

"Russell Small's approach moves beyond defining church revitalization; he created a process-driven resource for churches determining their revitalization pathway. Russell graciously walks a church through identifying who they are, where they've been, where they need to go, and who can help them accomplish the task. This much-needed resource provides more than a checklist, but a dialogical approach to solving issues for a congregation in revitalization."

—Kenneth W. Priest,
Founder, Revive This Church Ministries, revivethischurch.com

"Russell (Rusty) Small is an excellent scholar and a faithful pastor. This reality shines throughout this very fine book on church revitalization. It is biblical, theological, and practical. It is well written, and it is structured in such a way that it can serve as a valuable resource to be consulted again and again. This is essential reading for those called to this critically important work."

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President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

"If we say that we love Jesus but show little concern for his church, we have truly deceived ourselves. Rusty Small has labored to produce a resource that screams, 'I love the church!' He embodies our mission here in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity to come alongside the local church in its quest to fulfill the Great Commission. His insights gained, from diligent research and intentional relationships with pastors, is both convicting and inspiring. The task is hard, but your church will be healthier with these insights."

—Troy W. Temple,
Dean, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

"I am excited to read Rusty Small's book, *Church Revitalization: A Pastoral Guide to Church Renewal*. Rusty writes, not only from the viewpoint of a state convention leader, but also from the perspective of a pastor who has led his church through revitalization. I plan to use this book to train and to encourage my staff because every chapter addresses critical issues facing revitalization pastors and insights that provide a practical application of biblical wisdom. I am especially enthused about his chapter on 'Managing Conflict, Making Peace.' If you are a revitalization pastor, you need this book."

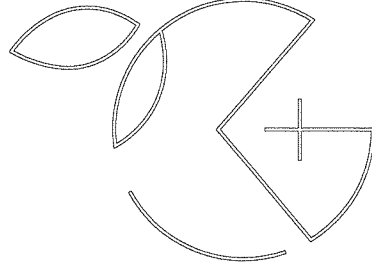
—William D. Henard,
Adjunct Professor of Church Revitalization, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Author of *Can These Bones Live?* and *ReClaimed Church*
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Athens, TN

"No cookie-cutter approach here, and that's what makes this book worth your time and investment! Dr. Small's book, *Church Revitalization: A Pastoral Guide to Church Renewal*, will cause you to ask the right questions, in order to find the correct solution for your own local church. It understands that no two churches are alike. By focusing on your church's uniqueness in history, community, and pastoral leadership, you can implement a customized strategy plan for long-term success. Forge your own future by following the encouragement and wisdom the author shares here. You'll be glad you did."

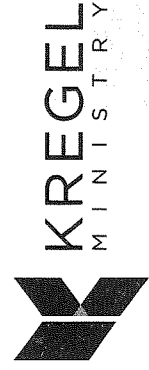
—Dr. J. David Jackson,
Replant Specialist, North American Mission Board, SBC
Author of *ReNew: Traveling the Forgotten Path*

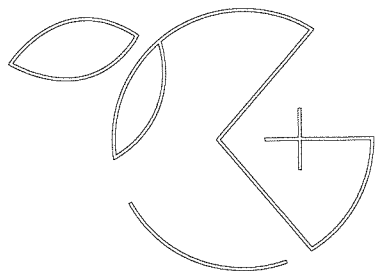
CHURCH REVITALIZATION

A PASTORAL GUIDE TO CHURCH RENEWAL



Russell N. Small





WHAT'S THE PLAN?

A pastor must be a leader. A clear-eyed plan for a church is essential for church revitalization. A church that needs revitalization has been unable to clearly devise and execute a quality plan for itself. This does not mean that plans are not being followed, nor that there is an absence of leaders in the church. What it does mean is the plan that has been set forth is no longer workable for the church to achieve vitality. There are many plans that can be devised to achieve church revitalization. Many churches have been able to follow different paths for vitality to be reborn. A pastor and church leadership must be able to devise a plan that is workable for a particular church in a particular season.¹ Understanding this reality means there are often fewer options for good plans, because a plan that a church will not accept and execute is not a good plan.

¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 23–104.

ASSESSING READINESS FOR CHANGE

Developing a plan requires more analysis than a pastor may first realize. Not only do many churches struggle to see that the plans they are following are not really working, but when a critical mass of church members state they want revitalization, this is the first step toward revitalization, not the last. Understanding the nature of change and resistance is important when developing a plan and putting forth reasonable steps for a church. Assessing readiness for change is part of developing a plan. The less a church is ready to change, the smaller the options for change exist. A relatively minor change in a resistant church will require a lot of work and emotional energy to accomplish. Therefore, readiness for change can be evaluated in five major stages. The stages are pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

Pre-contemplation is present in many declining churches. The signs of decline are so slow or are reasoned away so quickly that the church remains reasonably content in its current state. Even numerical and spiritual decline can be skewed as positive factors. A church can view itself as the last outpost for real Christians in the area or refocus itself on merely taking care of one another. This latter course is often clear when the primary function of a pastor is to make visits, care for the needs of the congregation, and sadly preach a meaningful funeral for dying members. At this point, the pastor is preparing to close the church, not revitalize it, but the members are pleased with the care they are receiving. Churches that are not ready for change in virtually any form because they have developed a workable (albeit a poor) long-term plan for the moment will just need to be given more time to change.

