change or vote to accept the church declaration that will lead to change at the project’s conclusion.

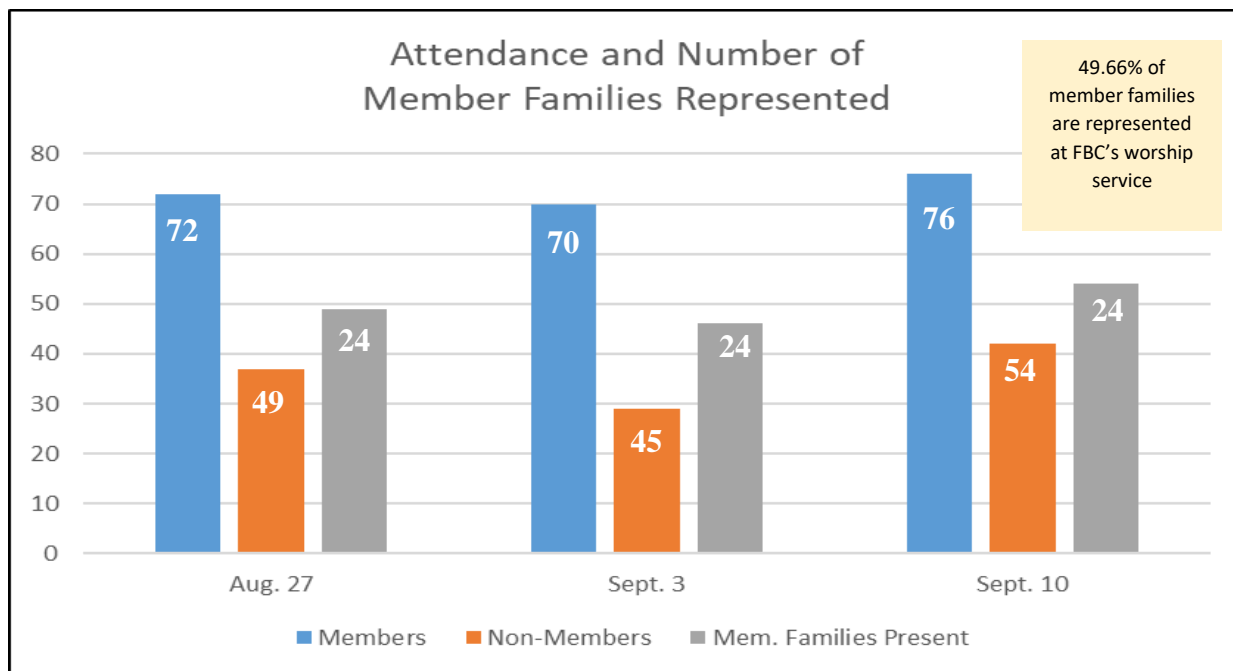


Figure 4.5. Attendance and number of member families represented at church

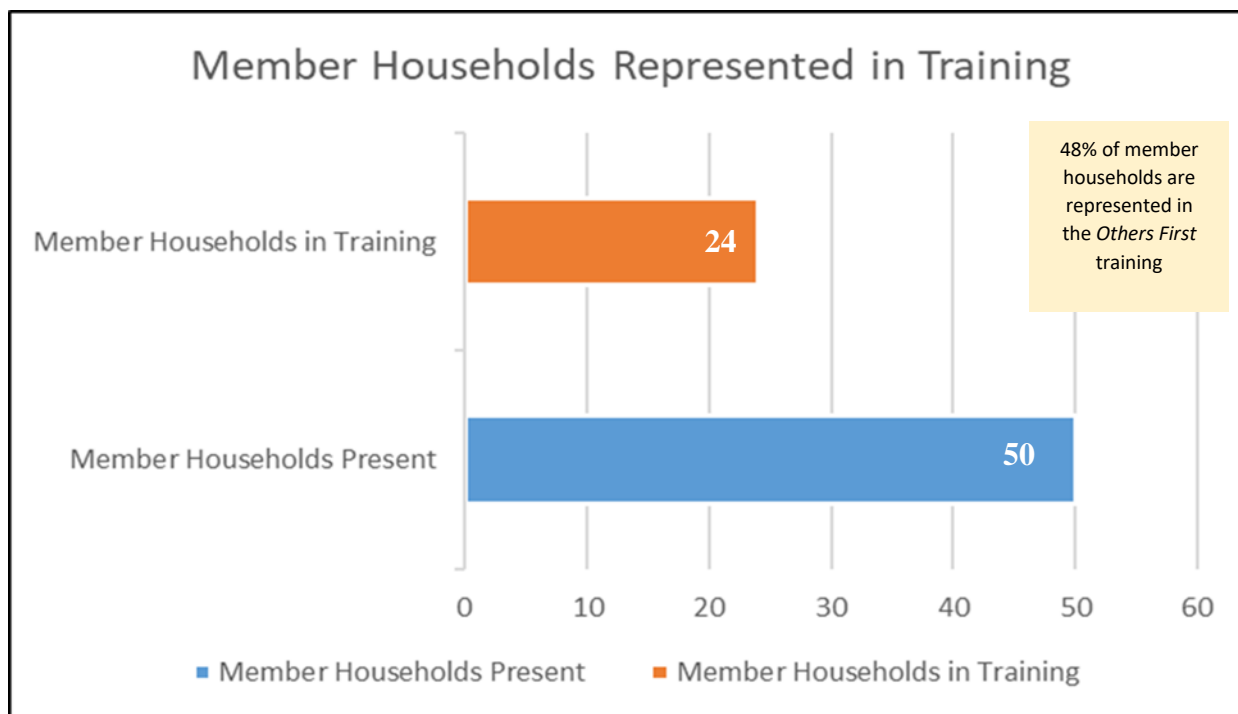


Figure 4.6. Member households represented in the *Others First* training

Reviewing the data in Figure 4.6, nearly half of the member households in the worship service recorded had at least one representative of the family registered to participate in the training. This was significant to the project because of an expectation that if at least one person from the member household could attend, they could take the information they learned through the project and share it with other family members. The sharing of information within the member household is an essential component of the project because it allows other family members in the home who did not attend the training to learn what was taught. Those in the training were encouraged to share the information learned with other non-members for the same reason. Nevertheless, the number of member households present in Sunday worship that took part in the training was 48 percent, as demonstrated in Figure 4.6.

Data Analysis

During registration, participants were given a questionnaire that asked 78 questions that looked at existing opinions regarding church functionality, including guest engagement, facility,

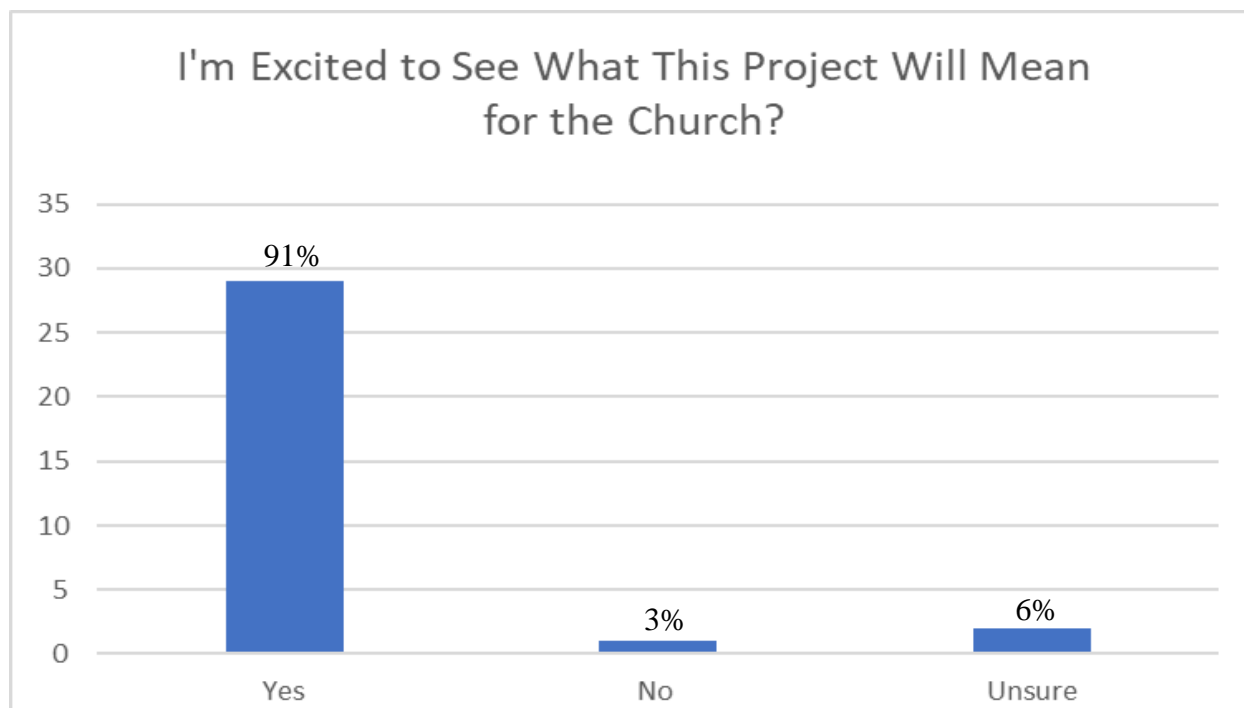


Figure 4.7. I'm excited to see what this project will mean for the church

member actions and behaviors, and programs. The aim was to identify the opinions of the church members that indicate having an inward focus mindset set on transactional ministry.

The survey found that 91 percent of participants were excited about participating in an improvement project that could help the church improve guest relations and advance the gospel message to others. However, as shown in Figure 4.7, 9 percent of the respondents participated in the project but were hesitant.

During the first training session, these responses were discussed at length to understand why some in the congregation may be hesitant about improving the church in a way that demonstrates the love of Christ to others, especially guests. Participants six and seven reported this was due to “the fear of change that they would disagree with” as part of the outcome or change that could result in some compromise with sin related to cultural issues in the nation.

This generated discussion that included additional comments from participant two, who said, “We need to be able to change to keep up with the culture around us.” Participants four and five stated, “We can make changes if necessary if we do not compromise with the world.” Participant number 22 noted there was a concern about moving away from the traditions of the church, which caused several other participants to shake their heads in agreement. Most discussion following the survey results supported the project and was optimistic and positive about anything the church could do to reach people better.

The hesitancy identified in Figure 4.7 is also shown in Figure 4.8, which explores the church’s opinion about the pastor leading the transformation the project will require. Of those completing the survey, 78 percent would trust the pastor, while the remaining 22 percent were hesitant or unsure. Again, there was a discussion about why there would be hesitancy in trusting the pastor who preaches the Bible to the congregation every week. Seven persons indicated the

issue was not a matter of trust but of wanting to hear what was being explicitly transformed. Members expressed fear over what they called “radical change” or “compromising with the world.”

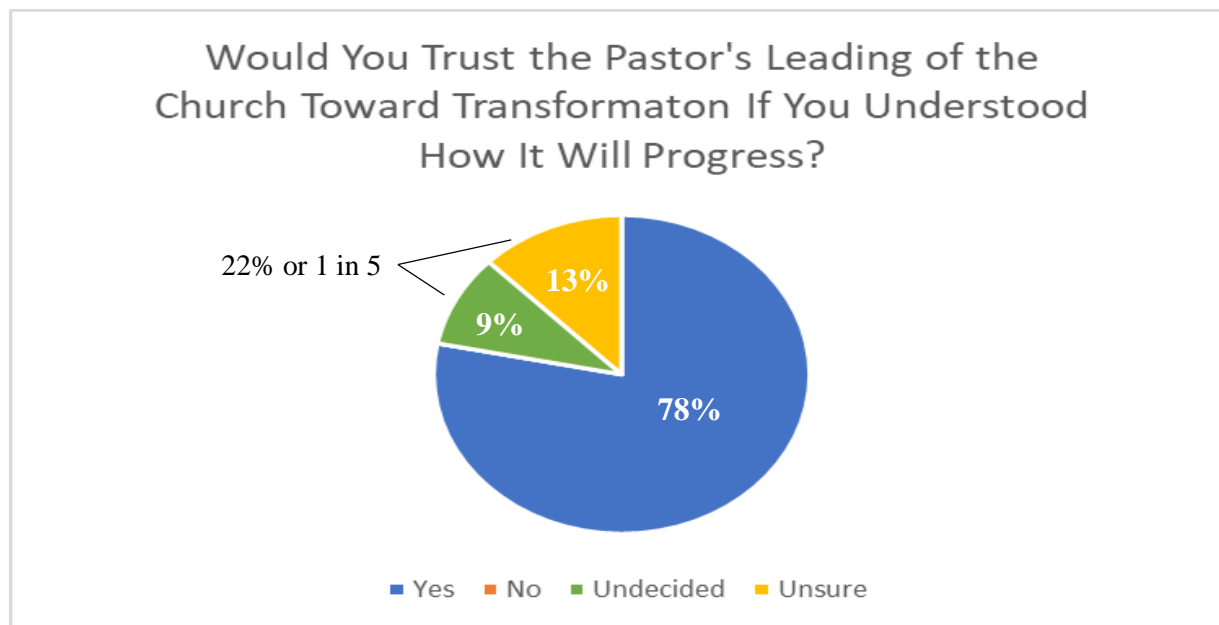


Figure 4.8. Willingness to trust the pastor's leading of the transformation

The discussion revealed inward focus tendencies where the idea of change was articulated more negatively than positively. When asked if they could hear what the transformation would involve and the reason behind it, participants 12, 18, and 22 expressed potential agreement “depending on what the transformation involved.”

