LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TRANSITIONING THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM
A RURAL TO SUBURBAN CONTEXT

A Thesis Project Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By
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Lynchburg, Virginia
August, 2009
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LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THESIS PROJECT APPROVAL SHEET

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GRADE

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MENTOR

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READER
ABSTRACT

TRANSITIONING THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM A RURAL TO SUBURBAN CONTEXT

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009
Mentor: Daniel P. Moosbrugger, Ph.D.

A review of current literature demonstrates that very little material is available to assist pastors and church leaders in transitioning their churches from a rural to suburban context. This project will serve as a tool to assist pastors in leading their churches to transition from a rural to suburban context. Based on demographic studies, an historical analysis, the development of a plan to move the church forward, analyzing potential disruptions, and seeing the end result of the rural to suburban transition, the goal of the project will be fulfilled.

Abstract length: 89 words.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my best friend, love of my life, sweetheart, and wife: Charity Hope Roberts. Charity, you are the epitome of the Proverbs 31 woman. Thank you for your patience and support through my academic pursuits. I love you.

I also dedicate this thesis to my future children. I do not know when you will be born, or what your names will be, but I do know I pray for you every day to receive Christ as Saviour and live lives reflecting Christ’s greatness.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Street:</th>
<th>Closest Cross-street:</th>
<th>Year of Count</th>
<th>Count:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Hines Valley Rd</td>
<td>Elts Rd (0.01 miles E)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>Frank Kinser Rd</td>
<td>United States Highway 321 (0 miles N)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>17,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>United States Highway 321</td>
<td>Broadway of America (0.28 miles SE)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Hines Valley Rd</td>
<td>Gentry Rd (0.44 miles NE)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>United States Highway 321</td>
<td>Shaw Ferry Rd (0.15 miles NW)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>28,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The report below indicates the number of vehicles that use a particular roadway. Also included is the year that the count was recorded. Look at the map on the next page to see the actual locations of these roadways.

Table 2. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church membership survey.

1. 64% of the congregation is female, and 46% is male.
2. 99% of the church is Caucasian.
3. The average age is 44 years old.
4. The most common jobs are: retired, student, clerical, housewife, and engineer.
5. 16% of adults are widows or widowers, 78% of adults are married, the other 6% either checked divorced or single.
6. Most adults in the church have their highest level of education being a high school diploma.
7. 7% of families in the church own a mobile home, 91% own a single-family home, and only 2% are renters.
8. The average family has lived at the same address for over seven years.
9. 78% were born in the state of Tennessee.
10. 34% were born in Lenoir City/Knoxville.
11. The average household income is $25,000-$50,000 with only 2% of the church $75,000 or more.
12. The average percentage of money given to the church from their annual income is 2.5%.
13. The average church member lives two miles from the church building.
14. The average church member has been a Christian for ten or more years.
15. The average church member has been a member of Pleasant Hill for 10-19 years.
16. In order, the first contact with the church was the following: friend, parents, drove by, and website.
17. The most common things mentioned for the reason why people joined Pleasant Hill were the following: the people, warm, intimate, preaching, and children’s ministry.
18. In a typical four Sunday month, the average church member attends two Sundays.
19. People were “very satisfied” with the Sunday morning worship, student/youth ministry, and preschool ministry. People were “satisfied” with Sunday morning Bible study, music ministry, and children’s ministry. People were “dissatisfied” with discipleship training opportunities, evangelism, leadership training, and missions emphasis. Besides a few sporadic surveys, church members are not “very dissatisfied” with any of the core ministries of the church.
20. 38% have considered leaving the church in the last five years, and the overwhelming reason was when the music minister was fired in 2006 due to financial indiscretion. Those who had not considered leaving the church in the last five years predominantly cited either family or friends as the reasons why they would not leave.
21. The church’s best traits are fellowship, preaching, and pastoral care.
22. The biggest needs of improvement are discipleship training, missions emphasis, and children’s church.
23. 83% feel they are vital members of the church body.
24. 68% feel they are being used according to their giftedness and passion either “usually” or “yes, I do” (meaning all the time).
25. Only 54% are a part of a small group of some sort.
26. 82% of church members “absolutely” believe the church would help them in a time of trouble.
27. When asked if anyone in the community would not feel comfortable worshiping at the church, the answers given were predominantly given for the reason the church does not have a choir.
28. 98% stated they would be comfortable encouraging nonbelievers to attend worship services at Pleasant Hill.
29. 17% of church members feel alienated from at least one person in the congregation.
30. 91% of the people polled stated that after the pastor and staff, the deacons held the greatest amount of influence in making major church decisions.
31. 62% of church members never made a suggestion accepted by the church, 12% had “one small” suggestion accepted by the church, and 26% stated “yes” to the question of if they made any suggestions accepted by the church.
32. When asked about church members’ ability to influence decision-making in the church, a majority of the questions referred to business meetings as the place to be able to do that, and reference to the church being “pastor-led” was another common response.
33. 31% of those polled were involved with a ministry team of some kind within the church.
34. For those who are in a position of service, that which gives them satisfaction in their position included: utilizing spiritual gifts, being with friends, and doing their part within the church family.
35. The most frustration for peoples’ positions pertained to lack of funding for their ministry.
36. A majority of those polled listed the time immediately following their salvation as the most fulfilling time in their Christian life. When asked if they feel closer to Christ than five years ago, 71% said “yes” and 29% said “no.” That which led people to answer “yes” listed Sunday morning Bible study and Christian friends as their primary reasons. Those who listed “no” either blamed the church, or their own spiritual apathy.
37. In order for the church to help others in growing in their relationship with Christ, the most common answers were: stronger discipleship, better Sunday morning Bible study program, and more outreach opportunities.

Table 3. Goals of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMBS</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptisms</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
<td>$166,400</td>
<td>$221,000</td>
<td>$294,000</td>
<td>$390,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Church</td>
<td>0 families added</td>
<td>3 families added</td>
<td>7 families added</td>
<td>10 families added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causing Additions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Groups</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest &amp; Invite Events</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Process accountability.

Figure 2. Respondents’ level of agreement with process accountability

Note: SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; MD = Moderately disagree; MA = Moderately agree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why the Topic is Needed

The fast-growing population in metropolitan areas often results in people moving further and further outside of the city limits of larger cities in order to experience the newness and comfort of newly developed areas with the accessibility of the larger cities merely a few miles away. As the suburbs sprawl, they move further and further into formerly rural areas. With suburbanization entering rural communities, it forces local churches to transition from a rural to suburban context. The approved topic for this Doctor of Ministry thesis is the following: Transitioning the Local Church from A Rural to Suburban Context.

Background Leading to Awareness in the Problem

The background of the author that has led to the need to solve the problem of the suburbanization of rural America stems from the context of the transitioning community around Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee, the church the author has the opportunity of serving as Senior Pastor. This topic would be of great value to the author personally in order to learn how to more effectively transition Pleasant Hill Baptist
Church from the mindset of being a rural church that it has been since 1837 to a suburban church that it is now becoming.

**Rationale for Choosing This Topic**

Churches, at times, have difficulty changing as surroundings and culture changes around her. The rationale for this topic is to provide a detailed plan to teach a local church body to transition its approach to ministering to the community as the community itself is transitioning from a rural to suburban context.

**Statement of the Problem**

Churches, at times, have difficulty changing as surroundings and culture changes around her. This project will serve as a tool to assist pastors in leading their churches to transition from a rural to suburban context.

**Terminology Defined**

Throughout this project, verbiage will be used that must be defined clearly in order to extrapolate a correct interpretation throughout this thesis. Three words, in particular, must be defined: “transitioning”, “rural”, and “suburban”.

**Transitioning**

According to Merriam-Webster, *transitioning* means, “to make a transition.”

The word “transition” means “a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to

another; a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another."

Rick Warren gives an example of the word transition in his foreword to the book entitled, *Transitioning*, “Today, tens of thousands of churches are transitioning from being program driven to being purpose driven.” Warren’s usage of the word transitioning is an ideal example of how the word will be used throughout this project. This word links the way a church would move from one process of operation to another process.

Rural

According to Merriam-Webster, *rural* means “of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture.” The U.S. Census Bureau defines *rural* as, “territory, population and housing units not classified as urban. Rural classification cuts across other hierarchies and can be in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas.”

To practically define what the word *rural* will mean throughout this project, a description of the community around Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in 2000 may serve as a clear portrayal of what it was like nine years ago:

These do-it-yourselfers take pride in their homes, lawns, and vehicles.

______________________________

2. Ibid.


Hunting, fishing, and woodworking are favorite pursuits. Pet ownership, especially birds or dogs, is common. Many households have a satellite dish, and TV viewing includes various news programs as well as shows on CMT and Outdoor Life Network.

Suburban

According to Merriam Webster, *suburban* means “an outlying part of a city or town, a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city, the residential area outside of a city or large town.” This succinct definition of the word *suburban* accurately describes the state the community of Lenoir City, Tennessee has now become.

Statement of Limitations

This is not an attempt to develop a “cookie cutter” didactic process for every church on the edge of town to experience phenomenal growth. Nor is it an exhaustive breakthrough for how pastors may become demographic specialists. This project will be a case study; a look at a needed transition in mentality and an effort to suggest a systematic approach toward needed ecclesial change as communal change takes place.

Theoretical Basis

Transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context is a concept that aligns with what a church should do if faced with such a situation. Theologically, biblically, and historically, it is something that is clearly shown.

Theologically

From a theological standpoint, it is the bishop, lead elder, overseer, or pastor’s responsibility to carry out three particular tasks as he oversees the local assembly: lead, care, and teach. This theological stance of the role of the pastor overflows into transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context.

**Leading**

As the community around the church transitions, it is the pastor’s responsibility to lead his church to reach the people in his Jerusalem. As his area changes, so must the methodologies and tactics used by the church in order to most effectively penetrate the culture with the Gospel without ever wavering from proper theology.

John 10:3 says, “To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” As the shepherd leads out the flock, they are to follow his lead. If the pastor is properly leading the flock, he will seek to lead the church to reach her Jerusalem with the Gospel. Observing the transitioning community is an important aspect of this ecclesial leadership.

**Caring**

A pastor shows his church family that he cares about them if he does what he believes is best for the church, in accordance with a proper hermeneutic of the local church. As caring for the church may include, but is not limited to, visiting the sick,

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9. Unless otherwise noted, all references from the Bible are from the English Standard Version.
counseling the hurt, and feeding the poor, it may also include doing what is best to move
the church forward in fulfilling her mission.

James 5:14 teaches of the importance of ministering to people who need to be
cared for physically, but in the instance of pastoring the church and caring for them, the
spiritual care must especially be noted and noticed. 1 Peter 5:2 states, “shepherd the
flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but
willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;”

Teaching

As the community around the church transitions from being rural to being
suburban, it is important the congregation is made aware of the changing surroundings, in
case they are oblivious to the changes going on in their society. This may be taught
through explanations of demographic research, explanations of changes in housing
developments, and pointing out the increase in restaurants and businesses through the
area.

Titus 2:1 teaches, “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.” As
sound doctrine is to teach the truth of the Bible, teaching the church body the wisest ways
to go about fulfilling the commands of the New Testament local church is important
when pondering the theological basis of transitioning the local church from a rural to
suburban context.
Biblically

The Bible gives examples of transitioning communities from rural to suburban. In order to understand how to minister to people in this type of a community, it is important to note examples of similar situations in the Bible. Examples of this may be found in 2 Kings 23 and Numbers 35.

2 Kings 23

In 2 Kings 23, the context tells the reader that King Josiah had a deep desire to “... walk after the Lord, and to keep His commandments ...” (2 Kings 23:3). King Josiah went about keeping the Lord’s commandments and walking after Him by extracting the evil from the greater Jerusalem area. King Josiah sought to remove idols, prostitution, and the priests who were breaking the Mosaic Law. In 2 Kings 23:4, King Josiah was serving the Lord in suburban Jerusalem when it says he burned the vessels made for Baal, “... outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron.”

Kidron is a valley on the eastern side of Jerusalem. As Kidron is on the outlying part of the city, it is therefore a suburb. King Josiah was ministering to people in the suburbs.

More specifically, Kidron was an area transitioning from a rural to suburban context. Kidron was, חוף, “in the open country.” In this area, Josiah faced a cultural barrier as this valley is just below the temple area and would have been a convenient dumping ground for all of the items being thrown out of the temple.10 Similarly to Lenoir City and Knoxville, Tennessee, Kidron was on the outskirts of Jerusalem and had

pastures with an increasing amount of new activity largely due to the proximity to the larger city merely a few miles away.

**Numbers 35**

The LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, ‘Command the people of Israel to give to the Levites some of the inheritance of their possession as cities for them to dwell in. And you shall give to the Levites pasturelands around the cities.’

The Lord spoke to Moses, and commanded him to give the Levites an inheritance of pasturelands around the cities. Similarly to 2 Kings 23, this was an area on the outskirts of town. Budd points out that the pasturelands were “on the peripheries.”

Moving to the beginning of the sixth verse of the same chapter, “The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge . . .” The rest of the chapter goes on to explain how the cities of refuge serve as a safe place for people who were killers without intent (v. 15), and the cities of refuge serve as a place of restoration (v. 25).

These cities were places that were rural farming communities that the Lord commanded Moses to transition into more active cities with a purpose for fulfilling the Lord’s plan.

Both Numbers 35 and 2 Kings 23 serve as examples of biblical areas transitioning from a rural to suburban context. It is also important to look at an historical perspective of communities that have transitioned from a rural to suburban context.

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Historically

In order to achieve the goal set forth for this project from a theoretical basis, the historical nature of American suburbia must be examined. From the initial stages of suburbanization, to the boom of suburbia in the 1950s, to the current state of the suburbanization of America in the twenty-first century, a process of growth has taken place, and must be analyzed in order to assist the reader in learning how to most effectively transition a church from a rural to suburban context.

Initial Suburbanization

American suburbs originally experienced growth in the middle of the eighteenth century to serve as places to build weekend villas as opposed to places to commute from on a daily basis. From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, areas on the outskirts of cities served as weekend getaway areas, and places for the lower class to dwell, as they could not afford to live within the city limits.

Boom of Suburbanization

In the mid-twentieth century, American communities on the outskirts of larger cities began to transition from being rural to being suburban at a significantly faster rate after World War II. “The rise and dominance of suburbia in America after the Second World War is inescapable.” Upon arrival back in the United States, men began moving

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their families to the peripheral cities outside of larger cities, and they exchanged longer
commutes for lower rents.\textsuperscript{16}

The time of the boom of suburbanization coincides with the development of the
baby boomer generation. The baby boomer generation, those born 1946-1966, represent
the single largest sustained population increase in the history of America, consisting of 83
million individuals.\textsuperscript{17} As this boom in population took place, a boom in housing also had
to take place. As cities began to be increasingly more built-out, the next closest place to
build multitudinous houses was surrounding cities. It was at this time that many
communities transitioned from being rural to being suburban; the city was moving closer
to them.

Since the time of the baby boomers, America has become more and more
populated in suburbs. By 2000, half of the population in the United States lived in
suburban areas.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Twenty-first Century Suburbanization}

Hall and Pfeifer explained the American suburban trends of the twenty-first
century when they wrote,

In developing cities, differences are even more radical. On the one hand,
there is American-style suburbanization of the wealthy; on the other side
informal low-rise high-density shanty towns, with their separated local

\textsuperscript{16} Joel Kotkin, \textit{The City: A Global History}. (New York City, NY: Modern
Library, 2005), 114.
\textsuperscript{17} Gary A. Adams and Terry A. Beehr, \textit{Retirement: Reasons, Process, and
\textsuperscript{18} U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Demographic Trends in the 20th Century,”
22, 2009].
economy, their own networks and self-help organizations, their family traditions and their highly differentiated self-organized economy.\textsuperscript{19}

Suburbs in modern day America are not necessarily upper-middle class communities with white picket fences. These communities may have multiple tiers of socio-economic statuses. The population continues to increase in America, and with that, the sprawling reality of rural areas becoming suburban is inevitable. While taking history as a lesson, this trend will continue for years to come.

\textbf{Statement of Methodology}

The proposed design of the project is one that involves ten steps. Each of these steps serves as a chapter in the project. Below is the chapter listing for the project.

Following the chapter listing, a summary of each chapter will be given.

\textbf{Chapter 1: Introduction}
\textbf{Chapter 2: Demographic Analysis}
\textbf{Chapter 3: Historical Analysis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and Traditions}
\textbf{Chapter 4: Current State of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church}
\textbf{Chapter 5: Concepts in Transitioning and Vision Development}
\textbf{Chapter 6: Vision and Transition Strategy}
\textbf{Chapter 7: Communicating the Vision and Transitional Strategy}
\textbf{Chapter 8: Potential Disruptions in Rural to Suburban Transitions}
\textbf{Chapter 9: Action Plans of Transitioning the Local Church from Rural to Suburban}
\textbf{Chapter 10: The Result of Transitioning from Rural to Suburban}

\textbf{Chapter 1: Introduction}

First an introduction will be given to the reader. This proposal will serve as the introduction to the reader of what to expect throughout the project. This chapter will

include the analysis of why the project needs to be examined, statement of the problem, statement of limitations, theoretical basis, statement of methodology, and a review of literature.