There are two approaches that can be employed when a church is in the pre-contemplation stage. The rock-bottom approach, which basically waits for a church to run out of money and members, will require the church to assess its situation when certain factors arise. However, it is surprising how long a church can be in the dying process yet never quite reach rock bottom. Further, when some churches finally reach rock bottom, their facilities are so in need of repair it is often easier to rebuild and start over than attempt repair. The other approach is

motivational interviewing. This approach, which attempts to help the church to see beyond its immediate strategy, is difficult because it seeks to move a church that sees little need for change into contemplation for change. This is best done by a denominational leader, church strategist, or interim pastor. A pastor who is in a church that has not even begun the process of contemplating change will have to fit into the church's expectations. Therefore, a pastor in a church that is in this stage will need to be content to minister to the church in a chaplain-style ministry.

Contemplation often occurs in the most observant leaders first. The slow fade in church life can be blamed on so many external factors. Church members can decry the death of the community due to globalization, the change of demographics, the secularization of society, or bad pastoral leadership. However, even in the midst of these excuses and the realities of decline are often seen in hard data such as attendance and giving records. These obvious signs allow some church members to begin to think about the need to make a change. These thoughts are often subtle. A church may contemplate initially that something of a past era needs to be reintroduced. There may be some truth to these initial thoughts, but what will make the church vital in the future is virtually never a reintroduction of an old strategy without serious modifications. This contemplation is positive, but typically the initial thoughts about how the church needs to change and how the church can look will be quite different from the end results in a revitalized church. A pastor can easily misread a situation of church contemplation, believing that because a church is thinking about change it is ready for all the changes in the mind of the leaders. This is rarely the case.

Preparation occurs when a church begins to make moves toward action. In many churches, a group of people will gather formally or informally to discuss possible changes. This process can take an exceptionally long time. Church change is often counted in months and years, not weeks. It is not unusual for a group of members in churches in need of revitalization to meet for months to discuss exceedingly minor changes. A pastor who is in this process must exercise patience. Attempting to rush church members who are accustomed to a slower pace of church life will only cause the process to slow down more.

Further, a pastor will typically need to help manage group dynamics. While a group of members may see the need for change, once preparation for any action is discussed the variety of ideas and the pace at which these ideas should be implemented will vary greatly. Not only must a pastor be aware of pushing his own agenda too hard to get the group of church members to turn against him. He must also stay on the lookout for members getting upset with one another. A pastor can be thrilled to hear that a church member sees the need for rapid change. However, if this church member is in the minority, it is possible that they will get frustrated with the process and quit. A pastor must think carefully about group dynamics so that an actionable plan can emerge out of this process. Many times, churches get to this point, have a lot of meetings, get conflicted, and abandon the process with very superficial changes that do little to engender real church revitalization.

Action occurs when a church develops plans that will work toward church revitalization. It is precisely at this point that most church-revitalization changes are often less dramatic than the level of change in a church plant. Since the church exists in some form, a pastor is not building the church from nothing. Further, good, actionable plans for church revitalization create change, but a pastor will need to likely remind himself that good church revitalization means progress, not perfection. Therefore, the goal will be to develop some initial changes toward revitalization that can be built on.

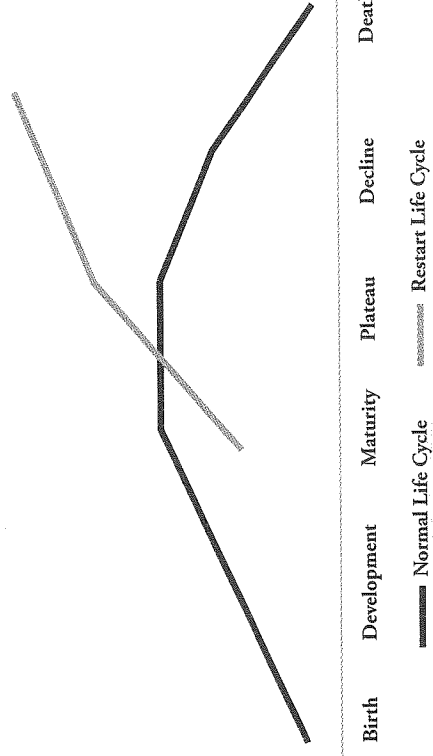
Maintenance will require that the church continue to hold these patterns of health. It is possible that after a few initial interventions, great resistance arises. The church will be pressured to go back to old forms of operation. An initial win might have stressed a portion of the congregation. Further, it is easy for a church to use a bit of vitality as an excuse to halt all progress rather than to build on it. The church, it is argued, is now stable. While it might be wise to pause if the church is stressed due to a series of changes, it would be unwise to allow for old patterns to become normative again.²