When asked if the transformation needed was primarily internal, involving a revival of the heart and a recommitment to telling others about Jesus, all were satisfied that an internal transformation could not hurt and every Christian should welcome that change. This discussion was optimistic as this was the first indication that the church would be open to change, with the vital component of the project being for the church to commit to loving Jesus more, telling others about the love of Christ, and helping seekers find the Lord through personal evangelism.

Another identifier in the pre-training data that indicates an inward focus was exploring the participants' willingness to consider how church members are leaving a legacy for future generations with the church. The question wanted to hone in on the church's willingness to adapt to the changing culture and the transformational needs of the people and if they saw that aspiration as being more important than the church facility itself. This is important because the church facility is nearly 160 years old and very traditional in look and feel.

While the church facility or property could seem insignificant, it does matter concerning first impressions of guests attending the church. A nonchalant attitude of "leaving things as they are" indicates an inward focus. By examining the question closely, there was an opportunity to determine what legacy church members thought the church was leaving in the community.

Figure 4.9 asks, "How is First Baptist Church leaving a legacy in the community?"

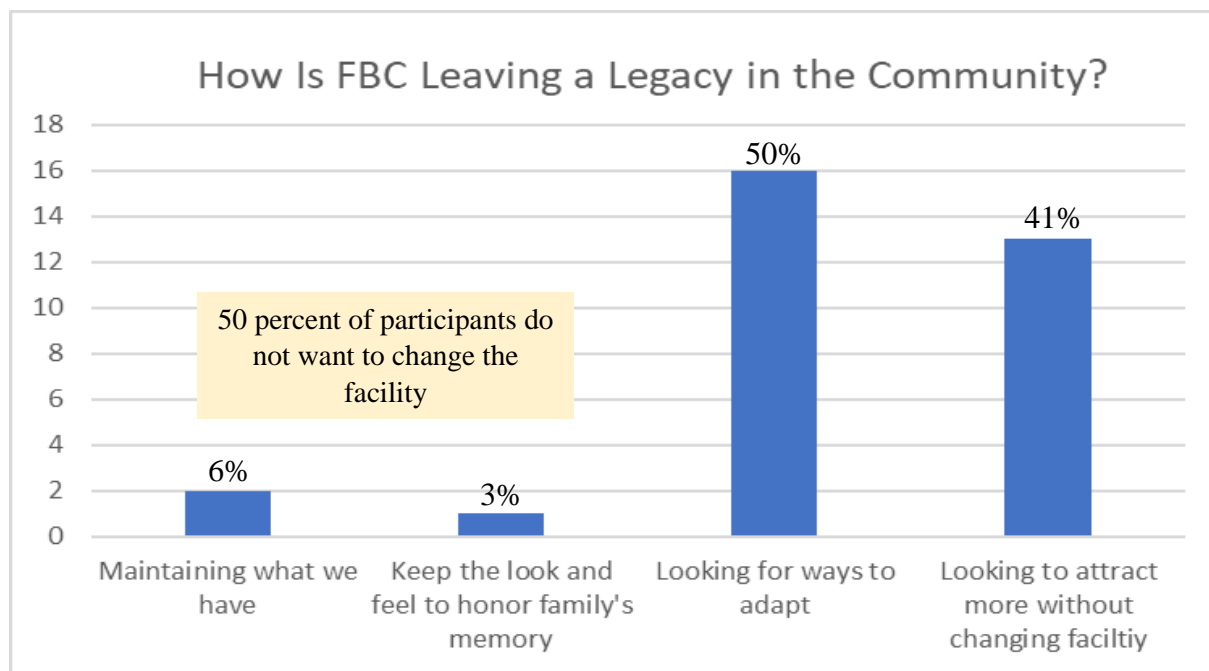


Figure 4.9. How is FBC leaving a legacy in the community?

Of those in training, 50 percent said looking for ways the church could adapt was part of leaving a legacy, while 40 percent said looking to attract more people without changing the facility was part of leaving a legacy. The other 10 percent reported that maintaining what they have and keeping the look and feel of the church to honor their family's memory was how it would leave a legacy for the next generation.

There was convincing evidence that the church should look for ways to adapt to leave a legacy, but it was also clear that no one wanted to do anything that could put the church facility at risk of being something the members did not want it to be. The group began to admit a connection to the church facility in an attempting to maintain its historical significance, yet also admitted that parts of the church desperately needed upgrading, such as the church facility foundation, the seating, the parking lot, and signage.

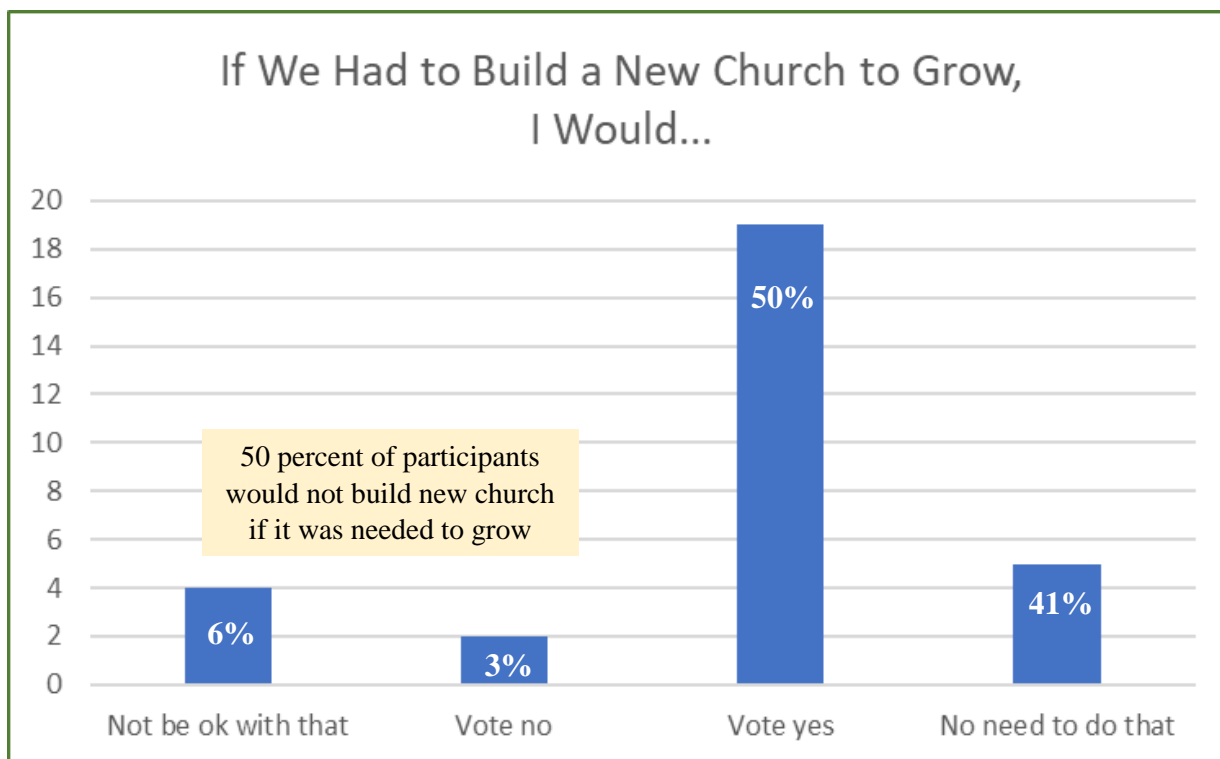


Figure 4.10. If we had to build a new church to grow

In order to further explore the participants' inward mindset about the facility, they were given the statement, "If we had to build a new church to grow, I would..." as part of the pre-training survey to consider. Figure 4.10 shows that 34 percent of the participants would not support building a new church if needed to ensure growth. However, 66 percent said they would support building a new church if it brought growth. Even more telling is that two participants skipped this question, which may have been intentional. If the question was intentionally skipped, the responder may have feared that voicing an opinion on the issue may be seen as a negative thought that would be shared later. Protecting the church's traditional appearance and even the furnishings inside the building concerned some respondents. These data demonstrate that 34 percent of those who participated in the training focused inwardly on church membership growth. Ironically, a third of participants were not willing to concede their church facility if that is what it took for growth to occur. Nevertheless, they still had a strong desire to reach the lost.

The participants unanimously admitted to having a desire to love Jesus more and were also unified in saying they desired to share the love of Jesus with others. While members shared the desire to share Jesus with others, the data did not support that prior to or after the survey. Figure 4.11 indicates that 61 percent of participants admitted to not discussing Jesus before the service as much as they should. Even more upsetting is that some reported never and sometimes.

Therefore, there was a need to dive deeper into this question and determine how often church members were talking about Jesus monthly. This data underscores the need for the church to reinforce its commitment to sharing Christ with others before and after the service. Figure 4.12 indicates nearly 60 percent of participants admitted to not talking to someone about Jesus more than once a month at church.