Chapter 2: Demographic Analysis

Second a demographic analysis will take place to learn whether or not the church is transitioning from a rural to suburban context. This chapter will teach of how to obtain demographic studies, and the wisest ways for ecclesial leadership to enhance their demographical research skills. After learning of how to demographically research a region, Lenoir City and the greater Knoxville region will be studied.

Chapter 3: Historical Analysis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and Traditions

Third an historical analysis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church will take place. Also, the traditions of Pleasant Hill will be explained in comparison with other traditionally rural churches. Then, tendencies of suburban churches will be extrapolated.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Current State of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

Fourth an analysis of the current state of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church will take place. Areas that will be examined are personnel, facilities and property, ministries, finances, and attendance in various ministries and gatherings.
Chapter 5: Concepts in Transitioning and Vision Development

Fifth ideas and concepts in developing a vision for the future of the church will be given. As the community transitions, the church must transition with it. As the church transitions, so must the future strategies. This chapter will outline how to develop a fresh vision as the community envelopes a fresh wind of newness.

Chapter 6: Vision and Transition Strategy

Sixth the development of a vision and strategy for the future suburbanized transition of the church will be given. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church will be used as an example throughout this chapter. The future of the community is rapidly changing, and with that reality, the church cannot remain stagnant.

Chapter 7: Communicating the Transitional Strategy

Seventh upon the development of a vision and strategy to transition the church, a clear plan of communicating said transition will be extrapolated.

Chapter 8: Potential Disruptions in Rural to Suburban Transitions

Eighth an analysis of the potential disruptions of a transition from a rural setting to a suburban setting will be seen. This will include examples from churches that have overcome the potential disruptions, and how they overcame them.
Chapter 9: Action Plans of Transitioning the Local Church from Rural to Suburban

Ninth action plans of transitioning from a rural to suburban context will be listed in a simple and clear manner. Since a vision was established in the sixth chapter, step-by-step action plans will be listed to assist ecclesial leaders in transitioning the church they lead from a rural to suburban context.

Chapter 10: The Result of Transitioning from Rural to Suburban

Tenth an estimation of the eventual result of the transition from a rural to suburban context will be explained to conclude the project. This chapter will concentrate on a pragmatic perspective of transitioning a local church from a rural to suburban context, and will lace together the entire project into a clear process of rural to suburban transition.

Review of Literature

Books


Cloud, Henry. 9 Things A Leader Must Do: How to Go to the Next Level and Take


Internet


__________. “Loudon County QuickFacts from the U.S. Census Bureau.”

__________. “What is the difference between urban and rural population?”
Roberts 17


Journals


Magazines


Newspapers

Douglas, Steve. “Church Preach, but Unconverted.” Sydney Morning Herald, 14 May


**Theses**


Ogle, Jacob J. “Is the American Protestant Church A Rural Institution? A Study of its Adaptations to Successive Social Environments.” Ph.D. diss., The University of Nebraska, 1938.


If one seeks to lead their church in a transition from a rural to suburban context, they must know if, in fact, their church is in transition, or if that transition is foreseen in the future. Specifically, quantitative research is needed in demographic research. Questions immediately arise when contemplating this situation: What kind of information do I need to learn within a demographic study? How do people obtain demographic research? How do people practically study demographics? What does a demographically researched region look like? In this chapter, these questions will be answered.

**What Kind of Information Do I Need to Learn Within A Demographic Study?**

In order to be as applicable as possible to a particular person’s individual scenario, the following list may be tweaked to use either part of or all of the information to most fully study one’s region: five, ten, and fifteen year trend projections of traffic, population, age, multiethnic populations, household income, household type, race, education, and lifestyle. Furthermore, doing such a study in a radius “ring” format to examine five, ten, and fifteen miles within one’s local church property is also valuable.

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information for a local church leader. This kind of information is vital in learning whether or not a church is transitioning from a rural to suburban context.

**How Do People Obtain Demographic Research?**

Before learning of how to obtain the research, one must know from whom to obtain it.

**Who to Obtain the Research From**

A simple way to obtain demographic research is through the United States Census Bureau and research groups that draw from the United States Census Bureau. Specifically, to research demographics of areas surrounding churches, a practical, thorough, church-centered, and cost-free research group is the Center for Missional Research of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Center for Missional Research is a free service to give demographic research to churches; their research is drawn from the United States Census Bureau and customized for local churches.

**How to Obtain the Research**

In order to obtain research from the Center of Missional Research, you simply log onto their website and follow their step-by-step directions of creating a profile in order for their professional researchers to create a customized data analysis within seventy-two hours.

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2. The web address of the Center for Missional Research is www.NAMB.net/Demographics.
hours. In order to obtain research directly from the United States Census Bureau, you may do so by logging onto their website.³

**How Do People Practically Study Demographics?**

If a church leader or researcher has a goal in their research of learning whether or not their local church is transitioning from a rural to suburban context, or if it ever will, then the variables of traffic and population are the most basic needs of study. As was stated in chapter one, a suburb is “an outlying part of a city or town, a smaller community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city, the residential area outside of a city or large town.”⁴ With this definition being known, and a study by the United States Census Bureau telling its reader great details regarding the area being studied, all the researcher needs to do is see if the studied area currently is, is becoming, or will become a community adjacent to or within commuting distance of a city.

Studying demographics in order to apply them into one’s unique situation is something that requires strategic thinking for what the researcher is looking for. If a student of demographics is looking at, for instance, how many people are projected to have measles in Bangladesh in twenty years or the use of contraceptives in Bobo-Dioulasso, Africa, they must tailor their research to have variables matching their desideratum.⁵ Therefore, in order to practically study demographics for a church, in order to learn whether or not it is transitioning from a rural to suburban context, one must

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apply the variables of (1) population and (2) traffic throughout the thoroughly researched area.

What Does A Demographically Researched Region Look Like?

As an example of what a demographically researched region looks like, research of Lenoir City, Tennessee will be analyzed. Lenoir City is a small town on the eastern side of the state of Tennessee, five miles southwest of Knoxville, Tennessee. What does a demographic study of Lenoir City specifically, and Knoxville generally, look like?

The following information in figure 1 is gleaned from a “ring” study of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee:

Figure 1. North American Mission Board Ring Study, 37771 zip code.
Within a five minute drive, the current population is 3,842 and the projected five year population is 4,187; within a ten minute drive, the current population is 27,644 and the projected five year population is 30,099; and within a fifteen minute drive, the current population is 61,794 and the projected five year population is 66,831. The population of Lenoir City (6,819), in comparison to Knoxville (183,546) and the entire metropolitan region (655,400) lends one to realize Lenoir City is a smaller town on the outskirts of a larger city.

The traffic patterns around Pleasant Hill Baptist Church show that a transition from a rural to suburban context is taking place, and will continue to do so over the next five years. Currently, 28,320 cars drive past the church on a daily basis. Within a five-minute drive of the church, population is projected to increase by 9%. If the traffic pattern increases by the same amount, then 30,869 cars would drive past the church every day. Table 1 below, shows the traffic patterns near the church properties at its cross street of Shaw Ferry Road.

Table 1. Traffic patterns near Pleasant Hill Baptist Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Street:</th>
<th>Closest Cross-street:</th>
<th>Year of Count</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>Hines Valley Rd</td>
<td>Ellis Rd (0.01 miles E)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>Frank Kinser Rd</td>
<td>United States Highway 321 (0 miles N)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>17,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>United States Highway 321</td>
<td>Broadway of America (0.29 miles SE)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11,490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Hines Valley Rd</td>
<td>Gentry Rd (0.44 miles NE)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>United States Highway 321</td>
<td>Shaw Ferry Rd (0.15 miles NW)</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>28,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Know Whether the Church is in Transition

If a church leader seeks to lead their church in a transition from a rural to suburban context, and they follow the steps outlined in this chapter, they will have quantifiably researched evidence to prove that they are in fact in the midst of this transition, or that they, in fact, are not in this transition. Details have been extrapolated, such as what demographic information is needed, how to obtain demographic research, how to study the research after obtaining it, and what a researched region looks like. If a leader goes through this process, and his research teaches him that he is in the midst of a transition from a rural to suburban context, he will be ready to move forward with the rest of the information provided in this thesis project.
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF PLEASANT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH AND TRADITIONS

As this project seeks to examine how a church transitions from a rural to suburban context, and is using Pleasant Hill Baptist Church as a case study, an historical synopsis of the church must be given. The traditions of Pleasant Hill must be explained in comparison with other traditionally rural church. Tendencies and traditions of suburban churches will also be extrapolated.

An Historical Synopsis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

In the year 1833, Hickory Creek Baptist Church of Lenoir City began a new church in the “old log cabin community meeting house” which stood at the current site of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. Four years later, in 1837, Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church was formally organized.

The church has had twenty-nine pastors over her 176 years of existence. The first pastors served as “circuit-riding preachers.” The pastor would be there once every four to eight weeks to shepherd the Pleasant Hill Missionary Baptist Church flock.

There is little known about the church from her founding in the 1830s through the 1940s except the names of the pastors and their dates of service. In the 1940s the church began having a weekly bulletin, and it was the first time in the church’s history that she had a pastor there on a weekly basis. Students from nearby Carson-Newman College would ride the bus from Jefferson City, Tennessee to Lenoir City, Tennessee on Friday afternoon and return home late Sunday evening.

The church’s current building was constructed from 1956-1958. Despite a new building, the church still has the original bell from the 1830s and rings every Sunday morning. In 1964, the church became debt free and has remained in such financial health since that date.

The church’s greatest time of stability came during her longest-tenured pastor, Rev. Glenn Gamble, 1980 thru 1994. While not seeing phenomenal growth in attendance, the finances increased, and morale was at an all-time high.

From 1994 thru the present day the church has seen inconsistent pastoral leadership with five pastors since that time with each pastor only staying between one and three years. One pastor was fired by the congregation during this period of time, and another was pressured by the church to find a new place of service. The last few months of 2007, the church had less than seventy people in average attendance.

2. Circuit riding preachers were proclaimers of God’s Word during frontier days of England and eventually the frontier days of America. Circuit riding preachers would pastor a handful of churches by riding their horses to a different congregation on a weekly basis. This model of ministry was founded by John Wesley. B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 291.
**Traditions of Pleasant Hill in Comparison with Other Traditionally Rural Churches**

The major traditions in the history of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church include the following: Homecoming Sunday, Sunday school, singing superannuated hymns, and revival meetings. These traditions are similar to the traditions of many rural American churches.

Indeed, the Great Awakenings, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century religious revivals that brought, among other things, Sunday school, revival meetings, and religiously inspired fundraising and contributed significantly to the strength of evangelistic Christianity in America, were largely rural movements if only because the country was largely rural at the time. And the kind of evangelical fundamentalist religion they fostered still resonate strongly throughout much of contemporary rural America.³

The only major traditions that have begun to be changed from the precedents set are that the church no longer has an annual or biannual revival meeting, and the church now sings a blend of hymns and newly-written songs with a praise team instead of a choir. Otherwise, the church is a traditional rural church.

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**Tendencies and Traditions of Suburban Churches**

In reference to the tendencies and traditions of suburban churches, there is less time in their history to have developed deep-rooted traditions. However, there are tendencies that suburban churches have.

Mike Erre pointed out the consumerism mentality of the suburban church is a strong tendency represented when he stated:

> Consumerism is the god of this age. I spend my days choosing between countless goods and services, all designed to cater to my preferences and

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whims. I wake up in the morning and have my choice among an absurd number of breakfast cereals. I can catch up on the news by either reading my choice of newspapers, by checking any number of Web sites, or by watching any one (or more) of two hundred TV channels. I stand in front of my closet looking at over thirty different shirts, thirteen pairs of shoes, pants, shorts – most of which I don’t need, let alone even wear . . . I spend all day, every day, deciding what I want and what will be most pleasing to me . . . My life is based on my right to choose. So it is no surprise that this mentality creeps into the church.

Erwin McManus, in his book Unstoppable Force, makes a distinction regarding the church, which has stuck with me. McManus distinguishes between the church as a movement and the church as an institution. A movement is concerned with its mission – it exists for a reason and will stretch itself to grow and accommodate to fulfill that mission. An institution, on the other hand, exists for itself – it seeks to maintain the status quo and usually has a great deal of resistance to change. A movement adapts and grows; an institution preserves and guards . . . God intended His church to be a movement.4

Besides suburban churches having a mentality of consumerism, there are other tendencies that suburban churches tend to lean toward. Worship services tend to be . . .

. . . high energy and includes entertainment forms such as contemporary music, plays, and skits, while youth programs might include church-made music videos, arcade games, and laser light shows – the emphasis seems to be on entertainment to keep a high level of interest.5

Ostwalt examined Niebuhr’s perspective on the traditions being developed by suburban churches, and stated,

. . . that many contemporary religious traditions have adopted a reactionary stance toward, technology, popular culture, and the secular world, employing elements of popular culture in an ‘If you can’t beat’em, join’em’ mentality in order to remain competitive and relevant in contemporary society.6

As Pleasant Hill Baptist Church prepares to make the transition from a rural to suburban context, a fine line of sensitivity must be walked. The traditions and historicity must be kept in perspective, but not dwelt upon to the point of holding the church back from charging forward. Also, the church must be careful to remain true to her theological roots while becoming more suburbanized so as to not water down the Gospel.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PLEASANT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH

If a church is to transition from a rural to suburban context, they must initially know where they are before they determine where they are going. Multiple facets of the local church must be examined in order to most accurately gauge where the church is going. As this project is using Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee as a case study, her particular statistics will be examined to know what the church’s current state is. Areas to be examined are the following: worship service attendance, Sunday morning Bible study attendance, undesignated receipts, baptismal statistics, and an analysis of the church’s facilities.

**Worship Attendance**

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church went through a controversial period of time in the year 2006 with the loss of a staff member due to poor financial discretion. As a result of this, the church lost over 60 average attendees. This was a decrease in attendees of more than 30%.

Through the end of 2007, the church averaged less than 100 people in attendance. In March of 2008, the church called a new pastor, the author of this thesis, and the
average attendance increased by 23% from the previous year. The graph below illustrates the ebb and flow the church has seen in worship service attendance over the previous four years.

![Worship Attendance Graph](image)

Figure 2. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church worship attendance.

**Sunday Morning Bible Study Attendance**

The Sunday morning Bible study, traditionally referred to as “Sunday school” is the weakest ministry of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. When the large number of parishioners left the church in 2006, not only did the worship service attendance decrease, but so did the Sunday morning Bible study attendance. The attendance decreased from 120 in 2006 to 88 in 2007, and decreased further by an average of two
people down to 86 in 2008. The graph below illustrates the ebb and flow the church has seen in Sunday morning Bible study attendance over the previous two decades.

Some sort of discipleship program, including a Sunday school format, is still important to the local church. This sort of ministry creates, “. . . excitement, caring relationships, and growth as vital dimensions of church life.”

Figure 3. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church Sunday morning Bible study attendance.

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Undesignated Receipts

The financial health of a church can tell someone a lot about the spiritual health of a church. For example, if a church member informs the pastor of their withdrawal of giving due to disagreement with a decision that was made, it is not only an abuse of the privilege of participation, but it is also a sign of poor spiritual help.\textsuperscript{2} Money talks.

The church’s finances, in recent years, have seen a significant ebb and flow. The finances rose to as high as nearly $300,000 in annual undesignated receipts, and dipped as low as $150,000 in 2007. In the most completed financial year, the undesignated receipts were approximately $175,000.

![Undesignated Receipts](image)

Figure 4. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church undesignated receipts

**Baptisms**

Baptisms gauge the evangelistic effectiveness of a church. While no one knows exactly how many seeds of faith were planted in any given year, baptisms serve as the simplest process for measuring the church’s evangelistic efforts.

Pleasant Hill’s evangelistic effectiveness is one that has transitioned from nearly non-existent in 2007 to thriving in 2008. The church went from just one baptism to 18 baptisms in those two years. Over a period of the last 20 years, the church has seen as many as 60 baptisms, and as few as zero baptisms.

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Property and Facilities

The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church property and facilities need some upgrades and need some areas need to be remodeled. The church has the following major aspects of property and facilities: office building, worship center, library, Bible study and fellowship rooms, signage, playground, the parking lot and fields of land.

Office Building

The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church office is in a 100-year-old house across the parking lot from the main church building. This house is in disrepair. The Building and Grounds Committee had the office inspected both structurally, and they also had the air
quality tested. A natural gas leak was found directly beneath the pastor’s office, and he was being slowly poisoned with carbon monoxide.