2 William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change*, 3rd ed. (New York: Guildford, 2013), 155–302.

LOCATING THE CHURCH IN THE LIFE CYCLE

Like other organizations, churches have a life cycle. They are born, develop, mature, decline, and unfortunately die. This does not have to be the case. If churches can identify their place in the life cycle and revision, then they are able to see fresh life appear. The stages of the life cycle can be divided among many terms. For ease of communication, the terms *birth*, *adolescence*, *adulthood*, *plateau*, *decline*, and *death* will be used. There is an original purpose behind every church that is born. Starting a church is often full of excitement and unknowns. In its early years it is very fluid, often formed around a small group of people with limited purposes. As a church grows into adolescence, systems and processes must be put in place for internal alignment and external outreach. Eventually a more clearly aligned organizational structure and system are established. The church reaches adulthood and has come to age in its organization. Reaching maturity as an organization means that systems and structures are developed for more complex functions. However, the systems and structures that can lead a church toward health in one era are the very systems and structures that can lead to decline in another.

Church Life Cycle



A plateau and subsequent decline are subtle. It is often difficult for a church to believe that plateau and decline are happening because the systems and protocols are being followed precisely. The problem is these systems and protocols no longer meet the needs of the moment. Times change, the situation is different, but the strategy is the same. This is a difficult moment because it involves a push and pull of change and control. There are some who realize the church must become less structured to adjust to the moment, and there are those who will resist any change to the structure. Here the church can be consumed internally with conflict, even attempting to undo old structures. A church that has grown old has a tough time acting young again. However, this is what is required. The old systems and processes must be readdressed, and a new vision that meets the moment must be developed and implemented to move the church to an earlier phase in the lifecycle. If this does not occur, a church can remain in a stable or plateaued position for years, even decades. However, without addressing the lifecycle realities death will ensue at some point in the future. It can be a slow, agonizing death, or it can occur quickly.³

Locating a church in the life cycle will have substantial influence on what interventions toward church revitalization are possible. If a church has merely been through a difficult season, clarity of vision and realignment of resources can make church revitalization doable. However, if decline has been ongoing, then significant work must be done for the revitalization effort to be possible. A church that has been in decline for several years may or may not have the necessary resources to accomplish revitalization.⁴ A church must not only develop a plan for revitalization but must also have the required resources to execute the plan developed.

3 Bill Henard, *Re-Claimed Church: How Churches Grow, Decline, and Experience Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 7–104.

4 Les McKeown, *Predictable Success: Getting Your Organization on the Growth Track—and Keeping It There* (Austin: Greenleaf, 2010), 95–130.

FOSTERING

Churches that have experienced decline over a substantial period may not have the resources to be able to execute a revitalization effort. Fostering is a process by which another church aids a struggling church with necessary coaching and resources to aid in the revitalization effort. A fostering church is not seeking to make the church part of their ministry. Rather, the fostering church comes alongside the struggling church for a limited time (typically one to two years) for the purpose of helping the church retain autonomy and supplementing resources for the revitalization effort. If fostering is successful, the struggling church will gain strength and continue revitalization on its own. If fostering is unsuccessful, the struggling church will need to decide either to close or replant.⁵

COMMON STRATEGIES IN CHURCH REVITALIZATION

While each church has a unique situation that needs to be carefully taken into consideration, there are some common initial strategies that can help a church take its first actionable steps toward revitalization. It is important to know some of these initial interventions so that their effectiveness for a particular situation can be evaluated. It is possible to do more than one intervention at a time. However, attempting to do too much too fast may frustrate the process. Even in a multifaceted approach, these interventions will need to be scheduled out in an orderly fashion, so the church has clarity on each task at the proper time.

Prayer-Focused Revitalization

Prayer is the catalyst of spiritual renewal. This intervention is a nonnegotiable even if other interventions are utilized. Prayer for church renewal is different from church members praying about

5 North Carolina Baptists are to be commended for their process of church fostering as a major tool in church revitalization. They have developed a workable process for the churches in their state.

the needs in their life. Prayer for church renewal brings the church together for focused prayer around the needs of the church. Church members are encouraged to specifically pray for the church, pray for the lost, pray for leaders in ministry, pray for the pastoral staff, pray for the deacons, and pray for clarity and greater vision for the church. Many churches that pray can fail to pray specifically for God to do a work in the church. When the entire church is committed to pray for the spiritual needs of the church and community, God can move in greater ways.⁶

Worship-Based Revitalization

The largest gathering of the church every week is typically the corporate worship service. If a church does not offer a quality worship service, it is hard for a church to be revitalized. Worship-based revitalization attempts to think through and improve the overall Sunday morning experience. While the music and the message will be important, there is more to worship-based revitalization than merely these two aspects. Churches that offer a quality worship service think about the entire worship experience. There are simple touches that communicate to the church that worship is important. These features can include greeters at main entrances, quality printed materials such as a bulletin, and a clean facility, especially the bathrooms and nursery area.