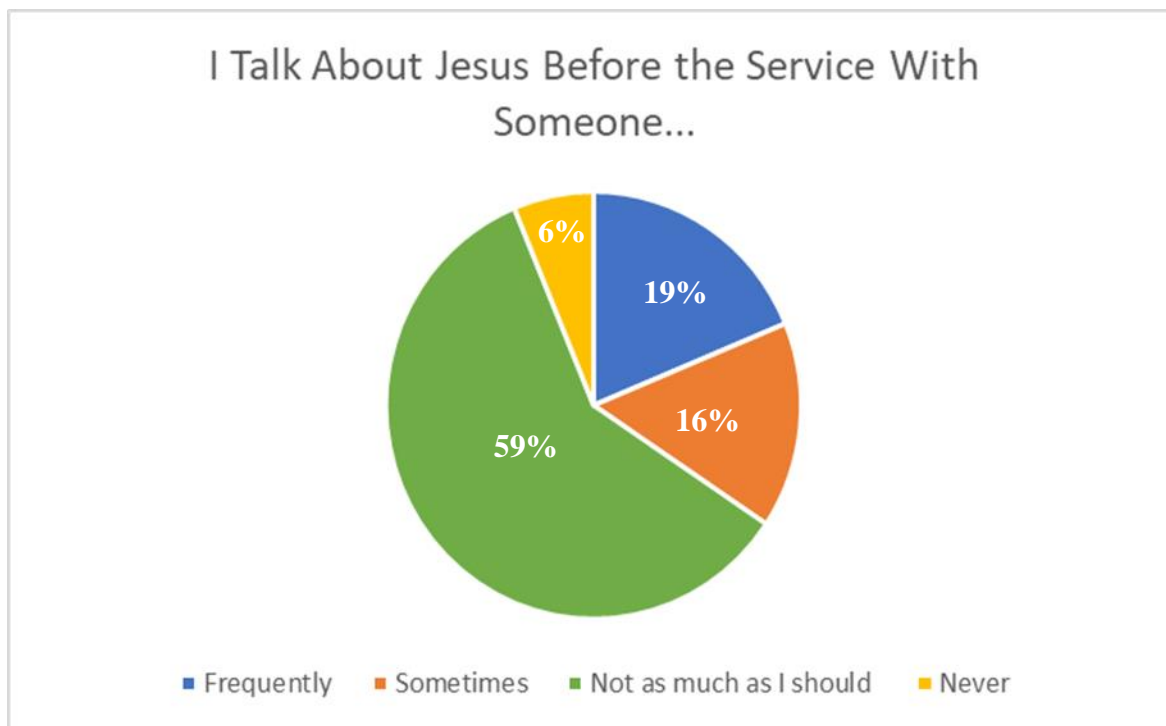


Figure 4.11. I talk about Jesus before the service with someone

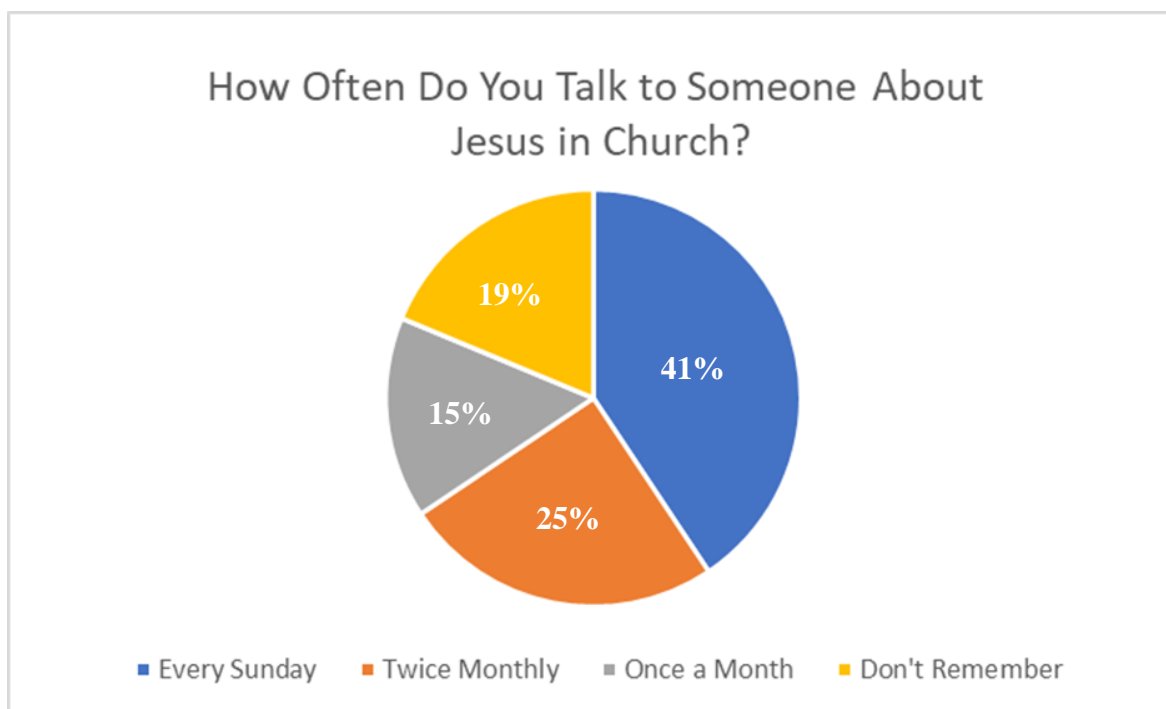


Figure 4.12. How often do you talk to someone about Jesus in church?

Moreover, 19 percent said they could not remember the last time they spoke about Jesus to someone before or after church. This indicates that time before and after the service could be better utilized to share the love of Christ with others. The data supports the desire of the church members to share the love of Jesus, but not many are doing it, and those who are do not do it often. Another interesting point in the pre-training surveys indicated that all participants believed they had a responsibility as a Christian to help others grow in their faith. They believed the church had the same responsibility. Interestingly, all but one respondent agreed that guests should know how the church can help others grow in their faith; that respondent was unsure. Most concerning is Figure 4.13, which indicated that 25 percent of attendees are unsure or said no when asked if First Baptist Church helps people grow in their faith.

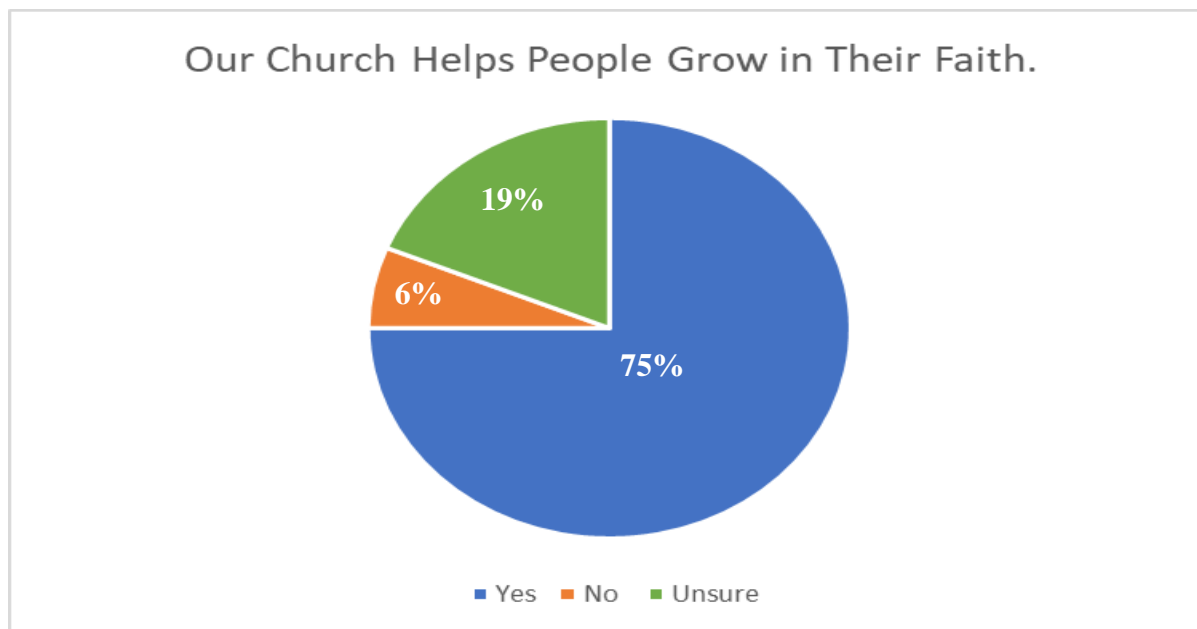


Figure 4.13. Our church helps people grow in their faith

This is concerning because church members agreed 100 percent that it was their responsibility to help someone grow in their faith, yet as many as one-quarter of the participants in the training program were uncertain if the church helps others in their faith. These data further support the need for a top-down program review to ensure that church programs offer

discipleship and evangelism opportunities to engage program participants, whether Christian or non-Christian, to help them advance in their spiritual journeys. Discussion among the group was limited as to what components currently exist in the church programs other than Sunday School and Bible study.

Summary of Results

First Baptist Church of Ravenswood has maintained a transactional approach to ministry throughout its history, leading to a pervasive and ongoing inward focus that negatively impacts guest engagement and spiritual growth. Having 48 percent of member families participating in the project represented church attitudes and beliefs regarding guest engagement, member attitudes, facility needs, and program enhancements, the four critical areas of church functionality captured in this project. The church has demonstrated an acknowledgment of its inward focus mindset and exhibited its desire to confront the issue by being willing to accept a pathway forward, as demonstrated by the data in Table 4.0, voting to accept a church declaration demonstrating its commitment to change.

These pre-training data indicate that the church members present in the training have a unanimous desire to love Jesus and share their love of Jesus with others. However, it was clear from other questions that many people were not speaking to others about Jesus or how the church could help them grow in their faith. When asked how often they talked about Jesus in the church, the answer was mixed, with most not remembering when or even if they could recall the last time they spoke about the Lord. Post-training data indicated there was clear desire to improve in this area. Initially, members admitted to not being very engaging with guests, whether Christian or non-Christian. Most agreed that guests were left unattended once they entered the building.

Following training, there was an understanding that everyone had the responsibility to engage guests and initiate relationships.

Post-Training Survey Results		Yes	No	Unsure
1.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training I have a better understanding of the differences of a transactional church ministry and a transformational church ministry.	32		
2.	After the training, I understand that we have been operating more as a transactional church (keeping things the way they are) with very little regard to sharing our faith with others collectively as a church.	31		1
3.	After the training, I realize we can do better at fulfilling our mission statement of <i>Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ</i> .	32		
4.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> Training, I believe I have a better understanding of what our church needs to do to share the love of Christ with others.	32		
5.	After having completed <i>Others First</i> training, I will be able to engage people better using the acronym T.A.L.K.	31		1
6.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I understand it is my responsibility to share the love I have for Christ with others.	31	1	
7.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I understand that building relationships with others will help our church grow in number and in faith together.	31	1	
8.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I realize there are facility upgrades that are needed to help ensure our church is equipped for meeting the ever-changing needs of the congregation.	31		1
9.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I understand I have a responsibility to engage guests in the church and welcome them to the service whether they are Christian or not.	32		
10.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I know the basics of leading someone to Christ.	30	1	1
11.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I understand the importance of sharing my faith with others.	32		
12.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I believe I have a desire to love Jesus more.	32		
13.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I want others to experience the same kind of relationship with Jesus that I have.	32		
14.	I want our church property to demonstrate our love for Jesus by having it clean, updated, and welcoming.	32		
15.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I trust Pastor Toby to lead the church in the transformation through the process identified.	32		
16.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I realize having a heart that loves Jesus is one the greatest things we can do to address our inward focus.	32		
17.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I realize that regularly reviewing our programs to ensure there are discipleship and evangelism components are important.	32		
18.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I believe if we implement the changes that the project has proposed, FBC will be an even greater church.	31		1
19.	After having completed the <i>Others First</i> training, I believe that I have a better understanding of how church can be transformed while protecting our legacy without compromising our values.	32		
20.	I am excited to see what this project will do for our church.	32		
21.	I support the pastor moving forward with this project as it has been taught and explained in the process.	32		
Total Evaluations Received		32		

Table 4.0. Post-training survey

Prior to the training, members reported not knowing how to engage guests, but agreed the training and role playing exercises provided an understanding of how to better share their faith with others. All agreed that once they understood how to approach guests, they would have confidence to do so. Additionally, members found that role-playing exercises were helpful regarding how to better share their love of Christ with one another.

Initially, the majority of attendees agreed that they spent most of their time with other people they already knew before and after service. Only three purposefully tried to engage guests after the service. Among friend circles, the group admitted that most conversation was about “life” or “other things” and not about the Lord or church service. There was complete agreement that the church would support an ongoing program to help improve the spiritual disciplines of the believer, involving prayer, Bible study, journaling, and devotion reading.

Members agreed that the church’s facility was essential to them and wanted to protect its legacy in the community. Data revealed that as many as a third of the church members participating would not support building a new church if it was required for growth. This question determined how much value the members placed on the existing facilities compared to the desire for growth. Some members who were protective of the facility were reserved in their comments and engaged in limited conversation about the facility, seemingly uncomfortable about giving their opinions.

When asked about their hesitation, two responded that they were listening. Three people only nodded yes or no during the conversation but again seemed to listen thoroughly. The group discussed how old the current seating was at over 60 years old and that the church was using a parking lot with grass growing up through the gravel. There was also mention of the church building’s foundation in great need of repair as it had shifted and sunk into the ground over two

inches, as well as the need for upgraded signage since the existing sign used mailbox letters. After the conversation that lasted over 30 minutes on the facility alone, members present unanimously agreed that the facility must be improved if there was to be an impact on guest engagement and member satisfaction while also preparing the church facility for the future.

By gaining a better understanding of the role of the facility in providing an environment that not only provided a more up-to-date facility, but made for a good first impression also was important, and perhaps necessary to help ensure repeat visits. Therefore, attendees supported the idea of church improvements such as foundation repairs, parking, signage, and even replacing the traditional bell chimes that have been broken for years. Many of these issues had been neglected over the years; now there was a plan to address them.

Members agreed that their own personal actions and behaviors needed to improve. One hundred percent of attendees admitted they were responsible for sharing their faith with others. Nevertheless, 75 percent were unsure how to do so when pressed on the issue. All 100 percent agreed that if they knew how to share their faith, they would feel more confident doing so with others. It was clear that most seemed more comfortable sharing their conversion story; however, few were comfortable with leading someone to faith in Christ.

Members agreed that a church has the responsibility to help lead people to faith in Christ and help believers advance in their faith. While members admitted to the importance of the church's role in this process, many did not know if the church was doing this. There was uncertainty about the programs underway in the church that may help advance that cause. Therefore, there was a unanimous agreement that the church should ensure that all programs have both an evangelistic and discipleship component.

The training provided the means for these issues to be brought to the fore and honestly and thoroughly discussed. The church had grown accustomed to letting many of the things in the church that needed to be addressed be put off for another day. Unfortunately, that day never seemed to come. After learning the differences in the complacency and apathy that often comes with a ministry model that centers on maintaining what the church has done in the past and not looking toward the future, there was a growing desire for change. Post-training data and evaluation demonstrated the church was ready to move forward with the plan to address the deficiencies identified in the church.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* quality improvement project contributes to rural church knowledge by helping small rural churches have a means for addressing their inward focus. The problem at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood was that members had an inward focus mindset, resulting from many years of attending the same church and striving to maintain day-to-day operations in an attempt to preserve the history and legacy of the church by using the same worship format, programs, and facility, while being so content in already-established relationships that new relationships are not often sought.