Furthermore, professionals did an inspection of the mold. Mold was found in the crawl space underneath the house, as well as an estimate of mold in the interior walls. For health reasons, the house is uninhabitable.

Also, there are structural problems that force the house to no longer be used. Expert inspectors informed the Building and Grounds Committee that the house needs a new foundation, a new roof, new siding, new interior walls, new carpet and tile on the interior, new pipes as more natural gas leaks will come without that. This house needs to be torn down.

Worship Center

The worship center was remodeled four years ago, and is in excellent condition. It has a new sound system, a new projection system, new lighting, recording equipment for sermons, and has seating for 300 people. The only thing the Worship Center could use is slight touch-up painting, but that is very minimal.

Education and Fellowship

The education and fellowship building, that is attached to the Worship Center building, has received few, if any, upgrades to her structure, décor, and even paint and carpet. The library spans across three classrooms, but could be consolidated down to one room without getting rid of any books. The bottom floor, which is a basement, floods and needs to be repaired. The entire education and fellowship area needs new carpet and
paint.

Signage

The current signage on the interior of the property is rusted, antiquated, and has not been upgraded in over twenty-five years. The interior has no signage. When guests enter the building, they do not have directions for where to find restrooms, children’s areas, classrooms, or the Worship Center.

Playground and Fields

The playground was upgraded in 2008 and is in pristine condition now. New gravel and toys were added to the playground, along with new landscaping. Now, the playground looks like an appealing place for neighbors from around the community to bring their kids to play.

The fields on the church property span two acres. They are on a steep hill, and are kept mowed. The rolling hills leading to the church property, with the Smokey Mountains in the distance lead to the church having a picturesque view from the road.

Southern Baptist Churches in the Area

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church is one of 38 Southern Baptist churches in Loudon County, Tennessee. If you look to near counties, there are even more. In Figure 6 below, all of the red names written represent different Southern Baptist churches surrounding Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, while Pleasant Hill is in the middle of the figure.
The Church’s Current State

In order for a local church to transition from a rural to suburban context, church leadership must analyze, synthesize, and summarize the present state of the church. As a church prepares to move forward, it is vital to know where they are. After this takes place, then a church can transition her thoughts to vision development and fresh ideas to transition from a rural to suburban context.
CHAPTER 5

CONCEPTS IN TRANSITIONING AND VISION DEVELOPMENT

Developing a fresh vision for the church as she transitions her context requires multitudinous steps from the pastor, staff, and lay leadership. This chapter will outline the steps church leaders need to walk through in order to comprehend what the vision may look like before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision.

If a person were to look at the big picture process of transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context as one preparing a meal, demographic analysis from chapter four would be analogous to preparing a shopping list to know what is currently in the cupboard of the church’s community and what will be needed moving forward. The conceptual aspect of transitioning and development would be analogous to shopping for the groceries.

The two primary steps of conceptually transitioning and preparing to envision the next step of the church into the future are to (1) seek spiritual guidance, and (2) seek to find the specific needs of the church’s community.

Seek Spiritual Guidance

Throughout the process of rural to suburban church transition, a constant process
of praying, fasting, Scripture meditation, and wise counsel from elder ecclesial leaders must be sought. Leadership in the church must walk down the proverbial aisles of prayer to seek wisdom from the Lord, get alone with God through fasting in order to completely concentrate on communicating with God about the direction of the church as the community changes, daily spend time in God’s Word and receive His manna, strongly examine the peripatetic fads of supposed church growth experts, and receive insight from seasoned church leaders from multiple walks of life.

**Praying**

Prayer is one of the most vital aspects of preparation for conceptually transitioning and preparing to envision the next step of the church into the future. When praying for God to assist His church leaders in moving forward, it is important they know their prayers do, in fact, influence God. Also, they must pray God’s way, and seek wisdom from Him.

**Prayers Influence God**

If one prays to God and requests guidance, wisdom, and clarity for what the next steps will be, the prayers can and do influence God. S.D. Gordon stated,

Prayer surely does influence God. It does not influence His purpose. It does influence His action. Everything that has ever been prayed for, of course I mean every right thing, God has already purposed to do. But He does nothing without our consent. He has been hindered in His purposes by our lack of willingness.¹

If church leaders decidedly pray to the Lord for His purpose of the local church to

thrive, then his actions will lead to seeing that purpose and those goals fulfilled. “God’s wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals.”

The local church’s goals are clearly outlined in Acts 1:8, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” God’s purpose of the local church being His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth will not change; however prayers will influence how effectively God will be used to fulfill that mission.

**Pray God’s Way**

“When we learn to pray the kingdom way, there are amazing results. When we connect with God in prayer, we are given His very presence and power for living.”

In the process of transitioning a church from a rural to suburban context, and seeking amazing results by praying God’s way, a natural question evolves: How does one pray God’s way? The prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 33:3, “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.” In order to pray God’s way, a person needs to simply call to God. Prayer is that simple. It does not require going to a priest to serve as a communicator for a person. All it requires is that a person calls out to God.

Jesus was the epitome of living the example of calling out to God the Father. The author of Hebrews went into great detail of Jesus, who lived a life of prayer, in Hebrews

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7:25, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Jesus continually, consistently, fervently, and passionately intercedes for those who draw near to Him.

**Seek Wisdom from the Lord**

Since praying to God is so simple, what should a person ask the Lord? The answer to this question is one word: wisdom. The strategy of how to fulfill the church’s purpose changes based upon context, and seeking wisdom from the Lord, through prayer, is essential in effectively transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context. Solomon knew of the importance of seeking God’s wisdom. 1 Kings 3:5 says, “At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, ‘Ask what I shall give you.’” Of all the things in the world Solomon could have asked for, almost as if a genie had a bottle granting one wish, in 1 Kings 3:9 Solomon sought the greatest thing he could ever obtain from the Lord, “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

Solomon’s communication with the Lord, praying to Him, led to His prayer influencing God. If church leaders go to the Lord and seek His wisdom through prayer, they will influence how effectively God’s purpose is fulfilled.

Solomon also stated, in Proverbs 4:7, “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.” Prayers need to be lifted to the Lord by church leaders for the church leadership, and church body as a whole to be given wisdom from the Lord.
Conceptually transitioning and preparing to envision the next step of the church into the future, wisdom is desperately needed. A church leader seeking wisdom for the Lord to know what God’s plan is as the future comes near must truly seek God’s wisdom, and not lift a prayer out of ritualism or religiosity. The desire for wisdom needs to overflow out of the heart. “Real prayers, whether extempore or liturgical, are the expression in words of the desire or desires of those who are uttering them.” The Psalmist wrote, in Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” If a church leader has pure intentions to see their congregation become as effective as possible to reach their changing culture, then they need to ask the Lord, and the Lord will give them the desire of their heart as long as it strengthens God’s purpose for changing the world to bring Him more glory.

Fasting

Not only do church leaders need to pray to the Lord, in God’s way, to seek wisdom from Him, but they also need to fast. Simply defined, fasting is, “the abstinence from food with a spiritual goal in mind or for a spiritual purpose.” The spiritual goal and purpose in this situation is for the Lord to give guidance to church leadership in order that they may comprehend what the vision may look like before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision.

The resource of God’s supernatural power is available for followers of Him. It would be foolish to not utilize the most amazing resource available to any person or thing

in this world and beyond.

God is willing and able to bless His people in our day with His unfailing supernatural power. He simply waits for individuals, churches, and nations to acknowledge their dependence on Him and His grace. Only then will the spiritual blessings He has promised be showered on those who commit themselves to radical obedience and absolute trust. But this won’t come easily. There will be a price to pay. The gateway to God’s supernatural power is prayer and fasting.\(^6\)

Fasting is not something limited to pastors, monks, or people who may seem overly-religious. Fasting is an essential part of attaining a spiritual goal and moving to a higher level of effectiveness in bringing glory to God. The reason it works is because when one removes food from their diet for several days, the clutter that distracts them becomes removed and sensitivity to God is increased.\(^7\)

An historical example of a person seeking a spiritual goal by fasting is David. In Psalm 24:7, David said, “Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me.” David was refraining from food, and his hunger and thirst for God became greater than his natural desire for food. David was going through a time of confusion, a time of searching, and a time of trial, where he was crying from the depths of his spirit to the depths of God.

Once you’ve experienced even a glimpse of that kind of intimacy with our God, our Father – the Holy Creator of the Universe – and the countless rewards and blessings that follow, your whole perspective will change. You will soon realize that fasting is a secret source of power that is overlooked by many.\(^8\)

As the process of seeking spiritual guidance from the Lord to give clarity of His

\(^6\) Ibid., 7.
\(^8\) Ibid.
plan for the future of the church takes place, there is no rigid rule of how long the fast must be. The important part of it is that one refrains from food in order to remove distractions of the world, be humbled physically, and have more clarity with God. James, the half-brother of Jesus, stated in James 4:10, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” If a church leader wants to see their church lifted to another level of Kingdom-wide effectiveness, the leader must be humbled before they can be exalted.

**Scripture Meditation**

While seeking spiritual guidance, praying and fasting must be high priorities while preparing to hash out what the vision may look like before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision for the next step of the church transitioning from a rural to suburban context. In order to keep prayer and fasting in proper perspective, the *meditatio Scripturarum*, meditation on the Scripture, must be the central reference point. “Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you.”

Psalm 77 gives an ideal example of the benefits of meditating on the Scriptures. Asaph was distressful and sorrowful in verses 1-9. Verses 10-20 describe how he overcame those problems through the mediation of the Scriptures. During sleepless nights as the Lord was working on his heart, in verse 3, he said, “When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints.” In verse 5, Asaph’s dysphoria was expressed as he recalled happier days, and in verse 6 he reflected on what he learned from God’s

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Word during happy times in his life. In verse 12, Asaph told the Lord, “I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.” “The psalmist’s deep despondency gave way to God’s deliverance when he focused on meditating on the works of God. This is the exact desired outcome of all devotional reading of the text of Scripture.”

Meditation is a function of someone seeking to fill their heart on that which they are meditating on. Psalm 49:3 teaches of how the goal of meditation is understanding when it says, “My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.” That which is to be meditated upon is God’s Word, according to Joshua 1:8. The end result of Scripture meditation is that “the Word of God remains constantly in the heart of believers in every situation that they find themselves in: when they sit down in their houses, get up to walk, lie down in the evening, or get up in the morning.”

If a church leader is consumed, marinating in God’s Word, overwhelmed with the aroma of God’s presence as a result of meditating on His sacred Text, the leader will be much better-prepared to understand what the vision may look like before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision for the next step of the church transitioning from a rural to suburban context.

Peripatetic Fads in Church Growth

As a part of seeking spiritual guidance in preparation before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision, it is important to realize the need for high prioritization of prayer, fasting, and Scriptural meditation instead of merely

11. Ibid. Also see the following verses for more details: Deut. 6:6-9; Proverbs 3:22-24; 6:22.
choosing to do something because it is a fad. Fads come and fads go. Fads are peripatetic. God, however, is anything but peripatetic. God is immutable. Erickson spoke of this nature of God when he said,

There is no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything, because He is already perfection. Nor can He decrease, for if He were to, He would cease to be God. There is also no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification.¹²

As a part of spiritual guidance, it is important to properly examine fads in church growth to understand if this truly is spiritual guidance, or if it is guidance of this world. It is also important to understand the difference between drawing a crowd and developing deep disciples of Jesus Christ. Seeking to draw a crowd as opposed to drawing glory to God is worldly.

Worldly Guidance

As human beings, people have natural inclinations to draw attention to themselves. This is true with Christians and non-Christians alike. As one seeks to prepare for a gathering of people to develop a team to seek out the vision for the future of a transitioning local church, guidance must come from God Himself and not from guidance of this world. This is especially true when it comes to following the guidance of faddish church growth leaders instead of seeking the guidance of God. Guidance from a man is not a bad thing, as long as it is from a wise person.¹³ However, solely reading books, blogs, or other various writings of church growth is seeking wisdom from man and not from God.

¹² Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 304.
¹³ More details on this will be extrapolated later in this chapter.
A lesson on guidance from this world may be gleaned from James 3:13-16,

“[13]Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. [14]But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. [15]This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. [16]For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

James 3:15, in particular, informs readers of the origin of worldly guidance. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. The wisdom of the world does not come from the Mighty Counselor. According to v. 15, it has a threefold origin: (1) earthly (2) unspiritual (3) of the Devil. This same trio is mentioned in Ephesians 2:1-3: the world, the flesh, and the devil. 1 John 2:16 also refers to these things, “For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.” The wisdom of the world comes from the secular, the sensual, and the Satanic.

Wisdom of the World is Secular

The wisdom of the world is “earthly.” The Greek word translated as “earthly,” ἐπιγείως, appears only seven times in the New Testament. Speaking of the enemies of the cross, Paul used the same word in Philippians 3:19, “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.”

Wisdom that originates in the secular results in confusion. Genesis 11:1-9 provides an example. In the hopes of making a name for themselves, the ancients applied

humanistic methods and secular wisdom to get God’s attention. Building a tower seemed like the wise thing to do. But the tower of Babel was not God’s idea, and therefore it brought about confusion and disorder.

Many years later, secular wisdom reasoned that it would be wise to put King Saul’s armor on young David when he was about to fight Goliath. However, it was not God’s wisdom, and therefore it created confusion. Saul looked to the wisdom and therefore it created confusion. Saul looked to the wisdom of the world while David looked to the wisdom of the Word. So often, people in general, including church leadership, seek to make decisions in the same way as Saul. Earthly, worldly wisdom has its roots in the secular world’s systems of thought.

Just as Saul immediately thought the way to overcome the enemy was to put on armor because that is what so many other fighters were doing, many church leaders think they need to lead their church down a particular path just because others do the same thing. This is not a plan of God; this is secular planning.

Wisdom of the World is Sensual

Wisdom of the world not only comes from the secular, but also from the sensual. As church leaders seek to differentiate between guidance from God and guidance from the world in preparation of developing a team to cast a fresh vision for the church, the sensual aspect of a lack of wisdom may get in the way.

15. 1 Samuel 17:38.
The wisdom of the world is unspiritual, according to James 3:15. The Greek word translated as “unspiritual,” φιλικος, is an adjective derived from psyche, which means “the soul.”\(^\text{16}\) The word “psychology” from this word.

In English, two different words are used to differentiate between man’s immaterial parts. One is “ψυχή,” (psyche) or “soul”: the other is “πνεῦμα,” (pneuma) or “spirit.”\(^\text{17}\) James 3:15 refers to the psyche, that which animates the body, that which gives life. Animals have psyche, but no pneuma.

The ancients believed that man can be divided into three parts: spirit, soul, and body.\(^\text{18}\) There is the soma (body) comprised of physical flesh and bones. There is also the psyche (the soul) that animates the body, giving it life and personality. Finally there is the pneuma (the spirit) that only a human being possesses. The spirit is what differentiates man from animals. Man’s spirit enables him to connect with God.

Sometimes, the word “soul” is used in the same sense as the ancients used the word “spirit.” But in the first-century Greek world, psyche meant sensual physical life; that which sees, hears, smells, touches, and tastes. By referring to the psyche instead of the pneuma, wisdom that animals use. It is more than natural instinct. There is no other thought than that of personal survival. Decisions are based merely on the senses – the sensual.

Worldly wisdom is perceived by senses. It says, “If it feels good, do it.” It places feelings above faith. It is sensual and unspiritual. Its philosophy is, “I’ll believe it when

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18. Ibid.
I can see it or touch it or smell it or taste it or hear it.” It operates in the realm of the soul instead of the realm of the spirit. This type of wisdom does not connect man with God, the source of true wisdom. This connection is only made when man’s spirit bears witness with His spirit.

Church leadership cannot simply take a pragmatic look at church growth as they prepare to move into the future with a vision team. If church leadership takes a sensual approach to leading the church, they’d make decisions based upon that which they could see, or hear, as opposed to changing their heart.

Wisdom of the World is Satanic

The wisdom of the world is “of the Devil.” The original word daimoniodes literally means “pertaining to demons.” This wisdom is demonic of origin. Simply stated, the wisdom of the world finds its origin in the Devil and not in God. Satan, the ruler of this world, is the power behind the wisdom of the world. Satan wants church leaders to read more books about church growth than they read the Word of God.

The wisdom of the world began in the Garden of Eden when Satan successfully deceived Eve into using the wisdom of the world instead of the wisdom of the Word. The wisdom of the Word that she had received from God said in Genesis 2:16-17, “[16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

20. Ibid.
The wisdom of the world, which was secular and sensual and Satanic, said, “You will surely not die.” Eve made her choice in Genesis 3:6, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

Eve chose the wisdom of the world and the result was the same as that of James 3:16. Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. If church leaders wish and desire they could be like a bigger church, or a church in a better financial situation, or in a church where the business meetings are times of celebration instead of bitterness, their jealousy and selfish ambition exhibits the Satanic wisdom of the world.