Regarding the worship service, there needs to be an attempt at planning. While a worship service should not be fully scripted, there certainly does need to be a sense of intentionality. Announcements need to be well crafted, music needs to be offered to the best of the church's ability, prayer needs to be personalized to church needs, and the message needs to be prayerfully prepared. These simple acts of intentionality signal to the church that an attempt at revitalization is underway. The more difficult but often necessary aspects of worship-based revitalization occur when the worship service needs

6 Thom Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings on How Congregations Avoided Death* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020), 71–84.

to be adjusted to minister more effectively to a wider audience. This may mean changing service order, updating the music, adjusting a preaching style, and potentially bringing new participants into worship. Even if done with discernment, these changes may still be resisted by some, but they may also reach out to a wider group. In a revitalization, a pastor will need to discern whether changing the worship should be the first actionable move toward revitalization.⁷

Evangelism-Focused Revitalization

The failure to share the gospel leads to spiritual dryness. A fresh focus on evangelism can certainly aid in revitalization. While older models of sharing the gospel are not as useful as in past generations, gospel sharing is still a mandate for all Christians. If a church engages in basic training in sharing the gospel, calls members to merely share the gospel with one person and gives the church tools to aid in a simple gospel presentation, church vitality can emerge from this context. Evangelism in many American contexts must build a greater bridge because the basic presuppositions of the Christian faith are not as widely held. There is growing disbelief in the existence of God, the reality of sin, divine judgment, and divinely offered personal salvation. Evangelistic engagement may take more time to address these concerns and require a greater relational commitment. However, the evangelistic response may be more solid because those who come to faith will do so out of a greater understanding of the gospel. If a church is ready to share the gospel, the potential for church revitalization is great.⁸

Small-Group-Based Revitalization

Small groups both enable the deepening of relationships within the church and serve as an opportunity for outreach outside the

7 Tom Cheyney, *38 Church Revitalization Models for the 21st Century* (Orlando: Renovate, 2014).

8 Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 76–160.

church. New small groups can be formed with little disruption to the current state of church life. Further, if a church has an aging congregation, a young couple can form a new small group to reach younger couples within the community without the initial struggle of bringing them into an older congregation. Further, a good small group offers an opportunity for deepening relationships. Many small groups meet in a member's home. This personal setting creates a different type of interpersonal atmosphere. This is not to rule out the possibility that the same objectives cannot be accomplished through more traditional Sunday school programs. The difficulty of small-group revitalization occurs when the new growth or the vitalized members in the church face resistance from those who do not see the need for change within the church. If a small group is reaching new people, the introduction of these families into the life of the church should be met with joy. However, sometimes the presence of a new contingent of people is directly or indirectly viewed as a threat to old power networks. However, if vitalized members and new members can assimilate into the life of the church, this can cause fresh vitality.⁹

Catalytic-Event-Based Revitalization

Catalytic-event-based revitalization attempts to create quick momentum using an event. This event is typically community-focused. These could be as simple as a community block party. The point of a catalytic event is to communicate to the surrounding community that the church is operational and ready to serve the community. Reports on the effectiveness of event-based revitalization are mixed. Many pastors and churches look for an immediate return from the catalytic event. For example, a small church may have a community block party that attracts hundreds, but the following Sunday church attendance is the same. Some pastors decry the willingness of the

9 Kenneth Priest and Alan Stoddard, *Groups That Revitalize: Bringing New Life to Your Church through Sermon-Based Small Groups* (Littleton, CO: Acoma, 2019), 45–102.

community to participate in community events but then failing to come to church. This appears to misunderstand the process of revitalization. Seen from another perspective, a positive experience for the community at a church event is an especially important win. Further, many who attend church events may have had a bad church experience or are merely testing out the church experience. A pastor or church should not expect an immediate return on investment. The church must commit to ministering to the community in fresh ways and use each one of these community events to build relationships and earn trust. Event-based revitalization can be a straightforward way to get the church outside the walls of the building. However, expectations will need to be tempered so that the church does not expect one positive experience with the church to overturn years of church stagnation or to overcome a past church hurt.

New Leadership Revitalization

New church leadership offers a unique opportunity for church revitalization. The presence of new pastoral staff and even new leadership structures can aid in revitalization. If a church needs revitalization, there has been a lack of leadership and a lack of congregational support to move the church toward vitality. Once patterns of behavior between church leadership and a congregation are set in place, it is difficult to change. It is possible for a current pastor to reform his leadership style so that he encourages the church toward greater revitalization. However, it is easier for a pastor who does not have a history with the church to change the way things operate and to introduce a new form of leading.

Next-Generation Revitalization

Reaching the next generation is important for the vitality of a church. A robust children's and student ministry typically signals the presence of vitality. However, older congregations will need to be willing to do a lot to reach and retain the next generation. Many churches pursuing revitalization realize the need to reach

children, students, and young families. However, this will not be done by merely adding a program onto the current structure. To be welcoming to a younger audience, change will need to occur on many fronts. Whether the church realizes it or not, it is set up to attract exactly who it is attracting. Therefore, hiring a children's or youth pastor and starting a new program will not create the level of cooperation to truly reach the next generation. A church must be willing to invest in the next generation while at the same time offering a total church experience that is more conducive to the group they are attempting to reach.