Members were not engaging guests who attended the church, not sharing the love of Christ prior to or after church, and many programs did not contain discipleship or evangelistic efforts. The church facility has numerous areas that needed improvements, including the building foundation that had sunk in the ground over an inch, pews that were starting to splinter, and the gravel parking lot that was in disarray, with grass growing through the rocks. These oversights by the church could negatively hinder first impressions of guests and the comfort of other church members. However, *Others First* helped members understand that all four phases of church operations work cohesively to demonstrate that the church lacked a missional mindset that could transform and revitalize the church by placing a greater emphasis on building relationships, sharing the love of Jesus with others, and drawing closer to the Lord through the Holy Spirit and practice of spiritual disciplines.

The preservation attitude in the church has existed for many years and had taken root to the point that even newer members were unaware of their lack of guest engagement and failure

to share the love of the Lord with others before and after the service. This maintaining of the status quo had been viewed as successful by all participants prior to the training, but after the training, members not only saw these four areas of operation as significantly in need of improvement, but also recognized this effort would involve a change of the heart, returning to their first love.

Dana Candler says, “First love is notorious for its contagious joy and exuberance and its passionate, uninhibited nature. When love is new and freshly awakened, wonder and delight are abundant, desire is full, sacrifice and striving are foreign concepts, and full givenness, one to another, is the only conceivable way to live.”³³² Candler further states, “One of the primary jobs of the Holy Spirit is to enable us to love God wholeheartedly and to empower us not only to love as we did at first but to love more and more, until we finally see Him, that His joy would both remain in us and be made full (John 15:11, NIV; Philippians 1:9– 11, NIV).”³³³

This training with the institution of a vision oversight committee and passage of a church declaration officially accepting the direction of the church toward revitalization indicates the church’s willingness to address its inward focus and embrace the strategic plan moving forward for First Baptist. The thesis posits that if First Baptist Church received training addressing its inward focus, it would become more missional, demonstrating its love of Christ to others.

The conclusions drawn from the pre- and post-training data demonstrate a shift in mindset from members of First Baptist Church as a result of the *Others First* project. This training helped bring awareness to the need for improved visitor engagement, facility repairs,

³³² Dana Candler, *First Love: Keeping Passion for Jesus in a World Growing Cold* (Ada, MI: Chosen Books, 2022), 16, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=69553665>

³³³ *Ibid.*, 21.

member actions, and behaviors that demonstrate the love of Christ by reevaluating programs for discipleship and evangelism components through discussions and role-playing exercises.

Admittedly, there is a need for additional studies on the topic, such as how to incorporate inward-focus awareness training in a rural church setting that could identify longstanding inward-focus tendencies in new members, as well as how facility neglect is often the result of this pervasive mindset. Additionally, an even broader study is necessary to consider the long-term effectiveness of this improvement project to determine if church members who have received training are continuing to share the love of Christ with others and exhibiting behaviors that are helping others grow in their faith by stressing evangelism and discipleship opportunities in the church years later.

This final chapter will address the research implications, applications, limitations, and further research suggested for this project. By sharing what the researcher has learned through the research process and how the church members at First Baptist Church responded throughout the training, there will be meaningful insight that will demonstrate the relevance and efficacy of the training conducted. This project has helped First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members understand that their inward focus was much in part due to needing a personal spiritual awakening to share their love of Jesus with others and make necessary improvements in the church to help the church become missional-minded, where soul care evangelism and discipleship are at the core of its operations.

Research Implications

Member complacency and apathy have driven the mindset of “we have always done things this way,” primarily due to most members having attended the church for many years or having family members who have attended for decades. Members have placed sentimental value

on how the church operates. Members were not engaging guests because they preferred to associate only with others with whom they already had established relationships within the church. In those relationships, conversations were more about secular activities than talking about the Lord or what the church can do to help someone in their faith journey.

Programs and facility upgrades lacked much-needed improvements because of the mindset that things were operationally acceptable. This position was that the church structure in place continues to work. Since most members already had relationships and friendships before church membership, most conversations before and after church stemmed around family issues or secular activities. Many programs had the same leadership, the same projects, and the same way of conducting their meetings for many years. Members admitted rarely, if ever, talking about their own salvation or spiritual journey with others and that they would struggle if they had to lead someone to Christ. The desire was there, but the knowledge of how to do so was missing.

This conundrum raised the question of the lack of enthusiasm in the church for sharing the love of Christ with others, as well as the willingness to make the necessary improvements in the church to the facility and in programs based on an inward focus or transactional ministry approach that has led church members to be unaware of their missed opportunities to evangelize and make disciples. Alternatively, the issue is founded solely on the personal satisfaction of church members based on individual, personal preferences over the years, believing that they like how things are at the church, so no changes are needed. In both cases, these mindsets are selfish and potentially sinful if the needs or concerns of others are not valuable in the church. Millard Erickson states that when a person cannot empathize with others due to sin, there is a limit to one's perspective because of selfish desires, reputation, and opinions.³³⁴

³³⁴ Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 220.

Regardless, this project demonstrated that church members in the rural setting have become complacent in the church as it is; they have lost their passion for seeing others turn to Christ or grow in their faith and have missed the church's call to reach the lost and make disciples. Members at First Baptist Church were more concerned about maintaining the current existence of the church without a genuine desire to make any significant changes in church operations that would have impacted souls. According to Erickson, this oversight in reassessing church member behaviors and actions by failing to consider different viewpoints could threaten the system because the church's aim is self-satisfaction.³³⁵

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* provided a setting where church members could honestly and openly share their actions and behaviors in the church, as well as their opinions regarding the church facility and programming. This dialogue helped the church members understand that Jesus modeled spiritual practices to his disciples, which caused his disciples to emulate him.³³⁶ This is the same premise as the church sharing their faith with others.

Therefore, six research implications may be deduced in rural church operations where an inward-focus mindset was present, as was the case for First Baptist Church. These implications include: 1) Members are now willingly sharing their love of Jesus with others, explaining how the church can help guests grow spiritually, 2) The church voted to update the facility, ensuring necessary repairs and upgrades to the structure and interior will be made and demonstrating the church's commitment to being mindful and careful about the condition of the church for first impressions, 3) Members are having meaningful conversations with people about salvation and the benefits of the programs in the church, 4) Programs in the church are now required to have

³³⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 43.

³³⁶ Wright, "The Power of Example," 1.

discipleship and evangelism components as well as regular leadership changes, 5) Church members voted to accept the strategic plan, identifying areas for improvement in each area of church operations while creating a vision committee to ensure fulfillment and ongoing review, and 6) The church voted to accept a declaration further affirming the project's importance in fulfilling the church's mission of *Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ*.

These implications result from participants first recommitting themselves to their love and desire to reach the lost for Christ. Members realized that collectively, they were not fulfilling the two basic tenets of their vision statement: to reach out to others and invite them to participate. This may have been evidence of the church being ready to die, according to Thom Rainer, who asserts that signs of a dying church are when members are 1) unwilling to go into the community to reach and minister to the people, 2) unwilling to invite their unchurched friends and relatives, and 3) unwilling to expend funds necessary for vibrant outreach.³³⁷ He said dying churches want these things to happen without prayer, sacrifice, and hard work.³³⁸ A dying church would also not want growth unless it met their preferences, allowing the members to remain comfortable.³³⁹

This information was helpful for members to see that there was a need for the refocusing of members' mindsets, demonstrating their willingness to embrace change and overcoming their longstanding mindset about maintaining current operations as part of a broader maintenance model of ministry, to becoming more intentional in reaching other people for Christ. Renewing a focus on guests coming into the church would help the church improve guest engagement, which meant improving how the church member engages other members and guests before and after

³³⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 44.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

church. This action meant they would share the love of Jesus and encourage other members and guests to get involved in the church programs that would help them grow in faith.

By becoming more missional-minded in the four key areas of church operations, members understood that many of the changes proposed in the training involved a revival of the heart. Being kind, welcoming, and sharing the love of Christ with others is something that cannot be purchased. However, through prayer and following the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their lives, members could not only rekindle their love for the Lord, but for others also.

This change of heart, a renewed focus and commitment to sharing the love of Jesus with others, and a willingness to practice evangelism or discipleship were well accepted by all in the training. Through honest personal assessment, members saw how the church had maintained much of an inward focus over the last 60 years that has negatively allowed many of the facility's needs to go unnoticed or unattended out of fear of changing the traditional look and feel of the church. Each needed area of improvement became apparent when the membership agreed that the integrity of the facility would be enhanced and the church's legacy would be better preserved by making necessary repairs.

Therefore, members in training admittedly went from seeing the church as a ministry that has been operating the same way for generations to now seeing their church as a living organism where people gather to praise the Lord, encourage fellow believers, lead the lost toward Christ, and pray that the Holy Spirit will rekindle their love for evangelism and disciple-making. An ongoing spiritual discipline course is offered by the pastor to help members and guests learn how to study their Bibles, pray without wavering, and serve others in a way that demonstrates their love of Christ. The member may now see their role in engagement across all aspects of church functionality, whether helping lead someone to Christ or helping them grow in their faith.

For years, the church feared that change would negatively impact attendance or make people uncomfortable. Nevertheless, through deep group-level discussions they began to see that change could be beneficial and not put the church at any significant risk of loss. First Baptist Church members accepted Carl Vaters's statement: "Change is healthy; change is good; change is normal. All living things change, or they die."³⁴¹ The only thing that does not change in a church is doctrine. Vaters says messing with doctrine brings collapse, not change.³⁴² His premise is that "implementing needed changes in a church that has always resisted change is one of the great challenges of pastoring."³⁴³

Therefore, having members renew their desire to serve the Lord and reignite their passion for Jesus through discussions and role-playing, sharing of pertinent Scripture, and sharing information from experts has led to meaningful changes that will both improve guest and member experiences in the church because the church has decided to become more missional and focus on soul care. Even the fact that members were willing to begin upgrading the facility was indicative of a mindset change.

Improvements have been necessary in various aspects of the church over the last 60 years, and for the first time, there was movement in that direction. Those problems that lingered for years demonstrated apathy regarding and delaying repairs, making those issues another generation's problem. A closer look at each implication demonstrates how church members evolved in their thinking and changed their desire to become more missional.

The first implication is that members become more willingly ready and able to share their

³⁴¹ Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 146.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

love of Jesus. The training showed that many members were uncomfortable sharing their faith with others. It was not due to a lack of love for other people, but rather, there was uncomfortability in doing so. Therefore, members seemed to gather around one another in familiarity.

When discussions involved the lack of guest engagement, there were significant discussions regarding how to engage people one does not know. The initial claim by church members was that their lack of engagement was mostly due to people having introverted personalities. This thought process brought a rebuttal discussion that said, no, it was because they did not know how to engage someone they did not know about church. The training allowed others to role-play using the acronym TALK to initiate the conversation. This simple approach explained to the member to 1) Tell others their name, 2) Ask them who they are, 3) Listen to what they have to say, and 4) Kindly tell the guest about the member's faith and how the church can help them, while providing any assistance they may need.

Vater says friendliness is more important for small churches than big churches.³⁴⁴ He claims it is easier for people to find churches with preachers who deliver great sermons, have excellent worship experiences, and engaging children's programming than to find a church where lasting friendships can be made.³⁴⁵ Using TALK is similar but different to Vater's GIFT in that a member greets someone they have never met, introduces people to each other, follows up with someone they met recently, and thanks someone who did something they appreciated.

Through their role-playing exercise, members found the TALK acronym helpful in remembering how to move the conversation forward. While the role-playing exercise was done

³⁴⁴ Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 191.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

with people in the church who already knew each other, all reported being able to follow the sample plan as a conversation starter to meet new people or even other members in the church who they were not that familiar with as far as who they are or their needs in the church. Since the training, more people are no longer conversing with one another about pleasantries and basic introductions, but are now talking more about the love of Jesus and how the church can help them in their faith.

Members have expressed to the pastor that communicating with others is not as tricky as they first thought. Before the training, data proved that not many conversations before or after church involved Jesus or the sharing of one's faith. However, church members agreed that being in church and never hearing about Jesus other than from the pastor is wrong, and one said, "troubling." Many of the conversations that were occurring had nothing to do with ministry at all.

Now members have an awareness that it is their responsibility to talk about Jesus before and after the service, not out of compulsion but because members want others to experience the same kind of relationship with Jesus that they have. Vater's model did not go as far as sharing with others about Jesus or church programs to help them grow spiritually, but *Others First* did. This conversation engagement opened the door for the church member to go even further than conversations before and after the service with the Christian and non-Christian guest, but to also consider other meaningful actions that will impact first impressions, including leaving seats open toward the rear of the church for other people who would prefer to sit there or who may arrive late, offering valet parking for older persons or those with mobility issues due to a lack of parking, and ensuring there is an understanding of what the church provides as resources and programs to help them grow in their faith.