How did Satan’s deceit create a selfish desire? A selfish desire resulted in a sinful decision. A sinful decision brought sure defeat. Eve’s choice had its roots in that which was secular, sensual, and Satanic; that is, the wisdom of the world.

Outcome of the Wisdom of the World

The wisdom of the world results in “envy,” zelos. The verb from which zelos is derived means “to boil” or “to bubble up.” The word “zeal” comes from zelos. Zeal has to do with fire. Fire can be good or bad. If a fire is under control, it can bring warmth on a cold night or cook a delicious warm meal. If a fire is out of control, it can

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23. Richardson, 166-167.
burn down a house, or cause a large forest fire. So it is with zeal; it can be constructive or destructive. Zeal, fire for God, can warm other people. Zeal can also burn others.

Some examples of envy, an outcome of wisdom of the world are when Cain killed Abel\textsuperscript{24} and when Joseph’s brothers threw Joseph into the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites.\textsuperscript{25}

Other results of applying wisdom of the world to one’s life, besides envy, include selfish ambition, disorder, and perversion. Instead of seeking wisdom from the world and resulting in such terrible consequences, it is important to draw close to God and His Word.

Drawing A Crowd vs. Developing Disciples

Some fads in church growth concentrate on drawing a crowd instead of developing devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. If drawing a large crowd was the measure of success, then Britney Spears, Elvis Presley, and Michael Jackson would have served as exquisite pastors at the peaks of their respective careers. Ed Young, Jr., Senior Pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas, wrote of his emphasis on leading his church for the crowd coming instead of the Lord Jesus when he said, “Our signs, direct mail, bulletins, messages, worship service, the words we use, the timing of our teaching series, programming – all are geared toward the seeker.”\textsuperscript{26} Their church’s leadership seeks to draw the people as opposed to drawing the presence of God.

\textsuperscript{24} Genesis 4.
\textsuperscript{25} Genesis 37.
Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, used to lead his church in the same way. After a detailed year of research on the effectiveness of the Willow Creek model of ministry, Hybels and his church’s leadership learned a paradigm-shifting truth:

We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become ‘Self feeders.’ We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between services, and how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.27

As a result of this major shift in the truth of their ministry of building the vision, ministries, marketing, sermons, and everything else around the seeker instead of the Saviour, Hybels realized a fundamental change needed to take place.

Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church. That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights. Insights that are informed by research and rooted in Scripture. Our dream is really to discover what God is doing and how he's asking us to transform this planet.28

While examining the peripatetic fads of church growth, examining if the fads, the movements, the trendy approaches to ministry are focused on bringing glory to God or just people to sit in a room and listen to a person give an entertaining thirty minute presentation.

Wise Counsel

Just because God knows everything, while man is extremely limited in his knowledge, it is still important to seek wise counsel. Studying statisticians and church

28. Ibid.
growth specialists can be beneficial if handled with proper balance. For example, it is important to see where the church currently stands in terms of it’s effectiveness as a twenty-first century congregation. Ed Stetzer spoke of the antiquarian nature of a majority of Southern Baptist churches when he stated, “If the 1950’s come back, Southern Baptists are ready to go.”

Seek Needs of the Community

Besides seeking spiritual guidance, guidance must also be sought by the needs of the community. In order to know the needs of the community, studies of the rates of divorce, suicide, depression, teen pregnancy, abortion, alcoholism, theft, poverty, healthcare struggles, and multiple other social difficulties to know what the local church’s community needs to specifically address.

As Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Lenoir City, Tennessee is being used as a case study throughout this thesis, understanding the needs of the community around Pleasant Hill is needed. Lenoir City, Tennessee has a terrible problem of teen pregnancies. According to the local CBS television affiliate covering east Tennessee, Knoxville, and Lenoir City, among others, there are over 90 counties in the state of Tennessee, and Loudon County has the third highest teen pregnancy rate in the state.

As this issue is so prevalent, Pleasant Hill assisted in the opening of Hope Resource Center, an unwanted pregnancy center to provide teaching on abstinence,

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medical assistance, including sonograms, and counseling. The church sends volunteers and money to Hope resource Center to reach the community as it transitions from a rural to suburban context and faces new challenges. Other churches are in communities with terrible drug problems, or issues with violence, and those churches need to minister to their community to fix those difficult needs.

The two primary steps of conceptually transitioning and preparing to envision the next step of the church into the future are to (1) seek spiritual guidance, and (2) seek to find the specific needs of the church’s community. Church leaders need to walk through these steps in order to comprehend what the vision may look like before a group of people is officially gathered together to help develop the vision. After this process is complete, the church and her leadership will be ready to develop a vision and strategy for the future of the church.
CHAPTER 6

VISION AND TRANSITION STRATEGY

Developing a fresh vision for the church as she transitions her context requires a strategic plan. As the future of the community is rapidly changing, the church cannot remain stagnant. To this point, the project has been introduced, details of demographic analyses have been elaborated, an historical analysis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church has taken place, the current state of Pleasant Hill has been explained, and concepts in transitioning and developments have been given. After following through with the preparation of the previous five chapters, church leaders are then ready to begin the process of developing a vision, and a strategy to fulfill that vision.

As churches envelope this exciting stage of envisioning the future of the church as the transition from a rural to suburban context will then have a laid-out plan, several things must be examined: vision, the scenario the pastor finds himself in, laying a foundation, developing a strategy team, compiling research and information, analyzing information, developing a purpose statement along with a vision statement and core values, and finally goals.

Vision

The transition from a rural to a suburban context must take place strategically. It
must be clarified with vision. As a part of this process, vision needs to be defined, see what the Bible says about vision, specifically examine what pastors should do as visionary leaders, and learn of questions that visionary leaders should ask.

**Vision Defined**

Some churches are dying because of either a lack of vision, or because of failed vision.¹ It is because of this that vision must be defined with complete clarity. There are many definitions of the word “vision.” Succinctly defined, vision is, “the act or power of imagination; mode of seeing or conceiving; unusual discernment or foresight.”² Jonathan Swift defined it this way, “Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.”³ George Barna stated, “Vision is a clear mental portrait of the future.”⁴

**Vision According to the Bible**

Since vision has now been defined, it is important to understand what the Bible has to say about it. Habakkuk 2:2-3 states, “[2] And the LORD answered me: ‘Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. [3] For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay.’”

Proverbs 29:18a states, “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained,”

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⁴ Michael, 92.
Pastors As Visionary Leaders

John MacArthur spoke of pastors as visionary leaders when he said,

Pastors must be men of vision. They must possess a deep sense of what they are to do, where they ought to go, and how they are to do it. Vision supplies these directions. Vision is critical to the life of the church as it is for any organization. ‘A vision gives life,’ wrote Lee, ‘and if there is no vision, the seeds of death are being sown and it is just a matter of time until death will prevail.’

Throughout history, it is evident that one of the marks of greatness among leaders is the ability to see a clear picture of a future reality that does not exist and to mobilize people and resources to make it happen. Effective leaders are able to create and sustain a compelling vision for the future. Pastors, especially, must do this.

Jesus, the Great Shepherd, certainly is a God and man of vision. His vision can be seen in the Great Commission in which He imparted to His followers a vision and a mission to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And each local church and Christian organization must discover a unique way to implement that vision through the local body of Christ.

Henry and Richard Blackaby stated, “For Christians, God alone sets the agenda. God remains unimpressed with leaders’ grandiose schemes and dreams because He is able to do immeasurably more than mortals can comprehend.”

Questions for Visionary Leaders

In a sermon at Thomas Road Baptist Church, the late Dr. Jerry Falwell, Founder

of Liberty University and Thomas Road Baptist Church, stated four questions for world-changing followers of Jesus Christ: (1) What would I try if I thought I might succeed? (2) What goals would I set if I knew I would not fail? (3) What price am I willing to pay? (4) What sacrifice am I willing to make?8

These questions are set up to allow someone to completely let loose with their ideas and dreams for what the future could hold. What would happen if church leaders in a congregation experiencing a transition from a rural to suburban setting would completely let go of all inhibitions and allow God to take over? With a fresh change to the community, a fresh vision has to take place. The pastor’s scenario, however, induces a large influence on what the vision looks like.

**The Pastor’s Scenario**

Pastors facing a church in the midst of a transition from a rural to suburban setting can come from multiple scenarios. These scenarios mold exactly how the vision comes from his mind, and from the mind of other church leaders. One may look at multiple scenarios and see if they can relate to any of the following:9

**A. The First Pastor**

A pastor was called to the church just one month ago. He has an objective perspective of the church and her community because he has not been consumed by it

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for a long period of time. This pastor is pondering what the vision looks like, and how he can get his new congregants to buy into the new vision and make it a part of their daily lives.

B. The Second Pastor

Another pastor just moved to a church that has never seen significant growth. The church has faced a plateau over several years throughout her history, and has declined in more recent years. This new pastor has a new vision for the church. It may not be a mega-church, but it has much more potential than the majority of the church truly realizes. This pastor has a great deal of willingness to lead, but wants to know if the church will follow. Will the church leaders get on board?

C. The Third Pastor

This pastor has served his church for five years. Things have not gone exactly according to plan. Five years ago, this pastor had high hopes. The Pastor Search Committee, claiming to represent the whole church, said the church was ready to move forward. The previous pastor’s departure resulted in some people leaving the church, and the pastor entered the fray with a lack of momentum. The church members who did not leave were not in perfect agreement, but they trusted this pastor to step into his lead role of their congregational bailiwick and save the sinking ship. After time has passed, however, this pastor is growing weary, and knows the church’s leaders need a boost.
D. The Fourth Pastor

Last night was yet another meeting with the primary leadership in the church for this pastor. Now, 18 months into this pastorate, the pastor is realizing the meeting with church leaders sounds just like the previous meeting, and the meeting before the previous meeting, then the one before that, ad infinitum. The calendar looks eerily similar to the previous year’s calendar. The leadership bicycle feels more like a stationary bike than it does a velocipede ascending through the French Alps on the Tour de France. This pastor is pedaling with all of his might, but is not going anywhere. How will this pastor get his church out of her rut?

E. The Fifth Pastor

Over the last decade this pastor has served at the same church, and he has seen consistent growth. Attendance has boomed, and the baptismal waters are stirred during nearly every service. Giving is great, and the church is completely debt free. This pastor is even leading his church to break ground on a new Worship Center that is triple the size of the current one. The big fear in this pastor’s heart is losing momentum. This is the largest church he has ever been a member of, much less has served as Senior Pastor.

These five scenarios touch either some or all of the major perspectives of church leaders. There are no easy answers. Knowing what vision looks like, and understanding the pastor’s current scenario leads to a solid foundation being laid.
Laying A Foundation

As a part of laying the foundation for developing a vision and a strategy to fulfill the vision, benefits of transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context with a plan must be seen, timing out the plan must be thought-out, and a Biblical basis for planning need to be described.

Benefits of Planning

The benefits of planning the transition a church will have from a rural to suburban context are the following: it puts the church in a mode of thinking ahead, it unifies the church body, it enhances the opportunity for the church to exercise good stewardship, it allows a church to have a voice, it provides a way for a church to evaluate effectiveness, it reveals strengths and weaknesses, and it allows the church to embrace change.

Thinking Ahead

Many churches get stuck in a mentality to simply “keep the church afloat.” Planning assists the church in moving ahead from a time of treading water to a time of charging ahead. The church that plans is on her toes, and is no longer on her heels. Planning in a strategic way helps the church become proactive to the mission instead of reactive to its environment.  

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10. Frances Knight goes as far as to say the British ancestry of America, and their mentality to “keep the church afloat” has led to the same mentality for multiple centuries in the United States. Frances Knight, The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 208.
Unified Church Body

As members of the church develop a unified agreement on what the church’s purpose is, the church will transition from a lack of alignment to running full speed with exquisite alignment on all cylinders. Moving forward becomes significantly easier if there is no dead weight of ecclesial disunity holding the church back.

A unified church body, as a result of strategic planning, can be illustrated by a Peanuts cartoon. In this cartoon, Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. “What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” asked Linus. “These five fingers,” said Lucy. “Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold.” “Which channel do you want?” asked Linus. Turning away, he looked at his fingers and said, “Why can't you guys get organized like that?”

The Bible addresses the importance for a unified church in Ephesians 4:1-6,

[1]I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2]with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3]eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4]There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5]one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6]one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

A church that gains unity from strategic planning can gather together to accomplish more as opposed to suffering through disunity and different cliques in the church trying to accomplish goals their own way. The process of strategic planning gives

all church members, staff and laity alike, a platform to healthily discuss issues in the church that need to be addressed. With this platform, decision-making and problem-solving can take place.

**Good Stewardship**

The only way to be the most effective stewards of God’s financial, building, and staff resources is to strategically plan. At the United States Library of Congress, they sought to develop a strategic plan to most effectively take care of their multitudinous books and staff members. The plan was used to serve as,

. . . a blueprint for ensuring that the library’s collections are safe and available for current and future generations. The plan identified four areas that must be satisfactorily addressed . . . Because the plan was developed collaboratively rather than being imposed from the outside, staff have considerable buy-in, a shared vocabulary, and an effective way to make the best use of limited resources.\(^\text{13}\)

A blueprint, a strategic plan, for the future of the church as her community changes, allows all resources to be strategically utilized to be as effective as possible for allowing the church to thrive. The strategic planning process assists in answering questions such as the following: What areas of service should church members place their energies? How should we use God’s money given to this church? What is the most effective way to utilize our buildings and individual rooms? When looking at all of these questions pertaining to stewardship, the only way to effectively answer them is to develop a strategic plan.\(^\text{14}\)

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14. More on stewardship will be extrapolated in chapter 10.
The Church Has A Voice

The church does not have to try every idea that comes across the table. Churches are individually unique, so the strategies they utilize will be unique. Just because there are multiple churches going through the same process of seeing their respective communities change does not mean they all develop the same strategic plan of transition. An insightful strategic plan allows a church to have a voice to communicate when to carry through with an idea or program, and when to decide to not enact such a change. “Sometimes, by identifying the changes required to support the strategic plan, board and staff resistance (fears of loss of control, lack of confidence, or vulnerability) can be identified.”\textsuperscript{15} This process of strategic planning gives a voice to the congregation.

Evaluate Effectiveness

“What is defined as effectiveness in a rural church and what is defined as effectiveness in a growing suburban church will differ. A strategic plan provides a base by which a church can measure its progress.”\textsuperscript{16}

Andy Stanley described his form of evaluation as pastor of North Point Community Church when he stated,

I have made it a habit to ask our top people these questions: What do you want us to do? How can I help you find greater satisfaction within this organization? Where are your skills not being put to good use? How can I help you focus your time and energy on the thing(s) that tap into your core competencies as well as well as add value to this organization?\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{16} Marshall, 10.

Members of the church body can gain a sense of positive direction as a result of strategic planning, and when members of the church sense positive direction, they are more likely to give of their time and resources. As more time and resources are given by church members, a positive transition from a rural to suburban context is more likely to occur.

**Reveals Strengths and Weaknesses**

A church that fails to develop a strategic plan may never pause for self-analysis in order to realize their personal strengths and weaknesses. Developing a strategic plan to assist the church in transitioning from a rural to suburban context acts as a mirror for the church to see her organizational pros and cons. If the person looking in the mirror sees a weakness of having gained some unnecessary weight, they can then make adjustments to their diet and exercise routine to remedy the problem. If they see their haircut looks nice, they can make sure they continue to use the same hair stylist to continue down the right path on that particular strength. Just as a person will look in the mirror to see what they look like, so must a church.

As this process reveals strengths and weaknesses, it allows the pastor to analyze his strengths and weaknesses as well. However, instead of trying to make himself a much more well-rounded leader, the process of revealing strengths and weaknesses through strategic planning can instead give him wisdom on what he needs to delegate to more people. What is meant by not seeking to become “well-rounded” is that the pastor would instead find people who are good at his weaknesses so he does not waste his time with those things.
Read the biographies of the achievers in any arena of life. You will find over and over that these were not ‘well-rounded’ leaders. They were men and women of focus. We should strive for balance organizationally, but it is not realistic to strive for balance within the sphere of our personal leadership abilities. Striving for balance forces a person to invest time and energy in aspects of leadership where he will never excel. When the point person in an organization strives for balance, he potentially robs other leaders of an opportunity to perform at the top of their game . . . When a leader attempts to become well-rounded, he brings down the average of the organization’s leadership quotient – which brings down the level of the leaders around him. Don’t strive to be a well-rounded leader. Instead, discover your zone and stay there. Then delegate everything else.18

The strategic planning process reveals the strengths and weaknesses of a church.

It also assists the church in embracing change.