Multisite-Based Revitalization

The multisite church revolution continues to grow and flourish. The model of one church in many locations is still developing. While for many churches it is ideal to keep their autonomy, this is not viable for many churches. Some church facilities are in strategic places and are in proximity to another vital work. In cases like that it might be better for a church to merge into another work than to die. The merging of a church facility to be the site of another church typically means the church loses its old identity to take on the characteristics and mission of the mother church. This will require humility, patience, and openness to the philosophy of the mother church. Sometimes the mother church will allow the pastoral staff to remain in the church in a nonteaching role. This can be done successfully, but a church will need to relinquish authority to the church that is willing to bring them on as part of a multisite campus.¹⁰

Restart/Replant-Based Revitalization

Sometimes church revitalization will mean giving away the church property to a new work. This approach is basically providing a

¹⁰ Geoff Surratt, Greg Ligon, and Warren Bird, *The Multi-site Church Revolution: Being One Church in Many Locations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 45–59.

church planter and his team an older facility to start a new work. In cases like this, when the change required is unlikely to occur, the church offers up its property with the current congregation and another vital congregation utilizes the space. For churches like this, some recommendations must be heeded. Basically, in this model the main offering of the church is to provide a building. If the church is not thoughtful in the gifting of a building even this final strategy can fail. Typically, a church that has been declining for years has a lot of deferred maintenance. Further, monetary reserves are usually taken down to virtually zero before a church is willing to transfer the property to another work. A church undergoing these circumstances may be less attractive to a church plant than purchasing a new building. Ideally, churches that realize they need a new work to accomplish a replant must be proactive in transferring the property. In an ideal situation, the church will attempt to address major deferred maintenance issues before they devalue the building greatly. Also, it would be ideal for a church to gift some money to a new church plant to make the gifting of the building more attractive. If a church plant had an older building without major deferred maintenance issues and \$50,000, it would be more probable that the new church would thrive in that location.¹¹

BEST PRACTICES IN REVITALIZATION

There are common best practices in revitalization. While in one sense, every church-revitalization situation is unique, they all have some similar features. It is important to note what is similar in various church-revitalization situations so these features can become part of the unique plan for church revitalization.

Culture of Excellence

A culture of excellence is essential to the execution of a plan. Whatever steps toward revitalization a church pursues, the initiatives must

¹¹ Mark Hallock, *Replant Roadmap: How Your Congregation Can Help Revitalize Dying Churches* (Littleton, CO: Acoma, 2017), 23–58.

be carried out with excellence. Attention to detail, quality execution of initiatives, orderliness, and going above and beyond expectation can make any plan attractive. A great plan done without excellence has poorer chances of success. The leadership team needs to commit to excellence. Further, a culture of excellence is put in place not only in the initial implementation of a plan but in each stage of all initiatives. Striving for constant improvement will set a pace for quality implementation and continual quality improvement.

Disposition of Leadership

Church leadership must have crystal clarity on the plan they desire to implement. However, the disposition of church leadership will need high degrees of emotional intelligence. The pacing, interventions chosen, ability to pause, ability to listen, ability to stand firm, and the ability to compromise require a unique disposition of leadership. Strong leaders can develop a plan and implement it at all costs. While this works in some business settings where there is understood allegiance to a leader, it often fails in a church environment. If it does succeed, a portion of the church typically retreats or leaves the church. In an environment where the church is too small to withstand such trauma, the entire church may be deeply harmed. And typically, this type of strong leader leaves. The ability of church leadership to have a clear plan and simply deal with the lack of strategic movement of some church members requires unique patience and maturity. However, it is often this type of leader who can survive the process of church revitalization.

Affirming Measured Growth and Acceleration

Church leadership must not only have a unique disposition of patience and strategy implementation but also execute measured growth. Everything does not need to be completed within the first few years. Successful church leadership must realize that church decline has taken years to materialize, and that revitalization will take time as well. Therefore, initial plans must not overwhelm the congregation but must be seen by the church as doable and reasonable. While a church congregation may need to trust God for what he can do in

church revitalization, church leadership must realize that there have been years of stagnations and that God's power has not been observed in the life of the church. Therefore, wise church leadership demonstrates to the church small wins and then builds on these small wins to generate momentum for greater interventions in the future.

Budgetary Alignment

A church in need of revitalization typically has limited resources. The resources have been allocated in a way that produced the current situation. There is little extra money in a church in need of revitalization. While not everything requires money, some interventions will require some budget to see them accomplished. Church leadership can get buy-in on budgetary alignment to make the limited resources of the church better positioned to accomplish plans that can encourage revitalization. Church leadership in a revitalization will also function as fundraisers. Resources are typically a major obstacle in church revitalization. Church members are often willing to give to vision. The lack of vision for the church has typically been one of the many reasons the church has not been compelled to give more sacrificially to the ministry of the church.