The second implication regarded the church's willingness to upgrade the facility. First impressions are formed within the first seven to ten minutes of arrival at the church.³⁴⁶ As demonstrated in the literature review, churches have only one opportunity to make a first impression, and facility look and feel are two of the criteria. Members decided to secure the church building's foundation that had been sinking. The problem has been known for years, but this was not at the forefront of the conversation until facility upgrades were discussed. Contractors have already been brought into the church and assessed that the project will cost over \$25,000 to fix. The church hired the contractor immediately, and work will begin soon to secure the foundation.

Additionally, the church has accepted the plan to replace the pews with new padded pews. The existing pews were more than 60 years of age. While some members shared their affection for the current pews, not out of comfort but for sentimental value, it was explained that those families with such feelings could request one of the pews when replaced. Memorializing one of the pews and having it displayed at the church with a placard detailing its use was also discussed. A committee has been designated to oversee this phase of the project.

Further, members agreed to pave the parking lot, which has been an eyesore. Estimates have been received, and work is expected to begin soon. Since most church members have preferred street parking closest to the church, the parking lot was merely an afterthought to most. However, the project asked what message the unkept parking lot gave to first-time guests or others who drive the lot every day. It was apparent that the church needed better upkeep on the parking lot, and having it paved and landscaped would enhance that visual appeal to others and church members, which may free up some of the closer parking spaces for others if the lot

³⁴⁶ Franks, *People Are the Mission*.

became more attractive to members. This improvement indicates a mind-shift change because members have neglected the parking lot for years. After all, it did not impact them directly. They have seen that an unkept parking lot communicates a negative message about how the church feels about that lot, which was as an afterthought that does not impact them.

The church also agreed to use signage inside and outside of the church. Because the church had operated for years as it has continuously operated, not one member thought about signage inside the church because it had always worked fine without signage. As part of the training, church members began to understand the importance of signage, inside the church for room locations and outside the church for directional street signage to parking. This lack of signage has been a significant oversight by the church. To adequately assess the situation, during the training, members were asked how many rooms they could identify if given a blank map and what activity was in each room. Most admitted they could not, with only two members being able to do so. The church recognized the need for signage and agreed to add the necessary signage and upgrade the main sign. This decision provided even more evidence that a shift in inward-focus mindset was occurring, as members saw the negative impact on others of not having appropriate signage at the church, which could further an experience for guests or new members.

Vater says, “Being a good steward of those material things that God has given our churches is good. Becoming obsessed with any one item to the neglect of His mission is idolatry.” The church understood from the training how it could respect the past and prepare for the future, and that involved ensuring the church could meet the needs of an ever-changing culture where comfort and accessibility are deemed necessary.

The third implication involved members' actions and behaviors in the church. Members learned they should talk about Jesus before and after the service. Members agreed they should have a heart like Jesus, which meant longing to help people come to faith in him and grow in that faith. They accepted that to grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord, they must practice spiritual disciplines. This shift in mindset included having a desire for an active prayer life, reading and studying the Bible more, applying the message of the weekly sermons to their lives first, and then treating others as they would want to be treated. One hundred percent of members attending the training admitted they needed to talk more about Jesus than they do now.

As part of this desire, members reluctantly admitted that they feel uncomfortable speaking with people they do not know well and even more uncomfortable leading people to Christ. For improvement to occur, members must be willing to share their faith with others, including their stories of what led them to faith in Christ. Again, role-playing sessions allowed attendees to practice sharing their conversion stories with others. Over half of the members felt their story of conversion was considered insignificant. Others had no reason for not sharing their story.

Members understood that all believers have a story that can help reach others for Christ. Being able to recount that story when necessary can help lead someone to Christ if they are an unbeliever, while a personal story can be encouraging to an already established believer. This effort could involve prayer, Bible-sharing, and being a friend, which can all be emboldened through practicing spiritual disciplines. Members were using the ABCs of leading people to Christ in that the unbeliever must 1) Acknowledge they are in sin, 2) Believe that Jesus Christ died for those sins and rose from the dead, and 3) Confess their need for him as their Savior, asking him to come into their heart and be their Lord. Role-playing allowed attendees to use this

strategy in leading someone to Christ. Nearly 100 percent of those participating agreed that this was helpful.

The fourth implication involved church program enhancements and evaluation. Many programs that are in existence at First Baptist Church have continually operated the same. The problem with programs that operate the same way over the years is the risk of the program becoming stagnant or irrelevant. Some examples at First Baptist Church include a feeding program that has less than two dozen people accepting a meal, a program for youth after home football games where they are treated to a free meal and have an opportunity to play games such as ping pong, foosball, and other card and board games. Attendance at one point topped over 150 and dropped to less than 30 children in the last year. Men's and women's fellowship programs have also seen many of the same people attend year after year without significant growth, with relatively no new members participating.

Therefore, after the training, members agreed to conduct a top-down review of all programs to see if these programs are still relevant or if changes are needed. The suggested review includes having regular leadership changes to avoid programs becoming stagnant. Programs must all have a discipleship and evangelism component. There should never be a program in the church that does not allow someone to come to faith in the Lord Jesus or learn how to grow in their existing faith. Programs need ongoing re-evaluation to look for deficiencies or gaps hindering participation.

There is little recruitment for these programs besides announcements that say each group is meeting. Before the training, there was no effort to explain further the purpose of each program, which may have hindered participation. A renewed commitment and sense of excitement by church members was evident about actively looking at the programs operating as a

group annually to ensure they are all worth continuing. The question at the center of that evaluation will be whether the programs are effective at reaching others for Christ through discipleship or evangelism, and whether the programs are worth continuing without further recruitment of participants.

Lastly, the key implication of the training has been the church's acceptance of the strategic plan or what was labeled the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. The church formally voted to accept the plan moving forward and affirmed a formal declaration to engage in the activities represented in the training to overcome its longstanding inward focus, becoming more intentional and missional. This transformation process is currently underway. These affirmations indicate an actual reversal of course for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, with members telling other members who were not present at the training about the success of the training and what was expected of all church members, not out of compulsion, but out of a love for Jesus. Therefore, a committee will be appointed to annually review the four areas of church operations where changes are occurring to ensure plan fulfillment.

Research Applications

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation will help First Baptist Church of Ravenswood members overcome their inward focus and become more missional, emphasizing soul care more than tradition and self-preservation. The process's first and most crucial step was to do as Jesus said in Mark 12:30 (NIV), which is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The people of First Baptist Church love the Lord but need a means to recommit to that love for the Lord and seek to serve others. If there were going to be changes made at First Baptist Church, they would need to be incremental, visual, and for a purpose.

Vaters says, “One of the worst mistakes a church leader can make is to change nothing for a long time, then change several things all at once.”³⁴⁷ This ideal is why the project looks at four focal points for change that will occur over time, and each component involves a training session to bring to the fore a transformation of the mindset. Vaters adds, “Churches that have a regular process for change do it well and in a healthy way.”³⁴⁸ This project aimed to develop a way to bring to light the existing mindset by examining what experts say regarding improving the four areas defined within this project. This strategy allowed members to rethink church functionality today, purposefully looking for areas in the church functionality that needed improvement.

Much can be learned from this project to help other small rural churches with a similar desire to transition from a heavily transactional ministry, where the primary focus has been maintaining what the church has done over its long history without change. This inward mindset at First Baptist Church resulted in a lack of Christian and non-Christian guest engagement, a lack of facility improvement, a lack of members talking about the joy and benefits of serving the Lord, a lack of understanding of how the church can help individuals grow in their faith, and a lack of discipleship and evangelism components in the church’s existing programs. These are all problem areas for churches that maintain an inward focus.

Many church members were initially somewhat hesitant to participate in an improvement project because they knew it would end with a strategic plan defining improvements to the church to bring about some changes to its functionality. Three participants noted that they only participated in the project for reasons they described as wanting to see what the church would do

³⁴⁷ Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 148.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

and to be heard if the suggested plan was “off the wall.” While those feelings indicate a pervasive inward focus, their attitudes changed by the end of the training, noting, “This should have been done a long time ago.”

Pre-training data supported some hesitancy with the project, but by the end of the training, which involved in-depth discussions, role-playing, and learning about the precedent literature, all participants voted to support the project to get back to the church’s mission statement, which is *Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ*. This revitalization of the heart led to not only accepting the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap for Transformation*, but also bringing a formal church declaration to the membership for a unanimous vote in making this plan the vision for the church moving forward.

While the study had limitations that the researcher had to work within, as indicated in Chapter One, the primary objective was to have church members refocus their mindset by examining their existing attitudes, looking closely at how the church operates, and comparing that information to the research found in the literature review. This approach opened the door for more thorough discussions about what improvements could mean for the church regarding guest relations and engagement with other members. Discussions proved helpful in that the members began to visualize that the *Roadmap* presented contained actionable items that were achievable and that the outcome of their improvements would positively impact the church. Therefore, similar-sized rural churches with these same existing attitudes regarding their church operations could benefit from bringing together their members for a similar project. When existing attitudes are shared, it becomes eye-opening for many to see where they have similarities and differences regarding the church’s focus.

The purpose of the project was to help members first have a desire for transformation and then revitalize their love for Christ and each other by recommitting themselves to loving and serving others, growing in their faith so they can help others, and understanding that the church has a role to reach the lost and disciple the saved. There is a duty to ensure the facility meets the needs of the church members, but also is inviting and comfortable, ensuring that programs in the church have a purpose beyond self-gratification. Vaters says, “Facilities exist to serve the church, and the church is the people.”³⁴⁹ He asserts, “The church does not exist to build and sustain facilities, no matter how beautiful some of them might be.”³⁵⁰

Through role-playing and discussions over the five-week training period, members understood how the transformation begins with a heart on fire for Jesus. This setting allowed members to rediscover that first love that had been missing. This change in heart led to active discussions and excitement to see how these changes would impact the church. Visitor engagement is now occurring, and members discuss their love for Jesus and the church before and after the service with guests and other members. In addition, members who were hesitant to upgrade the facility are now excited to get started on the work. Other churches with similar pre-training mindsets can see their church shift in their thinking as members come together and realize that the church’s efforts over the years have led to this moment. It is up to today’s rural church to have similar conversations and role-play to reinforce the need to improve how much of those existing attitudes have negatively impacted church repairs and needed program overhauls.

By sharing evidence in the literature review section of this project, members will see how a transactional attitude can be detrimental for churches that are hesitant to change out of concern

³⁴⁹ Vaters, *Small Church Essentials*, 239.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

for the church tradition or history. By the end of the training, the information from the literature review and thorough discussions that allowed for self-evaluation of the existing mindset, coupled with pre-training data, allowed participants to learn that moving toward a missional approach to ministry would be positive for the church.

Research Limitations

Four significant research limitations exist in this project. These include: 1) Participation in the training was voluntary and available only to members of First Baptist Church, 2) Only four areas of church functionality were considered in the project, 3) Time constraints of a five-week project, and 4) The long-term sustainability of an outward-focus mindset. Sensing asserts, “A limitation to qualitative research must be seen in the recognition of not being able to discover some macro-narrative.”³⁵¹ These limitations did not negatively impact the project but supported the need for additional consideration.

The project involved four two-hour training sessions over five weeks, learning about transactional and transformational ministries, role-playing exercises, and group discussions. This project involved a micro-longitudinal study that measured pre-training and post-training attitudes regarding church functionality concerning guest engagement, member actions and behaviors, facility needs, and program enhancements.

While areas of an inward focus were identified in each area of functionality, only church members participated in the training. There were 48 percent of member families represented in the training. These data meant that nearly half of the members who were eligible to participate did not. When asked why spouses or others in the household did not participate, the standard answer was that information learned in the training would be shared with the other person or

³⁵¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 218.

persons in the family who did not attend. This project could not compel members to participate; therefore, this limitation is due to the limited sample size in the longitudinal study.

Sensing argues that “longitudinal studies are not practical for DMin projects, but prolonged engagement at the ministry site develops deeper understandings of the people and the context of the project.”³⁵² Therefore, it was necessary to create prolonged engagement. Time constraints for this project were an issue as this project measured existing attitudes against post-training attitudes over five weeks. Since only four areas of church functionality are part of the project, other areas within the church could have an inward focus that was not addressed in this project.

However, the training questioned whether these attitudes continued and spread to others or diminished over time. In order to achieve what Sensing suggests about DMin projects needing prolonged engagement, this project impaneled an oversight committee to help ensure that all aspects of the strategic plan are complete, with ongoing training existing annually. The concern is to protect the newly ignited outward-focus mindset and not revert to a transactional means of ministry.