**Embracing Change**

Sixteen percent of any community or organization is called “laggards.” They are essentially bound by tradition. They are the last people in the church who will change, if they ever change. As futuristic thinking leaders have their eyes fixed ahead, laggards have their eyes fixed on the past. “Don’t think that Laggards are clueless or even bad people. They can embrace change, but it takes them a long, long time to feel happy or secure.”19 Laggards are people who may have gone through a terrible tragedy in the past. They may have been burned. This is a reason why people who went through the Great Depression are typically against change. A decade of their life was a time when people were told to not take risks.20

A time of strategic planning assists in having people embrace change instead of

20. Ibid.
have disdain for it. Change is inevitable in a church. Membership changes. Leadership changes. Facilities change. In this situation, the community is rapidly changing. As change occurs all around the church and her community, strategic planning will allow the congregation to determine some things that will change (methodology and strategy), but also what will not change (theology, vision, and core values).

Timing of Planning

“The ability to think juncturally, to think about timing, is a special skill set that must be cultivated if the strategic planning process is to be successful.”

Just as once the community’s transition from a rural to suburban context never turns back, so is the journey of planning the church’s transition.

At the initial stages of the strategic planning process, it may need to coincide with or come slightly before the annual budget planning process comes so that the plan and finances are instep with one another. Once the plan is established, it will need to be reviewed every few months to ensure the church is staying on track.

On an annual basis, the church’s leadership should thoroughly review the plan and what has actually occurred. The methodology used to fulfill the vision will need to be reevaluated. The vision and core values will not need to be reevaluated, but instead will need to be re-taught to the church family to ensure a greater propensity for the church to stay on track with why she is in existence.

Biblical Basis of Planning

As the pastor looks at the church, he knows if the calendar looks the same as the previous year, and the church begins feeling cyclical and predictable. The pastor knows the church needs more intentionality. After a while, lay leadership may begin insinuating the same things the pastor has been thinking: a plan is needed.

Besides these thoughts, several major questions must be asked: Is strategic planning Biblical? Will strategic planning lead the pastor’s leadership from the road of Titus 1:5-9, and down the road of corporate ecclesiology? Will God honor strategic planning, or will He view this process as a squelching of the Holy Spirit?

Strategic planning is found in the Bible. Through theory and practice, strategic planning is of God. There are a multitude of examples in the Word of God when people theoretically and practically went through the process of strategic planning.

David, in 1 Samuel 21, was being sought out by Doeg the Edomite whom served as a spy for King Saul. In order to escape from Doeg, David developed a strategic plan to escape to the least likely place, the hometown of Goliath, Gath. Upon his arrival into Gath, David knew the Philistines of Gath would seek him out because he killed tens of thousands of Philistines including their lead warrior, Goliath. In order to not be killed by the Philistines, David planned to act like he was crazy. In 1 Samuel 21:13-14, speaking of David,

[13] So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. [14] Then Achish said to his servants, ‘Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?’

22. 1 Samuel 21:7.
23. 1 Samuel 17:50; 18:7.
In the ancient world, people who acted insane were considered cursed by God and no one wanted anything to do with the crazy person lest they be cursed as well. 24 With David’s strategic plan, he was able to escape from both Doeg the Edomite and from the Philistines who would have otherwise imprisoned him.

Jesus is also a leader who strategically plans. Jesus recruited key leaders to fall under his tutelage, and he trained them, and then sent them to the ends of the earth. 25 Other examples of strategic planners in the Bible include Joshua and Nehemiah.

The book of Proverbs teaches of strategic planning in the following verses:

Proverbs 14:15, “The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.” Proverbs 16:3, “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” and Proverbs 20:18, “Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war.”

God wants and expects people to plan. However, plans need to be God’s plan, and not simply one’s own personal desires. God makes it clear that man is not supposed to trust his own desires, but they are supposed to trust in the Lord. 26 Only after praying to the Lord and meditating on His Word can a person come to the realization of a plan being of God.

Strategic planning is God’s chosen method of reaching Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the Earth. Since God plans this way, it is important to not repeat the previous year’s activities just because the church has traditionally done the same things the same way. It is important to intentionally reach people with the Gospel

Developing A Strategy Team

The pastor cannot singlehandedly transition the church from a rural to suburban context. He must have the help of others in the church. In the development of a strategy team, two key things must occur: communication and enlistment of the strategy team.

Communication

When it comes to the future of the church, the pastor has to communicate as much as possible. “Understanding the dynamics of communication in groups and learning to orchestrate and affect those dynamics are tremendous assets for a leader.”

When it comes to developing a strategy and vision for the future of the church, the entire body needs to be informed of what is going on during the crucial points. Communication will need to take place in spoken word, letters mailed to the church family, emails, blogs, tweets, Facebook updates, included in sermons, and in any other way it can be communicated to the church. Over-communication is better than under-communication. Not every occurrence with the church strategy team needs to be voiced to the congregation, but at key times in the planning process, the church needs to be updated thoroughly.

Another point of communication is ensuring the strategy team knows what to keep in confidence, and what they can tell anyone. If a strategy team member is married,

they need to be told that if they tell their spouse private information from the strategy team meetings, then they are responsible if their spouse inappropriately reveals classified information.

Enlistment of the Strategy Team

A strategy team must be enlisted for this important task. An important question is: Who should be on the church strategy team?

Some churches may have a master planning committee already in place. Others may not. Existing structures are less likely to make the necessary changes to move forward as they have already developed a *modus operandi*.

Most churches need to develop a completely fresh and new team of people to be a part of the church strategy team. A few key leaders may need to be placed on this team, but there should also be fresh faces within this group of people. In the case of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, the process was to enlist members of different ages, genders, and length of time as members.

The members of the church strategy team included the following: a fifteen-year-old boy who recently submitted to God’s call on his life to go into vocational ministry and had only been a member of the church for two years, a thirty-five-year-old mother of two and homemaker who attended sporadically for the previous five years, a thirty-four-year-old businessman who serves as the deacon chairman and volunteer minister to students and has been a member for several years, a thirty-four-year-old bank executive who serves as the finance committee chairman and whose wife is the volunteer minister to children and has been a member for nine years, an eighty-year-old widow who has
been a member for three years, and the senior pastor who was twenty-four-years-old and had been at the church for six months.

Depending on the size of the church, the strategy team may need to be larger. However, any more than ten people may result in too many opinions and cumbersome meetings. Going through the process, breaking into subgroups may be an option to work on different projects.

It is important to allow everyone’s ideas to be equally heard. As some on the team may be more natural leaders than others, it is important for the pastor to lead the group in such a way that balanced participation and insight are heard. It is important that as ideas are expressed that people are accepting of constructive criticism of their ideas. “Criticism is usually well received when it is kept constructive and offered in order to elevate and challenge.”28 Proverbs 15:32 states, “Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.”

People who are approached to serve on this team should know of the expectations on them. They should know of the time and preparation required for such a task. A schedule of meetings needs to be given to them at the time they are approached with the possibility of joining the church strategy team. They will be asked to assist in research, to attend the meetings, and to read the necessary materials. They need to be told of the magnitude of being a member of this team, as it will shape the future and direction of the church.

Because of the importance of the meetings, a covenant for the members is

necessary to sign. Having the team sign it together at the beginning of the first meeting sets the process in the direction of capturing how important the process is, and it gives a written contract to dedication to be a part of the team until their work is done.

If a church has staff members, it is up to the pastor’s discretion as to whether any staff members will serve on the strategy team. Input is especially necessary from the staff for the vision statement and core values, but the laity will buy into the process more if they play a major role on the strategy team. When a church allows laity to carry a lot of the leadership weight, they will develop higher expectations for themselves to be involved, serve, and lead.29 The staff will be responsible for implementing the changes decided within the team and for evaluating progress.

**Compiling Research and Information**

As the process for compiling research and information takes place, several issues must be examined: the church’s model for ministry, the church’s culture, and the vital signs for the church. This research and information gathered by the enlisted team will allow the team to be well-prepared moving into goal-setting, establishing core values, and capturing a vision.

**Model for Ministry**

What are the primary ministries of one’s local church? The answer is different depending on the church one is in. Some put a high level of emphasis on children’s

ministry, others on counseling ministries, some on Sunday school, and others on off-campus small groups. Whatever ministries serve as the primary skeleton for the church, the strategy team needs to write these down. It is helpful for the strategy team to have a large dry-erase board or projector in order for the entire group to communicate their thoughts in a streamlined pattern.

Gene Mims described a close look at Jesus’ model for ministry with four basic practices that assist the church in applying biblical principles: corporate worship, open groups, closed groups, and ministry teams. When looking at the church’s four basic practices for her respective ministries, the church strategy team needs to study the biblical principles to learn what the church’s practices should be, to actually look at the church practices, and what the results are in terms of making a difference for the Lord’s Kingdom.

The figure below serves as a picture of the process by which the church strategy team would undergo when determining the model for ministry.

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In the case of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, the major ministries included: Sunday morning on-campus Bible study, Sunday morning corporate worship, AWANA Wednesday night ministry for children, and a Wednesday night service for the student ministry.

Church’s Culture

Mims described a church’s culture as “. . . characterized by the interaction of four forces: (1) The leadership style of the pastor, key staff, and lay leaders; (2) The demographic characteristics of the people and the community; (3) The current life cycle of the church (growing, stable, or declining); The current life cycle of the community (growing, stable, or declining).”

The environment within the church family creates the culture. A church that fails

31. Ibid., 108.
to understand and study the cultural makeup they possess will have a difficult time transitioning from a rural to a suburban context, or transitioning to anything except internal ecclesial complacency.

In order for the church strategy team to gather information about the church’s culture, a survey must be conducted. In chapter two, research was conducted for the community’s makeup. In chapter four, the current state of the church was examined. This section of chapter six will learn seek to examine the church’s makeup in terms of surveyed information of the entire congregation.

The membership survey needs to be filled-out by as many church members as possible. The survey needs to be distributed through Sunday morning Bible study classes, made available in the church building, and available online. An anonymous drop-box to place the surveys should be available in the church. The more people who fill out the survey, the more accurate pulse the church strategy team can get for the church’s culture.

The following is information gathered from the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church membership survey:

Table 2. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church membership survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>64% of the congregation is female, and 46% is male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>99% of the church is Caucasian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The average age is 44 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The most common jobs are: retired, student, clerical, housewife, and engineer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16% of adults are widows or widowers, 78% of adults are married, the other 6% either checked divorced or single.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Most adults in the church have their highest level of education being a high school diploma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7% of families in the church own a mobile home, 91% own a single-family home, and only 2% are renters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The average family has lived at the same address for over seven years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. See Appendix A to see a sample survey for the church strategy team to distribute to the congregation. The survey in Appendix A is the one that one passed out to Pleasant Hill Baptist Church.  
33. The survey was passed out over a period of four weeks, and was completed by 137 people.
9. 78% were born in the state of Tennessee.
10. 34% were born in Lenoir City/Knoxville.
11. The average household income is $25,000-$50,000 with only 2% of the church $75,000 or more.
12. The average percentage of money given to the church from their annual income is 2.5%.
13. The average church member lives two miles from the church building.
14. The average church member has been a Christian for ten or more years.
15. The average church member has been a member of Pleasant Hill for 10-19 years.
16. In order, the first contact with the church was the following: friend, parents, drove by, and website.
17. The most common things mentioned for the reason why people joined Pleasant Hill were the following: the people, warm, intimate, preaching, and children’s ministry.
18. In a typical four Sunday month, the average church member attends two Sundays.
19. People were “very satisfied” with the Sunday morning worship, student/youth ministry, and preschool ministry. People were “satisfied” with Sunday morning Bible study, music ministry, and children’s ministry. People were “dissatisfied” with discipleship training opportunities, evangelism, leadership training, and missions emphasis. Besides a few sporadic surveys, church members are not “very dissatisfied” with any of the core ministries of the church.
20. 38% have considered leaving the church in the last five years, and the overwhelming reason was when the music minister was fired in 2006 due to financial indiscretion. Those who had not considered leaving the church in the last five years predominantly cited either family or friends as the reasons why they would not leave.
21. The church’s best traits are fellowship, preaching, and pastoral care.
22. The biggest needs of improvement are discipleship training, missions emphasis, and children’s church.
23. 83% feel they are vital members of the church body.
24. 68% feel they are being used according to their giftedness and passion either “usually” or “yes, I do” (meaning all the time).
25. Only 54% are a part of a small group of some sort.
26. 82% of church members “absolutely” believe the church would help them in a time of trouble.
27. When asked if anyone in the community would not feel comfortable worshipping at the church, the answers given were predominantly given for the reason the church does not have a choir.
28. 98% stated they would be comfortable encouraging nonbelievers to attend worship services at Pleasant Hill.
29. 17% of church members feel alienated from at least one person in the congregation.
30. 91% of the people polled stated that after the pastor and staff, the deacons held the greatest amount of influence in making major church decisions.
31. 62% of church members never made a suggestion accepted by the church, 12% had “one small” suggestion accepted by the church, and 26% stated “yes” to the question of if they made any suggestions accepted by the church.
32. When asked about church members’ ability to influence decision-making in the church, a majority of the questions referred to business meetings as the place to be able to do that, and reference to the church being “pastor-led” was another common response.
33. 31% of those polled were involved with a ministry team of some kind within the church.
34. For those who are in a position of service, that which gives them satisfaction in their position included: utilizing spiritual gifts, being with friends, and doing their part within the church family.
35. The most frustration for peoples’ positions pertained to lack of funding for their ministry.
36. A majority of those polled listed the time immediately following their salvation as the most fulfilling time in their Christian life. When asked if they feel closer to Christ than five years ago, 71% said “yes” and 29% said “no.” That which led people to answer “yes” listed Sunday morning Bible study and Christian friends as their primary reasons. Those who listed “no” either blamed the church, or their own spiritual apathy.
37. In order for the church to help others in growing in their relationship with Christ, the most common answers were: stronger discipleship, better Sunday morning Bible study program, and more outreach opportunities.

In the process of gathering information, the strategy team needs to compile the information gathered by the pastor and staff before they began meeting as a team, such as
the demographic information of the community and the current state of the church. Once research is compiled, a process of analysis must take place.

**Analyzing Information**

The strategy team needs to ask, “What are the reasons for success or lack of success in each church?” They must gather the surveys, distribute them within the team, and analyze the information to gather statistics from each question.

In the process of analysis, the church needs to be compared to the community. If the church’s average age is 44 years old, but the community is predominantly retired senior adults, the church has a disconnect. In this case, the church would need to develop a strategic initiative to reach the demographics around them.

All major statistical information needs to be processed by each church strategy team member. It is at this point that any informational questions posed by the team would need to be answered. By the end of this process, every member of the church strategy team should have a strong perspective of the “on paper” status of the church’s history, present state, and community.

The strategy team would find it advantageous to write out all major points of statistical data gathered on the white board in the room. Furthermore, historical data should be logged on paper and distributed to the team for whenever they may need to refer to it on their own time.

Developing A Purpose Statement with A Vision and Core Values

At this point, the church strategy team has a clear and fresh perspective of the church, her community, and all details necessary to move forward. It is now time for the strategy team to develop a vision of what God wants the church to be. With this vision, a purpose statement and core values will also be developed.

Purpose Statement

A purpose statement answers the question “Why?” Why does this church exist? Why do we do what we do? In the process of developing a purpose statement, both the importance of it and the development of it need to be addressed.

Importance of Purpose Statement

A purpose statement keeps the church on track. It keeps the church focused. Imagine if the church had no purpose; it would not gain in traction in effectiveness. As Zig Ziglar once stated, “If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.” If a church has a clear destination, is focused on it, and she redirects her attention toward it, she will reach her destination. The purpose statement for a church keeps her medialized.

Development of Purpose Statement

In a study of some of the most visionary companies in history, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras gave examples of both a bad and a good purpose statement:

If you’re thinking about purpose for your own organization, we encourage you to not specifically write a description of your product lines or customer segments (‘We exist to make \( X \) products for \( Y \) customers’). For example, ‘We exist to make cartoons for kids’ would have been a terrible purpose statement for Disney, neither compelling nor flexible enough to last one hundred years. But ‘to use our imagination to bring happiness to millions’ can easily last one hundred years as a compelling purpose. The important step is to get at the deeper, more fundamental reasons for the organization’s existence . . . We’ve found that most companies benefit from articulating both core values and purpose in their core ideology, and we encourage you to do the same.37

The purpose statement needs to be clear and concise so that church members can easily repeat it to anyone who asks what the church is about. When questioning any decision to be made or ministry to start, one should immediately refer to the purpose statement. The purpose statement serves as a unifying statement during a time of ecclesial distress, and a rallying point during times of victory.

In the development of the purpose statement, it should not be rushed as this is a definitive statement for the future of the church as she transitions from a rural to suburban context. If a church already has a purpose statement, it will need to be reevaluated just as everything else in the church is currently being reevaluated. If the existing purpose statement is too long, lacks clarity, is outdated, or has barely been communicated to the church, then it is time to rewrite it.