Facility Enhancement for Ministry Effectiveness

The state of many church facilities is a visual representation of the state of the church. When members and visitors alike enter the building, the carpet from thirty years ago, the dirty bathrooms, the outdated nursery, and the poor sound system all communicate the state of the church. The facilities communicate that the church is in need of vitality. Rehabilitating a building that has experienced years of deferred maintenance is a daunting task. However, a visual sign of freshness in a church facility can communicate to the church that church revitalization is underway. An area of the church that has been a long-term eyesore can especially be an area that the congregation is motivated to fix and give toward. Again, updating a facility will not in and of itself cause revitalization, but often some facility improvement signals to the church that church revitalization is in motion.

A Simple Path to Discover Vision

Discovering the vision of the church can be a long, complicated process. Some churches distribute surveys, form groups, have meetings, and expend a lot of energy in a visioning process. Some of this process will be necessary. However, discovering the vision of the church is both simple and complex. Many church members can envision a more vibrant church than the one that currently exists. Rather than attempting to craft a perfect vision for the church, just developing and agreeing on a better vision can move the church toward revitalization. Since the actual process of church revitalization is going to take a lot of energy, it is important not to overexpend energy in the planning phase of revitalization. Therefore, a simple path to discover vision without frustrating the church in the initial planning phase is especially important for successful implementation.¹²

MAKING YOUR CONVICTIONS PLAIN THROUGH VISION

A vision is a compelling future reality that calls the church to action. It is important to remember that while the church will need a step-by-step approach to accomplishing a future desired state, the vision cannot merely aim for the head. It must also aim for the heart. A compelling vision enables the church to see afresh what they can be. This vision will need to enable church members to see a church that is cultivating strong community, reaching a younger generation, nurturing Spirit-led worship, and reversing the effects of years of decline.

Before a church attempts to dream again and aspire to make the church greater than its current state, the church needs to evaluate why it will aspire to attempt church revitalization. Hopefully, the reason a church would attempt church revitalization is because of a deep desire to serve God and make disciples. The why of church revitalization is a desire to see God's glory revealed in every church. The presence of

¹² Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 91–164.

a dying church is out of step with God's victorious plan. Therefore, the recovery of God's glory in every declining church should be a strong motivating factor.

VISION STATEMENT, MISSION STATEMENT, AND VALUES

A vision statement is for the purpose of aspiration. It paints a picture of a future desired state. A vision for a church could be a desire to touch every home in the city or to engage missions or to focus on the community. These are aspirational statements that provide a framework for a future reality. A vision statement does not require all the specific details to be described. It calls the church to action emotionally by envisioning a future for the church that is the basis for motivation.

A mission statement provides objectives for the purpose of the church's existence. Many churches' mission statements revolve around the commands of Jesus to love God and neighbor or to make disciples. A mission statement gives clarity on the objectives of a church and can serve as a guiding principle for everything accomplished in the church. A pastor could use the mission statement as the means to evaluate the programs of the church. If a church's ministries are poorly aligned with the mission statement of the church, then church leaders should address those ministries. Ideally, every ministry of the church should fulfill the objective set forth by the mission statement. If ministries of the church do not achieve the objectives of the mission statement, it is worth asking how these ministries are contributing to the objectives of the church.

The values of a church are a further elaboration on how the mission statement will be accomplished—for example, the means by which a church seeks to make disciples. The values of a church, like the marks of the church discussed in chapter 2, could be evangelism, discipleship, worship, fellowship, prayer, and ministry. These values engage the mind, motivate the heart, and create action, further elucidating the mission statement and providing greater clarity to accomplish the objectives of the mission statement. Further, the values clarify

the parameters of how the church can accomplish the mission of the church.¹³

THE PROBLEM WITH BEING UNSPECIFIC

The process of change is a time of vulnerability for a church. The church knows how to operate under the old plan, so clarity regarding the new plan is essential. It builds confidence and competency. A pastor can believe that he has achieved clarity while the congregation feels otherwise. This lack of clarity is due to two main factors. First, the plan itself is not clear enough. There are many assumptions a pastor can make about a plan that are not assumed by the congregation. Therefore, every detail of a plan must be mapped out. The diligence of clear plan-making is a very consuming project. Second, the plan itself might be clear, but it is not communicated clearly enough. About the time pastors, church leadership, and staff are weary of discussing a plan is often the time the congregation is just beginning to comprehend it. A pastor should not underestimate how hard it is to get people to understand the contours of the most basic plan. This is not due to the lack of intelligence of the congregation, but the divided attention in their lives. A church member has many obligations. Therefore, church is often a solace from the hectic schedule. It requires mental work to think about strategy as it relates to church life, and this requires focused intentionality by church leadership.