This effort attempts to secure the credibility that Sensing asserts that “the bottom line relates to whether the findings ‘ring true’ for the participants.”³⁵³ Sensing notes, “DMin researchers do meet the criteria and rationale for prolonged engagement by the nature of their relationship with the context in question.”³⁵⁴ Therefore, ongoing engagement beyond the project itself will benefit the project’s success.

³⁵² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 223.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 224.

Therefore, the church voted to accept the project's findings as a roadmap forward and agreed to an oversight committee. The participants have accepted the rationale behind the project, which is an outward-focus or transformational mindset, putting soul care as one of the primary concerns of the church. Nevertheless, there is no assurance that leadership changes, personnel changes, and new members coming into the church can change course for the church, negatively impacting the efforts underway.

Further Research

There is a compelling need for more research on overcoming an inward-focused mindset that has existed in small rural churches for generations. There is very little information on the subject matter. Therefore, the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* improvement project for First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, a small rural church in West Virginia, has been developed to help church members identify and overcome in themselves areas of an inward focus that has been pervasive in four areas of church operations. Of the 48 percent of the member families represented in the training, 100 percent agreed that the project helped them become more outward-focused, seeing the need for the recommended changes and wanting to share the love of Jesus with others and help them grow in their faith.

Members saw the need to engage people before and after the service about what the Lord has done in their own lives and how serving him can make a difference in their lives. They also found that the facility and programs in the church needed upgrades and enhancements that have been neglected over the years, as many lacked discipleship and evangelism components.

This desire to become more missional involved soul searching and contemplating on the Great Commission that Jesus gave when he said believers are to go and make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to obey the words he taught (Mat. 28:19-20). The church voted formally to

accept the strategic plan that the project put forward and to implement an oversight committee to ensure the plan was followed.

However, this project only addressed about half of the member families in the congregation, meaning there could be a need to explore further if a systemic inward focus remains among those who did not participate in the program. Due to the ephemeral nature of the project's scope, exploring this mindset in others who did not participate in the church was impossible and left room for further exploration to understand the success of sharing the training outcomes with others.

Second, the aim of this project is to target a small rural church where many people who attend church together already have existing relationships as family or friendships. Many people who attend these churches have had families attend the same church for generations. Therefore, another area for possible research could be if the exact model presented in this program would work with other similar-sized congregations but in an urban setting.

Third, while role-playing exercises demonstrated how members can share their faith and love for the Lord with one another and how to lead people to faith in Christ, all of the practice sessions occurred in a controlled environment. This strategy poses the question: Will members be confident enough to continue those discussions with people they may know who are not attending church? Will members accept that discipleship involves work outside of the church?

Jonathan Dodson says, "Disciple is an identity; everything else is a role. Our roles are temporary, but our identity will last forever."³⁵⁵ The missional component of discipleship is not measurable in this project, yet it is an essential consideration as it involves teaching and evangelizing. For example, Dodson asserts that Jesus' disciples were sent out on a mission so

³⁵⁵ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship: Revised and Expanded* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 24, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6841572>.

they could learn to live by faith, depend on the hospitality of others, and preach to people who were opposed or hostile to their message.³⁵⁶ He notes that this process allowed these disciples to gain insight through the challenges they faced on the mission, which they would not have grasped if they remained in what he said was the safety of the home or classroom.³⁵⁷ Therefore, additional research could help rural church members further explore and understand that discipleship involves more than their personal spiritual development and reaching others outside of the church.

Perhaps one of the most significant areas that could involve additional research is how children in the rural church setting respond to other youth in and outside the church. Addressing questions such as how much influence youth active in a church have over children who are not active in church would be interesting. Are youth in the rural church willing to share the love of Christ with others more willingly and with less hesitation and reservation? Alternatively, is there a need to create role-playing models to help young people become better witnesses and share their love of Christ with others?

Summary

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training provided the means for church members to look seriously at four critical operations of church functionality. Through frank and thorough discussions, members saw many of their biases revealed in the data. By having church members assess their own deeply-held opinions in an open training forum and by participating in role-playing, problem areas were identified in the church.

³⁵⁶ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 26.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training used those areas to engage further members looking to identify where attitudes of self-satisfaction and a maintenance mindset were pervasive. This information helped begin the transformation process of the mind that shows having a love for Jesus begins with a desire to share that love with others. This renewed sense of purpose in the church helps make changes in the rural church setting not only doable, but enjoyable also. Initial hesitation for the project was overcome as members learned the importance of reaching others in all aspects of church ministry. Members grew to see that loving Jesus, loving others, and loving the church are keys to revitalizing the rural church. The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* program demonstrated that small rural churches can overcome their long-held inward-focus mindset if given the opportunity. It provided a training setting where open and honest discussions could occur about the differences between transactional and mission-focused ministry versus how things were being done in the church now.

This program allowed members to provide data necessary to demonstrate that an inward-focused mindset exists. Members heard from other members who believed the church was doing more than it was to reach others, and programs were thought to all have discipleship and evangelism components. Participants learned that was not necessarily the case. A series of recommended actions in guest engagement, facility needs, member actions and behaviors, and program enhancements were lauded by those who participated in the training.

First Baptist Church members came to understand the importance of soul care. Sharing the love of Jesus with others before and after the service is critical to others seeing a church that loves Jesus more than anything. Communicating effectively with others how to be saved and how the church can help one grow in their faith is essential to providing an environment that

fosters spiritual maturity, leading to discipleship opportunities. Ensuring the church facility sends a message that the church is alive and vibrant by making necessary repairs and ensuring the facility will meet the needs of future congregations is essential. When those necessary improvements are neglected, the first impressions of guests and others are unfavorable.

While First Baptist Church was very concerned about maintaining what it had been to the community over the last 150 years, it somehow lost the importance of demonstrating that first love of having a desire to reach others for Christ. The training demonstrated more concern over protecting an outdated facility than a willingness to build a new one if it ensured growth. There was a desire in the church to reach the lost and share the love of Christ with others, but they agreed this was not happening regularly. The facility had improvements that were desperately needed yet ignored.

The church came to accept that there was a mindset that was more focused on existing relationships than building new ones. This behavior is easy in rural churches where members are often related, live in the same neighborhoods, and are sometimes even former classmates. The church had gotten away from simply engaging Christian and non-Christian guests in a manner that would initiate conversations that would lead to new relationships and friendships.

The church had somehow forgotten its mission of reaching out, inviting in, and growing together in Christ. The *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* program allowed the church to see that sharing the love of Christ with others is the first step in becoming more missional-minded, which helps fulfill the role of making disciples for Christ. By making facility improvements, having a renewed sense of purpose, and ensuring program enhancements, the rural church made a declaration to support the project and provide safeguards such as an oversight committee to ensure the recommendations are completed.

APPENDIX A
STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Visual Roadmap: Sharing the Love of God with Others
Strategic Plan for Improvement



GUEST ENGAGEMENT	FACILITY NEEDS	MEMBER ACTIONS & BEHAVIORS	PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make Contact Before and After Service 2. Use T.A.L.K. 3. Leave Seats Open Toward the Back of the Church 4. Share Church Resources and Programs 5. Provide Facility Map and Program Information 6. Offer to Help Others Find What They Need at the Church 7. Provide Valet Parking for the Elderly and Mobility Challenged 8. Save Closest Street Parking for Others 9. Treat People as Though God sent them to the Church 10. Invite Others to Return Next Service 11. Reengage Next Visit 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Secure and Seal the Foundation of the Church Building 2. Pave the Gravel Parking Lot and Landscape 3. Purchase New Pews 4. Purchase and Install Signage: Street Signage to Direct to Parking; Affix Signage to the Privacy Fence at the Parsonage; Update Main Entrance Sign; Install Signage Throughout the Facility 5. Replace Bell Chimes with Digital Chimes 6. Consider Other Facility Needs 7. Consider Other Facility Needs as Appropriate 8. Provide Ongoing Facility Reviews 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce Yourself and Be Welcoming 2. Have a Desire for a Heart Like Jesus 3. Ask the Holy Spirit to Help You Grow Spiritually 4. Practice Spiritual Disciplines: Praying, Reading and Studying the Bible, Discipling 5. Share the Gospel and Love of Christ with Others 6. Share What Jesus Has Done for You, 7. Pray with Others, and Be Willing to Help Lead Others to Faith in Jesus 8. Share Information About Programs to Help Others Grow Spiritually 9. Aim to Serve; Invite Others to Church 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review All Programs 2. Ensure Programs Have Evangelism and/or Discipleship Components 3. Ensure Program Leadership Changes Can Occur Regularly to Bolster New Ideas and Opportunities 4. Develop a Program Recruitment Plan 5. Consider New Programs 6. Provide Brochures About Programs 7. Implement Spiritual Growth Plan Opportunities 8. Consider Small Group Learning Initiatives 9. Implement Program Goals and Evaluation 10. Discontinue Programs if Needed

APPENDIX B

MALE SECRET SHOPPER RESPONSES

Demographics:

White, Male, 46

Location: Residence within 1.5 Hours

Social: Middle Class

Arrived at 10:15 a.m.

Dropped off a block away from the church to walk to the church.

The following observations were made:

- No thoughts on parking, since he walked.
- Reported seeing no one outside of the church or walking to the church as he arrived. Was not approached by anyone until he got to the front door of the main entrance on Ann Street.
- He was welcomed into the church by the greeter/usher. He was asked if he was a visitor and given a coffee mug as a gift as a result. The mug was nice, but when looking at it he noticed it still had a price tag of \$5.99 on the bottom. There was no imprint on the mug to indicate it was from the church. Would suggest something on it to remind people that it was from the church and remove the price tag.
- Was seated a few rows from the main entrance on the left side of the sanctuary.
- No one engaged him about attending Sunday School or of its availability.
- No one engaged him about Bible study.
- No one engaged him about the worship service.
- Six people from the congregation spoke to him before service. One person spoke to him after service.
- He was invited back to a future service.
- While in the pew, he did have a significant amount of conversation with one or more people around him. He was engaged in conversation after the church outside by one person at some length.
- Reported that he was made to feel welcome in the service. He enjoyed the flow of the service and the worship service itself overall.
- The inside décor and furnishings were good. He felt “awesome” walking into the church for the first time. He felt comfortable inside of the church and linked that with a feeling of being welcomed by quite a few people.
- He was able to find seating he preferred quickly. The pew was reported to be comfortable and attractive.
- Pew spacing was not an issue for him. The pew aisle was not an issue for him. He reports that newer seating would not have changed his seating experience.
- The church congregation was viewed as friendly overall because of the interactions he saw around him.
- He noted that he was approached by some younger people and welcomed, which he considered impressive. He said he felt it was appreciated that he was there.
- Nothing was noted specifically about what could have enhanced his experience better in the sanctuary.
- He believed the church congregation was overall happy to have him present. He believed this because of the way he was engaged in conversation.
- No one appeared rude or uncaring, and the people sitting around him seemed really friendly.
- He reported he would be willing to attend this church in the future, because it was a good service and “people didn’t shy away from me as a stranger.”
- Positives: Projector use. Seating area and the view it afforded. He reported he could see everything.
- Negative/Improvement Area: More preaching from the Bible in regards to taking time to explain the Bible verse better so everyone knows what the Scripture means. This can be taken for granted. Not everyone knows what the Scripture means, and it’s important to not assume they do.
- People appeared to love Jesus in the church because of their “Amen” reaction to parts of the sermon. No one shared with the shopper how the church helped them in their walk with Christ. No one shared with the shopper how Christ changed their lives.
- Only one person asked him why he chose to visit First Baptist.
- Mixed feelings about the bulletin. Parts he understood and parts he did not (No specifics given).
- Other: While looking around the church, he was informed where the restrooms were right away. His thoughts on the outside of the church was that it looked good (appealing).
- When he asked two people about what the church offered in regards to programs or activities that could help him spiritually, there was nothing in response.
- Asked about his experience if he would consider a future visit and he said he would because the “congregation felt like they were a church family.”
- He was made to feel welcome in all aspects. He noted people were friendly to him which doesn’t always happen, because he is a big guy and people sometimes are afraid to approach him.
- Describing the church: joyful, the choir was awesome, and the church was friendly.

APPENDIX C

FEMALE SECRET SHOPPER RESPONSES

Female Secret Shopper Report**Demographics:**

White, Female, 63

Location: Residence within 1.5 Hours

Social: Middle Class

Arrived at 10:15 a.m.

Parked on the main street by the school, one block away, north of the church. Shopper considered the parking for the church confusing. Shopper reported learning about the church parking lot after the service was over. She did not see the parking lot upon arrival.