When the pastor is preparing the church strategy team to rewrite the statement, they each need to prepare with their own personal study of the early church in Acts to see what the purpose was at the initial formation of the ecclesia. A time of prayer should take place in preparation for this statement. Also, a compilation of some other churches’ purpose statements should be gathered.

The following are some examples of churches’ purpose statements:


Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas,

“Our mission at Prestonwood Baptist Church is to glorify God by introducing Jesus Christ as Lord to as many people as possible and to develop them in Christian living using the most effective means to impact the world, making a positive difference in this generation.”

Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas, “Our vision for Fellowship Church is simple. We exist to Reach Up, Reach Out, and Reach In. These three are the biblical mandates of the local church.”

First Baptist Church in Oviedo, Florida, “At First Baptist Oviedo our purpose is to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ by worshipping God, growing together and serving others.”

Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, “Mars Hill Church lives for Jesus as a city within the city—knowing culture, loving people, and seeing lives transformed to live for Jesus.”

Samples like these need to be used for the church strategy team to think about their own purpose statement. At this juncture, the team may have multiple ideas of


extreme variance, and it is important for members of the team to be open to deferring to others’ ideas. Writing out the different ideas for purpose statements on the board will assist the team in developing the best statement for their church.

As the church prepares for her new context of suburbia, the statement must be fresh, just as the community is fresh. Taking time, possibly over multiple meetings, to prepare such a statement is necessary in ensuring the best possible purpose statement. Finally, when the team decides on the final purpose statement, write it on the white board and leave it there for the remainder of the time the church strategy team meets together. The rest of the transition from a rural to suburban context will need to have this purpose statement wrapped around it.

Vision Statement

After establishing a purpose statement, a vision statement needs to be established. As the purpose statement answers the question, “Why?” the vision statement answers the question, “What?”

“Take all the information you’ve just gathered and write your ideal and unique image of the future . . . We recommend that this statement be brief, but not a one-liner.”43 The vision statement needs to be challenging. This statement will affirm the church’s direction as she stays focused with the purpose statement and forward-thinking with the vision statement.

In a similar process to the development of the purpose statement, each member of the church strategy team needs to prepare with their own personal study of the early

church in Acts to see what the vision was at the initial formation of the ecclesia. A time of prayer should take place in preparation for the vision statement. Just as the process with the purpose statement, a compilation of some other churches’ vision statements should be gathered.

The following are some examples of churches’ vision statements:

Cherry Hills Community Church in Highlands Ranch, Colorado, “What keeps us energized is our vision to become: A congregation mobilized in service to transform our community elevate the urban poor and impact our nation and world for Christ.” 44

Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas,

Through prayer and sacrifice, together, we intend to expand our tents for ministry, lengthen the cords of love, strengthen the stakes of faith, and go deeper in our walk with Christ. We are praying for God to expand and enable greater influence for Christ through worship, Bible Fellowship, evangelism, community service, sacrifice, Christ-centered living and discipleship.

You are invited and encouraged to join us in this journey of faith. The challenge for all of us is to make it personal. To do so, we must be diligent in prayer and realign our vision and values toward things that will matter for eternity. Together, we are seeking a revival of spirit that will bring freshness and fullness as we move forward—moving beyond all limits. 45

Again, just as the purpose statement’s development, it is important to take as much time as necessary, possibly over multiple meetings, to prepare the right vision statement for the church. Once the vision statement and the purpose statement have both been developed, it is time to begin developing the church’s core values.

Core Values

As the purpose statement answers the question, “Why?” and the vision statement answers the question, “What?” the core values answer the question, “Who?” More specifically, “Who does God want the church to become?” These are the necessities reflected in the church.

Referring to core values, Kevin Ford stated the following:

These are our deep-seated understandings about who we are. It is not enough for a business to say, ‘Our core values are honesty, integrity, quality, and service.’ Every organization says that. Likewise, it is not enough for a church to proclaim, ‘Our core values are fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism.’ Your church must define its values in ways more related to personality, experience, genetics, and style.

I’ve consulted with some churches that have descriptive core values, like ‘meeting God in unexpected ways,’ ‘innovative excellence,’ ‘chasing truth together,’ and ‘serving on the edge.’ Those core values give their people a greater sense of the personality and style of the church.46

The church strategy team should follow the same process as they did in the development of the purpose statement and vision statement. The following are examples of churches’ core values:

First Baptist Church in Springdale, Arkansas, “Our Core Values: Christ-likeness, relationships, trust, teamwork, and excellence.”47

Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio, “Xenos Christian Fellowship is guided by the following core values: Christ, service, gratitude, moral integrity, and


family.”

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Lenoir City, Tennessee, “Core Values: Evangelism, Fellowship, Worship, Discipleship, Godly Lifestyle, Prayer, Unity, and Service.”

As the church strategy team considers what the core values should be, and how to properly state them, they should brainstorm together, pray together, and study the Word of God together to examine what a local church core values should be. After establishing the core values, the team should have the purpose statement, vision statement, and core values written out in front of them. The statements and core values need to be reviewed altogether to ensure they connect.

Goals

As churches envelope this exciting stage of envisioning the future of the church, the transition from a rural to suburban context will then have a laid-out plan. Another thing that must be examined is a compilation of goals. Goal setting is key in transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context. Along with goals, action plans must be set in order to know how to achieve the goals. Chapter nine will explain details for action plans.


“A goal is an end to which you direct specific effort.”⁵⁰ There are four elements within goal development: an accomplishment to be achieved, a measurable outcome, a specific date and time to accomplish the goal, and a maximum cost.⁵¹

An Accomplishment to Be Achieved

Examples of accomplishments to be achieved from Pleasant Hill Baptist Church were to improve the average attendance in worship and Sunday morning Bible study classes, increase the number of baptisms, increase the amount of money received, develop a new children’s church program, develop a better plan for discipling church members, and being more outreach-focused.

A Measurable Outcome

“Outcome assessment is a goals-based process in that programs are assessed relative to the goals they are designed to achieve.”⁵² Continuing to use Pleasant Hill Baptist Church as an example, the measurable outcome for improved average worship attendance would be 300 people, improved Sunday morning Bible study average attendance would be 180, improved number of baptisms would be fifty, and increased annual money given would be $390,000.

The measurable outcome for a new children’s church would be to develop one, have a team developed, and add ten families to the church as a result of this ministry.

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⁵¹ Ibid., 3-4.
The measurable outcome for an improved discipleship program would be to add “Home Discipleship Groups” to the already-existing Sunday morning Bible study program, and eventually see thirteen Home Discipleship Groups. In order for the church to be more outreach-focused, the measurable outcome would be to implement an “Invest and Invite” evangelism strategy while utilizing four major outreach-focused events per year as a part of the strategy.

A Specific Date

As the church strategy team is in the process of developing goals, including measurement of the goals and a specific date, the goals need to be achievable. When it comes to setting goals, making sure it is achievable . . .

. . . is very important because goals perceived to be unreachable have a negative impact on motivation. However, there’s equally strong evidence to suggest that goals are too easy to lead to low performance. Putting the appropriate amount of stretch in your objectives is critical.\(^{53}\)

The simplest way to develop a specific date for the goals set by the church strategy team is to log the goals in a chart. For Pleasant Hill Baptist Church to achieve her goals, she needs to go achieve the following numerical goals in order to achieve the ultimate goal.

Table 3. Goals of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMBS</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>102</td>
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<td>Children’s Church</td>
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<td>10 families added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causing Additions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Groups</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest &amp; Invite Events</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maximum Cost

In chapter 8, poor finances will be described as a potential disruption for the church as she transitions from a rural to suburban context. With this possible disruption, it is beneficial to think of the most expensive possibility for each goal so as to not be financially blindsided. When preparing the maximum cost, it is important to add to bids as prices may increase if it takes several years to achieve the goal. It would also be beneficial to approach both the Building and Grounds Committee, as well as the Finance Committee when preparing the maximum costs in order to have their opinions and keep them informed.

As churches undergo the exciting process of envisioning the future of the church as the transition from a rural to suburban context, the vision, the scenario the pastor finds himself in, laying a foundation, developing a strategy team, compiling research and information, analyzing information, developing a purpose statement along with a vision statement and core values, and finally goals have all been processed. It is at this point that the church is ready to hear the process for the church’s transition into a suburban context.
context clearly communicated.
CHAPTER 7

COMMUNICATING THE TRANSITIONAL STRATEGY

Upon the development of the vision and strategy of the church to transition from a rural to suburban context, a clear plan of communicating the strategy must be developed. In this chapter, the vision will be communicated by taking the advice of leadership guru John Maxwell.¹

Maxwell emphasizes the leader’s role in communicating the vision with three areas of emphasis: (1) See it clearly; (2) say it continuously; (3) show it creatively.² In order to communicate the direction of the church as she moves forward, these three things must be woven together to communicate the vision God has placed on the hearts of the Senior Pastor and Church Strategy Team.

See the Vision Clearly

After following the previous steps outlined in this thesis, the vision for the future of the church as she transitions from a rural to suburban context has finally been developed. An introduction to what a transition from a rural to suburban context has been detailed (chapter 1), processes of demographic analysis have taken place (chapter

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² Michael, 93.
2), an historical analysis of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, the case study for this project was given (chapter 3), the current state of Pleasant Hill has been explained (chapter 4), concepts in transition and development have been given (chapter 5), and the vision and strategy of the church was developed (chapter 6). Leading up to this point, if the pastor of a church going through a process of transitioning from a rural to suburban context, he will know the following outline for the message he will deliver to his flock: (1) what vision is, (2) where the church has been, (3) where the church is, (4) where the church is going, and (5) how the church is going to get there. The pastor must wait patiently, allow the vision to move from his head to his heart, and then write out a manuscript of his planned communication of the vision.

Wait Patiently

Since the pastor now has all of the pieces of the transitioning puzzle in place, it is now important that the pastor knows, in great detail, that this truly is the next step God has planned for the church. He does not need to launch the vision just days after the work is completed with the church strategy team, but some time needs to be given for the pastor to marinate the information in his mind and in his heart. The length of time cannot be rigidly stated, but varies on each pastor’s heart.

The process of patience with the vision cannot be understated. It is the pastor’s responsibility as overseer of a flock to discern God’s vision, and he must not rush the process. Rushing things is rarely the key to success. Psalm 40:1 says, “I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.”

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Transition the Message from the Head to the Heart

After waiting patiently for complete peace from the Lord for clarity of the vision, the pastor must transition from merely cognitively comprehending how the church will move from being a rural church to being a suburban church to having a passionate fire burning in his belly to see his church propel to another level of effectiveness as the church’s context transitions.

Whatever passion is in the heart of a pastor will naturally overflow to his congregation. Rick Warren gives an example of this with a pastor who has a strong passion for worship. “If the pastor’s passion and gifts lie in the area of worship, he will instinctively lead the church to become an ‘experiencing God’ church.”

It is at this point in the process of the church’s transition that the pastor realizes the importance of leading his flock to a new mindset as the community around the church is forced into a new mindset. The clarity of the vision will be clearer when it is obvious that the pastor not only knows the church’s plan to transition to a suburban context, but also wants the church to transition this way.

Write Out A Manuscript

After being patient and developing the passion for the transition, the pastor is ready to write out the vision in order to communicate it clearly. Writing a manuscript is a rewarding discipline that keeps the pastor/preacher on track and helps the communicator

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to be precise in the selection of his words.\(^5\) Since the launching of this vision is so vital to the future of the church, every word counts. If there were ever a message that a church member would parse the preacher’s words like a final exam in a seminary Greek class, it would be this message. Since attendees of the vision-launching service will closely pay attention to the words being spoken, it is important to clearly write out what needs to be said.

In the process of writing out a manuscript, LaRue stated the following:

In writing the sermon manuscript I have learned the important difference between writing for the ear and writing for the eye. For example, I write for the eye if I am writing for the sermon to be read. In writing for the eye I have the luxury of writing long and complicated sentences because the reader can see the sentence and review it, if necessary, for clarity. However, this is a luxury the worshiping congregation does not have because the preaching event is an oral happening. Therefore, my sermon manuscript is an oral writing in which I am writing for the ear.\(^6\)

The manuscript is vital in the clarity of communicating the vision of how the church will transition from a rural to suburban context. Throughout the writing of the manuscript, the vision must be communicated continuously and creatively.

**Say the Vision Continuously**

As the vision is said continuously, it needs to be repeated in multiple formats. It needs to be continuously stated in the initial launching of the vision, and it needs to be continuously after the launching of the vision.


\(^6\) Ibid.
Continuously Say the Vision When it is Launched

People who hear a message repeated will be assisted in enhancing their liking of it. As the pastor is seeking to bring about a smooth transition from a rural to suburban context, and is communicating a fresh vision to do so, the pastor needs the congregation to actually like the vision. The pastor needs the people to “buy into” the vision.

Maxwell contends that people first have to buy into the leader before they can buy into the vision.

If they believe in leaders, then they embrace what those leaders believe in. Even when their leaders promote a vision that isn’t compelling, the people who have already bought into them continue to support them. However, this variation of the Law of Buy-In is also true: No matter how good the vision is, if people don’t believe in the leader, they will have problems buying into the vision.

As the vision is launched, it must be stated continuously. The vision must be repeated over and over so that people know with complete certainty what the vision is. “Lawyers understand the use of repetition and do not hesitate to repeat until every juryman is impressed.” If a lawyer states their case repeatedly to win their case, how much more important is it to repeatedly plead the case of the most effective strategy for the bride of Christ to move forward in the midst of communal change. While writing out the manuscript for the launching of the vision, repetition of the major points of transition must occur.

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9. Ibid.
Continuously Say the Vision After it is Launched

As a part of communicating the transitional strategy, it does not just stop after the morning worship service when the message of the vision is formally delivered. The vision must be stated continuously after its initial launch.\(^\text{11}\) Sheila Smith and Mary Doctor stated,

> It is nearly impossible for change leaders to overcommunicate . . . The advice I’d like to offer to others is communicate, communicate, communicate. And when you think you’re finished, communicate some more.\(^\text{12}\)

Continuously saying the vision of transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context is an example of excellent communication. The pastor must communicate the vision after its initial launch. After he finishes communicating it, he needs to communicate it some more.

**Show the Vision Creatively**

After the pastor sees the vision clearly and determines to say it continuously, he must also show it creatively. The creativity of showing the vision of a transitioned church in her new suburban context needs to be done by promoting and packaging a special day of celebration for the future, using illustrations that are easy to remember, and giving people something tangible to remember the historic day in the life of the church.

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11. Chapter 9 will go into great detail of what to do after the launching of the vision of the transitioning church.
Promoting “Vision Sunday”

Vision, in and of itself, creates energy on its own; and visionaries need to tease out that energy.¹³

Clearly, shared vision is key – and to enlist others, leaders need to bring that vision to life. Leaders animate the vision and make manifest the purpose so that others can see it, hear it, taste it, touch it, feel it. In making the intangible vision tangible, leaders ignite constituents’ flames of passion. By using powerful language, positive communication style, and non-verbal expressiveness, leaders breathe life (the literal definition of the word *inspire*) into a vision.¹⁴

As a way to tease out the energy that vision brings, an entire day in the life of the church needs to be devoted to the initial launching of the vision. A church in the midst of this transition can call the day whatever they would like to, “Vision Sunday” or “Next Step” or anything the pastor and strategy team think would be mind-stimulating. What really matters is not what the day is called, but that there actually is a day set aside to specifically concentrate on the next step in the church.

While promoting this special day, it should be based around the idea of bringing about unity in the church to rally behind the fresh vision of moving into the future of a suburbanized church. The promotion of “Vision Sunday” needs to occur weeks, if not months, in advance. Every church member needs to be contacted to ensure they attend on this date. Every person who has visited the church in the last year and every inactive member should have a handwritten letter mailed to them and be personally called to encourage them to see what is fresh and new in the church.¹⁵

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¹⁵. It is important that the letter actually be handwritten. People are significantly more likely to actually read a letter if it is personally handwritten to them.
Promote the day with video commercials during the services for several weeks leading up to the big day. Show the church in any and every way possible that this day is a turning point to the church’s future, and nobody in the church should miss out on it.

With “Vision Sunday” (or whatever the leadership decides to call the day), in order to have a strategic initiative to bring about unity in the church during this pivotal time, gathering people together for a time of fellowship must take place. This can be done either with a brunch before the service launching the vision, or a lunch afterwards. Either way, it is a strategy to unite the church together and allow them to dream together over a meal. “Christ wants his church to foreshadow human community. Therefore, we Christians will manifest our unity in Christ by entering into fellowship.”