Developing a clear plan is a mix of aspirational and actual goals. If a plan is merely a sterile step-by-step process without a clear end goal, it will not motivate the heart. If a plan is merely aspirational it should have enough focus on the details of execution to accomplish it. A long tenure for a pastor in a church is ten years. The average tenure of a pastor in a church is around four years. Developing actual plans beyond five to ten years is an exceedingly difficult prospect. However, to achieve church revitalization a pastor must commit to stay at a church for the long-term to see deep change realized. The ability to dream and execute actionable steps toward church revitalization is essential for a quality plan.

¹³ Michael Worth, *Nonprofit Management: Principles and Practice*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019), 186–88.

Developing a Plan

Five- to Ten-Year Aspirational Goals

What is the best-case scenario for the church in five to ten years? Develop the vision of what this would look like.

Five-Year Actual Goals

List actual goals that must be accomplished for the aspirational goal to occur over the next five years. Write out goal and action plan.

1. Goal 1 (with detailed plan of action)
2. Goal 2 (with detailed plan of action)
3. Goal 3 (with detailed plan of action)
4. Goal 4 (with detailed plan of action)
5. Goal 5 (with detailed plan of action)

One-Year Aspirational Goals

What is the best-case scenario for the church in the upcoming year?

One-Year Actual Goals

List actual goals that must be accomplished for the aspirational goal to occur in the next year. Write out goals and action plans.

1. Goal 1 (with detailed plan of action)
2. Goal 2 (with detailed plan of action)
3. Goal 3 (with detailed plan of action)
4. Goal 4 (with detailed plan of action)

Five- to Ten-Year Aspirational Goals

Aspiration goals are not goals that need clarity on how a church will accomplish them, but merely a vision of what a church could be. It is important to avoid asking questions about feasibility of accomplishing aspirational goals, but to merely dream what could be. A pastor starting his pastorate at a church could ask what he would like his legacy to be at this place. What does he hope the church will have become upon his exit? Further, especially in church-revitalization situations, a past era seemed to have more vitality than the current one. It is helpful to ask members to express how the realities of the past era could be realized in the future. For example, maybe a church was known for its mission involvement, worshipful music, or evangelistic outreach.

Get members to express how this would look if it were recovered. Allow new members in a church revitalization to express what aspects of other churches they envision their church obtaining. Again, it is important to stay focused on expressing aspirational goals without attention to detail and feasibility.

Aspirational goals sometimes feel unreachable, but part of the reason the church has not reached for them is because they have become overly fixated on obstacles and immediate feasibility. In the field of counseling, counselors ask clients the miracle question. The miracle question asks the client to pretend that tomorrow morning when you awake the problems of life are gone. Then the therapist asks the client to describe what this problem-free life looks like. Likewise, when talking about aspirational goals, the church merely contemplates that if the church were as they hope it to be, what would it look like? Many church members have general aspirations and hope for the church, but these are rarely articulated in specific ways. Further, what many church members have given up as impossible is far more doable than they realize when they finally state their aspirations.

Five-Year Actual Action Steps

The movement from aspirational to specific action steps is simple. If an aspirational goal is going to be accomplished, then certain steps would need to be taken to realize it. It is important to carefully state three to five major things that must be accomplished in the next five years to reach the aspirational goal. These action steps must be placed in some type of sequence. Depending on the action steps, they may need to occur either concurrently or one after the other. A leadership team can solidify what these action steps need to be. Even at this point it is not necessary to work out the detail of how each one will be completed. Each action item will need to be clearly stated. The details as to how to best accomplish them can be worked out later.

One-Year Aspirational Goals

As you are in this planning process, it becomes easier when a leadership team thinks only in terms of one year. One year is a truly short period

in the life of a church. However, if a leadership team envisions how the church could have its best year ever, ideas about what would be accomplished at the end of one year is still aspirational. Just dreaming about how the church could have its best year will engage robust conversation and excitement. It is important again that the feasibility of the aspirations is not evaluated at this point. The door is open to allow for brainstorming.

One-Year Actual Action Steps

This is the arduous work of planning in church revitalization. What are the minimum of one and maximum of four actions steps that will be accomplished this year to see the one-year aspirational goal accomplished or partially realized? These one-year objectives need to be consistent with the long-term vision of the church. However, they need to be short-term enough to be accomplished in one year in order to gain a short-term win that is consistent with the long-term vision of the church. Getting wins in the short term can build momentum and energy to increase in scope and speed on future initiatives. If a church is not able to gain a few short-term wins to show that aspirational goals can at least be partially realized, there will not be sufficient motivation to continue to push the vision forward.