The following observations were made:

- Reported seeing people as she approached the entrance. She was not engaged. She noted there was really no opportunity to do so.
- Used the main church entrance on Ann Street. She reports upon entering the main entrance she was immediately greeted by the usher. Reported the usher/greeter shook her hand, introduced himself, and asked for her name. She was informed where the restrooms were if she needed them. Was informed the church was out of visitor mugs.
- Seated herself in middle right of the sanctuary. Reported being immediately approached by two persons behind her. It was a welcome conversation. No one approached the shopper about the worship service itself. No one asked about her family. She was asked kindly what brought her to First Baptist.
- Reported that she was not feeling ignored but noted there were two people in the same row that never spoke or made eye contact with her. Shopper tried to engage by trying to make eye contact.
- People in the church did not seem rude or uncaring, but maybe uninterested in her. Shopper noted it could be a “backward (introverted) personality.” Five people approached her before service. One person made an effort for conversation after service.
- Four people asked her to come back for a future visit.
- No one in conversation voluntarily shared information about programs that the church offers. However, when she asked about programs she was given limited information but not specifics. Those who approached the shopper made good eye contact and shared information about outreach and activities.
- Church facility was attractive. The white color makes for easy and positive feeling to see. She felt comfortable in the church and felt the decor was a good balance of not too old or too new.
- Comfort: The church was not crowded, and there was ample room in the pew. The pew aisle caused no issue for her and was wide enough. The pew cushions were thin and the shopper reported finding herself shifting positions a lot in the seat in an attempt for comfort. She believes newer setting would have been more comfortable. At minimum, better seating would have enhanced her experience a little.
- The church was viewed as friendly and inviting. Shopper said she was made to feel welcome overall and invited to return.
- The welcome was great and she liked having the song lyrics projected.
- The service was fast paced at times and seemed rushed. Some things were not explained in a way that a visitor could understand: God’s Cadets, where to find mission project envelopes, sign-in sheet location, and when/how the World Mission Offering was used.
- No signage was noticed other than the main entrance sign. There were no parking signs. Suggest usher may want to ask guests where they parked and let them know about closer parking options. Signs would help a visitor in regards to restroom, fellowship hall, classrooms, and office.
- Suggests considering more time for prayer concerns, and an opportunity for praise and worship reports from the congregation.
- The choir was nice but the piano volume overpowered them at times.
- Three positives: happy people, bright appearance in the sanctuary, and engaging preacher
- Three negatives: Beginning of the service was too fast (rushed) from subject to subject during announcements, some things not explained that were announced, and parking
- People appeared to love Jesus because of how they looked (happy), and tone of the conversations in the sanctuary
- No one told the shopper how the church helped in their walk with Christ. She said there was really no opportunity for them to do so (not enough time).
- No one told the shopper how Christ has changed their life. She said there was really no time or opportunity for them to do so.
- Bulletin: Positive and negative experience. The bulletin assumes a lot of knowledge exists for the reader. Example - Women’s ministry didn’t mention a home address location which makes sense, but there was not phone number to call to get that information. How often do they meet? What do they do?
- Outside needs: Trimming back the shrubbery to clear sidewalks is needed.
- When looking around the inside of the church, she was asked if she was looking for something. What she noticed was the comfort of people around one another. Based on the visit, shopper would consider a future visit if looking for a church. No one made her feel uncomfortable and she noted it was actually quite the opposite.
- Three thoughts from her visit about the church: It was big. It was friendly. It has an easy to find.

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT REGISTRATION FORM

Participant Registration Form (Member)

Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation

I have a desire to participate in the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* project at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood.

1. First and Last Name: _____
2. What is your gender? Please circle one. Male Female
3. What is your current age range? Please circle one age range: 18-30 31-50 51-64 65+
4. What is your highest level of education completed? Please circle one shown below:
No High School Some High School High School Bachelor's Degree Masters/Above
5. Are you a member of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood? Please circle one. Yes /No
6. Are you willing to attend four 90-minute training sessions that will be held on Saturdays or Sundays? Do you understand these training sessions will include a focus group discussion regarding First Baptist Church functionality? Please circle one: Yes / No
7. Written survey responses will be anonymous. Focus Groups include people you attend church with and limit privacy within the group. Are you ok with this?
Please circle one: Yes No
8. The training sessions will be videotaped. Are you ok with being filmed?
Please circle one: Yes / No
9. I understand participation in this project is completely voluntary and I can discontinue or quit at any time. Please circle one: Yes / No

I understand by registering for this project, if I have questions at any time, I may contact Toby Wagoner at [REDACTED] or by e-mail at [REDACTED]

APPENDIX E
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent for Member

Title of the Project: *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*
Principal Investigator: Toby Wagoner, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of an Improvement Project

You are invited to participate in an improvement project. To participate, you must be a member of the First Baptist Church of Ravenswood and be at least 18 years of age. Taking part in this project 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 improvement project about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the project is to better understand the existing attitudes of members regarding First Baptist Church's functionality as a rural church through guest engagement and instilling a love for Jesus. The feedback from this local congregation will support the need for a custom curriculum called *Others First: A Roadmap 4 Transformation* to demonstrate what action steps First Baptist Church needs to take to improve guest engagement in their rural church over the next 120 days.

What will happen if you take part in this project?

If you agree to be in this project, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Sign up to become a participant in the *Others First: Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* project.
2. Complete an anonymous survey, asking a series of questions about how you feel First Baptist Church functions in numerous aspects. This process will take less than 10 minutes. You will be asked to place your completed survey in the attached envelope, seal it, and drop it off in the lock box at the main office window within two weeks.
3. Agree to attend four separate days of training which will be video recorded. During this training date, the survey data collected will be shared with you. The training will cover the differences in church functionality pertaining to inward and outward-focused churches in regard to guests and helping them love Jesus. Each training session will last 90 minutes. These trainings will occur over a two-month period.
4. During the training you will be asked to participate in a board focus group discussion regarding church functionality regarding guest engagement lasting about 20-30 minutes.
5. At the conclusion of the project, you will be asked to complete an anonymous post-training survey and a training evaluation. This will take about 10-15 minutes at the end of the training.
6. You will also be presented with a copy of the project action plan, called the *Roadmap 4 Transformation* that will be implemented by the church over the next 120 days.
7. You may choose to discontinue participation in the project at any time.

APPENDIX E (CONTINUED)
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

How could you or others benefit from this project?

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

What risks might you experience from being in this project?

The expected risks from participating in this project 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 project will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Project records will be stored securely, and only the project coordinator will have access to the records. 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. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and hardcopy records will be shredded. Video recordings of the training will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years. The project coordinator will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this project. However, there will be light refreshments including fruit, cookies, water, and coffee available to those who want them.

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

To participate in the project, there is no cost to you.

Is the project coordinator in a position of authority over participants, or does this person have a financial conflict of interest?

The project developer serves the pastor at First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, written data collection will be anonymous, so the pastor will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this project. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this project.

Is project participation voluntary?

Participation in this project is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

APPENDIX E (CONTINUED)
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

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

If you choose to withdraw from the project, please inform the pastor/project coordinator that you wish to discontinue your participation. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the project.

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

The person conducting this improvement project is Toby Wagoner. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the project coordinator's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey S. Mayfield, at [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 project and would like to talk to someone other than the pastor, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this project. Make sure you understand what the project is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The project coordinator will keep a copy of the project records. If you have any questions about the project after you sign this document, you can contact the project 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 project.

The project coordinator has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this project.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX F

MEMBER INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Member of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood,

As a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting an improvement project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my project is to help First Baptist Church of Ravenswood, a rural church, transform its inward focus into an outward focus regarding guests by becoming guest-centered and helping them fall in love with Jesus. This effort involves completing surveys and attending four 90-minute training sessions called *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation*. I am writing to invite you as an adult member of First Baptist Church to join my project.

Participants must be at least 18 years of age and a member of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. Participants will be asked to complete pre- and-post training surveys and attend four 90-minute training sessions, including participating in focus group discussions regarding church functionality. The training sessions will be video recorded. Written responses will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

Guests who have been attending the church for three months or less are also being asked to help inform the project by completing a survey about church functionality. Guests and nonmembers will not be included in the training.

If you meet my participant criteria, please complete the consent document that is attached and return it to church on Sunday. When you turn in your consent form, you will be given an initial survey to complete anonymously and then return by placing it into the attached sealed envelope and dropping it in the lock box at the office window within two weeks. The training dates will be announced. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may discontinue participation at any time.

A consent document is provided attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my project. After you have read the consent form, please sign the form and return it to the church on Sunday. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the project.

Participants will not receive any compensation. However, those who attend the training will be treated to light refreshments that will be served during the training sessions.

Sincerely,

Toby Wagoner
Pastor, First Baptist Church of Ravenswood


APPENDIX G

VISION/IMPLEMENTATION OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE



1. The pastor will establish the *Others First Vision Committee* to ensure the work contained in the improvement project that needs to be done, gets done.
2. Members of the church will be appointed to each of the four focus areas contained in the project.
3. A representative from the trustees, finance, and deacon board will serve in an advisory role for this committee.
4. The pastor will facilitate these meetings.
5. This committee will provide a report to church members on the status of the implementation of the project.

APPENDIX H

CHURCH DECLARATION SUPPORTING THE PROJECT

Special Church Meeting to Vote on Declaration

On October 29, 2023, a special meeting was called by Pastor Toby Wagoner to celebrate and recognize First Baptist Church of Ravenswood completing the *Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation* training. As a result of completing the training, the church votes today to accept the recommendations made in the project to reinforce the church's commitment to its mission statement.

The church declares today the following:

1. To take necessary actions both individually and collectively to strive to overcome an inward transactional focus with the hopes of becoming more missional and intentional in reaching others for Christ.
2. To commit to loving one another of the faith as Jesus commanded, as well as openly sharing and demonstrating one's faith with non-believers who attend this church.
3. To actively share one's conversion experience with others and be willing to lead others to faith in Jesus Christ as needed.
4. To become more welcoming of guests in an effort to build relationships by being nonjudgmental and kind, and treating others with respect in the same way the member wants to be treated.
5. To personally practice spiritual disciplines such as having an active prayer life, participating in Bible study, and being willing to serve in the church in an effort to model a Christian life to others.
6. To make improvements to the church facility that will restore the beauty of the church providing a structurally sound, comfortable, and accessible facility to better meet the needs of others that demonstrate welcomeness and appeal.
7. And, to consider ongoing program evaluation and leadership changes within those programs in an effort to promote new ideas and limit stagnation, ensuring discipleship and evangelistic components while actively recruiting new participants.

First Baptist Church of Ravenswood resolves as a church body, that it needs to become more intentional and missional in its evangelistic and discipleship efforts, concentrating more on the love of Christ among believers and sharing that joy of a Christian life with others across all aspects of church functionality. We affirm by vote, that our church is now in a position, having had this training, to better fulfill the mission of First Baptist Church of Ravenswood which is to be *Reaching Out, Inviting in, and Growing Together in Christ*.

APPENDIX I
BECOMING MORE MISSIONAL

Becoming More Missional

EVERYTHING WE DO
MUST BE ABOUT JESUS

Demonstrate the
Love of Jesus

How to Grow in
Christ

How to Find Christ

How We Love
Others

Serving Others



Bibliography

- Aiken, Christopher Michael. "Church Revitalization and the Role of Pastoral Leadership: A Mixed-Methods Study." EdD. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018. https://repository.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/6486/Aiken_sbts_0207D_10509.pdf.
- Allison, Gregg R., and Bryce Butler. "Why Transactional Leadership Hurts the Church." April 4, 2022. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/transactional-leadership-hurts-church/>.
- American Baptist Churches USA. "Our History." Accessed March 31, 2023. <https://www.abc-usa.org/what-we-believe/our-history/>.
- Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Barna, George. *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. Barna Reports. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2013. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nledk&AN=739841&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Billy Graham Evangelist Association. "Sharing Your Faith 101." Last modified July 29, 2019. <https://billygraham.org/story/sharing-your-faith-101/>.
- Blackaby, Henry T., and Richard Blackaby. *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on God's Agenda*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.
- Blanchard, Ken, and Rene Broadwell. *Servant Leadership in Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Incorporated, 2018. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5254140>
- Boa, Kenneth, and William Kruidenier, *Romans*. Vol. 6, Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.
- Brand, Chad, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, Ray E. Clendenen, Trent C. Butler, and Bill Latta, eds. "Guest." In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.
- Brown, J. E., V. van Mulukom, Watts F. Jong, and M. Farias. "Exploring the Relationship Between Church Worship, Social Bonding and Moral Values." *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 44, no. 1 (2022): 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/008467242111070858>.
- Butler, Trent C. *Luke*. vol. 3. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.
- Byas, Jared. *Love Matters More: How Fighting to Be Right Keeps Us from Loving Like Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. <http://ebookscentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6649854>.