Using Creative Illustrations

Another important step in showing the vision creatively is to have creative illustrations in the presentation of the vision. The following is an example of a creative illustration to open the presentation:

(A microwave will be on a table on the stage with a towel underneath it.)
What I hold in my hand are two eggs. Let’s see what happens when you heat two eggs in the microwave for three minutes. There is a method to my madness. Kids, don’t do this at home. (On the screen, have a 3:00 countdown clock ticking as the eggs are in the microwave. Jeopardy music will be played in the background.) (After three minutes elapse)
What you just saw is a couple of eggs blowing up inside of a microwave. What is interesting about microwaves, and how they heat, is that they heat from the inside out. The interior of the eggs got so hot that the shell could

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17. In order to most fully communicate the way this illustration is taught, first person tense is used in this illustration.
no longer hold the heat, and an explosion of the interior affected everything around it. This morning, I want you to know that our church can and will explode in spiritual, physical, and fiscal growth if you follow this vision. Our community is transitioning from being a country town to being a booming suburb. Now is the time to capitalize on the growth of our community. Our church will catch on fire, and everyone around us will feel the heat, and this building will no longer be able to contain it. Are you ready? Let’s get started!

Illustrations are key in showing the vision creatively. “Well-chosen, skillfully used illustrations can do just about everything – restate, explain, validate, or apply ideas by relating them to tangible experiences.”18 Illustrations assist people in remembering the point being made; they stir emotion, create need, hold attention, and establish rapport between the speaker and the audience.19

In the process of communicating the transitional strategy of the church, creative illustrations need to be given in order to stimulate the presentation in order to show the vision with ingenuity. It is also important for parishioners to tangibly feel something from “Vision Sunday.”

Giveaways

Giving away a trinket of some sort to commemorate the beginning of a new chapter in the church’s life will serve as a continuous reminder to them of the vision. The trinket does not have to be elaborate or expensive, but it should be given to all attendees, and explained to them the purpose of them receiving it. The purpose is twofold: (1) to remember the vision, and (2) to pray for the vision.

In order to communicate the direction of the church as she moves forward, the pastor must see the vision clearly, say it continuously, and show it creatively. With these three things woven together, it results in a strong strand of communication to transition the local church from a rural to a suburban context.
CHAPTER 8

POTENTIAL DISRUPTIONS IN RURAL TO SUBURBAN TRANSITIONS

Life would be nice if there were no disruptions. However, reality is that disruptions are a part of life. In the process of transitioning the local church from a rural to a suburban context, there are several potential disruptions. After studying 300 churches, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson determined the three biggest challenges that deter a church from moving forward: attitudes, finances, and facilities.¹

In this chapter, potential disruptions in transitioning the local church from a rural to a suburban context will be extrapolated. Also, examples of how to overcome the disruptions will be given from churches that have actually done it. Capitalizing on Stetzer and Dodson’s research, the three primary disruptions of poor attitudes, poor finances, and poor facilities will be used as catalysts for studying the potential disruptions in moving the church forward during her transition.

**Poor Attitudes**

Attitude makes a difference. A person’s (or a church’s) attitude will determine their altitude. Organizations and people will never soar high in their goals if they constantly have a pejorative outlook on things. Organizations and people will soar if they

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¹ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Church: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 199.
look for the positives in a situation.

  Working with people who have a good attitude is like running with the wind at your back. Working with people who have a negative attitude is like a Friday afternoon commute in the rain – it takes more energy, more time, and there’s always a greater chance that something bad will happen.²

Attitude may be the biggest potential disruption³ of a church transitioning from a rural to a suburban context. Attitude obstacles may surface such as: small-church image, ineffective evangelism, inadequate programming, downward momentum, and ingrown fellowship.⁴ Every one of these listed items can, and often do, relate to attitude. Perhaps this is why Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3-5,

  [3]Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4]Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5]Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

Poor attitudes cause several things to occur within a church: squelching of dreams, disunity and dissention, spiritual insubordination, and selfishness. Poor attitudes can tragically tear a church down instead of building it up.

  Squelching of Dreams

A poor attitude within a group of people can result in the squelching of the dreams of church members who want to see the church move forward as the community moves forward. One can only imagine what would have happened if Christopher Columbus would have fulfilled his dream of discovering a new world if he had a negative

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3. Stetzer and Dodson, 204.
attitude when it came to achieving it.

Christopher Columbus studied astronomy, geometry, and cosmography at the University of Pavia. His mind was also stimulated by studying *The Book of Marco Polo*, geographers’ theories, and mariners’ reports. After an extensive time of inductive study, he came to a conclusion that the world was not flat, but it was a sphere. He knew Marco Polo reached the Asiatic Continent by traveling east, so he sought to approach the same place by sailing west in order to attempt to prove his theory of the world being a sphere.

Over a period of ten years, he was often on the verge of receiving help from people. He felt defeated as scientific advisors sought to disprove his theory, and the king brought his deception and ridicule into Columbus’ life. However, he kept moving forward. Despite people trying to squelch his dream, he kept moving forward. The poor attitudes by others resulted in delaying Columbus’ eventual journey by ten years, but he finally was able to sail to a place he thought was India, but was in fact the Caribbean.5

Just as Christopher Columbus faced poor attitudes, so will a pastor of a church seeking to transition from a rural to suburban context. People will try to disprove his attempt to move the church forward despite thorough factual research to prove what needs to be done. Despite the poor attitudes, the pastor must continue to move forward with the vision God has given him. The saddening thing is that poor attitudes may result in either squelching the dream or significantly delaying the dream. By the time the church finally moves forward, they may miss their opportunity to capitalize on the surge of people moving into the community.

Disunity and Dissent

The disruption of poor attitudes resulting in the squelching of dreams is saddening, and so it is with disunity and dissention. Instead of listening to the pastor’s launching of the plans for the church to transition from a rural to a suburban context with excitement, the attitude is that of looking at all of the negative consequences of this movement in the church.

Ephesians 4:3 teaches of the need for church members to be, “. . . eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unfortunately, if a person does not get their way, and they get in the flesh, they have the propensity to become biblically disobedient and cause disunity in the church.

Disunity in a church can often be traced back to a person or group of people within the congregation whose attitude and disposition of mind is in the same place as Philippians 2:2-4. When people are selfish, they do not consider others more significant than themselves as Philippians 2 teaches. People stuck in a spirit of selfishness ignore than words of John the Baptist in John 3:30, as he spoke about Jesus, “He must become greater; we must become less.” With a selfish person, they make themselves greater and Jesus less. They invert their priorities.

Spiritual Insubordination

People who have poor attitudes are prone to suffer from spiritual insubordination.

The one mark of spiritual people today is insubordination. We have wild spiritual impulses that would give an opportunity to Satan as an angel of

light to switch the very elect, if it were possible, away from God’s plan.\textsuperscript{7} 

God’s plan for the local church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ and see that they become obedient followers of Christ by being baptized.\textsuperscript{8} In order to most effectively fulfill that purpose, the church must stay grounded theologically, but adapt methodologically as the community around her changes. People who usurp their pastor’s spiritual authority and seek to do things their way instead of the pastor’s way are being disobedient and sinful. As long as the pastor is leading the church to more effectiveness, is theologically grounded, and has the church’s good in his heart, the laity should follow. Spiritual insubordination leads back to a poor attitude.

In any organization, a church or otherwise, if the leader sets forth a plan, but some followers try to fulfill their own agenda instead of the leader’s, it will end in organizational schizophrenia. Neither side will achieve their goal, and the result could be disastrous.

Church Discipline

If the spiritual insubordination reaches a level where church discipline must be enacted, then so be it. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander refer to the type of discipline needed in a situation like this as “corrective discipline” and makes the claim that it is analogous to surgery on a human’s body that is not functioning well.\textsuperscript{9}

Corrective discipline is like surgery – it corrects something that’s gone wrong in the body so that more serious injury doesn’t result. Rebuke,

\textsuperscript{7} Oswald Chambers, \textit{If You Will Ask}. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1989), 61.
\textsuperscript{8} Matthew 28:18-20.
admonition, and excommunication (removal from the church membership roll and prohibition of taking the Lord’s Supper) are all examples of corrective discipline. They correct the more serious errors that members make in doctrine and lifestyle . . . Neglecting corrective discipline can be deadly for a church. No one likes the prospects of going under the knife. But sometimes it is the knife that saves your life. The prospect of corrective church discipline, especially when public, is seldom pleasant. But unrepentant sin and those who continue to cherish it are cancers that must be removed if the body is to enjoy health and engage in productive work.\textsuperscript{10}

Selfishness

A poor attitude also results in selfishness. “Being unwilling to change, when change is necessary in order to grow, is the wrong attitude.”\textsuperscript{11} All churches have traditions. However, when choose traditions over the most effective way to reach the lost, a poor and selfish attitude results. Being consumed and obsessed with the warm and fuzzy feelings of small church intimacy instead of making room for more people to come to the church is a poor selfish attitude.

Churches that choose not to extend themselves with new ministries because it may be too much work results in a selfish attitude. Excuses abound when church leaders try to start new ministries, but face selfish people with poor attitudes: “I don’t have enough time.” “It doesn’t sound like something I would be comfortable doing.” “I don’t know if this will work.” The common denominator in excuses like the ones given are the first person personal pronoun, “I.”

James 4:1-4 addresses the results of selfishness,

“[1]What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2]You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Stetzer and Dodson, 205.
You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. [4] You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

People in the church who have a difficult time with the concept of the church transitioning from a rural to a suburban context must be reminded to purposefully check their attitude. They must transition from selfishness to sacrifice; sacrificing their personal desires for the good of the church at large. Selfishness, however, distorts true sacrifice, and sacrifice is at the heart of true care.  

Churches That Overcame Attitudinal Disruptions

Jeff LeBert, pastor of New Hope Church of the Nazarene in Rogers, Arkansas, organized a carnival for the entire community called “Family Fest” with games, food, and prizes. In order for guests to receive prizes, they had to sign a registration card. After excellent follow-up, several families from the carnival wound up joining the church. The church overcame disruptions, particularly of poor attitude, by sponsoring this outreach event.  

In Fort Smith, Arkansas, Bluff Avenue Baptist Church used campaigns such as 40 Days of Purpose and 40 Days of Community to assist in overcoming attitudinal disruptions. Other contributing factors to them overcoming disruptions in the church as they moved forward was a strong Vacation Bible School and the implementation of

13. Stetzer and Dodson, 205.
FAITH evangelism.\textsuperscript{14}

Clinton Road Baptist Church in New Hartford, New York, led by Pastor Samuel Macri, overcame disruptions in their church by re-focusing on their mission. The way they re-focused on their mission was through the \textit{Experiencing God} program and by studying \textit{The Purpose Driven Church} with the entire church family. The way leaders were empowered resulted in increased reconciliation, service, and involve in mission efforts.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Poor Finances}

Besides poor attitudes, poor finances can serve as a potential disruption to seeing the church transition from a rural to suburban context. A lack of money can slow a church down from fulfilling what needs to be accomplished, such as inadequate staff and increasing complexity.\textsuperscript{16}

Increased finances can lead to hiring more staff to assist with administrative details and can make things less complex in a hurry. This can lead to allowing the church to become molded into the vision set forth before the congregation.

At Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, in order to overcome poor finances, the church began teaching Dave Ramsey’s \textit{Financial Peace University}\textsuperscript{17} to people. In just one thirteen-week class of six families, over $65,000 of debt was reduced. As the church’s families have less financial burden on their shoulders, they are freer to give. The last lesson in the class is based around the biblical concept of giving, and how people with

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} McIntosh, 180.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Dave Ramsey, \textit{Financial Peace}. (New York: Viking Press, 1997).
\end{itemize}
true financial peace are givers. Even through the recession of 2008-2009, Pleasant Hill was ahead of budget.

Paul Poole, the pastor of First Assembly of God in Beaver, Pennsylvania, does not lead his church to stop doing certain ministries when finances are poor; he just becomes more creative in his approach. An example of this is their annual Valentine’s Banquet. This banquet typically requires a lot of money. Instead of paying for items, the church sought out businesses that gave free candy, decorations, and other related items. 18

Also, instead of underwriting the costs of mission trips, the church had members pay for their own trips. This forces the members to have a vested interest in the trip, and it means more to them in the end.

**Poor Facilities**

Inadequate facilities can significantly disrupt the church’s attempt to move forward from a rural context to a suburban one. While it is not the sole factor in disrupting growth, it surely is a factor. Insufficient meeting space, poorly designed classrooms, or a lack of bathrooms can result in holding the church back from moving forward.

Poor facilities are like a bonsai tree. Bonsai trees can actually grow to become large trees, but its tap root (where it gets its nutrition) is tied off, cutting off the source of its strength. Because of this, the tree never grows to any significant size. 19 The same is true of church facilities. If facilities are tying off the ability for the church to hold the

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18. Stetzer and Dodson, 205.
amount of people needed, and if the facilities deter people, the church will not grow to any significant size.

Potential disruptions in transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context occur around poor attitudes, poor finances, and poor facilities. As the three disruptions tie together to represent the difficult work of transitioning the local church as she moves forward, the positives still heavily outweigh the negatives. In conclusion, James 1:2 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” Even through trials of disruptions, may church leaders count it a joy to lead their church to their next step of effectiveness for the glorification of God’s Kingdom.
CHAPTER 9

ACTION PLANS OF TRANSITIONING THE LOCAL CHURCH FROM RURAL TO SUBURBAN

The purpose of this chapter is to give action plans for church leaders seeking to lead their church from a rural to suburban context. After going through such a rigorous process of planning to lead the church into the future, leaders in the church will surely be excited about what lies ahead for their local assembly of believers in Christ. However, all the enthusiasm and commitment in the world will not get the church very far if they do not adhere to a detailed and workable action plan.¹ In order to develop an action plan of transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context, several things must occur: learn what an action plan is, analyze the transition process to this point, and develop clear steps to achieve the church’s goals.

What An Action Plan Is

Despite the clear vision set forth for the church to transition from a rural to a suburban context, and clear goals being set forth, the goals must be achieved by developing a clear action plan.

An action plan is a way to make sure your goals are concrete. It describes the way you will use strategies to meet your objectives. Each action step or change to be sought should include the following information: What

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actions or strategies will occur? Who will carry out these changes? By when will they take place and for how long? What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes? Communication – Who should know what?2

An action plan allows participants to plan a series of steps or tasks that will enable them to achieve a resolution to the issues investigated.3 The success of the action plan depends largely on preparation that should be rigorous, moldable, and realistic.4 An action plan is the leading process of implementing change in an organization.5

Church leadership must develop a simple action plan to effectively transition the church from a rural to suburban context. If the plan to transition the church did not have an implementation plan, it would be a waste of time. What a shame it would be to spend so much time in preparation, only to fail in the follow through of it.

Analyze the Transition Process to This Point

Up to this point, if church leaders seek to lead their church from a rural to suburban context, they would have (chapter 2) engaged in demographic research to see whether their church is, or soon will be, in the midst of a transition from a rural to suburban context. (chapter 3) Church leaders, if they determined they were in the midst of this transition, would have studied their church’s history in order to have learned about where they have been. (chapter 4) Then, they church leadership would have examined

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2. During the “Develop Clear Action Points” section of this chapter, the answers to these questions will be asked in reference to the local church’s situation, while using Pleasant Hill Baptist Church as an example. Michael J. Marquardt and Peter Loan, The Manager As Mentor. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 119.
5. Ibid., 163.
where the church is right now. (chapter 5) Following this point, the church’s leadership
would have been involved in spiritual preparation for such a dynamic shift in the future
of the ministry by examining concepts and developing the plan to move forward.

(chapter 6) It is at this point in the process that the church leadership would have
established a church strategy team to develop the vision, the purpose, the values, and
researched the congregation through detailed studies. (chapter 7) Then, a special Sunday
will be designated to cast the vision of the church to move forward in order to
strategically transition from a rural to suburban context. (chapter 8) Unfortunately, there
are potential disruptions to the transition from a rural to suburban context.

**Develop A Clear Action Plan**

When it comes to an idea of church leadership developing and implementing an
action plan, the most difficult thing is getting started. Overcoming the inertia, as great or
small as it may be, and transitioning from theory into practice is the most difficult process
of action point development.6

In order to develop a clear action plan, the questions of Marquardt and Loan will
be asked. The answers stated will serve as the legs to the body of the vision set forth in
chapter six.

**What Actions or Strategies Will Occur?**

The goals set forth at the end of chapter six serve as the answer to this question.

The actions and strategies that need to take place for the church to transition from a rural

to suburban context must be clearly set before the people who put together the action plan for the church’s transition.

Who Will Carry Out the Changes?

Each step in the action plan needs to be delegated to the person(s) who will directly oversee their respective step. Delegation must take place in order to broaden the leadership base. Broadening the leadership base assists in distributing responsibilities which makes the leader more easily replaceable. Strong leaders in the church must expand the church by transitioning novices from followers into leaders. In the efforts to expand the base of leadership, training, spiritual gift assessment, and accountability need to be taken into consideration.

Training

Besides asking someone to take on a task, and them agreeing to it, sometimes they may need to be trained. For the overseer of their respective point of action, if needed, they should be trained. An example of this from Pleasant Hill Baptist Church is with the need to re-vamp the Wednesday AWANA program for children. The new director for this program had never led AWANA before, and needed to be trained. After calling the AWANA headquarters, the director found a one-day conference to train directors, and also to train all the volunteers she would eventually oversee.