These clearly developed action steps must state the what, the who, and the how. What is going to be accomplished must be written with crystal-clear detail. Who is going to see to it that these plans are implemented and must be organized with crystal-clear detail? How it is going to be accomplished must be administrated with crystal-clear detail. This must be first understood and communicated to the church leadership team, but once it is developed it must be clearly communicated to the church at large.¹⁴

MANAGING THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

Change is not nearly as difficult as the change process. A good leader not only has to know where he is going but must also manage the

14 Will Mancini and Warren Bird, *God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church's Future* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 39–72.

church through the process of change. For example, a freshly renovated home is a wonderful end goal. However, living in a house that is under renovation is not nearly as enjoyable. Likewise, a church that is in a change process will go through a season that may be less enjoyable than the current state of things so that a new future reality can be realized. A pastor who is not able to empathize with this reality may compromise the possibility of change.¹⁵ Communication, understanding, restatement of vision, restatement of actionable steps, and the ability to make the change process as enjoyable as possible are important. A pastor must focus on managing today while making tomorrow better. Some will not be up for the journey no matter how much encouragement the pastor gives. Therefore, he will need to embrace the reality that some will not make the journey, but ought to graciously allow them to depart the church with an open door for them to return in a different season. A pastor also during this time needs to appreciate the leaders and members who are walking through this process. This can be accomplished through appreciation dinners, letters and emails of encouragement, and spoken words of encouragement. A pastor will need to be a positive cheerleader and empathic listener as the change process unfolds.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

It is hard to overstate the need to communicate. Communication must be frequent, succinct, detailed, and passionate. It is better for the church to become tired of hearing the vision than for them to be confused about what the vision is. It is easy to give a three-to-five-minute update and restatement of the vision immediately before the Sunday morning message, while keeping in mind that it can become problematic if *all* messages are about the church vision. Church leaders must communicate the vision often through various

15 Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2018). Iorg gives personal testimony on the emotional toll of leading people through the change process before experiencing the joys of positive change.

means—for example, handouts and social media. One simple handout can set forth what is occurring in the life of the church over the next year. Therefore, anyone who is confused about what is happening can read the vision as well as hear the vision.

Succinct vision communication is also necessary. While there are times to say more, many times the need is to say less. The vision of the church should be able to be simply stated in one minute or less. It will be these small summaries of the vision that will give many in the church a simple grasp of what is going to be accomplished. Once a communicator can make a vision simple, it often means that the communicator truly has internalized the vision.

Details should be given occasionally. A few in the church will often desire more detail. It is important for church leadership to be transparent about the details of the vision. Even in places where accomplishing the vision will require the church to be stretched, it is prudent to be honest to the church about this reality. Further, when it comes to spending church money, it is important to be forthcoming about how money is spent, and decisions are made. This will not be necessary for everyone in the church, but necessary for some. Therefore, clear, detailed responses to honest questions should be met with competence to engender confidence in church leadership.¹⁶

Passion and urgency are so important in communication.¹⁷ The church needs to know if a pastor merely knows the vision or if he believes in the vision. Passion communicates a pastor's belief in the vision. When clear vision and passion meet there is virtually always a group willing to follow and participate in the vision. Passion cannot merely be short-lived. It is especially important as the change process unfolds and difficulties arise that a pastor maintain passion and optimism. The church will need a pastoral staff that is able to show optimism and passion through the change process.

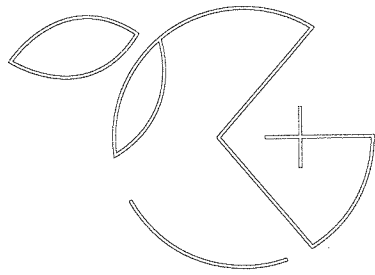
16 Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (New York: Currency, 2010), 101–249.

17 John Kotter, *A Sense of Urgency* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2008), 1–38.

MAKING YOUR PLAN CONTEXTUAL AND POSSIBLE

It is important to understand context when communicating and implementing the vision, and it is important to know the people. If a pastor thinks he will communicate a vision like another pastor at another church or mimic goals and objectives of another church, it will likely fail. The vision for the church must be the vision appropriate for the church in this location. Further, the people in the church need to receive communication in a certain way. Communication and implementation need to consider the history of the church, the personality of the church, the cultural location of the church, and a myriad of other factors. The plan must fit the church and the personalities of those in the church. For this reason, when developing a plan, make sure the plan is not just possible in theory but in the culture in which the church is located. This is often as simple as talking to the church about the plan informally. Sometimes the vision needs to marinate informally in the church for a season before it can or should be promoted publicly. A church leadership team wants to set itself up for success. So, a church may require informally setting forth ideas, listening, compromising, and persuading for a season before the church is ready to participate in a revitalization plan.

CHAPTER 7



WHO'S THE TEAM?

The task of church revitalization is a team effort. Even in church models where a singular leader may have more prominence, a team is always required. It is not enough to have a good plan without a good team. The plan must be clear, and the team must be organized. In churches there are varieties of leadership. Therefore, understanding the varieties of leadership and coordinating these leaders toward common objectives are critical tasks.¹

One of the common mistakes among pastors is developing a decent plan but failing to develop and organize a team. Therefore, the pastor sets out to implement a plan without help. There are always leaders in the church. If a pastor surprises the leaders of the church with a plan, he can expect apathy at best and resistance at worst. With a clear-eyed vision of leadership organization, a plan can be implemented swiftly while managing the resistance in the church.

¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, eds., *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 85–98.