- Candler, Dana. *First Love: Keeping Passion for Jesus in a World Growing Cold*. Ada, MI: Chosen Books, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6955365>.
- Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6526207>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "CDC Museum COVID-19." Accessed March 31, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html#:~:text=January%2010%2C%202020,2%20virus%20on%20its%20website>.
- Cunningham, Adam. "An Assimilation Strategy for First Baptist Church Plant City." DMin thesis., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Davis, Jovan Troy. "A Complete Overhaul of the Guests to New Discipleship Assimilation System at St. John Missionary Baptist Church." DMin. thesis., Drew University, 2018. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. 4th ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6735039>.
- Dodson, Jonathan K. *Gospel-Centered Discipleship: Revised and Expanded*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?DocID=6841572>.
- Earls, Aaron. "Apathy in Churches Looms Large for Pastors." Lifeway Research. Last modified May 10, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/05/10/apathyin-churches-looms-large-for-pastors/>.
- _____. "Greeters and Gifts: How Churches Welcome Guests." Lifeway Research. Last modified March 24, 2018. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/03/14/greeters-and-gifts-how-churches-welcome-guests/>.
- Enlow, David R. *Church Usher: Servant of God*. Chicago, IL: Wingspread, 2006.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- _____. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.
- Fay, William. *Share Jesus Without Fear*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1999. ProQuest Ebook. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=556103>.
- First Baptist Church of Ravenswood. "Brief History of Our Church." Accessed March 24, 2023. <http://fbcravenswood.org/brief-history-of-our-church/>.

_____. "Mission Statement: Reaching Out, Inviting In, and Growing Together in Christ." Accessed March 24, 2023. www.fbcravenswood.org.

Franks, Danny. *People Are the Mission: How Churches Can Welcome Guests Without Compromising the Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. Logos.

Gallaty, Robby. *Growing up, Revised and Updated: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples*, Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2022. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=29249893>.

Gangel, Kenneth O. "Acts." In *Holman New Testament Commentary*. General Editor, Max Anders. Pages. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998.

Garland, David E. *2 Corinthians*. Vol. 29, The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

Giddens, Jesse. *Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life: The Master Key to Unlocking Total Victory*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2018.

Giffard, Pierre Alain. "Leadership and Church Growth: The Case of Chuck Smith." *Great Commission Research Journal* 11, no. 1 (2019): 76-93.

Got Questions. "What Are the Spiritual Disciplines?" Accessed August 29, 2023. <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-disciplines.html>.

Green, Gene L. "The Letters to the Thessalonians." In *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2002.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Harris, David. "Try Different Things." *The Presbyterian Record* 5, no. 2 (2016): 2. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/try-different-things/docview/1790172743/se-2>.

_____. "We Are Called to Be Angels." *The Presbyterian Record*, no.10 (2011): 4. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/904403136>.

Headley, Clyde David. "Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus in the Local Church." DMin diss. Liberty University, 2022. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Henard, Bill. *Reclaimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018. Proquest Ebrary.

Holcomb, Nate. *Christian Maturity: Grow Up Before You Go Up*. Copperas Cove: Him Publishing, 2017.

- Horn, Sam. "Choosing a Church: Two Models: Recognizing the Theological Orientation of a Local Church." *Bob Jones Today*. Last modified November 19, 2019. [https://today.bju.edu/vice-president/choosing-a-church-doxological-vs-attractional-models/#:~:text=Attractional%20model%20\(AM\)%20churches%20believe,and%20reconnect%20with%20the%20church.](https://today.bju.edu/vice-president/choosing-a-church-doxological-vs-attractional-models/#:~:text=Attractional%20model%20(AM)%20churches%20believe,and%20reconnect%20with%20the%20church.)
- Hunt, Chad. *The Real Reason Guests Come Back to Your Church*. Accessed June 23, 2023. <https://theunstuckgroup.com/2015/02/the-secret-to-getting-guests-to-come-back/>
- Huttar, David K. "Hospitality." In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Jenssen, Jan Inge, and Arne Mella. "The Significance of the Senior Pastor for Change and Growth: A Literature-Based Discussion." *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology* 10, (December 6, 2023): 157–181. <https://www.sjlt-journal.com/index.php/sjlt/article/view/90>.
- Jones, Jeffrey M. "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time." Gallup, 2021. Accessed February 21, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.
- Keener, Craig S. *Galatians: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5756040>.
- Kim, Daniel J. "Comparative Study of Prophetic Call and Shamanic Call and Its Implications for Christian Missionary Call." *복음과 선교* 44 (2018): 267. doi:10.20326/kems.44.4.265.
- Kingdom, Christopher L. "Church Leadership: Effectual Strategic Planning Towards the Congregational Growth and Maturation of Go and Teach Christian Ministries." DMin. thesis., Liberty University, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/3196/>.
- Kitson, Adrian. "Welcoming the Stranger: Being a Welcoming Church." *Lutheran Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (2008): 77-85. www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/welcoming-stranger-being-church/docview/213728891/se-2.
- Lawrence, Michael. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Lester, Terence. *I See You: How Love Opens Our Eyes to Invisible People*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5811351>.
- Lifeway Research. "Why the Rural Church Matters." Last modified May 18, 2018. <https://research.lifeway.com/2018/05/18why-the-rural-church-matters/>.

- Love, Christie. *God of the Gaps: Finding Faith in the In-Between Spaces of Our Journey*. New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2021. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6884878>.
- Mancini, Will, and Cory Hartman. *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2020.
- Martin, D. Michael. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Vol. 33, The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
- Martin, Eric Tate. "Characteristics of a Healthy Church Used as a Model to Aid in the Survival and Growth of Small Churches in the Dallas, Texas Metroplex." DMin diss., Regent University, 2021. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- McClendon, P. Adam, and Jared E. Lockhart. *Timeless Church: Five Lessons from Acts*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020.
- Mills, Rodney. "Healthy Churches Grow." *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 68-76.
- Mittelberg, Mark, and Lee Strobel. *Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021.
- Mounce, Robert H. "Romans." Vol. 27. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.
- "Natural Church Development." North American Division Evangelism Institute. Accessed January 30, 2024. <https://www.nadei.org/nadequipping/natural-church-development>.
- Neese, Amberly. *The Friendship Initiative: 31 Days of Loving and Connecting Like Jesus*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6550182>.
- Nelson, Ryan. *I'm Never Coming Back to This Church: A Church Staff's Guide to Visitors*. Bellingham, WA: Proclaim, 2016.
- Newport, Frank. "Church Leaders and Declining Religious Service Attendance." Gallup. Last modified September 7, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/242015/church-leaders-declining-religious-service-attendance.aspx>
- Nieuwhof, Carey. "10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often." Accessed September 20, 2023. <https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>
- Ogden, Greg. *Discipleship Essentials*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Parrott, Richard. "Transformational Leadership: Theory and Reflections." *Ashland Theological Journal* 32, (2000). https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ashland_theological_journal/32-1_063.pdf.

- Péter-Contesse, René, and John Ellington. *A Handbook on Leviticus*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1992.
- Peterman, Gerald W. "Philippians." In *The Moody Bible Commentary*. Eds. Michael A. Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham. 1860. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014.
- Pew Research Center. "Why Americans Go (and Don't Go) to Religious Services." Last modified August 1, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/08/01/why-americans-go-to-religious-services/#:~:text=Among%20self%2Didentified%20Christians%2C%20the,going%20to%20church%20more%20often.>
- Pillay, Jerry. "COVID-19 Shows the Need to Make Church More Flexible." *Transformation* 37, no. 4 (2020): 266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378820963156>.
- Postell, Marissa. "People Aren't Scared of Your Faith." Lifeway Research. Last modified March 18, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/03/18/people-arent-scared-of-your-faith/>.
- Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016. <https://books.google.com/books?id=vurxDAAAQBAJ&lpg=PT9&dq=6%20markers%20of%20especially%20elcoming%20churches&lr&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Powell, Katherine C., and Cody J. Kalina. "Cognitive and Social Constructivism: Developing Tools for an Effective Classroom." *Education* 130, no. 2 (2009): Pages?://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A216181184/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=3f64b9a8.
- Psychology Today. "Growth Mindset." Accessed September 14, 2023. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/growth-mindset>.
- Rainer, Thom S. *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- _____. *Becoming a Welcoming Church*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2018. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=5973492>
- Scandrette, Mark. *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=2033930>.
- Schreiner, Thomas. R. *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5521091>.
- Searcy, Nelson, and Jennifer Henson. *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church*. Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2008.

- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011.
- Shellnutt, Kate. "Small Wonders: Rural Ministers Celebrate God's Work Even in Places Plagued by Decline." *Christianity Today* 63, no. 2 (2019): 15-17. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A577397065/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=f02ba68d.
- Sittser, Gerald L. *Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=2050901>.
- Smith, Brandon. "Expressing God's Love in the Local Church." Lifeway. Accessed July 7, 2023. <https://leadership.lifeway.com/2014/10/20/expressing-gods-love-in-the-local-church/#:~:text=Leaders%20should%20strive%20for%20excellence%20and%20use%20their,his%20gospel.%20No%20one%20can%20improve%20on%20that.%E2%80%9D>.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Thom S. Rainer. *Transformational Church: New Scorecard for Congregations*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Oz5bRaT4tWgC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=transformational+church+assessment+tool&ots=nnwOpZdauM&sig=G4ozrFewtvdDOWREAondtTo4g1Y#v=onepage&q=transformational%20church%20assessment%20tool&f=false>.
- Stockstill, Jonathan. *The Real Jesus: Challenging What You Know About the Greatest Person Who Ever Lived*. Chicago: Charisma House, 2021. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6534529>.
- Stringer, Ernest T. *Action Research*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007.
- Swider, Brian, T. B. Harris, & Qing Gong. "First Impression Effects in Organizational Psychology." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 107, no. 3 (2021): 346-369. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000921>.
- Terry, John Mark, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson. *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998.
- Thumma, Scott L. "Exploring the Dynamics and Challenges of Congregational Size." *Theology Today* 78, no. 3 (2021): 285-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405736211030245>.
- Tolliver, Olanda. "Creating a Transformational Model that Bridges the Gap Between Church and Community." DMin. thesis, South University, 2020. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

- U.S. Census Bureau. "City and Town Population Totals: 2020-2021." Accessed March 24, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-cities-and-towns.html>.
- _____. "Quick Facts West Virginia." Accessed March 24, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/WV>.
- VanGemeren, Willem A. *Psalms*. Vol. 5. The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms. Revised Edition. Eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Vaters, Karl. *Small Church Essentials: Field-Tested Principles for Leading a Healthy Congregation of Under 250*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018.
- Walker, Adam Mark. "Church Guests Matter: A Strategic Program to Welcome Guests." DMin. thesis., Liberty University, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2936/>
- Waltz, Mark. *First Impressions: Creating Wow Experiences in Your Church*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2013.
- Wasserman, Keith, and Christine D. Pohl. *Good Works: Hospitality and Faithful Discipleship*. Chicago: Eerdmans, 2021. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/reader.action?docID=6647786>.
- West Virginia Baptist Convention. "Mission Statement." Accessed March 31, 2023. <https://www.wvbc.org/about-us/mission-statement/>.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014.
- Williams, Thaddeus. "The Emotions of Jesus, Part 3: Compassion," *The Good Book Blog*. Biola University, June 15, 2015. <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2015/the-emotions-of-jesus-part-3-compassion>.
- Wilson, Bill. "What does a healthy church look like?" *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 3. (2016): 333–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637316658582>.
- Wilson, Barbara Jean. "The Church and the Retention of Young Adults." DMin. thesis., Trevecca Nazarene University, 2020. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Wilson, Jared C. *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Wise, Ronald Kent. "Transformational Leadership: Equipping Small Churches to Make Disciples By Integrating Wesleyan Principals." DMin diss., Liberty University, 2020. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Wormack, Willie Lee. "Church Revitalization: Fashioning Church for Growth." DMin. thesis., Liberty University, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2848>.

Wright, Catherine. "The Power of Example: Following Jesus on the Path of Spirituality in Luke-Acts." *Religions* 14, no. 2 (2023): 1. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ref14020161>.

Young, Jason, and Jonathan Malm. *The Come Back Effect: How Hospitality Can Compel Your Church's Guests to Return*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018.

IRB APPROVAL LETTER**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 13, 2023

Toby Wagoner
Jeffrey Mayfield

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22-23-1752 Others First: A Visual Roadmap 4 Transformation

Dear Toby Wagoner and Jeffrey Mayfield,

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 that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because

(2) it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(1).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. 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, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office