When delegating work, it is important to seek to match staff and church members’ spiritual gifts with the jobs that need to be filled. Willow Creek Community Church takes this point seriously:

We at Willow Creek spend a lot of time thinking about spiritual gifts, talking about each individual’s spiritual gift mix, identifying the gifts needed for each role, and analyzing how those gifts blend with other team members to create the ministry impact we hope to have.8

Church members need to be taught what spiritual gifts are. Furthermore, they need to be taught to be open to whatever gifts for ministry He may want to give people for ministry to serve Him. Likewise, people must continue to seek every opportunity within a local church to use their spiritual gifts in direct service to those in the body of Christ.9

Speaking of spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 says, “4Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” Thankfully, the members of the church are completely different. Some members have the gift of exhortation and should be placed in an opportunity to encourage people when they’re down; an example of this would be serving on a benevolence ministry. Some members have the gift of administration, and would be perfect fits for the finance or personnel committees. Others have the gift of teaching and would make excellent Sunday morning Bible study teachers.

Since there are many jobs in the church and many people with different spiritual gifts, the jobs need to match up with the gifts for there to be a clear match.

In order for members to be matched with their spiritual gifts, they may need to take a spiritual gift assessment. “A variety of programs and gift-assessment tools are commercially available to assist congregations.”¹⁰ Some members may know what their gifts are, but others may be oblivious, and need to study what their gifts actually are.

**Accountability**

When it comes to who will carry out the changes in the development of the action plan, no matter how much training or examinations of spiritual gifts, if the volunteers or staff members overseeing their steps in their respective ministries are not held accountability, the hard work of preparation would lead to failure. Eric Geiger and Thom Rainer voiced this belief by stating, “Once you have recruited staff or volunteers, you must lead them. One important aspect of leadership is accountability. Without accountability, people naturally drift away . . .”¹¹

Max Depree stated, “Movements suffer when leaders are unwilling to hold the

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group accountable.” As church leaders need to hold people accountable, leaders in the church must avoid the extremes on either end of the accountability spectrum: neglect and micromanagement. Micromanagement, on one hand, handcuffs those being overseen. Neglect allows people to be slothful and complacent.

In the book, Simple Church, Eric Geiger and Thom Rainer revealed their research of accountability’s importance in churches. The dichotomy between vibrant churches and comparison churches is drastic when it comes to the level of importance placed upon holding people accountable in their ministry. These researchers and writers see the big picture of the importance of accountability.

Table 4. Process accountability. Churches that have a process of holding people accountable in action plan fulfillment are more vibrant than those that do not have such a plan.

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13. Rainer and Geiger, 175.
When Will the Changes Take Place and for How Long?

A timeline needs to be given for action plans. For example, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church transitioned from having weekly Sunday evening services to having “Home Discipleship Groups” the first two Sundays of the month, an evening service the third Sunday of the month, and no church activities the fourth (and fifth, when applicable) Sunday of the month. As the vision for the church was cast in January, the church needed to know when these changes would take place, and how long they would be in effect. In this situation, the church was told the changes to the Sunday night schedule would take place beginning in March, and the change was indefinite.

Salvatore Maddi and Deborah Khoshaba described two reasons why a timeline is important in an action plan:

First, it’s unwise to lull yourself into thinking that now you know what needs to be done and you can do it at the drop of a hat. You may end up putting the action plan on the back burner, because you feel you can do it easily, whenever you want. Only, you may never quite get around to it. Second, it’s rare for people to be able to quickly carry out actions that effectively reduce a problem’s stressfulness. A realistic estimate of the time each of the instrumental acts will take to accomplish will help you continue to carry through on your Action Plan and prevent you from throwing up your hands in frustration when the goal doesn’t come immediately. It may be next to impossible to be very precise about your timeline. But, the effort to make one stick to it will be helpful to you.15

Determining when and how long changes in the process of rural to suburban transition take place have the propensity to give greater excitement to the church family as they can await with anticipation specific times some changes will take place. Also,

this gives a target for when church leadership wants to achieve certain goals.

What Resources (i.e., money, staff) Are Needed?

Within the action plan, the resources needed are necessary to analyze. Depending upon the time of year and the amount of changes needed, a re-analysis of the church’s budget may need to take place, or a re-analysis of the church’s staff structure may need to be examined.

With every goal in mind, the pastor and those overseeing each action point need to meet in order to determine what costs and possible staff additions will be needed. After determining the answers to the intricate financial questions, decisions may need to be made to prioritize which points in the action plan are the most important and the least important to devote finances or staff toward.

Communication: Who Should Know What?

The church’s key leadership: staff, leaders of committees and ministries should be informed in great detail of what lies ahead for the church. If the leadership of the church is in the loop, they are more likely to buy into the process of transitioning the church from a rural to suburban context.

Communicating to the church at large, however, requires more discernment on the part of the pastor. Skeptics and excited church members alike want to know as much information as possible. People want to know what will happen, who will be in charge, when and for how long will the changes take place, and how much it is going to cost. With the communication process, and who should know what, a lot of the answers to this
question depend upon the unique context for each church.

If the church is used to extremely transparent leadership, especially a congregationally-led church, then they are more likely to want to know what lies ahead as they will have a voice with their vote. Elder-led churches may not be forced into being as forthcoming with minutia of the transition process.

Communicating the leadership over major areas of new initiatives in the transition process is important so that potential volunteers will know who to go to in order to offer their services. Also, this saves time for the church members and staff so people can know exactly who to go to without having to call the church or check the website.

The timeline for the transition process is important to communicate. The American society is impatient, and church is another part of American culture where people can be impatient. People want to know when something is going to happen because they are used to having information at their disposal through the multitudinous avenues of media and communication.

Communicating the resources needed depend upon if additional money will be sought from the church. If more money is needed, details of costs may be explained during a capital campaign. If there is enough money in the budget, or in reserves, it may not be necessary to communicate with as much depth. Also, similarly to the question of what actions or strategies will occur, the amount of information given to the church may vary depending upon the church’s structure governmentally.

The purpose of this has chapter has been to give action plans for church leaders

seeking to lead their church from a rural to suburban context. After learning what an action plan is, analyzing the transition process, and developing clear steps to achieve the church’s goals, the church is now ready to move forward and enjoy the future as a well-prepared and well-organized church to reach their changing community most effectively for Christ.
CHAPTER 10

THE RESULT OF TRANSITIONING FROM RURAL TO SUBURBAN

Not everything always goes to plan. After reading chapter eight, that statement is quite obvious. While analyzing the process of transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context, it would be nice to be able to see the future. Unfortunately, foresight is not a power human beings have the luxury of utilizing. Despite the lack of ability to be able to see what will happen, to look at the future with hope leads a person to see what can happen. In an attempt to take a pragmatic glance at transitioning the local church from a rural to suburban context, this chapter will outline the end result of such a transition.

The eventual result of transitioning a local church from a rural to suburban context has both strengths and limitations, can lead to pastors and elders effectively fulfilling their responsibility as stewards of God’s flock, it can lead to a new beginning for the church’s life, it can result in leading the church to more strategically reach her community, can result in a stimulating change to shock the church into a new level of much-needed vibrancy, and results in recommendations from the author.

Strengths and Limitations

Within the pages of this thesis, there are items that are strengths, as well as some items that serve as weaknesses. Before concluding this thesis, it is essential to briefly
examine the strengths and limitations.

Strengths

The strengths available through this thesis are that a leadership roadmap is clearly laid-out for other church leaders of congregations facing a rural to suburban transition, the project can easily be examined by church leaders in settings other than a rural to suburban transition to be altered to fit their respective context, and it forces church leaders to ponder details of their congregations in order to most strategically move them forward.

Gives A Leadership Roadmap

If a church leader in a rural to suburban transition were to read this thesis, they would benefit from the clear roadmap laid-out before them. The process examines all facets of the local church in order to most effectively move the church forward to a higher level of excellence through the demographic change that is forthcoming.

Applies to All Contexts

Despite this project being written specifically for local assemblies incurring a transition from a rural to suburban context, the project can easily be tweaked to apply to churches of all settings. The process is more in the analysis than it is in the setting. The analysis is forced upon the reader throughout the project.
Forces A Detailed Analysis

The force of detailed analysis is healthy for a church leader. This strength of the thesis is inevitable. The reason is that as a church leader flips through the pages of “Transitioning the Local Church from A Rural to Suburban Context,” it stimulates memories, thoughts, and ideas of their respective context. The mind-stimulating thoughts are detailed analyses.

Limitations

Despite the strengths there are some limitations to this project. In particular, two items stand out. The reality of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church’s particular context is that 37 other Southern Baptist churches plus a multitude of churches of other denominations are sprinkled throughout Loudon County, Tennessee. The response of the evolving community, or lack of response will effect the way Pleasant Hill Baptist Church transitions.

The other limitation is the inability to decipher the spiritual growth that takes place during this transition. Attendance, finances, and facilities may be tangibly measured and graphed to study with ease. Spiritual growth is tangibly indistinguishable.

Pastors and Elders Fulfilling Their Responsibility As Stewards

If the pastors or elders of the church failed to lead the church to transition as the community transitions, they would be failing as God’s stewards (Titus 1:7) because they would not be handling God’s flock with the greatest care. As the church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27), it is the apple of God’s eye. The Lord has entrusted His prized possession in the hands of pastors to oversee the congregations and ensure they
move in the best direction to effectively reach the most people for Christ.

**Strategically Reaching the Community**

The transition of the church from a rural to suburban context leads the church to more strategically reach her community. A church’s ministries are severely hurt when they do not fit in with the community around her. As ministries are out-of-context, and they serve as a square peg in the community’s round hole, it will result in people not wanting to be a part of the church and her ministries.¹

**Stimulating Change**

In his book, *Change or Die*, Alan Deutschman describes the truth about heart bypass surgeries in America.² There are approximately 600,000 heart bypass surgeries per year. After receiving their bypasses, people are told they have to change their lifestyle. Heart bypasses are temporary fixes to give people time to change their health habits of smoking, drinking alcohol, eating right, and exercising. If those people do not change their habits, they will die quickly.

One may assume that being so close to death would shock people into submitting to their doctors’ orders. Surprisingly, ninety percent of heart patients do not change.

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¹ Hickson described an example of a person who was searching for a ministry to belong to, but continually felt out-of her comfort zone and like a “square peg in a round hole.” Rebecca Hickson, *When Time Stands Still*. (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2004), 204.

Two years following their heart surgery, their behaviors have not altered.

If a church is situated in a community that is in the midst of transitioning from being rural to being suburban, and the church fails to change their methods and strategies to most effectively penetrate the culture with the Gospel, then they will eventually die. If the church did not change, she would die. The end result of a church that goes through this detailed process of transition is stimulated change, and is therefore new life.

**A New Beginning for the Church’s Life**

God can and does give second chances. The life of a Christian is the life of a second chance. This is true in the life of Jonah. In Jonah 1:3, Jonah disobeyed God by fleeing to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh. In Jonah 3:1, “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time.” God gives new beginnings to people if they accept it.

Not only can individuals receive new beginnings, so can churches. With an influx of new residents in the community, it provides a new opportunity for the church to impact people. Going through the process of transitioning from a rural to a suburban context can give a new beginning to a church’s life.

**Recommendations**

In order to make this project tangible to each reader, it is necessary to make some recommendations. The two recommendations for the reader are to keep in mind that every situation is unique, and flexibility is essential.

As every situation is unique, please understand that this project is not meant to be
a “cookie cutter” didactic process for every church on the edge of town to experience phenomenal growth. No two churches are the same, so it is recommended to not attempt to take this process, apply it to another church in a similar setting, and expect phenomenal results to take place.

The recommendation of flexibility within this project is important to state because the reader has a different background and perspective of the author. An example of needed flexibility that is being recommended pertain to demographic analysis. The author recommended the use of the North American Mission Board and the U.S. Census Bureau. If the reader has access to another source in their respective context in order to obtain demographic research, they should be flexible in their approach to the study of social statistics.

**Conclusion**

Churches, at times, have difficulty changing as surroundings and culture changes around her. This project has been written to serve as a tool to assist pastors in leading their churches to transition from a rural to suburban context. As the Lord’s face is sought in the process of transitioning His church, may He receive all glory, and honor, and praise forever and ever. Amen.

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3. This sentence is a reiteration of page 4.
APPENDIX A

1. Gender
   ___ Male ___ Female

2. Race
   ___ White ___ Hispanic ___ African-American ___ Other _____________

3. Birth Date

4. Occupation:
   ___ Clerical ___ Craftsman ___ Part-time
   ___ Housewife ___ Laborer ___ Unemployed
   ___ Farm Worker ___ Professional ___ Student
   ___ Sales ___ Service worker ___ Retired
   ___ Manager ___ Operative or transport ___ Other ___

5. Marital Status:
   ___ Single ___ Separated ___ Divorced ___ Married ___ Widowed

6. Check highest education level completed:
   ___ Middle School ___ High School ___ Trade/Technical School
   ___ Junior College ___ College ___ Post grad work/degree

7. What type of dwelling is your home?
   ___ Single-family housing (If so, do you rent or own? _________________)
   ___ Apartment/condominium (2–9 units)
   ___ Apartment/condominium (10+ units)
   ___ Mobile home

8. How long have you lived at your present address? _______________________

9. Were you born in this state? □ yes □ no

10. Were you born in this city? □ yes □ no
11. Where would you place your household income?
   ___ Less than $25,000 ___ $25,000–$50,000 ___ $50,000–$75,000
   ___ $75,000–$100,000 ___ $100,000+

12. What percentage of your income do you give to the church?
   ___ 0% ___ 5% ___ 10% ___ More than 10% ___ (fill-in-the-blank if your % isn’t listed)
   Comments:_________________________________________________________

13. Approximately how many miles do you live from the church building?

   ________________________________________________________________

14. How long have you been a Christian?
   ___ Not a Christian ___ Less than a year ___ 1–2 years
   ___ 3–5 years ___ 6–9 years ___ 10+ years

15. How long have you been a member of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church?
   ___ Not a member ___ Less than a year ___ 1–2 years
   ___ 3–5 years ___ 6–9 years ___ 10–19 years ___ 20+ years

16. What was the first contact you had with the church?
   ___ Friends/relatives attended ___ Spouse was member
   ___ Parents brought you ___ Radio or TV
   ___ Former pastor’s recommendation ___ Personal visit by the pastor
   ___ Religious survey ___ Personal visit of a member
   ___ Newspaper ad ___ Came on my own
   ___ Drove by ___ Special event

17. What one thing influenced you to join this church?__________________________

   ________________________________________________________________

18. In a typical four-Sunday month, how often do you attend worship services?

   ________________________________________________________________

19. Indicate with a checkmark if you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very
dissatisfied with the following:

   Very Satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied
   Sunday Morning Worship ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Sunday Morning Bible Study ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Music Ministry ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Discipleship Training Opportunities ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Student/Youth Ministry ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Children’s Ministry ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
   Preschool Ministry ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Evangelism  ■  ■  ■  ■
Leadership Training  ■  ■  ■  ■
Missions Emphasis  ■  ■  ■  ■
Comments:

20. Have you considered leaving this church in the last five years? Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

21. What do you believe our church does best?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

22. What do you believe our church most needs to improve?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23. Do you feel you are a vital part of the church family?  ■ yes  ■ no
Please explain:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

24. Do you feel you are being used according to your giftedness and passion?
  ■ not really  ■ occasionally  ■ usually  ■ yes, I do
Please explain:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

25. Are you a part of a small group?
  ■ Sunday Morning Bible Study Class  ■ Discipleship Group  ■ Other:
________________________________________________________________________

26. Do you feel the members of this church would help you in a time of trouble?
  ■ not really  ■ depends  ■ usually  ■ absolutely
Comments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
27. Are there people in this community who would not feel comfortable attending worship services Pleasant Hill Baptist Church? Why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

28. Are you comfortable encouraging nonbelievers to attend the worship services of Pleasant Hill? Is there anything about Pleasant Hill you would not want them to know?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

29. Do you currently feel alienated from anyone in the church?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

30. What members of this church, other than the ministerial staff, have the greatest influence on major church decisions?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

31. Have you made suggestions that have been accepted by the church?
☐never ☑one small one ☐yes
Comments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

32. How do you feel about your ability to influence decision-making in the church?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

33. Are you involved with a ministry team of any kind in the church? (i.e. music, missions, committees, etc.)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

34. What gives you the most satisfaction in the position you now serve?
35. What gives you the most frustration in the position you now serve?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

36. When in your life were you most fulfilled as a Christian?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

36. Do you feel you are closer in your relationship to Christ than you were five years ago? If so, what has this church done to help enable that?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

37. What could this church do to help you in grow in your relationship to Christ?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
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VITA

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